

WORLD DAY OF MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES
15 JANUARY 2017

**MINOR MIGRANTS,
VULNERABLE AND
VOICELESS**

PARISH RESOURCE PACK



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Foreword

As we prepare to celebrate the 103rd World Day of Migrants and Refugees, on Sunday, 15 January 2017, it is important that we come together to remember and pray for the tens of thousands of children who migrate alone, unaccompanied, to escape poverty and violence.

Children are the most vulnerable and hardest hit among the world's migrants and require special protection, Pope Francis said.

The Pope made these comments in a message on the theme of '**Child Migrants, the Vulnerable and the Voiceless**' for the **World Day for Migrants and Refugees 2017**. In his message, the Pope called for greater protection and integration of immigrants and refugees who are minors, especially those who are unaccompanied.

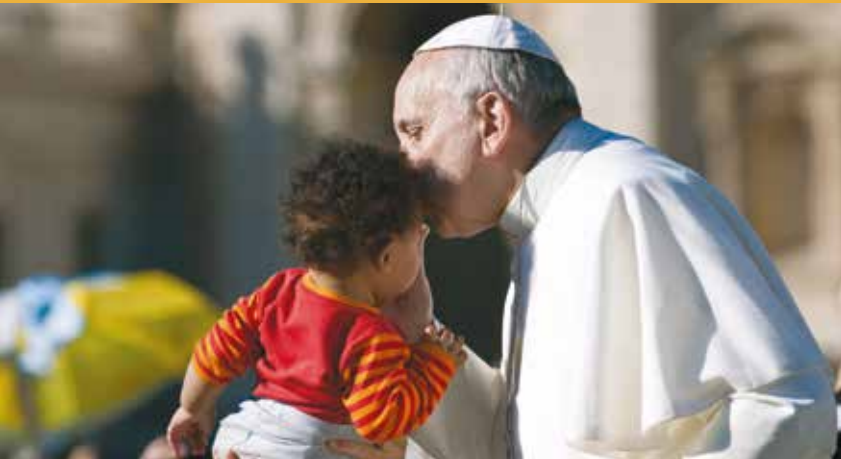
'Minors are especially fragile, vulnerable and often invisible and voiceless – unable to claim or unaware of their rights and needs,' he said.

In particular, they have 'the right to a healthy and secure family environment, where a child can grow under the guidance and example of a father and a mother,' the Pope said. 'Children, furthermore, have the right to recreation,' he added. 'In a word, they have the right to be children.'

Please join with Pope Francis and the Council for Immigrants of the Irish Bishops' Conference in drawing attention to the refugee crisis, in particular the plight of minor migrants.

We hope this **Resource Pack** will assist you in raising awareness of the challenges facing children across the globe and we encourage you to make use of these resources in reaching out to the people of your parish in relation to this important issue.

If the Council for Immigrants can be of any assistance to you in your ministry, please contact our offices in Maynooth. We also encourage you to visit our websites: www.catholicbishops.ie/immigrants



Message of His Holiness Pope Francis for the 103rd World Day of Migrants and Refugees (15 January 2017)

'Child Migrants, the Vulnerable and the Voiceless'

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me' (Mk 9:37; cf. Mt 18:5; Lk 9:48; Jn 13:20). With these words, the Evangelists remind the Christian community of Jesus' teaching, which both inspires and challenges. This phrase traces the sure path which leads to God; it begins with the smallest and, through the grace of our Saviour, it grows into the practice of welcoming others. To be welcoming is a necessary condition for making this journey a concrete reality: God made himself one of us. In Jesus God became a child, and the openness of faith to God, which nourishes hope, is expressed in loving proximity to the smallest and the weakest. Charity, faith and hope are all actively present in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, as we have rediscovered during the recent Extraordinary Jubilee.

But the Evangelists reflect also on the responsibility of the one who works against mercy: 'Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin: it is better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and be drowned in the depth of the sea' (Mt 18:6; cf. Mk 9:42; Lk 17:2). How can we ignore this severe warning when we see the exploitation carried out by unscrupulous people? Such exploitation harms young girls and boys who are led into prostitution or into the mire of pornography; who are enslaved as child labourers or soldiers; who are caught up in drug trafficking and other forms of criminality; who are forced to flee from conflict and persecution, risking isolation and abandonment.

