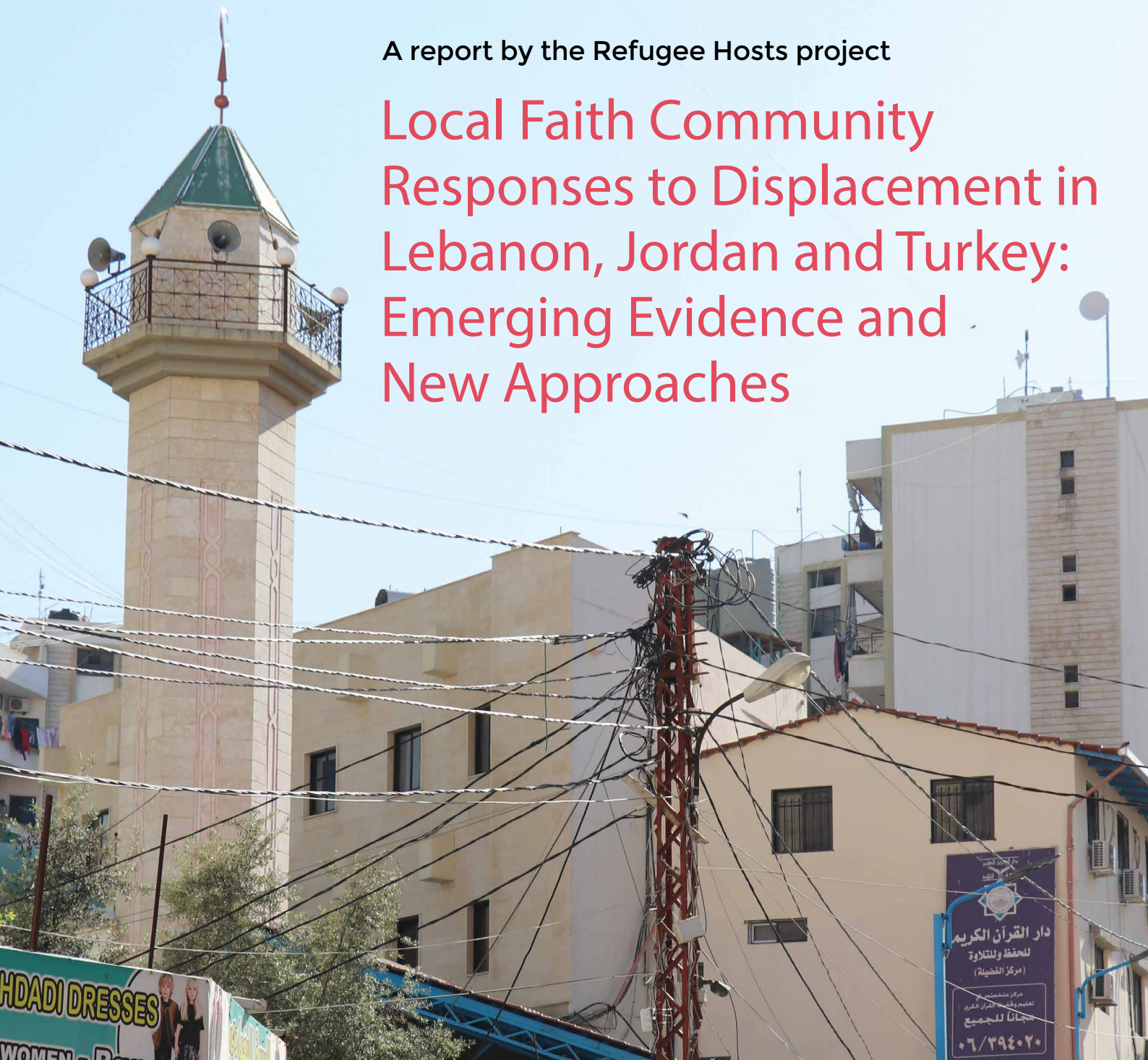


A report by the Refugee Hosts project

# Local Faith Community Responses to Displacement in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey: Emerging Evidence and New Approaches



Refugee Hosts is an interdisciplinary AHRC-ESRC funded research project, which aims to improve our understanding of the **challenges** and **opportunities** that arise in local responses to displacement, both for refugees from Syria and for the members of the communities that are hosting them in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Cover image: Local mosques provide diverse forms of support to refugees living in the neighbourhood of Jebel el-Baddawi on the outskirts of Tripoli, N. Lebanon. © E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, March 2018.

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## Local Faith Community Responses to Displacement in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey: Emerging Evidence and New Approaches

This report has been written by the Refugee Hosts team: Mr Aydan Greatrick (UCL), Dr Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (UCL), Dr Anna Rowlands (Durham University), Professor Alastair Ager (Queen Margaret University) and Professor Lyndsey Stonebridge (University of East Anglia).

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### Introduction

There is a growing interest within academic and policy circles surrounding the roles played by local faith communities (LFCs) and faith based organisations (FBOs) in responding to displacement.<sup>i</sup> This trend contrasts with some of the significant negative and secular assumptions that typically frame mainstream humanitarian engagements with faith groups. For example, humanitarian responses to displacement have been critiqued for their reliance on secular frameworks that too often mistrust faith and religion, seeing them as a problem to be solved rather than as an opportunity to improve and enhance refugee protection.

These assumptions typically stem from a lack of effective knowledge about the ‘interface of governmental, intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations with local faith communities in the course of humanitarian responses,’<sup>ii</sup> and they often emphasise the ‘traditionalist’ and ‘conservative’ nature of religion in contrast to the more ‘progressive’ social and political approach taken by humanitarian actors toward, for example, human rights and women’s rights.<sup>iii</sup>

Understanding and exploring these assumptions is a key priority for the authors’ ongoing research into local community responses to and experiences of displacement from Syria in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. As part of our AHRC-ESRC funded Refugee Hosts ([www.refugeehosts.org](http://www.refugeehosts.org)) research project, we have been investigating how faith both *explicitly and implicitly* informs the ways in which people displaced from Syria are hosted by local communities. Based on our research to date in Lebanon and Jordan, we argue that the role that faith plays in times of displacement is far more complicated than the secular assumptions highlighted above might suggest.

