Social Analysis: The Integral Ecology of Migration

In preparation for taking a corporate stand in solidarity with migrants, Sisters of the Holy Cross are reflecting on the experience of migration, learning more about its root causes and discerning effective ways to respond. We are using the familiar format of the pastoral cycle: reflection on experience, social analysis, theological reflection and informed action.

We began by sharing stories of our sisters’ experiences of migration in each of the countries where we live and minister. They told of how individuals and families migrated to earn money to send back to their families, for family reunification or for a better life for their children; to escape domestic violence or memories of abuse; or to flee civil war, a failing state, gang violence and poverty. We also learned various ways migrants were received in their new home. We hope these stories helped you to, in the words of Pope Francis, “stand in the shoes of those brothers and sisters of ours who risk their lives to offer a future to their children.”

The next movement of the cycle is to do a social analysis to determine the root causes of migration, an increasingly complex phenomenon. In December of 2017 the United Nations estimated that 258 million people were international migrants, meaning they were living in a country other than the one in which they were born. That number has doubled since the turn of the century, and about 1 in 10 of them are refugees or asylum seekers. An additional 40.3 million were internally displaced by war, conflict or human rights violations.

In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis called us to recognize that solutions to our global problems require that we see and understand each problem as it relates to other issues surrounding it. He called this method of analysis *integral ecology*, which looks at how social, environmental, economic and cultural factors relate to each other as they impact justice issues. Following this model, we will look at how complex factors interact and contribute to the root causes of migration.
In September, the United Nation’s High Commissioner for Refugees released a report called *Desperate Journeys*, which described migration journeys that were, indeed, desperate. Those seeking refuge in Europe “reported being kidnapped for ransom, sold for extortion or forced labour, forced into sexual exploitation, subjected to sexual violence, held against their will without sufficient food and water, beaten by state authorities while attempting to cross borders irregularly, and abandoned in the desert.” Along some migration paths, the majority experienced torture and many had witnessed deaths. In fact, the recent death rate almost tripled that of the 2015 high of migration to Europe.

Why would people subject themselves or their loved ones to such violence? The report again gave a succinct summary of the reasons: “Some continued to flee armed conflict, insecurity, and human rights violations, while others seek international protection on account of religious, ethnic or political persecution, persecution due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, or to escape from different forms of sexual or gender-based violence.” While those fleeing conflict and persecution fit the legal definition of refugees, many migrate for other reasons.

Historically migration has been influenced by geopolitics, economics, trade and cultural exchange. More recently it has been the result of specific events such as conflict and climate change in Africa, expulsion of the Rohingya in Asia, gang violence and economic instability in the Americas, and conflict in Syria which has affected multiple world regions. But the unprecedented number of migrants across the globe is often the result of a “perfect storm” of many events coming together to intensify the forces causing migration. Each region of the world is affected by national variables as well as by global trends.

We will begin with a discussion of the factors contributing to migration in each region of the world in which Sisters of the Holy Cross minister. This will include “perfect storms” intensifying migration in some areas and conclude with additional overarching trends. The *World Migration Report 2018* provided the context for regional dimensions and developments. This was supplemented with material on specific countries (see Resources section).

Ghana: Migrating to the City for a Better Life

While conflict and changes in the weather pattern in the north are influencing internal migration, youth unemployment is the primary cause of external migration. Boahinmaa hopes that after graduation her son will not join the surge of young men migrating to more prosperous African countries, or undertake the even more dangerous journey to Europe in search of employment.

Migration is a major feature of Africa, with over 16 million Africans living in another country in the continent, and a like number living in other regions of the world.

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis wrote, “There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty aggravated by environmental degradation. They are not recognized by international conventions as refugees; they bear the loss of the lives they have left behind without enjoying any legal protection whatsoever.” This is certainly true of Africa. Major drivers of migration in this region are climate change and conflict, as well as the economic and social instability resulting from them.

In West Africa ethnic groups live on both sides of very porous national borders. This easy movement between countries encourages seasonal, temporary and permanent labor migration. Boko Haram extremism, political instability and ethnic tension also contribute to internal and cross-border migration.