For this reason, on the occasion of the annual World Day of Migrants and Refugees, I feel compelled to draw attention to the reality of child migrants, especially the ones who are alone. In doing so I ask everyone to take care of the young who, in a threefold way, are defenceless: they are children, they are foreigners, and they have no means to protect themselves. I ask everyone to help those who, for various reasons, are forced to live far from their homeland and are separated from their families.

Migration today is not a phenomenon limited to some areas of the planet. It affects all continents and is growing into a tragic situation of global proportions. Not only does this concern those looking for dignified work or better living conditions, but also men and women, the elderly and children, who are forced to leave their homes in the hope of finding safety, peace and security. Children are the first among those to pay the heavy toll of emigration, almost always caused by violence, poverty, environmental conditions, as well as the negative aspects of globalisation. The unrestrained competition for quick and easy profit brings with it the cultivation of perverse scourges such as child trafficking, the exploitation

and abuse of minors and, generally, the depriving of rights intrinsic to childhood as sanctioned by the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Childhood, given its fragile nature, has unique and inalienable needs. Above all else, there is the right to a healthy and secure family environment, where a child can grow under the guidance and example of a father and a mother; then there is the right and duty to receive adequate education, primarily in the family and also in the school, where children can grow as persons and agents of their own future and the future of their respective countries. Indeed, in many areas of the world, reading, writing and the most basic arithmetic is still the privilege of only a few. All children, furthermore, have the right to recreation; in a word, they have the right to be children.

And yet among migrants, children constitute the most vulnerable group, because as they face the life ahead of them, they are invisible and voiceless: their precarious situation deprives them of documentation, hiding them from the world's eyes; the absence of adults to accompany them prevents their voices from being raised and heard. In this way, migrant children easily end up at the lowest levels of human degradation, where illegality and violence destroy the future of too many innocents, while the network of child abuse is difficult to break up.

How should we respond to this reality?

Firstly, we need to become aware that the phenomenon of migration is not unrelated to salvation history, but rather a part of that history. One of God's commandments is connected to it: 'You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt' (Ex 22:21); 'Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt' (Deut 10:19). This phenomenon constitutes a sign of the times, a sign which speaks of the providential work of God in history and in the human community, with a view to universal communion. While appreciating the issues, and often the suffering and tragedy of migration, as too the difficulties connected with the demands of offering a dignified welcome to these persons, the Church nevertheless encourages us to recognise God's plan. She invites us to do this precisely amidst this phenomenon, with the certainty that no one is a stranger in the Christian community, which embraces 'every nation, tribe, people and tongue' (Rev 7:9). Each person is precious; persons are more important than things, and the worth of an institution is measured by the way it treats the life and dignity of human beings, particularly when they are vulnerable, as in the case of child migrants.

Furthermore, we need to work towards protection, integration and long-term solutions.

We are primarily concerned with adopting every possible measure to guarantee the protection and safety of child migrants, because 'these boys and girls often end up on the street abandoned to themselves and prey to unscrupulous exploiters who often transform them into the object of physical, moral and sexual violence' (Benedict XVI, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, 2008).

Moreover, the dividing line between migration and trafficking can at times be very subtle. There are many factors which contribute to making migrants vulnerable, especially if they are children: poverty and the lack of means to survive, to which are added unrealistic expectations generated by the media; the low level of literacy; ignorance of the law, of the culture and frequently of the language of host countries. All of this renders children physically and psychologically dependent. But the most powerful force driving the exploitation and abuse of children is demand. If more rigorous and effective action is not taken against those who profit from such abuse, we will not be able to stop the multiple forms of slavery where children are the victims.

It is necessary, therefore, for immigrants to cooperate ever more closely with the communities that welcome them, for the good of their own children. We are deeply grateful to organisations and institutions, both ecclesial and civil, that commit time and resources to protect minors from various forms of abuse.