In particular, by approaching faith through a focus on everyday dynamics we can begin to identify the diverse faith-based values that inform the nature of assistance offered to refugees by local hosting communities. Similarly, becoming more attuned to these dynamics may also enable international humanitarian organisations to develop a better understanding of the challenges that exist at the local level, such as the proliferation of exclusionary or sectarian practices, whilst simultaneously reflecting on the theological and ethical traditions that in turn guide ‘secular’ humanitarian work.

The need for more thorough, evidenced-based findings relating to the roles played by LFCs in responding to the needs of displaced peoples is clearly vital. A key aim of our project is, therefore, to better understand the challenges *and* opportunities that exist vis-à-vis local community responses to displacement from Syria, especially when such responses are motivated (either *implicitly or explicitly*) by faith.

This goes beyond an assessment of service provision, and toward a more nuanced engagement with faith and, relatedly, the ‘embedded theologies’ that shape a range of humanitarian practices, and their roles in shaping the diverse, everyday *practices* and *experiences* of hosting, hospitality and hostility which frame the lives, of refugees and hosts alike.

Moreover, as the Refugee Hosts project is evidencing in its research, producing nuanced evidence about the role(s) played by local hosting communities also requires policy makers and practitioners to acknowledge the extent to which hosts are themselves often also established refugees. This raises important questions about the motivations and responses of refugees-as-hosts, in particular how notions of faith-based solidarity and ‘neighborliness’ motivate such communities to offer assistance to other displaced peoples.

Through the Refugee Hosts project, a Religious Literacy Handbook<sup>1</sup> will also be developed in consultation with local communities so that *humanitarian* actors working with LFCs and FBOs in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey can be better equipped to overcome unfounded negative assumptions about faith. We also hope this Handbook will enable practitioners to develop policies and strategies that are more attuned to the challenges and barriers that remain, and the exclusionary practices that can sometimes emerge through a misunderstanding of the role(s) of faith in displacement contexts.

In building on these aims, and the related conversations taking place through the Refugee Hosts research project and elsewhere, a two-day workshop on *Local Faith Community Responses to Displacement* was held in Beirut on 17 and 18 July 2017.<sup>2</sup> This workshop, which was funded by the UCL Knowledge Exchange Fund and coordinated by the Refugee Hosts research project, brought together 21 academics and humanitarian practitioners from faith-based and secular organisations who work on or with LFCs in Lebanon, Jordan and/or Turkey. This report summarises the rich conversations which were had over the course of the two-day workshop, pointing to key issues and themes which require further consideration both within the context of the Middle East and further afield.

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<sup>1</sup> Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2016) ‘Refugees hosting refugees,’ *Forced Migration Review*, 53, September 2016 and Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. and Qasmiyeh, Y. M. (2018) ‘Refugee Neighbours and Hospitality: Exploring the complexities of refugee-refugee humanitarianism,’ *Refugee Hosts*, 20 March 2018.

<sup>2</sup> We would like to thank colleagues at University St. Joseph, Beirut, for hosting this two day workshop. We would also like to thank the practitioners and academics who contributed to this two day workshops. All participant names and affiliations have been removed in keeping with Chatham House rules.

## Embedded Theologies and Everyday Ethics

Throughout this report we will refer to ‘embedded theologies’, ‘everyday ethics’ and ‘everyday practices’ as a way of conceptualising the ways in which the behaviours, attitudes and ideas of both secular and non-secular organisations, communities, groups and individuals are shaped and informed by deeply embedded, socio-cultural world-views. This framework is informed by a desire to bridge the secular-religious divide that often underpins negative assumptions about religion and faith.

As Refugee Hosts Co-I and political theologian Dr Anna Rowlands has argued: *“we are conscious that theological and religious ideas and narratives operate as deep cultural and political forces, shaping our views of time and space, value and purpose. Nor is ‘the secular’ devoid of the influence or presence of theological ideas, despite ‘secular’ world-views remaining at times suspicious of the roles played by ‘formal’ religion in times of crisis.”*<sup>iv</sup>

To this end, conversations that took place during the workshop encouraged participants to consider the ‘embedded theologies’ and/or ‘embedded world-views’ of their own work with LFCs and FBOs and secular organisations alike.

## Context Setting: Why Faith

Faith plays a key role in framing responses to and experiences of displacement on the one hand, and humanitarian engagements with local faith actors on the other. At a most foundational level, it is important to observe the ways in which people affected by displacement are simultaneously the authors and shapers of traditions of hospitality. Faith and theologies play a crucial role in determining the nature of local responses given their footing in shared traditions that can be called upon to demand that assistance be provided in times of need.

In the context of displacement from Syria, many LFCs and FBOs have operated as key providers of aid on local, national and international levels. However, there remains a real challenge when it comes to talking about faith and religion vis-à-vis humanitarian contexts: trying to ‘get hold of it’ is difficult, often because faith can remain implicit or invisible, emerging in everyday activities or through ‘embedded’ customs and ideas that might otherwise seem ordinary and non-theological.

Large secular humanitarian organisations often lack the language to discuss complex faith motivations as they emerge through everyday practices. Where faith appears explicitly, operating in sectarian or political ways, it likewise becomes difficult to discuss for fear that engaging with faith may promote an image of exclusivity and exclusion in organizational responses.

Such an outcome may lead some to assume that one organisation exclusively operates on behalf of Christians, for example, undermining the broader, inclusive aims of specific service providers and organisations. In this way, it may seem easier to work *around* faith, to both accept that it is latent, but also highly present.

