

**JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE** on  
**FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

---

# Refugees & Forced Migration Learning Hub

Scoping Study on  
Localization & Urbanization  
Webinar

[refugee.jliflc.com](http://refugee.jliflc.com)

# JLI Refugee Hub



## Hub Co-chairs:



Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh,  
University College  
London



Atallah Fitzgibbon,  
Islamic Relief  
Worldwide

## Hub Scoping Studies:

Scoping Study  
LFCs and Localization &  
Urbanization  
(2017)

Scoping Study  
LFCs in the Spaces and  
Stages of Refugee  
Experience  
(2018)

# Localization and Urbanization

Localization broadly includes a shift toward active participation of local actors in the design, decision making and governance processes of response; an increase in the flow of resources to the local level; and a commitment to equity in partnership between local and international actors.

By 2030, it is expected that 60% of the world's population will live in cities and towns and the refugee population mirrors this trend, particularly in the Middle East with an estimated 90% of Syrian refugees living in non-camp settings. LFAs are responding to displaced people in urban environments around the world.

## Local Faith Actors (LFAs)

LFAs include

- local religious leaders,
- informal local faith and worship communities mobilizing in crisis to provide basic services,
- faith networks, such as zakat committees, or councils of churches, and
- formalized local and national faith-influenced organizations.

# Religion, Refugees, and Forced Migration

## Challenges

- Party to conflicts driving displacement
- Lack of compliance with humanitarian norms and standards
- Lack of inclusion in international refugee response
- Parallel coordination structures to international actors
- Lacking capacity and overburdened
- Proselytisation and partiality

## Opportunities



# Provision of Basic Services

## 1. Access to isolated refugee populations

- Lebanon example: “theology of place,” known by the community

## 2. Shelter in religious building for displaced people<sup>1,2</sup>

- Iran – example of gendered inclusion and exclusion for Afghan refugees<sup>3</sup>

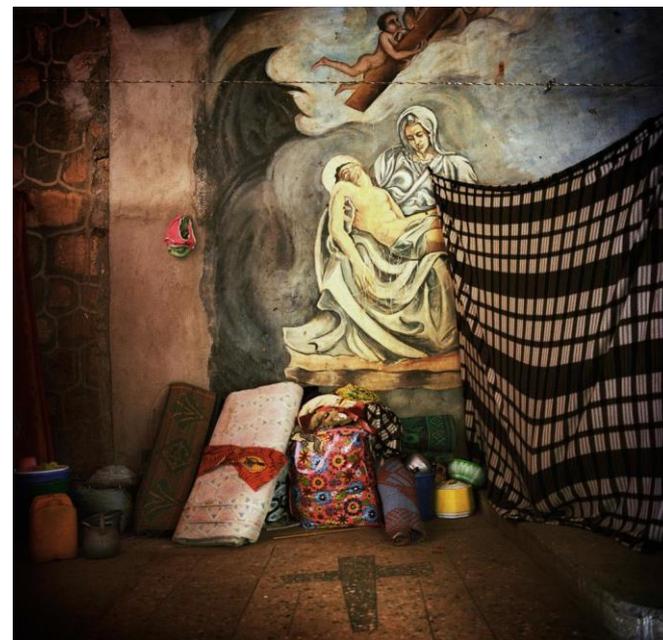
## 3. Inter-religious cooperation for shared resources<sup>4</sup>

- ex. Egypt

## 4. Overlapping displacement with refugees hosting refugees<sup>5</sup>

- DRC – example of churches and mosque established by displaced people then hosting more newly displaced people
- Baddawi camp – see case study A.

## 5. Registration and Refugee Status Determination



St. Theresa's Cathedral, Yola, Nigeria.  
PC: Chris De Bode, The Guardian

# Psychosocial and Spiritual Support

Faith supports resilience to and recovery from traumatic experiences (do LFAs have to provide support at the required standard for mental health and psychosocial interventions?).

