



## **Towards a Theological Ethics of Migration in Europe and its Implications for Catholic Social Thought**

### **Model for Action: Learning from Experience**

#### **Pax Christi International**

The commitment of Pax Christi International on migration, asylum seekers, (internally) displaced persons (IDPs) and connected aspects such as human trafficking is in the field of advocacy and awareness raising campaigns worldwide.<sup>1</sup> Pax Christi International has special consultative status with the United Nations.<sup>2</sup> Pax Christi International highlights the deeper causes of migration and (forced) displacement and focuses on the root causes of (violent) conflicts. The original problems need to be solved. At the same time, that commitment is based on a shared and well-developed spirituality of advocacy.<sup>3</sup>

The spirituality of Pax Christi International's political activities is based on the fundamental choice and respect for the dignity of each and every individual, especially the most vulnerable and those in need. We will meet victims of injustices, listen and learn from them. This means that Pax Christi International is an ally and spokesperson for those who cannot reach their full potential or whose fundamental human rights are violated.

As a faith-based NGO, Pax Christi International is concerned about human rights and therefore acts. God has endowed every human person with an inherent and inalienable dignity which entails basic rights. As a peace and human rights organisation, Pax Christi International is required to protect human rights and to educate its members about the dignity, liberty and equality of all humans. Respect for human rights is the requisite for peace.

Concern for refugees must lead us to reaffirm and highlight universally recognised human rights, and to ask that the effective recognition of these rights be guaranteed to refugees. During times of conflict, people are brutally uprooted and forced to flee their homes, exposing them to danger and insecurity.

Catholic Social Teaching or Tradition as well as international conventions (such as the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees - CRSR) will support our efforts. It is essential to show solidarity with those who are hurt. When listening to victims and analysing their situation, and when working with partners in conflict situations, the Pax Christi network can be mobilised for lobby and advocacy efforts in a

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<sup>1</sup> This is done via publications, statements, interventions, workshops, letters, blog articles and more.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.paxchristi.net/about-us>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.paxchristi.net/our-work/our-approach/advocacy-campaigning>

“globalised solidarity”. Given the transnational nature of peace policies, the movement engages in international campaigns and actions.

Indeed, the current situation needs a global approach: some pressing issues are the ongoing financial, environmental and energy crises, global warming, increasing migration flows, uncontrolled arms trade and regional conflicts. Together, ethnic and religious conflicts are the key references for wars and clashes worldwide for decades and especially since the end of the Cold War.

### Convention on Status of Refugees

The United Nations defines “refugee” in its 1951 Refugee Convention<sup>4</sup> as someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” These are people who flee their homeland because their government cannot or will not safeguard their life or liberty. Today’s refugees indeed face immediate and real life-threatening danger from a myriad of places around the world where peace can seem like a distant dream.

Others who flee their homeland feel like opportunities for a dignified and sustainable future are only an elusive ideal. These are “refugees” of a different sort. These people are those policymakers term “economic migrants”<sup>5</sup> who choose to migrate to improve their future prospects. Regardless of the severity of deprivation, these “refugees” are considered very differently under international law—despite the fact that they are dying in the same boats.

### Migration is a Peace Issue!

Migration will continue to rise in the future and is an unstoppable trend. Our globalised world is confronted with migratory flows. By the end of 2014, over 59.5 million people had been forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations. The reactions against migration are growing as well, both on the political level as well as within the public opinion.

Migration has been on the agenda already for many years!

- In Belgium, on 17 February and 16 July 1964, the government signed an agreement with the governments of Morocco and Turkey to make migration to Belgium possible.
- The number of Syrian refugees is about 4 million and around 7, 6 million Syrians have been internally displaced several times. This is clearly a long term problem to be solved.
- Early October 2013, we saw the Lampedusa boat tragedy with people, mainly refugees, coming from sub-Saharan Africa. Several of them were

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c125.html>

unaccompanied minors. Almost every year, the Mediterranean Sea turns into a graveyard as hundreds of men, women and children drown in a desperate bid to reach the European Union.

