



# Breaking Boundaries

A Mercy Response to  
People on the Move



A Publication of  
Mercy International Association





LOVE

has NO  
Borders

ARISE

RISE





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***Peace is the Path to Freedom***

Artwork by Naser Moradi, an Afghan asylum seeker in Australia.

Photo courtesy of Young Mercy Links

## Acronyms

**ATD**

ALTERNATIVES TO  
DETENTION

**GCM**

GLOBAL COMPACT FOR  
SAFE, ORDERLY AND  
REGULAR MIGRATION

**GCR**

GLOBAL COMPACT ON  
REFUGEES

**ICE**

UNITED STATES  
IMMIGRATIONS AND  
CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

**IMRF**

INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION  
REVIEW FORUM

**JRS**

JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE

**MGA**

MERCY GLOBAL ACTION

**MIA**

MERCY INTERNATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION

**OHCHR**

OFFICE OF THE  
HIGH COMMISSIONER  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

**PTSD**

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS  
DISORDER

**SDGs**

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
GOALS

**UN**

UNITED NATIONS



# Definitions

## MIGRANT

There is no internationally accepted legal definition of a migrant.<sup>1</sup> Like many organizations, we often use the term “migrants” to refer to people staying outside their country of origin, who are not asylum-seekers or refugees. Within this broad group, there are many sub-categories: undocumented migrants, permanent residents, seasonal workers, forced migrants, etc. While most people on the move do not fit the legal definition of a refugee, they could nevertheless be in danger if they went home. It is important to understand that, just because migrants do not flee persecution, they are still entitled to the protection and respect of their human rights, regardless of their legal status in the countries to which they have moved. Governments must protect all migrants from racist and xenophobic violence, exploitation and forced labor. Migrants should never be detained or forced to return to their countries without a legitimate reason.

## REFUGEE

A refugee is a person who has fled their own country because they are at risk of serious human rights violations and persecution there. The risks to their safety and life were so great that they felt they had no choice but to leave and seek safety outside their country because their own government cannot, or will not, protect them from those dangers. Refugees have a right to international protection, and a right not to be returned to a place where they will face danger. The international definition of a refugee is enshrined in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees<sup>2</sup> and its 1967 Protocol,<sup>3</sup> though there are other regional refugee law instruments, including

the 1969 Organization for African Unity Convention,<sup>4</sup> 1984 Cartagena Declaration,<sup>5</sup> Common European Asylum System<sup>6</sup> and Dublin Regulation.<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that the 1951 Convention’s definition of a refugee does not include climate-displaced people, even if they are unable to return to their country of origin due to severe degradation of their living environment.

## ASYLUM-SEEKER

An asylum-seeker is a person who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country, but who hasn’t yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their asylum claim.<sup>8</sup> Seeking asylum is a human right, which means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum.

## STATELESS PERSON

A stateless person is not necessarily a migrant, but they encounter some of the same obstacles as other non-citizens in accessing their rights. The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons<sup>9</sup> establishes the legal definition for stateless persons as “individuals who are not considered citizens or nationals under the operation of the laws of any country.” A person’s citizenship and nationality may be determined based on the laws of a country where an individual is born or where her/his parents were born. A person can also lose citizenship and nationality in a number of ways, including when a country ceases to exist or a country adopts nationality laws that discriminate against certain groups to which that person belongs.



# Moving Mercy Beyond Borders

Sr Biviana rsm sharing coffee with migrants sleeping rough on the streets of Peru.  
Photo courtesy of Carmen Rosa Callomamani rsm





**"I am convinced that we must promote communities "beyond borders"—i.e., each of us allowing God's spirit to move us beyond our comfort zone, to reach out and welcome "strangers", not as threats but as brothers and sisters whom we have not yet met, "to live and move and have our being" as Mercy's with "the least among us", and there meet the living God. In a word, to do my small part in moving Mercy beyond borders—not just physical or national borders, but also ethnic, racial, religious, & psychological borders, by taking risks, by overcoming fear through faith, by our willingness to listen and learn from those who are "other" in some way."**

Marilyn Lacey rsm

**IN SEPTEMBER 2021**, Mercy International Association (MIA) hosted a Generative Conversation with members of the Mercy World, called "Opening Doors to an Emerging Future." This conversation was planned in the context of a global crisis and the Mercy community moving into a third century of service in the spirit of Catherine McAuley, who read the signs of the times and listened attentively. The Generative Conversation led to a strengthened recognition that we need to listen deeply to the voices of everyone if we are to move forward with courage and hope. Attendees of this Generative Conversation left energized and hope-filled by the opportunities for collaboration and mutual sharing among sisters and brothers.

One participant reflected on the process by saying, "Through conversation, Mercy opens itself to engage in dialogue across boundaries, internal and external."

As we emerge from a time of global crisis and pandemic, we are mindful of our call to continue Catherine's legacy and vision into the future. World leaders have called us to 'Build Back Better' and justice advocates have challenged us to find new solutions and systems which support both people and the planet. In that spirit, we present this publication, which highlights the global Mercy community's commitment to 'breaking boundaries' in order to create a more just and merciful world for all.





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## The Mercy Global Action Migration Task Force

**RESPONDING TO THE CALLS** of the present moment, the Mercy Global Action (MGA) Office has sought to gain a greater understanding of the work of the Mercy World and offer opportunities for sharing as well as learning about common experiences, challenges and successes in engaging with people on the move. In September 2021, the MGA Office established a Migration Task Force, consisting of Sisters and Mission Partners from Australia, Cambodia, Ireland, Peru, and the United States, to provide direction and leadership to the Mercy World on justice issues related to international migration, as well as to contribute Mercy experiences of human mobility and accompaniment of migrants and refugees to the United Nations (UN) reviews of

the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), and other relevant international fora. Mercy Global Action hopes that this work will lead to enhanced partnerships and strengthened advocacy at local, national and/or global levels.

The MGA Migration Task Force connected with the Mercy World on justice issues related to human mobility, and reflected on these experiences through the lens of the Mercy Justice Advocacy Approach.<sup>10</sup> Through this publication and accompanying materials, the Task Force aims to raise awareness throughout the Mercy World of those most at risk and/or vulnerable during the migration cycle, the contributions of migrants to our communities, and to share recommendations on how to reduce these vulnerabilities and enhance migrant inclusion. This gathering of Mercy experiences, challenges encountered, and best practices is also an important contribution to the United Nations and to the civil society networks in which we engage.

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**Mercy accompanies people who are on difficult and life-changing journeys to ensure that they feel safe, welcome and included.**

## Collecting & Analyzing Data from the Mercy World

MERCY SISTERS, ASSOCIATES AND PARTNERS encounter refugees and migrants in small, inter-personal ways, some in larger projects, and some in advocacy at local, national and/or global levels. In order to collect Mercy experiences from around the world related to migration, the MGA Migration Task Force conducted a survey which invited respondents to answer questions that might apply to them in their work/ministry, either as individuals or as members of organizations. The Task Force received over 90 responses to the survey, representing 14 countries. 85 percent of survey respondents were Sisters of Mercy, and the others were lay partners in mission. Many offered further engagement with their particular ministries with migrants and refugees. We are grateful for the generous response to the survey, which provided an abundance of information, insights and understandings into migration around the Mercy World. We acknowledge that because not everyone was able to respond, this does not fully represent all of the Mercy World's encounters and work with people on the move. Despite this inevitable limitation, the survey responses sent a clear message to the Task Force: The Mercy World cares about this issue, and has a multitude of experiences to share. The survey responses and follow-up conversations revealed the myriad of ways that the Mercy World engages with people on the move, as illustrated throughout this publication.

The analysis of Mercy work with people on the move draws upon our Mercy Tradition and Catholic Social Teaching, as well as commentary and analysis from academia, other civil society and



Photo courtesy of Mercy Connect

faith-based organizations, the United Nations, and other international stakeholders. It considers the international frameworks that articulate the rights of migrants and refugees around the world and contribute to migration governance.\*

This process has offered us an opportunity to celebrate the Mercy World's engagement with people on the move. Despite the many obstacles and challenges people face when they migrate, Mercy Sisters, Associates and partners are at the frontlines of engagement - in parishes, running hospitals, schools and shelters, providing legal services, skills training, and psychosocial support for victims and survivors of gender-based violence, ensuring that migrants, refugees and their families can move and live in dignity. Most importantly, Mercy accompanies people who are on difficult and life-changing journeys to ensure that they feel safe, welcome and included. Mercy kindness, compassion and hospitality shine brightly throughout diverse communities, and unify the many different manifestations of Mercy work on migration around the world.

\* These include the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families, the 2018 Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) and Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and others.



# Migration as a Human Right

Migration has been part of the human experience throughout history, and is a cross-cutting phenomenon that relates to many other justice issues of concern to the Mercy world. The right to migrate and the right to seek asylum are codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country” (Article 13.2) and “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution” (Article 14.1).<sup>11</sup> Like all other human rights, these are universal, meaning that they apply to all people without discrimination, and they are indivisible and interdependent, meaning that these rights cannot be enjoyed fully without realization of the others, including the full range of political, social, economic and cultural rights.

Whether people move by choice, or are forced to leave their country, a person’s migration status does not alter or diminish their humanity nor change the fact that they are rights holders. Migration is a source of prosperity, innovation and sustainable development in our globalized world. Nonetheless, migration undeniably affects migrants, their families and communities in very different ways. The political, social, economic and environmental situations in countries of origin, transit, and destination determine how, where and when migration occurs, and affect the

experiences of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers on their journeys, but does not change the fact that all people on the move are rights-holders. Throughout the Mercy World, we seek to uphold the dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of the reasons why they move and the legal status they may hold.

## Migration as a Cross-Cutting Justice Issue

The UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>12</sup> acknowledge how migration is impacted by development (or lack thereof), and how migration itself affects the development of countries of origin, transit, and destination, as well as the well-being of migrants themselves. Migration is relevant to all of the SDGs, and at least 10 out of 17 goals contain targets and indicators that are directly relevant to migration or mobility.<sup>13</sup> The motto of the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one behind” is a clear call for sustainable development to be inclusive, including for people on the move.

Even if they don’t work specifically with migrant, refugee or asylum seeker populations, Mercy Sisters, Associates and Partners around the world work on development and human rights issues that alleviate the negative drivers of human mobility, including work on poverty eradication, education, women’s empowerment, anti-trafficking, climate action, and more. When people are able to live a dignified life in their country of origin and are not threatened by conflict,

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**Throughout the Mercy World, we seek to uphold the dignity and worth of every individual, regardless of the reasons why they move and the legal status they may hold.**



Photo courtesy of Amanda Carrier rsm

**Deeply rooted in Mercy charism, the hospitality and care provided by Mercy Sisters and partners around the world demonstrates a willingness to keep doors open to those who come looking for a place to call home.**

persecution, human rights abuses, climate change, or a lack of opportunities, they are less likely to be compelled to make desperate and often risky journeys. We seek to shift both local and global political, socioeconomic, ecological, and cultural systems that cause and perpetuate these negative drivers of migration, and work to ensure people can earn a decent income, live in safety, and believe in a positive future. In doing this work, we hope to ensure that migration becomes a choice, rather than a necessity.

For many migrants, refugees, families and communities, migration brings significant benefits, from political freedom, to social connections and cultural enrichment, economic opportunities and more. Mercy Sisters and partners accompany migrants on their journeys and in their places

of destination, welcoming them to their new communities, and assisting them with housing, healthcare, education and skills-training so that they can secure decent work and live in dignity.

Deeply rooted in Mercy charism, the hospitality and care provided by Mercy Sisters and partners around the world demonstrates a willingness to keep doors open to those who come looking for a place to call home.

This work reduces inequalities and strengthens the welfare of all members of society, with the acknowledgment that fully-integrated migrants are better positioned to contribute to prosperity for themselves, their families, and communities of origin and destination.



## A Theological Reflection on Migration

THE MERCY WORLD'S ENGAGEMENT and encounters with people on the move is a sign of a constant and steadfast commitment to God's mission. This mission, in keeping with the Gospel vision of inclusivity of all, welcomes the stranger, provides hospitality, supports migrants at borders, attempts to uphold the rights of migrants and creates a sense of belonging and inclusion. Rejecting monochrome portrayals of people on the move as vulnerable and helpless, the Mercy World recognizes the inherent dignity of each person and embraces this uniqueness, acknowledging that each person's journey has its own distinct meaning and characteristics.

Theologian and New Testament scholar, Joshua Jipp, claims that a theology of migration refuses to accept 'dehumanizing stereotypes and exclusionary practices' that are 'entirely antithetical to the Gospel.'<sup>14</sup> This idea is reinforced by Sister of Mercy, Margaret Evans rsm who assists migrants to reenter the workforce through skills programs offered at Holy Cross Services in Brisbane, Australia. She states, *"Welcoming new arrivals 'fits' with the non-discrimination precepts of the Gospel."*

The recognition of Mercy as 'a springboard from which all other actions flow', resounds throughout the Mercy World. An Australian Sister of Mercy, reflecting on her ministry of teaching English to adult refugees, states, *"I am a Sister of Mercy and I try to live out our Mercy Mission and the principles of our Christian faith."* Likewise, Patricia Lamb rsm, supporting migrants and refugees by volunteering with La Casa Amiga in Michigan, United States, says that what drives her

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**The Mercy World recognizes the inherent dignity of each person and embraces this uniqueness, acknowledging that each person's journey has its own distinct meaning and characteristics.**

is that she is *"inspired by the Gospel, the cry of the poor and Catherine McAuley's love for the poor."* In keeping with this sentiment, Marilyn Gottemoellere rsm reflects on her life of ministry with many migrants and refugees by asking, *"What would Catherine do? What is God calling me to do and give of my time, and how can I engage others in also responding to the need?"* Reflecting on her motivation for her work at the immigrant and refugee center in San Diego, California, Mercy Sister and member of the Mercy Global Action Migration Task Force, Mary O'Connor rsm shares the following thoughts: *"As an immigrant myself, 57 years ago, from Ireland to the US, I have a heart for the struggles of immigrants, especially these days when climate disasters or political/social oppression make life impossible for so many. My mission is to help them find a home, physically, emotionally, spiritually. There are many small steps in this process. I can just be part of the helping mechanism at a couple of the steps."*

Sr Mary further stresses that the impetus for her work is enshrined in spirituality: *"My life is life in God; I can't but act out of that, and out of the consciousness of God in all I meet."*

Likewise, Kathleen Conneally rsm is a board member of Diversity Sligo in Ireland. In sharing the impetus for her many years of work supporting migrants and refugees, she says,

***“I believe in a shared common humanity and God in everything and everyone.”***

Drawing on the Mercy charism, Anne Connolly rsm, who works on a refugee project in Philadelphia, USA states, ***“Mercy means that we seek to know what compassion is needed in the moment. What do Jesus and Catherine need from us/me?”***

Pat Zerega is a staff member of Mercy Investment Services in the USA. As part of the shareholder advocate team she uses Mercy’s shareholder status to raise concerns to corporations about people on the move. This involves raising awareness of issues related to migration in global supply chains, the travel sector and private prisons in the US involved in immigration detention. She claims that ***“the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy underpin all our work.”***

Lourdes Flores, Director of the Mercy-sponsored ministry ARISE Adelante, in Rio Grande Valley in South Texas, clearly grounds the work of ARISE in the context of Mercy. She states: ***“The Spirituality of Mercy (Mujeres de Mercy) guides us in the work we do in our community since the very foundation of ARISE. The critical concerns of the Mercy Institute are a deep expression of the pillars of ARISE, which impels us to work for justice issues within the immigrant community.”***

Further stressing the influence of Mercy, Irish Sister of Mercy, Nora Burke rsm, when contemplating her work as a volunteer with Leitrim Refugee Support in Carrick-On-Shannon, says what drives her is mostly ***“mercy and compassion.”*** Esther Murphy rsm, working in prison ministry in Dublin, Ireland and encountering many migrants states, ***“My motivation stems from my spirituality and belief that we are all***



Mercy Connect volunteer with a young student.  
Photo courtesy of Mercy Connect

***equally loved by God and lovable. We are born to be free and that is God’s plan for us.”***

Likewise, Sally Bradley rsm, Director of Mercy Works in Australia, points out the significance of the Mercy charism, ***“Our Mercy spirituality is foundational to all our work.”*** As an Immigrant Legal Advocate in Albuquerque, USA, Marlene Perrotte rsm states that, ***“The Works of Mercy are planetary principles for climate change refugees and asylum seekers.”***

It is evident that Mercy Spirituality provides a lens through which one can approach the incoming stranger as a chance to show welcoming hospitality. This charism, coupled with Catholic Social Teaching and its focus on the human dignity of each person, provides a rich foundation in which to respond to people on the move.





Photo courtesy of Carmen Rosa Callomamani rsm

## Pope Francis and a Culture of Encounter

POPE FRANCIS HAS CONSISTENTLY CALLED for the need to embrace migrants and refugees throughout his papacy. Drawing on the biblical imperatives to care for the stranger, he calls for a culture of encounter. Jean Stoken, a member of the Institute Justice Team of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and a longtime advocate for migrants and refugees, states what drives her to do this work.

