



**DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING
INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

**Welcome to the Event
“Initiatives in refugee & migrant education.
Moving forward. Digging deeper. Together”**

Cardinal Michael Czerny S.J.

Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome, 26 September 2022

I welcome you to this Event entitled “*Initiatives in refugee & migrant education. Moving forward. Digging deeper. Together*”.

First, let’s highlight the word “**Together**” since it is only by joint efforts that we can achieve and sustain fundamental works of justice, compassion and human dignity: To give back to migrants and refugees what they have lost by leaving, or forcibly fleeing, their places of origin.

I offer cordial greetings to the former Rector, Fr Nuno da Silva Gonçalves S.J, whom I thank for his kind invitation, and to the new Rector, Fr Mark Lewis S.J., and to the Refugee and Migrant Education Network who are co-organising this event with the Faculty of Social Sciences, and to all present.

I am grateful to the university community for your commitment to study and research; to teach; and to witness and advocate. I encourage you to adapt the methodology of *Gaudium et Spes*: “tackling problems not within a deductive framework derived from doctrinal sources, but through an inductive analysis of events. By truly relying on the assistance of the Spirit, such analysis can identify new paths and courageous choices. Thus, there is no single, universal solution to the difficulties brought about by today’s social realities [such as the challenges of migrant and refugee education], but each Christian community must take up the task of finding adequate responses to the complexities of its own specific context.”¹

Applying this approach to your dialogue among university and other educators: How does your research contribute to *seeing* more deeply and widely? How does your teaching embody *judging* what is worth conveying, and how does it form consciences to refine their capacity to judge? And what is your *action*, not just as researchers and teachers but also, for example, as employers and as advocates in civil society?

¹ Michael Czerny and Christian Barone, *Fraternità - Segno dei Tempi: Il magistero sociale di Papa Francesco*, LEV, 2021, 59.

Thus, Catholic social teaching offers a framework that can help you explore, share ideas and begin working together.

And secondly there's your moto **“Moving forward”**. Nearly three years ago, the Holy Father addressed the International Conference for Leaders of Catholic Universities: “With your *universal* openness (precisely as an “*universitas*”), you can enable the Catholic university to become a place where solutions for civil and cultural progress for individual persons and for humanity, marked by solidarity, are pursued with perseverance and professionalism. You can also examine that which is contingent without losing sight of that which has a more general value. Old and new problems must be studied in their specificity and immediacy, but always within a personal and global perspective.”²

It is in this optic of a committed observatory that we can move forward together, in educating refugees and migrants. What do we observe regarding the challenges that they face when it comes to accessing educational opportunities? Some countries lack the resources to provide education to their own citizens, much less to poor newcomers. Other countries, though better resourced, adopt policies that prevent or delay access to education by newcomers. Others erect financial barriers. Additionally, refugees usually lack the free movement needed to take advantage of training and education opportunities.

This is why education has to be offered in many locations and circumstances: ideally in purposed institutions, but also in camps and in marginal urban settings, where half of the refugee population currently lives. We have many good practices developed by Catholic organisations which could and should be replicated.³ For example, providing education through technologies and distance learning. Another form of assistance is scholarships for refugees and migrants which will enable them to flourish and grow.

We know that the education gap between refugees and their host community peers can be wide. It undermines the integration of children into the local community. The situation is especially dire at the higher levels of education. Today, only five percent of refugees have access to post-secondary education and training, but these learning and educational opportunities are essential to their success. Opportunities to work, earn a living, and be self-reliant are the most effective ways for refugees to rebuild their lives.⁴

Let me stress self-reliance under the third slogan, **“Digging deeper”**. Post-secondary education encourages the development of a sustainable livelihood that is not dependent on humanitarian aid. It allows refugees to establish economic independence and a better standard of living, no matter where they are or how long they remain displaced, and it provides better socio-economic inclusion within

² Pope Francis, Address to the international conference for leaders of catholic universities: "New frontiers for university leaders. The future of health and the university ecosystem", Rome, 4 November 2019.

³ For example, Jesuit Worldwide Learning, or Jesuit Commons Higher Education at the Margins.

⁴ JRS USA, “A Path Forward: Building a Future for Refugee Students Through Post-Secondary Education”, 2022.

their host communities. This is particularly important because the majority of refugees (76 percent) spend at least five consecutive years in exile.

Another important contribution will be the mutual recognition of academic qualifications (not just swapping the titles of degrees) among Catholic universities as a concrete way of empowering refugees and migrants. The academic and professional competences of refugees and migrants need to be recognized, and this requires appropriate assessment as well as courses of updating and upgrading.

It is also important to offer training courses for pastoral agents engaged in many different programs catering to refugees and migrants; and other programs to prepare future policy makers and government executives, introducing modules on migration and asylum in various curricula.

In this sense, following the Holy Father's advice, "Interdisciplinary approaches, international cooperation and the sharing of resources are important elements that can permit universality to translate into shared and fruitful projects on behalf of humanity, of all men and women, and the environment in which they live and grow."

Another facet of digging deeper takes up the Holy Father's appeal: "Today, we need to remember more than ever that all teaching entails questioning the 'why'. In other words, it calls for reflection on the foundations and purposes of each discipline. Education reduced to mere technical instruction, or mere passing on of information, becomes an alienated and fragmented education. To believe that we can transmit knowledge without concern for its ethical dimension is essentially to abandon the task of teaching."⁵

In order to achieve this, "the training of leaders achieves its goal when it seeks to make the life of the university develop not only the mind but also the 'heart', the conscience, together with students' practical abilities. Scientific and theoretical knowledge must be blended with the sensitivity of the scholar and researcher, so that the fruits of study are not acquired in a self-referential way, concerned with professional training alone, but have a relational and social end."⁶

"Three kinds of language are needed," Pope Francis underlines, "and all three languages need to come into play: the language of the mind [for reflecting and judging], the language of the heart [for perceiving], and the language of the hands [for acting]. We need to think in harmony with what we feel and what we do, to feel in harmony with what we think and do, and to act in harmony with what we feel and think. An overall harmony, never divorced from the whole."

Complementing these topics and considerations, let us not overlook the scandal of hostility towards refugees and migrants. It can arise everywhere, even in Catholic and academic communities around the world. Is it simply ignorance about the conditions that lead to human displacement, or overlooking the contributions that newcomers make to host communities? Can research expose the fears and

⁵ Pope Francis, "New frontiers ...," Rome, 4 November 2019.

⁶ *Op. cit.*

resistances which feed negative narratives and toxic myths about migration? An important contribution from universities -like the Gregorian hosting us today- could be a sound, honest assessment of the root causes of contemporary forced migration, highlighting the responsibilities of the leading countries, counter-balancing a narrow understanding of the common good and distributive justice, with new ethical assessments: the good of all humankind, as in *Fratelli tutti*.

Let me end with the first word **“Together”**: governments, practitioners, communities, the Church have complementary responsibilities to provide access to meaningful educational opportunities for refugees and migrants, working hand in hand with a clear mission and generosity of spirit: To offer those who have been uprooted from their homes, the opportunity of quality education to become men and women for others, siblings all, carers of our common home.