It is important that evermore effective and incisive cooperation be implemented, based not only on the exchange of information, but also on the reinforcement of networks capable of assuring timely and specific intervention; and this, without underestimating the strength that ecclesial communities reveal especially when they are united in prayer and fraternal communion.

Secondly, we need to work for the integration of children and youngsters who are migrants. They depend totally on the adult community. Very often the scarcity of financial resources prevents the adoption of adequate policies aimed at assistance and inclusion. As a result, instead of favouring the social integration of child migrants, or programmes for safe and assisted repatriation, there is simply an attempt to curb the entrance of migrants, which in turn fosters illegal networks; or else immigrants are repatriated to their country of origin without any concern for their 'best interests'.

The condition of child migrants is worsened when their status is not regularised or when they are recruited by criminal organisations. In such cases they are usually sent to detention centres. It is not unusual for them to be arrested, and because they have no money to pay the fine or for the return journey, they can be incarcerated for long periods, exposed to various kinds of abuse and violence. In these instances, the right of states to control migratory movement and to protect the common good of the nation must be seen in conjunction with the duty to resolve and regularise the situation of child migrants, fully respecting their dignity and seeking to meet their needs when they are alone, but also the needs of their parents, for the good of the entire family.

Of fundamental importance is the adoption of adequate national procedures and mutually agreed plans of cooperation between countries of origin and of destination, with the intention of eliminating the causes of the forced emigration of minors.

Thirdly, to all I address a heartfelt appeal that long-term solutions be sought and adopted. Since this is a complex phenomenon, the question of child migrants must be tackled at its source. Wars, human rights violations, corruption, poverty, environmental imbalance and disasters, are all causes of this problem. Children are the first to suffer, at times suffering torture and other physical violence, in addition to moral and psychological aggression, which almost always leave indelible scars.

It is absolutely necessary, therefore, to deal with the causes which trigger migrations in the countries of origin. This requires, as a first step, the commitment of the whole international community to eliminate the conflicts and violence that force people to flee. Furthermore, far-sighted perspectives are called for, capable of offering adequate programmes for areas struck by the worst injustice and instability, in order that access to authentic development can be guaranteed for all. This development should promote the good of boys and girls, who are humanity's hope.

Lastly, I wish to address a word to you, who walk alongside migrant children and young people: they need your precious help. The Church too needs you and supports you in the generous service you offer. Do not tire of courageously living the Gospel, which calls you to recognise and welcome the Lord Jesus among the smallest and most vulnerable.

I entrust all child migrants, their families, their communities, and you who are close to them, to the protection of the Holy Family of Nazareth; may they watch over and accompany each one on their journey. With my prayers, I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 8 September 2016.