***“It is the Dignity of the human person; teachings of the Church--particularly Pope Francis’ call to encounter and accompaniment of migrants.”***

Similarly, Karen Donahue rsm, another member of the Sisters of Mercy of the America’s Justice team who focuses largely on legislative advocacy with the US Federal government, states: ***“I am***

***motivated by the scriptural call to welcome the stranger and by the words and example of Pope Francis.”***

In his Papal Message marking the 108th World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2022, entitled ‘Building the Future with Migrants and Refugees,’ Pope Francis calls for a world in which everyone can live in peace and dignity. ‘No one must be excluded. God’s plan is essentially inclusive and gives priority to those living on the existential peripheries. Among them are many migrants and refugees, displaced persons, and victims of trafficking. The Kingdom of God is to be built with them, for without them it would not be the Kingdom that God wants...’<sup>15</sup>

## Prayer as a Ministry for Migrants and Refugees

PRAYER AS A POWERFUL INTERCESSION for migrants and refugees is highly valued by the Mercy world. Many across the globe reflected on the powerful nature of prayer not only for those experiencing displacement but also for the inspiration to be able to assist those in need.

Rita Specht rsm, who volunteers with Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants in Chicago, stresses the importance of prayer in her own life. She states, ***“I could not do this work without a deep prayer life and am inspired by the faith of the people I visit.”*** Similarly, Brigid Frawley rsm from Australia, who strongly supports asylum seekers through her work at the Romero Center in Brisbane, expresses the significance of scripture and prayer. It is through the inspiration of prayer and Scripture that she writes letters advocating for the rights of asylum seekers, gives casual employment to migrants and refugees, and reads about the plight of refugees. Likewise, in working with refugees and asylum seekers through her parish community and the Mercy Action Hub in Melbourne, Rosemary Patterson rsm draws inspiration from the Holy Spirit by praying for guidance each day in working with African families, teaching English and in seeking to combat discrimination, racism and xenophobia.

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***“I could not do this work without a deep prayer life and am inspired by the faith of the people I visit.”***

In her ministry as Diocesan Vicar for Religious, Californian Mercy Sister Frances Coleman rsm has worked with the Council for Religious in



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establishing a Wants of the Age fund, with donations from communities of religious. The fund serves undocumented migrants and refugees affected by insecurity and stress due to their irregular immigration status and their fear of being deported. She sees the face of God in these people's vulnerability and marginalization and this provides the impetus for her work.

Similarly, Australian Sister of Mercy, Margaret Tallon rsm who has worked in refugee camps over the years and now visits refugees in their homes in Brisbane, states, ***“My prayer life overflows into prayer for my refugee friends.”***



Working to advocate for migrants in a global context, Australian Mercy Sister and member of the Mercy Global Action Migration Task Force, Maryanne Loughry rsm states, ***“Being a member of the Catholic Church and working in the field of migration and refugees is one that’s seen as a special space to work...and that’s very life-giving. What’s been so enabling to us as Sisters is having structures that facilitate [being able to respond] ...so that at a moment’s notice I can go. We have got a system that enables us to move quickly.”***

It is clear that there is overwhelming support for the Mercy World to be engaged with people on the move. This was exemplified through the Mercy International Reflection Process in 2016,

when the Mercy World named, “Displacement of Persons’ as a key concern. This gives confidence to those working in the migration space that their work is valued and appreciated. Maryanne Loughry rsm articulates this sentiment, stating: ***“The Sisters of Mercy have been greatly trusting that what I’m doing is what they would want me to be doing...they’ve just said ‘go, we believe in this work, we believe in this response.’ It’s been very empowering.”***

Sister of Mercy, Anne Connolly rsm from Philadelphia, in expressing her motivation for working on the border and now in a resettlement ministry with the Afghan community states, ***“This is what Catherine McAuley would be about today!”***



Photo courtesy of Mercy Connect

***“This is what Catherine McAuley would be about today!”***

## How might our Gospel Tradition Inform our Understanding of Migration?

IN SCRIPTURE, there are a multitude of examples where Jesus consistently broke boundaries and turned the social order on its head. The Gospels prioritize those who are poor or left on the margins (See Matthew 5:10, Luke 6:21, Luke 13:19) and provide images of welcome and hospitality to the outcast. Theologian, Joshua Jipp argues, “If the Church today imagines itself as continuing the same story and mission of Jesus, then many of our churches need to reject their obsession with strict boundaries, over the consistent witness that the Church is comprised of unusual friendships, that is a group of disciples crossing borders, transgressing boundaries and norms, to extend and receive the presence of Christ as embodied in one another.”<sup>16</sup>

**The image of crossing borders is a powerful one and calls us all to respond with generosity and faith.**

If we reflect on the Gospel story of the Syro-Phoenician woman and her encounter with Jesus we witness a crossing of boundaries. We see a new social relationship emerging through engagement and challenging dialogue. We see healing take place, a balm, for long term division and separation.

*Mark 7:24-29*

*<sup>24</sup> Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret.*

*<sup>25</sup> In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet.*

*<sup>26</sup> The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.*

*<sup>27</sup> “First let the children eat all they want,” he told her, “for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”*

*<sup>28</sup> “Lord,” she replied, “even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.”*

*<sup>29</sup> Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.”*

In this encounter between Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman we witness a profound transformation, one in which Jesus is challenged and thereby expresses the all-embracing inclusivity of the Gospel. In his reading of the scripture, Jipp reminds the faithful that “The Church continues the ministry of Jesus and enacts God’s mission precisely through crossing borders, settling in new lands, and engaging in deeply surprising, even unsettling friendships.”<sup>17</sup>

The image of crossing borders is a powerful one and calls us all to respond with generosity and faith.



# Mercy Encounters with People on the Move

Photo courtesy of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas





**"Our role as members of the circle of friends is to befriend individuals and families because we know how important being welcomed into a supportive community is for people who have experienced war, conflict, trauma...it's sometimes one of the pathways for wholeness and healing of their past experiences."**

Meredith Evans rsm

## Mercy Welcome & Hospitality

Reflecting on a theology of mission amongst migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, missiologist Ross Langmead claims that a central theme is hospitality. Langmead identifies a number of practical actions integral to this idea, including justice-seeking, political action, inclusion around tables, intercultural friendships, pursuing a hospitable multicultural approach to Church life, practical assistance and long-term commitment.<sup>18</sup> These actions are exemplified in the Mercy World's ministry to migrants.

As people devoted to an all-encompassing community of equals, the Mercy World invests significant energy and resources in welcoming and engaging with people who often face adversity and experience marginalization. At the same time, forming relationships of mutuality and reciprocity, the Mercy World recognizes people on the move for their unique giftedness, the powerful contributions they make to the world and the new life that they bring with them. This approach

stands in stark contrast to 'pervasive frameworks that reduce migrants to their economic function or cast them as threats to national security and cultural cohesion.'<sup>19</sup> Often experiencing displacement, estrangement, loss of identity and trauma, people on the move are welcomed as friends and equals, rendering borders invisible.

This notion of reciprocity is illustrated by Mary Waskowiak rsm, who lives in an intentional community supporting migrants on the US/Mexico border. In speaking of Casa de Misericordia, her community of action and contemplation, she states, ***"We seek to form relationships characterized by mutuality and inclusivity. By collaborating with others in works of mercy, we learn to be Merciful."***<sup>20</sup>

Mercy Advocate and member of the Institute Justice Team of the Americas, Marianne Comfort states, ***"Personally, I had some experience with refugee resettlement... I am deeply moved by the biblical call to welcome the stranger."***



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It's clear that God's mission of hospitality to the stranger demands passion, creativity and long-term commitment. In that same spirit, Genevieve Caffery rsm, a Sister of Mercy from Brisbane, Australia has been committed to accompanying refugees over the past forty years. She states, ***"As Jesus and his family were refugees, we can believe that the refugee is near to the heart of God. We are called to reach out to the stranger, to recognize that we cannot address God as father/mother without recognizing that we are brothers and sisters, that we are but different faces of the one human race. We are called to build bridges not walls, to understand our interconnectedness and to act accordingly."***

Margaret McBride rsm from Phoenix, Arizona works in Mission Integration in healthcare and provides services to migrants and refugees. Care is provided

at no cost. She expresses that this kind of service provides an opportunity to offer a welcoming presence as Jesus would in his ministry.

Irish sister of Mercy Helena Daly rsm works with Syrian refugees to help integrate them into the local community. Her ministry includes organizing English classes, providing transport when required, assisting with resettlement needs and visiting refugees in their new homes. She believes the impetus for this work can be found in the Scriptures where Christ said, ***"I was a stranger and you welcomed me."***

In San Diego, Mary Waskowiak rsm reflects on her experience of working on the border with people on the move, ***"As an intentional community grounded in Mercy, we bring our individual gifts to weave a spirituality that keeps us alive and alert to the bigger picture of God-at-work, locally and globally."***

Welcome is a core value in the Mercy World. A graduate of the Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship, Jemima Welsh shares her experience working with Asylum Circle, which facilitates interaction with migrant and refugee organizations in Brisbane. She says the aim of Asylum Circle is ***"to welcome openly and warmly, and to be as patient, kind and caring as possible in interactions with migrants and refugees, so they can experience a sense of home wherever they are."*** This reflects a belief ***"that all people have innate dignity and deserve to be treated with respect, kindness, hospitality and love."***

Angela Murphy rsm, Center Manager of Welcome English Language Center, a Mercy Project in Cork, Ireland, recalls the writings of Catherine McAuley and believes that Catherine's words on charity,



**"I can see the eyes of God in the people I encounter and especially those in most need."**

sum up the sentiments of what the Welcome English project is about. ***"Our charity is to be cordial. Now cordial signifies something that renews, invigorates and warms. Such should be the effect of our love for each other."***<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, Irish Sister of Mercy, Helen Keegan rsm, undertaking parish ministry with Syrians in County Leitrim in Ireland, recognizes each person as a sister or brother. In this same spirit of Mercy, Patricia Mulderick rsm, ministering with ARISE and numerous centers on the border, assisting migrants with the legalization process and many other essential needs, claims that she takes her

motivation from Gospel teachings, ***"In every way! 'Be merciful as your God is Merciful'...I was hungry, and you gave me food, thirsty and you gave me to drink, a stranger and you welcomed me' ... 'Love God with your whole heart, your whole mind, your whole soul....and love your neighbor as yourself.'"***

Filipina Sister of Mercy, Derby Mercado rsm, provides practical and psycho-spiritual support to internally-displaced and Indigenous people at risk of trafficking and climate displacement. She states: ***"I can see the eyes of God in the people I encounter and especially those in most need."***

Welcome and hospitality is essential to encounters with migrants, a critical part of this is forming relationships of friendship and connection.



Photo courtesy of Young Mercy Links



## Friendship and Human Connection

Isabel Salter, a member of Young Mercy Links, Australia, stresses the importance of relationships. She states, ***“As forced migration can be an isolating experience, one of our initiatives at Young Mercy Links is simply to maintain social relationships with the individuals and families we work with. Although we can’t fill the void that these young women feel in their inability to attend university, we can offer our hospitality, friendship, and when needed, a distraction. We do this by organizing casual coffee and dinner catch ups. A perk of being a youth-led organization is that these interactions feel more natural. Still, it can be difficult to maintain connections that feel authentic and reciprocal for our migrant contacts given the differences in opportunities we are afforded.”***

This notion of recognizing our own privilege and the need to share our resources is shared by Mary Anne Poeschi rsm. As a Pastoral Associate for the local parish and in her ministry spanning a wide area covering Canton, Mississippi, her work has involved supporting many Hispanic migrants and their communities, particularly those who are grieving family and loved ones who died on the migration journey. She has arranged finance for many burials and other emergency needs. In speaking of this powerful work, she says, ***“These are our brothers and sisters in Christ who need our help and support. They do not enjoy all the benefits or security that I have. I am a Sister of Mercy who helps those in need as best I can.”***

The following story of Christine, a volunteer with Mercy Connect in Sydney, and Rodiyah, a Somali woman with refugee status in Australia, encapsulates the significance of friendships and human connections. The connection between Christine and Rodiyah is clearly an unbreakable life bond.



Photo courtesy of Young Mercy Links



Christine and Rodiayh  
Photo Courtesy of Mercy Connect Sydney

### Christine shares:

*“Early in 2015, I was introduced to Rodiayh, a shy year 10 student who was described as withdrawn. Her trust and our easy connection were, I think, a surprise to us both. Shyly she responded to my gentle enquiries. A crumpled piece of paper pulled from her pocket on our second meeting outlined her enormously difficult journey as a refugee. She offered a small heart-wrenching account of her life before arriving in Australia. From there somehow, we’ve never looked back... Rodiayh and I have shared films, botanical garden walks (both Auburn and Mt Annan), a visit to the Powerhouse Museum with the twins and my grandsons but perhaps most memorable for me was a trip to observe World ‘Wuthering Heights’ Day in Sydney Park. Many hundreds of Kate Bush look-alikes gathered to dance, and a choir sang on a hillside as we both ‘escaped’... Now Rodiayh is 26 and I know we are friends for life. So much in life is fortuitous. I am so much richer for giving that little hand of support. She is remarkably resilient. Her strength of character, her creativity, her warmth, her mothering, her loyalty to her friends, her talents. These are among the many reasons why I love this young woman.”*

### Rodiayh shares:

*“In 2015, life smiled at me again. At Bankstown Senior College I met Ms. Christine, a woman full of life who was to become my lifeguard. She was the first volunteer person I met. It was at a time when I had fallen into a sea that I could not get out of, and she was the hand that lifted me up. Ms. encouraged me to do the things I love. She helped me in my practical, school, and social life. Ms. was my advisor, she gave encouragement, and determination and today she is still that to me. I was a shy girl by nature and antisocial. I still don’t make friends easily but just talking to her on that first day, I knew that I could bury my secrets with her. I felt that feeling of a friend, mother, and sister had arrived that I’ve never had. I remember when she said to me, I am a part of her family. That made me cry a lot and I couldn’t hold my tears. Ms. was my inspiration when I wrote a story for a writing competition at school, and she was the first to read it. I always loved it when she read my stories in her voice. I call her Ms. not because she was my teacher at school or because it’s a habit, but I call her Ms. because she is still the Ms. who smiled at me when I was in one of my saddest times, supported me when I felt my weakest. She was always the guardian of my dreams. I tried to call her Chris but ended up with Ms. The first time I went to the theater was with Ms. in Bankstown. I was so excited and happy! For me it was a different world, and I loved the discussion that took place between us after the play ended. I still remember every word. Even the first time I went to the cinema was with Ms. We saw the movie “Brooklyn” which we both loved. I have many bad memories. But everything with Ms. has a special place in my memory that I will never forget.”*



These kinds of encounters illustrate that relationships of mutuality and reciprocity are common across the Mercy World. In Peru, Carmen Rosa Callomamani rsm articulates this notion with regard to the Venezuelan asylum seekers she accompanies. ***“Let it be clear that for us the migrant and refugee, in the first place, is our brother and sister, their life matters to us. That is why our meeting not only lasts a few hours, but, in most cases, consists of accompanying them throughout the trip until they reach the destination country. Sometimes we even continue to maintain contact over time, as is the case of some families who have been in other countries for two or three years without breaking communication with us.”***

She further recalls her interaction with a Venezuelan woman who was seeking refuge with her young family including a two-year old son: ***“I spent a good time listening to their story of struggle and hope. Everything seemed fine, but suddenly the lady began to cry uncontrollably, which scared me a lot, thinking that something I said could have bothered her. But when I asked her what was happening...she told me...: “in all this time no one had listened to me with such attention, since I arrived in the country I only heard words like: “Veneca [pejorative word for a Venezuelan woman]; You come to take away work spaces; Lazy; They want everything easy; Go back to your country.” This conversation turned out***

***to be a formative experience for me and led me to decide to dedicate full time to accompanying our migrant brothers and sisters. Now that I reflect, it makes me think of the words of Catherine McAuley: ‘There are things the poor prize more highly than gold: the kind word, the gentle, compassionate look, and the patient hearing of their sorrows.’***

Connection and friendship are key values in the ministry of Margaret Moore rsm who offers local support to refugees and asylum seekers at the Mercy Hub in collaboration with other volunteers and groups in Melbourne, Australia. Her work with migrants began many years ago when, as a school principal, she encountered families in the inner city schools of Melbourne. This led her to respond to a request to undertake pastoral care in a UN-run refugee camp in Thailand. Here she encountered beautiful families and witnessed the vulnerability of people who shared very disturbing accounts of violence, rape and other forms of abuse while on route to the camp. She reflects that many were ‘broken’ and ‘desperate



Photo courtesy of Young Mercy Links



to find a new life', and she and her co-workers provided opportunities to listen to their stories and offer support. Recalling her time as the Mercy Refugee Service Coordinator in Sydney in the 1990's, she shares, ***"What I learned was people didn't have a fear of refugees...they came with an open caring for the ones who were coming to our country. It was very different to the feeling you have now... how it's been politicized and people don't even want to be called or talked about in the context of a refugee or asylum seeker."*** As a result of these significant encounters with migrants and refugees, Sr Margaret participates in Mercy advocacy and education groups in Australia, especially in relation to asylum seekers who arrive in Australia and are placed in detention centers.

