

# **A CHURCH THAT WELCOMES**

*"It is essential that parish communities throughout Europe welcome migrants and do all they can to make them feel at home" (COMECE 15/11/2013)*

The current situation of migrants in the Maltese Islands  
and the strategy to effectively face this new reality  
in Gozo

A

**REPORT**

prepared by

**THE DIOCESAN COMMISSION  
FOR THE INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS IN GOZO**

presented

to

**H.E. Mgr Mario Grech  
Bishop of Gozo**

*November 2013*

The Good Shepherd Pastoral Centre  
Tac-Cawla - Victoria  
Gozo

## PREAMBLE

Mindful of the challenges posed by the arrival of migrants and asylum seekers in our midst and spurred by the urgent need to ensure that the Church assists the community to read and interpret the signs of the times, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 2013 H.E. Bishop Mario Grech set up the Commission for Immigrants and Refugees in Gozo, to identify ways in which the Church in Gozo can respond effectively to this new reality.

The Commission was mandated to prepare a report on the situation of migrants living in Gozo and on the efforts being made by the local Church to assist them. It was also invited to make recommendations regarding the possible contribution that can be made by Gozo and, more specifically, by the Church in Gozo to meet this national challenge, by accompanying migrants living in our midst and the hearts of the people to receive them in a spirit of love and compassion.

The Commission starts this report by emphasizing that this paper is a simple proposal of a course of action with the objective of helping in the integration of those people who seek refuge among us. We humbly acknowledge that no member sitting on the Commission is a demographer or an expert on migration matters. The considerations brought forward are therefore to be interpreted as a modest account of what we saw, listened to and encountered with, rather than a scientific study on the immigrants' situation in Gozo. Therefore questions which the challenge of migration pose to the whole world will surely not find their clarification or solutions in this paper. Our observations reflect only the local scene in Gozo and surely not elsewhere, including our bigger sister island of Malta, where the situation may have developed and reached a different reality than that of the island of Gozo.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Commission is guided and inspired by the teachings of the Catholic Church, which has repeatedly voiced concern about the situation of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, who are 'not pawns on the chessboard of humanity' but 'children, women and men who leave or who are forced to leave their homes for various reasons, who share a legitimate desire for knowing and having, but above all for being more.'<sup>1</sup>

Guided by the principles of 'the dignity of the human person ... which is the foundation of all the other principles and content of the Church's social doctrine; the common good; subsidiarity; and solidarity'<sup>2</sup>, and motivated by Christ's teaching: ' "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me" (Mt 25:35-36), the Church offers her love and assistance to all forcibly displaced persons without distinction, as to religion or background, respecting in each of them the inalienable dignity of the human person, made in the image of God.'<sup>3</sup>

These principles direct us to work for a more just society, one where refugees are not seen as burdens or as objects of our charity, but as our brothers and sisters whose rights should be respected, 'in this way, assistance given will not be considered as alms from the goodness of our heart, but an act of justice due to them'.<sup>4</sup> They also call us to action in the face of violations of human dignity as, 'if this God-given and great dignity of the human person is violated, then all members of the Body of Christ suffer and are accordingly called to see, act and correct this evil and sin'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, September 24, 2013, accessible at: <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/pope-francis-message-for-world-day-of-migrants-and-refugees>

<sup>2</sup> Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People and Pontifical Council Cor Unum, *Welcoming Christ in Refugees and Forcibly Displaced Persons - Pastoral Guidelines*, Vatican City, 2013, at 5, accessible at: <http://www.pcmigrants.org/documento%20rifugiati%202013/927-INGL.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> As at [n 2] above, at page 3

<sup>4</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Address to the Participants in the Assembly of the Council of the ICMC 2001*, 12 November 2001, nos. 2-3: *O.R.*, Weekly Edition in English, 21 November 2001, 4, cited in [n 2] above at 14.

<sup>5</sup> As in [n 2] above, at 5

Above all, they imply a need for us to change the way in which we, as individuals, as a Church and as a society, perceive and respond to refugees. In the words of Pope Francis: 'We ourselves need to see, and then to enable others to see, that migrants and refugees do not only represent a problem to be solved, but are brothers and sisters to be welcomed, respected and loved'.<sup>6</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI affirmed that this love must be extended to all, irrespective of race, religion or other distinction: 'caritas-agape extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter by chance, whoever they may be' (Dce no. 25)<sup>7</sup>.

