



THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Statement on the new EU Return Regulation

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The Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) takes note of today's vote in the European Parliament approving the new Return Regulation, which complements the recently implemented Pact on Migration and Asylum.

While recognising the legitimate responsibility of public authorities to manage migration, ensure the integrity of borders and combat human trafficking, COMECE remains deeply concerned about aspects of the new framework that risk weakening the effective protection of fundamental rights and the dignity of vulnerable persons. In particular, the expansion of detention, the limitations on effective remedies and appeals, and the increasing externalisation of responsibilities to third countries raise serious ethical and humanitarian questions.

Migration is not merely a matter of procedures, statistics or border management. It concerns human beings: women, men and children, each possessing an inviolable dignity that must remain at the centre of every policy decision.

During his recent visit to the Canary Islands, Pope Leo XIV reminded Europe and the world that we cannot remain indifferent to those who perish at sea, fall victim to human trafficking, or are forced to flee war, violence, persecution, hunger or environmental degradation. As the Holy Father stated, migrants are not "a category or a statistic", but persons who "could be part of our own family". These words challenge our conscience and call us to look beyond fear and political expediency.

The European Union was founded on the conviction that human dignity is inviolable and that solidarity among peoples is not an optional ideal but a fundamental responsibility. Europe cannot claim to uphold these values while becoming accustomed to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic serving as silent cemeteries for those seeking safety and a future for their families.

COMECE therefore renews its call to ensure that migration and asylum policies remain firmly anchored in respect for human dignity, fundamental rights, the right to seek asylum, the protection of family unity, and special care for the most vulnerable. Security and solidarity are not opposing principles; they must advance together.

At the same time, we echo Pope Leo XIV's appeal to the international community. Countries of origin, transit and destination all share responsibility for addressing the root causes that force people to migrate and for protecting those who are on the move. Every person has not only the right to seek protection when life is threatened, but also the right not to be forced to leave their homeland because of war, persecution, poverty, corruption or environmental collapse.

Today's vote concerns more than migration policy. It raises a broader question about the kind of Europe we wish to build. At this decisive moment, Europe is called not to retreat from its founding values, but to reaffirm them with courage, wisdom and humanity.