### **The important aspects of encounter: "To listen to their needs and to respond in any way possible, helping them evaluate the context of their needs and responding with Mercy and compassion."**

Over many years, JoAnn Persch rsm and Pat Murphy rsm based in Chicago, USA, have responded to a call to accompany migrants who were being detained and often deported. Over sixteen years ago, these two sisters were significant in the founding of the Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants. One particularly touching story shared by the sisters, illustrates the value of friendship and human connection. After finally being released from detention, a young man faithfully made contact. They recall:

***"He needed emotional support- as a young man alone in the country-we were the only people he knew. So he called us every morning to tell us to have a good day and every night to see if we had a good day. Just human contact."***

Catherine Ryan rsm from Limerick, Ireland, volunteers with Spirasi, an organization that supports survivors of torture. She describes her mission as a befriender, providing a supportive role to asylum seekers, refugees and those who have experienced trafficking. Simple encounters over a coffee or tea are crucial ways of offering support. Likewise, Helen Stannard rsm from Parramatta, Australia meets weekly with migrant families offering pastoral support. In this ministry, she encounters many seeking friendship, emotional and spiritual support as well as a desire to be connected to the community.

The importance of relationships and connection are highlighted by those who have experienced deep encounters with migrants and refugees. Maryanne Loughry rsm states: ***"My heart is still very much there, in the fieldwork. So while I love teaching about the work, there's nothing that replaces the actual meeting of the people and engaging with them."*** Australian Sister of Mercy Genevieve Caffery rsm claims, ***"The thrust of my mission in this area has been to welcome, to assist people on the move to find a place in a new country and in particular to accompany those who do not have family support, especially isolated women."*** Likewise, Nora Burke rsm, ministering to migrants and refugees in Carrick-On-Shannon shares the important aspects of encounter: ***"To listen to their needs and to respond in any way possible, helping them evaluate the context of their needs and responding with Mercy and compassion."***



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## Supporting Migrants at Borders and in Detention

For people on the move, including the 280.6 million people migrating in 2021,<sup>22</sup> the process of immigrating is often undignified and perilous. International borders can be dangerous places for migrants, particularly those who are (or who are presumed to be) in irregular situations.

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**"Borders are 'a place of encounter rather than a frontier of conquest.'"**

Roberto S. Goizueta

Many migrants lose their lives when they board unseaworthy boats, moving trains or sweltering trucks, when smugglers leave them to die at sea or in the desert, or when border guards are given orders to deter irregular migration. At land, sea and air borders around the world, migrants can experience discrimination and arbitrary decision-making, torture and sexual or gender-based violence, dangerous interception practices, and prolonged or arbitrary detention.<sup>23</sup>



## Assistance in Transit and at Borders

People around the Mercy World encounter migrants throughout every aspect of their journey and many support migrants who have recently crossed borders. For some, that means providing companionship and immediate assistance, including medical care, adequate food and water, blankets, clothing, sanitary items and an opportunity to rest.

Carmen Rosa Callomamani rsm, works at the Bolivia-Peru border, accompanying migrants and Venezuelan asylum-seekers on their journeys, offering psychosocial support and spiritual guidance. She describes a typical day on the border:

***“In the evenings, until approximately 9 pm, we go out to meet our migrant and refugee brothers and sisters who, at this hour, are preparing to spend the night in the parks and squares. We dedicate ourselves to carrying some blankets, which UNHCR generously provides us, and we share a cup of coffee or an emoliente [a typical Peruvian drink] with a piece of bread. When we find families with small children, we have the possibility to pay for a night in a hotel, especially in consideration of the children, because the temperature in this part of the country sometimes drops to 10 to 15 degrees Celsius below zero. We share warm clothes, especially chullos [hats] and gloves for the children.***

***In the mornings, generally at 4:30 in the morning, we start to prepare oatmeal or coffee, to go out at 5am at the latest to meet those who arrived at dawn and who are often really shocked by the cold. We begin to offer hot drinks and bread, as well as blankets and hygiene kits provided by UNHCR. We also spend time educating them***



Carmen Rosa Callomamani serving migrants in transit through Peru.  
Photo courtesy of Carmen Rosa Callomamani rsm

***about the weather and the dangers they are exposed to along the way.***

***During the day, we sometimes spend time reading or painting with the children. In our experience, children are thirsty to learn to read and write, so we take advantage, even if it's no more than an hour, to read stories or draw. We also find families who have walked for weeks without having eaten hot food for three to four days, eating only water and biscuits. In these cases, we buy hot food so that, at least that day, they can eat in a dignified manner.”***

In her work at Joseph's Mercy Hospital in Phoenix, Arizona, in the United States, Margaret McBride rsm has witnessed the life-threatening risks that migrants face when attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Joseph's Mercy Hospital is 2.5 hours from the border, but as the only neurological center in the area, it sees many migrants who have sustained serious spinal and head injuries from attempting to climb the border wall. In Arizona, and in many other places, people in undocumented situations are ineligible for public medical care and may avoid going to public institutions for fear of their information being shared with immigration enforcement agencies. Mercy



hospitals step in to reach those who cannot access healthcare any other way. Sr Margaret explains, ***“In our Mercy Healthcare system we can employ physicians ourselves. We remind our physicians and staff that this is part of our work as Sisters of Mercy. Further, we educate our employees in our charism, the care of the poor. They in turn are generous and helpful.”***

Psychologist Marianne Loughry rsm describes her work with Catholic Relief Services in helping newly-arrived Afghan refugees in the United States:

***“We were the first responders. The people had just arrived in the military base that we went to, which was in Wisconsin. The first day there were something like 300 people, and by the time I left, there were 13,000. And they literally had just got off the planes. And that was a raw experience because it was an emergency and people had come without adequate clothing. The base was not set up for appropriate shelter and education and the needs of the people. We worked to set up the system as much as we could. We were responsible for child safe areas, child friendly areas, and also for assisting women and men with some recreation activities and some English language.”***

As part of States’ human rights obligations, migrants at borders should have access to individual health and medical screenings and referrals for further medical attention, including mental health referrals. Reception processes should ensure that necessary assistance is provided to all migrants, on a non-discriminatory basis regardless of their migration status or the circumstances in which they arrived at the border.<sup>24</sup>

Mary Waskowiak rsm is the Director of the Community Resource Center at Our Lady of Guadalupe parish in San Diego, California, on the US-Mexico border. Along with Sisters Gloria Mary Avila rsm

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**As the increased militarization and externalization of borders has made migration more dangerous for people on the move, individuals and organizations who provide life-saving support to migrants are needed more than ever.**

and Mary Kay Dobrovolny rsm, and lay colleagues, she is part of Casa de Misericordia, ***“a community of action and contemplation, [which] believes all humans share a common home - all are welcome.”***

Casa de Misericordia responds to the needs of migrants and their local community through direct service, and by seeking to form “relationships characterized by mutuality and inclusivity,” comforting families and helping them to become self-sufficient. Sr. Mary describes the partnerships that are important to her work: ***“We serve those on the move locally and in Tijuana through Franciscan Mission Sisters of Our Lady of Peace. We work with them through the assistance of a San Diego County social worker and the local immigration services, including Catholic Charities of San Diego.”*** Through the Community Resource Center, migrants can receive food and clothing, assistance with job retraining and placement, access to a social worker and support groups for those who have experienced trauma, English language classes, and information about the availability of COVID-19 vaccines and other public services.

For many migrants who have recently crossed a border and are still on their journey to their final destination, all they need is a place to rest and figure out their next steps. Sandy Di Cianno rsm in Ely, Nevada in the United States recounts,

***“I never ask too many questions because I don’t want to scare them [the migrants she encounters]. They rest, get gas, move on... I often give***

**gas money out of my own budget. Now we have a food pantry and can give them food also.”**

Sister Sandy tells this story of how a small act of support can help someone get back on their feet:

**“One day while I was at the Church office, a young Hispanic man called David came in, asking if I could help him out. I made a few calls [about jobs] without any success. In the end, we went down to the gas station/mini mart and I filled his car with gas. We then went in and bought him some groceries with the remaining \$20 I had. We parted and I promised him I would pray for him. It was probably a year later when I heard “Hi Sister Sandy!” I turned and it was David, the man I had helped the year before. He was on his way through. He had a steady job in Colorado. He reached in his wallet and pulled out some money. I didn’t want to take it but he insisted. So I took the \$20 and I told him that I would keep it to help someone else coming through. Pay it forward!”**

This type of assistance is not always welcomed by governments. There is a worrying and growing trend of “criminalization of solidarity” in recent years, as individuals and organizations who have helped refugees and migrants by providing food and water, temporary shelter, or rescue at sea, have been threatened, smeared, intimidated, harassed, and prosecuted in courts simply for

helping migrants in need. These tactics have been used by governments in some countries of destination to dissuade others from showing solidarity with people on the move and in order to deter refugees and migrants from attempting to enter their territories.



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As the increased militarization and externalization of borders has made migration more dangerous for people on the move, individuals and organizations who provide life-saving support to migrants are needed more than ever. Without people to assist at international borders, such as competent interpreters, legal aid service providers, health service providers, guardians for separated children and others, it is also difficult, if not impossible, to identify and refer migrants who may be at particular risk, or to ensure that people have the opportunity to access information about their right to seek asylum and to access fair and efficient asylum procedures.

Recalling her work in refugee camps in Thailand, Margaret Moore rsm describes talking to families seeking asylum in Australia, who were unaware of the nuances of the legal system.

**“They came pleading for a way out of a camp so that they could get settlement in a new country. Through accompaniment and assistance, many of the families were able to get interviews to help determine the next steps in their journey.”**

Similarly, in Ireland, Anne Scully rsm emphasized the importance of legal assistance:

**“People need support in making their application which can determine the rest of their lives. This can often be very difficult to access. Legal support before the interview is very scant and almost non-existent. With COVID-19, a face-to-face preparation for the interview is impossible. The same goes for the interview itself. It is so difficult for people to understand the nuances of what they are being asked, much less to give a satisfactory answer.”**

In some countries, when people do not have access to these services, and no one to advocate on their behalf, they can end up in prolonged or arbitrary detention.

## Assistance to Migrants in Detention

Immigration detention is a relatively recent phenomenon that has spread over the last thirty years, as governments have increasingly sought to control the movement of people across their borders. Over the last decade, there have been at least 2,000 facilities used for immigration-related

purposes in approximately 100 different countries.<sup>25</sup> Detention is used for various political, bureaucratic and symbolic reasons, and is part of a growing trend to criminalize migrant communities, including through harmful pushbacks, externalization of borders, and other measures to deter or prevent migration. Immigration detention is being used in a widespread and systematic way, perpetuating societal discrimination and marginalization, with very real impacts on migrant rights and lives.

For migrants and asylum seekers, the experience of immigration detention has many damaging and enduring effects, including physical and mental health impacts that are often felt beyond their detention for the rest of their lives. Detention also tears families apart and instills fear in communities. When viewing the impacts of detention through an intersectional lens, it is clear that migrants with

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**"Every Friday, we went to the deportation center to pray and work with the families of those being deported and also to talk to and listen to those being deported...we work out of the principle that every person is a child of God deserving to be treated with dignity and respect. Ours is a ministry of presence and accompaniment."**

Pat Murphy rsm & JoAnn Persch rsm



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diverse and intersecting identities also face layered harms from discrimination based on sex, gender identity and sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, and culture, among other factors. According to the International Detention Coalition, “Along with its well-documented and known harms, evidence also shows that immigration detention does not support effective and sustainable migration governance outcomes.”<sup>26</sup>

In the United States, sexual assault and sexual violence are rampant with 33,000 complaints of sexual and/or physical abuse reported between 2010 and 2016 alone.<sup>27</sup> In Australia, under its policy of mandatory immigration detention for migrants in irregular status, asylum seekers detected in boats in Australian waters are detained in facilities throughout Australia, as well as ‘offshore’ on Christmas Island, Nauru and Manus Island. Migrants are often detained for long periods of time with “heavily restricted freedom of movement, and limited access to sunlight, space to exercise, and fresh air.”<sup>28</sup> Additionally, migrants often have trouble obtaining legal or medical assistance in detention. For example, in Ireland, “non-citizens confined at a Dublin Airport transit facility lack access to legal safeguards and guarantees, including lawyers, medical assistance, and detention reviews.”<sup>29</sup>

Although detention and strict immigration laws are presented as means of safeguarding countries from threat, they harm migrants and countries as a whole by furthering and legitimizing the criminalization of migration as well as systematic intolerance, xenophobia, racism and all other multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Furthermore, detention has become an income-generating machine for private companies and governments worth billions of dollars

worldwide.<sup>30</sup> Profiting off of the degrading treatment of migrants and other human rights abuses incentivizes state-sponsored violence at and around borders. However, “international borders are not zones of exclusion or exception for human rights obligations”<sup>31</sup> and Mercy Sisters throughout the world are at the front lines pushing for accountability and action. In Melbourne, Australia, Margaret Moore rsm calls the forced detention and relocation of asylum seekers coming to Australia “disturbing” and has worked to call upon others within her parish to join her in supporting those stuck in detention.

Maryanne Loughry rsm describes her experience influencing Australian policymakers on immigration detention: ***“I was invited to get on to the Minister of Immigration’s Advisory Counsel. I was on that for a number of years. Australia had a very strict, and still has a very strict, detention policy and at the time had a number of families and children in detention and also moved [them] to offshore detention in the Pacific. I was an insider in a sense that I was able to access these detention centers and I was also able to access members of the government and to talk with them about the negative effects that detention was having on individuals and families. We did manage to get children out of detention, but we also didn’t have a lot of success in closing the detention centers, especially the offshore ones. And also we witnessed a lot of violence whilst visiting the centers. And at the same time the Sisters of Mercy were responding to the people who were in detention and who had just been released.”***

Based in Chicago, United States, but working with migrants detained in Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin, JoAnn Persch rsm and Pat Murphy rsm demonstrate the importance of accompanying

migrants in detention and fighting for policies to ensure all migrants can access their rights. Through their advocacy and friendship with migrants, they have been able to create a “ministry of presence” that provides migrants comfort and companionship in times of uncertainty.

Sister Pat and Sister JoAnn’s access to migrants in detention was not always easy. ***“We worked to get inside the detention center in McHenry, IL where over 200 men and women were being detained. Of course, we were told ‘no’, but since we can’t take that for an answer we had to work to get a bill passed in the State of Illinois allowing access for religious workers to the immigrant detainees. Many trips to the state capitol for lobbying and finally in November of 2008 the bill passed unanimously in the Illinois House and Senate. It still took a year to get in and a lot of work with the sheriff and the jail staff, but finally we got into the jail in January 2010 and several years later ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] asked us to go into 3 other detention centers which we did until the lockdown of the pandemic and then we continued virtual visits.”***

Their hard work made a world of difference to migrants and their families. ***“The families coming to say good-bye needed loving support on that traumatic day when their loved one was***



JoAnn Persch rsm visiting migrants at McHenry County Adult Correctional Facility, Illinois.  
Photo courtesy of JoAnn Persch rsm and Pat Murphy

***deported. It made us realize how traumatic it must be for the people being ripped from their families and sent out of the country... We got inside [the detention centers] and were able to provide pastoral support, pray, and make phone calls to families who often didn’t know that their loved one was being deported. We also were able to pray on the buses and vans when they were ready for the airport.”***

Sisters Pat and JoAnn were also able to accompany migrants in immigration court. ***“A lawyer friend told us our presence made the judge sit up a little straighter. It was that visit and many others that led us to form a court watch program where volunteers of our organization are present morning and afternoon five days a week. Now the immigrants ask for someone to be present for them and it provides support knowing that someone is there who cares for them.”***

In order to provide this pastoral care and accompaniment, Sisters JoAnn and Pat developed teams of volunteers to visit four jails each week. ***“These were men and women from the Catholic community but also from 15 other communities of faith - Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, and many Christian denominations.” Through these visits and the leadership of Sisters JoAnn and Pat, detained migrants were able to receive not only pastoral support but also legal, administrative, and emotional support. “We visited, we listened, gave them money for their commissary accounts, contacted their families, worked with ICE to get them out of jail if that was possible, worked with the jail staff to help with special needs.”***

In Ireland, asylum seekers are housed in privately-run Direct Provision centers which operate on a for-profit basis. For twenty years, the Direct Provision system has been at the center of ongoing human rights scandals in Ireland, as people’s



**Alternatives to Detention programs prove that detention is not necessary during the immigration process, and cases can be resolved while people are free in communities. An end to immigration detention is not only possible, it is beneficial to states, and necessary to ensure the dignity and rights of people on the move.**

rights to safety, privacy, housing, employment, and education are placed at risk in these institutional settings. After years of campaigning by NGOs and civil society organizations against this form of migrant detention, the Irish Government has agreed to phase out this abusive system by 2024.

