

Recognising Hosts as Refugees and Refugees as Hosts

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In contexts of displacement, it is increasingly recognised that local host communities are often if not always the first providers of assistance to refugees. However, whilst this recognition is important, the fact that many of these local communities are themselves made up of displaced peoples is overlooked. For example, in Baddawi refugee camp, 'established' Palestinian and Iraqi refugee communities have responded to 'new' refugees from Syria. These refugees as hosts – or refugee hosts – challenge policy makers and practitioners to recognise the agency of refugees, who are also key providers of aid and assistance in many local contexts.

However, this nuanced picture is obscured by the dominant binary of 'refugee *and* host communities' typically reproduced in literature and materials created by INGOs. Instead, I argue that policy discussions relating to local host community engagement must recognise the important role played by established refugees who simultaneously host new refugees.

Throughout the AHRC-ESRC funded Refugee Hosts research project (www.refugeehosts.org), we have been producing evidence that aims to recognise and bring to light the roles played by refugee communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey in responding to the needs of refugees from Syria. In particular, and as I have argued previouslyⁱ, local host communities in the Middle East are often made up of established refugee communities, including Palestinian refugees and Iraqi refugees, who are now hosting refugees from Syria, who have in the past also been hosts themselves – to Palestinians and Iraqis, for example.

This 'overlapping' nature of displacement forces us to re-think the assumptions widely held in practitioner and policy circles that refugees are passive recipients of aid. Through empirical research gathered by the Refugee Hosts project, we are instead able to account for the diverse roles played by refugees in responding to the needs of other displaced peoples. This also emphasises the need to recognise how past experiences of displacement in the Middle East contribute to forms of resilience, as well as motivations for hosting, that are overlooked and – subsequently – under-engaged with by international humanitarian responses.

It is also important to recognise here that efforts to engage refugee communities in humanitarian programmes and initiatives should not unintentionally exclude members of the host community that are themselves members of protracted refugee communities. Instead, by developing policies that recognise the realities of protracted and overlapping displacements can efforts to engage with local communities affected by displacement be more effective and sustainable.

Recommendations:

Agencies and NGOs should:

- Recognise local communities as first responders in displacement situations,
- Recognise that refugees are often members of host communities, rather than creating and reinforcing a binary between 'refugees *and* hosts',
- Recognise that refugees often provide different forms of support to other refugees,
- Avoid unintentionally excluding members of protracted refugee communities when they design programmes for newly displaced groups.

ⁱ Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2016) "Refugees Hosting Refugees" *Forced Migration Review* Vol. 53