The area is greatly affected by environmental changes. People living in the Sahel region bordering the Sahara Desert are enjoying more rainfall, but rain has become unpredictable. Their livelihoods are affected by increased drought interspersed with unprecedented flooding.
Population increases have put stress on available farm land, so more forests have been cleared. This, plus overgrazing has resulted in even more environmental degradation. Lake Chad is drying up due to both drought and the larger volume of water being used for irrigation. This has affected fishing, farming and herding, and has resulted in food insecurity for the growing population.

Herders and farmers are competing for land, which adds an economic component to the religious conflict they sometimes experience. When climate change affects livelihoods dependent on natural resources, tension and conflict can result. Both internal and external migration have become strategies to respond this perfect storm of violence, insecure livelihoods, and social upheaval.

Migration in East Africa is affected by social and economic factors, as well as by conflict, political instability and climate change. Low wages, lack of jobs and the resulting poverty have encouraged many to migrate to the Gulf Coast States for economic opportunities. Irregular migrants sometimes turn to smugglers, which can result in extortion, violence, human trafficking or death.

Refugees fleeing complex conflicts, violence and chaos have affected most of East Africa. South Sudan, which experienced decades of conflict before it became an independent country, has the third largest number of refugees in the world. Some of the displaced Sudanese have been searching for a safe place to settle for close to twenty years. About four million have fled conflict and hunger in the new South Sudan, with a million of those seeking refuge settling in Uganda alone. Often highlighted as a welcoming model, Uganda is having difficulty providing for the historic number of refugees while still providing services to its own people.
Environmental change and disasters have also affected Eastern Africa. Gradual environmental changes such as the unpredictability of rain and increased drought have led to food insecurity here, too. A 2015-16 drought brought on by the El Niño cycle resulted in widespread famine and human displacement in several countries. Rapid-onset disasters such as a 2016 flood also displaced hundreds of thousands in the region.

Aids to Reflection

1. What emotions are stirring within me as I reflect on the plight of migrants and refugees in Africa?
2. What new or strengthened insights do I have about migrants in this area and the countries who host them?
3. Through the lens of integral ecology, how did environmental, economic, social, political and cultural factors interact to intensify migration in the region?
Migration is also a key factor in Asia, with 40 per cent of all international migrants coming from this continent. The Gulf States in particular draw a large number of temporary migrants.

Migration not just outside but also within the region is common, especially from countries having a labor surplus to countries with more economic opportunities. This movement relieves population pressure, and the remittances sent home help decrease poverty. Common historical roots, culture and kinship ties all contribute to this inter-regional migration.

Rapid onset natural disasters are common in this region. Their destruction is intensified by poor infrastructure, high dependence on land resources, and dense population living in vulnerable areas. Last year Cyclone Mora displaced hundreds of thousands of people in Bangladesh alone. More gradual effects of climate change such as rising sea levels, land erosion, increased flooding and groundwater depletion are also common and contribute to migration.

While the World Migration Report 2018 noted that long-standing conflict, repression and political instability led to significant displaced populations in Southern Asia, its production deadline was before 700,000 Rohingya refugees fled to Bangladesh in the face of military and mob violence. While the Rohingya crisis is commonly described as religious persecution of Muslims by Buddhists in Myanmar, and sometimes called genocide, important geopolitical factors are also involved.

“\nThe human rights catastrophe of 2017 was planned, foreseeable and inevitable."


The Rohingya have lived in Rakhine State of Myanmar for centuries and have long been subjected to government sanctioned discrimination. They face restrictions on marriage, family size, freedom of movement, education and
Bangladesh: Migrating to Support Family Members.

Three of the women ... went to Arab countries as domestic workers. The first two years they were mistreated by the owner of the house because they did not know the language, culture and people.... [T]hey had not earned enough to support their families well, or even repay the loan they took to go abroad. ... [Later] their salary was increased so they are able to support their families and educate their children. “Now they are the blessings of their families,” said Sufia and Sahara.