The Church fulfils this mission in various different ways, including: 'personal contact; defence of the rights of individuals and groups; the denunciation of the injustices that are at the root of this evil; action for the adoption of laws that will guarantee their effective protection; education against xenophobia; the creation of groups of volunteers and of emergency funds; pastoral care'.<sup>8</sup>

Although advocacy and services are essential, they are not enough, 'hope, courage, love and creativity are necessary so that lives can be restored'.<sup>9</sup> Above all, therefore, the Church is called to be a place where all are welcomed and received with love. 'Welcome and hospitality are fundamental characteristics of pastoral ministry, including the one among asylum seekers, refugees, IDPs and trafficked persons. They guarantee that we regard the other as a person and, if a Christian, as a brother or sister in the faith, thus preventing us from considering him/her as a number, a case, or a workload. Welcome is not so much a task, but a way of living and sharing. Offering hospitality grows out of an effort to be faithful to God, to listen to His voice in the Sacred Scriptures and recognize Him in the people around us. Through hospitality, the stranger is welcomed into the local Church, that must be a safe place where he/she finds comfort, which respects, accepts and is friendly to him/her. Such a welcome involves attentive listening and mutual sharing of life stories. It requires an openness of heart, a willingness to make one's life visible to others, and a generous sharing of time and resources. From giving things to offering time and friendship and finally giving Christ, our treasure, to others, as a respectful and humble proposal.'<sup>10</sup>

**Compassion, friendship, hospitality and solidarity** are attributes accredited to the people living in Malta and Gozo since time immemorial. The Maltese people are renowned for their warm welcome to visitors who through fate, choice or will or accident happened to disembark on our shores. Digging into our most distant past one will surely find various values already profoundly embedded in our cultural and spiritual being. It is enough to mention the numerous prehistoric and megalithic temples scattered around the islands or to read the inspired narrative by St Luke in the Acts of the Apostles and other mention of Malta in the classics of historians to appreciate this legacy.

Such qualities of compassion, friendship, hospitality and solidarity were not acquired by chance but were moulded through a long process of struggles for our religious, political, economical and social autonomy. They were, for our ancestors and remain for us today, the fruit of a continuous search for better human conditions for us all.

In this context we must never forget or deny our recent past, when our own forefathers had to leave their beloved ones, their families and their homeland and their culture in search of a better future. In our case they did it mostly for economic reasons. Nevertheless, we must remember and acknowledge that we too are in debt and should be grateful to other countries and their governments who allowed our forefathers to share the good and bounty of their people.

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<sup>6</sup> As in [n 1] above

<sup>7</sup> Cited in [n 2] above, at page 3

<sup>8</sup> Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, jointly with the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, *Refugees, a Challenge to Solidarity*, 1992, at 26

<sup>9</sup> See [n 2] above at 85

<sup>10</sup> See [n 2] above at 82 and 83

Therefore, whether immigration will be a temporary or lasting situation, this document is intended to offer a Christian vision and an itinerary of humanitarian awareness and actions that may be considered by the diocese of Gozo and thus directed to its members in an effort to welcome and nurture love and understanding towards our brethren, who deserve compassion and solidarity. The people of Gozo have to let themselves be guided by the compelling Words and the powerful Spirit of Jesus Christ who commanded us *“to love our neighbours as ourselves”*. As a Christian community, we can succeed in accomplishing this challenge assigned to us by our Lord, only if we constantly nurture a stronger pastoral and missionary driving force that will impel, revive and sustain our Christian obligation towards migrants and refugees.

## METHODOLOGY

It is from their inner Christian conviction that the members of the Commission for Immigrant Refugees in Gozo embarked on this task entrusted to them by Bishop Mario Grech. The Commission had a definite deadline: “the end of November” 2013. As explained earlier, its objectives were to look and observe what was being done and from that to propose what could be added or created.

The Commission was directed to focus on the situation of ‘immigrants’ in Malta, with a particular focus on Gozo.

