

**“Promoting better regional cooperation towards smart and humane migration across the Mediterranean”, Malta 16.11.17**

**Shannon Pfohman**

I would like to **thank the** organisers for having invited Caritas Europa and myself to such an important and high level conference, and to speak today about **the need to promote sensible political and societal discourse on migration.**

I’d like to **reflect on what political and societal changes must transpire** to enable the full participation of all migrants in all areas of collective life, and to present some examples of the activities we are undertaking at Caritas Europa, which may serve as an inspiration. This will naturally incorporate some policy recommendations.

For those unfamiliar, Caritas Europa is a network of 49 member organisations in 46 Council of Europe countries. So our network **encompasses a broader outreach than just the EU** Member States. Moreover, we are also only one of seven regions of Caritas Internationalis, which means that Caritas is actually a global, worldwide network. This is important to mention as it connotes our **intention to not present Eurocentric solutions**, but rather to consider a holistic approach with a global vision for the common good.

Our members are working on the frontline, often providing support throughout the entire migration journey:

- Caritas responds with **humanitarian relief efforts**, providing basic hygiene packs and cooperating with local partners on the ground;
- Caritas implements international cooperation and **development projects** and in so doing is acting to help address some of the root causes of migration, such as poverty conflict, hunger, climate change, etc.
- Caritas **advocates for more safe and legal channels**, such as resettlement, family reunification, temporary visas, student visas, etc.
- Caritas in Italy and France are also engaged in implementing **humanitarian visas**;
- Caritas in the UK, Austria, Belgium, Germany and elsewhere are working to set up **community sponsorship initiatives and to upscale such practices throughout Europe**;
- Caritas offers **service provision and support to migrants newly arrived in Europe**, assisting with schooling, language courses, housing, bureaucracy, legal advice, psychosocial support, among other services.
- Caritas is also involved in **facilitating welcoming environments** in Europe, recognising that integration is a dynamic, multidirectional process in which migrants and receiving governments, institutions, and communities intentionally work together to



create a more cohesive society. Responsibility, therefore, rests not with one particular group but rather with many actors.

Based on the experiences of our members working on the ground, we uphold the following:

1. A primary focus on security is doomed to fail, as it forgets the human dimension. It results in more human suffering, drownings at sea, and fuels trafficking and smugglers' business models.
2. Without safe and legal pathways, irregular migration will continue and will entail more human suffering, drowning at sea and trafficking while smuggler businesses will thrive.
3. People's protection needs or desire to live a dignified life tends to be stronger than their fear of walls/border controls.
4. In this sense, we question whether migration movements can ever really be controlled...? The flows in the summer/fall of 2015 prove this to be a challenge. The future prognosis indicates migration movements will continue, if not increase.
5. We know this is a scary thought for many policy makers and citizens. For this reason, we argue for better migration management. If policy makers want more ordered asylum and migration, then more safe and legal pathways are needed.
6. Unfortunately, efforts toward more safe and legal pathways have not allowed for an adequate response to peoples' needs.
7. A long-term vision for the EU is needed instead of "crisis" management mode; short-sighted policies are often inefficient and expensive and result in increased suffering, abuses and migrant deaths.
8. Together, we can come up with sustainable solutions, but there needs to be a willingness to collaborate with CSOs, and not blame them for rescuing people at sea.
9. Clearly, the fundamental rights of all people must be protected and ensured.

And now to the topic at hand: Integration.

#### **See: the reality we see on the ground**

As a network concerned with the rights of migrants and refugees, Caritas has worryingly followed the emergence of European trends, which highlight contemporary migration and integration issues through the promotion of negative clichés, as a so-called "threat" to society.

We repeatedly hear about the fears related to the "floods of migrants and refugees", the many "challenges" of integration, concerns about poverty and having to cover the costs of refugees and migrants, especially considering the financial crisis and widening gaps between the rich and poor, high unemployment, and populist notions of immigrants taking away jobs



from European citizens. Numerous comments have even been made by politicians, all of which contributes to the rise in anti-migrant sentiments.

In fact, those with both visible and cultural differences tend to experience the greatest prejudice and are blamed for increased crime, bringing in diseases, taking away jobs, driving down wages, abusing the welfare states, building parallel societies, lowering school standards, and generally behaving “as if the place belonged to them”.

