Vatican

Vatican News



Pope Francis delivers his blessing as he recites the Angelus noon prayer from the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter's Square, at the Vatican, Sunday, Feb. 26, 2023. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini)

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Pope Francis will visit Hungary at the end of April, the Vatican said Feb. 27, in a trip expected to focus on migration to Europe and Russia's war in Ukraine.

The April 28-30 trip to Budapest represents a proper state visit after Francis made a brief, hours-long stopover in 2021 to close out a church conference. That visit was visibly awkward, given Prime Minister Viktor Orban's hard-line views on migration and Francis' call for countries to welcome those fleeing war, hardship and poverty.

Since then, Hungary has accepted hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians fleeing Russia's invasion. Francis, who has repeatedly expressed solidarity with Ukraine, met at the Vatican with Orban last April and thanked him for taking them in.

Upon arrival, Francis will meet with Orban, a contentious leader who has centered his political brand around a staunch rejection of immigration and a focus on preventing Hungary from becoming "mixed race."

While Hungary accepted Ukrainian refugees, it has refused to provide weapons to Kyiv or allow their transfer across its borders, and has lobbied against European Union sanctions on Moscow and held up some financial aid packages to Ukraine.

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Francis has been supportive of Ukraine's plight following Russia's invasion -- likening it to a 1930s genocide of Ukrainians blamed on Soviet leader Joseph Stalin -- while Orban has been lukewarm in his support for Hungary's eastern neighbor.

Still, Orban has cast his view of the war as being in line with the Vatican's, saying during a speech Feb. 18 that his government and the papacy were the only powers in Europe advocating for peace in Ukraine.

Francis has also tried to maintain relations with Moscow and the Russian Orthodox Church. Hungary was key in blocking the EU from sanctioning the head of the Russian church, Patriarch Kirill, over his support for the war.

Francis will meet with refugees during his visit, as well as children. On his final day, he will deliver a speech to the Hungarian academic and cultural world, in which he is likely to issue a message to Europe at large.

Francis, who just returned from Congo and South Sudan, has other trips confirmed or in the works this year. The 86-year-old pope, who marks his 10th anniversary as pontiff next month, is due to participate in World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal in August. He has said the Vatican is studying a possible trip to Mongolia at the end of September, after a brief stop in Marseille, France.

This story appears in the **Pope Francis in Hungary** feature series. View the full series.