Nevertheless, in both cases, the importance of faith – and the need to develop *literacy* around the roles of faith in displacement contexts – appears vital, so that the challenges and opportunities of working with LFCs can be identified and appropriately addressed. Doing so requires us to first develop tools and methods to properly identify the ways that faith ‘comes through’ in the first place, and in relation to highly specific, localized spaces.

In order to effectively approach questions relating to LFCs and FBOs in the context of Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, it is appropriate, and essential, to ‘think locally.’ In this sense, consideration should be given to the locally-specific sectarian, political, social and cultural contexts that exist within different spaces. In particular, throughout our workshop, focus was given to the specific context in Lebanon in which many of the participants operate, and the challenges that this presents when it comes to LFC engagement and refugee protection.

### ***Lebanon: Blurring the Lines Between Religion and Politics?***

Lebanon’s recent political and sectarian history – especially following the 1975 to 1990 Lebanese Civil War and the 2006 War – means that practitioners, displaced Syrians and local hosting communities confront a particularly tense environment in their work. This is amplified by the sectarian demographics of the country, where roughly 27% of the population are Sunni, 27% are Shia, and 40% belong to diverse Christian sects. This contrasts with the Jordanian and Turkish contexts, where Sunni majorities have arguably enabled a more uniform response on the part of faith groups and national governments to refugees from Syria. The relative diversity in Lebanon, and its refraction into sectarian political parties (such as the Shi’ite Hezbollah Party and the Christian Free Patriotic Movement) and socio-economic groups (where wealthier Christian neighbourhoods sit alongside less wealthy Muslim ones) has produced a highly complicated, politicised context for practitioners to operate in.

The context in Lebanon can often shape the ways in which the actions of practitioners who work with LFCs and FBOs are perceived by different sectarian groups. For example, one secular organisation’s work supporting Syrian refugees living in Christian neighbourhoods was perceived by other groups as evidence that this organisation was only interested in “helping rich Christians”.

Other challenges in Lebanon relate to the often incoherent legal and political response to refugees from Syria at the municipal level. New arrivals may set up on a new plot of unused land for six to seven months before being issued an eviction notice by a municipality which claims that this land is in fact not vacant but is instead private property. Subsequently, organisations have learnt to work more closely with municipalities and the needs of LFCs in order to mitigate these sorts of setbacks.

A participant from an international agency reflected on their experience of working in Tripoli (North Lebanon) in 2012 as an example of ‘lessons learned’. The agency’s initial response was to establish support for refugees from Syria within a particular village. However, the municipality was not initially consulted about this, and criticized the

agency for prioritizing the needs of refugees over that of the local host community. In similar situations, municipalities across Lebanon have imposed ID cards, curfews and other obstacles on the refugee population as a way of responding to the concerns of disgruntled local communities, including LFCs. Going forward, international agencies and organisations have developed protocols to liaise with municipalities and specific LFCs before responding to the needs of refugees, so that refugee-host relations are not negatively affected. This report, and the Refugee Hosts project more generally, aims to highlight areas where engagement with LFCs, local communities and municipalities can overcome such challenges.

### Defining LFCs and FBOs

Throughout our research with local communities – including ‘local faith communities’ – in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, the Refugee Hosts research project proposes a need to move towards an understanding of ‘faith’ that goes beyond the sectarianism that it often conjures up.<sup>v</sup> We argue that exploring and identifying how faith informs the responses of LFCs and FBOs in broader, theological ways can add important nuance to the way that such groups are categorised.

Some definitions of faith communities highlight the formal nature of religion in determining the membership and composition of the community: faith communities and LFCs broadly refer to ‘formally-recognized groups or bodies which profess a belief in a superhuman reality and/or god(s) and which worship this reality and/or god(s).’<sup>vi</sup>

In contrast, a ‘faith-based organization’ (FBO) can be defined as ‘any organization that derives inspiration from and guidance for its activities from the teachings and principles of faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within a faith.’<sup>vii</sup>

### Evidencing Faith: Beyond Implicit Markers?

Encountering faith is complex both for refugee and host communities, and for practitioners, policy makers and researchers. The ways in which LFCs are engaged and accessed by diverse actors – including by refugees and international organisations – can be highly context-specific, with certain ‘spaces’ possessing their own explicit and implicit faith markers and faith dynamics. This makes the work of ‘seeing’ faith in displacement contexts difficult, especially if certain assumptions about faith guide an organisation’s engagement strategies.

Workshop participants reflected on the often-held assumption that faith operates in similar ways across diverse towns, cities and camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. However, as organisations and researchers have engaged with LFCs, it has been increasingly acknowledged that faith plays very diverse roles across specific areas, requiring a nuanced approach. In this way, how we ‘see’ and evidence faith must reflect the different ways that faith operates across time and space, encouraging us to engage with the *implicit* roles of faith, as well as the more explicit ones such as those organised by mosques or churches, for example.

Such *implicit* roles might include the ways in which hosting and hospitality are informed by ‘embedded theologies.’ These might come across through seemingly everyday encounters between hosts and refugees that are nevertheless informed by faith teachings and practices. This is particularly true when we examine the theological motivations that may underpin diverse practices of hospitality, such as those - in the words of one of our workshop participants - that seek to ‘raise the soul’ and welcome ‘the whole person.’

In this way, faith can act implicitly as a way of establishing forms of wellbeing for those affected by displacement that go beyond those linked purely to formal rights and material resources. However, there is a need to more fully conceptualize the *implicit* roles of faith in displacement contexts, something that emerged as a point of contestation in the workshop: some participants expressed reluctance to give too much emphasis to examining the *implicit* questions surrounding faith and instead highlighted the urgency for a focus on a more programmatic angle: are the rights and needs of displaced peoples being met?

As such, when it comes to evidencing faith, there is a need to similarly acknowledge the secular, factual, economic and political emphasis guiding UN definitions and strategies relating to LFCs. These emphasize the broader need to ensure that basic rights needs are met, narrowing the space for a broader discussion about diverse, local faith practices.