The term ‘immigrants’ is extremely broad, encompassing all foreigners residing in Malta whether legally or illegally for whatever reason, be it employment, study or the need to obtain protection in Malta. It was therefore determined at the outset that the Commission would focus on the situation of forced migrants who came to Malta seeking protection. While somewhat wider than the category of migrants legally defined as refugees, this understanding of the term, which includes ‘*de facto*’ refugees, is in line with that adopted by the Catholic Church.<sup>11</sup>

The method was casual rather than formal. Meetings were held regularly during which the members brought forward their various suggestions for discussion. The members of the Commission read and shared relevant literature and continuously communicated with each other through emails. Minutes were meticulously taken and filed.

Some meetings were enriched with the sharing of experiences from invited competent guests. Individually and collectively the members of the Commission met with delegates from the office of the UNHCR, addressed the parish priests and the clergy, and requested and received information in writing from parish priests, Caritas, Social Security Department, the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) and the Local Councils. The Chairperson even called upon the Director of the Malta Emigrants Commission and his Assistant to discuss their experience with the immigrant refugees in Malta. He took the opportunity to observe the relationship with the numerous immigrants continuously requesting and receiving assistance at Dar I-Emigrant and was shown around one of their Open Centres located in Sliema.

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<sup>11</sup> See for example: *‘Refugees: a challenge to solidarity’* published by the Council for the Care of Migrants and Itinerant People and Cor Unum in 1992. This document stresses that “in the categories of the International Convention are not included the victims of armed conflicts, erroneous economic policy or natural disasters. For humanitarian reasons, there is today a growing tendency to recognize such people as “*de facto*” refugees, given the involuntary nature of their migration. After all, the States who signed the Convention had themselves expressed the hope that it would “have exemplary value beyond its contractual scope.” The General Assembly of the United Nations has on various occasions asked the High Commission for Refugees to use its good offices to assist such persons who are involuntarily outside their own country. The practice accepted in Europe after the two World Wars, and more recently by some countries of first asylum in other continents, has been moving in this direction. In the case of the so-called “economic migrants”, justice and equity demand that appropriate distinctions be made. Those who flee economic conditions that threaten their lives and physical safety must be treated differently from those who emigrate simply to improve their position.”

The more recent document ‘Welcoming Christ in Refugees’ too stresses that: ‘there are those who are forced to move due to persecution, natural calamities, environmental disasters, or other factors causing extreme difficulties including danger for their life. Others decide to leave their homeland because they can no longer afford to live with dignity there, while there are those who simply want to find better life opportunities abroad. There is, therefore, a difference between migrants and refugees or asylum seekers. This must be maintained although there are “mixed” migration flows, in which it becomes difficult to distinguish between classically-defined asylum seekers, those in need of other kinds of protection or aid, and those who simply take advantage of the migration flow.’

The chairperson took the effort to personally meet with a number individual immigrants residing in Gozo to listen to their stories and understand their needs. In addition, a questionnaire was circulated among the migrants in Gozo with whom the Commission was able to establish contact in order to obtain their views about their situation and how this could be improved, however only 16 migrants participated in this survey.

Most of these migrants were Somali nationals enjoying protection in Malta. The Commission is aware that there are a number of migrants from other ethnic backgrounds residing in Gozo however it was not possible to make contact with them within the established timeframe. This shortcoming is addressed in the recommendations, which contain proposals for further action in this area.

In the short life-time allotted to it, as it is accounted above, the Commission managed to consult and listen to various stakeholders working with immigrants or interested in so doing. The members discussed, scrutinized, discerned and ultimately concluded on the information gathered and are herewith presenting their final report.

## **IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES IN MALTA AND GOZO**

### **Context and Background**

#### ***Migrants and asylum seekers in Malta: the national context***

In the past decade most asylum seekers in Malta arrived by boat in an irregular manner<sup>12</sup>.

From 2002, Malta experienced an increase in the number of undocumented migrants arriving by boat from Libya. Most of the migrants arriving through this route are from Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>13</sup>; the majority are adult men, however annual arrivals always include a number of women and children.