Rather than being a legitimate military response to an attack by extremists, a UN fact finding mission reported in August of 2018, “The human rights catastrophe of 2017 was planned, foreseeable and inevitable.” They noted that there had been increases in both anti-Rohingya propaganda and military forces in the Rakhine State earlier the previous summer, indicating premeditation. Recent investigations of the spread of “fake news” on social media discovered that Facebook and WhatsApp also played a part in inflaming the hatred and violence in Myanmar.

Why then? Ashrafuzzaman Khan, a researcher at the Ulster University in the United Kingdom suggests that this catastrophe was part of a land grab due to the strategic importance and rich resources of the Rakhine State. He noted that Myanmar is entering into alliances and economic partnerships with China and India, and is creating special economic zones in Rakhine province for their investments. Subsistence farmers have been displaced by land grabs, and now entire Rohingya villages have been leveled in service to Myanmar’s economic growth. This has opened up vast resources of farm and coastal land, oil and off shore gas reserves.
Mr. Khan noted that a presence in Rakhine will give strategic advantages to both China and India. It would give China access to the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal and would strengthen their defense ties with Myanmar. It would also strengthen their military and trade alliances with Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. India’s presence in Rakhine would allow them to keep closer tabs its northeastern provinces, which are only loosely connected to the rest of India and have experienced separation movements and insurrections in the past. He argued that these strengthened strategic alliances with both regional powers would reinforce military support of the Myanmar government.

Amnesty International’s report, *Remaking Rakhine’s State*, gives credence to some of Mr. Khan’s concerns. It notes that while bulldozing burned villages, the government is also destroying homes and buildings that had not been damaged earlier, and is clearing land of trees and other vegetation. Agricultural land the Rohingya have farmed for generations is disappearing.

Some of the Rohingya still remaining in Rakhine have had their homes and land taken for a major new border guard base. New security structures and villages being built for non-Rohingya are being constructed on or next to former villages. New roads are being built through the sites of former villages, not around them, and two sea ports are being improved. Infrastructure improvements are probably in anticipation of increased investment in the region.

Changes are being made without taking into consideration the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya who fled and the tens of thousands who remain. Amnesty International cautions, “Without greater transparency, access and consultation with the Rohingya themselves –and indeed other communities
living in the state—the prospect for safe, voluntary, and dignified return becomes increasingly unlikely.”

Aids to Reflection

1. What emotions are stirring within me as I reflect on the plight of the Rohingya?
2. How will the presence of such a large number of refugees affect both the refugees themselves and the receiving country?
3. What factors came together to create a “perfect storm” intensifying migration in the region?
A key feature of migration in the Americas has been the movement of peoples from south to north, about 25 million people by 2015. In the last twenty-five years, the number of migrants has doubled in size, driven by population increases in Latin America and Asia, and economic growth and political stability in North America. The United States has the largest foreign-born population in the world, and has been the destination country of 85% of the migrants to this region. Over 700,000 refugees and asylum seekers were in the US in 2016, with the majority being asylum seekers.

The migration corridor from Mexico to the United States, although slowing recently due to economic changes and increased border controls, is the largest country-to-country movement in the entire world. (The number of emigrants leaving Mexico is second largest in the world, exceeded only by those leaving India). The next largest immigrant groups settling in the US come from China, India and the Philippines. Student and family sponsored visas are their main means of entry.

Mexico is also a transit country, with large numbers of migrants and refugees moving through to the United States. While they are mainly from other countries in Latin America, that has begun to diversify to include the Caribbean and increasing numbers from Africa and Asia.

United States: Migrating to escape gang violence

“If I return to my home country [in Central America], I will be killed. The gang members have gone to my grandmother's house looking for me, and if I return and they find me, they will kill me.” ... USCIS did not believe that he was in immediate danger; therefore, their office would not approve his asylum case.
Recently socioeconomic conditions and increasing violence has let to substantial migration from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. A high number of women and children, including an increasing number of unaccompanied children, have fled gang violence and poverty, and the number of applications for asylum in the United States and Mexico has skyrocketed. In 2014 Mexico implemented a “Southern Border Plan” to decrease the number of irregular migrants entering from Central America. Criminal gangs control smuggling, and they are often simply repatriated when caught, passing themselves off as irregular migrants themselves.