However, in ensuring that basic rights protections are met and expanded vis-à-vis local community responses to displacement, there is a similar need to question the widely-held belief that it is more inclusive to *not* talk about faith. In contrast, attempting to evidence faith and its role in shaping LFC responses may encourage a discussion about faith that focuses on harnessing mutuality and an ‘ethic of care’ that may promote the wellbeing of displacement-affected communities, and a promotion of their rights too.

How this can be achieved and implemented will ultimately depend on the nature of the evidence that is gathered, and the ways that this evidence is collected and analysed. The Refugee Hosts project is therefore engaging with and evidencing the *implicit* roles of faith, not by asking about religion explicitly, but by taking a more ‘embedded’ approach to the ways in which hospitality and refugee-host encounters are informed by different beliefs and everyday practices.

Such evidence will also have the added benefit of challenging modes of engagement with LFCs that often rely on a set of negative *assumptions* about the roles of faith in displacement contexts that emphasize exclusionary practices whilst failing to ‘see’ the scope for mutuality.



Many participants recalled examples of how LFCs meet refugee needs not typically provided through the more transactional approach taken by secular organisations and NGOs. Whilst the latter provide key emergency support, such as clothes, food parcels and shelter, other important needs remain unmet or are even undermined as a result of the more bureaucratic, programmatic nature of this response. For example, some refugees will not seek out such support from larger organisations or UN agencies because doing so propels them into, by their own accounts, a somewhat faceless system, where they are given a number and left in a situation of relative precariousness. By contrast, beyond the acquisition of aid and support, refugees and displaced people seek out a return to normalcy and dignity, something that can be found through everyday human encounters, especially in contexts of protracted displacement.

In this way, achieving the key humanitarian goal of dignity in the broadest sense of the word requires the creation of a genuine *human* connection, something that LFCs and local communities are arguably better positioned to develop and maintain. This was described in the workshop as ‘raising soul’ or a ‘whole person’ response that built on a deep ethic of care.

Learning from LFCs and their work with refugees could help to improve the ways in which secular organisations work with and support refugee communities more generally, leading to a more humanitarian response overall, one which supports people in a way that enhances the dignity of the ‘whole person’ in contrast to a more basic form of assistance.

More broadly, this might be enhanced through the creation of a dialogue between refugee communities, LFCs and humanitarians, something we aim to contribute to through the production of a Religious Literacy Handbook.

### **Faith and Local Communities: Toward Improved Religious Literacy**

Local communities have, according to one participant, ‘the ability to embrace the whole person,’ to deliver human dignity *alongside* some of the more transactional features of the humanitarian response, such as the provision of emergency resources and shelter.

More broadly, this holistic approach to ‘dignity’, and its relationship with specific local communities and particular shared spaces, plays an extremely important role in the lives of displaced peoples, yet it is rarely spoken about. Finding a language or forms of literacy around *implicit* and *performative* aspects of faith suggests that efforts to enhance the dignity of the “whole person” – arguably a key humanitarian aim – by LFCs *and* humanitarian practitioners can be enhanced rather than overlooked.

## Ramadan Meals in Baddawi<sup>viii</sup>



'Her hands'. © E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, March 2018.

Before and during every Ramadan, local groups of Baddawi camp residents collect donations (including through zakat) to prepare and distribute iftar food baskets with which particularly vulnerable families can break their fast – these donations, collected by, from and for refugees are distributed to families with particularly precarious livelihoods, irrespective of their place of origin or how long they have lived in Baddawi: this includes long-term Baddawi residents, refugees from Nahr el-Bared, and 'new' refugees from Syria alike.<sup>ix</sup>

However, despite these opportunities, bias and sectarianism do inform the responses of some local communities to refugees. Indeed, UNHCR's work with local communities in Lebanon has had to navigate this challenge, where working with one particular LFC may facilitate accusations of exclusion from others. Moreover, while many LFCs and faith leaders actively promote women's rights and gender equality, some LFCs and faith leaders may formally or informally condone certain practices through invoking religious and cultural grounds, such as forced marriage and marital rape, which international humanitarian organisations would formally and publically reject. Can these practices really deliver the dignity of the "whole person"? Or do such challenges present themselves as a major obstacle to effective, inclusive service provision?

Moreover, the ways in which faith is 'performed', and its impact on people's ability to access aid in dignity, remains a challenge. As Fiddian-Qasmiyeh has argued in the case of Sahrawi refugees in South West Algeria,<sup>x</sup> there is a pragmatics to the performance of faith that can be developed as a direct response to the assumptions and priorities set out by aid providers. In this way, the agency of displaced peoples to 'negotiate and mobilize faith in order to enhance their own and other displaced people's human welfare and to develop systems of spiritual, material and political self-sufficiency'<sup>xi</sup> cannot be ignored.

However, the implications of this, in the Sahrawi case, has arguably relied on refugees resorting to performing the role of 'the ideal refugee' in order to secure aid from specific FBOs – the provision of assistance here is dependent upon Sahrawi refugees demonstrating that they uphold an idealised form of 'secular' and 'gender-equal' politics, while 'other' refugees are excluded from aid programmes due to international fears that they are 'non-ideal', or even 'bad' 'Muslims.'

Overcoming these challenges, so that the opportunities presented by LFCs can be fully grasped, is dependent on the ability of researchers and humanitarian practitioners and

policy-makers alike to develop literacy around faith that goes beyond a sectarian focus, and which engages with what our workshop participants referred to as ‘local non-responses’ to refugees.

A ‘non-response’ might refer to an informal response to displacement which does not present itself ‘as’ a response but rather as a way of offering dignity precisely through a return to everyday normalcy. One example from Stefano Fogliata’s research includes the role of informal football matches between different groups of refugees in refugee camps and neighbourhoods in Lebanon. During these matches, sectarianism, faith and other ‘barriers’ to inclusion are negotiated and managed through the informal activity of playing football. This, in contrast to the easily evidenced formal responses initiated by established faith groups, offers an alternate example of how informal ‘non-responses’ can facilitate important improvements in people’s experiences of displacement, community collaboration and engagement.

