

# JOURNEYING TOGETHER

## A Brief Report on the Research Study by JRS (MENA) in collaboration with USJ

The audience on 27 September 2018 at the Gulbenkian Auditorium in the St Joseph University of Beirut campus listened with rapt attention as the findings of a path-breaking survey were presented. Present in the audience were Ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps; UN representatives and some other officials; academics, researchers, humanitarian aid workers and other civil society members. Entitled ‘**Journeying Together**’ the findings of this collaborative research study between Universit  Saint Joseph (USJ) and the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) MENA Region, were presented by Fr. Cedric Prakash sj, the JRS Regional Advocacy and Communications Advisor, who also headed the research study.

The overall goal of the research study was to engage more effectively relevant stakeholders (host community, refugees and others) in Lebanon dealing with Syrian refugees in a constructive and mutually enriching dialogue. These interactions, it is hoped would lead to a better understanding of the refugee’s reality (their ‘brokenness’; living in a ‘fractured’ society; the uncertainty about the future; their return to their homeland, etc.) and policies, assistance projects and behaviours. This hopefully, could ultimately ensure better conditions for refugees, and thus contribute to healthier and safer communities.

Whereas the main inter-related objectives were (i) to better understand the current situation/realities of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon today (ii) to create opportunities for synergies and collaboration among the various stakeholders, to foster continued host communities acceptance and greater empathy with the refugees (iii) to establish a platform through which refugees and members from the host community can express their concerns (about the future, the possibility to return to their homeland, etc.) and to provide ideas and solutions to address them. (iv) to look at possibilities/options for re-strategizing the work of JRS both in Lebanon and possibly in Syria

The rationale of the study included (a) the mandate of GC 36, ‘*Companions on a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice*’ (Decree 1) #26, #36 and (Decree 2) of the Society of Jesus to make our service more effective through **Discernment, Collaboration and Networking** ; and the Society’s process towards discernment of our Universal Priorities (cfr the recent letters of Fr. Arturo Sosa, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus) (b) the call of Pope Francis to respond to the cries of the refugees and the displaced ( Messages for World Day of Peace 2018 and World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2018) to **Welcome, Protect, Promote, and Integrate** refugees; the document ‘*Towards the Global Compacts on Migrants and on Refugees*’ (c) the vision and mission of the Jesuit Refugee Service **to serve, accompany and advocate** for the refugees.

The main findings on the perceptions of the Syrian refugees living in Lebanon on their welcome, their protection and the prospects of their return, were indeed revealing. One hundred and eighty Syrian refugee families from Jbeil, Bar Elias, Burj Hammoud (in Beirut) and Balbek areas of Lebanon, participated in the qualitative survey

The majority of the respondents (71%) did not feel welcome in Lebanon and have experienced some form of hostility. On the point of protection, 72% of the respondents did not experience it.

The key question was also on returns. An overwhelming 77% said that they did not want to continue living in Lebanon; of these 61% want to return to Syria, whereas 16% would like to go to another country. For the remainder, most of them expressed a helplessness and said that they have no choice but to stay on in Lebanon. Most of them expressed fears about returning to Syria; the fears included, what are they going back to? Will they be able to go back to their original lands/ homes (Law 10)? What about employment/ education for children/ other basic facilities/amenities? Military conscription; retribution/ revenge

Several important lessons for humanitarian community, for the academics, for policy makers and for the host community have emerged from the research study. These include on the **Reality of The Syrian Refugees in Lebanon** (their suffering, their **Fears**, the question of their **Return**; on the Challenges of **Accompaniment**; on **Collaboration**; on the **Core Competencies** of an organization like the Jesuit Refugee Service; on the **Re-strategizing of the JRS work** in Lebanon and Syria; on the understanding of concepts like '**Brokenness**', **Accompaniment**; on the urgency, need and importance of '**Journeying Together**' with the refugees, the displaced and with one another.

The Round Table also featured eight presentations by researchers of St Joseph University. These studies were done earlier. The subjects included the mental health of refugees, their legal status, their vulnerabilities.

Earlier Prof Salim Daccache sj, Rector, Saint Joseph University of Beirut in his inaugural address highlighted the importance of studies like these and the urgent need to have a tangible framework to respond to the cries of the refugees. In his introductory remarks, Fr. Nawras Sammour sj Regional Director, Jesuit Refugee Service (MENA) highlighted the importance of collaboration and significance of the spiritual, ethical and political dimensions of the mission of the Jesuits.

Ms Monique Sokhan, Assistant Representative (Protection) from the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), in her concluding remarks expressed her satisfaction at the nature and the depth of the study. She hope that the findings will be used extensively by academics and humanitarian aid workers to help better the conditions of the refugees in Lebanon and to help build more meaningful bridges with the host community

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