Recently a caravan of up to 7,000 asylum seekers from Central America, made up largely of families and unaccompanied youth traveling together for protection, made their way by foot through Mexico. The president of the United States sent military troops to the border to turn back what he called “invaders” and criminals. Fleeing gang violence and poverty, many in the caravan were hoping for asylum in the U.S., while others dropped out and sought refuge in Mexico.

A strengthened economy, improved education and stronger border controls at the US southern border have made Mexico a more attractive destination for migrants and refugees. The number of foreign born in Mexico increased close to 25% between 2010 and 2015, with the number still rising. Migrants from the United States (over 880,000) still make up the majority of Mexico’s foreign-born residents, but increasing numbers are coming from other Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Irregular migrants have become an increasingly polarized political issue in the United States. Large numbers of irregular migrants already come from Central America and increasing numbers from Asia. While some enter illegally, others
simply overstay their visas. Mexicans have particularly been demonized in political rhetoric even though they account for only half of that population, and the number is decreasing. Since the 2008 global economic downturn, more Mexicans have been leaving the United States voluntarily than entering and give family reunification as their primary reason.

Global warming could change this trend in the future. A 2010 study estimated that climate change could drive up to 6.7 million Mexicans from rural areas into the US by 2080, while another projected a smaller 40,000 exodus within the next 50 years. An expert in international migration believes the number would be far less because the safety net put into place by the Mexican government will provide protection from climate-fueled crop losses. However, she cautioned that extreme weather in Central American countries would exacerbate climate driven migration as it intensifies instability due to violence and poverty.

The United States has historically had the largest refugee resettlement program in the world, but as the number of refugees has reached epic numbers, doubling across the globe in just the past 5 years, US resettlement quotas are declining. In 2016 the US admitted about 85,000 refugees, and in the 2018 fiscal year which just ended this dropped to about 25,000. A cap of just 30,000 refugees has been announced for the coming year. In 2017 the largest numbers came from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq and Syria. Refugees are required to apply for permanent residency a year after they come to the United States. They may apply for citizenship after five years of residency, although the current administration is making this more difficult.

Aids to Reflection

1. What images does the caravan of refugees traveling together for protection call to mind? What insights does it shed on the situation in the region?
2. What factors came together to intensify migration in the region?
3. What ideas/images do I want to keep in mind as we develop a corporate stand on migration?
In addition to the large migration north, there is also considerable migration from country to country within South America. Shortly after the turn of the century, countries began to make it easier for regional migrants to cross borders and recognized their basic rights. About 70% of the migration is within the region, fueled by economic inequality and uneven job opportunities. Increased demand in the service and care sectors has led to a feminization of this migration. Regional trade agreements have liberalized migration rules which also encouraged labor movement and led to less irregular migration.

Profound political crisis has also led to widespread displacement of peoples, especially in Colombia and in Venezuela. In Colombia over 7.2 million people were internally displaced at the end of 2016 after decades of civil war, the largest number in the world. Another 300,000 were living as refugees abroad, and 1.2 million were migrants in Ecuador and Venezuela. The Colombian peace talks of 2016-17 and deteriorating economic and political conditions in Venezuela encouraged Colombians to begin returning home.

Venezuela, a country which was known for welcoming immigrants, is now in an economic and political crisis of its own. Since 2015, over 2.3 million people have fled the country, making this one of the largest mass migrations in the continent’s history. Many sought refuge in Brazil and Peru. In spite of good will,

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**Brazil: Migrating to Join Her Husband**

She explains, “it is not easy to live outside your territory and your family. I miss them so much. ... I wish I could have a job and a space that I could bring my two daughters here. I do not know if I’ll ever be able to see them it again.”
neighboring countries are hard pressed to welcome so many refugees, resulting in great stress on their resources.

Venezuela has the largest known reserve of oil in the world, but mismanagement, corruption and falling oil prices in 2014 led to economic collapse. Prior limits on the independence of the judiciary and legislature, widespread inflation and shortage of food and other vital supplies led to demonstrations, angry crowds ransacking stores for food and violent government repression in response.