Fogliata added that this example also presents a challenge to the assumed binaries of inclusion and exclusion set out by humanitarian actors, whereby the relations within and between different football groups defy a straightforward sectarian logic. As such, developing a more nuanced literacy around such ‘non-responses’ and other more formal engagements could enable a more complete and effective response to refugees on the part of humanitarian organisations and ‘faith-based humanitarian’ actors alike.

## **Humanitarian Engagement with LFCs: The Localisation of Aid Agenda, and Beyond**

Humanitarian work with LFCs is often framed by donor priorities and strategies put in place at the international level. Despite the existence of extensive negative assumptions about faith, there is increasing acknowledgement here both of the roles played by LFCs, and the different ways in which faith and religion can help promote meaningful responses to displacement. In particular, workshop participants reported that donors have been quite reflective when it comes to engaging with faith.

Indeed, this speaks to a number of other points raised by the workshop, which highlighted how a growing interest in working with LFCs is part and parcel of a broader attempt to understand and work with those ‘on the ground’ (as part of the so-called ‘Localisation of Aid Agenda’<sup>xii</sup>).

This often leads to a highly institutionalized mode of engagement with faith, through which international agencies seek out local faith-based partner organisations as key implementing partners with the knowledge and know-how to deliver aid and assistance where it is most effective.

However, this approach continues to elide some of the broader points raised during the workshop for it stops short of reflecting on the additional roles that faith can play in enhancing the wellbeing of the whole person. In other words, it aims to adopt the local language, but stops short of the broader epistemological task of reflecting on secular assumptions and the influence they have on the wider international humanitarian system.

In this way, the workshop evidenced a fairly substantial gap between the conversations and priorities taking place at the international level, and those that are taking place locally. In enhancing the localization agenda set out by the UN Grand Bargain, the UN Global Compact on Refugees and the UN Global Compact on Migration, deepening an understanding of faith and theology in local contexts seems essential so that top-down strategies are more sustainable and effective on the one hand, and also more attuned to highly localized practices on the other.

For example, one workshop participant who works with a secular international organization operating in Lebanon reflected on how volunteers' and local partners' motivations to help displaced peoples were sometimes framed in highly religious language. This sometimes conflicted with the organisation's need to provide professional assistance and meet donor needs: the help that some volunteers sought to provide sometimes went beyond basic needs assistance, such as the handing out of aid packages, and extended toward what another participant tentatively described as delivering 'spiritual capital' to those affected by displacement.<sup>xiii</sup>

In this way, there is a need to reflect on the demands of donors and the need to be 'professional' in humanitarian work by asking what this does vis-à-vis humanitarian engagements with LFCs. It is difficult to describe or evidence a clear uniformity in the work of LFCs, yet uniformity of assistance is often a key goal of humanitarian work. In this way, a workshop participant who works with a Lebanon-based FBO argued that there is a need to recognize the local specificities of local practices and motivations to support displaced peoples within donor priorities and reporting requirements.

Nevertheless, the need to approach faith cautiously was emphasized by many of the participants, especially those working for larger international organisations and UN agencies. One participant described working with LFCs as 'maneuvering the waters': there is a challenge to justify working with certain groups both in terms of reassuring donors, but also of practicing inclusivity. As noted above, another participant reflected on how working with particular groups can lead to accusations of bias from others. It can sometimes be difficult to transcend these perceptions, especially when local contexts remain characterized by political fractures or driven by sectarian tensions.

## Theology in Secular Humanitarianism

Given its relatively under-studied nature, during our workshop we had hoped to more concretely grasp 'the extent to which religious identity, belief and practice [...] provide[s] the underpinnings for humanitarian responses to forced migration.'<sup>xiv</sup>

This required not only a reflection of the theological motivations underpinning the work of faith-based organisations, but also of the 'embedded theologies' and worldviews of secular organisations in their understanding of religious affiliation and sentiment. The presumption of a secular discourse in discussing humanitarian issues meant that such conversations were not readily forthcoming or immediately obvious to those in the room, despite the signaling of its relevance in the agenda. However, such an approach is important if we

are to encourage within policy, academic and practitioner circles a conversation about faith that goes beyond what Erin Wilson has described as the ‘religion/secular’ divide in humanitarian responses to forced migration.<sup>xv</sup>

Alastair Ager reflected that the difficulty of bringing to the surface the diverse ways that faith informed the approaches and motivations of the workshop participants could potentially be understood with respect to three processes. One was the concern to maintain a language of ‘objectivity’ and ‘neutrality’ in line with humanitarian principles. Another was the distinctive sensitivity of public acknowledgment of religion in the context of Lebanon, where sectarian affiliation is of such political significance. Thirdly, it was also possible that, for some participants, religious principle and impulse were so deeply embedded that their influence on humanitarian motivation and action was tacit, and therefore ‘invisible.’

The workshop highlighted the need to develop tools that will allow us to ‘see’ and evidence faith motivations and practices in otherwise ‘neutral’ and secular spaces. A first step in this direction would be to recognise that the secular framing of humanitarianism does not represent a ‘neutral’ position but rather one that reflects a specific positionality in philosophical and theological terms.<sup>xvi</sup>

## LFCs and Hospitality

The workshop provided us with an opportunity to examine the roles played by faith in determining the nature of hospitality, and also how hospitality is understood and negotiated at the local level in relation to embedded faith practices and values.

In theological terms, one element of hosting is sacrificial: it is about an obligation to give space and resources to another. For example, the act of hosting requires the host to enter into social relations with the guest, co-residing with them, in turn sharing resources (at multiple levels) such as water, education, health services.

