

MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES: A GREAT RESOURCE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN LIGHT OF POPE FRANCIS'S TEACHING

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Abstract

To believe that everyone created by God bears a spark of Divinity should be a criterion to believe that no one is deficient of Divine gifts to engender human flourishing, social transformation, and economic development and growth. This is the position of Pope Francis when he drew the attention of the host communities and countries of migrants and refugees to their enormous potentials to help the society in his message of the 108th World Migrant and Refugee Day (Vatican, May 12, 2022). In light of this, Pope Francis believes that the situation and the condition that led people to be migrants and refugees did not deplete their God given talents, gifts, and potentials. To this end, he advises the host communities and countries to see them as a resource for building the economy and the future of their society. This is what this paper sets to advance, as I understand equally that anyone irrespective of his or her background, conditions, and status can drive human flourishing, social transformation, and economic growth and development. Thus, migrants and refugees should be respected by their host communities and hence, be given an opportunity to develop their

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potential as people with a common humanity. God never created anyone tabularized!

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Introduction

Certain conditions can compel people to a status of migrants and refugees: economic crisis political brouhaha, wars, conflicts, and sought for a better future and conditions (Fratelli Tutti § 37) To this end, people are forced to leave their home countries or native lands to seek for, either protection or greener pastures to countries that might likely offer them either of aforementioned. It must be understood that the situation that forces people out of their native lands, apart from sometimes, causes them psychological problems, depression, and frustration, does not in any way make them less human or purge them of their potentialities and natural endowments. Pope Francis stated: “For this reason, the presence of migrants and refugees – and of vulnerable people in general – is an invitation to recover some of those essential dimensions of our Christian existence and our humanity that risk being overlooked in a prosperous society.”¹

Unfortunately, some of their host communities and countries seem not to have seen and believed in the potentialities and the natural endowments of these migrants and refugees, thus, finding it difficult to integrate them. For such communities and countries, migrants and refugees are liabilities that will constitute nuisance. However, in his roundtable remarks he made on September 19, 2016, Angel Gurría, the Secretary General of The Organization of Economic Corporation and Development (OECD), among other points stated: “we need to focus on Integration.” This is borne out of his observable research, which notes that:

We have ample evidence on the positive economic and fiscal contribution of migrants for OECD countries. Migrants add human capital to our societies. Over the last ten years, migrants accounted for 47% of the increase in the workforce in the United States and 70% in Europe. Our evidence also shows that in most countries, migrants pay more in tax and social contributions than they receive in individual benefits.²

¹ Pope Francis’s message for 2019 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, September 29, 2019.

² Angel Gurría, Remarks at the UN summits for Migrants and Refugees: Strengthening the Positive Contribution of migrants and Refugees, September 19, 2016, New York. As the secretary General of OECD, Gurría made for important remarks on this day that stand to interrupt the negative approach towards migrants

The above submission indicates that migrants and refugees have such endowments and potential that can be harnessed to turn around the economic and social development of their host communities and countries. Thus, rather than despise them, or see them as a “threat”³ their hosts should properly integrate them as part of their assets. It implies seeing migrants and refugees as brothers and sisters of an inestimable value we can accommodate, integrate, and work with for social, economic development, and human flourishing. This takes us to the theological discourse of creation narrative, which provides us understanding that we are all created by the same God, who magnanimously created us in His own image and likeness (Gen 1: 27). This is a backdrop for espousing ethical supposition and moral principles that emphasize and argue that we are of common descent, thus requiring us to recognize everyone as brothers and sisters to build a constructive collaboration that reflects relational solidarity.

This undergirds the teaching of Pope Francis, which borders on consistent ethics of life, respect for human dignity, recognition of the other as human with full potential, and divine and natural endowments. His social encyclicals and other documents to his credit bear eloquent testimony. It is from all these documents that I argue that migrants and refugees have all it takes to contribute to the social and economic development of their host communities and countries.

