

Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration and the Movement of Peoples

Three Basic Principles of Catholic Social Teaching on Immigration

Although Catholic theology has always promoted human rights rooted in natural law and God's revelation, it was the encyclical *Rerum Novarum (On the Condition of Labor)* in 1891 that developed a systematic presentation of principles of the rights and responsibilities of people. *Rerum Novarum* commented on the situation of immigrants; in later documents, popes and bishops' conferences have synthesized the Catholic theological tradition to articulate three basic principles on immigration.

First Principle: People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families.

At the end of World War II, with the fall of the Nazi empire and the subsequent creation of the Soviet "Iron Curtain," Europe faced an unprecedented migration of millions of people seeking safety, food, and freedom. At that time, Pope Pius XII wrote *Exsul Familia (The*

Universal Declaration of Human Rights at 70: 30 Articles on 30 Articles - Article 14

Article 14: Right to Asylum

Article 14 of the UDHR grants the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution. This right, in addition to the right to leave one's own country (Article 13), and the right to nationality (Article 15), can be traced directly to events of the Holocaust. Many countries whose drafters worked on the UDHR were acutely aware that they had turned away Jewish refugees, likely condemning them to death. In addition, many Jews, Roma and others hunted by the Nazis had been unable to leave Germany to save their lives.

Under the umbrella of Article 14, more fully articulated in the 1951 Refugee Convention, over the decades millions of people have been given life-saving protection as refugees, been able to rebuild their lives and often have gone home again once the danger has passed. Many have also been resettled in generous third countries, where they use their skills to contribute to their new homelands. And some can settle permanently in the countries where they found refuge, like more than 170,000 Burundians who fled the country in 1972 and received Tanzanian citizenship in what is believed to be the world's biggest naturalization of refugees.

change, but statistics on internal displacement are illustrative. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates that from 2008-2016, weather-related disasters displaced, on average, 21.7 million people within their own countries every year. This does not include problems that build more slowly because of more insidious forms of climate change, such as rising sea levels, ground water turning salty, or farming and grazing land turning into deserts.

Similarly, people displaced by famine are in many cases not considered refugees within the definition of the 1951 Refugee Convention, or the various expanded forms of refugee protection. Yet clearly, they are in need of protection and assistance – and if they cannot get it at home, they have no option but to go abroad.

The Global Compact for Migration calls on countries to “cooperate to identify, develop and strengthen solutions for migrants compelled to leave their countries of origin owing to slow-onset natural disasters, the adverse effects of climate change, and environmental degradation.” For such people not able to return to their home country, solutions envisioned in the Compact include planned relocation and new visa options.

For more information, visit the website.

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23923&LangID=E>