- On 9 February 2014, a small majority (50, 3 %) of the Swiss population voted in a referendum for a stop of mass migration.
- On 16 February 2014, a co-pilot of Ethiopian Airlines hijacked a plane to Geneva requesting asylum in the country.
- In Bulgaria, which is the border between Turkey and the EU, the government authorised the building of a fence to keep Syrian refugees out of the country. That fence was completed in mid-March 2014.
- In July 2015, Hungary started building a fence at the border with Serbia to keep out refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and other countries.
- Latvia and Estonia are planning fences at the border with the Russian Federation. Finland strengthens its borders with Russia as well.
- The United Kingdom erected barriers in Calais to prevent migrants from crossing the Channel.
- Migrants move and bring their culture, language and religion with them.<sup>6</sup>

### Worst Refugee Crisis since WWII

In fact we are witnessing the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War. World-wide, 60 million people have been forced to flee their homes. That is 10 million more than in 2014. Two-thirds of them have been internally displaced due to a conflict in their own country. The global rise in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees is putting an ever-increasing burden on host countries and aid agencies providing essential and life-saving health care services. It is also preventing a growing number of refugees and IDPs to access both primary and life-saving health care when they need it the most.

It is best practice in refugee work, and also a sensible strategy for refugees themselves, to stay as close as possible to their home countries. Conflicts do come to an end and people can return to, pick up on their lives. People only move beyond that when return becomes out of the question.

Syria has the largest refugee population, totalling almost 4 million.<sup>7</sup> The neighbouring countries Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan are hosting most of the Syrian refugees. Other countries with significant refugee populations include Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea, Sudan, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Iraq, Colombia, and the Central African Republic.

Let us not forget the almost 180.000 Burundians who have fled to neighbouring countries in 2015 to escape electoral violence, or the islanders who are fleeing to Djibouti to escape the fighting in Yemen, or the over 39.000 refugees in Cameroon who fled the violence of insurgents in Nigeria.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/03/08/religious-migration-exec/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>

Furthermore, this migration crisis is happening at a time when Europe is dealing with growing extreme nationalist sentiments that have recently become a troubling fixture of its politics. Anti-immigration approaches are becoming ever more important in the national politics, and political leaders seeking to be elected are adopting this vision. By contrast, those who speak of the dangers of a ‘fortress Europe’ and who don’t want to use the word ‘border’ will at the end of the day hand over power to the parties calling for the return of national borders.

### Lack of Courageous Leadership

When one discusses the issue of migration almost everybody has his or her opinion about it. Right wing parties and sectors of the media are feeding the general population with anti-migrant feelings, “they” against “us”. “Our territory is full” is a statement made many times by populist politicians and opinion makers. The narrow interests of people get more attention than the expression of solidarity with those who are in need. The global debate in most of the European countries is polarised. You are in favour or you are against new migration. In most cases, “fear” is fed to justify the restrictive policies against new migrations. Public opinion is under strong influence of far-right anti-immigration parties. We have seen the rise of the Pegida movement<sup>8</sup> in EU countries, especially in Germany, but also in Belgium, Hungary, the United Kingdom, Denmark and elsewhere. Pegida is anti-Islam and is in favour of very restricted immigration policies.

There is a lack of political leadership and courage in most of the EU countries on this issue. Politicians are absent or on holidays when urgent problems arise such as in Calais earlier this year. Right wing parties and the media are filling the gap and that is not in the favour of those seeking asylum.

### The continuing need to address the root causes of forced displacement<sup>9</sup>

In 2015, UNHCR<sup>10</sup>, the UN Refugee Agency, anticipates that approximately 480.000 new arrivals will seek international protection in Europe via the Mediterrean. In 2016, this number could reach 700.000 or more.

Confronted with dysfunctional asylum systems and barriers to normal onward travel routes within the European Union has forced thousands to take the Balkan route from Greece through Serbia and Macedonia to Hungary in order to reach some EU countries that show commendable humanity and leadership when it comes to hosting refugees and migrants needing protection. Unfortunately, hundreds of thousands of migrants and asylum seekers were blocked at different borders across the Balkan Route.

