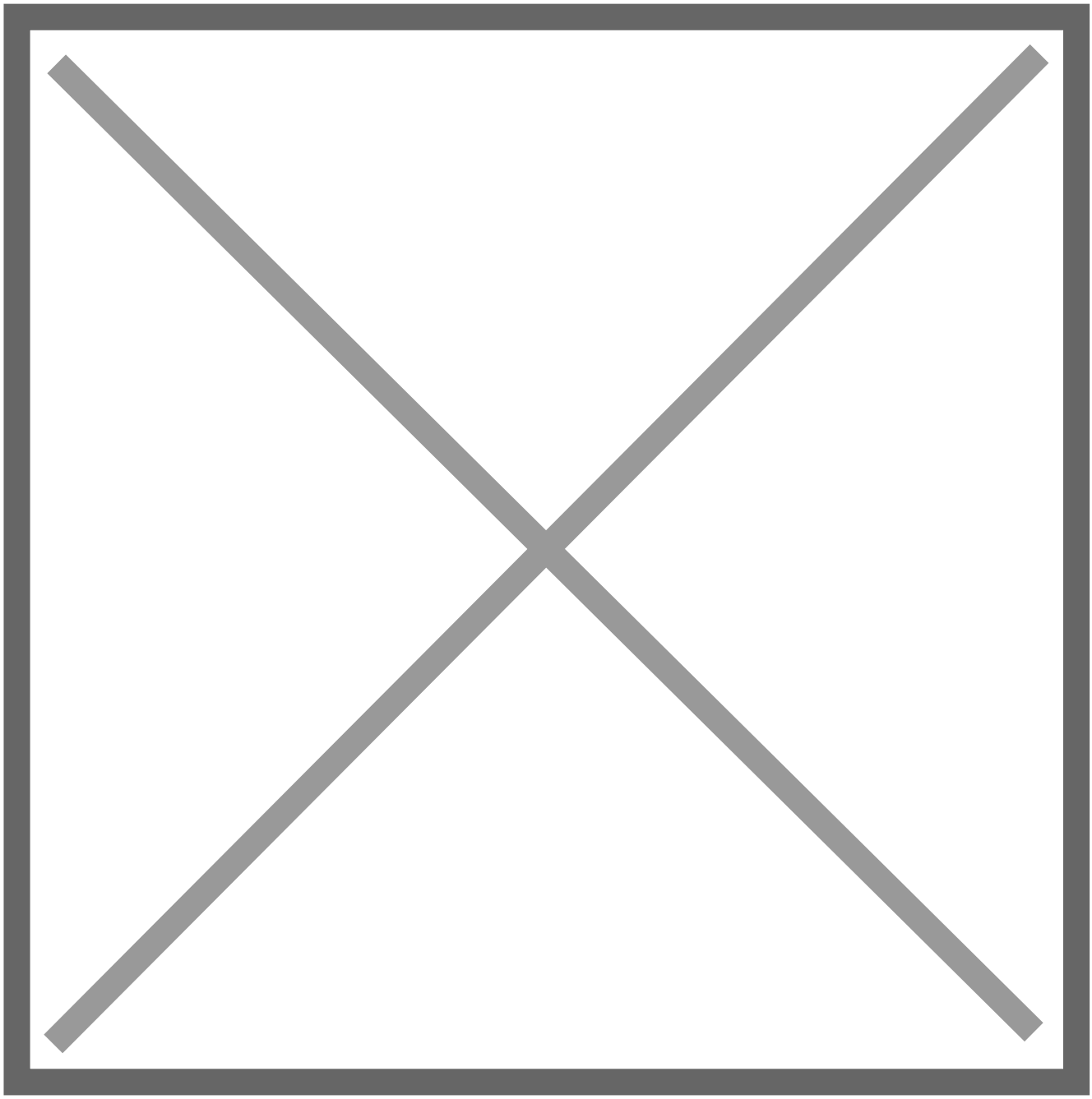
News
Vatican



Francesca Di Giovanni, undersecretary in the Vatican's foreign ministry office, reads at a morning Mass with Pope Francis in this undated photo. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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Countries hosting millions of refugees are not receiving adequate support, and the situation is made worse when other nations forge agreements that trap migrants and refugees, often indefinitely, "at strategic points along their journey," said a top Vatican official.

"The fact that millions of our fellow brothers and sisters remain in limbo is a crisis in solidarity. It should challenge our conscience as a family of nations to seek strategies that engage with all countries as equal partners," said Francesca Di Giovanni, an undersecretary in the Vatican's foreign ministry office.

She spoke Oct. 5 as head of the Vatican delegation to the executive committee of the U.N. High Commissioner's Program for Refugees in Geneva. The Vatican published her remarks the same day.

The current system in place for handling those who are forcibly displaced has been "entirely overwhelmed" and "struggles to respond adequately," making displacement, within and across borders, "one of the most pressing challenges of our times," she said.

Even though the 1951 Refugee Convention declares its aim is to guarantee that refugees may exercise their "fundamental rights and freedoms," millions of refugees are unable to enjoy these rights in many regions of the world, she said.

Many nations are trying to provide "both immediate and durable solutions," but host-countries do not receive adequate support, Di Giovanni said.

"A number of countries have even increased the burden of host communities through an unsustainable strategy of externalization, avoiding direct responsibility for large, mixed flows of migrants and refugees through agreements that stop them, often indefinitely, at strategic points along their journey," she said.

Countries near these areas of crisis "are only as strong as the unity and effectiveness of the international community in extending financial and technical support to first responders and to local populations that are struggling to continue on with daily life," she said.

The Vatican, she said, is calling on all countries "to adopt concrete, meaningful actions, especially in response to the increasing number of grave humanitarian crises."

The urgently needed action, she said, "includes the efficient, judicious and generous concession of humanitarian visas; the launch of individual and community sponsorship programs; opening humanitarian corridors for the most vulnerable; and ensuring family reunification" as well as addressing the root causes of conflict and instability that force people to flee.

The Vatican also insists on protecting the "right to health of everyone, including refugees and migrants, and especially of women and children who are at particular risk in humanitarian situations," she said.

She said the UNHCR executive committee "cannot allow ideology to determine access to healthcare or make it conditional on the acceptance of concepts of health that do not share international consensus or that violate human dignity and ignore religious beliefs."

"Instead, access to health care must be ensured through nondiscriminatory, comprehensive laws and policies that are centered on the good of every human person, and founded on the right to life for all, from conception to natural death," she said.

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