Nine out of ten families in Venezuela are “food insecure” and even with a full-time job, parents are unable to feed their children. Hyperinflation is at 200,000 per cent this year, wiping out savings and wages. Although malnourishment is widespread, babies are dying by the hundreds, and basic medical supplies are lacking, the government refuses to accept international aid. In response to corruption and human rights abuses, countries have called for economic sanctions on Venezuela and some of its leaders, and the president has blamed this for the country’s economic collapse. He has called it an “economic war” led by his political opponents with the support of the U.S. president.

Peru: Welcoming Refugees from a Country in Crisis

As the situation in Venezuela got progressively worse, the family started to sell their personal possessions to survive. Inevitably, Carlos had to face a life-changing decision – to leave his mother and grandmother and look for opportunities elsewhere before they died of malnutrition and lack of medical attention.

As the number of refugees and irregular migrants in South America continue to rise, several countries are now taking a harder, anti-immigrant view. To bypass border controls, migrants have turned to smuggling networks run by organized crime which has exposed them to kidnapping and extortion.
In response to the recent tightening of regional borders, Amnesty International has focused the situation in Venezuela as a human rights crisis. It noted that in order to escape arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial executions and denial of the rights to food and health, millions walked for days to find safety. It called on Venezuela’s neighbors to protect them and not forcibly return them.

Aids to Reflection

1. Why did Venezuela change from a country which welcomed migrants to one of mass migration? What factors came together to intensify migration in the region?
2. How is this affecting the surrounding countries?
3. What ideas/images do I want to keep in mind as we develop a corporate stand on migration?
Migration is all too often a response to life threatening circumstances rather than a choice. While many have been lifted out of poverty as a result of globalization, it has also increased economic inequalities which have left many behind. Trade policies sometimes include subsidies, tariffs and quotas that limit the ability of poorer countries to market their own products or support their own agriculture. At the same time, free trade agreements have undercut local farmers and led to worse working conditions. When international labor standards, including the right to organize are ignored, poverty increases.

Debilitating interest on foreign loans has destabilized economies and decreased resources available for health and educational services. In the search for international investment, some governments give land concessions that displace indigenous peoples, and result in deforestation and environmental degradation. In the guise of regional security, foreign assistance often benefits the military rather than the true human security of education, employment and health care.

Rather than building walls and relying on expensive security measures to stop massive forced displacement in rural areas, there are more effective and humane solutions. José Graziano da Silva, director-general of the Rome-based UN Food and Agriculture Organization, highlighted the role government investment in decent rural employment opportunities especially for young people and in social protection schemes would decrease distress migration. He also noted how South-South Cooperation, partnerships in which developing countries share best practices and resources, has resulted in improve food security and has helped poor rural households manage risks.
Countries rich in natural resources but short on capital and stable institutions are often victims of widespread corruption. Foreign investors sometimes offer bribes to extract unfair concessions that enrich corrupt officials and leave the country treasury empty. Without oversight of the financial system, money laundering or bank accounts in foreign countries enable the unscrupulous to hide their economic crimes. With the help of corrupt financial networks, abundant natural resources don’t translate into adequate living conditions for many, who see migration as a viable option to meet their basic needs.

**Migration and Gender**

The migration stories shared by sisters earlier in the year point to another factor influencing migration, gender. Several of the stories implied a power imbalance in the family resulting in domestic violence or sexual abuse, or being chosen by family members to work abroad and send remittances home. The precarious lives of widows were illustrated in the need to move from one’s native village for more options in the city, or for protection from conflict in another country.

*The World Migration Report* noted that girls and young women often migrate due to a crisis in the family, such as the loss of a parent. Even in the face of limited options and constraining gender norms, they want to do something to change the situation. When it is a choice not driven by catastrophes, migration decisions are affected by tradition, culture, religious beliefs, status, and family power structures.