Commonly described as 'mixed flows', annual arrivals include people who want to reach Europe for very different reasons and who have very diverse and complex needs. Many have experienced war or serious violations of their human rights, not only in their countries of origin, but also in the countries through which they transited.<sup>14</sup> Most, though not all of the arrivals, have international protection needs: between 2002 and 2012 some 56% of immigrant arrivals were granted international protection in Malta, as they fled war or serious violations of their human rights. In 2012 and 2013 the proportion of those granted protection was even higher, with some 79% of all applicants being granted some kind of protection in Malta.<sup>15</sup>

#### ***Reception of migrants and asylum seekers***<sup>16</sup>

On arrival in Malta all arrivals are detained in terms of the Immigration Act. They are also provided with the opportunity to apply for asylum in Malta and, as was already indicated above, the vast majority do in fact apply and many are granted protection. As a rule, asylum seekers remain in detention pending the outcome of their asylum application; the only exceptions are those considered 'vulnerable', who are released to await the outcome of their asylum application in the community.

Asylum seekers granted protection are immediately released from detention. Detention lasts up to a maximum of 12 months in the case of asylum seekers and 18 months in the case of those whose

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<sup>12</sup> Statistics for applications in 2011 indicate that out of 1862 applications processed by Refugee Commission 85% were made by boat arrivals - available at [www.unhcr.org/mt](http://www.unhcr.org/mt)

<sup>13</sup> Out of a total of 16664 arrivals between 2002 and 2012, 5997 (by far the largest national group at 36%) were Somali, 2528 (15%) Eritrean, 999 (6%) Nigerian, 793 (5%) Sudanese and 626 (4%) Ethiopian. Arrivals in 2013 were mostly Somali and Eritrean.

<sup>14</sup> JRS Malta, *Bridging Borders*, June 2012, at page 9

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.unhcr.org/mt/statistics>

<sup>16</sup> For further information on the laws, policies and practices in place for the reception of asylum seekers see *inter alia* [n. 14] above and People for Change (PFC) Foundation, *Researching Migration and Asylum in Malta: A Guide*, April 2013, accessible at [http://www.pfcmalta.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12174934/researching\\_migration\\_and\\_asylum\\_in\\_malta\\_-\\_a\\_guide.pdf](http://www.pfcmalta.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12174934/researching_migration_and_asylum_in_malta_-_a_guide.pdf)

asylum application has been rejected. Rejected asylum seekers remain subject to removal once this becomes possible even after they have been released from detention.

Upon release all are placed in Open Centres, intended to provide initial accommodation and support until it is possible for the individuals concerned to achieve self-sufficiency and move into independent accommodation.

The extent of an individual's entitlements to social security and other forms of support are largely dependent on legal status, with only beneficiaries of protection being entitled to financial support from the State. All migrants released from detention are able to obtain a work permit if they find employment; in the case of rejected asylum seekers problems arise if they lose their job as, unlike beneficiaries of protection they are not entitled to any form of financial assistance.

### **Public perception of immigrants and immigration**

Although these arrivals represent only a small portion of the immigrant population in Malta<sup>17</sup>, national debate on immigration, which is both ongoing and controversial, is almost completely dominated by the challenges presented by this annual influx of "boat people", often referred to somewhat pejoratively as "illegal immigrants".<sup>18</sup>

Although a number of people are sensitive to their needs and aware of the reasons why they flee their homes, public perception of the arrivals is generally negative. Migrants are often perceived as a burden on Malta's limited resources, taking what rightfully belongs to the Maltese, and presenting a threat to Malta's social cohesion, security and economic stability.<sup>19</sup> Negative perceptions appear to be particularly pronounced in those areas where the Open Centres are located<sup>20</sup>, probably as there are large numbers of migrants living in a relatively small locality.

In general, the migrant community lives largely separate from the Maltese community and there are few if any opportunities for Maltese people to interact with migrants and relate to them as friends and equals. Thus prejudice and misconceptions abound and, unsurprisingly some migrants view Malta as an inhospitable place where they are not welcome.

Within this context, there is little appetite for integration or long-term stay in Malta. This is not only due to a lack of willingness on migrants' part, but also because of the limited opportunities available and the lack of support to achieve true social inclusion. Until today, Malta does not have a comprehensive national integration policy<sup>21</sup> and resettlement and intra-EU relocation of beneficiaries of protection are perceived as the best possible option by both migrants and the Government.