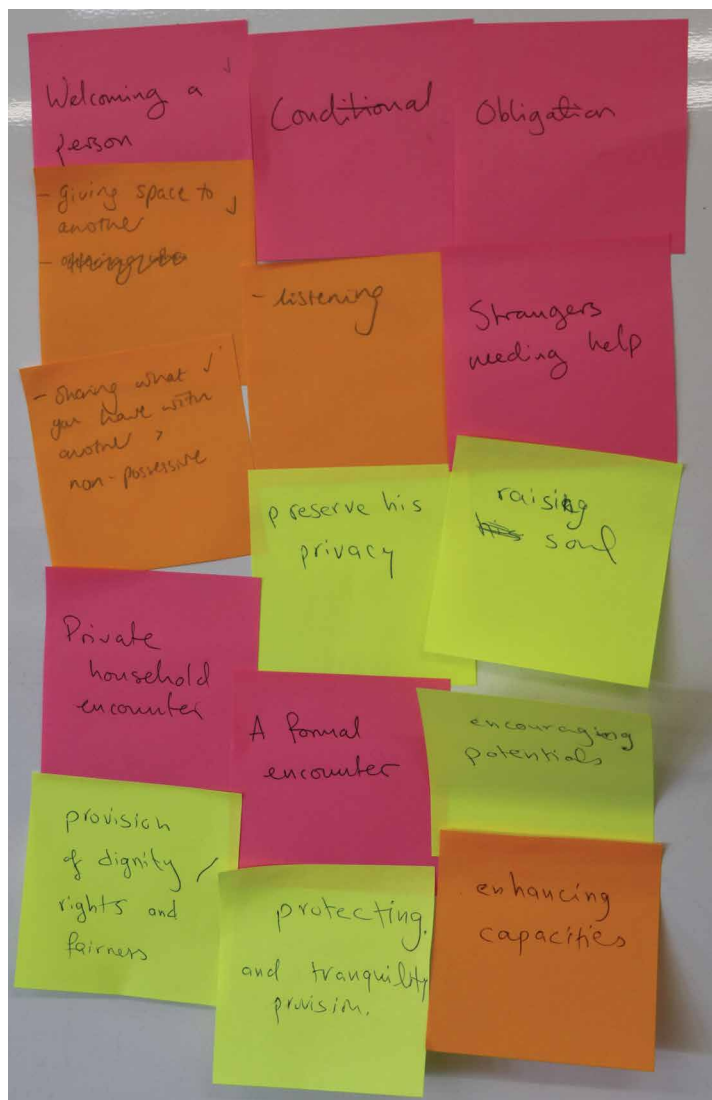
Yet, as we discussed at the workshop, the extent to which the obligation is applied varies depending on the capacity of the host and the limits that are laid down by that host in relation to specific resources. More significantly than that, the decision to share water is not the same as sharing a home. In any case, the act and process of hosting refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey can be described as a *factual* outcome of displacement from Syria, in that it is and has taken place on a large scale within and across diverse local communities. In theological terms, this response can be understood as an attempt to ‘raise the soul’: it is not just about opening the door, but a way of responding to the needs of the whole person – to interact with the guest in a theological sense.

However, this hospitality cannot be taken for granted nor idealized as an instinctive outcome of local compassion. In many instances, refugees from Syria encounter hostile hosts, who may be obliged to share space with displaced peoples but who nevertheless resent and refuse the obligation. At another level, some landlords have been welcoming of Syrians as that means higher overall rents.

Understanding the co-existence of these different motivations is a key aim of the Refugee Hosts project. On this point, discussions throughout the workshop emphasized the need to acknowledge the multi-scalar nature of hospitality, one that encompasses everyday local-level encounters between hosts and refugees on the neighbourhood level, as well as more formal responses initiated by municipalities, states, regional organisations and INGOs.

In this way, adopting hospitality as a framework for thinking about the localization agenda is useful for it allows us to conceptualize the multiple scales or spaces in which responses to the needs of displaced peoples takes place, and to bring these into conversation with one another.

This taps into one of the cross-cutting themes of this workshop: by attempting to proactively evidence and engage with the diverse motivations underpinning responses to displacement (including faith-based motivations) it becomes possible to trace ways to enhance the overall international and state-level response to refugees.



How do local faith communities respond to refugees?  
Key approaches and aims identified and discussed by workshop participants in Beirut. © E. Fiddian-Qasimiyeh, July 2017.

However, in evidencing this, there is also a need to think carefully about the way we conceptualize and discuss communities that host, and what it is they offer to those affected by displacement. For example, how do we distinguish between host communities and LFCs? There is a need to carefully consider the potential overlap that may exist here in light of the broader move to localize responses.

Furthermore, in discussing hospitality and LFCs, there is an important need to remain focused on access to fundamental rights. As one participant who works in an international agency asserted, it is not possible to talk about hosting if key fundamental rights are missing. In this way, it is important to ensure that rights protections are met *despite* the discretionary power of the host community.

However, in ensuring key fundamental rights are protected in contexts of displacement, opportunities to learn from LFCs and theologies of hospitality could be useful. For example, it is important to establish how the ‘gift’ of rights protection is perceived by those receiving them.

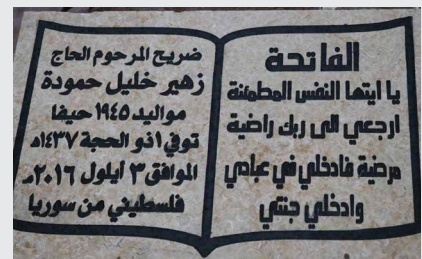
As one participant commented, it is not just about giving someone their rights, but also about making sure the rights are given in the right way. In this way, ensuring a sense of dignity and wellbeing can be just as important to many displaced peoples as receiving basic rights protections. Overall, exploring the local level, faith-based motivations behind hospitality can enable us to bring attempts to enhance and protect basic rights into an overall ‘care ethic’ that simultaneously encourages, in the words of another participant, an attempt to listen to and give dignity to those in need of support.