There is a critical need to address the core issues which affect forced displacement around the world. The massive flow of people will not stop until the root causes of their plight are addressed. Much more must be done to prevent conflicts and stop

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<sup>8</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pegida>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.paxchristi.net/news/continuing-need-address-root-causes-forced-displacement/4849#sthash.yFlvEKSY.dpbs>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

the ongoing wars that are driving so many from their homes. There should be far greater concern for the protection of civilians, as laid down by international humanitarian law. There should be an immediate end to the devastating obstruction of humanitarian aid to the people in need, such as in Syria.

A consistent and global response to refugee situations needs diplomacy, political will and concerted action for the prevention, as well as resolution, of conflicts that force people to move. Such a comprehensive approach is essentially absent in the wars going on in Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Afghanistan and others. Greater investment in conflict prevention and resolution as well as durable solutions should therefore form an integral part of a diplomatic and political approach to addressing forced displacement. The lack of political commitment on the international level is unacceptable and morally irresponsible!

Some countries in the Middle East such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey show admirable humanity and leadership when it comes to hosting refugees and migrants needing protection. The countries neighbouring war zones, which shelter 9 in 10 refugees worldwide, must be more strongly supported, including with the necessary funding. The annual budget for the UNHCR is less than the monthly budget of the European agricultural policies. The UNRWA<sup>11</sup>, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East, is perpetually struggling to get the necessary budgets to assist the needs of the Palestinian refugees.

Efforts to address the root causes of the refugee crisis should then increase funding for humanitarian assistance to stabilise forcibly displaced populations in the region of origin, most notably countries around Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and others. More robust, timely, and sustained structural support for the most-affected refugee-hosting countries is essential, which requires enhanced operational linkages between humanitarian and development actors from the very beginning of a crisis. It is then essential that development cooperation policies are reoriented with the objective of giving people the opportunity to have a future in their own countries.

Restoring peace, security and human rights in war affected countries will take long and focused work. It is true that the people most responsible for the victims of war and migration are those leaders who have failed to uphold human rights, and robbed their people of hope. The international community, and specifically the UN Security Council, has significant power and influence over terrible conflicts such as Syria and Iraq, and it must now urgently find the consensus to act.

### Migration and Globalisation

The root causes of migration are the syndromes of the impact of human actions on the world: war, pollution, globalisation, stress on natural resources, global warming, governance deficit and a rise in intolerance. Our “global village” needs a comprehensive long-term vision.

Because of revolutions in communications and transport, and also due to the power of networks, migratory flows have been gaining in density and intensity, from South

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are>

to North, but particularly within the South - from China to Africa - from the east of Africa to South Africa.

The push factors of migration are well known: wars, misery or poverty, persecutions or discriminations, civil war, religious persecutions, interethnic tensions, political repression, climate change, etc. At the same time people thirst for freedom and are looking for work. Women, who represent the majority of migrants, are not only looking for family reunification, but also looking for jobs. Women want to play their role in the market place. Some of these women risk ending up in the hands of traffickers and “disappearing” into prostitution or illegal activities.

The link between migration and security can be seen in the field of terrorism risks, import of diseases, and an increase of criminal activities. Critics are also arguing that the influx of more migrants is weakening our social services (schools, social, security, etc.)

It becomes clear that the routes of migration are becoming more complex. It is important to question the root cause-effect relationships between all the social, political, economic and security challenges posed by migration in today’s globalised world. Clearly, migration is a peace issue.

### Is Europe a Continent of Hope?

Libya and immigration represent the altogether more modern nightmare of state failure, uncontrollable chaos, transnational crime, and terrorism. All on Europe’s doorstep! With an enormous displacement crisis persisting right in Europe’s neighbourhood, the EU continues to face a rising number of people seeking international protection in Europe.

Migration is a security issue whose very nature consists of internal and external aspects. A very telling example is the case of the massive flows of migrants across the Mediterranean Sea. In 2014, over 219.000 migrants managed to cross the Mediterranean from north Africa and the Middle East to the southern member states of the EU: 80% of these migrants entered the EU through southern Italy, many of them trying to reach Britain via the Eurotunnel or via simple boats that cost them a fortune.

