

Migration, Refugees and Asylum in Our Society today.

The teaching of the Church is clear. In St Matthew's gospel, Ch 25, Jesus taught us when he described the Last Judgement:

“Come. You, who my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the Kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world for I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me; sick and you visited me; in prison and you came to see me. Then the virtuous will say to him, Lord, when did we see you hungry, and feed you? or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger? and make you welcome? naked and clothed you? sick or imprisoned and go to see you? And the King will answer: “I tell you solemnly, insofar as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.”

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is a powerful example of how we are supposed to live; how we must respond to others in need. In response to the question, “who is my neighbour?” Jesus gave this example. And remember that the Samaritan and the Jew wouldn't speak to each other, they were enemies. Pope Francis in his encyclical Fratelli Tutti devoted the second chapter to a wonderful analysis of this parable. I encourage you to read it.

Church Teachings have always fully endorsed that we must always put the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable first. These teachings are a set of principles. Bishops Conferences then interpret these principles to make clear how we must respond in our own particular circumstances. Our bishops released a wonderful document entitled Love the Stranger. It is on the bishop's website: <https://www.cbcew.org-love-the-stranger/>

Church Teaching.

In this document, our bishops teach us the principles and specific actions we need to adopt which need to be understood and applied in our attitudes to migration, asylum seekers, refugees.

Here is an extract from the foreword:

“Scripture tells us: “Love the stranger then, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:19). The word ‘stranger’ is variously translated as ‘foreigner’, ‘immigrant’, ‘sojourner’ or ‘alien’. However, the message remains consistent: those arriving from other parts of the world are our sisters and brothers. We are called to see Christ in them, for all people are created in His image. And we are called to see ourselves in them, for we all share this common humanity.

In 2023, people making dangerous journeys across the Channel to reach the UK are also called by various names: ‘refugees’, ‘asylum seekers’, ‘migrants’, and often by more derogatory terms. This publication by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales Department for International Affairs is shaped by, and articulates, our Christian duty to look beyond such labels and see the person who has left their homeland in search of a better life.”

The document goes on to explain what our attitude should be, and why. The bishops list twenty-four principles which we all need to understand and apply. These are listed below:

ONE: Our response to migrants and refugees is rooted in the innate worth of each human person.

TWO: Recognising the universal destination of goods, we must not exclude others from having the means to flourish simply because of where they were born.

THREE: Nationalist or individualistic tendencies should not be allowed to take hold and prevent us seeing humanity as a single family.

FOUR: We recognise the right of all people to flourish in their homeland; every nation has a duty to uphold this by working for peace, promoting good governance and tackling the causes of poverty.

FIVE: We ask our own government to help other countries address the factors that drive people from their homelands, including through the provision of a just aid budget, control of the arms trade, promotion of human rights and action to tackle the climate emergency.

SIX: We affirm the responsibility of the Church and civil society to help people in their homelands, including through the work of organisations such as CAFOD, Missio, Pax Christi, and Aid to the Church in Need.

SEVEN: We uphold the right to migrate, which may be exercised not only by those fleeing threats to their safety but also by those seeking to build a better life for themselves and their families.

EIGHT: We recognise that states have a right to control their borders; however, such measures cannot be based on economic factors alone; states have a responsibility to promote the common good of the people within their boundaries, but they also have obligations to the wider world.

NINE: We encourage the extension of safe routes such as resettlement programmes, visa schemes and humanitarian corridors, so that people can exercise their right to migrate in a dignified and humane manner.

TEN: We must not allow the concerns that some communities might have about migration to be exploited for political purposes or allow such concerns to develop into a xenophobic attitude; Christian communities must play their part in providing a genuine welcome to migrants and refugees.

ELEVEN: We seek and promote dialogue with the local Church in people's countries of origin, and the countries through which they have travelled, so that we can better understand their stories.

TWELVE: We defend the fundamental human dignity of all migrants and refugees, regardless of their legal status, including through policies providing access to decent accommodation, healthcare, and childhood education, as well as facilitating family reunification

THIRTEEN: We call for the sanctity of life to be prioritised in all border security arrangements and reject measures that place people in danger or deny reasonable assistance to those in need.

FOURTEEN: We call upon the government to avoid the use of immigration detention, arbitrary expulsion and other practices which violate human dignity.