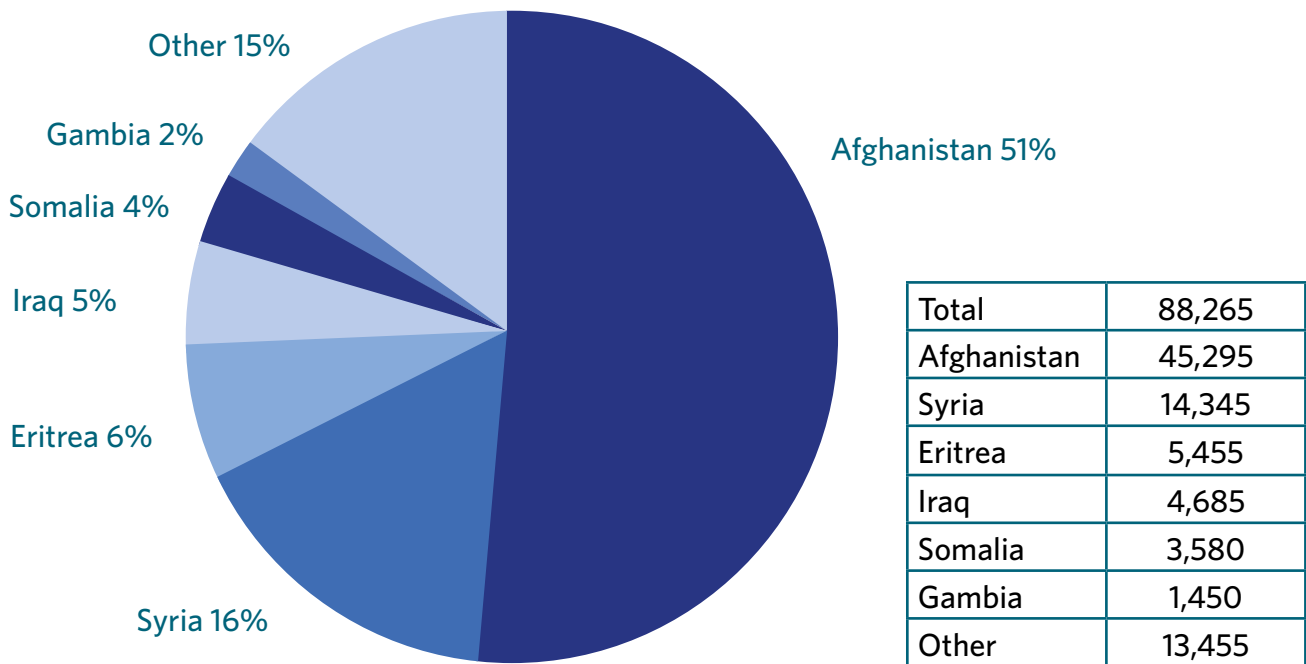
Franciscus

European Union Unaccompanied Minor Figures

In 2015, 88,300 unaccompanied minors were among asylum seekers registered in the European Union (EU). Slightly more than half are Afghans. While their number always stood between 11,000 and 13,000 in the EU over the period 2008-2013, it almost doubled in 2014 to reach slightly more than 23,000 persons, then nearly quadrupled in 2015.

In 2015, a substantial majority of unaccompanied minors were males (91%) and over half were aged 16 to 17 (57%, or 50 500 persons), while those aged 14 to 15 accounted for 29% (25,800 persons) and those aged less than 14 for 13% (11,800 persons). Around half (51%) of asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors in the EU in 2015 were Afghans.

Asylum applicants considered unaccompanied minors in the EU, by country of citizenship, 2015



4 in 10 applied for asylum in Sweden

In 2015, the highest number of asylum applicants considered to be unaccompanied minors was registered in Sweden (with almost 35,300 unaccompanied minors, or 40% of all those registered in the EU member states), followed by Germany (14,400, or 16%), Hungary (8,800 or 10%) and Austria (8,300 or 9%). Together these four member states accounted for three-quarters of all asylum applicants considered unaccompanied minors registered in the EU in 2015.

Source: Eurostat Press Release May 2016

IRELAND UNACCOMPANIED MINOR FIGURES 2015

35 unaccompanied minors were recorded applying for asylum in Ireland.

- » 10 from Afghanistan
- » 10 from Albania
- » 5 from the Democratic Republic of Congo

The Plight of Unaccompanied Refugees in Europe – Nasir's Story

Nasir left his home in Afghanistan's Baghlan province seeking safety in Europe. He travelled to Iran by foot and in the back of smugglers' trucks.

At the border with Turkey he escaped the bullets of Iranian border guards, who killed seven people just behind him. He spent four days hiking in the mountains before arriving in Bulgaria, where he ran from gunshots again. It took him almost three weeks to cross that country, and most of it was spent in a deep forest with little to eat and no shelter at night.

A smuggler left Nasir in Belgrade, and he waited for another smuggler to take him on the next leg of his journey to Germany. He joined a group of four other refugees who had a tent. This was the first piece of shelter he had since he began his journey. He was able to escape the cold and wet rain that night. Unfortunately, the tent could not sustain that many people sleeping in it, it was too cramped, and Nasir, the smallest, was forced to leave by the others. He spent the night sitting in the rain, trying to stay warm.

Nasir is just eleven years old. He says he left home to escape an abusive uncle after an earthquake killed his parents. He is one of over 83,000 unaccompanied children making their way to Europe this year. Without parents to guide them, these minors are often at the mercy of smugglers and face heightened risks of physical and sexual abuse.