Teresa O’Neil rsm is a staff member at Doras Luimni, an Irish support group for asylum seekers and refugees. She has been actively involved in supporting asylum seekers with their legal processes and facilitating their access to basic services. Her ministry at Doras Luimni has played a fundamental role in advocating to end Direct Provision in Ireland. Similarly, at Diversity Sligo, Kathleen Conneally rsm provides support to asylum seekers living in Direct Provision centers locally. Through letter writing to political leaders and policymakers, and organizing events with experts, she has contributed to the movement to eradicate Direct Provision from Ireland and replace the facilities with an alternative that respects people’s human rights. Likewise, Sheila Curran rsm has worked tirelessly to provide support for people seeking protection in Ireland, to advocate for humane and dignified protection procedures and responses to people fleeing persecution.

Non-custodial, community-based alternatives to detention (ATD) exist and are used widely in many

countries around the world for individuals whose immigration status is being resolved. The International Detention Coalition defines alternatives to immigration detention as: “Any law, policy or practice by which persons are not detained for reasons relating to their migration status.”<sup>32</sup> These alternatives better respect the human rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, not only by preventing unlawful or arbitrary detention practices, but also by protecting civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights.

By prioritizing well-being and self-sufficiency, these alternatives enable people to contribute fully to society if residence is secured, or to better face the difficult possibility of return orders. ATD programs are significantly more cost-effective than custodial detention, and they have been shown to maintain high compliance rates, especially when migrants are able to meet their basic needs, and are able to access the legal and social support necessary to make informed decisions about their migration journey.<sup>33</sup> ATD programs prove that detention is not necessary during the immigration process, and cases can be resolved while people are free in communities. An end to immigration detention is not only possible, it is beneficial to states, and necessary to ensure the dignity and rights of people on the move.



At a Mercy Immersion Experience at the US/Mexico border, a message for migrants on the journey: ‘You are not alone.’ Photo courtesy of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas

# Meeting Needs & Upholding Rights

## What Contributes to a Person's Legal Migration Status?

There are many different factors that influence a person's decision to start a journey to build a life in a new country. Some of these factors encourage a person to leave a place of origin, and others that draw a person to a particular destination. Some migrants leave their country in order to work, study or join family. Others feel they must leave because of poverty, widespread human rights violations, political unrest, violence, the effects of climate change and environmental degradation or other serious circumstances that are location-specific. Often people will face a combination of these factors in making their decision.

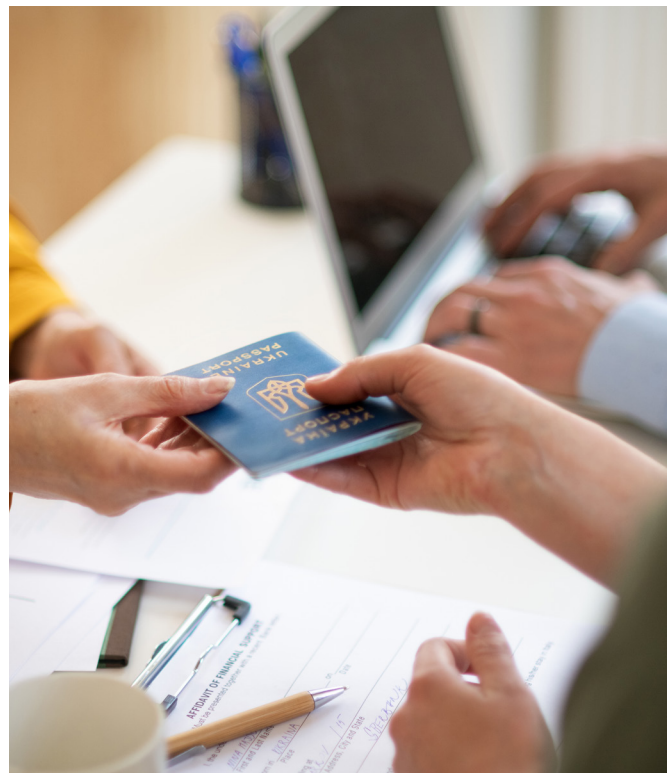
A person's migration status is complex – it can be determined by who a person is (e.g. a child, a member of a religious minority, a student, etc.), why a person moves (e.g. for employment opportunities, to escape war or persecution, to reunite with family members, etc.), or how they migrate (e.g. through legal channels or outside of them, by being trafficked, etc.). A person's migration status is also not fixed – it can change over time, either because of an active choice (e.g. getting a new job, getting married) or because of a change of circumstances (e.g. a change in the political situation in one's country of origin, a change in the laws of the country of destination, etc.).

**In the complex reality of contemporary mobility, it can be difficult to neatly separate people into distinct categories as people may simultaneously fit into several categories, or change from one category to another in the course of their journey.**

Though every country has its own immigration laws and visa schemes, there are certain broad labels that governments apply to non-citizens residing in their countries that affect the obligations of States and the ability for people to access rights.<sup>34</sup>

**"Refugee", "migrant," "asylum-seeker," "undocumented," "citizen," or "stateless" do not reflect a person's whole identity. When we use these labels, we need to remember that out of the many ways in which people describe themselves, these terms only refer to one aspect of their lived experience.**

Peoples' identities are complex, and a multitude of nuanced experiences impact how a person



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decides to identify themselves. For example, a person may choose to describe themselves as being from a certain country or region, or belonging to a group that speaks a certain language or shares a culture. Or that person might talk about occupations or their family status, for example, they are a teacher, doctor, artist, passionate music fan, sister, son or mother.

The international human rights regime establishes that States should respect and protect the rights of all those within their territories, whether nationals or not, and guarantees most rights to all people, without discrimination. Nonetheless, international law still permits important differences between the treatment of nationals and non-nationals, and the protection of a state of nationality remains an important guarantee of rights.

## The Importance of Documentation in Accessing Rights

Although the question of identification and documentation is conceptually distinct from the question of legal status in a country, it is increasingly inseparable in practice. At the most basic level, a person lacking identity documents cannot travel through legal channels, which increases a person's vulnerability to trafficking, for example, by making it more difficult to prove a person's age or family relationships, or to workplace abuse and exploitation in countries of destination, among other vulnerabilities and forms of exclusion.

If registration and identification procedures are not implemented with rigor and integrity, people may face greater difficulties proving their entitlement to nationality or to refugee status, and therefore may be subject to immigration detention and deportation to a country where they are

in danger. They may also find it difficult to access public services in countries of transit and destination. Weak identification systems can make it difficult for displaced persons and their children to reunite, to repatriate after crises have ended, and to reclaim land and property that they have left behind.

Denise Coghlan rsm describes the situation of the people she encounters in her ministry in Cambodia, ***“We meet Vietnamese people who were actually born here, whose families have been here for generations, but they have no documentation. They’re like stateless people. I don’t know if we can even call them migrants or refugees, but they’re stateless people in our country. And the challenges they face are pretty similar, really - they all need a legal identity, they need documentation, so that they have some sort of status in the country to be able to earn a living or open a bank account, or have a driver’s license or to travel.”***

In the Global Compact for Migration,<sup>35</sup> governments commit to “fulfil the right of all individuals to a legal identity by providing all our nationals with proof of nationality and relevant documentation.” They further commit to ensure “that migrants are issued adequate documentation and civil registry documents, such as birth, marriage and death certificates, at all stages of migration, as a means to empower migrants to effectively exercise their human rights.” As the requirements to produce identity documents in order to access healthcare, education, and other social services become more complex and pervasive, it is imperative that we see a standardization in fair, inclusive and efficient legal frameworks that meet international human rights obligations.

## The Need for Regular Pathways and Paths to Permanency

Even with access to a legal identity, too many migrants remain limited in their options to migrate safely, or to regularize their status if they are in an irregular situation. In the absence of safe and dignified regular pathways, migrants are often left with only precarious and irregular migration options. Others may be granted a temporary stay in a country, and then be left unable to adjust to a permanent status, leaving them in limbo. Both of these situations keep people in situations of vulnerability, either unable to access educational or employment opportunities and public services, or detained and criminalized for being ‘out of status’.

At Mercy Connect in Australia, a child refugee from Iraq shared one experience of her journey through Thailand: ***“I had the worst experience anyone could have, which is losing freedom. We were on temporary visas, the immigration police caught us and we were in jail for 25 days then went out on bail. We didn’t know that before going to Thailand. Before experiencing jail, I had a dream to become a lawyer in the future. However, after being in a situation where I needed a lawyer and couldn’t find one, becoming a lawyer became a definite goal.”***

Many Mercy ministries and people around the Mercy World assist migrants who need legal assistance to regularize their status so that they are not criminalized and are able to live to their fullest in their new homes. Jen Barrow rsm in the United States shares: ***“As an immigration lawyer, I handle defensive and affirmative cases. I represent people in immigration court defending against deportation, and I file***

***affirmative applications with United States citizenship and immigration services. Most of my clients fled unsafe situations in their home countries. My clients seek asylum, legal relief available to domestic violence survivors, and status for special immigrant juveniles.”***

In Australia, Mary Symonds rsm describes her work: ***“Personally, I assist people to obtain visas, to apply to the courts if unsuccessful, in writing to the Minister for ministerial intervention. I attend interviews with them at Immigration and write submissions on their behalf to Immigration, to the Immigration Assessment Authority, and other review bodies and to the Minister when all else has failed.”***

This type of assistance is essential so that people are able to live a safe and dignified life in their new countries, and so they can reach their full potential. Ada Snell from Young Mercy Links in Adelaide, Australia articulates some of the barriers people experience with irregular or temporary legal status:

***“Some of the main challenges people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds in Adelaide face are the lack of certainty about their future due to temporary protection visas. They want to settle in Australia and many have been here for a number of years now (over 5), without any assurance that they will be able to stay here permanently – they are waiting for updates and renewal of their visas and this causes psychological stress. Our people on temporary protection visas are forced to pay international student fees if they want to pursue higher/tertiary education and make a life for themselves in their chosen field. As young people, being (unfairly) excluded from such***

***important opportunities can be devastating, and push people into a state of disappointment and despair as they watch their peers move forward in their lives, while they are barred from similar opportunities.”***

Margaret Moore rsm in Melbourne, Australia shares a similar concern: ***“Very clearly the needs are for permanency. To be accepted to live in this country. The painful part of that now is that the younger children who were babies when we first knew them are now moving into secondary school. It’s very painful for them to have that growing realization that they might not stay in this country. Their friends are here; they’re loving the schools there...it’s awful really. I was talking to one girl last week and she doesn’t want to come to Palm Sunday March [The annual Palm Sunday Walk for Justice for Refugees in Melbourne] ... she said ‘no, it’s too painful for me.’”***

While the COVID-19 pandemic has been marked by border restrictions and limitations on mobility, some countries have recognized the specific situations of migrants, implementing opportunities with regards to pathways to remain in the country.<sup>36</sup> Even though this has mostly included temporary measures, these opportunities have often focused on extending the stay of migrants unable to leave, and in some instances, regularizing migrants more broadly, by legalizing the presence of migrants who are currently in a country in contravention to immigration laws, including amnesty for those in the country irregularly.

The pandemic offers an opportunity to implement measures that promote pathways to regularization (even if limited in eligibility and time) as promising practices and tools to ensure that

pathways are expanded more proactively in the longer term, beyond the pandemic. A failure to capitalize on this opportunity presents a serious danger of allowing the pandemic to become an excuse for continued and increased criminalization of migrants and for maintaining restrictive border regimes and migration policies.

**The pandemic offers an opportunity to implement measures that promote pathways to regularization (even if limited in eligibility and time) as promising practices and tools to ensure that pathways are expanded more proactively in the longer term.**

This is particularly significant in view of the fact that we are yet to see more large-scale, meaningful advances on regular pathways for migrants in countries of origin and transit. Lack of progress in these areas would not only increase the vulnerability of migrants settled in countries of destination, but would also severely affect those migrants that will face greater risks on the journey. Jean Stokan, from the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas’ Justice Team emphasizes the need for governments to create more regular pathways to address protection gaps for forced migration, saying we must ***“promote change in immigration laws and policies; educate and advocate for addressing the root causes of forced migration - particularly related to decades of failed US policies toward the countries of Central America, and the impact of the extractive industries.”***



Similarly, Wendy Flannery rsm describes the situation in the Pacific: ***“People in the Pacific are facing forced migration and trying to find options, including, for atoll nations, how to maintain their sovereignty and sovereign rights over their territory. We must highlight the issue of forced climate migration, to support the work of governments and organizations in the Pacific Islands region having to deal with this challenge, to explore and highlight its human rights dimensions, and to develop ideas to influence policies regarding migration pathways.”***

Pathways for regular migration, including new and expanded regular pathways to admission and stay, can be an effective tool to ensure

the protection of migrants and their rights, including migrants in situations of vulnerability. This responds to the reality of many migrants who currently lack access to regular migration options, but are compelled to leave their countries of origin. Providing migrants with access to entry and/or residence through regular channels reduces their need to move, live and work in unsafe circumstances, and ensures the protection of their human rights, including labor rights, decent work and social protection, and access to services while facilitating integration into the community of the destination country. Pathways for regular migration also benefit all countries, helping them to build strong communities and contributing to sustainable development.



**Mercying**  
Photo courtesy of Mercy Global Presence

## Belonging & Social Inclusion

Global migration flows contribute to the richness in diversity of cultures, ethnicities, and linguistics around the world. The successful integration of migrants, refugees, and their descendants is fundamental in all areas of society.

The process of migrating can cause people a great sense of vulnerability throughout their journeys. People are confronted by social inequalities and discrimination which produce and reproduce unequal life chances for those displaced. To minimize social disparities and inequalities for migrant groups, it is important that people on the move receive positive receptions from their host governments and communities. Involuntary exclusion from a society's political, economic and societal processes can diminish a person's sense of belonging and human security.<sup>37</sup> By centering responses to migration on social inclusion, both the challenges and opportunities for migrants' integration are exposed in both government migration policy and at the community engagement level.

The adoption of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development marked a breakthrough for migrant rights. SDG target 10.7 advances the "orderly, safe, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through implementation of planned and well managed migration policies."<sup>38</sup> This target calls for the empowerment of people on the move and underscores the importance of creating inclusive societies for the

**"Access to shelter, health, employment, education and food are all basic human needs. But more importantly, the sense of acceptance, safety and belonging are the essential needs of our human souls."**

Beata Ostapiej-Piatkowski, Romero Centre

advancement of sustainable social, economic, and political development. Sisters of Mercy, Associates and Partners in Ministry are cooperating at the local, national, and global levels to create spaces which celebrate solidarity, diversity and openness so that people on the move feel welcome and accepted by host communities.

On arrival to a host country, migrants often face challenges with respect to citizenship and documentation, language ability, skill sets, and social networks. All of these challenges contribute to their sense of belonging and inclusion. Ada Snell from Young Mercy Links in Australia explains: **"The challenges of accessing rental housing, finding work, and staying out of relative poverty, as well as accessing higher education, all combine to make people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds feel very different, not so normal, compared to the people they interact with at work and school."**

\* Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes "the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health." In order to fulfill their obligations under international human rights law, States must make sure that health facilities, goods and services are available, accessible, acceptable, of good quality and applicable to all sectors of the population, including migrants. (CESCR General Recommendation 14)

To give migrants a voice, recognize their true values, and enable them to participate in all spheres of life, Mercy ministries can be seen to engage in work that facilitates social integration of migrants and refugees into host communities, and allows people to access their human rights, including through healthcare, housing, education, and employment sectors.

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**"Instead of repeating harmful narratives of fear and exclusion, it's time to welcome people into our communities, to reimagine our collective future"**

Michelle Bachelet, Former UN  
High Commissioner for Human Rights

## Social Inclusion

Rooted in Mercy hospitality, people and organizations around the Mercy World engage in ministries to welcome migrants into their new communities, and help them to adjust to their new surroundings. Social inclusion is a process by which migrants, refugees and asylum seekers become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups. The International Organization of Migration defines integration as "the two-way process of mutual adaptation between migrants and the societies in which they live, whereby migrants are incorporated into the social, economic, cultural and political life of the receiving community. It entails a set of joint responsibilities for migrants and communities."<sup>39</sup>

This process ensures that those at risk of exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in community life, including decision-making that affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights. This is also related to the concept of social cohesion, which promotes values such as anti-discrimination, countering xenophobia and promoting mutual understanding.

Integration occurs in the public and private realms, across generations, and at the individual, family, community and national levels. In addition to helping migrants, refugees and asylum seekers to access labor markets and basic services, people around the Mercy World contribute to social inclusion by offering opportunities to learn the language, traditions and customs of the host community, and empowering migrants to become engaged in their new communities.