FIFTEEN: We urge the fulfilment of obligations under international frameworks protecting migrants and refugees, such as the Refugee Convention, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Global Compact on Refugees, and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration.

SIXTEEN: Recognising the practical contribution that our Church can make, we support the work of Catholic organisations such as Caritas, the Jesuit Refugee Service, and the St Vincent De Paul Society, as well as parish and diocesan initiatives, in upholding the human dignity of migrants and refugees.

SEVENTEEN: Reaffirming the Church's responsibility to help eliminate the evils of trafficking and slavery, we support the work of Catholic organisations such as the Santa Marta Group.

EIGHTEEN: We recognise that trafficking and slavery are exacerbated by a lack of accessible alternatives for migration or seeking sanctuary – efforts to tackle trafficking and slavery must therefore go beyond more active law enforcement; we also need to support people to flourish in their homelands, establish more safe routes for migrants and refugees, and work to eliminate the demand for those services that slave labour continues to meet.

NINETEEN: Migration enriches our culture – we must welcome migrants and refugees so that they can live fulfilled lives in their new country.

TWENTY: We support the simplification of routes to citizenship and opportunities for people to regularise their immigration status.

TWENTY-ONE: We celebrate the vital contribution of migrants and refugees to our parishes and the life of the Church in England and Wales.

TWENTY-TWO: We recognise the gifts that migrants and refugees bring which can enrich our society in many ways, including economically.

TWENTY-THREE: We encourage policies that give migrants and refugees the right to work, to facilitate their contribution to the common good of our society.

TWENTY-FOUR: We call upon all those who employ migrants and refugees to treat them in a dignified and humane way.

There is commentary on how we must apply these principles in the document. Please read it.

MIGRATION: THE FACTS:

The facts about migration and refugees. (taken from Government website)

In 2016, Annual net migration in the U.K. was 336,000. Net migration is the difference between how many immigrated (arrived) and how many emigrated (left the U.K.) Seven years (and five Prime Ministers) later, annual net migration in 2023, was 860,000. Last year, 2024, it was 431,000. In 2024, the total number of immigrants was 948,000, with 517,000 leaving. Including dependents, the total number arriving was 1.2 million, a 20% decrease on 2023.

Another large proportion of immigrants contributing to the total are University students. These are a good source of income for universities. In 2023/24 the UK had 732,285 overseas students, 23% of the total number of students. 75,490 were from the EU, and 656,795 from outside the E.U. In the previous year, 2022/23, the total was approximately 759,000, a record high.

Small Boats crossings: Looking at these figures, the numbers of refugees and migrants coming across the channel in small boats is only a very small percentage of the total. The numbers crossing the channel for the last three years are:

in 2024 -- 36,816.

in 2023 -- 29,437.

in 2022 -- 45,755.

and this year 36,000 to October. This is less than 5% of the total number of migrants.

The fact is that migrants, refugees, crossing in small boats is a very small percentage of the total number. It is well below 5% in each year.

INTERNATIONAL LAW

Following the second world war, we (Great Britain) helped to formulate the U.N. Convention on Refugees, 1951, which received an additional Protocol in 1967. The original Convention, prepared after the second world war, dealt with refugees from European countries. The 1967 Protocol removed the specifications concerning the time frame (the war) and the locations (Europe) and widened the Convention to apply to anywhere in the world where people were forced to flee their homes.

The document is worth reading. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/1951-refugee-convention-and-1967-protocol-relating-status-refugees>

Here is a short extract:

“The 1951 convention consolidates previous international instruments relating to refugees and provides the most comprehensive codification of the rights of refugees at the international level. In contrast to earlier International Refugee Instruments, which applied to specific groups of refugees, the 1951 Convention endorses a single definition of the term refugee in Article 1. The emphasis of this definition is on the protection of persons from political or other forms of persecution. A refugee, according to the convention, is someone who was unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. The Convention is both a status and rights-based instrument and is underpinned by a number of fundamental principles, most notably non-discrimination, non-penalization and non-refoulement. Convention provisions, for example, ought to be applied without discrimination as to race, religion, or country of origin. Developments in international human rights law also reinforced the principle that the Convention be applied without discrimination as to sex, age, disability, sexuality or other prohibited grounds of discrimination. ***The Convention further stipulates that, subject to specific exceptions, refugees should not be penalised for their illegal entry or stay. This recognises that the seeking of asylum can require refugees to breach immigration rules. Prohibited penalties might include being charged with immigration or criminal offences relating to the seeking of asylum or being arbitrarily detained purely on the basis of seeking asylum.*** (my emphasis).