Ways to address tension:

- **Religious community as identity** – upholding human dignity by affirming identity and providing stability by upholding community cultural practices and routines. Example of Iraqi refugees in Syria (before war)<sup>8</sup>
- **Religious interpretation of displacement** – secular psychosocial response will be insufficient if it does not comprehend religious meaning in displacement. Example of Iraqi men in USA.<sup>9</sup>
- **Religious leaders support** – their leadership naturally means that people will look to these figures for mental support. Example from Nepal earthquake: religious leaders and secular psychologists provided integrated psychosocial and spiritual support

# Influencing public and political opinion

1. LFCs working to change local public opinion on welcoming displaced people. Example of *desplazados* in Colombia.<sup>11</sup>
1. International faith actors speaking out to change general public opinion. Examples from the Pope and World Council of Churches letter to churches.
1. Religious leaders speaking to politicians in power to influence change. Example of LFC organizing in Australia interfaith advocacy when 112 faith leaders occupied 12 parliament members offices to impact view on refugee
  - Counter example of faith involvement in anti-immigration sentiment in the USA.



Pope Francis greets Syrian refugees he brought to Rome from the Greek island of Lesbos, at Ciampino airport in Rome (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

# Localization for refugee response

- Many faith groups **have always been “localised”**
  - LSESD (Lebanon) as a mediating organization
- **Bias in the international system** – the intersecting identities that marginalize local actors- example Bias against Muslim organizations.
- **Parallel coordination structures** –faith-based networks in various cities working to organize refugee response, but in parallel to secular networks. Example of BASRAN in Bangkok.
- **Challenging the fears of proselytization and partiality**– training on principles and standards for LFCs can engage with fears around impartiality and proselytization to change practices. Example of negotiation from Lebanon.



PC: Chris De Bode, The Guardian

# Case Study 1:

## Refugees-Hosting-Refugees in North Lebanon

**Where:** Baddawi refugee camp in urban Lebanon

**Religious ritual between refugees hosting refugees**

### Before and during every Ramadan

- Local Baddawi residents collect donations (including through zakat) to prepare and distribute iftar food baskets for vulnerable families to break fast
  - distributed irrespective of origin or amount of time in Baddawi
- includes long-term Baddawi residents, refugees from Nahr el-Bared, and ‘new’ refugees from Syria

Other rituals include burial space  
(5 cemeteries shared by Syrians, Palestinians, Iraqis & Kurds)

“I dig for the living, and I dig for the dead “  
- **Abu-Diam, only grave-digger in Baddawi Camp**



PC: Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2017

# Case Study 2: Humanitarian Corridors from Syria to Italy

**When:** 2016-2017

**Where:** Italy

**What:** Community of Sant'Egidio, the Federation of Evangelical Churches (FCEI) and the Waldensian Church protocol with the Italian Ministries of Interior and of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

## Faith context:

- 1000 exceptional visas costs covered by FBOs through fundraising and transnational network contributions
- Replicated for 500 visas for refugees based in Ethiopia w/ reception in Italy and another in France



# Case Study 3: Transnational networks for South-South refugee movement and integration

## Examples

- (1) Rooted in Southern diasporas,
- (2) Offer humanitarian support of varying kinds to refugees,
- (3) Include displaced communities as participants

- The Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), a Nigerian Pentecostal movement operating in 110 countries with over five million followers. It provides social services, especially to displaced communities in the African diaspora. This has led to more active membership and participation in RCCG on the part of refugees.
- The Aga Khan Development Network, originally Ismaili Muslim movement in India & now operates in over 19 countries.
- The Baha'i International Community (BIC) that began in Iran and currently operates in over 180 countries, is now comprised mostly of non-Iranians.  
*“The BIC has partnered with local communities and the United Nations (UN), and has initiated and implemented a host of projects to aid refugees, improve the condition of women around the world, and strengthen global socioeconomic stability—and these are but a few examples of the projects they are undertaking across borders.”*