Children often try to avoid detection, telling authorities they're eighteen because they fear being detained or delayed. Due to the large increase of people crossing the borders, the authorities are often overstretched and do not have the manpower or interpreters available to communicate with the children.



European countries are now engaging with and implementing procedures to try and protect minors; however, according to Human Rights Watch, 'they need to get more creative and flexible,' as the current inflow of children staying for short periods of time in certain countries is 'new territory'. At least, 'they have to ensure that the kids can pass through safely and they're afforded the kind of protection they need from exploitation and violence and other risks.'

Nasir spent three days in Belgrade before he was informed that his new smuggler was ready to take him on the next stage of his journey. They were heading towards the Croatian border. Nasir was still dressed in the clothes in which he began his journey and did not know what future perils might lie ahead for him on this journey, alone.

Pray for Nasir, and the thousands of children like him, seeking safety and life in Europe. Pray for their protection, and that governments will take their role seriously in finding them places of safety and security to live.

Pray for those working with refugee children, many of whom are traumatised and have suffered abuse. Pray for compassion, love and grace to flow from the heart of Jesus through His people, and that many children will find healing and life in Christ.

Pray for peace in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, for a future and a hope for the people of these nations and for future generations.

Source: <https://pray.interserve.org/author/jackie-smith/>

To read the full story of Nasir and the issue of refugee children, go to: <http://america.aljazeera.com/multimedia/2015/10/unaccompanied-afghan-boy-refugee.html>



Prayer for Unaccompanied Migrant Children

For Children Immigrating Alone

Mary, you traveled alone
To reach the loving embrace
Of your beloved family member.
Elizabeth welcomed you with
Open arms and an open heart.

Be with those children
Who are travelling across borders
To seek solace with family.
Protect them from exploitation
And from traumatising experiences.

Teach us by
The example of the Visitation.
Grant us open arms
And open hearts
To receive your children
Trying to find the way
To a new, life-giving home.

Mary, Mother of the human family,
Help us end the misery
Of children separated from family
By man-made borders
But not by love.
May they arrive, as you did,
To joy and to the benediction
Of a loving embrace.