Sometimes families decide that one of their members will migrate to send remittances home, and this has become a significant part of the economy of several countries. In some cultures, it might be a young, single woman whose family needs come before her individual choice. In others, the irregular migration of young men is almost a rite of passage into adulthood. Remittances can make a significant improvement in the lives of families left behind with improved nutrition, education, health care and overall quality of life. At the same time, it can increase the workload of women back home.

Where a “culture of migration” has developed, some feel forced to move to make a better life for family members. Peer pressure has made migration into a competition in a few areas, with those not moving seen as losers, even among
young women and girls.

Recently observers have begun to speak of the “feminization of migration.” The proportion of women and girls among international migrants has increased to almost half overall, although this varies greatly by region. Now women are more apt to move individually rather than with family groups, and they are able to send remittances home. With family members depending on them for financial support, this has begun to change gender dynamics in families and society, and sometimes gives women a greater role in decision-making.

Pope Francis vividly described the conflicting possibilities facing migrants when he wrote, “in an age of such vast movements of migration, large numbers of people are leaving their homelands, with a suitcase full of fears and desires, to undertake a hopeful and dangerous trip in search of more humane living conditions.” Fears, desires, hopes and dangers are all part of the complex decision to leave one's home and undertake the difficulty journey into an unknown future. For some who are experiencing “perfect storms” of environmental degradation and economic, political or social catastrophe in their home countries, migration has become a viable strategy that can lead to safety, a humane quality of life, and a means of support for family in the country left behind.

Aids to Reflection

1. How have economic policies of other nations influenced migration into or out of my country?
2. What policies or practices in my own country have influenced decisions regarding migration?
3. Have I seen examples of a culture of migration, the feminization of migration, or changed gender roles as a result of migration?
4. In the imagery of Pope Francis, what would I find packed in “a suitcase full of fears and desires” as people set out on their journey into an unknown future?

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1 Pope Francis, Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2015)
Background on Root Causes of Migration 2018

Climate Change-Poverty-Migration: The New, Inhuman ‘Bermuda Triangle’
Inter Press Service, 7 July 2017
Baher Kamal discusses the severe threat climate change is to rural populations and suggests ways to mitigate its effects. http://www.ipsnews.net/2017/07/climate-change-poverty-migration-new-inhuman-bermuda-triangle/

Desperate Journeys
This report from the High Commissioner of Refugees describes the challenges faced by refugees and migrants to Europe from January 2017 to March 2018 and makes recommendations for their protection. http://www.unhcr.org/desperatejourneys/

GCM at a Glance
This 1-page introduction to the Global Compact for Migration, highlights objectives to protect the human rights and safety of migrants, reduce forced migration, and manage migration more effectively.

How climate change could drive immigration to the United States from Mexico, USA Today, 29 December 2017
Although migration from Mexico has been declining, Sammy Roth discusses how climate change could affect the future flow from rural areas of Mexico to the US. https://www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2017/12/28/how-climate-change-could-drive-immigration-united-states-mexico/948358001/
Roger F. Noriega, a former assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, describes how the crisis in Venezuela has been 20 years in the making. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/10/opinion/out-of-good-options-for-venezuela.html

Papal Messages for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees
For over 100 years, each pope has written an annual message expressing his and the Church’s concern for migrants and refugees.
  - Pope Francis http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/migration.index.html
  - Pope Benedict XVI http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/migration.index.html

Remaking Rakhine’s State
Using satellite images, videos and photographs, as well as interviews with Rohingya who had fled or stayed behind, NGOs and experts, Amnesty International describes how the Myanmar government has begun reshaping the farm land and villages the Rohingya had occupied for generations. https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/ASA1680182018ENGLISH.PDF

The strategic importance of Rakhine State, *Straits Times*, 3 September 2018
Ashrafuzzaman Khan, a researcher at the Ulster University, UK analyses how the causes of the Rohingya Crisis are due to political, economic and biophysical conditions in Myanmar. https://www.farmlandgrab.org/post/view/28403-the-strategic-importance-of-rakhine-state

World Migration Report 2018
This comprehensive annual report of the International Organization for Migration describes the complexities of migration and emerging issues. It was used as a basis for the regional overviews. https://www.iom.int/wmr/world-migration-report-2018

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