For some migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, language barriers can delay their integration into a new society. Frustration or a lack of confidence in being able to speak the language of the country of destination may lead to social self-censorship, as migrants and refugees may choose to refrain from or avoid certain activities because they seem too challenging linguistically. This may lead to further exclusion. While social networks with other people who speak languages of countries of origin offer immigrants practical and emotional support in the early periods of their settlement in a new country, and are key to a person's identity and sense of self, the development of social networks through the language of the country of destination provides long-term practical and emotional support and a sense of community and belonging.





Students at Welcome English Language Centre, Cork City.  
Photo courtesy of the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, Ireland

At Welcome English Language Centre, a Mercy ministry in Cork, Ireland, Angela Murphy rsm works to meet the linguistic needs of migrants in the community:

***“Welcome English desires that all immigrants registered in the center would be facilitated in achieving a functional level of English to help them with social integration as well as enhancing their educational progress.” Beyond English and literacy classes, Angela emphasizes that “provision of a welcoming space for all those that come to our center to meet and chat and social inclusion is so important in our centre for all.” The values of hospitality, respect and equality are at the core of this ministry, which offers a person-centered welcoming attitude and atmosphere, recognizing the dignity of each person and the importance of respecting cultural diversity.***

Learning the language of the host community is important in a practical sense - to access public information about healthcare, housing, education, employment and more. But perhaps more important than being able to read or speak a new language for a purely practical purpose is the ability to engage in the community and build new relationships. This gives migrants and refugees the ability to have a voice and participate meaningfully in society, leading to mutual respect and

recognition between migrants and their host communities, which in turn can enhance feelings of inclusion and well-being.

At Mercy Connect in Melbourne, Australia, support for migrants, refugees and asylum seekers extends beyond the English classes that are taught there.

There is a mutual benefit for both the people who have newly arrived as well as the community that is receiving them. ***“It is becoming part of a community and developing friendships that are even more important as they [migrants and refugees] begin life adapting to a new culture in a new country. The value of these connections is immeasurable for all involved in the Mercy Connect classes at Dandenong Library.”***

Beyond language classes, Mercy ministries offer other social activities to help people to establish new friendships and networks of support and to provide a sense of normalcy in the midst of a challenging period of transition in peoples' lives. In Melbourne, Margaret Moore rsm explains, ***“It’s day-to-day living. The moment they stay here, the more their kids want to join in. Join a soccer club, live their lives normally. It’s just becoming harder and harder for that to be a reality.”***

Currently residing in Ohio in the United States, Marilyn Gottemoeller rsm persists in her work to make sure that new refugees feel welcome, despite the challenges: ***“Because of the pandemic and now living in one of our retirement communities, I have been pretty limited to letters, phone and financial help. In years past, I have set up an organization of sisters and Mercy associates who ensured that the refugees new to Cincinnati got to 1-2 grocery stores weekly until such time as 2 of them received their own driver’s licenses and cars.”***



Photo courtesy of Young Mercy Links

At La Posada, the organization she founded in Idaho in the United States, RoseMary Boessen rsm describes her work, helping migrants in her community with legal services, counseling, a low-income taxpayer clinic, and through “Mercy Pantry,” to help stabilize households with emergency assistance to families and individuals that have lost their jobs and/or homes or for those that have experienced life-changing circumstances. **“Our mission is to help families adjust to life in the community by assisting with daily challenges, encouraging cultural pride, and connecting mind, body and spirit.”**

In Adelaide, Australia, Meredith Evans rsm describes the importance of meeting both the physical and emotional needs of the migrants and refugees in her community,

**“Our circle of friends in particular works with Young Mercy Links South Australia, and its focus is not only on meeting some of the pressing material needs, such as helping with electricity,**

**gas bills, assistance with transport and food costs... [We] have developed a real focus on facilitating social networks through various activities, events, gatherings which bring people together across different cultural and religious divides. In many instances, we have witnessed real, supportive, caring relationships develop.”**

Ann Scully rsm in Limerick, Ireland shares her work with Doras, a non-profit organization that provides direct support to migrants and refugees, and campaigns at local, national and international level for change in policy and legislation relating to ending Direct Provision and anti-racism, among other areas. Doras offers an opportunity for encounter, support and sharing between migrants and host communities. The space created by Doras not only brings comfort, healing and empowerment to migrants and refugees who have endured difficult journeys, but also benefits the local population, enabling greater understanding and helping to reduce racism and xenophobia.

**“Women, in particular, join our women’s groups. Here they learn skills, improve language, and laugh which is such an important therapy for traumatized people. This is also very important for the local Indigenous population as they sit in the same room as people from other cultures, they give them a lift to and from their accommodation. This helps break down barriers and prevents the rise of racism. We are part of the local Community Market selling our produce. This gives people from different cultures the opportunity to be in public space in a normal unforced way. Women are also afraid to go to the park with their children. We support them in going there. They stand tall when they are with us in public places.”**

By focusing on the voices of migrants and the people who welcome them, and creating spaces for welcome, connection and understanding, Mercy ministries play an important role in countering the harmful, dehumanizing, and often racist narratives on migration that have increasingly permeated political movements, media and other forms of public discourse in many countries. These narratives have used migrants as scapegoats for deep-rooted societal problems and fears, often for political or financial gain. When migrants are criminalized and even dehumanized by policies and rhetoric, the result is often that they become targets of violence, intimidation and incitement to discrimination. They might face harassment in public spaces, or avoid seeking help when they've been attacked. While many media reports on flows of migrants and refugees focus on numbers of arrivals, returns and deportations, it is important to remember the human faces and stories behind these statistics, and to keep these numbers in perspective.

Doras in Ireland and the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas are just two examples of organizations that have prioritized anti-racism in their advocacy and policy work. According to the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, ***“The Mercy community recognizes the intricate inter-connectedness between Earth, immigration, women, nonviolence and anti-racism. It is vital that we carefully analyze systems of oppression as well as the myths and hidden mechanisms in church and society which have supported these structures which have been dominant for a very long time.”*** American Sisters Pat Murphy rsm and JoAnn Persh rsm acknowledge that it is difficult and necessary to change these systems: ***“For all these years we hoped for immigration reform.***

***We wonder what it is that prevents that reform from happening. The pandemic pointed out even more clearly the deep systemic racism that exists and we have reflected on the role that plays in the lack of immigration reform.”***

Evidence-based narratives can be a powerful tool for change, shifting narratives and migration policies based on fear, hate and division to those that uphold everyone's human dignity and focus on what we have in common, and the positive impacts that migrants and refugees have on their communities.

**By focusing on the voices of migrants and the people who welcome them, and creating spaces for welcome, connection and understanding, Mercy ministries play an important role in countering the harmful, dehumanizing, and often racist narratives on migration that have increasingly permeated political movements, media and other forms of public discourse in many countries.**

It is also vital to cultivate partnerships in order to transform our societies to be more inclusive and equitable. At Romero Centre, part of Mercy Community Services in Brisbane, Australia, Beata Ostapiej-Piatkowski discusses the importance of including the whole community in the work of welcoming and supporting refugees and asylum seekers: ***“Romero is a place of welcome and sanctuary, inspired by the mission of Catherine McAuley and Oscar Romero to courageously and creatively serve the most vulnerable refugees and people seeking asylum. We work in whole-hearted collaboration with a wide, always***



***expanding circle of communities and community organizations, local businesses, volunteers, supporters, churches and parishes, to meet the unmet needs of the people seeking asylum we have the privilege to serve.”***

Maryanne Loughry rsm further highlights the importance of Mercy collaboration with partners in order to assist migrants and refugees, and to strengthen our collective voice for advocacy: ***“In Australia in the early 1980s Sr Patricia Pak Poy helped establish Mercy Refugee Service (MRS) which worked in partnership with Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) for many years until the establishment of Mercy Works. The establishment of MRS provided much impetus and structure to the Australian Sisters of Mercy who wished to respond to the needs of the refugees. The partnership with JRS facilitated many sisters working with refugees and asylum seekers in a number of refugee camps, detention centres in many countries. This impetus is still evident today in our support of refugee families and our advocacy.”***

Enhancing whole-of-society partnerships is vital to fostering mutual respect, understanding and appreciation among migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and their communities of destination. Collaboration between governments and Church and civil society partners is also necessary to address the many needs of migrants and refugees in their new communities, including access to essential services and decent work in order to foster inclusive societies and empower migrants and refugees to live to their fullest potential.

## **Access to Healthcare**

For many people on the move, the experience of migration or displacement is risky, and has both short- and long-term effects on individuals’ physical and mental health. Migration also has to be considered in public health policies, to ensure that communities remain healthy and safe. States have an obligation to protect and promote the right to health for all people in their territory.\* This right includes freedoms, including the right to be free from non-consensual and uninformed medical treatment, as well as entitlements, including the right to a system of prevention, treatment and control of diseases on an equal basis for all, access to information and education about health, and essential medicines and health-care services.<sup>40</sup>

Migrants, asylum seekers and refugees face many health-related risks along their journeys. Even before people leave their countries of origin, they might encounter trauma, such as war, human rights violations, torture, or sexual violence. This is especially the case for people in forced migration flows. In transit, migrants might experience exhausting journeys, dangerous travel conditions (e.g. exposure to extreme temperatures, perilous modes of transport, lack of basic health necessities, etc.), or traumatic events, abuse and violence. This is particularly true for those traveling through irregular migration pathways. In their host communities, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees may face exclusion or discrimination from healthcare systems and policies due to their migration status, language and/

\* In Articles 2 and 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and in Article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination all individuals are recognized as having an inherent right to adequate housing without prejudice based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

or cultural values. They might also experience abuse, exploitation, or unsafe working and living conditions.

Margaret McBride rsm in Phoenix, United States shares how Joseph's Mercy Hospital fills important gaps in healthcare coverage: ***"They start treating refugees immediately, before they are accepted on Medicaid, which can take months. Many have post-traumatic stress - we refer them for therapy and actively get them assistance."*** Sr. Margaret also mentions, ***"I work in Catholic healthcare and we provide services to migrants at no cost."*** The long tradition of Mercy care of the neighbor, which began with Catherine McAuley and the first Sisters of Mercy during the cholera epidemic in Dublin, continues today in places where people are marginalized and excluded.

Excluding migrants from a rights-based approach to health is a blatantly poor public health practice, as it increases migrants' vulnerability, creates and amplifies discrimination and health inequalities, incurs higher health costs for migrants and is, in general, a violation of migrants' rights. On the contrary, addressing the health needs of migrants can improve health status and outcomes, facilitate integration, prevent long-term health and social costs, contribute to social and economic development, and, most importantly, protect public health and human rights.

**"Migrants are particularly vulnerable to human rights violations, the enjoyment of housing being among the most endangered rights."**

Raquel Rolnik, Former UN Special Rapporteur to Adequate Housing

## Access to Housing

As the number of people on the move has increased within countries and across borders, irregular migrants, refugees, people with subsidiary protection status, overstayers, and refused asylum seekers have been found to represent a growing proportion of homeless populations.<sup>41</sup> Since the turn of the century, growing research into the issue of homelessness has found migration to be among the structural drivers causing homelessness alongside discrimination in the labor market, the financialization of housing, and inequitable social welfare systems.<sup>42</sup>

Essential for the successful integration of migrants and refugees in host countries is the establishment of a loving and nourishing living environment. Access to adequate housing is often foundational to a person's sense of personal dignity, security, community and belonging. According to "The Right to Adequate Housing



The Multicultural Long Table Lunch fundraiser run by Young Mercy Links SA to raise money for a housing project run by Denise Coghlan rsm and Jesuit Refugees Service in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Photo courtesy of Young Mercy Links

Toolkit,”<sup>43</sup> for housing to be adequate it must meet the following conditions: affordability with security of tenure; cultural adequacy to facilitate distinct expressions of cultural identity; accessibility for disadvantaged or marginalized groups; location in a safe and convenient area for access to services and facilities; and alignment with the necessary services, materials, facilities and infrastructure for daily life. Unfortunately, many migrants and minority ethnic groups face barriers in accessing adequate housing due to their migration and economic statuses.<sup>44</sup> In many countries, public funding for housing and homeless services is not provided to those with an irregular migration status, and thus, NGOs, faith-based organizations, and voluntary agencies are called to enable support services and facilities for migrants experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. These services include the provision of food, shelter, healthcare and other homeless services, such as hygiene facilities, laundry and storage.<sup>45</sup>

Ministering to those rendered homeless, especially women and children, and advocating for the provision of housing for all have been priorities of the Mercy World since the opening of the first House of Mercy on Baggot Street in Dublin in 1827. Catherine McAuley recognized the importance of providing shelter and housing to those most marginalized in society to enhance their standard of living and uphold their dignity and sense of purpose in life. Mercy communities and ministries around the world have continued this commitment, listening to the experiences of people living in housing insecurity and homelessness, opening their doors to migrants and refugees to provide housing and shelter, and simply asking what they need in the hope of offering a supportive hand.

At the Mercy Foundation in Sydney, Australia, Sue Mowbray, CEO, reflects: ***“In the spirit of Catherine McAuley, our work with asylum seekers is to help provide housing and support, one of the most fundamental needs; Catherine also addressed homelessness for some of Ireland’s most vulnerable women.”***

Discrimination and disadvantage in accessing public and private housing based on language, ethnicity, religion, size of their family, and legal status affects many migrants and refugees across the globe. This includes experiences of racially-motivated and xenophobic behavior to prevent migrant households from residing in certain communities. Ada Snell reflects on these experiences through her work at Young Mercy Links:

***“Another major challenge is finding rental housing, especially early on in the first few years after arriving. Without a rental history, and with very little money due to coming from less financially secure backgrounds in their home country, compounded by the difficulty of finding well-paying work, people from refugee backgrounds are forced to accept properties that are less than the typical standard of others in society, and sometimes that are built for fewer people than are living there. Many people we have worked with are in a sense, ‘running from poverty’, or trying to keep afloat on low incomes, especially the families with single parents.”***

Migrants who work in low-paid and informal jobs have less stability and often struggle to compete in the housing market, which increases their likelihood of poverty, homelessness, or living in substandard housing conditions. For those under temporary or irregular migration status, exclusion from the housing market is exacerbated



due to a lack of affordable housing and limited access to social safety nets. For this reason, many undocumented migrants are found living in overcrowded, unhealthy, and informal settlements.

As a consequence of the increasing unaffordability of the housing market, many Mercy ministries assist migrants and refugees who need financial support or rent assistance for housing so they do not face eviction and enter into homelessness. Meredith Evans rsm in Australia shares: ***“In some instances rent support (was provided) because rent is very expensive in many parts of South Australia...In the midst of this COVID-19 pandemic, many people have found it extremely difficult to find work that can provide for their families.” Likewise, Margaret Moore rsm explains in her work some migrants ask “... for assistance with their accommodation... even some who got permanent residency...we had a family come to us last week who said... ‘we don’t have that money...I’m in big trouble.’”***

The Mercy World supports and advocates for governments’ full commitment to the realization of the right to adequate housing for people on the move. Under international law governments are responsible for ensuring the effective implementation of equality and non-discrimination principles in the provision of adequate, affordable, secure, and safe housing.\* These rights apply to all persons regardless of their migration or socioeconomic status. The Mercy Law Resource Centre in Ireland is an example of a leading organization that challenges housing inequalities and demands the realization of housing rights. The center provides legal advice

clinics and free legal advocacy and representation for individuals, including migrants and refugees, to help them secure housing and reduce their risks of homelessness.<sup>46</sup>

Access to accurate housing information, education on tenants’ rights, and host language support are often required to overcome the many barriers facing migrants in finding adequate housing. Once granted refugee status (often following periods of mandatory detention), many migrants are challenged to quickly adapt to the host society and find their own independent accommodation. This can be difficult due to widespread housing shortages and a lack of a coordinated approach to transitional housing. Pat Murphy rsm & JoAnn Persch rsm in the United States share their experiences of accompanying and supporting migrants and refugees in these circumstances:

***“If men or women were released (from detention or the justice system) we had to find housing. We did that but finally we opened two homes, one for men and one for women, or families. There they needed legal help, to be housed, clothed, educated, and cared for medical and dental needs. Someone had to help them learn the city and how to get around on public transportation. They needed transportation cards and spending money. We only could do this with the generous financial support of individuals, grants, and foundations. Also, even though there is a small paid staff there are over 300 volunteers that make all of this happen.”***

The availability of transitional housing and short-term safe and secure emergency accommodation is important for refugees and migrants due to their

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mobile nature. Joy Clough rsm volunteers under the auspices of the Interfaith Committee for Detained Immigrants based in Chicago. She reflects on her role assisting migrants **“traveling from ICE detention or screening to their family members in the U.S.”** and providing **“housing for those awaiting their court dates; and for court watch volunteers.”** Anne Connolly rsm also accompanies migrants on their journeys in the United States as part of her ministry. In response to the increase in Afghan refugees in 2021, Anne says she assisted with the provision of **“Afghan Placement and Assistance, collaborating with local Resettlement Agencies”** and emptying **“parish buildings... to share for temporary housing.”**

Supportive interventions by Mercy Sisters, Associates, and Partners in ministry in assisting migrants with their housing needs are recognized as having positive effects on building more inclusive societies. Amy Keller, Mercy Associate and graduate of the Mercy Global Action Emerging Leaders Fellowship, describes her work with refugees in the USA: **“I volunteer with Restoring Dignity, a group that provides assistance with home maintenance for**

**refugees in Omaha. They join with local refugee groups here to run a storage facility for donations as well... Providing home goods, providing home remodels (similar to what is seen on TV), diaper drives for refugee families, and showing refugees how to maintain their homes (and also to stand up to landlords that might take advantage of them).”**

Similarly, at Young Mercy Links in Australia, Ada Snell shares: **“We have helped to find and inspect houses and arrange rental agreements, and have helped to find donated furniture and other donations of household supplies as well. During and after the pandemic, we have also been involved in fundraising in our community to help provide some extra money for families to pay their rent in these periods of economic hardship.”**

In supporting the successful integration of migrants and refugees, the Mercy World recognizes the need for a holistic approach to housing which protects the dignity and well-being of all. A holistic approach requires collaboration between governments, local authorities, service providers,

Peruvian Sisters of Mercy sharing UNHCR blankets with our migrant brothers who are preparing to spend the night in Desaguadero square. Photo courtesy of Carmen Rosa Callomamani rsm



and civil society organizations to provide sufficient supported housing options and create spaces for migrants to actively engage in the community. Protecting those living without a home, living in inadequate housing, and those at risk of homelessness is essential in fostering a more just, equitable and humane world.