Various organizations working in Malta such as UNHCR, Integra Foundation and JRS have initiated projects aimed at promoting integration. These include projects focused on promoting integration of refugee children in local schools, befriending projects and projects focused on combating discrimination and prejudice by raising awareness of the situation of refugees the reasons why people flee their homes.

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<sup>17</sup> At any given time, there are always a number of non-EU nationals who are legally present in Malta for various purposes, including study, work or family re-unification. See *inter alia*: Gauci J, Migration Trends, published in *Migration and the Labour Markets in the European Union, (2000-2009)*, accessible at <http://www.pfcmalta.org/uploads/1/2/1/7/12174934/iommiglabmrkt.pdf> and Amore K, *Active Civic Participation of Immigrants in Malta*, March 2005, accessible at: <http://www.politis-europe.uni-oldenburg.de/download/Malta.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Camilleri J, *Do I belong? Psychological perspectives and educational considerations of young immigrants' school experiences*, Malta Review of Education Research, Vol 6, No 1, 2008, 64-79, at 65; see also, Pisani M, in *Post Colonial Directions in Education*, 2(1) 68-99, at 77

<sup>19</sup> See *inter alia*: Pisani, cited in [n. 18] above, PFC Foundation cited in [n. 16] and Texeira F, *At the Gate of Fortress Europe; Irregular Migration and Malta*, Institute for Political studies of Rennes, France, 2006

<sup>20</sup> UNHCR Malta, *What do YOU think? Report on public perception about refugees and migrants in Malta*, 2012, at 7-8, accessible at <http://www.unhcr.org/mt/statistics/634>

<sup>21</sup> See *inter alia*, [n. 14] above, The Public Policy Institute, *Managing the Challenges of Irregular Immigration in Malta*, 2008

### ***Migrants in Gozo: the local context***

The exact number of migrants and asylum seekers residing in Gozo was somewhat difficult to determine as, in the process of its research regarding the presence of migrants and refugees in Gozo, the Commission received various conflicting figures. The highest estimate was 400 immigrants mostly originating from the Horn of Africa and other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa .

The migrants living in Gozo are all living in rented accommodation. Some move to Gozo straight out of the Open Centres, while others move to Gozo at a later stage if they find accommodation or employment there. Those who move to Gozo directly out of the Open Centres are often in a precarious situation, particularly until they start receiving financial assistance, as in many cases they would not yet have a job<sup>22</sup>. Migrants who lose their jobs could also find it difficult to meet their basic needs, especially if they are not entitled to financial support.

Unlike Malta, Gozo does not have high concentrations of refugees and migrants living in one area. The immigrants, of their own initiative, chose to rent accommodation in different locations in Gozo which they share with two, three or even four other immigrants. This custom brought about an automatic and successful localized integration and encouraged interaction with the locals, at the bakeries, groceries and in the village squares. This means that immigrants staying in Gozo are already mixing with local residents to a greater extent than many others who live in Malta. This factor was openly shared by the refugees themselves in their responses to the questionnaire where they affirmed that they had chosen Gozo because: they felt welcomed in Gozo, accommodation is cheaper, Gozo is quieter, the people are friendlier and they feel they can live at ease with the local people.

In spite of the fact that migrants' experience of life in Gozo appears to be generally positive, it is clear from the feedback a number of the migrants who communicated with the Commission as well as that of the individuals who work with them, that migrants living in Gozo often face significant difficulties. Apart from the difficulty meeting basic needs at times when they do not have an income and cannot access any financial support, highlighted earlier, the challenges they mentioned include: finding stable or better employment, accessing education opportunities, and obtaining a more secure legal status in Malta or in some other country. Although most of the migrants interviewed do not seem to view Gozo (or Malta) as their permanent home, many indicated a desire to further their education, both in the area of language as well as in other areas.

### ***Perception of immigrants and immigration among the local population***

These findings regarding the migrant population would seem to complement those of the UNHCR survey on public perception towards migrants conducted in 2012, cited above. In this survey the majority of Gozitan respondents 'strongly disagreed' that there are too many migrants coming to their locality. Moreover most felt that migrants did not pose a threat to the way of life in their locality. This response contrasts sharply with that of respondents in the South and East of Malta. This notwithstanding, it also emerged that while respondents in Gozo were generally aware of what being a refugee means, the distinction between refugees and economic migrants is not always clearly understood.<sup>23</sup>

It is clear, from both the experiences of the Committee members and from the information collected, that a number of projects aimed at promoting integration of migrants in Gozo have been undertaken by various individuals and entities, such as parishes and local councils. Some are one-off events, while others are ongoing. Most of these efforts are the result of individual initiative and there seems to be little or no coordination between them.