Importantly, the Convention contains various safeguards against the expulsion of refugees. The principle of non-refoulement is so fundamental that no reservations or derogations may be made to it. It provides that no one shall expel or return a refugee against his or her will in any manner whatsoever to a territory where he or she fears threats to life or freedom.

Finally, the Convention lays down basic minimum standards for the treatment of refugees, without prejudice to states granting more favourable treatment. Such rights include access to the courts, to primary education, to work and the provision for documentation, including a refugee travel document in passport form. Most states parties to the Convention issue this document, which has become wide as widely accepted as the former Nansen passport. An

identity document for refugees devised by the 1st Commissioner for Refugees, Fridtjof Nansen, in 1922.”

From a legal standpoint, it is therefore quite clear that refugees, seeking asylum, have to be welcomed, housed, listened to and if their claim to asylum is valid, granted leave to stay. They must be given opportunity to tell their story.

Scapegoating: Stop the Boats.

Why has this become such a hot topic? First, a genuine concern for the safety of the people trying to reach our shores. It is heartbreaking to read of people, especially young children, drowning in the English Channel, (and in the Mediterranean, and elsewhere). Of course we should be concerned. The 9th Principle, quoted by our bishops, calls for the establishment of ‘humanitarian corridors’ to allow safe travel. Have you asked your M.P. or suggested this to [him/her](#)?

The idea of scapegoating is as old as any history of mankind. If I can put into your mind that something or someone is a threat to your wellbeing, creating fear, and then offer a solution which can make you feel safe again, you will vote for me.

Another main driver of the rhetoric about refugees however, and always has been, is xenophobia, and/or racism. [Xenophobia or fear of strangers is the fear or hatred of people who are perceived as being different from oneself.] [Racism: prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people on the basis of their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized]. The slogan “Stop the Boats” is catchy, but behind it is the racist attitude.

It is easy to demonise those crossing the channel. This is the first step of what can be called the Trumpian playbook. Select your scapegoat. Then start ‘blaming’ them for any or all of the country’s problems, real or imagined or just made up. Appeals to simple patriotism, (raise the colours and so on) are heeded and you begin to have a following. Social media, in various forms, magnifies the scaremongering and lies.

Politicians, who gain power from people voting for them, rarely state the principle, but jump on band wagons just hoping they will be elected. This is happening today in the United States and the world, and now in our own country.

OTHER CONCERNS

Although it is very difficult to ascertain the numbers involved, we must all be concerned about **Human Trafficking**. Women and children are most vulnerable. Check out the Santa Marta group, and the Medaille Trust. These organisations do wonderful work.

Overseas Aid. The vast majority of the world’s refugees are housed in their own or neighbouring countries. Why do people move?

The most common reason is that they are unable to sustain their lifestyle, provide for their families and themselves because of persecution, war or violence, and very simply, the effects of climate change. Our government has cut back, dramatically, the funds allocated to Aid. This

will have, or is already having, an effect on countries in the global South, being unable to take remedial actions in combatting climate change. The only consequence of this decision will be more climate refugees. (Can you write to your M.P. about this?).

SUMMARY: These are facts:

Only 0.7% of the UK population are refugees; (claims that our services are being overrun is fearmongering: if our services are stretched it is because of years of under-funding).

Small boats refugees/migrants account for approximately 3-4% of the U.K.s migrants.

Migrants contribute about £3.3 billion to the U.K. economy, in taxes, and by setting up businesses.

1 in 6 migrants crossing in boats are children, the most vulnerable.

1 in 5, working in the N.H.S., are migrants.

Please read and understand the Church's Teaching.

And most importantly, pray. Pray for every person who is displaced, searching for a better future. Pray for all those who want to expel all migrants. Pray for all our civic leaders, that they make fair and just decisions, not swayed by hatred or fear, and pray for our Bishops, and priests, that they are always ready to guide us in living out gospel values.

Justice and Peace Commission,
November 2025.

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