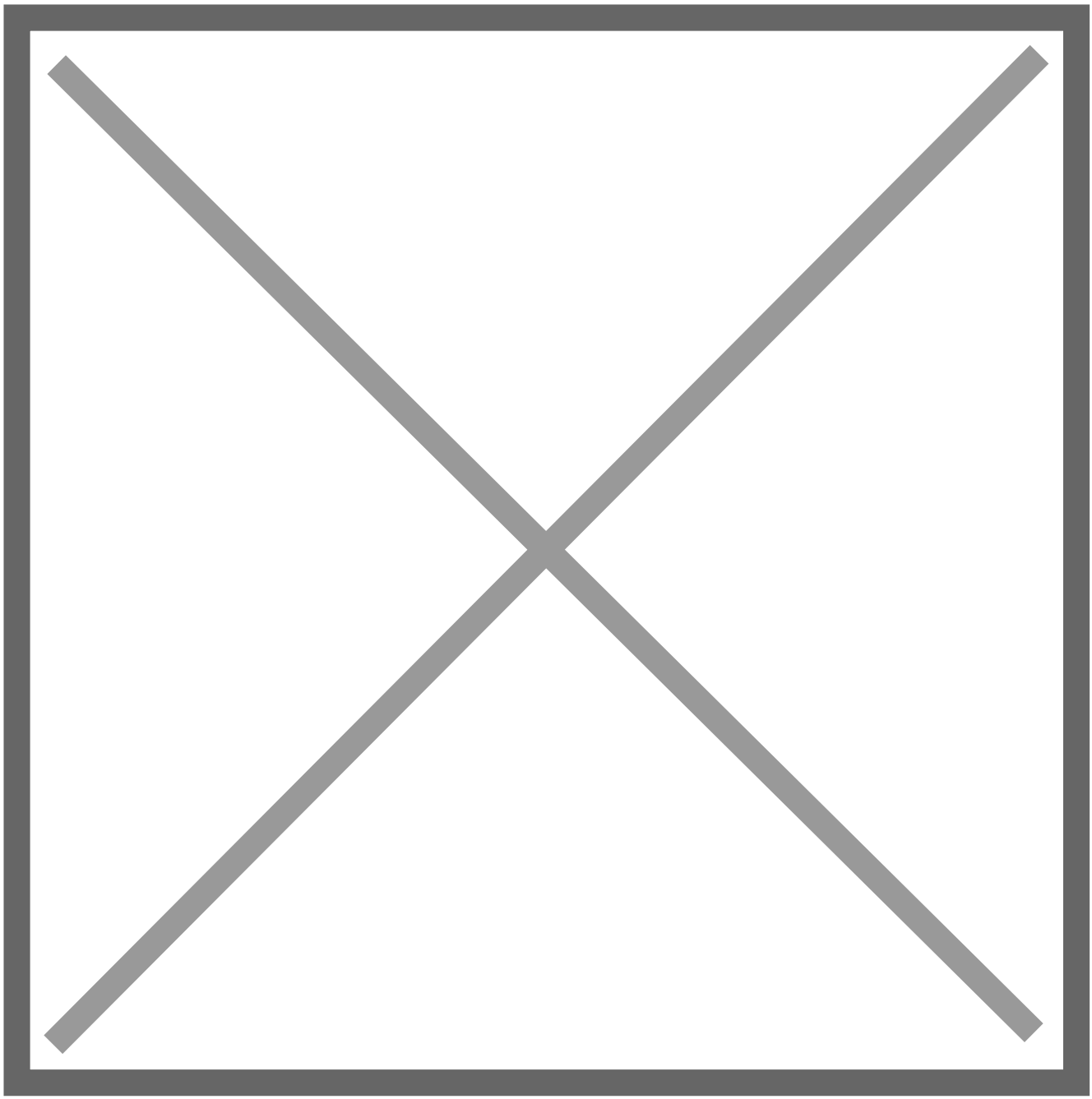
News



Immigrants who are former street vendors work as tailors sewing clothes Dec. 5, 2025, for their own collections to sell in a Top Manta shop in the Raval district of Barcelona, Spain. "Top Manta" is the name given to street vendors in Spain, where mantas (blankets) are used to display goods. (OSV News/Reuters/Nacho Doce)

Junno Arocho Esteves

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Catholic leaders and charitable organizations hailed a government plan to regularize the status of half a million migrants in the country without authorization, calling it an "act of social justice" for vulnerable people who have long been ignored.