So far this year, the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates<sup>12</sup> that more than 680.400 refugees and migrants (as of 22 October) have crossed the Mediterranean (including 537.700 to Greece, approximately 139.800 to Italy. One-third of them are from Syria. Eritreans form the second largest group as a result of human trafficking. Their hope is to reach European shores as they flee from violent conflict, terrorism, poverty and persecution. Hundreds of thousands more are expected to do the same - looking for a new life. Unfortunately, many do not make it! Hundreds of refugees died in the Mediterranean Sea. The refugees’ dramas continue in the Mediterranean, the Balkan and in the Channel Tunnel in Calais.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/search?page=&comid=4a3201f76&cid=49aea93a7d&keywords=migration>

It is shocking to see so many boats capsizing in the Mediterranean Sea. Death at sea has become a grimly common occurrence. Human traffickers who smuggle migrants, mainly due to the political anarchy in Libya, should be detected and arrested. They are called “the slave drivers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”. Pope Francis has repeatedly called for the international community to take action decisively and quickly in order to stop these tragedies from recurring. The Pope calls the Mediterranean Sea “a vast migrant cemetery”.<sup>13</sup>

These catastrophes clearly show the need for a “robust” rescue-at-sea mechanism aimed at saving the lives of the people and at preventing future tragedies. Pax Christi International supports the call of the UNHCR that has long been advocating for a comprehensive and urgent response from the European Union.

Policies on border security, the harmonisation of asylum procedures, tackling illegal migration, trafficking, organised crime, but also foreign policy, development cooperation, and defence are all relevant in their interrelated application to the issue of migration.

Many refugees see Europe as a safe haven and a continent of hope. Refugees take a variety of routes and come from a number of different countries, including Afghanistan, Eritrea, Niger, Syria, Iraq and Somalia. Most of them land in Italy and in Greece. Smaller numbers have been recorded in Spain and Malta.

We need to see Europe as part of the global community and show compassion and leadership when responding to a world in which 60 million have been displaced. What some officials cannot accept is that this global phenomenon is touching Europe. The needs of these large numbers of people fleeing war, violence and persecution will not be solved automatically. In fact, the flows of people will continue for years to come until these conflicts are resolved and persecution ended. Further resources at a significant scale will need to be put into place as well as long-term plans and emergency assistance.

### Migration is a European Issue

Migration is no longer a national issue; it has become a European one. Indeed, the Schengen agreement<sup>14</sup> and philosophy consists of two parts: eliminating internal borders and reinforcing the external border. The fact is: we don't really apply the second element. We have left this mission to frontline member states. But it is impossible to continue this way, because today migration is clearly a European issue and should be managed at EU level. The Schengen area requires an efficient management of the EU's common external borders to ensure strong protection. It is clear that no EU country can or should be left alone to address huge migratory pressures.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://news.vice.com/article/pope-francis-warns-european-union-that-the-mediterranean-risks-becoming-a-vast-migrant-cemetery>

<sup>14</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schengen\\_Agreement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schengen_Agreement)

The UNHCR is advocating for a comprehensive and urgent response from the European Union. Refugees awaiting registration, including families with children, have no choice but to sleep in the open. Hundreds of men, women and children are sleeping in cramped and unsanitary conditions. People in need should be supported with full respect for their human dignity.

The Foreign Affairs Council of 18 May 2015 agreed to establish an EU military operation - EUNAVFOR Med - to target gangs smuggling migrants from Libya. If in the short term, this could be seen as a good signal, it is also a dangerous signal. First of all, neither migrants nor their countries of origin are our enemies. The EU should not be at war with migrants.

### Seeking Solidarity

Over the years, European leaders have been called to act. More than 3.150 people have died during 2015 trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea to seek refuge in Europe from their conflict-torn homelands throughout Africa and the Middle East. These are mothers and their children, fathers and their families, young people and old: human beings, each with a name and a hope for a life.

The other fundamental human question is: who is left behind? In many cases migrants and asylum seekers with some money and with the physical capacity to move can make it, hopefully. Some of them already have a family member in Europe. What about all those who have to stay behind such as the disabled, the elderly, the poorest of the poor, etc.

