



Statement of the Permanent Mission of the
Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva
81st Standing Committee - Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Program
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Statement on International Protection
Geneva, 6 July 2021

Mr. Chairperson,

The latest global trends on forced displacement¹ demonstrate, once again, an appalling image of disrupted family life, flight from local communities and home countries, and an ongoing uncertainty of access to health care, education, and decent work. The disconcerting causes of displacement have become more and more complex, including the increasing impact of natural disasters and climate change which have a disproportionate effect on the poorest and those in vulnerable situations.

The fact that 82.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced at the end of 2020 is an alarming indicator of the tragic wounds of violence, persecutions and conflicts that bedevil our world, and of their increased aggravation by the COVID-19 pandemic. We must never forget that such numbers and statistics represent the individual lives of 82.4 million of our fellow sisters and brothers.

Mr. Chairperson,

Confronted with such a high scale of displacement, more generous resettlement policies are required, together with a stronger commitment to responsibility sharing. Such actions would alleviate the heavy burdens of care shouldered by countries that receive and host the largest numbers of refugees, the majority of which are in developing countries.

In this regard, this Delegation reiterates the appeal of Pope Francis for this year's World Day of Migrants and Refugees to "journey together towards an even wider "we" to all men and women, for the sake of renewing the human family, building together a future of justice and peace, and ensuring that no one is left behind".²

Mr. Chairperson,

It is regrettable that the pandemic has also become a crisis of protection as well as another cause of delay in the achievement of durable solutions.

As this year marks the 70th anniversary of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, it is a good occasion to reflect on the underlying ethical and moral values that led to such an important legal instrument. The right to seek asylum ultimately acknowledges that we are one human family. When a brother or sister is facing difficulties, other members of the human family are affected and thus share a responsibility to provide assistance.

The Holy See Delegation also wishes to express its deep concern that, in certain circumstances, the pandemic has challenged fundamental norms of refugee law, particularly the right to seek asylum and the cardinal principle of *non-refoulement*. Amidst the tragedy of forced

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/unhcrstats/60b638e37/global-trends-forced-displacement-2020.html>

² Pope Francis, Message for the 107th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2021).

displacement, the right to seek asylum represents a beacon of hope for many. After all, the decision to seek asylum is a leap of faith in the solidarity and unity of the human family.

Mr. Chairperson,

As the pandemic continues, so do protracted situations of uncertainty and vulnerability among refugee populations, thus causing grief and despair to many. The problems faced by refugees and asylum seekers remain without an adequate response. The struggles of host communities remain unanswered. Resettlement quotas have dropped, and durable solutions remain an elusive goal.

The impacts on access to healthcare and education have been enormous, with refugees often excluded from access to these basic goods. This lack of equitable access inhibits many from benefitting from preventive measures, including vaccines, diagnosis and treatment. It is important to strengthen international cooperation and solidarity, with the aim to assist effectively those States hosting a large number of refugees.

We often speak - and rightly so - about the generosity, solidarity and innate sense of hospitality that many governments and host communities show for refugees. But it is also important to acknowledge the resilience of refugees and the positive examples of the contributions that refugees have displayed in response to the pandemic, for instance by making available their skills, knowledge, experience, and expertise, most often on a voluntary basis. Refugees and displaced persons are not merely the objects of assistance, they are subjects of rights and duties, as are all human beings.

Mr. Chairperson,

Among the legitimate concerns for public health, we have witnessed some impressive examples showing that the duty to protect populations during public health emergencies can go hand in hand with the fulfilment of responsibilities and commitments made by States to respect international Conventions and the basic principles of international humanitarian law.

Indeed, one of the best lessons that can be drawn from the pandemic is future preparedness. In this regard, while the Holy See respects the exclusive right of States to manage their own borders, it also wishes to reaffirm and encourage that it is possible to balance public health concerns and the respect for the principle of *non-refoulement* and the right to seek asylum.

Mr. Chairperson,

In conclusion, the Holy See wishes to take this occasion to recognize the valiant role played during the Covid-19 pandemic by UNHCR staff as well as other stakeholders, many of whom have placed the service of others over ensuring their own health, safety and security. Among these courageous individuals are those engaged in government response programs as well as non-governmental and faith-based organizations who have remained on the frontlines as essential personnel offering special attention to the needs of refugees and migrants.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.