The message generally conveyed is that certain “foreigners” should not dare to feel too comfortable in European societies. The result is that any person or group who is relying on the European welfare system or is perceived to be clearly different from the norm (in appearance, behaviour, religion, legal status, etc.) or who is not “worthy” of receiving refugee protection may be easily targeted as “different”, criminalised as being “illegal” (even though no person is illegal), blamed for acting in a deviant manner, and thus accorded fewer rights and privileges.

As a network concerned with the rights of migrants, refugees and internally displaced, Caritas Europa understands its role to intervene when such “labels” or social constructs are used to reaffirm, propagate and secure inequalities that benefit the vested interests of a few, while being detrimental to the immense majority of the European population.

I’d like to quote Pope Francis in his address to the EP in Strasbourg, 25 November 2014: “Men and women risk being reduced to mere cogs in a machine that treats them as items of consumption to be exploited, with the result that – as is so tragically apparent – whenever a human life no longer proves useful for that machine, it is discarded with few qualms (...while to) tend to those in need takes strength and tenderness, effort and generosity in the midst of a functionalistic and privatised mind-set which inexorably leads to a “throwaway culture”. Migrants and refugees are often part of these.

### **Judge: Caritas philosophy**

Pope Francis is a wonderful ally and role model. In his message for the 104<sup>th</sup> World Day of Migrants and Refugees on 14 January 2018, he called for “welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating migrants and refugees”.<sup>1</sup> These 4 verbs now lay the foundation for our work on integration.

Considering the current situation, “**welcoming** means, above all, offering broader options for migrants and refugees to enter destination countries safely and legally. This calls for a concrete commitment to increase and simplify the process for granting humanitarian visas

---

<sup>1</sup> The forthcoming paragraphs explaining the 4 verbs are taken nearly word for word from the MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR THE 104<sup>th</sup> WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES 2018, 14 January 2018, entitled: “Welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating migrants and refugees”. For further info, see: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170815\\_world-migrants-day-2018.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20170815_world-migrants-day-2018.html)



and for reunifying families. A greater number of countries ought to also adopt private and community sponsorship programmes, and open humanitarian corridors for particularly vulnerable refugees. Furthermore, special temporary visas should be granted to people fleeing conflicts in neighbouring countries. Collective and arbitrary expulsions of migrants and refugees are not suitable solutions, particularly where people are returned to countries which cannot guarantee respect for human dignity and fundamental rights.

Here, the importance of offering migrants and refugees adequate and dignified initial accommodation must be emphasised. This is because the more widespread programmes of welcome, already initiated in different places, seem to favour a personal encounter and allow for greater quality of service and increased guarantees of success. The principle of the centrality of the human person obliges us to always prioritise personal safety over national security. It is necessary, therefore, to ensure that agents in charge of border control are properly trained. The situation of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees requires that they be guaranteed personal safety and access to basic services. For the sake of the fundamental dignity of every human person, we must strive to find alternative solutions to detention for those who enter a country without authorisation.

The **second verb, protecting** may be understood as a series of steps intended to defend the rights and dignity of migrants and refugees, independent of their legal status. Such protection begins in the country of origin, and consists in offering reliable and verified information before departure, and in providing safety from illegal recruitment practices. This must be ongoing, as far as possible, in the country of migration, guaranteeing adequate consular assistance, the right to personally retain identity documents at all times, fair access to justice, the possibility of opening a personal bank account, and a minimum sufficient to on which to live. When duly recognised and valued, the potential and skills of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees are a true resource for the communities that welcome them. Considering this, migrants ought to be offered freedom of movement in countries of arrival, as well as work opportunities, and access to means of communication, out of respect for their dignity. For those who decide to return to their homeland, there is a need to emphasise to develop social and professional reintegration programmes.

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a universal legal basis for the protection of underage migrants. Child migrants must be spared any form of detention related to migratory status, and must be guaranteed regular access to primary and secondary education. Equally, when they come of age they must be guaranteed the right to remain and to enjoy the possibility of continuing their studies. Temporary custody or foster programmes should be provided for unaccompanied minors and minors separated from their families. The universal right to a nationality should be recognised and duly certified for all children at birth. The statelessness which migrants and refugees sometimes fall into can easily be avoided with the adoption of "nationality legislation that is in conformity with the



fundamental principles of international law". Migratory status should not limit access to national healthcare and pension plans, nor affect the transfer of their contributions if repatriated.