This current Mediterranean refugee crisis has been called a “tragedy of epic proportions” by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Special Representative for International Migration and Development, and the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in a joint statement released on 24 April 2015.<sup>15</sup> This statement is true, but its desperate cry is too late for the thousands who have lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea this year. The real tragedy is that the recent increase in deaths is the result of policy decisions *to do less* about the dangers.

What makes the current Mediterranean refugee crisis particularly challenging is that Europe is also in crisis. The European Union is being challenged to its core, as a union of independent states bound together by the common principles of humanity, solidarity and respect for human rights. How the European Union responds to this current crisis will give insight into its future.

International and national health actors have been exploring a number of ways to respond to these new challenges; in Syria for instance, UNRWA, with support from the European Union, has opened an additional 12 health points in new locations to give Palestinian refugees better access to facilities as they cope with mass displacement caused by the ongoing conflict. To better protect patient files against physical destruction, the agency is also introducing a new e-Health system to

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.unrefugees.org.au/news-and-media/news-headlines/europe-joint-statement-on-mediterranean-crossings>



digitalise all medical records. In Ukraine as well, healthcare access is a major issue. WHO is therefore supporting and managing Primary Health Care Units (MEPUS) and Primary Health Care Posts (EPPS) to address urgent health needs on the ground. Supplies of basic medicines and other primary care services are being made available to internally displaced, the poor and receiving communities.

### Ukrainian Crisis at the Border with Europe

The whole of Ukraine has been destabilised by a conflict that has already cost between 9.000 and 10.000 lives (fighters and civilians). The number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and those seeking refuge abroad is reaching catastrophic proportions. As of September 2015, 1.4 million people have been internally displaced in Ukraine. More than 900.000 people have fled Ukraine, with over 660.000 to Russia, 81.100 to Belarus and thousands more to other countries. Despite the February-implemented Minsk II ceasefire agreement,<sup>16</sup> fighting continues in the Donbass region. In a recent policy note,<sup>17</sup> Pax Christi International called for the United Nations to identify a senior international leader, or neutral country, to engage in a confidential dialogue and renewed diplomacy involving all key actors. The diplomatic track needs to be pursued. The human tragedy is much too high in Ukraine.

### On Syrian Refugees and Burden Sharing

Pax Christi International has long advocated for an EU-wide pilot relocation project for Syrian refugees arriving in Italy and Greece as one way to address the current imbalance of asylum-seekers and refugees among member states. Resettlement is an important manifestation of solidarity and responsibility-sharing and also provides a durable solution.

In this regard, the proposal to offer tens of thousands of resettlement places in the EU, using distribution criteria that account for the efforts already made on a voluntary basis, is a welcome step forward. Pax Christi International urged member states to support this initiative, as it would both provide additional places for Syrian and other refugees in need of resettlement and send a positive signal of support to refugee-hosting countries in the Middle East and elsewhere.

Pax Christi International recommends that the response clearly articulate gender-sensitivity and effective mechanisms for the identification of people with specific needs, such as unaccompanied and separated children, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, and survivors of torture, for their referral to services. Refugees should be treated as equals. No divisions or discrimination should be made on the basis of religion, philosophy, gender, minority, origin, nationality or ethnicity.<sup>18</sup> The human dignity of all refugees should be the driving principle.

We repeat again that addressing the root causes of forced displacement and irregular movement should have priority. Therefore, we are encouraged by the

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/21b8f98e-b2a5-11e4-b234-00144feab7de.html#axzz3fITWK9Y9>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.paxchristi.net/news/looking-ukrainian-crisis/4686#sthash.xwfLeFxm.dpbs>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.caritas-int.be/en/news/humanitarian-and-moral-obligation-protect-syrian-refugees>

European Commission's continued commitment to stepping up humanitarian aid as well as development cooperation with these countries. Through more targeted development initiatives in third countries, the resilience and self-reliance of refugees and internally displaced populations could be strengthened, allowing them to live their lives with hope and dignity.

#### Who is a Palestinian refugee?<sup>19</sup>

Persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period of 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict. This includes descendants through the male line.

