

# GIAN MIGRATION

*"The stranger who resides with you, you shall look upon as one of your people and love him as yourself" (Lev. 19:34).*

## **Solidarity with Refugees and Migrants in the Era of COVID-19**

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### **Position Paper of the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network on Migration (GIAN Migration)<sup>1</sup>**

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We currently find ourselves in a global crisis, unprecedented in our lifetimes, as result of the COVID-19 pandemic. With numbers rising every day from their current levels [of nearly 800,000 cases and more than 37,000 deaths in 178 countries as of March 31, 2020](#), the virus has disrupted life in almost every corner of the globe. In response to the rapid spread of the virus, many countries have decided to close their borders, cease all non-essential activities, and impose a lockdown on all residents. Healthcare systems risk becoming even more overwhelmed as the pandemic spreads. Both health and economic consequences are expected to be devastating and will affect – in fact, are already affecting - the most vulnerable individuals and communities, including migrants, refugees, and forcibly displaced persons. These are the populations with whom we as the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network on Migration (GIAN Migration) are especially concerned.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This global network on displacement, migration and refugees, promoted by the [Secretariat for Social Justice and Ecology](#) of the Jesuit Curia in Rome, brings together various accompaniment, research, and advocacy organizations and their experiences working with and for displaced populations, migrants, and refugees across five continents. The network is composed of one representative from each of the six Conferences (administrative divisions) of the Society of Jesus, as well as Jesuit Refugee Service, which serves as an international ministry.

<sup>2</sup> The recommendations included in this statement are based on our own experience accompanying displaced persons, migrants, and refugees across five continents with whom we travel together through life.

## **Recommendations: *How can we take care of most vulnerable migrants? What can be done?***

We, the Global Ignatian Advocacy Network (GIAN) Migration, believe that as a matter of urgency, the following measures must be implemented according to their country-specific contexts:

- 1. - Evacuate overcrowded refugees camps** as well as detention centers, thereby offering migrants the opportunity to protect themselves and others from infection.
- 2. - Stop the deportations of migrants** particularly to countries with weak healthcare systems. The principle of non-refoulement (i.e., the right not to be returned to a country in which person's life or integrity is at risk) does not admit exceptions.
- 3. Prioritize access to medical attention for the homeless, displaced persons, migrants, and refugees in transit** – particularly the most vulnerable within those populations. These groups are in particular need of support because many people live in shadows, afraid to seek medical attention. It is important to protect them and provide them with relevant information to reduce their risk. Many shelters, both public and private, are high-risk environments as they continue to provide services yet lack proper medical supplies.
- 4. - Offer humanitarian and financial support** to those countries and areas with a high concentration of migrants, refugees, and displaced people.
- 5. - Uphold the right to asylum or other forms of international relief, including the right to due process.** People in need international protection cannot be rejected at the border, even in times of crisis.
- 6. - Provide safe emergency resources** for homeless people or those living in overcrowded settings who cannot comply with prevention and “social distancing” measures.
- 7. - Provide accurate and timely information** in different languages about the current conditions as well as recommended health and safety measures. We ask that government authorities act with the utmost transparency by transmitting the most accurate and up-to date information. While stay-at-home orders and similarly restrictive measures are scientifically and medically necessary to reduce the spread of the virus, they must never be used as a cover to trample on constitutional or human rights, which must always be preserved and upheld.
- 8. - Implement a network of care providers** that can quickly mobilize to provide relief for those who may be sick, alone, or stranded by border closures. Such networks already exist in part through civil society, churches, etc.

**9. - Raise awareness about the most vulnerable members of our society.** In many cases, those working at the frontlines as “essential workers” to provide much needed services such as childcare, caring for the elderly, agricultural labor, construction, etc. are migrants. They place themselves and their families at great risk to carry out this work so that they may ease the burden on the rest of society. They will also help rejuvenate society once the current health crisis ends. At this time, there is an urgent need to more deeply reflect on and communicate to the broader public the contributions these workers make so that they may be better appreciated and integrated into our societies.

**10. - Fight against falsehoods and populist trends** by immediately denouncing all attempts to link the spread of COVID-19 to migration or to otherwise stigmatize or blame migrants. Instead, we must be committed to providing the facts about how the virus is actually transmitted.

*In these bleak and uncertain times, we are comforted by the many creative gestures that have made us more aware of our interdependence within a global community. As Pope Francis points out, this is an opportunity to remind ourselves once and for all how indispensable solidarity is and that we live as one human family. In other words, we will only overcome this crisis if we stick together. Solidarity is the best protocol of all.*

*“We were surprised by an unexpected and angry storm, but we realized we were in the same boat. In this boat we are all like the disciples who speak with one voice and, with anguish, say 'we are lost'. We also realize that we cannot go on our own, but only together.”*

**Pope Francis, Rome, March 2020**

March 31, 2020