## Access to Education

The Mercy World has long been invested in education. This tradition stems from Catherine McAuley, who from the first ‘House of Mercy’ established a school for careful instruction of girls. Over the last two centuries, Mercy education has spread across the world, spanning early childhood development all the way through to tertiary education. This deep commitment to education continues today, especially with some of the world’s most marginalized. Sister of Mercy Marilyn Lacey rsm states: ***“I’m inspired by Catherine’s insight that the education of females is critical for peaceful and just societies.”***

Often people on the move, especially those who have undergone forced displacement, experience significant gaps in education. Consistent and quality schooling is often unattainable due to unforeseen and uncertain circumstances. Barriers to schooling can be further exacerbated when newly arrived migrants do not fit the criteria for certain educational programs. States have an obligation to protect and promote the right to education.\*

Patricia Mulderick rsm working for ARISE Adelante on the border of Southern Texas and Northern Mexico works as part of the immigration

**“The right to education is a universal human right: it applies to everyone, everywhere and always... An indispensable tool to protect the freedom and dignity of all migrants, education allows them to fully integrate into their new societies.”<sup>47</sup>**

Fons Coomans, UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Peace, Centre for Human Rights Maastricht University

Cohort of ARISE. This initiative helps people on their path to legalization. She also works with ARISE’s immigration pillar, which promotes advocacy for immigration reform. One day a week she helps at the Catholic Charities Respite Center in McAllen, Texas, a place that receives folks who have just crossed over the border and provides needed food and services until they connect with family and or sponsors. She recognizes the importance of education especially for women. ***“ARISE Adelante promotes the personal development and empowerment of the immigrant community, especially women, Children and youth of the Rio Grande Valley through educational programs that strengthen their community organization and civic participation.”***

In Australia, Mercy Connect, a program of Mercy Works, aims to provide educational opportunities to refugees and asylum seekers. This support aims to help overcome the barriers to

\* Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognize the right of everyone to education. States Parties agree that education “shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity” and it “shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups.”



education arising from language, socio-cultural and economic challenges facing students at a critical time in their settlement in Australia. Many arrive after having experienced periods of dislocation, grief and trauma (many living with PTSD) from lengthy periods of living through war or in refugee camps. Mercy Connect also recognizes that heightened anxiety levels and isolation also impact their capacity to negotiate the challenges of mainstream schooling (adapting to new ways of learning, classroom expectations, tacit rules, and procedures) and to integrate into the wider Australian community. These unique challenges put many at-risk of disengaging or leaving school altogether and underpins the continued and increasing demand from schools for additional, targeted teacher resources.

The overall aim of Mercy Connect is to provide mentoring and additional academic support to students from a refugee or asylum seeker background, using trained volunteers within a school program. Mercy Connect volunteers provide regular in-class mentoring support during periods of transition through the education system, while nurturing student well-being, confidence, and self-esteem. The support also focuses on literacy and numeracy skills, and with understanding classroom instructions, assessment tasks and in organizing their schoolwork. The volunteer support and relationships that are developed, help students re-engage academically and socially and increases the likelihood of them completing secondary school - and ultimately underpins a pathway for better life opportunities through and an increased capacity for further educational, training and employment opportunities.



Mercy Connect volunteer with student.  
Photo courtesy of Mercy Connect

Mercy Connect is now operating in five cities across Australia – Sydney, Melbourne, Ballarat, Bendigo, and Perth – with more than 300 volunteers supporting over 1400 students in 116 primary and secondary schools.

Fatima, a Mercy Connect Sydney student from Iran, was studying law in her home country, and hopes to continue to study law in Australia. She spoke of the challenges and how important a program like Mercy Connect is and the difference it can make: ***“The nice teachers and volunteers at Bankstown Senior College helped me to find my way and start my steps again... When you are new in a country of course it is language [which is difficult], but it is like you are born again.”***

Similarly, a refugee student from Iraq in Australia via Lebanon says: ***“I finished year 12 in Iraq in 2014. However, I’m a year 12 student in***

***Bankstown Senior College and I'm hoping to go to university next year. It's pretty hard to study in high school again at the age of 24 because of the language and the different education system and environment but I decided to keep going in my studies for a better future. Furthermore, I'm the older son in my family so I need to work and study at the same time. My dream in Iraq was to be a civil engineer but I can't do that anymore because I lost many years being a refugee. I actually always think about time because I'm 24 and I need to finish as fast as possible. Also, life in Sydney is very expensive especially for someone who arrived new to Sydney like me. So I need to consider the financial expenses because Centrelink student payments are for a teenager not for a 24-year-old man like me. Besides that, I have a family and my parents can't work because of the language barrier, and a young brother who is 16 and focuses on his studies. Therefore, I should work and study while I'm at university."***

Similarly, Fadi Esho, an Iraqi refugee in Australia via Turkey, shares: ***"Despite all this struggling, in Iraq I was doing well at school, and I was already in Year 12; but my family decided to flee to Turkey because the situation in our beloved country was very dire. I couldn't complete my studies in Turkey because I had to work and help my family to pay for the rent and other basic living expenses. We stayed in Turkey for three and half years until we received our visa to come to Australia. When I arrived in Australia, I was already over 18 [and] really disappointed and sad because I thought no school would accept me due to my age. But lucky for me at Bankstown Senior College they do accept older students."***

Reflecting on the challenges in education that many migrants face, Young Mercy Links advocate, Isabel Salter recognizes the struggles for migrants on Temporary Protection Visas. She believes the requirement for them to pay international student fees if they wish to attend university is unfair as this system was designed for an overseas market with greater resources. She states,

***"I have witnessed these prohibitively expensive fees force these young women into a standstill after high school – not only in terms of their aspirations, careers, and financial security, but in terms of their social inclusion. I can imagine it is difficult for these young women to relate to and feel truly comfortable around their peers, who have mostly continued onto university degrees, and whose conversations revolve around the joys and stresses of university life"***

While the Australian government provides migrants on temporary visas with a secondary education, it does not provide for them to continue onto tertiary education, leaving them at a great disadvantage to their peers. Stressing this injustice, Meredith Evans rsm argues,

***"This has one of the biggest consequences for our young people that we have come to know in our circle of friends...Many of these young people...cannot proceed to university even if they had very high marks to go to university and were accepted at the Universities, they cannot afford to pay international fees because they are classed as not permanent residence. Only permanent residents get help for their University studies. Consequently, many of these young people can't continue with further study."***

US-based Mercy Sister Michele Schroeck rsm ministers at House of Mercy in Erie, Pennsylvania. The House of Mercy provides activities and advocacy for an economically and ethnically diverse East Erie neighborhood. It serves families living in scattered public housing, who at this time, are primarily new immigrants from Bhutan, Nepal, Iraq, Syria and various African countries. While ensuring that students are assisted with formal studies, she also highlights the needs for other areas of education such as obtaining a driver's license or preparing for a citizenship test. This type of life education is just as critical to those newly arrived immigrants. The house of Mercy is sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy and aims to promote a healthy neighborhood by providing activities and advocacy that engage adults and children in positive experiences for them and their neighborhood.

Sandy Di Cianno rsm is Director of Religious Education at Sacred Heart Parish, Eli, Nevada. She is troubled by the fact that many migrant children in the region are missing basic education. She states, ***“I feel bad for them when I look at the sadness in the little kids’ eyes, and the anxiety in the parents’ eyes, afraid that they’ll be taken up. I deal with a lot of kids who may or may not have papers. Some are from families working seasonally on the ranches and the big quarry here, and then moving back to Mexico... Some children of immigrants are just out of the loop, and I understand that. For example, sports are very important for young people so they can get scholarships later: I will always be on the side of mercy and compassion when decisions have to be made, so that they are not penalized for low attendance, and also let make up any of the lessons that they have missed.”***



Sister Carmen Rosa reading with students in Peru.  
Photo courtesy of Carmen Rosa Callomamani rsm

migrants to be accommodated in formal education systems and also supported through informal education to flourish intellectually and socially. Some refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants have been ‘left behind’ in terms of schooling and although desirous of an education, can often find themselves excluded from formal systems. Education, both formal and informal, is critical to a person’s development, inclusion and contribution to society. Importantly, education is recognized as an inherent and inalienable human right meaning that no one’s access to education or to educational institutions should be excluded or limited based on their migratory status.

## Access to Employment Opportunities and Decent Work

Inclusion of migrants and refugees in the labor market is essential for their successful integration into host societies. Many people migrate to escape poverty and unemployment. Labor market integration offers migrants and refugees the chance to secure a better livelihood, expand



**"The inclusion of migrants in the labor market is key to ensure their effective integration into the host societies; this entails fully using their skills and realizing their economic potential."**

— European Commission<sup>48</sup>

their skill sets, and boost their overall resilience to social, economic, and cultural challenges. Providing employment opportunities to migrants in countries of destination is not only beneficial to the individual and their families, but contributes to the overall economic growth and development of the destination country. Moreover, the remittances which migrants receive from their new employment are often used to strengthen the economies of their country of origin.

Unfortunately for migrants and refugees, decent opportunities in the labor market are usually hard to come by and many barriers exist for them to secure employment in both the public and private sectors. A person with refugee status from Iraq reflects on the challenges she has faced as a student in search of employment in Australia: ***"I moved with my family to Australia in 2019, after we lost everything in our mother country, Iraq, because of war. We started from scratch – once again. It is a big challenge for me to finish my education with these new conditions. As you can appreciate, as new arrivals, our limited resources mean there are difficulties in living expenses while preparing for the future at the same time. COVID-19 has made it harder for me and my family to support ourselves financially."***

At Mercy Connect in Australia, another student shares some of the barriers she has faced in the labor market: ***"As a young student from a refugee***

***background in Australia, my struggles include financial difficulties, minimal employment opportunities, age and education restrictions. Australia is incredibly expensive; it is hard to explain that... both of my parents are unemployed. My parents barely cover our basic needs."***

Due to the shortage in mainstream employment opportunities for people with a migrant background, migrants and refugees are often overrepresented in "low-wage labor sectors." These sectors include textile work, the agricultural industry, the construction sector, extractive industries, and the informal economy, including domestic work. Migrants and refugees in low-wage labor sectors are especially vulnerable to situations of exploitation where they are overworked in hazardous conditions, underpaid, and under-protected by social policies.

Carmen Rosa Callomamani rsm reflects on situations of labor exploitation of Venezuelan migrants in Peru: ***"The population in the host countries began to see them [migrants] as cheap labor, even in some cases they stopped hiring people from their own country to give work to migrants since they could pay much less, or sometimes***



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*they were not paid at all. So, along with the growing rejection of the migrant population, mistreatment increased, not to mention the issue of human trafficking, a crime through which many young people have been captured for sexual exploitation and labor exploitation. It is wrongly stated that foreigners are taking jobs away from locals, or people simply generalize, assuming that they [migrants] are all criminals.”*

For many migrants, these low-wage labor sectors perpetuate cycles of poverty and deprivation that often reflect the conditions that drove them to migrate in the first place. Young Mercy Links in Australia connects with communities of migrant and refugee women in the hopes of breaking their cycles of poverty through sourcing full time employment opportunities. Isabel Salter, a staff member at Young Mercy Links explains:

*“Another way that we help these young women to overcome the barriers presented by their visa arrangements is by assisting them in their pursuits for employment. Of course, they possess lots of agency and generally manage to find casual jobs and work experience placements through their own accord.”*

Also at Young Mercy Links, Ada Snell witnesses some of the barriers migrant and refugee women face in accessing employment: *“Finding work, especially with limited English and little experience of employment in Australia, as well as navigating the Australian job market with its very formal process of applying for roles through resumes, cover letters and interviews, is another challenge.”*



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Ensuring that migrants and refugees have support for language learning and training is essential to help them to realize their economic potential.

Mercy ministries, like Young Mercy Links, and Mercy people around the world are called to support migrants to navigate the labor market and find suitable employment opportunities. Staff at Young Mercy Links ***“have helped with job hunting and helping people to prepare resumes, including basic language editing so they have a fair chance in the eyes of employers.”*** At the Holy Cross Services in Brisbane, a ministry that provides employment opportunities to migrants and those disadvantaged, Margaret Evans rsm, reflects, ***“Migrants & asylum seekers on arrival urgently need to earn income.”*** The Holy Cross Services in Brisbane offer these migrants, refugees and asylum seekers access to employment ***“as a first step to settling into the new society and working towards stability in their new environments.”***

Raising awareness among employers of the various skill sets that migrants and refugees can offer is essential to enhance employment opportunities for people with migrant backgrounds. In Cincinnati in the United States, Marilyn Gottemoeller rsm volunteers to provide food, clothing, household goods, and job support to migrants and refugees. In recognizing the benefits of providing migrants and refugees with employment opportunities, she recalls, ***“Other Mercy ministries in Cincinnati hired refugees to work in their buildings and on their properties in various roles, depending on their skills.”***

While teaching in the United States, Maryanne Loughry rsm had the opportunity to assist a former Afghan humanitarian worker in finding employment. After his arrival in the United States,



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Maryanne was able to connect him with a job that would allow him to use his skills to their full potential. ***“When back in Boston, I managed to work with one gentleman, and find, he was a skilled social worker and managed to get Boston College to employ him.”*** Recognizing and validating the many skills and qualifications that immigrants bring to their host country can help migrants find a sense of purpose while also reducing any labor shortages which exist in the host society’s workforce.

Facilitating more widespread recognition of migrants’ skills and agency is a key step towards building more equitable labor markets and inclusive societies. To drive sustainable economic development, the Mercy World recognizes the need for effective policy measures to improve recognition of migrant skills and migrant integration in the workforce. By focusing on the opportunities presented by migrant employment, we can highlight the economic benefits of immigration and discredit the myths that migration reduces opportunities for local citizens.





Photo courtesy of Young Mercy Links

## Contributions of Migrants

What resonates clearly throughout the examination of the work of the Mercy World with and for people on the move is how much people recognize and appreciate the gift of working with migrants and refugees. The positive impacts of migration for both host and origin communities, as well as for migrants and refugees themselves, are well-documented.

Of course, most migrants are also migrant workers, stimulating economic growth in their countries of destination. Both low- and high-wage migrant workers bring skills and knowledge to fill labor shortages in countries of destination, addressing market needs and facilitating increased productivity in key sectors. Migrants

and refugees also bring new ideas and ways of thinking, contributing to innovation and entrepreneurship. As noted previously, migrants and refugees also make significant economic contributions to their countries and communities of origin through numerous channels. The most-widely recognized channel is remittances - transfers of money which are often used to meet the basic needs of families and communities (estimated to reach US\$630 billion in 2022<sup>49</sup>). Diaspora bonds are another key instrument of support, which allow countries to raise necessary funds, such as after disasters. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development expressly recognizes “the positive contribution of migrants for inclusive growth and sustainable development,”<sup>50</sup> and the Global Compact for Migration builds on

this, articulating actions governments and other stakeholders can take to create the conditions for migrants and diasporas to contribute fully to sustainable development.

Migrants and refugees share new foods, music, habits, traditions and beliefs with their new neighbors. Diaspora communities contribute to the civil and political lives of their new countries, and sometimes engage with political processes in their countries of origin. Beyond that, migrants and refugees are resilient, creative and hopeful – they have undertaken challenging journeys to build better lives, not only for themselves, but for their children and their communities.

At Mercy Connect in Sydney, Fadi (Iraq) and Rodiayh (Somalia), who both hold refugee status, share their ambitions for the future.