The parish of Xewkija in particular, stands out as an example of solidarity and hospitality in practice. The parish priest, who is clearly very much in touch with the needs of the migrants living in his community, works with a network of committed individuals both within and outside his parish to keep regular contact with the refugees living there and to provide for the material needs of those

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<sup>22</sup> Rapport lill-Kummissjoni Immigranti Rifugjati f'Ghawdex mibghut mill-Arciriet Monsinjur Carmelo Mercieca, Parrocchia San Gwann Battista, Xewkija, Ghawdex

<sup>23</sup> See [n. 21]

who cannot support themselves, particularly where they have just left an Open Centre. On occasion they also assist individuals to find employment. The parish has also 'adopted' a specific family, providing them with personalised support as necessary. Through regular contact with the migrants in their midst, the parish has clearly become far more attuned to the challenges faced by migrants and refugees and more aware of the reasons why people flee their homes in search of protection and the chance to live with dignity.

### ***Conclusions based on findings***

In view of the findings outlined above, the Commission concluded that the efforts of the Church in Gozo should be focused on promoting further the integration of immigrants living in Gozo by becoming further attuned to the needs of the migrant community in Gozo, addressing the needs they identify, and building on existing good practices. This should be accompanied by efforts to raise awareness, of the reality experienced by immigrants living in their midst as well as of the wealth of Catholic social teachings on immigration issues, which call us to go beyond integration and tolerance to true welcome in a spirit of love and compassion, among the local parish communities.

## **A PROPOSAL OF AN INTEGRATION STRATEGY FOR GOZO**

Integration has been described as 'a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation' by all immigrants and members of the host society<sup>24</sup>. It needs the cooperation and openness of both parties concerned if it is to be truly successful. Integration can only happen when the hosts and the guests are in unison in the need to learn and to get to know each other. Ignorance or lack of proper information is often the cause of fear of "the other". Compassion, friendship, hospitality and solidarity can be present only once people begin to talk, discuss, discover and relate to each other. The Commission strongly believes that for any proposal to be practically feasible for Gozo it has to be workable within the limited resources of a small and modest diocese which Gozo is. We are also convinced that this proposal can succeed only if it is developed on a simple structure, an educational content and above all on a compassionate approach.

These should be the three key factors to lead any action taken to operate this social and cultural programme which is divided into two elements but oriented towards a shared common effort of integration.

### **Aspect A**

#### ***Awareness within the Gozo Christian Community***

The aim of this part of the proposal is that the residents of Gozo are smoothly and gradually prepared to welcome and accept the immigrants as part of their daily life.

To reach the above goal the spiritual and pastoral element inherent in any missionary work must not be overlooked. The community has to learn about the background of the immigrants and to be well-informed about the dynamics behind the phenomenon of irregular immigration and this is to happen before, or at least simultaneously with, any material and humanitarian assistance the parish may be ready to offer to the immigrants.

Priests are invited not to exclude immigration issues from their sermons. They themselves have to believe and thus transmit the certainty that the presence of immigrants in our midst is willed by God and thus is a golden opportunity for all to practice and bear witness to their faith by welcoming migrants and refugees and ministering to them through genuine, loving concern. The teachings of the Catholic Church recently highlighted by His Holiness Pope Francis, outlined earlier in this report, could be a source of enlightenment and inspiration, encouraging local communities to open their minds, hearts and homes to migrants and asylum seekers.

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<sup>24</sup> Common basic principles for immigrant integration policy in the European Union, reproduced in the European Commission, *Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and practitioners*, April 2010



The entire integration process is to be considered and maintained as a living and loving Christian experience at all times. The integration programme has therefore to make all those willing to participate, to become aware that they themselves have got to respect each other to be able to witness to the compassion, friendship, hospitality and solidarity integration imply. The Christian community must therefore seek the best spiritual and missionary growth to thus be a healthy integration factor as part of a universal loving Church.