### Dignity in Life and Death: Burial Practices in Baddawi refugee camp

Local level rituals are organized by, with and for different groups of refugees in Baddawi refugee camp. For instance, the cemetery has been at the core of Baddawi refugee camp from the camp’s birth in the 1950s, and, as time has passed, and as wars have led to new arrivals – Palestinians from other camps, Syrians, Kurds, Iraqis... – the cemetery has outgrown its original space. There are now 5 cemeteries in Baddawi camp, with Syrians, Palestinians, Iraqis and Kurds all now sharing the same soil.

Abu-Diab, the only grave-digger in Baddawi camp, speaks of the pragmatics of dying: **“I dig for the living, and I dig for the dead.”** To live and maintain life, to keep the dignity of the dead and the solace of those who remain.<sup>xvii</sup>

Humanitarian responses that emphasise rights-based dignity in life could learn from such LFC motivations to ensure dignity in death too.



## Reconceptualising ‘Basic Needs’

Basic needs’ in humanitarian situations are often intimately related to the religious identity and belief system of refugees, with local conceptualisations of ‘basic needs’ often transcending secular organisations’ perceptions.

Importantly, as Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh has argued,<sup>xviii</sup> basic needs and dignity must be viewed in relation to the importance that displaced people may give to celebrating key rituals pertaining both to life, *and* to death; indeed, being able to bury a loved one with dignity can be as, if not more, important than what the international community often assumes to be the ‘immediate’, emergency needs for food and shelter.

However, international agencies have often been reluctant, or have even ‘resisted’, displaced people using tarpaulin ‘officially’ designated to be used for ‘living spaces’ to be used as mosques or temple spaces, or even to bury loved ones instead.<sup>xix</sup>

Baddawi refugee camp – one of the neighbourhoods where Refugee Hosts has been conducting research for the past few years - is an urban Palestinian camp in North Lebanon that has been home to ‘established’ Palestinian refugees since the 1950s, to over 15,000 ‘new’ Palestinian refugees who were displaced from nearby Nahr el-Bared refugee camp when that camp was destroyed during the fighting between Fatah Al-Islam and the Lebanese army in 2007, *and* to tens of thousands of ‘new’ refugees arriving from Syria since 2011.<sup>xx</sup> Since 2011, these include not only Syrian refugees, but also Palestinian and Iraqi refugees who had been living in Syria at the outbreak of the conflict and who have found themselves refugees-once-more.

As in the past, this encounter with refugees fleeing Syria situates Palestinians as active providers of support to others, rather than as aid recipients, whilst, equally, reflecting the extent to which urban camps can become ‘shared spaces’, spaces to which ‘new’ refugees can head in search of safety.<sup>xxi</sup> With an estimated 10,000 Palestinian refugees from Nahr el-Bared still residing in Baddawi camp, these ‘internally-displaced-refugees-hosted-by-refugees’ have in turn become part of the ‘established’ refugee community in Baddawi hosting ‘newly’ displaced refugees from Syria.<sup>xxii</sup>

During Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh’s interviews in 2015-2017, refugees from Syria explained that they had travelled directly to, and arrived in, Baddawi camp, where established residents and local organisations offered them shelter, food and clothes. This is in spite of the extreme poverty and armed clashes that take place between factions controlling different parts of the camp.<sup>xxiii</sup> Baddawi camp continues to be perceived by many ‘new’ refugees as being safer than any of the (‘national’/ Lebanese) spaces available outside of the existing Palestinian camps, as they are isolated from the national policies that increasingly restrict refugees from Syria in the country.



## Conclusion and Next Steps

Overall, this report illuminates several new approaches that merit further research. In particular, there is a clear need to recognize the opportunities and challenges that follow from the ‘Localization Agenda’, notably the need for INGOs and donors to work within local specificities, and to recognize in turn the diverse, embedded theologies that frame many local community responses to refugees. This, as was evidenced through the workshop discussions, is often difficult because of a commitment on the part of international practitioners to humanitarian principles of ‘impartiality’, that make many hesitant to explicitly work with local faith groups for fear of appearing biased in favor of one faith group over another. By contrast, recognizing the ways in which faith informs every day, *implicit* and highly *localized* acts of hospitality, or motivates diverse forms of support to refugees, can enable the international humanitarian system move beyond a conceptualization of faith as ‘sectarianism’. This is important because the ‘secular-religious’ divide that pervades mainstream humanitarianism often frustrates, due to misunderstanding more so than intention, meaningful engagement with local communities.

Refugee Hosts will therefore be producing evidence and a Religious Literacy Handbook to better inform practitioners of the opportunities and challenges that exist when engaging LFCs through a lens of local, everyday faith practices. This aim similarly dovetails with additional research conducted by members of the Refugee Hosts team, along with colleagues at Yale University and the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities including in collaboration with UNHCR, and which has been funded by the European Union, the British Council and the Henry Luce Foundation. These additional projects will produce and disseminate further evidence vis-à-vis the role religion plays in supporting refugee wellbeing in specific local and diverse contexts around the world.

Below we have summarized the key points emerging from the workshop discussion and Refugee Hosts research relating to emerging evidence and new approaches vis-à-vis international humanitarian engagements with LFCs.

### **Local level:**

- Encourage a broad conversation about hosting and hospitality at the local level, recognizing that this is often highly specific, leading to unique challenges and opportunities both for the local host community and those who are (not) welcomed into that space.
- Apply a highly localized lens when it comes to determining where responses should take place. This requires us to develop tools for ‘seeing’ hospitality, especially in light of the numerous faith-based responses that exist but which nevertheless remain implicit or ‘invisible’. Linking up with mosques, churches and other faith-based spaces could facilitate more effective coordination to this end.
- Through dialogue with local level responses, efforts should then be made to link back with municipal level efforts. This should enable an on-going learning process both for the highly localized actors, but also for those working at the sub-national, national and international level.

