

Migration – “Welcoming the stranger”

Maryknoll missionaries have worked with migrants and people on the move for decades. They have served Burmese refugees in Thailand, Burundian and Rwandan refugees in East Africa, have walked with Guatemalans, who, after years in Mexico, returned home to start anew in a more peaceful country, and accompanied imprisoned asylum seekers. Our faith compels us to stand in solidarity with migrants, particularly with those who, due to economic or security factors in their own community, feel forced to leave home and find employment and/or safe haven elsewhere.

Life and death along the border

Crossing from Mexico into the U.S. without proper documentation is a misdemeanor, technically “unlawful entry.” In the past 10+ years, thousands of migrants have died along the border while committing this misdemeanor. Draconian immigration policies, instituted in the mid-1990s, sealed major urban crossing areas in the southern U.S. without providing additional legal means to enter. Policy makers assumed that the desert would prove a deterrent to undocumented migration, but tragically, that has not been the case.

Current proposed legislation would construct a fence along the Mexico-U.S. border, in the name of national security. However, construction of any physical fence will damage natural migration patterns of the region’s animal life and harm a fragile ecosystem. Many border residents, including those with business interests, are resistant to the fence; they cite not only a concern for nature, property rights, wasteful spending, and economic losses, but also express serious doubts that the border fence will improve security.

Men and women without a country

Asylum seekers and refugees live like undocumented migrants, often unable to provide definitive proof that they are escaping conflict, repression or persecution. Iraqi refugees in the Middle East, Darfuri refugees in Chad, Burmese refugees in Thailand are just three groups of people who have lost their homes and possessions, and who often lose faith that they will ever return, as has been the case of many Palestinians. For those asylum-seekers who enter or who are apprehended without papers, the system in the U.S. and in many other countries demands that such persons be held in detention until their hearing. Often they are in a regular prison for weeks, months, even years – without access to legal advice or translation services.

The human cost of remittances

For workers overseas, earned money is often sent home to support family. Often these remittances constitute the primary source of income or foreign exchange for a poor country, such as El Salvador. Complex trade policies allow for the easy transport of goods and services, but many countries’ most valuable export, human beings, is the factor most difficult to lawfully transfer. The cost of migrants’ work at or below minimum wage, creating divided families and bereft communities, is staggering; the long term impact on local economies is yet to be seen.

Catholic social tradition

Catholic social teaching on migration is extensive, always keeping the focus on migrants and refugees as human beings, children of God, deserving of respect and dignity. Too often migrants' unique faces are lost in generalized ethnic groupings. Their search for food and employment disappears in politicized "immigration" debates, and their physical and emotional suffering is subsumed into "human rights violations."

1. [Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope](#): A pastoral letter concerning migration from the Catholic bishops of Mexico and the United States, available on the USCCB website
2. [Fact sheet on Catholic social teaching and migration](#), available on USCCB website
3. [Migration and Catholic social teaching](#), available on Maryknoll Global Concerns' website
4. [Exsul Familia Nazarathana \(The Emigre Family\)](#), encyclical by Pope Pius XII (1952)
5. [Notable quotations from Catholic social teaching on immigration](#), available on Office for Social Justice, Diocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis

Maryknoll statements

Find these on the Maryknoll Global Concerns' website, www.maryknollogc.org

1. [Migration section](#) of the Maryknoll Global Concerns website
2. ["Toward global solidarity"](#) Maryknoll leadership statement (September 2006)
3. Maryknoll Global Concerns' [update on migration \(May 2006\)](#)

For more information:

Migrants and refugees

1. [Justice for Immigrants](#), USCCB project
2. [International Catholic Migration Commission](#)
3. [American Friends Service Committee's immigration program](#)
4. [U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants](#)
5. [International Organization for Migration](#)
6. [Migration Information Source](#)
7. [Migration Policy Institute](#)
8. [Forced Migration Online](#)
9. [Refugees International](#)
10. [Franciscans International's Handbook on Migrant Workers](#)

U.S.-Mexico border:

1. [Border Working Group resource packet](#)
2. [Church Without Borders](#)
3. [Border Action Network](#)
4. [Humane Borders](#)
5. [No More Deaths campaign](#)
6. [Project Puente](#)
7. [BorderLinks](#)

Asylum:

1. [Catholic Legal Immigration Network \(CLINIC\)](#)
2. [Human Rights First](#)

Trafficking:

1. ["Lives for Sale"](#): Maryknoll/Lightfoot Films video on human trafficking
2. [Franciscans International's Handbook on Human Trafficking](#)
3. [ECPAT USA](#), End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking
4. [HumanTrafficking.org](#)