Against this backdrop, this paper will bring into focus both moral and political responsibility as the vehicular principles that can espouse policies that will drive its possibility in our sociopolitical space, where people, whether migrants or refugees will be offered an opportunity to make a useful contribution that will drive socioeconomic and religious development. This implies, according to Pope Francis that “In every political activity, in every programme, in every pastoral action we must always put the person at the centre, in his or her many aspects, including the spiritual dimension.”⁴

I will start this work with an exposition of how migrants and refugees are seen as a threat, thus constituting a threat to

and refugees. Among these are a call for international cooperation that is so effective to give attention to the conditions of migrants and refugees, the need for short term protection and measures in the event of their displacements, to offer them hope, less they turn to smugglers, and lastly, and need to focus on their integration.

³ Angel Gurria, Remarks at the UN summits for Migrants and Refugees.

⁴ Pope Francis’s message for 2019 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, September 29, 2019.

socioeconomic, and even religious development. When someone considers you as one who stands in his or her place, he does not care about what you can bring to the table that can help him or her. An adage in my locality says, “*Onye Kporo gi asi adighi ahu mma n’ime gi*” (one who hates you does not see anything good in you). Many migrants and refugees have become victims of harsh immigration and refugees’ laws. That is, laws that seem to reflect ‘we do not want you and need you here, no matter what you have.’ This kind of law has somehow in various places led to xenophobic attacks against foreigners, skirmishes between the foreigners and the supposed owner of the land, and the denial of a permanent resident permit to many for no just cause. This will take me to question what so many songs of globalization have done to instill in the minds of the countries of the world a sense of acceptability, respect, and integration of others in their countries.

Against this, the criticism of globalization by Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, gave rise to a teaching about a common humanity that should be the best definition of globalization. This calls for recognition, respect, and value for migrants and refugees, thus advocating for the creation of programmes and opportunities that will enable them to deploy their talents and skills, develop their potential for the benefits and economic growth of their host communities. This implies that migrants and refugees are not depleted of their skills, talents, and potential by the conditions and situations that made them migrants or refugees. This takes me to the discussion of the renewal of international politics as the only feasible way to get the countries to understand that we all have a common humanity to be able to see ourselves in the plights and predicaments of migrants and refugees.

Migrants and Refugees: Are they really threats?

The question of whether migrants and refugees are really a threat to their host countries has become necessary given many challenges they have faced for the sake of being what they are in their host countries. Most of their countries have seen them as constituting a nuisance and for that reason have excluded them in the scheme of things that can engender their contribution to social and economic development. This expresses the economy of exclusion and inequality undertone according to Pope Francis. Such exclusion leads to marginalization that translates into no work and means of possibilities (*Evangelium Gaudium*, §53). Against this backdrop, Pope Francis would encourage that we say no to the economy of exclusion and inequality

not to undermine the social and political system nationally and globally (*Evangelium Gaudium* § 69). This entails showing hospitality to everyone for the fact that everyone belongs to one family, as Pope Francis highlights in *Fratelli Tutti* (§84). He substantiates his position with the words of the Gospel which challenge people to welcome strangers the way we would welcome Jesus (Matt 25 :35). Thus, not only welcoming the strangers but also share in their joys and challenges as St. Paul highlighted in his letter to the Romans: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” (Rom 12:15)

Considering this, there is a need for compassion, charity, and intervention which must be driven by being part of their story, as Pope Benedict VI highlighted in *Caritas in Veritate*. Stan Chu Ilo articulates it this way: “Charity in Truth is an invitation to Christians and all men and women of goodwill to apply spiritual vision in understanding and responding to the pressing economic, ecological, social, political, and moral challenges facing humanity today.”⁵ This view explains the connectivity and relationality of the entire human persons that must manifest at all times in our disposition to share with one another’s goodness and challenges of any sort. To this end, it becomes a moral duty to show compassion to one another as part of one another. That is a call to be humanitarian; to render humanitarian service to humans because all men and women are God’s children.⁶ Because they are all God’s children “they are made for goodness”⁷ according to Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu. They believe that “we are fundamentally good. When you come to think of it, that is we are at our core. Why else do we get so outraged by wrong? When we hear of any egregious act, we are appalled. Isn’t that an incredible assertion about us? ... you and I, too are fundamentally good. We are tuned to the key to goodness.”⁸

⁵ Stan Chu Ilo, *The Church, and Development in Africa: aid and development from the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching* (second edition), Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick publications, 2014, 1.

⁶ David Hollenbach, *Refugee Rights: Ethics, Advocacy, and Africa*, Washington D.C: George Town University Press, 2008, 46.