The **third verb, promoting** essentially means a determined effort to ensure that all migrants and refugees – as well as the communities which welcome them – are empowered to achieve their potential as human beings, in all the dimensions. Among these, we must recognize the true value of the religious dimension, ensuring to all foreigners in any country the freedom of religious belief and practice. Many migrants and refugees have abilities which must be appropriately recognised and valued. Since "work, by its nature, is meant to unite peoples", a determined effort to promote the social and professional inclusion of migrants and refugees is encouraged, guaranteeing for all – including those seeking asylum – the possibility of employment, language instruction and active citizenship, together with sufficient information provided in their mother tongue.

In the context of migration, the family is "a place and resource of the culture of life and a factor for the integration of values". The family's integrity must always be promoted, supporting family reunifications – including grandparents, grandchildren and siblings – independent of financial requirements.

In terms of international cooperation and humanitarian aid, the assistance offered ought to take into account the needs (such as medical and social assistance, as well as education) of developing countries which receive a significant influx of migrants and refugees. Also the local communities, which are vulnerable and facing material hardship, should be included among aid beneficiaries, but this should not be at a cost of official development aid.

The **final verb, integrating** concerns the opportunities for intercultural enrichment brought about by the presence of migrants and refugees. Integration is not "an assimilation that leads migrants to suppress or to forget their own cultural identity. Rather, contact with others leads to discovering their 'secret', to being open to them in order to welcome their valid aspects and thus contribute to knowing each one better. This process can be accelerated by granting citizenship free of financial or linguistic requirements, and by offering the possibility of special legalisation to migrants who can claim a long period of residence in the country of arrival.

Hence, it is vital to foster a culture of encounter in every way possible – by increasing opportunities for intercultural exchange, documenting and disseminating best practices of integration, and developing programmes to prepare local communities for integration processes".

Spaces of encounter are essential for promoting peaceful, inclusive societies for integral human development. This reflects a diplomacy of encounter toward deeper mutual



knowledge and mutual respect, a dialogue towards resolving conflicts, a dialogue toward promoting unity and fighting exclusion.

This is the focus of a **new online toolkit** on which Caritas Europa is working, in which we are focusing on addressing cultural barriers by creating spaces of “encounter”. Encounter evokes dialogue, bridges, solidarity, fraternity and charity. A “culture of encounter” is increasingly being used in the sphere of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue.

This is a concept that will also be promoted throughout the **CI Global campaign on migration, “Share the journey”**, which Pope Francis launched in Sept. advocate for rights of migrants and refugees and for the right to a diverse and peaceful society. It is important with this notion that people are not divided into categories, i.e. legal vs. irregular migrants, skilled versus low-skilled workers, so-called “worthy” asylum seekers versus economic migrants, etc. This campaign aims to remind of the individuals, the humans behind the topic of discussion today.

Another thing Caritas Europa has done has been to produce the **publication: “Welcome. Migrants make Europe stronger”<sup>2</sup>**. In this, we present 3 categories of integration barriers: cultural, structural and socio-economic that we have observed. We also present Caritas Europa’s vision of Europe and some promising practices for overcoming the 3 types of barriers.

Overall, we learned from the collection of promising practices that:

- Working with migrants is just as important as **working with receiving communities** in order to change the thinking and to contribute to a positive, constructive narrative of foreigners.
- **Active involvement** of migrants in the labour market, or engaging them as volunteers, is essential for their integration process.  
  
i.e. Engaging them as mentors or cultural mediators has proven an added value not only for their well-being but also for the common good. **In general a lot can be achieved by empowering and allowing them to participate actively in society** and in strengthening their engagement in migrant associations.
- **Partnerships at local level with different stakeholders are crucial for successful integration.**
- Finding innovative solutions that switch the typical paradigm (migrants – poor – needing funds) **to showcase the positive contributions migrants make to the receiving society.**

---

<sup>2</sup> This is available on our website: [http://www.caritas.eu/sites/default/files/welcome\\_2016.pdf](http://www.caritas.eu/sites/default/files/welcome_2016.pdf)



- **Innovation** is needed in order to raise awareness and to change peoples' mind-sets, as well as **to provide services and job opportunities**. An important role in this regard can be played by **social economy and social enterprises: they can foster integration of migrant in the labour market as well as also change mind-set.**<sup>3</sup>

**Comment [SP1]:** Add hyperlink to video

In conclusion, for Caritas, an inclusive Europe implies a welcoming environment where everybody is enabled and encouraged to participate in their community and where their contributions to social and cultural life are acknowledged and valued. It is where each person enjoys equal access to goods and services and all forms of discrimination are combatted. Those who are marginalised or living in poverty are empowered to be active in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

To assess where we are at in this process, we ask ourselves: to what extent are newcomers encouraged to actively participate in the resources, interactions and activities of the receiving society in a move towards equality? Are they able to achieve economic capital and social mobility, i.e. can they acquire a job, earn a decent living wage, and improve their economic status over time? Can they participate in the school system? Are they able to retain linguistic, cultural, and religious ties with their country of origin? Is this valued? Are they able to acquire citizenship in the host society and participate in politics? Can they vote? Can they save money to buy desired material objects such as a car, an apartment or a home? Do they feel a sense of belonging? Do they live in solidarity with their neighbours? Are they able to enjoy their lives? Are they accepted as equal members of society? Are they even allowed to enter Europe or are they held in detention centres awaiting their return?