#### On Palestinian Refugees (Syria)

*Palestinian refugees pose a significant threat to stability in the Middle East. Since the start of the Arab-Israeli conflict on 1 April 1948, at least 700.000 Palestinians were internally displaced. In total, there are currently 7 million Palestinian refugees, of whom 7 million are registered by UNRWA.<sup>20</sup> They reside in 58 different refugee camps in Syria, Gaza, West Bank, Jordan and Lebanon. In Gaza alone, there are 1.28 million Palestinian refugees living among a total population of 1.81 million (70, 7 %). The UNRWA takes care of the basic needs of refugees in eight refugee camps.*

*According to UNRWA, there are 5 million Palestinian refugees living under inhumane circumstances. Many of the 527.000 Palestinian refugees registered in nine camps in Syria have experienced secondary displacement as a result of the Syrian conflict. Some of them were forced to flee into neighbouring countries. Living conditions have become particularly harsh in Syrian refugee camp Yarmouk, hosting 18.000 Palestinians as well as other camps.*

The situation of the Palestinian refugees in Syria (PRS) is one of the most compelling circumstances of refugees ever. PRS is one of the poorest groups in Syria. At a total of about 20 million Syrians, only 570.000 are PRS. In these five years of armed conflict, very little access is given for humanitarian agencies in providing aid to the thousands of PRS living in camps, closed areas, such as in Yarmouk. Many of them, especially women and children, died because of the lack of food or water and are affected by diseases as a result of bad health conditions. The numbers of deaths are rising. PRS are not welcome in other countries. They do not know where to go!

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) <sup>21</sup>started its mandate in 1949, after the creation of the state of Israel and after the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. Hundreds of thousands Palestinians have been forced to leave their homes and live in refugee camps in countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Egypt and in the West Bank and Gaza. UNRWA has delivered assistance to PRS in Syria for over 60 years.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.unrwa.org/>

Of the 540.000 PRS, almost all of them require assistance. In peacetime UNRWA offers the refugees “normal” services such as food, health care, water, school infrastructure, etc. But now in war time, UNRWA is making extra efforts in assisting the victims of the war. They can only do so if they are allowed access to enter the camps. On 18 January 2014, UNRWA was able to distribute limited food parcels to PRS in Yarmouk. The limited access so far has suggested that most civilians remaining in Yarmouk have very large and desperate humanitarian needs.

Palestine refugees are disproportionately affected: by January 2014, approximately 50% had been displaced within Syria (270.000 of 540.000 registered) with a further 50.000 seeking shelter in Lebanon, 10.000 in Jordan and many thousands more in other countries. All Palestine refugee camps in Syria are affected by conflict, with camps in Damascus becoming active battlegrounds: Yarmouk, Khan Eshieh, Khan Danoun, and Sbeineh. These camps are mainly located at the border of main cities, and therefore one of the first areas for the battle fields.

UNRWA tries to manage buildings currently sheltering 13.624 individuals. But the vast majority of displaced have been forced to seek expensive, overcrowded accommodation elsewhere. Many of them have been displaced twice or more. Several UNRWA officers have been killed or are kidnapped.

#### PRS in Lebanon

About 52.000 PRS live in Lebanon. Fifty-one percent live in UNRWA camps, and the rest live in private rented accommodation or informal gatherings. UNRWA continues to monitor and offer advice and assistance to PRS crossing at the border and to advocate with the Lebanese government for equal treatment of all refugees at the border, because since August 2013, a number of refugees from Syria, including PRS, have been denied entry into Lebanon.

#### PRS in Jordan

In Jordan, about 11.000 PRS are recorded with UNRWA. Most PRS, 98%, reside in local communities with host families or in rental premises, while 196 reside in Cyber City, the government-appointed facility in Irbid. A large number live in abject poverty, and their precarious legal status creates difficulties for civil processes, access to services and employment. Forty-eight percent are under the age of 18 and women and children comprise 75% of PRS in Jordan.

Jordan revealed its policy of non-admission of PRS in January 2013, which continues to compound the extreme vulnerability of those who seek safety in Jordan or have already entered the country. Incidents of denied entry and forcible return have been documented. Jordan should be urged to grant temporary access and protection of PRS.