⁷ Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *Made for Goodness, Made for Goodness and Why This Makes all the Difference*, New York: Harper One, 2011, is a book title by these great personalities drawn from their understanding of the common descent of entire humanity, given the creation narrative, but most importantly highlighted how scriptures stated how everyone is created good. Thus, the book among mostly reacts to apartheid and other acts that express the dehumanization, discrimination, and marginalization of people.

⁸ Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *Made for Goodness, Made For Goodness and Why This Makes all the Difference*, 5.

Not paying attention to the fact that ‘we are all fundamentally good’ right from creation is the root cause of every form of discrimination, dehumanization, racism, tribalism, inequality, xenophobia, lack of recognition and respect for the other. And those who have not understood this will ever see migrants and refugees as threats. Thus, they would do everything to demonize them to be able to deny them an opportunity to contribute to the social and economic growth of their host countries. For such countries and communities, they are a threat rather than a gift to their countries and communities. Such countries and communities would always see diversity and difference as a source of threat and weakness. However, Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice in their work “Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing” countered this view as they believe that diversity and difference are a gift that we should celebrate as a way of “making institutions and societies more inclusive of diverse people groups.”⁹ Continuing, they stated that “one of the positive contributions of the focus on diversity and multiculturalism has been to acknowledge that differences are not a threat but a gift to our life together The unique particularities of colors, histories, geographies, and cultures make life interesting.”¹⁰ This can be a strong basis of argument to draw the attention of the host countries of the migrants and refugees to embrace them as a source of growth and development in their countries. That many countries and communities have not met this expectation raises questions about all trumpeted globalization and its achievement so far in today’s world.

The Failure of Globalization: A Contributing Factor to the Problem of Migrants and Refugees

As a global ethical principle, globalization was evolved to establish a network of connectivity and relationality among all people across the globe to engender a shared responsibility that will benefit all via development. Globalization is driven by global and international politics that focuses on “economic development and economic progress.”¹¹ I think this is where the problem starts. The focus here being on economic development and economic progress highlights a neglect of humanity. Because of this, the church, through various

⁹ Katongole Emmanuel & Rice Chris, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing*, Downs Grove, Illinois: IVP Books, 2008, 29.

¹⁰ Katongole Emmanuel & Rice Chris, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace, and Healing*, 29.

¹¹ Stan Chu Ilo, *The Church, and Development in Africa: aid and development from the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching* (second edition), 32

Popes, has pointed out that globalization has not taken into consideration the development of people. Pope Paul VI in his *Populorum Progressio* draws our attention to this, as he emphasizes that development should be people centered to be able to respond to their challenging problems: hunger, deprivation, endemic diseases, and ignorance. This would entail providing a programme that will help the people overcome these challenges and pursue their ordered ends. To this end, the Pope was advocating for the integral development of human persons that must be driven by a restructured economic, political, and economic life.¹²

It is these lacunae of globalization that made Pope Benedict XVI to describe it as a drama of our times. That is, globalization rather than encouraging and enforcing connectivity and relationality that engenders recognition and equality of all human persons has become a driving force behind underdevelopment, inequality, discrimination, deprivation, etc. (*Caritas in Veritas* § 33) Leaning on this, it implies that the problem of globalization is a result of its separation from charity and truth. To this end, Pope Benedict in *Caritas in Veritate* was advocating for charity and truth to guide globalization to be able to change a global landscape that has been besieged by various challenges that hinder integral human development.

Against this backdrop, Stan Chu Ilo states that “globalization must be evaluated from a moral point of view, in order to alert humanity to its moral and spiritual implications including poverty, inequality, and injustice which are rapidly spreading among peoples in developing countries, and increasingly contributing to the marginalization of the vulnerable and minorities even within wealthy societies.”¹³ In light of this, Pope Francis identifies globalization as a “moral deterioration that influences international action and a weakening of spiritual values and responsibility. This contributes to a general feeling of frustration, isolation, and desperation.” (*Fratelli Tutti*, § 29) At this point, globalization which should be the course of building a family that houses all persons is seen as a driving force that catalyzes political, economic, and social crises that lead to inequality, discrimination, and injustices. Against this backdrop, Pope Francis said:

¹² Stan Chu Ilo, *The Church, and Development in Africa: aid and development from the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching*, 32.

