



## **THE NEURALGIC ISSUE OF GLOBAL MIGRATION TODAY**

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### **1. Introduction**

“Development is the process of expanding human freedoms that include elementary capabilities like being able to avoid deprivations and starvation, undernourishment, escapable morbidity and premature mortality, as well as the freedoms that are associated with being literate and numerate, enjoying political participation and uncensored speech and so on”.<sup>1</sup> International trade and global financial markets are very good at generating wealth, but they do not take care of other social needs, such as the preservation of peace, alleviation of poverty, protection of the environment, labor conditions, or human rights.<sup>2</sup> Most people know that they “with adequate opportunities, can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other”<sup>3</sup>. That is the motivation for migration.

### **2. Empirical data about migration**

According to statistics from the World Bank, in 2006 the world population stood at 6.5 billion. 191 million people (3% of world total population) were living outside their country of birth. 64 million of them were living in the European Union; 53 million in Northern America; 45 million in industrious regions of Asia. Migrants represented about the 14 per cent of the total population in these receiving regions. The process of migration has been increasing in the last years. For example, in the period 2000-2005 the net migration from less developed regions to developed ones has been 2.6 million per year.

### **3. Causes of migration**

Migration is affected by factors such as international economic imbalances, poverty and environmental degradation, natural disasters, combined with absence of peace and security, human rights violations, and the varying

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<sup>1</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, (NY: Anchor Books, 2000) 36.

<sup>2</sup> George Soros, *On Globalization*, (NY: Public Affairs/Perseus Books, 2002) 14.

<sup>3</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, (NY: Anchor Books, 2000) 11.

degrees of development of judicial and democratic institutions.<sup>4</sup> All these factors push and even force people to leave their countries to seek better opportunities to live. So, there are people who migrate fleeing from armed conflicts, genocide, or human rights abuses<sup>5</sup> (in 2006 there were 13 million refugees in the world, plus 26 million internal displacements). However, the majority of people migrate because of the lack of opportunities to work in their home countries. In this sense, some economic indicators show the unequal income distribution in the world: 16 per cent of the world total population receives 76 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product. This means that GDP per capita in high and middle developed regions is about 99 US Dollar, while in less developed regions (more than 1 billion people) it is less than 2 US Dollar. Therefore, available employment, safety and socio-economic standards in developed countries are the major pull factors for desperate workers in the poor world. Transportation and communication have made moving easier, so that people migrate for better opportunities to live.

#### 4. Effects of migration

On one hand, receiving countries are increasingly recognizing the need and benefit of international migration. They are less inclined to reduce immigration than a decade ago. They are implementing policies promoting the immigration of the highly skilled workers to do the well-paid jobs that the native, older population cannot do. But at the same time they are increasing the barriers for majorities of low-skilled workers<sup>6</sup>. The five most industrialized countries in the world are spending 17 billion US Dollars to prevent illegal immigration.<sup>7</sup> By now, politics about migration have been focused mainly on the control of the borders, at a very high cost in lives and money. The consequences have been: death, illegal immigration and human right abuses.

On the other hand, migrants contribute to the economies of their home countries through their remittances. In 2004, remittances sent to less developed countries were 145 billion US Dollars,<sup>8</sup> which represents 0.3% of the Gross Domestic Product worldwide. According to the 0.7% worldwide campaign against poverty, migrants are the main supporters of that program. They contribute themselves three times more than official aid. It is an example where the private money is serving the public good. However, there are consequences

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<sup>4</sup> United Nations, "Report of the International Conference of Population and Development", (El Cairo, 1994) 67.

<sup>5</sup> In 2006 there were about 13 million refugees in the world. 7,7 million were living in Asia; 3 million in Africa; 1,9 million in European Union. The 80% of refugees are women and children.

<sup>6</sup> In USA, the number of visas issued to low skilled workers lags behind economic demand. Immigration offers 5,000 visas for low skilled workers plus 66,000 agricultural visas for temporary workers. Another 500,000 low skilled workers enter without visa annually. From National Immigration Forum, and Jeffrey Passel cited in "In All Things. A Jesuit Response of the Social Apostolate", Winter 2006-2007.

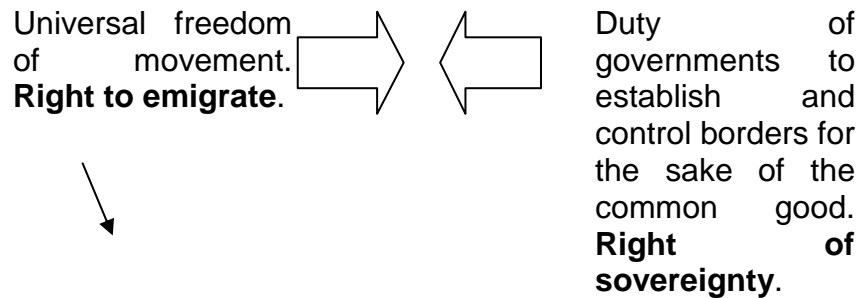
<sup>7</sup> Intermon-Oxfam, "Informe Puertas al Mar", Octubre 2007, p.2.

<sup>8</sup> Source: United Nations. Department of Economics and Social Affairs. Population Division. International Migration 2006.

[[http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/2006Migration\\_Chart/Migration2006.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/2006Migration_Chart/Migration2006.pdf)]

affecting the development of home countries such as the loss of young workers and exodus of better skilled workers (the issue of “brain drain”).

**5. A policy reform: humanitarian aid or justice? The theological reflection.<sup>9</sup>**



Based on:

- The principle of the **universal destination of goods.**
- The **dignity** of the human person.