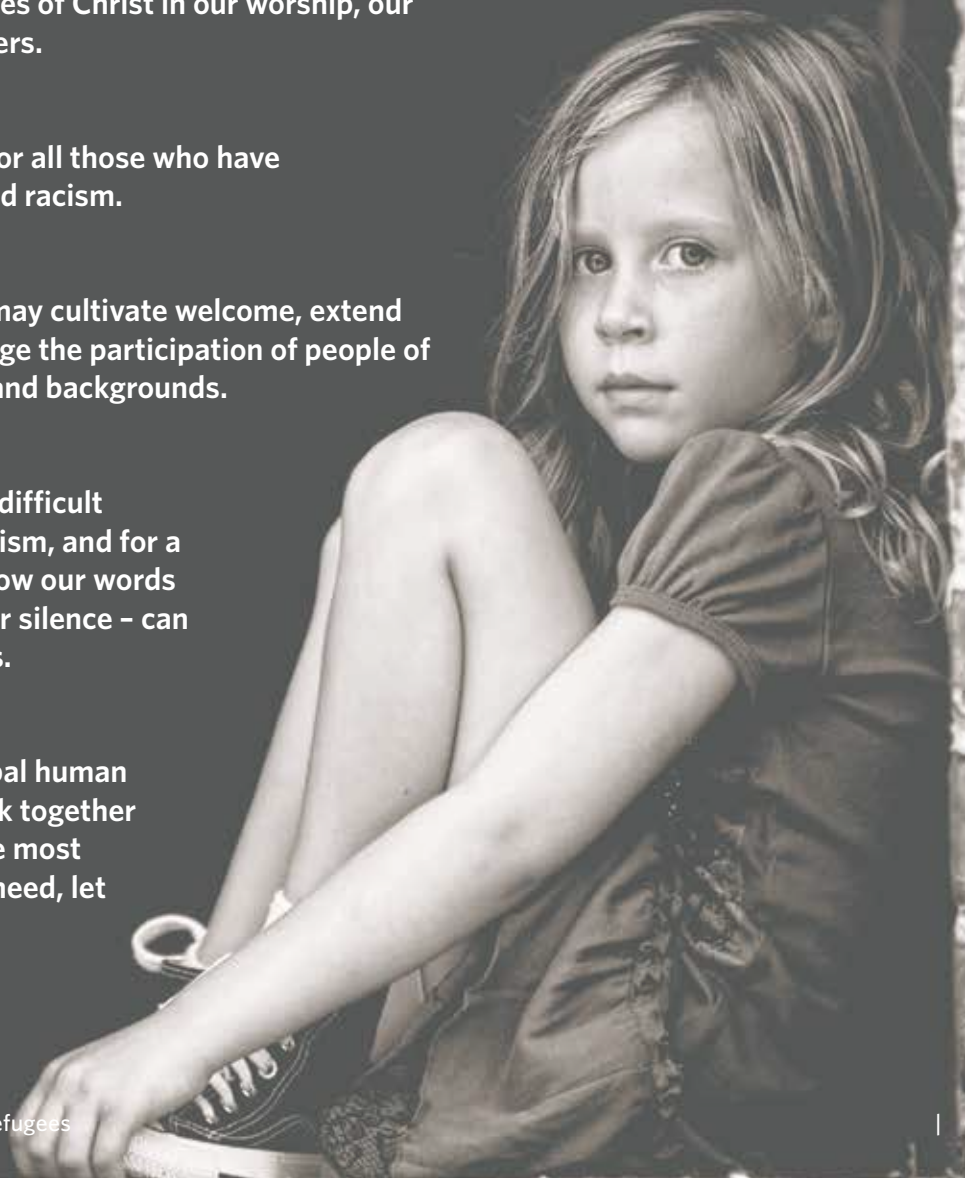
Amen.

Sisters of Mercy

Prayers of the Faithful

In communion with Christ and one another we pray:

- » For an end to the violence perpetrated by harsh words, deadly weapons, or cold indifference.
Let us pray to the Lord
- » For the grace to see every human being as a child of God, regardless of race, language or culture.
Let us pray to the Lord
- » For the wisdom to receive the stories and experiences of those different from ourselves and to respond with respect.
Let us pray to the Lord
- » For the strength to teach our children how to resolve differences non-violently and respectfully, and the courage to model it in our own behaviour.
Let us pray to the Lord
- » For our faith community, that we may celebrate and welcome the diverse faces of Christ in our worship, our ministries, and our leaders.
Let us pray to the Lord
- » For healing and justice for all those who have experienced violence and racism.
Let us pray to the Lord
- » For our parish, that we may cultivate welcome, extend hospitality, and encourage the participation of people of all cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds.
Let us pray to the Lord
- » For the courage to have difficult conversations about racism, and for a better appreciation of how our words and actions – or even our silence – can impact our communities.
Let us pray to the Lord
- » For solidarity in our global human family, that we may work together to protect those who are most vulnerable and most in need, let us pray to the Lord.
Let us pray to the Lord



Suggested Homily Notes for World Day of Migrants and Refugees (15 January 2017)

In the Catholic Church no one is a stranger; the Church has a strong tradition of welcoming the stranger and the Church is open to anyone, anywhere. The Church is 'God's family on earth,' as Pope Benedict said in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*; and in God, as we know, there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free; we are all children of the same Father, and while we celebrate and respect our different cultures, we share a common dignity.

We are all very aware that migration can mean enormous hardships and suffering for our brothers and sisters who are migrants; the migration of families and children, in particular, is marked by great suffering. Our migrants are deprived of their most basic human rights which we take for granted.

The Church recognises in migrants the image of Christ who said, 'I was a stranger and you made me welcome' (Mt 25:35). Their suffering is, therefore, a challenge to our faith and the love of believers who are called on to heal the suffering and evils caused by migration and discover the plan God pursues through migration even when there are obvious injustices. God's appeal, made without compromise in both the Old and the New Testaments, is for charity, compassion, love, fraternity – for there to be new bonds of friendship forged between newcomer and native.

