RESOURCES BRIEF: FAITH ACTORS AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES

This targeted resource brief provides a selection of works published by academics, NGOs, and faith actors (FAs) on the role that faith plays in contexts of forced displacement. The resources are grouped into the three main areas in need of support as outlined by the Global Compact on Refugees. Within each area, subheadings and keywords are meant to facilitate access to resources on specific topics. This resources brief supports the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities’ accompanying policy brief on faith actors and the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees.

BURDEN- AND RESPONSIBILITY-SHARING

FAs are crucial partners as they represent several aspects of a multi-stakeholder approach, including local, civil society, and faith-based organizations. Engagement with FAs recognizes the place of religious belief and practice for refugees and host communities. FAs enhance response and are involved in coordination with other actors. FAs often act as intermediaries between international humanitarian actors, and local communities, and between faith and non-faith actors. Partnerships with local FAs are hindered by lack of capacity and fears related to religious motivations (e.g., proselytization, extremism), but research shows that there are ways to mitigate these issues and that FAs’ distinctive contribution can be crucial to the mobilization of material and spiritual resources for people who have been displaced.

  - Keywords: humanitarian standards; impartiality; multi-religious staff; spiritual needs; trust-building in assistance; faith-based/secular partnerships; interfaith partnerships; barriers to partnership
  - Keywords: local faith communities/international organizations partnerships; intermediaries; localization; humanitarian standards; professionalism; Jordan; Lebanon

1 The term “faith actors” is used in this brief as a broad definition of stakeholders including, but not limited to, local faith communities, religious leaders, and local, national and international faith-based organizations.
RECEPTION AND ADMISSION

There is evidence that FAs can play an important role in strengthening preparedness, providing immediate reception arrangements, and meeting specific needs (including assessment and referral).

  - Keywords: preparedness; immediate reception arrangements; shelter; transit spaces; Northern Triangle of Central America
  - Keywords: referral, immediate reception arrangements, basic services; spiritual and material resources; Uganda
  - Keywords: immediate reception arrangements; shelter; IDPs; special needs assessment; spiritual support

The roles faith can play in experiences of displacement are not always adequately addressed during Refugee Status Determination (RSD) procedures. Spiritual support during such stages, as in registration and removal centers, is essential.

  - Keywords: challenges in RSD; religious illiteracy; religious stereotypes; faith and belonging; UK
  - Keywords: spiritual support; RSD; multi-religious initiatives; registration and procedure centers; Switzerland
  - Keywords: spiritual support; detention and deportation; chaplaincy services; religious spaces; religious
Arrival and reception stages are not reached by those who perish during their journey. There is evidence that FAs (including faith leaders and faith-motivated refugees) engage in rituals and public initiatives to restore their dignity in/after death.

- Keywords: non-arrival; mourning rituals; local faith communities; dignity in/after death; Spain
- Keywords: non-arrival; deaths at sea; dignity in/after death; religious leaders; visibility of migrant deaths; mourning rituals; Italy
- Keywords: dignity in/after death; burial rituals; refugees mourning refugees; refugee camps; Lebanon

MEETING NEEDS AND SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

Refugees, internally displaced persons, and host communities need the support of a plurality of actors to face challenges such as facilitating access to education and the job market, fostering integration, psychosocial wellbeing, and peaceful coexistence, as well as meeting specific needs related to gender and age. FAs are often providers of education in displacement, both in urban contexts and in camps.

- Keywords: non-formal education; localization; religious buildings; safe environment; holistic approach; Lebanon
- Keywords: temporary education centers; education as humanitarian response; faith and education; education and political agenda; gender-segregated education; Turkey
- Keywords: higher education; faith-based/secular partnerships; faith-based financial support; university; Australia
Faith and religious practices are often indicated as major resources to cope with psychological distress and foster resilience in displacement, particularly for children and youth, as well as for women and older refugees.

  - Keywords: religion as coping; psychosocial assistance; spiritual support; challenges; religious symbols; US; Jordan

  - Keywords: resilience of refugee children and youth; cultural and religious practices; spirituality; Canada

  - Keywords: older refugees; women; resettlement; coping; psychological distress; faith as resource for psychosocial wellbeing; US

There is evidence challenging the stereotype that faith and FAs, as opposed to secular humanitarianism, are always reinforcing gender imbalance and patriarchy.

  - Keywords: humanitarian standards; gender imbalance; faith-based/secular partnerships; gender policy; bridging normative environments

  - Keywords: LGBTQI+ refugees; resettlement; social inclusion; belonging in displacement; digital storytelling; Canada

  - Keywords: gender, Sahrawi, DRC, violence, refugees

Thanks to their community networks, FAs are well placed to foster processes of resocialization in the host society, through facilitating access to the job market and home-making processes in displacement.
Interfaith encounters and multi-religious initiatives can greatly contribute to building good relations and peaceful coexistence in the host society. However, segments of religious organizations and communities have also taken hostile stances towards refugees.

- Keywords: resocialization; IDPs; community networks; access to job market; belonging in displacement; Colombia

- Keywords: home-making in displacement; sacralized home; community and kin networks; religious spaces/domestic spaces; Syria

- Keywords: resettlement; community networks; access to job market; access to housing; interfaith encounters; US

- Keywords: local faith communities; religious leaders; xenophobic violence; provision of food and clothing; donations; interaction with other organizations; South Africa

- Keywords: hostility; anti-refugee attitudes; religious leaders; othering; divided Church; religious discrimination; Poland

SOLUTIONS

Voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration, along with complementary pathways for admission to third countries, are the main durable solutions identified by the UNHCR. Religious beliefs and faith-related factors (including conversion in displacement) can play an important role in decision-making regarding voluntary repatriation and in processes of reintegration. FAs are also often engaged in activities to foster reconciliation and peacebuilding among different communities in countries or regions of origin.
FAs are often key to resettlement programs. They provide services to resettled migrants, and can exert their influence on local communities and national migration policies.

  - Keywords: return; resettlement; religious traditions; spirituality; US
  - Keywords: refugee children; proselytization; refugee camps; conversion; return; reintegration; Christian evangelism; Sudan
  - Keywords: IDPs; peacebuilding; reconciliation; religious leaders; faith communities; interfaith initiatives; Colombia

Complementary pathways for admission to third countries are often promoted and implemented by FAs, as in the case of the long-standing Canadian private sponsorship program, and of some of the more recent humanitarian corridors initiatives.