

# I was a stranger and you invited me in

## CLC Document on Migrants Issue

The topic of migration is one of the epochal issues of our present. In this present, we must read "the signs of the times", trying to discern how the God of the History acts, and which task we are called to as a national CLC, as well as local communities. We are aware that migratory movements have always been a constitutive element of the living and development of the human communities; we also know that this phenomenon is extremely complex and articulated, and in continual evolution. It is important not to look at it as an indistinct entity, but to read the different articulations of it: migration traces the features of a kaleidoscope of human experiences, among which we identify both positive integration and marginalization and invisibility.

We note that many migrants in Italy, today, are on the border of society, and among them, refugees and asylum seekers represent a particularly vulnerable and marginalized population. Since 2001, the European CLC identified the issue of refugees as an area of priority engagement.

All these people – refugees, asylum seekers, migrants who need welcome and integration – are our brothers and sisters, and they're often invisible to the members of our society. But, at the same time, they are the least, the poor to whom Jesus Christ invites everyone to look with love, since «Good News is being preached to the poor» [Matthew 11:5]. Another clearest and – at the same time – most sharpening Jesus' teachings is contained in Matthew's Gospel: «For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger, and you invited me in, I needed clothes, and you clothed me, I was sick, and you looked after me, I was in prison, and you came to visit me», because «whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me» [Matthew 25:35-40].

CLC has been engaged in this area for years and has implemented various support and inclusion programs for migrants. These actions are the expression of the Christian vocation, which invites us to turn the Gospel message into practice.

However, today, as CLC, it is necessary to reflect even deeper on our duty as Christians: we must be aware that the intensification of migratory movements is marking our historical era and requires a broad gaze as well as an open heart.

The Mediterranean Sea is standing in a tragic situation for years, which pushed us to raise our voices. We must do it to face the loss of so many lives and the absence of a European and national "policy", which answers, with humanity and foresight, to the current crisis situation. For this reason, the National CLC ExCo, last February 16th, approved and released a public statement entitled "Are We Still the Europe of Rights?".

### Hence an invitation for all of us:

#### Let's put our eyes on it

The instinct comes to shut the eyes; the instinct to look the other way, to slip into a reasonable resignation, to shield ourselves from the pain of brothers and sisters, to reject the questions that pose such sufferance and chaos, is the first temptation to fight. But our faith is not an escape from unpleasant realities: it is a gift that should allow us to bring ourselves to their level, to interrogate and challenge them.

*To put our eyes on it* means to "see and recognize" these people who arrive and live in our country as foreigners, who bring with them complex experiences, to observe their faces looking for marks of their life stories.

#### Let's put our heads on it

Eyes are not enough! We must make an effort to understand. Looking at it means keeping ourselves informed and documented too. Complex issues cannot be approached with hearsay superficiality, especially considering that the migration issue is one of the most misrepresented and manipulated by the media.

We need to operate constant attention to the language used, institutionally, socially and even inside the community, on this topic. Words such as "(state of) emergency", "invasion", and "rejection" induce fear and generate an inevitably conflicting view of the issue. The migrant is presented as a "scapegoat" for our country's ills. The CLC *Way of Proceeding* is based on words like "listening", "supporting", and "welcoming". It shows us a path of deep understanding of the subject and not preconceived opposition. Indeed, it shows us a challenging and complex path too.

We should feel even further motivated in this direction by the verbs used by Pope Francis – welcome, protect, promote and integrate – to summarize his commitment to

migrants. In Pope's vision, there is a deep harmony with the centrality of the person, which is what we most cherish (see "Aggiornamenti Sociali", October 2021, p. 554).

We will then find it obvious to reject improper, aggressive and mortifying language on this subject, first from ourselves, and then not accepting it from others.

### Let's put our hearts on it

Our hearts must be joined with our minds because reality is not made only of data, but of people. Each one is different because they carry different cultures and because each person is unique: according to the education received in their birth and upbringing environment, to the personalities and experiences they have lived and suffered before reaching our countries, and to their capacities to deal with adversity. Looking at migrants as people, taking their problems to our hearts, and sharing moments of pain and joy with them: it means living the relationship with empathy, and letting ourselves be positively transformed by the encounter.

Let's pray for the Lord to enlighten us and open our hearts. Let's pray for the Lord to help us place our brothers' and sisters' needs ahead of our own security and fears. Let's not forget the strength and insistence in prayer (personal prayer, but in more collective and public forms as well), without which our action risks getting lost and emptied.

### Let's put our faces on it

Here's an invitation to take a stand, whenever appropriate, as we did with the first statement proposed by this think tank. In addition to what the national CLC does and says, there may be specific circumscribed situations, related to a city, or an area where a local action is more effective. And let's remember that, even as individuals, we can do a lot to witness.

Let's speak openly about our struggles in welcoming them, let's be guided by those who have more experience. Let's witness how much our migrant brothers' and sisters' lives matter to us by taking a clear stand in defence of their rights.

Let's talk about it in the community as well, listen to all points of view, seek reliable information and think critically. For example, the concern about having to welcome everyone who arrives on our shores should be compared to what Italy, and even European countries less open to emigration, have done for Ukrainian refugees. Let's

ask the reasons and whether that reason might be, among others, that they are less different from us than African or Asian migrants.

### Let's put our hands on it

Here's the invitation to "do", to give our own concrete contribution. There is no need to wait for CLC to create from scratch its own initiative specifically addressed to migration (although it could happen, and we hope so). These initiatives already exist (the closest to us, in terms of origins and spirituality, are the ones of Centro Astalli, but there are many others), and it is important that more Community members get in touch with them to ask what they can do and to offer their commitment, as far as they can. The harvest is always great, and the workers are always few.

"To do" means: to take up and inhabit the time and places of our current existence for a better life and for others, with fewer possibilities than us, to live and co-inhabit the world.

For example, we can't miss the opportunity to help them when they cross our lives. Perhaps, they are the people who work for us or with us, or the schoolmates of our children and grandchildren who are in trouble, and sometimes are marginalized within the class because they are foreigners. Carrying out our educational tasks, let's educate children and young people to accept the different; let's create opportunities for encounters between our children and young migrants.

Let's put our hands on it and, as a local community, let's promote initiatives to:

1. raise internal awareness and listen, especially to the experience gained and initiatives promoted by Centro Astalli, about people who arrived in Italy by makeshift means or as refugees;
2. meet and welcome people, families and children in need of care, assistance, access to essential services (school, health, work) and economic and housing support;
3. share, access, and transmit community assets (intangible assets: knowledge, skills and relationships) to strengthen the processes of awareness, information, inclusion, and integration of migrant people in the community of your area.

## Let's put our pockets on it

Not every member of our Communities can be a stable volunteer welcoming and helping integration, due to their life and work commitments. However, many of us can be regular contributors to these initiatives, sharing these experiences in our communities. This is not only about "giving money", which is absolutely needful, but about becoming reliable stakeholders and fostering good practices.

## Let's put our houses on it

Talking with local communities, one of the most felt problems is the housing emergency of foreigners. In our communities, there are already people having personally welcomed immigrants into their homes. But real estate can also become available to those who welcome it. And the Community can promote dialogue with public and religious institutions so that they make unused space already available.

## Finally, let's put everything in the Lord's hands

Let's put everything in the Lord's hands, knowing that everything depends on him.

«Act as if everything depends on you, knowing then that actually, everything depends on God» (see Pedro de Ribadeneira, *Vita di S. Ignazio di Loyola*, Milano 1998).

The draft Document was presented to the National Assembly in Assisi (7.12.2022), which decided to constitute a migration think tank to prepare the final drafting of the document.

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