

**Tenth Global Forum on Migration and Development**  
*"Towards a Global Social Contract on Migration and Development"*

**Roundtable 2.2**

**Fostering the development impact of returning migrants**

**Holy See**

**Intervention of Reverend Father Michael Czerny S.J.,**

**Undersecretary,**

**Migrants & Refugees Section**

**of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development**

The phenomenon of the returning migrant is probably just as complex as the countless human situations in the previous three moments of human mobility: departure, transit and arrival. For example, migrants might return to their homeland with innovative new ideas for their country, or convinced that 'the old ways are the best ways' – the same variations are found in those who never left. Moreover, migrants may return feeling they have succeeded while away or have failed while away – perceptions of success and failure are also true for those who stayed home.

The biggest difference is that migrants were away. In this, when returning, they are more like immigrants. Many points which apply to the reception of newcomers by the host-country residents also apply to the welcome and integration of returnees into their family, community, society of origin.

This is how Pope Francis addressed asylum seekers and forced migrants: "Too often you have not been welcomed. Forgive the closedness and indifference of our societies, which fear the change of life and mentality that your presence requires. Treated as a burden, as problem, a cost, you are instead a gift."<sup>1</sup>

Let me make three points: about the needs of all; about the special situation of returning migrants; and about coercion.

Personal and family development is an undeniable right of every human being. The State is responsible to assure the necessary conditions, namely, fair access to

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Message for the 35th anniversary of the Astalli Centre*, 19.04.2016.

fundamental goods for everyone. These fundamental goods are probably best understood in terms of basic capabilities. They include: to live healthily, to be knowledgeable and spiritual, to enjoy a decent standard of living, and to participate in the life of the community, for both current and future generations.<sup>2</sup>

Given these fundamental conditions for integral human development, our attitudes and provisions for returning migrants should mirror those for fully participating resident populations. Not more, not less.

This brings me to the second point. Tension can develop between local populations who persevered through poverty, conflict or crisis, and returning migrants who left in search of better living and economic conditions. The latter, whatever their situation and motives for returning, might be regarded as 'other' and 'invasive'. They themselves might harbour feelings of loss, failure, anxiety and stress (or, alternatively, of superiority), which will hinder their reintegration. Poor economic prospects and security concerns will further destabilize the physical and psychosocial well-being of the returnee.

When return migration is not well managed and where capacities for integration are insufficient, returning migrants can be perceived as a burden or a threat to the social cohesion of receiving communities. An effective best practice would be to facilitate the recognition of professional and vocational training, credentials and experience acquired abroad. For example, communities to which migrants are returning will benefit greatly from trained healthcare workers, teachers, artisans, tradesmen and so on, if they are allowed to practice. Whereas shortsighted self-interest might block them from making their contribution.

Pope Francis sees these issues from a fundamental perspective of compassion and integration. When he speaks about "encounter", his prophetic words apply to those first departing, in transit or arriving, but they also apply to those who are returning: "We are called to promote a *culture of mercy* based on the rediscovery of encounter with others, a culture in which no one looks at another with indifference or turns away from the suffering of our brothers and sisters."<sup>3</sup>

A third point is about coercion. It seems that certain nationalities of new arrivals are immediately repatriated, without any process, without any possibility of appeal. It is a matter of deepest concern if, in the attempt to reduce the number of

---

<sup>2</sup> See the annual UNDP *Human Development Report* since 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Apostolic Letter, Misericordia et misera*, § 20.

arrivals, agreements are implemented between a country of origin and a country of destination, in order to reduce or eliminate the recognized rights of those seeking asylum.

What holds for migration is also true of *most* returns. So an absolutely crucial question boils down to the quality - even the ethics - of the return process. Is it free or coerced? Is it transparent or covert?

Migration will never be “orderly, safe, regular and responsible” (New York Declaration, paragraph 16) so long as some are forced to return rather than being really free to stay in their new land. Coercion as expulsion, in initial departure or in forced return, introduces a thoroughly toxic element into any receiving community. Whether abroad or after return, migrants will be far more likely to enjoy and foster sustainable development if their choice to move has been free.

In conclusion, by considering the needs and potential of returning migrants, this GFMD Roundtable helps us to rediscover what is at the very basis of our concern and should motivate our resolve. “More decisive and constructive action is required,” Pope Francis insists, “one which relies on a universal network of cooperation, based on safeguarding the dignity and centrality of every human person.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Message for the 101st World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 03/09/2014.