¹³ Stan Chu Ilo, *The Church, and Development in Africa: aid and development from the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching*, 33.

In today's world, the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia. What reigns instead is a cool, comfortable, and globalized indifference, born of deep disillusionment concealed behind a deceptive illusion: thinking that we are all powerful, while failing to realize that we are all in the same boat. This illusion, unmindful of the great fraternal values, leads to "a sort of cynicism." (*Fratelli Tutti*, § 30)

From this precedence, globalization is a problem and a contributing factor to the problems of migrants and refugees in their host countries, since according to Pope Benedict XVI, it has succeeded in bringing people together, but has failed to make them brothers and sisters (*Caritas in Veritate*, § 43). Thus, it has become necessary to advocate for the renewal of international politics by subjecting it to the guidance of charity and truth. I believe this is the only way migrants and refugees can be recognized, respected, valued, and assisted by their host communities.

A Call for a renewal of International Politics: hope for humanity everywhere

It has become a normal thing for people to describe politics as dirty and distasteful because of the way politicians have negatively engaged in it. Pope Francis has this to say in this regard:

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Given the way people have been treated, maligned, and marginalized in the countries that take them as strangers, it is obvious that international politics has not gotten the true renewal it needed to do the needful. That is, international politics has not allowed itself to be guided by charity and truth as Pope Benedict XVI would suggest, or what Pope Francis would refer to as "political love." With these, politics, whether local or international, would live up to the expectation of making life meaningful for one and all despite one's background and nationality. Being guided by truth and charity, politics would come to understand that we are for one another, given the common descent of all as drawn from the creation narrative. Thus, we have the responsibility to care for one another. In the context of political authority, Pope Francis corroborates this in this way:

Recognizing that all people are our brothers and sisters, and seeking forms of social friendship that includes everyone, is not merely utopian. It demands a decisive commitment to devising effective means to this end. Any effort along these lines becomes a noble exercise of charity. For whereas individuals can help others in need, when they join in initiating social processes of fraternity and justice for all, they enter the “field of charity at its most vast, namely political charity (*Fratelli Tutti*, §180).

This political love, when appropriately interpolated into politics will transform politics to advance such ethical and political principles that enforce fraternal and universal friendship of all people. At this point, the world will begin to experience healthy politics that recognizes that “global society is suffering from the structural deficiencies”, thus evolves an economy that is integral of political, social, cultural, and popular programs that is directed to the common good, and creating possibilities that precludes stifling human creativity and ideals of progress but direct such an energy to a new channel. (ibid. § 179) This position of Pope Francis; I believe has motivated his advocacy for recognition and respect for migrants and refugees as those who are endowed with potential that can contribute to the social and economic development of their host countries. In his message for the 108th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2022, Pope Francis highlighted that migrants and refugees should not be seen as invaders but as those who have what it takes to help to construct and build, thus calling their host countries to recognize and value them.

Building the future with migrants and refugees also means recognizing and valuing how much each of them can contribute to the process of construction. I like to see this approach to migration reflected in a prophetic vision of Isaiah, which considers foreigners not invaders or destroyers, but willing labourers who rebuild the walls of the new Jerusalem, that Jerusalem whose gates are open to all peoples (cf. *Is 60:10-11*).¹⁴

This is against the thought of many host countries who have seen migrants and refugees as those whose conditions have depleted their God given talent and potential. Thus, his position remains with this submission that migrants and refugees should always be given an opportunity to develop their potential and talents not just for their own good, but for the development of their host countries. The Pope would mean to say that rather than being treated like parasites that have nothing to contribute, the host countries should create a programme

¹⁴ Pope Francis, Message for 108th World Day of Migrant and Refugees 2022, Vatican, September 2022.

that will help them to develop their skills that will in turn contribute to their social and economic development. In his words he stated: “Migrants and refugees have “enormous potential” to help society if they are given a chance ... New arrivals played a “fundamental role” in social and economic growth. Yet this contribution could be all the greater if it were optimized and supported by carefully developed programmes and initiatives... Enormous potential exists, ready to be harnessed, if only it is given a chance.”¹⁵