The Spanish government's Jan. 27 announcement was in sharp contrast to events in the Mediterranean, where Italian church leaders mourned the estimated loss of nearly 400 migrants in several shipwrecks they said were met with indifference by European authorities.

In a joint statement published after the announcement, the Migration Department of the Spanish bishops' conference, as well as Caritas and the Spanish Conference of Religious, known by the Spanish acronym CONFER, praised the decision, which "has been demanded by broad sectors of society as a measure of political, ethical and social responsibility."

"The time has come to take a decisive step toward a more just and inclusive society, where no one is relegated to invisibility and exclusion," the statement read.

According to the Spanish government's Council of Ministers, the regularization process will grant legal status to migrants who have resided in the country without documents for at least five months prior to Dec. 31, 2025. The measure applies to foreign nationals with no criminal record, including asylum-seekers who filed applications before the cutoff date.

Those accepted will receive an initial one-year residency permit. Once it expires, they will be able to transition to standard long-term residency status under Spain's Alien Regulation Law.

"When social reality is ahead of bureaucracy, the responsible State is the one that acts to order it, not the one that looks the other way," said Elma Saiz, Spain's Minister of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration.

In a video statement, Archbishop Luis Argüello of Valladolid, president of the Spanish bishops' conference, said the regularization process was "a recognition of human dignity and an opportunity to collaborate for the common good."

"The challenge of integrating immigrants continues; the hurdles of cultural integration and the need to regulate migratory flows in our state also remain. This can hardly be achieved without an agreement within the European Union," he said.

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While Church leaders in Spain hailed the process as a victory for migrants, in Italy the head of the Italian bishops' conference warned of widespread indifference toward migrants dying at sea.

According to a Jan. 26 report published in Avvenire, the newspaper of the Italian bishops' conference, an estimated 380 migrants are feared dead or missing after a powerful low-pressure storm system dubbed Cyclone Harry battered the central Mediterranean.

A total of eight boats that departed from Tunisia are believed to have capsized over the week, the most recent one occurring Jan. 25, in which one migrant was rescued while 50 were believed to have drowned, Avvenire reported.

During the Jan. 26-28 meeting of the Permanent Bishops Council of the Italian bishops' conference, or CEI, Cardinal Matteo Zuppi of Bologna, president of the conference, said that the government and society at large could no longer ignore such tragedies.

"We cannot resign ourselves to the logic of death in which hope takes the form of despair, with the tragic consequences we know well and to which we can never

become accustomed," Zuppi said.

In a statement to Avvenire, Fr. Camillo Ripamonti, president of the Astalli Refugee Center, denounced a "progressive reduction in information on migrant movements in the Mediterranean" by the government.

Such inaction, he said, "is resulting in an attitude of irresponsibility, akin to a Pilate-like 'washing of one's hands,'" Ripamonti said.

The head of the Astalli Refugee Center denounced increasingly restrictive migration policies, as well as obstacles to rescue operations, and "the systematic exposure of migrants to deadly risks, in the absence of safe alternatives for those fleeing conflict, violence, and human rights violations."

"The protection of the right to life and the protection of people on the move must prevail over any security rationale and over any border. The Mediterranean cannot continue to be the scene of recurring tragedies," he said.

Echoing those concerns, Archbishop Gian Carlo Perego of Ferrara, head of the CEI's Migrants Commission, called for a joint sea rescue operation by EU member states and lamented the increasing number of deaths at sea "amid Europe's disinterest."

"When will Europe respond to Pope Francis's appeal during his visit to Lampedusa: 'Where is your brother?'" Perego asked.

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.