Fadi: ***“My long-term goal in Australia is to get a job that I like and help my family financially. I want to become a productive citizen of***

***Australia, a person helping other people in this country that offers so much to me and I want to be a person who will leave a positive mark in this world.”***

Rodiayh: ***“I decided I wanted to be a frontline worker during COVID as a COVID-19 tester, to give my dream land a hand in bad times. I am still working in childcare five days a week and weekends at a COVID testing station. I love to help people and be close to children. I wish I could take away all the pain and tears from children and give happiness instead. I wish all children in the world to not have a single day of worry and to have a childhood not like my one. I wish to work one day with children with disabilities and offer a different life from mine.”***

She adds this passionate recommendation to people who have experienced a similar pathway to Australia: ***“The advice I have for any refugees/asylum seekers (even though I am not good at advice) is that Australia offers a chance to have a better life for us and our children. We must try to build and leave a beautiful imprint.”***

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**“Building the future with migrants and refugees also means recognizing and valuing how much each of them can contribute to the process of construction. I like to see this approach to migration reflected in a prophetic vision of Isaiah, which considers foreigners not invaders or destroyers, but willing laborers who rebuild the walls of the new Jerusalem, that Jerusalem whose gates are open to all peoples (cf. Is 60:10-11).”**

Pope Francis<sup>51</sup>

Migrants and refugees play diverse sociocultural, civic-political and economic roles in both their origin and destination countries: as workers, students, entrepreneurs, family members, artists, and much more. They contribute not only to the vibrancy and richness of their communities, but also to the individual lives of people in the Mercy World. Pat and Joann reflect, ***“Being a Sister of Mercy is an amazing gift as through these many years of ministry a bit on the fringes we have been encouraged, loved, and supported. We are grateful to God, the Mercy Community and our immigrant sisters and brothers.”***



# Raising the Voices and Experiences of the Mercy World

Members of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team protesting at the US Capitol Building.  
Photo courtesy of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas





**"Sometimes we have to step out of our comfort zone to step up and speak out to our State or U.S. politicians. And it has even led us to the rotunda of the Russell Senate building in Washington D.C. twice to speak out and be arrested."**

Pat Murphy rsm & JoAnn Persch rsm

Day in and day out, Mercy Sisters, Associates and Partners are on the front lines providing services and care to communities most in need. The direct service and accompaniment that people around the Mercy World provide to migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and all people on the move cannot exist in isolation without the support of advocates and activists who dedicate their time and energy demanding the resources, policies and systemic changes that are necessary to ensure that all people can live in dignity and enjoy their full human rights. Through research, partnership and advocacy, Mercies at the global, national and local levels disseminate knowledge, effective practices and recommendations to decision-makers shaping the future of migration and refugee policy. Advocacy is a powerful tool to influence the priorities and actions of those in power, and create a policy environment that supports the rights of all people on the move.

As the justice arm of Mercy International Association, Mercy Global Action leverages its Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations to bring the voices

of people around the Mercy World, including migrants and refugees, directly to government delegates in order to demand a better world with equitable social and economic systems and one which delivers justice and protection for all.

Each person and organization has a powerful voice, and there is even greater power in the collective voice. Through MGA's membership in the NGO Committee on Migration, Mercy is connected with a global network of civil society organizations advocating for the rights of people on the move. At the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) in May 2022, the first global review of the Global Compact for Migration, MGA Global Policy & Research Advocate and Chair of the NGO Committee on Migration, Cecilie Kern brought forward the insights and experiences of the Mercy World to the UN General Assembly.<sup>52</sup> In her intervention, she touched on many of the themes that have resonated throughout Mercy ministries:

***"Faith-based and other civil society organizations fill important gaps in providing essential services across the migration cycle...Despite***

*the challenges, migrants contribute enormously to development in all of our societies, and are entitled to the fulfillment of their human and labor rights... We strongly urge States to make permanent and replicate positive practices and partnerships that have been implemented during the pandemic, including regularization and effective firewalls, to enable migrants, regardless of status, to access public health services, education, labor rights protections and justice... This IMRF is an opportunity to have a conversation –together– about the future of our economies and societies, to find solutions with and for people on the move, especially those most marginalized. In the next four years States, civil society, Mayors, the private sector and others must together tackle systemic and structural social, economic, and political inequalities, and policies that institutionalize or perpetuate racial injustice and xenophobia. To do this effectively, it is of the essence to center the voices of migrants and diaspora in solution-building at all levels of government, including and especially at local and grassroots levels... We remain committed to working in partnership with governments and stakeholder partners, and most especially with migrants, their families and communities. In the words of one Sister of Mercy, ‘we are called to respond.’”*

Advocacy is not limited to international policy-making spaces like the United Nations – everyone has the capacity to use their voice to engage with decision-makers and other relevant partners and actors wherever they are. While migration is a global phenomenon, and no country can manage migration on its own, most policies that influence the day-to-day lives of people on the move are created and implemented at the national and local level. National governments determine who

can enter and stay in their territories, and local governments are responsible for the policies and practices that impact access to services and social inclusion.

**Whether at the local, national or global level, there is a need to demand better policies and systems of governance that are responsive and equitable, and to take action to ensure these systems work in a way that meets the needs of all people.**

It is also important to ensure that individuals and communities that are at risk of or may be facing marginalization or oppression are also part of the conversations around solutions to the challenges they face. The Mercy Justice Advocacy Approach<sup>53</sup> begins with deep listening to the experiences of people and the planet. Migrants and refugees themselves understand their challenges better than anyone. They bring forth a perspective that is deepened by lived experience and are ready to envision and implement the solutions that are needed.

**Each person has a unique voice and the ability to make a difference and to engender change no matter where they are.**

Whether in our local communities, schools, workplaces, parishes, in our cities, counties, states, provinces, or in our countries, we all have the capacity to use our voices and talents to take action in order to ensure that everyone, everywhere has access to the opportunity to live in peace and with dignity.

**For people all around the Mercy World, and for our partners who are in a position to raise their voices, it is important not to squander that opportunity.**



## Calls on the Mercy World and Faith-Based and Civil Society Partners

As migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are separated from their existing social networks, and due to distrust of government institutions or exclusion from public services, for many, faith-based and other non-governmental organizations become the first systems of support in times of isolation, danger, uncertainty and transition. When governments are unable or unwilling to support and protect migrants and refugees, we are called to respond.

The Mercy World, as both part of the Church and diverse civil society networks, commits and calls

on all our partners to continue work collaboratively for a rights-based and people-centered approach to all our encounters with people on the move, and to further advocacy at local, national and global levels.

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**"Authentic faith-inspired solidarity forbids an attitude of neutrality and demands an unambiguous commitment on behalf of the victims of injustice."**

**Fr. Bryan Massingale**



## Mercy Welcome and Hospitality

- Create and participate in spaces of encounter, sharing and understanding between migrants and refugees and local communities
- Promote positive narratives of migration, centering the experiences of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers themselves, as well as people and communities who welcome them. Check out the #StandUp4Migrants Toolkit<sup>54</sup> based on OHCHR Seven Key Elements on Building Human Rights-Based Narratives on Migrants and Migration<sup>55</sup>
- Examine the relationship between racism and migration policies
- Share the Mercy charism and the call to accompany migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and all those who are marginalized and excluded with others:

*“We had many many Sisters and still have many Sisters who are working in this area of migration and refugees now for decades. What’s exciting is that we are starting to see people who are part of our schools, who have come to know us, who are young adults, who also want to join because they see this as a*

*part of our work, they want to join us in this ministry. It’s exciting to see that while I’m less able to respond as much as I used to, there are others who want to step up into this space. Our charism of Mercy and our systems can enable that to happen and we can continue to offer the support that people will need.”*

Maryanne Loughry rsm

## Advocating for People on the Move

- Engage with municipal, local and national governments to ensure the implementation of policies which support the wellbeing of migrants and refugees.
- Advocate for equitable distribution of funding and resources at local and national levels.
- Be more vocal to make sure policies and practices are human-rights based and non-discriminatory.
- Consider the list of recommendations for governments below. Focusing on those areas that resonate most with you/your organization based on the circumstances in your community/ country, reflect on possible areas of action and advocacy at local, national and global levels.



Volunteers and adult students at Dandenong Library for Mercy Connect Melbourne.  
Photo courtesy of Mercy Connect



## Calls on Governments

The following are recommendations to governments based on the experiences and stories of the Mercy World in response to people on the move:

### Supporting Migrants at Borders and Detention

- **Human rights should be at the center of border policies, practices and procedures.**

Governments should accelerate the implementation of policies and practices to fulfill Objective 11 of the Global Compact for Migration, in which States commit to manage borders in an integrated, secure and coordinated manner. This does not mean only national security, but also human security. Some States have used “safe, orderly and regular migration” as a justification for exclusionary, restrictive and security-centered migration policies, rather than for policies

that decriminalize migration, demilitarize border enforcement against migrants, and stop and reverse border externalization.

- **People fleeing from persecution, armed conflict, violence, disasters, and human rights abuses, and who are victims of human trafficking, need specialized protection and assistance.** Governments must improve the protection of migrants in situations of vulnerability at or near borders, in compliance with international human rights law and improve the treatment given to persons crossing or seeking to cross international borders, including by upholding the right to seek asylum and taking into consideration relevant recommendations from the OHCHR Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights at International Borders.

- **States must prioritize child protection at borders,** ensuring that the best interest of the child is upheld and protected and that processes prevent family separation and reunite families when family separation occurs.
- **Decriminalize irregular migration.** Given that border crossing is an administrative issue, national laws should ensure that irregular entry or stay is not considered a criminal offence, and that administrative sanctions applied to irregular entry should be proportionate, equitable, non-discriminatory, and fully-consistent with due process and other obligations under international law.
- **Decriminalize solidarity and humanitarian assistance.** Governments must decriminalize humanitarian efforts by civil society organizations and human rights defenders who assist migrants in distress, such as during rescue at sea, providing aid and water in arid border regions, providing shelter or food assistance inland, etc.
- **Prioritize alternatives to detention, and use detention only as a measure of last resort.** Governments should accelerate implementation of policies and practices to fulfill Objective 13 of the Global Compact for Migration, in which States commit to prioritize non-custodial alternatives to detention that are in line with international law. Governments must ensure rights-centered, community-based, non-custodial alternatives to immigration detention, including community and civil society partnerships, for all migrants, and use detention as a measure of last resort only. In the rare case that immigration detention is used, governments must ensure that it follows due process, is non-arbitrary, based on law, necessity, proportionality and individual assessments.
- **Governments must immediately end the practice of child immigration detention,** where it is being used, and must ensure that children are never detained solely because of their migration status or because they are unaccompanied, as detention is never in the best interest of the child, and is always a violation of child rights.<sup>56</sup>

## Meeting Needs & Upholding Rights

- **Improve access to legal identity and adequate documentation.** Implement policies and practices to fulfil Objective 4 of the Global Compact for Migration, including facilitating access to personal documentation, such as passports and visas, and ensuring that criteria to obtain these documents are non-discriminatory.
- **Strengthen measures to reduce statelessness,** fully respecting the human right to a nationality.
- **Ensure access to basic services.** Review and revise requirements to prove nationality at service delivery centers to ensure that migrants without proof of nationality or legal identity are not precluded from accessing basic services nor denied their human rights.
- **Address the negative drivers of migration and forced displacement.** Accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and other international agreements to address and minimize the adverse drivers of migration and displacement.
- **Expand regular migration pathways.** In order to ensure people can migrate in a safe and dignified



way, States must commit to broadening the availability of regular pathways across a wider spectrum of sectors, and with more flexible options to remain, leave and return, be joined by family members, and to be able to use migration to respond to their real-life situations, dangers and hopes. Governments should implement policies and practices to fulfill Objective 5 of the Global Compact for Migration, in which States commit to adapt options and pathways for regular migration in a way that facilitates labor mobility and decent work reflecting demographic and labor market realities, optimizes education opportunities, upholds the right to family life, and responds to the needs of migrants in a situation of vulnerability, with a view to expanding and diversifying availability of pathways for safe, orderly and regular migration.

*“It is my firm belief that temporary visas ought to be replaced with a pathway to permanent residency. It is clear that temporary visas make all aspects of life more difficult – not only in terms of migrants’ access to key services, but also in terms of their psychological healing and social inclusion.”*

Isabel Salter, Young Mercy Links, Australia

- **Ensure human rights-based screening, assessment and referral.** Implement policies and practices to fulfill Objective 12 of the Global Compact for Migration, in which States commit to increase legal certainty and predictability of migration procedures by developing and strengthening effective and human rights-based mechanisms for the adequate and timely screening and individual assessment of all migrants for the purpose of identifying and facilitating access to the appropriate referral procedures, in accordance with international law.

*“Once people have been found to be genuine refugees, making the pathway to permanent residency as fast and straightforward as possible would be the just thing to do. On the same line, extending access to HECS-HELP (for university education fees) to people who are intending to settle here in Australia once they are granted permanency by the government would help these people to achieve their dreams alongside their Australian peers.”*

Ada Snell, Young Mercy Links, Australia

## Belonging & Social Inclusion

- **Promote the meaningful participation of migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people in policy development, delivery and reviews.**
- **Pursue policies to eliminate all forms of discrimination, including racism, systemic racism, xenophobia and related intolerance, and challenge and reframe misleading narratives that generate negative perceptions of migrants and refugees.**



Cecilie Kern delivers Mercy International Association’s intervention at the first International Migration Review Forum at UN Headquarters in New York. Photo courtesy of Cecilie Kern

- **Ensure migrants can access basic services and exercise their human rights regardless of their migration status, and without fear of immigration enforcement.** Governments must strengthen the provision of information, support and services which contribute to migrants' integration, and establish "firewalls" against immigration enforcement when migrants exercise their labor rights, seek justice, access healthcare, education, and other essential public services.
- **In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, ensure migrants can access their right to health, regardless of their migration status.** Governments must ensure access to health services for all migrants, particularly, and as a minimum, to COVID-19 vaccinations, testing and treatment, and primary health care, and full occupational safety and health protections.
- **Improve access to adequate housing for asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants.** With the aim of reducing the number of migrants at-risk of or experiencing homelessness, implement public policies for holistic supportive housing arrangements and services that take into account the specific needs of migrant groups, such as children, unaccompanied minors, single women, single mothers, people with disabilities, and older persons.
- **Uphold the principles of non-discrimination and equity in housing provision.** To reduce discrimination, exclusion, and racism in the housing market as a result of language, ethnicity, religion, size of their family, legal status etc., regulate access to social housing and increase the availability of social supports for migrants and refugees.
- **Prioritize access to education at primary, secondary and tertiary level for all migrants, regardless of status.** The human right to education should be given the highest priority for all children, adolescents and adults, as a pathway for development both socially, communally and financially.
- **Promote the right to just and favorable conditions of work and fair remuneration.** Address issues of discrimination and exclusion in finding stable and well paid employment with safe, equitable and humane working conditions for migrants and refugees. Implement policies which address the pay gap for migrants, promote opportunities to upskill, and improve the safety of working and living conditions.

***"The government could also help to break the stigma of being a 'refugee' that acts as a barrier to accessing employment and rental properties, particularly through using more positive and humane language in discussion, and shape policies based on a sense of duty and pride in providing welcome and support towards people from different countries. The government's leadership in offering a welcoming and fair stance towards refugees would surely flow on through other sections of society."***

Ada Snell, Young Mercy Links, Australia

***"Housing is getting more expensive, even in Phoenix. Low-income housing is no longer available in the new developments; that ideal has seemingly vanished from the city's priorities. There are many wonderful people helping the poor, immigrants, and refugees in Arizona. Perhaps we can get a movement together to recommend low-income housing to government bodies, both in-state and nationally."***

Margaret McBride rsm





# Conclusion

*The history of humanity is a history of migration – some have even argued that movement is our natural state. People migrate for freedom, for safety, for family, and for new opportunities. Migration has always been an essential part of our adaptation to environmental stress, social, economic and political upheaval, and other challenges. Beyond borders and boundaries, along the journey and at places of destination, Mercy Sisters, Associates and Partners accompany and encounter people on the move, whether they have migrated by choice, or been forcibly displaced.*





**The Sacred Garden at Mercy International Centre**  
Photo courtesy of Elizabeth MacNeal

The survey conducted by the Mercy Global Action Migration Task Force aimed to collect, and analyze the experiences and work of Mercy around the world related to migration and displacement. Rooted in a charism and spiritual tradition characterized by hospitality and care for those most marginalized, and guided by a human rights framework that places the experiences of people at the center, Mercy individuals, ministries and communities welcome the stranger, provide refuge and support, attempt to uphold the rights of migrants and refugees, and create a sense of belonging and inclusion.