# Moving forward

- Local faith actors are local actors. As shown by the number of ways that local faith actors are involved in the provision of basic services, their presence cannot be ignored. Humanitarian localization best practice must recognize these groups as **legitimate “ local ” actors**.
- The localization process can learn from **community organizing and faith-based community organizing**. An integrated approach looking at the mobilization of LFCs in situations of displacement is encouraged for future efforts.
- Barriers and biases around partnership with local faith actors, particularly Muslim actors, need to be broken down. A greater **familiarity with the structures of LFAs** is needed.
- **Mediating organizations** or actors with an understanding of both the international humanitarian system and local faith structures can be essential in increasing partnerships and breaking down barriers.
- Psychosocial assistance that integrates elements of **secular psychology with the spiritual support** of local faith communities is needed to provide culturally relevant and appropriate psychosocial support .
- **Research translation and communication** is needed to engage with decisionmakers and promote an awareness of and familiarity with LFA structures for refugee response.
- Humanitarian **coordination**, and coordination lead organizations in particular, must engage more deeply with local actors, including local faith actors.



Photo: Islamic Relief Worldwide

# Hub Co-chair Remarks

## Q&A

# Sources

1. <http://www.irinnews.org/feature/2017/08/15/cathedral-becomes-refuge-last-resort-south-sudan-s-displaced>
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/ng-interactive/2016/nov/03/nigerian-communities-open-homes-hearts-to-refugees-boko-haram-photo-essay>
3. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (ed) “Gender, Religion and Humanitarian Responses to Refugees,” 13.
4. “Local Religious Organisations Performing Development: Refugees in the Central Methodist Mission in Johannesburg,” *Journal of International Development* 27, no. 2 (March 1, 2015): 197–212; Edward Benson and Carine Jacquet, “Faith-Based Humanitarianism in Northern Myanmar,” *Forced Migration Review* 48 (2014), <http://www.fmreview.org/faith/benson-jacquet.html>; Damaris Seleina Parsitau, “The Role of Faith and Faith-Based Organizations among Internally Displaced Persons in Kenya,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 3 (September 1, 2011): 493–512.
5. Elisabeth Yarbakhsh, “Iranian Hospitality and Afghan Refugees in the City of Shiraz,” *Anthropology of the Middle East* 10, no. 2 (December 1, 2015): 106.
6. Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, “Writing the ‘Other’ into Humanitarian Discourse,” 21.
7. Shatha El Nakib and Alastair Ager, “Local Faith Community and Related Civil Society Engagement in Humanitarian Response with Syrian Refugees in Irbid, Jordan: Report to the Henry Luce Foundation” (New York: Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health, April 2015), 7, <http://jliflc.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/El-Nakib-Ager-Local-faith-communities-and-humanitarian-response-in-Irbid-.pdf>.
8. Tahir Zaman, *Islamic Traditions of Refuge in the Crises of Iraq and Syria*, Religion and Global Migrations (Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), 144.
9. Shoeb, Weinstein, and Halpern, “Living in Religious Time and Space,” 449.
10. <https://ajws.org/blog/how-a-community-of-buddhist-nuns-and-monks-bounced-back/>
11. Borda Carulla, Susana. “Resocialization of ‘desplazados’ in Small Pentecostal Congregations in Bogotá, Colombia.” *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (January 1, 2007): 36–46. doi:10.1093/rsq/hdi0225.
12. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/international-affairs/letter-on-european-refugee-situation>.
13. Marcus Campbell, “Christian Civil Disobedience and Indefinite, Mandatory Immigration Detention in Australia,” *Forced Migration Review* 48 (2014), <http://www.fmreview.org/faith/campbell.html>.
14. Shatha El Nakib and Alastair Ager, “Local Faith Community and Related Civil Society Engagement in Humanitarian Response with Syrian Refugees in Irbid, Jordan: Report to the Henry Luce Foundation” (New York: Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health, April 2015), 18–19, <http://jliflc.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/El-Nakib-Ager-Local-faith-communities-and-humanitarian-response-in-Irbid-.pdf>.