**SOLIDARITY**

Migration is not only an ethical and political issue but a theological issue as well. It is related to love of God and to love of one’s neighbor as oneself. The Gospel warns believers to “welcome the stranger,” because “what you do unto the least of my brethren, you do unto me” (Mt 25, 35. 40-41). In this sense, Catholic Social Teaching offers a strong defense for universal freedom of movement (the right to emigrate) and a call for openness and a spirit of solidarity on the part of receiving nations. Pope Pius XII in a letter to the American Bishops in 1948 captures well the two-prong foundation of the right to emigrate:

First, it is the principle of the universal destination of goods. Those who are unable to satisfy their needs or to fulfill their familiar or social duties because of unfavorable conditions in their homelands have a right to move to where it is possible to do so.

Second, it is the dignity of the human person. It means that every human being has the right to life, to bodily integrity and to the means necessary to the proper development of life. It implies a broad range of social, political and economic rights.

However, Catholic social thought also assumes that it is the duty of governments to establish and control borders for the sake of the common good: the sovereignty of the state must be observed. How does one reconcile the tension between the right to emigrate and the right of sovereignty?

<sup>9</sup> Ryan, M. & Whitmore, T.D. Ed., *The Challenge of Global Stewardship: Roman Catholic Responses*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997) 210-233.

The issue is the dignity of the human person. It defines, on one hand, the scope of the right to emigrate, and the opportunity of persons to realize their full potential and live in dignity. On the other hand, it limits national sovereignty. No state can arbitrarily deny an individual or a people the right to emigrate for just reasons or to “enter a political community where he hopes he can more fittingly provide a future for himself and his dependents”<sup>10</sup> Only under exceptional circumstances<sup>11</sup> can borders function as a means of self-defense against the moral duty to admit immigrants who have been forced by political or economical reasons to leave their homes.

In order to face the controversy between these rights (migration and sovereignty), it is useful to distinguish “common good” and “national interest”. Common good is “the total sum of those conditions of social living whereby men are enabled to achieve their own integral perfection more fully and easily”.<sup>12</sup> But what is necessary to secure equal access to the minimum conditions for human existence and opportunities for human flourishing (common good) is not equivalent to what might be perceived as desirable by the people of a particular nation (national interest). The common good of the citizens should not be used as an excuse to justify selfish and exclusionary policies. Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion but a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good.

However, every day the human consequences of a broken immigration system are apparent: families separated, migrants exploited by unscrupulous employers and smugglers, and human beings, desperate to escape poverty, perish in their journey to their imagined promised land. Because of its harmful impact on human life and dignity, a comprehensive reform of the immigration system is necessary.<sup>13</sup>

### **Some clues for a policy reform about migration:**

First, from a moral perspective, when debating barriers to migration, protection of the national interests can never be considered without reference to the realities and challenges of interdependence in the global world.

Second, in receiving countries, the genuine concern for the common good should face the challenge of assimilation as an issue of human dignity. In this way, much will depend on the degree to which civil society is positioned and the pressures on politicians. Governments should promote for persons with different cultural histories and identities, the means to flourish and to participate in society. It is unjust to benefit from the hard work of undocumented workers

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<sup>10</sup> Pope John XIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1963, n°106.

<sup>11</sup> Exceptional circumstances could be when if doing so would radically compromise public order or seriously undermine the state’s ability to maintain the political, economic, and social conditions necessary to protect broad human dignity.

<sup>12</sup> Pope John XIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 1961, n°65.

<sup>13</sup> Appleby, J.K., “The Catholic Case for Comprehensive Immigration Reform”, *In All Things. A Jesuit Response of the Social Apostolate*, Winter 2006-2007, p.19.

while relegating them to a permanent underclass.<sup>14</sup> Naturalization is a means of promoting human dignity. By providing them legal status and a path to citizenship, undocumented workers would be better able to assert their rights in the workplace and fully contribute to their communities without fear.<sup>15</sup>

Third, immigration policy is a subject for national debate and decision, but the effects are felt locally. In this way, communities have the right to existence and to self-development. But this right is qualified by a corresponding duty to respect the rights of other communities and by a call to “active solidarity”<sup>16</sup> for the sake of promoting the equal dignity of all persons.<sup>17</sup> Active solidarity goes beyond not harming other communities that are struggling in their efforts to achieve their proper goals.

Fourth, the calls to restrict immigration on cultural grounds is not usually motivated by concern for human dignity or an interest in creating conditions under which individuals and groups have just access to available goods and opportunities. Rather, it is the desire to protect a way of life enjoyed by some persons against the perceived threat posed by others. In one sense, membership in the one body of Christ transcends particular loyalties of race, culture and nationality.

Fifth, migration is a complex phenomenon. The issues such as the brain drain and brain circulation, remittances, transnational communities, asylum, trafficking and unauthorized movements, intersect with national concerns regarding low fertility and population aging, unemployment, poverty, human rights, the rights of citizens, social integration, xenophobia and national security. These concerns lead to a re-examination of migration policies and the potential benefits and disadvantages occurring in countries of origin and countries of destination. Immigration policy must be evaluated alongside a range of policies, including those regulating foreign trade and investment, proposals for sustainable development, education and training in developing countries, debt alleviation, and foreign policy. As the US Catholic bishops argue: “efforts to stem migration that do not effectively address its root causes are not only ineffectual, but permit the continuation of political, social and economic inequities that cause it.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Appleby, J.K., “The Catholic Case for Comprehensive Immigration Reform”, *In All Things. A Jesuit Response of the Social Apostolate*, Winter 2006-2007, p.19.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p.19.

<sup>16</sup> Pope John XIII, *Pacem in Terris*, 1963, n°98.

<sup>17</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n°38.

<sup>18</sup> Appleby, J.K., “The Catholic Case for Comprehensive Immigration Reform”, *In All Things. A Jesuit Response of the Social Apostolate*, Winter 2006-2007, 19.