Survey responses from a range of Mercy experiences around the world revealed four main themes which help to understand the various ways that Mercy Sisters, Associates and Partners respond to migration. Mercy welcome and hospitality emphasizes the call to form relationships of mutuality and reciprocity, celebrating the unique giftedness and the powerful contributions that migrants, refugees and asylum seekers make to their societies. As people around the Mercy World accompany those

who have experienced displacement, discrimination, and trauma, they help people to find friendship, safety and home. Mercy individuals and ministries also encounter and work with migrants at borders and in detention, protecting people's human rights and helping people to navigate difficult and dangerous journeys with dignity. Amidst complex and confusing legal systems which determine how people on the move can access safety and essential services, Mercies guide migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people to access documentation and assistance so they can claim their rights. In transit and destination, Mercy ministries also help their new neighbors to feel like they belong, working to promote social inclusion, and to assist migrants, refugees and asylum seekers with access to healthcare, housing, education, employment opportunities. People around the Mercy World play an important role in celebrating and promoting the contributions of migrants and refugees to their new communities, and in countering discrimination.





The monarch butterfly represents the beauty of migration. Like the monarch butterfly, human beings cross borders in search of safety. The monarch butterfly symbolizes resiliency, determination, and the right of all living beings to move freely.  
© Shutterstock/Noradoda

Mercy work on migration extends beyond accompaniment of migrants and refugees on their journeys and at their destinations. Mercy Sisters, Associates and Partners continue to work on changing migration and refugee governance systems so that they are more people-centered and human rights-based. From the local to the global level, people around the Mercy World raise their voices to make policies more inclusive, to ensure that migrants are welcomed and that they can access what they need to move and live with dignity. As people of Mercy, along with our faith-based and other civil society partners, we play an important role in influencing policymakers at all levels to protect the rights of people on the move, but also to address the systemic issues that affect migration – neoliberal economic systems that prioritize profit over people’s wellbeing, racism, xenophobia and other forms of discrimination, and the environmental and climate crisis.

This process has offered the Mercy World an opportunity to reflect on, learn from, and celebrate

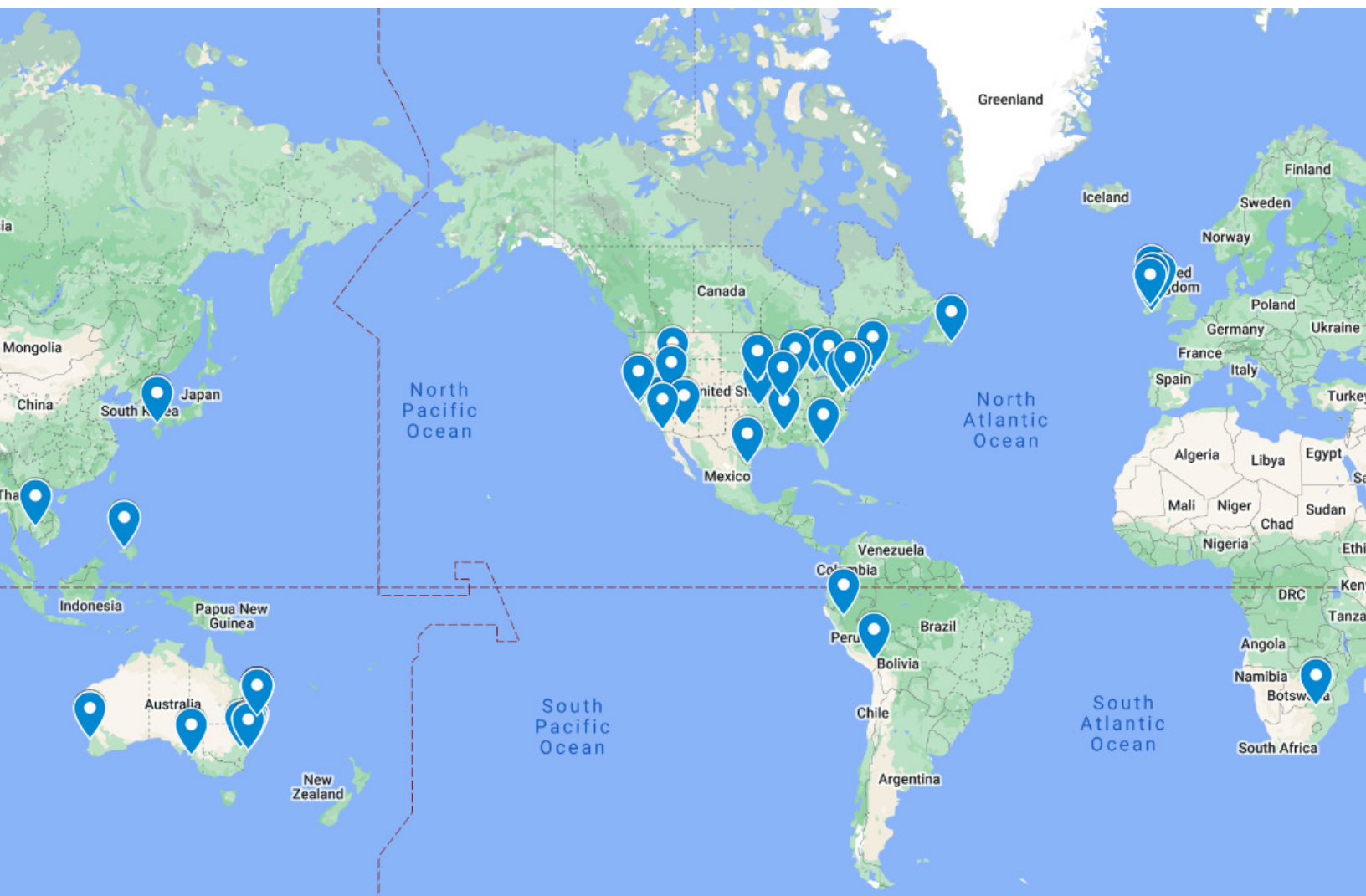
Mercy engagement with people on the move. Despite the many challenges people face on the migration journey, Mercy Sisters, Associates and partners embrace a culture of encounter that not only provides support and accompaniment, but also enriches the lives of our communities.

***“We’ve also learned so much from our friends who are seeking asylum. We’ve learned about resilience in the face of difficult situations. We’ve learned about courage against all odds in some instances coming from one country to another, and making that transition from one experience of living in a country to another. We’ve learned about hospitality because we’ve experienced the genuine hospitality that friends offer us, as a circle of friends. We feel that we are in this together, we are not a part of these people’s lives. We are part of their lives, and indeed, they are very much part of our lives, and that is a blessing and privilege for all of us.”***

Sr. Meredith Evans rsm

ANNEX

# The Mercy Migration Map





**Mindol Metta Karuna (JRS Cambodia)\***

Siam Reap, Cambodia  
[jrscambodia.org/Reflection\\_Centre/reflectioncentre.html](http://jrscambodia.org/Reflection_Centre/reflectioncentre.html)

**Mercy Action and Spirituality Hub\***

Melbourne, Australia  
[mercyhub.org.au](http://mercyhub.org.au)

**Holy Cross Services\***

Brisbane, Australia  
[hcl.org.au](http://hcl.org.au)

**Mercy Centre NJ\***

Ashbury Park, United States  
[mercycenternj.org](http://mercycenternj.org)

**Mercy Beyond Borders\***

Santa Clara, United States  
[mercybeyondborders.org](http://mercybeyondborders.org)

**Star of the Sea Guest House\***

Apollo Bay, Australia  
[institute.mercy.org.au/mercy-in-action/we-provide-a-place-to-be/star-of-the-sea-guest-house-apollo-bay](http://institute.mercy.org.au/mercy-in-action/we-provide-a-place-to-be/star-of-the-sea-guest-house-apollo-bay)

**Mercy Works Ltd\***

Parramatta, Australia  
[mercyworks.org.au](http://mercyworks.org.au)

**Mercy Care\***

West Perth, Australia  
[mercycare.com.au](http://mercycare.com.au)

**Welcome English Language Centre\***

Cork, Ireland  
[welcomeenglish.ie](http://welcomeenglish.ie)

**Kopano Lerato OVC Project\***

Winterveldt, South Africa  
[sistersofmercy.ie/2008/02/mercy-response-to-the-need-for-care-of-orphans-and-vulnerable-children-in-rural-south-africa](http://sistersofmercy.ie/2008/02/mercy-response-to-the-need-for-care-of-orphans-and-vulnerable-children-in-rural-south-africa)

**Sisters of Mercy of the Americas\***

Silver Spring, United States  
[sistersofmercy.org](http://sistersofmercy.org)

**House of Mercy Erie\***

Erie, United States  
[houseofmercyerie.org](http://houseofmercyerie.org)

**Sisters of Mercy Western Province Lifestyle Choices Group\***

Western Province, Ireland  
[sistersofmercy.ie/province/western](http://sistersofmercy.ie/province/western)

**ARISE Adelante\***

Alamo, United States  
[arisesotex.org](http://arisesotex.org)

**Misericordia Scholarship, College of St Mary\***

Omaha, United States  
[csm.edu/admissions/misericordia-scholarship-application#:~:text=The%20Misericordia%20Scholarship%20is%20provided,a%20fraction%20of%20the%20cost.](http://csm.edu/admissions/misericordia-scholarship-application#:~:text=The%20Misericordia%20Scholarship%20is%20provided,a%20fraction%20of%20the%20cost.)

**Casa de Misericordia\***

San Diego, United States  
[casademisericordiasd.org](http://casademisericordiasd.org)

**Mercy Foundation\***

Wollstonecraft, Australia  
[mercyfoundation.com.au](http://mercyfoundation.com.au)

**La Posada, INC\***

Twin Falls, United States  
[laposadainc.org](http://laposadainc.org)

**Mercy Investment Services, Inc.\***

Frontenac, United States  
[mercyinvestmentservices.org](http://mercyinvestmentservices.org)

**Mercy Community Services, Romero Centre\***

Dutton Park, Australia  
[romero.mercycommunity.org.au](http://romero.mercycommunity.org.au)

**Sisters' Association in Mindanao (SAMIN)\***

Davao City, Philippines  
[facebook.com/sistersmindanao](http://facebook.com/sistersmindanao)

**Catholic Healthcare/ Dignity Health\***

Phoenix, United States  
[dignityhealth.org/about-us/press-center/press-releases/catholic-healthcare-west-is-now-dignity-health](http://dignityhealth.org/about-us/press-center/press-releases/catholic-healthcare-west-is-now-dignity-health)

**Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants\***

Chicago, United States  
[icdichicago.org](http://icdichicago.org)

**Boston College**

Boston, United States  
[bc.edu](http://bc.edu)

**University of Newcastle Legal Centre**

Newcastle, Australia  
[newcastle.edu.au/school/newcastle-law-school/legal-centre](http://newcastle.edu.au/school/newcastle-law-school/legal-centre)

**Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland, Hispanic Ministry**

Portland, United States  
[portlanddiocese.org/hispanic-ministry](http://portlanddiocese.org/hispanic-ministry)

**NSW Ambulance**

Newcastle, Australia  
[ambulance.nsw.gov.au](http://ambulance.nsw.gov.au)

**NSW Disaster Chaplaincy**

Newcastle, Australia  
[nswdrcn.org.au](http://nswdrcn.org.au)

**Bathurst Refugee Support Group**

Bathurst, Australia  
[bathurstrefugeesupportgroup.com](http://bathurstrefugeesupportgroup.com)

**Leitrim Development Refugee Support Group**

Carrick-on-Shannon, Ireland  
[sistersofmercy.ie/2011/10/a-taste-of-something-new](http://sistersofmercy.ie/2011/10/a-taste-of-something-new)

**HSN Homeless Ministry, Inc**

Independence, United States  
[homelessministry.org](http://homelessministry.org)

**Georgian Court University**

Ladewood, United States  
[georgian.edu](http://georgian.edu)

**La Casa Amiga, Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan**

Pontiac, United States  
[ccsem.org/hispanic-outreach-2](http://ccsem.org/hispanic-outreach-2)

**ASRA Program, Communitify Qld**

Brisbane, Australia  
[communitify.org.au/multicultural-programs](http://communitify.org.au/multicultural-programs)

**Edmund Rice Centre WA**

Mirrabooka, Australia  
[ercwa.org.au](http://ercwa.org.au)

**Vinnies House of Welcome**

Kilburn, Australia  
[vinnies.org.au/page/Find\\_Help/SA/Resettling\\_in\\_Australia/Migrant\\_and\\_Refugee\\_Committee](http://vinnies.org.au/page/Find_Help/SA/Resettling_in_Australia/Migrant_and_Refugee_Committee)

**Immigration Ministry, Archdiocese of Chicago**

Chicago, United States  
[pvm.archchicago.org/human-dignity-solidarity/immigration-ministry/about-us](http://pvm.archchicago.org/human-dignity-solidarity/immigration-ministry/about-us)

**Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity**

Oakland, United States  
[im4humanintegrity.org](http://im4humanintegrity.org)

**Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc. (CLINIC)**

Miami, United States  
[cliniclegal.org](http://cliniclegal.org)

**Globe House**

Sligo, Ireland  
[hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/intercultural-health/sligo-globe-house-moving-on-updated.pdf](http://hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/intercultural-health/sligo-globe-house-moving-on-updated.pdf)

**Director Office for Religious, Diocese of San Bernardino**

San Bernardino, United States  
[sbdioecse.org/index.cfm](http://sbdioecse.org/index.cfm)

**Spirasi - National Centre for Survivors of Torture**

Dublin, Ireland  
[spirasi.ie](http://spirasi.ie)

**St Patrick's Catholic Church, Drumshanbo Parish**

Leitrim, Ireland  
[drumshanboparish.ie](http://drumshanboparish.ie)

**Climate Frontlines, Friends of the Earth Australia**

Brisbane, Australia  
[brisbane.foe.org.au](http://brisbane.foe.org.au)

**Jesuit Social Apostolate of the Japan Region**

Shimonoseki, Japan  
[jesuitsocialcenter-tokyo.com/eng/?page\\_id=5147](http://jesuitsocialcenter-tokyo.com/eng/?page_id=5147)

**Holy Child Jesus Church**

Canton, United States  
[jacksondiocese.org/parish/canton-holy-child-jesus](http://jacksondiocese.org/parish/canton-holy-child-jesus)

**Sacred Heart Church**

Canton, United States  
[sacredheartcanton.org](http://sacredheartcanton.org)

**Headway Ireland clg**

Limerick, Ireland  
[headway.ie](http://headway.ie)

**St Camillus Church**

Silver Spring, United States  
[stcamilluschurch.org](http://stcamilluschurch.org)

**Doras Luimni**

Limerick, Ireland  
[doras.org](http://doras.org)

**Restoring Dignity**

Omaha, United States  
[rdomaha.org](http://rdomaha.org)

**Federation of the Sisters of St Joseph**

Philadelphia, United States  
[catholicphilly.com/2021/08/news/local-news/catholic-agencies-nuns-working-diligently-to-help-afghan-refugees](http://catholicphilly.com/2021/08/news/local-news/catholic-agencies-nuns-working-diligently-to-help-afghan-refugees)

**St Anastasia Catholic Church**

St Augustine, United States  
[saccfl.org](http://saccfl.org)

**Sacred Heart Catholic Church**

Ely, United States  
[sacredheartchurchely.org](http://sacredheartchurchely.org)

**Association for New Canadians**

St John's, Canada  
[ancnl.ca](http://ancnl.ca)

**Red Kawsay Y PMH**

Puno, Peru  
[facebook.com/redtrata.peru](http://facebook.com/redtrata.peru)

**Jesuit Refugee Service**

Rushcutters Bay, Australia  
[aus.jrs.net/en/jesuit-refugee-service](http://aus.jrs.net/en/jesuit-refugee-service)

**Brisbane Refugee and Asylum Seeker Network**

Brisbane, Australia  
[facebook.com/brassnetwork](http://facebook.com/brassnetwork)

**International Rescue Committee, Center for Economic Opportunity**

San Diego, United States  
[irc-ceo.org](http://irc-ceo.org)

**Kiva Refugee Investment Fund**

San Francisco, United States  
[refugees.kiva.org](http://refugees.kiva.org)

**Pastoral Social del Migrante**

Roque, Peru

\* Mercy Entity/Direct Affiliation

## About Us

Mercy International Association was founded in 1992 by the leaders of Sisters of Mercy Congregations throughout the world. The Sisters of Mercy are an international faith-based organization founded in Dublin, Ireland in 1831 and who now have members in over 30 countries and territories worldwide. We are committed to serving those who suffer from poverty and other forms of disadvantage and to empowering women and children to live full and dignified lives within their diverse social and cultural contexts.

Mercy Global Action in New York is the international justice arm of Mercy International Association. Through Mercy Global Action, we are able to expand our advocacy capacity and re-imagine ways in which the grassroots experience can influence global policies. With Mercy contacts on the ground, Mercy Global Action is able to exchange knowledge, identify best practices and bring the two chief areas of concern (displacement of persons and degradation of Earth) to the work at the United Nations where we enjoy Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

For more information, visit [mercyworld.org](https://mercyworld.org)

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**Looking through the eyes of love: Embrace with Mercy and Hope**  
Photo collage courtesy of Ma Victoria Paderanga rsm (Philippines), Mercy Global Presence

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