So while we have a clear vision of Europe, where Caritas' values are incorporated, human and social rights are fully respected, and each person, family and community is empowered to develop, we can't help but appeal to you in the audience to think carefully about this vision. This is because we wonder how this can be achieved against the backdrop of impunity, rising nationalism, failed democracies and the tendency of certain policy makers to concentrate solely on being re-elected rather than contributing with real solutions to address societies' many challenges?

Considering this, we are already preparing our campaigning actions ahead of the EU elections in May 2019. Caritas will continue to try to make a positive impact in promoting welcoming societies and spreading messages of hope in the hopes of winning the support of policy makers in committing to human dignity, fighting against poverty, and supporting the most vulnerable by adhering to a rights-based approach.

---

<sup>3</sup> See for instance our work on social economy related to migrant integration: [http://www.caritas.eu/sites/default/files/caritas\\_europa\\_social\\_economy\\_leaflet.pdf](http://www.caritas.eu/sites/default/files/caritas_europa_social_economy_leaflet.pdf) and our videos: <http://www.caritas.eu/functions/policy-advocacy/social-economy>

**Recommendations:**

Knowing that we can't act alone, we work closely with policy makers to develop and implement solutions that put the person at the centre. For this reason, we have collated the following policy recommendations.

**We call on policy makers to:**

- Work with communities to change thinking and contribute to a positive, constructive narrative about migrants. Recognize their many contributions and publish statistics and facts about these.
- Create spaces of encounter, fostering dialogue and exchanges between migrants and European communities.
- Support festivals, classes, etc. that educate the majority about migrants, their cultures, language, histories, etc. Remove the fear factor of the unknown by getting to know migrants on a personal basis.
- Recognize Europe's cultural and historical past and explore how "native" cultures are already hybrid. Migrants do not make culture "impure," because culture is never "pure" or "static".
- Accept that migration is a natural part of our history. It is not something that can realistically be stopped or rolled back. Instead of fearing it, let's manage it as a natural phenomenon and treat migrants as human beings!
- Find innovative ways to empower migrants and foster their participation in society.
- Increase human rights oversight for external dimensions of asylum and migration policies. Ensure external surveillance/immigration staff have human rights training.
- Apply a more harmonized asylum policy, responsibility sharing, solidarity between countries.
- Curb the strict security approach taken at borders. Preventing migrants' entry to Europe and isolating them as a border/security/justice issue guarantees a narrow approach – the opposite of welcoming - that discourages real integration.
- Implement national integration strategies aimed at creating welcoming attitudes in receiving societies, in cooperation with key stakeholders, including migrants and CSOs. But what does it mean, in practice, to "work in cooperation with other stakeholders". When it comes to integration, there is no other way to function except for in partnerships with a number of different actors and stakeholders,



different sovereign systems, EU and non-EU countries. Considering the costs of creating systems that foster integration, it's also important to consider partnering with donors, foundations, governments, businesses etc.

- Find solutions that avoid competition over economic resources and don't restricting budget lines for one population group over another (migrants versus poor residents). European states must work toward balancing their duties to migrants and receiving communities, fostering dialogue and intercultural and inter-religious understanding. It is vital not to dismiss people's real lived-experiences, as this tends to promote xenophobia. Governments need rather to enable spaces of dialogue and exchange.
- Guarantee access to basic services: good quality healthcare services must be offered to everyone, regardless of a person's legal status; ensuring effective housing policies and access to education for migrants are also musts.
- Review coherence of migration/integration policies: ex. allowing children to stay, but expelling the parents or not allowing the parents to work, of course reconciling policies in favour of migrant rights.
- Work with journalists about bias/stereotypes and clear up misconceptions and inaccurate practices, such as the use of blanket terms (i.e. calling all migrants asylum seekers, criminals, etc.).
- Mainstream migrants and their needs into different policy areas and foster their participation in political processes.