The commission has identified numerous examples of solidarity action already being undertaken which are surely not publicized enough. The parish of St John the Baptist in Xewkija is one such case of a successful integration venture which should be studied and imitated by all other parishes in Gozo.

## **Aspect B**

### ***Services and Support For Immigrants***

Through their day-to-day work experience within their communities, lay Christians and religious organisations have a wealth of humanitarian know-how to share and offer. They therefore can and should all be invited to contribute in the process of continuous integration of immigrants within the local community by implementing initiatives and projects towards this end. They should also be encouraged to offer their expertise and experience to provide: education and training, counselling, legal aid, food distribution, sports activities and other social encounters.

In order to perform such a delicate humanitarian mission, well thought-out and coordinated plans are essential for effectiveness and efficiency, so that time, energy and resources are not wasted. Therefore the Diocese may have to source out persons proficient in immigration matters to the necessary structures.

It is recommended that one person or entity is identified to act as a focal point on immigration matters and to coordinate the efforts of the local diocese in this area, in collaboration with the Emigrants' Commission in the diocese of Malta. Collaboration with other NGOs and international organizations working in this area is also encouraged.

The role of the focal point would include:

As a first step:

- To conduct an in-depth assessment of the needs of the migrant community in Gozo, which takes into account all of the migrants and asylum seekers of concern to the Commission who are living on the island, in order to obtain a deeper understanding of their experience of life in Gozo and to be better able to identify their needs and the challenges they face. This assessment should be undertaken by meeting and consulting with the migrants themselves, rather than just with the people who work with them.
- To map the existing initiatives being undertaken by local communities, be they parishes or simply groups of committed individuals, in order to draw on the experience and commitment of those who, of their own accord and with little or no support, reached out to the migrants in their midst and offered them support. These people and groups should surely be at the heart of any concerted effort to promote the integration of refugees in Gozo.
- To map the needs within the local labour market, in order to facilitate access to the job market and provide targeted training where necessary.

Once this initial exercise is completed, on an ongoing basis:

- To work with interested individuals to plan and establish the necessary services for migrants in Gozo, which could include:
  - Establishing a Drop-in Centre for migrants, providing information about: life in Gozo, services available and how to access them, initial support to find employment or accommodation and ongoing social work services.

- Organising educational courses focusing on language and the acquisition of skills that would enhance employability.
  - Establishing a migrants' consultation group, which would meet regularly to discuss issues of concern, highlight new and emerging needs, provide feedback on existing initiatives, evaluate ongoing services and assist with the planning of all services.
  - Training and recruitment of translators to support the various initiatives of the diocese
  - Activities promoting social inclusion in collaboration with other stakeholders, such as parishes and local councils. These activities could be occasional initiatives, such as the organisation of an intercultural event, or ongoing, such as the Xewkija parish initiative to 'adopt' a family or individual with particular needs or the UNHCR befriending project.
- To coordinate activities in order to ensure that resources are maximised and overlap is avoided, and offer training, guidance, mediation and support to all who are offering their services in the field.
  - To keep regular contact with Government authorities and other agencies working in the field.
  - To tap accessible funds from central and local government and the from the EU funding programmes.

The members of the Commission are first and foremost thankful to God All Mighty for illuminating the Church in Gozo to deliberate on such a delicate matter of immigrants and refugees. They are also very grateful to HE Mgr Mario Grech, bishop of Gozo for entrusting them with the task to start the process of discussion and action. They are also appreciative to all those who in one way and another have cooperate with us and contributed to the completion of this report. Finally they invite all the faithful members of the Church in Gozo to heed and collaborate with their pastors to make this proposal work for the good of humanity and the Church and ultimately for Glory of God our Father.

*Chairperson:* **Fr. Emmanuel Cordina**

*Secretary:* **Deborah Grech**

*Members:* **Arcp. Mgr. Fr. Frankie Bajada**

**Dr. Katrine Camilleri LLD**

**Theresa Lucas**

**Stefan Said**

**Fr. Anthony Schembri**

**Antoine Vassallo**

*Date:* 24<sup>th</sup> November 2013  
*Solemnity of Christ the King*