

## **MIGRATION AND UPROOTING**

According to UNHCR, 100 million people in the world live the harsh reality of migration. The reasons for fleeing their home countries are very different: wars, dictatorships, hunger, and religious or ideological persecution... But they all suffer the devastating impact of uprooting, leaving behind their family, their culture, their country, in search of a better life.

At the end of September, I attended an [Expert Meeting at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C.](#), organised by the UK think tank Home Renaissance Foundation. The aim was to address, among academics from very different disciplines, this great challenge facing the world and to which, without a doubt, a response must be given from the public sphere.

The home is a space, an essential environment for the proper development of the individual. It is the place where, ideally, we can be ourselves, where we are loved for who we are, not for what we have, where we are not judged but embraced and where we are taught to love. But all this, which will surely resonate with readers, is not a real scenario for the millions of displaced people. The results of a US National Study, after 20 years of fieldwork, show suffering, marginalisation, violence, hopelessness, stress, and depression. Refugees left behind in transit camps see no prosperous future for themselves, migrants who do not know the language of the country they arrive in cannot find work, those who flee to countries with very different cultures lose their identity which is the only thing they bring with them. And 98% state that without faith in God they would not have been able to get ahead.

People, who are forced to leave their lives behind, were born in countries-which circumstances forced them to flee and their only dream is to return to create a home, to give their family what many of us take for granted and to contribute their talents to their new host society. And here comes the question: what can I do from my living room? And it is simple: listen, look-each other in the eye, reach out to and act as a good host - or better still, neighbour. Just like when you welcome someone into your home for the first time. And institutions, the same response is needed, and for national and local governments, such as town halls, libraries, parishes, schools could do much more by sharing their spaces and resources with those who need it most. Without a strong host community, integration is very difficult.

At this meeting, I learned about the exemplary work that Colombia is doing with the reception of the millions of Venezuelans who have crossed the border. It is true that they share the same language, culture, religion and even to a large extent their food choices, which has favoured better integration, but the Colombian government has also taken measures so that Venezuelans can work and start a new life in the country.

In March this year, the European Union acted swiftly when Russia invaded Ukraine, opening its borders to Ukrainians who did not belong to a member state, eliminating bureaucratic visa barriers to work and facilitating schooling for children in schools in the 27 member states. Migration policies were adapted to this crisis by putting the focus on the individual, assuming the risks that this period of vulnerability could bring, but taking into account other past crises in which the measures taken were not sufficient, leading refugees to extreme situations. And it is not a question of changing laws, it is a question of correctly orienting the projects and initiatives that are carried out. It is frankly interesting to see how, on private initiative, there are micro-investment projects, already underway, that

offer refugees the opportunity to present their proposals and make their talents count. In this way, some are encouraged to undertake and others to invest, giving rise to enriching proposals and a win-win situation.

Technology, often criticised in the first world, in these cases, has helped people not to suffer a total uprooting. The mobile phone becomes an umbilical cord because it allows them to remain connected to their past, to be in contact with their families and to keep up to date with current events in their country.

What comes next I simple to propose but complicated to implement: the objective now is to make society aware that this difficult reality is a struggle that we have to win together. A reality which has names and stories and which, I am sure you also know through the neighbour across the street or the family on the corner. Those who come and those who go, those who arrive and those who return, those who respond and those who say goodbye.

Whether or not we share the same culture, whether or not our language is more or less similar, and whether or not we all cross ourselves in the same way, we all have something in common, we are people, and as such, worthy of a home, a job and a stable and happy life.

[Here you can read the original article in Spanish published on Thursday 27 October 2022.](#)