#### Responsibly to Protect! Europe Act Now!

It is believed that the EU could and should do more. In the Syrian civil war, the EU is remaining on the side-line, both in terms of politics as well as in welcoming Syrian refugees, including the PRS. The EU and the whole international community have a responsibility to protect and provide shelter for victims of war. The EU and its 28 member states, should take at least the following three steps:<sup>22</sup>

1. Give refugees a safe way into Europe

Refugees have very few possibilities to travel to Europe safely and legally. Those who want to get to Europe put their lives in the hands of smugglers or face life-threatening journeys.

European leaders must support greater access to Europe for Syria's refugees by relaxing visa restrictions, significantly increasing resettlement places above and beyond current national quotas and offering other forms of admission through embassies in the region.

2. Protect refugees arriving at Europe's borders

Lives are in danger at Europe's doorstep. Many refugees risk their life attempting the treacherous journeys by land or by sea, only to be sent straight back as soon as they reach Europe's borders. European leaders must put an end to all push-backs at the borders and ensure that people in distress are rescued. The people who survive the journey to Europe must be humanely treated and their need for protection must be fairly assessed.

3. Reunite families torn apart by crisis

Many families are divided by the war in Syria. Flight leaves families split, often leading to prolonged separation. Others, with family members in Europe, find themselves trapped in the midst of the crisis, prevented from reuniting with loved ones by complex visa and administrative procedures. European leaders must work to reunite divided families, helping them to easily join loved ones in Europe. Family members should not be subjected to lengthy and difficult administrative processes.

The conflict in Syria has generated the largest refugee movement (mostly Syrians as well as PRS) since the Rwandan genocide and is described as the defining refugee crisis of our era and as such needs specific attention. A crisis of this magnitude on our doorsteps requires European solidarity. We should stand for what is right!

On Church Asylum

Some parishes and churches from different denominations have an involvement with church asylum. Several Pax Christi members are active in that context as well,

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ecre.org/>

especially in Germany but also elsewhere such as in Brussels for instance with refugees from Afghanistan in the Béguinage Saint John the Baptist church.<sup>23</sup>

Church asylum is a form of temporary protection for refugees without the status of legal residence who would face unacceptable social hardships, torture or even death if forced to return to their country of origin. During the church asylum, all relevant legal, social and humanitarian aspects are examined. A legal solution should be achieved which entails a continuous dialogue with the authorities. In many cases, it turns out that the authorities' decision needs to be revised, which means that a new asylum procedure has a chance of success. Many cases ended with a solution protecting refugees from human rights violations and from danger of physical harm.

Parishes provide, sometimes for a period of several months, accommodation, basic needs and in certain cases medical services. The legal and theological counselling to be given for those taking care of the asylum seekers on a daily basis is also essential.

In networking with NGO's, Pax Christi International strives for a fundamental improvement of the situation of undocumented persons. We demand access to medical services, the right of education, and protection from unfair labour practices. On a European scale, Pax Christi International is a member of the Platform for International Co-operation and Undocumented Migrants (PICUM).<sup>24</sup>

### Prophetic and pragmatic

The nature of Pax Christi International's political engagement is two-fold: it is both prophetic and pragmatic. Lobby activities will be prophetic: to tell the truth, denounce injustices and aspire to a more just and peaceful society and world. In other words, the prophetic aspect provides spiritual and moral guidance in political peace activities. The pragmatic aspect of lobbying focuses on what can be achieved and aims for consensus reached in dialogue.

We as Christians need to be reminded that we are the product of people movements: some forced, some voluntary, some hopeful, some fearful. It is out of this resource of experience, and our founding texts and Catholic Social Teaching that point to justice and compassion as going to the heart of what God requires, that we should seek to respond.

Every person in need has the right to be assisted. We must be well aware that each one of us could be in an urgent situation of need, calling for help. Alongside the command to love God, the command that "you must love your neighbour as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18) is given a high status to be lived by all human beings.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://brusselstimes.com/brussels/3689/the-afghan-refugees-in-beguinage-church-still-believe-they-have-a-future-in-belgium>

<sup>24</sup> <http://picum.org/en>

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