

Living as One Human Family

The Catholic Church teaches that anyone who is forced to move to preserve their lives or human dignity has a moral claim on the hospitality of others. The more vulnerable or needy the person, the greater is their moral claim on others. This means for example that people fleeing death-dealing poverty cannot simply be labelled 'economic migrants' nor people fleeing generalized violence and human rights abuses dismissed as 'not real refugees'. We have a moral responsibility to preserve the lives and dignity of our sisters and brothers.

As well as calling us to respond to the immediate needs of people on the move, Catholic teaching calls us to act to protect their rights and to transform the causes of displacement. They should not have to flee in the first place. This is a duty of solidarity.

We believe that every human person, regardless of their legal status or geographic location, has a transcendent dignity that must always be respected. It follows that people on the move should enjoy the full range of human rights regardless of their legal status, and that others have a duty to see that these rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Governments have an important role to play. They exist to serve the human person by fostering, organizing, and promoting the common good. That is why the dignity of persons comes before the interests of nation states. Governments have a right to control their borders insofar as this contributes to the common good. However, they should be more concerned with protecting people than with protecting borders; people must never be treated as means.

In a globalized world, the common good must also be understood globally. Responding to people on the move requires all nations and international organisations to work together to ensure that all people and groups can meet their needs and achieve their potential, in other words, to share in the common good. Effective expressions of solidarity are needed.