- Make space for and recognize those who may be marginalized at the local level through outreach in urban and non-urban neighbourhoods.
- Enable not only inter-faith coordination, but also intra-faith coordination, given that parallel neighbourhoods may have substantially different capacities but nevertheless similar motivations to support those affected by displacement.
- Create an awareness within faith-based spaces of the need to listen potentially, through offering counsel and prayer – of ‘raising soul’ – and its broader benefits to the wider humanitarian goals of empowerment and dignity highlighted in this report.
- Establish literacy and guidance vis-à-vis the potential for the development of supportive frameworks in otherwise hostile local contexts. These could be more effectively navigated by working with local, municipal and national level faith leaders, and through theological guidance.
- International actors should work with a broader range of local actors and reflect on local experiences and the ways in which they inform local practices of hosting. One example includes UNHCR’s ‘Welcoming the Stranger’ initiative which invites faith leaders and members of LFCs to reflect on their responses to and experiences of displacement.<sup>xxiv</sup>

***Sub-national level - municipalities, towns and cities:***

- Identify and support the creation of sustainable, shared spaces of encounter between different groups of refugees and hosts, and identify - in order to overcome - structural barriers which might prevent people from accessing those shared spaces, and/or which might make those spaces exclusionary in nature.
- Local-level activities should be designed in such a way as to promote accessibility and communality.

***National level:***

- Encourage national-level actors to work with and support local community leaders in such a way that enables them to shape core responses to displacement.
- Support joint learning and multidirectional literacy to bridge the gap between LFCs and the international community, and to work at the national level to ensure diverse LFCs understand convention rights and work to uphold them within their broader work.
- Communicate at a national political level how the allocation of resources between refugees and hosts is just. Working with LFCs here will be a benefit to ensure that this is well communicated and understood.

***International and regional level:***

- Provide equal opportunities for refugees and hosts, taking account of livelihoods and the local contexts that they share. This also requires recognition that refugees often become hosts, and hosts have often been displaced in the past.
- Enable conversations between in/formal faith leaders, community members, and national and international levels that are attentive to gender in particular.
- Ensure good coordination strategies are in place to ensure that international organisations are able to work locally in ways that are sustainable.

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- <sup>ii</sup> El Nakib, S. and Ager, A. (2015) Local faith community and civil society engagement, pg. 2.
- <sup>iii</sup> A comprehensive UCL Migration Research Unit report titled *Gender, Religion and Humanitarian Responses to Refugees* captures the extent of these tensions, whilst highlighting a number of significant recommendations for policy, practice and research. See: Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (ed) (2016) *Gender, Religion and Humanitarian Responses to Refugees*, available at [www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/research/research-centres/migration-research-unit/pdfs/Low%20Res.Gender%20Religion%20and%20Refugees.MRU%20PB.pdf](http://www.geog.ucl.ac.uk/research/research-centres/migration-research-unit/pdfs/Low%20Res.Gender%20Religion%20and%20Refugees.MRU%20PB.pdf).
- <sup>iv</sup> Rowlands A. (2017) "Beyond the Religious-Secular Divide" *Refugee Hosts*. <https://refugeehosts.org/faith-and-displacement-series/>.
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- <sup>vi</sup> Snyder, S. (2009) 'Faith-Based Humanitarianism: The Response of Faith Communities and Faith-Based Organizations to Refugees and the Challenge of Forced Migration', Unpublished Background Paper, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, cited in Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2011) "Introduction: Faith-Based Humanitarianism in Contexts Of Forced Displacement" *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Oxford University Press: 429-439.
- <sup>vii</sup> Clarke, G. (2006) 'Faith Matters: Faith-Based Organizations, Civil Society and International Development'. *Journal of International Development* 18: pg. 6.
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- <sup>ix</sup> Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. and Qasmiyeh, Y.M. 'Refugee Refugee Solidarity in Death and in Dying,' *Refugee Hosts*, 23 May 2017. Available at <https://refugeehosts.org/2017/05/23/refugee-refugee-solidarity-in-death-and-dying/>.
- <sup>x</sup> Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2014) *The Ideal Refugees: Gender, Islam and the Sahrawi Politics of Survival* (Syracuse UP).
- <sup>xi</sup> Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2011) "Introduction: Faith-Based Humanitarianism in Contexts of Forced Displacement" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24(3): 433.
- <sup>xii</sup> Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2018) "Contextualising the Localisation of Aid Agenda: Introduction" *Refugee Hosts* [<https://refugeehosts.org/blog/contextualising-the-localisation-of-aid-agenda/>]; Wilkinson, O. and Ager, J. (2017) Wilkinson, O. and Ager, J. (2017) "JLI Scoping Survey." *UCL Migration Research Unit/Joint Learning Initiative* [<https://jliflc.com/resources/jli-refugee-scoping-lfc-urban/>].
- <sup>xiii</sup> For more on spiritual capital see Ager, J., Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. and Ager, A. (2015) "Local Faith Communities and the Promotion of Resilience in Contexts of Humanitarian Crisis" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 28(2): 214.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2011) "Introduction: Faith-Based Humanitarianism in Contexts of Forced Displacement" *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24(3).
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- <sup>xvi</sup> Ager, A and Ager, J. ed (2015) *Faith, Secularism and Humanitarian Engagement*. Palgrave: New York; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2016) "Gender, Religion and Humanitarian Responses to Refugees" *UCL Migration Research Unit Policy Brief*.
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- <sup>xxiv</sup> UNHCR "Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders" UNHCR [www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/hcdialogue%20/51b6de419/welcoming-stranger-affirmations-faith-leaders.html](http://www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/hcdialogue%20/51b6de419/welcoming-stranger-affirmations-faith-leaders.html).



REFUGEE HOSTS

Refugee Hosts is an interdisciplinary AHRC-ESRC funded research project, which aims to improve our understanding of the **challenges** and **opportunities** that arise in local responses to displacement, both for refugees from Syria and for the members of the communities that are hosting them in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

**Cover image:** Syrian refugees live alongside established Palestinian refugees in Baddawi camp, N. Lebanon. © E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, March 2018.

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