It must be noted, however, that the United Nations has been encouraging countries to always be open to show solidarity to migrants and refugees, as they remind all of us of our common humanity, which I have earlier pointed out. According to the United Nations “We need to begin by recognizing our common humanity. Millions of people on the move have been exposed to extreme suffering. Thousands have died in the Mediterranean, on the Andaman Sea, in the Sahel and in Central America. Refugees and migrants are not others; they are as diverse as the human family itself. Movements of people are a quintessentially global phenomenon that demands a global sharing of responsibility.”¹⁶ Against this backdrop, it goes further to state that “far from being a threat, refugees and migrants contribute to the growth and development of host countries as well as their countries of origin. The better new arrivals are integrated, the greater their contribution to society will be. We need more measures to promote the social and economic inclusion of refugees and migrants.”¹⁷ To this end, it advises the political and the community leaders to always be courageous to speak against discrimination and intolerance. This shares a lot in common with the position of the church whose message borders on common humanity, shared responsibility, recognition and respect for human dignity, and value for all persons. Thus, it forms the backdrop of Pope Francis’ messages and teachings on migrants and refugees in World Day of Migrants and Refugees in 2022. In light of this, every migrant and refugee should not be despised as parasites, burdens, vagabonds, and never do- wells in society. Whatever condition that forced them out of the countries of their origin did not take away their God given talents and potential. This is why the OECD advises that we should focus on their integration, as it believes that migrants and refugees contribute economically and fiscally

¹⁵ Pope Francis, Migrants and Refugees have enormous potential to help society, Vatican, May 12, 2022

¹⁶ United Nations, Refugees and Migrants: A crisis of Solidarity, <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/refugees-and-migrants-crisis-solidarity>

¹⁷ Ibid.

to the OECD countries through their skills and professions as I earlier highlighted.

In what seems to be a case study, Carlos Encina, the manager of NSW, Spanish and Latin American Association for Social Assistance (NSW SLASA) in her submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration inquiry into Economic, Social, and Cultural impacts of Migration in Australia corroborates the OECD position, as he highlighted how NSW developed and implemented many various community development programmes for the Spanish communities in partnership with the government and non-governmental organizations, thus, enhancing national productivity and capacity. He articulates the outcome in this manner:

It is common knowledge that migration has had a positive economic, social, and cultural impact on Australia. Generally speaking, migrants and refugees show strong resilience and adaptability to new challenges and surroundings. Migrants and refugees have made a substantial contribution to the economic, social, and cultural development of Australia. They have assisted in the expanding of consumer markets for local goods, opening new markets; they brought skills needed by the Australian Labour Market which has been creating employment and filling empty employment places. They have made cultural, social, and economic contributions that have moulded Australian society and impart vitality and multiculturalism into Australia.¹⁸

Conclusion

At this point, I still want to maintain that migrants and refugees are an asset to their host countries that if properly integrated will turn out to be catalyst and a driving force for social and economic development. My position here, as inspired by Pope Francis, is that the host countries, rather than seeing migrants and refugees as parasites that have nothing to contribute, or obstacles to socioeconomic development, they should create a programme that will develop them, as their own and part of them in view of making gain out of it. The reason being that migrants and refugees are humans that are endowed with rational power, talents, and potential like any other persons, thus, should be harnessed for the common good. The high point of this message is inclusion and integration of migrants, as against exclusion and discrimination. All people despite their background and nationality share a common humanity that reminds us of the dignity of everyone, thus calling us to a shared responsibility. It will be equally

¹⁸ Carlos Encina, a Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration inquiry into Economic, Social, and Cultural impacts of Migration in Australia, p. 3 and 8

nice to conclude with this prayer which Pope Francis composed for the 108th World Day for Migrants and Refugees in 2022:

Lord, make us bearers of hope,
so that where there is darkness,
your light may shine,
and where there is discouragement,
confidence in the future may be reborn.

Lord, make us instruments of your justice,
so that where there is exclusion, fraternity may flourish,
and where there is greed, a spirit of sharing may grow.

Lord, make us builders of your Kingdom,
together with migrants and refugees
and with all who dwell on the peripheries.

Lord, let us learn how beautiful it is
to live together as brothers and sisters. Amen