



"Free to choose whether to migrate or to stay"

Joint statement by Caritas Internationalis, RED CLAMOR¹ and RAEMH²
on the occasion of the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2023

On 24th September we celebrate the World Day of Migrants and Refugees. This year the Holy Father has focused [his message](#)³ on the right of every person to choose whether to migrate or to stay, in full respect of their human dignity. These are the guiding principles that, inspired by Catholic Social Teaching, guide our daily commitment to communities and people on the move.

The dramatic increase in forced displacement over the last decades shows how these rights are systematically violated. According to UNHCR's Global Trends Report 2023, 108.4 million people were forcibly uprooted from their homes as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and other events by the end of 2022, with an increase of 21%. In conflict-affected and neighbouring countries, people remain for years in precarious conditions. Most of them living in refugee camps separated from their beloved and without prospects due to the lack of political resolution of conflicts. In this difficult context, addressing the root causes of displacement and working for [durable solutions](#)⁴ is essential to provide a rights-based, dignified and long-term response to the legitimate right of every person to a dignified life.

The distress faced by so many men, women and children compels us to act to transform the social and political structures that fuel their struggle for survival and their rejection. It also calls on decision makers and other stakeholders to re-centre States' policies and community care on welcoming, protecting, promoting and fully integrating people on the move in the host societies. It is important to acknowledge the generosity with which many countries from the Global South welcome, host and assist the great majority of people on the move, despite their own economic and development challenges.

The right to migrate means that everyone is ready to understand, to empathise with and to support those who are migrating. Like Jesus himself, who identified with those left behind and welcomed those who gave food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, shelter and welcome to the migrant (cf. Mt 25:35-36), we are called to respect unconditionally the dignity of those who leave, often against their own will.

The right to remain in one's own country means that social, working and human development conditions are guaranteed for people in their places of origin. It involves a multi-stakeholder commitment and is a clear expression of social justice. Unfortunately, "the right to stay" has not yet been codified in national legislations, and there are many examples to illustrate the extent to which it is flouted.

¹ RED CLAMOR is a network that, linked to CELAM, coordinates and supports the pastoral work of Catholic Church organisations in Latin America and the Caribbean that welcome, protect, promote and integrate migrants, displaced persons, refugees and victims of trafficking. Several Caritas, congregations (Jesuits, Scalabrinian etc.) and Church organisations are members.

² The RAEMH - Africa-Europe Network for Human Mobility - is an inter-regional initiative inspired by the principles of the Catholic Church. With local roots in many countries in West Africa, North Africa and Southern Europe, the members of the RAEMH strive to respond unconditionally to the different needs of people in mobility situations: social, health, psychological, educational, etc.

³ *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2023*,

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/20230511-world-migrants-day-2023.html>

⁴ On the occasion of the 109th World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Caritas Internationalis, RED CLAMOR and the RAEMH network organized an event on "Durable Solutions to Cross-Border Displacement". More Information can be found on the Caritas Internationalis website (www.caritas.va)

In [Latin America and the Caribbean](#), unregulated and often state-sponsored national and multinational mining activities are threatening the habitat and driving indigenous communities from their ancestral lands. Also, government mismanagement and economic policies widening the gap between rich and poor resulted in reduced income, a setback in unemployment and a higher poverty rate in various countries of the LAC region. In [Africa](#), on the fringes of the Sahara, widespread insecurity linked to conflicts and terrorist threats, coupled with the impact of climate change and food insecurity, are driving people to wander with no prospect of finding refuge in another territory ready to take them in for the long term. The [Middle East](#) - Syria and Yemen in particular - has been at the centre of geopolitical interests hindering a peaceful settlement of conflicts and the safe return of refugees and IDPs to their homes. In [Asia](#), the lack of bold climate action by the international community (particularly the major polluters) and predatory human activities (including mining and other large-scale development projects) carried out without consulting local communities has increased the number and intensity of rapid and slow-onset extreme climate events, and led to a widespread environmental degradation. In the [South Pacific Islands](#), climate change has led to a sea level rise and ocean warming, coastal erosion and even the disappearance of islands. Coastal populations were forced to leave their homes, which has led to the loss of their land and livelihoods as well as the loss of their ancestral cultural heritage.

This World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2023 is therefore an opportunity to rethink our unsustainable development models and to build a new architecture of peace. As the Holy Father reminds us in his message, "Migrants flee because of poverty, fear or desperation. Eliminating these causes and thus putting an end to forced migration calls for shared commitment on the part of all, in accordance with the responsibilities of each. **This commitment begins with asking what we can do, but also what we need to stop doing. We need to make every effort to halt the arms race, economic colonialism, the plundering of other people's resources, and the devastation of our common home.**"

Through daily work with migrants and refugees, [our organisations and networks](#) are contributing to making the choice of people living in vulnerable situations "to migrate or to stay" become a reality. To this aim, we call on governments to tackle the complex factors and root causes of today's increasingly forced migration by implementing fairer economic policies, reducing social imbalances and inequalities, encouraging peace processes and promoting environmentally sustainable development policies. In this way, the decision to migrate or to stay will be a real and free choice for everyone.