A constant command in both the Old Testament and the New Testament is to offer hospitality to the exile and the stranger – the excluded and unloved – seeing in him and her the face of Christ. Faith in the presence of Christ in the migrant leads to a conversion of our minds and hearts, which leads us to a renewed spirit of respect, charity and unity.

St. Luke's Gospel reminds us: "Then Jesus called for the children and said to the disciples, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it" (Lk 18:16).

Fifty million children around the world are on the move as migrants. They are running from conflict, war, extreme poverty and various forms of abuse and exploitation. Their numbers have dramatically increased in recent years.





Refugee and migrant children – in particular unaccompanied ones – face multiple dangers. They are prime targets for trafficking and exploitation. When a boat sinks, they are the most likely to drown. They are the first ones to suffer hunger and thirst. They are the most vulnerable to extreme weather as they move through deserts and forests with no protection or shelter. We see the many images of these migrant children on our televisions, in our newspapers and on social media.

Millions more children are caught in situations of conflict, trapped in situations of extreme poverty or in areas of extreme environmental vulnerability. These harrowing situations of children call us to commit ourselves to fighting the root causes of their sufferings. The primary cause of today's mass displacements of populations is created by humans: namely, wars and conflicts between nations. Indeed, twenty-eight million of the fifty million children on the move were driven away from their homes by conflict. There are disturbing and horrible lists of violations against the rights of children, which have been increasing both in number and in intensity. In certain conflicts throughout the world, up to 40 percent of the victims are children. Never in recent memory have so many children been subjected to such violent brutality: children used as soldiers, suicide bombers, sex slaves, and disposable intelligence-gatherers in the most dangerous military operations. The deliberate destruction of their homes, schools and hospitals, in total disregard of international humanitarian law, has become a strategy of war. These migrant children have no childhood; they are forced to survive as adults and never know the joy and happiness of being young.

Other serious violations of the rights of children exist, among them child labour. Pope Francis has appealed to the International Community to 'unite and renew [its] efforts to remove this cause of modern slavery, which deprives millions of children of some fundamental rights and exposes them to serious dangers.'

We all have a part to play in the care of migrant children and we may not be able to change governments or disable warfare while we can raise our voices in prayer. We can also raise our voices in calling on those who have power to change the situation of our migrant children; our voices are the voices of the children left homeless and abandoned who need our voices and our prayers as their voices weaken with fear and hunger.

Fr Willie Purcell, November 2016, Council for Immigrants

Parish Actions Remembering Minor Migrants on World Day of Migrants and Refugees



Pray Together. Gather to pray and reflect. Many parish communities are using the Pope's Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees as a starting point for reflection and discussion.



Reach Out Together. Create intentional opportunities for members of your parish community to listen to the stories and experiences of people of ethnicities, languages and cultures different from their own. Acknowledge refugee or migrant backgrounds of parishioners: for example, ask a member of your parish to talk about their journey to live in Ireland.



Bring what you've learned through reaching out to pray and reflect on the hard questions. Are the many faces of the diverse body of Christ represented in decision-making processes of our parish? Who is missing around the table? In our worship together, and in activities of our community, do we cultivate welcome, hospitality and participation for people of all cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds? How do we invite our members to reflect about and understand racism? How are we currently working to change perspectives and address the causes of racism?



Learn Together. Make an effort to learn more about racial disparities and the causes of racial tension in Ireland. In recent years, there has been ample media coverage on disparities in the direct provision system, the justice system, and other areas. Use group discussions to draw from your experiences of prayer, reflection, encounter, and study to discern what action the Holy Spirit might be calling you to take as a community.



Act Together. Some parish communities in Ireland chose to reach across faith traditions, joining ecumenical and interfaith efforts to work together on racial justice issues. Other communities are called to commit to practical changes in the ways they practise hospitality, cultivate leaders, and celebrate cultural traditions. Understanding the importance of encounter and dialogue can lay the groundwork for closer community ties.





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