

E-Conference on World Day of Migrants and Refugees (WDMR)

World Day of Migrants and Refugees Global Perspective on JRS's mission and work

Allow to do this by looking at three different pieces of that picture:

1. Reality
2. JRS's response to that reality
3. Challenges and opportunities we face

First typically when we think of refugees we go back to the Geneva Convention of 1951 which offered protection to the people who had fled their homelands based on well-grounded fears because of their ethnic background or religion or other categories. The source of that disruption was a single event, World War II. The resolution of refugees status was fairly a quick one. Many people lived in camps for a brief period of time and the resolution was often called re-settlement. People could move to a new country to start their lives over again.

Single cause, brief resettlement 70 years later, while that image is still floating in our minds is not the true one. Forced displacement these days has multiple causes. Climate change, natural disasters, civil war, resource wars, drug wars, chronic poverty and lack of education. All sorts of reasons which push people, which force people to leave their homes. This displacement is not quick. Forced displacement has become a long-term reality for the majority of the 82 million forcefully displaced people in our world. Refugee camps that were supposed to be temporary are now multi-generational citified realities.

If you spent 5 years in a refugee camp you are most likely to spend 20. 85% of forcefully displaced people live in the developing world protests of Europe and North America notwithstanding. And finally, the majority of that 82 million people did not leave their own country, they are internally displaced in places like Syria, Colombia, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Just because they did not leave their country does not mean their situation is any better. And while resettlement continues to be the dream for many, it is a dream with a closing door. Over the last decade proportionally the number of people resettled each year is small. The current crisis in Afghanistan may bump that slightly. But the reality is that most people will continue to live where they have arrived. A refugee serving agency like JRS, our primary focus is to offer protection for those vulnerable people who are forcefully displaced. What that looks like in long term displacement needs to be change and in fact has changed. JRS was founded in 1980 by Fr. Pedro Arrupe, the then Superior General of the Society of Jesus. He was moved with compassion by the Exodus of the Vietnamese refugees in the late 1970's more than a third of them died in the oceans, leaky boats, pirates and storms et cetera.

His own experience as a refugee, he'd had to flee his native Spain during the Spanish civil war. As experienced working with Korean migrants in Japan and living through the Atomic bomb in Hiroshima gave him a compassionate heart in response to this crisis. But even then while JRS was founded in response to Vietnam, Ethiopians were fleeing famine and arriving in Rome in the early 1980's and at the same time we were accompanying Vietnamese refugees in camps, we were offering food and shelter and other services at Centro Astalli connected to the Society of Jesus home church, the Gesu in Rome. JRS has always been an international reality. When Father Arrupe founded JRS he did not want us to be like a business, looking at numbers. He insisted that our work be humane, pedagogical and spiritual.

These three attitudes have been distilled into a word that really describes our way of proceeding these days...accompaniment.

JRS walks with forcefully displaced people. We listen to their stories and from that listening and with those people we develop the programs and interventions that make the most sense to give them protection, to restore dignity, to give them and their families hope in the future.

This closeness is our hallmark and I'm so proud of the way JRS does what it does.

So what are we doing in this time of extended global displacement?

Over the past few years we have developed a strategic framework that focusses on four different types of service for intervention that we think makes the most difference for who we are "Catholic Jesuit" organisation relatively small, where we can make the biggest difference in people's lives.

These 4 areas are:

1. Reconciliation
2. Mental Health and psychosocial services
3. Education and Livelihoods
4. Advocacy

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is an important theme of Pope Francis and it has been an important directive of the Society of Jesus for many years.

Reconciliation means different things in different contexts, but fundamentally it means the re-weaving of society, or reconnecting communities that have been torn for whatever reason and this coming together takes place in many contexts, different refugee communities, within a particular refugee community or refugee communities learning to live with local communities. Our reconciliation work strives to find the commonality and people's experience, and wherever possible to build that commonality in faith experiences. And for us it is not enough to talk about faith, or commonality, it is to develop projects that benefit all sides, that give more stability, that give more opportunity for hope and resilience for locals and refugees together.

Psycho-Social Support

Being forced to leave home is traumatic. And the roads, the journeys that many people take are even more traumatic. When they arrive in a city or in a camp where we are, we do our best to attend to those

stories, to listen to the trauma, to listen to the heart, so that it can be let go off, not forgotten, but not to be the primary experience that people live out on. We do this through groups, play, art, individual counselling. All designed to re-ignite and re-establish the hope that people had when they left home, so that they continue to build on that hope and offer to their families and friends.

Education and Livelihoods

We are a Jesuit group so of course we take education seriously, but traditional refugee work puts livelihoods in a different bucket. We see the two of them needing to be joined because if you are going to stay in one place your education needs to be oriented towards success in that place, employment or your own business or participation in the broader society so that you can put food on the table and send your own children to school. Obviously, we cannot do everything in JRS when it comes to education, but we do focus in some particular areas:

1. Teacher training (both as employment and to improve overall educational quality)
2. Keeping girls in school. Especially through high school and university, because a young woman with an education has much better outcomes for herself and her family.
3. Special needs children. Often hugely forgotten in many of the areas where we work.
4. Our newest type of intervention programme is called Path Finder. Which is to work with those who have finished high-school to help them find the right step forward in terms of employment or self-employment through some training, some opportunities through finding a job, finding an interest that meets needs in the communities where they live.

Education can no longer be focussed on resettlement. What will look good on my transcript over there. Education needs to be focus on building a life here and we are committed to doing so.

Advocacy

Works on many levels, keeping particular person safe or struggling to find peace in a number of situations. And most importantly advocacy aims to give those we serve their own voice to make them participants in their own future through the experience of reconciliation and healing in education and training. They have a voice and vision to say this is who we are, this is where we want to go. This is how we can fulfil what God invites us to do. Those aren't the only things we do, it is the focus of what we are doing or why. Finally some opportunities not just for JRS but for all of us:

1. *Sustainability*

I look at sustainability in two ways:

One is the obvious one in a world of decreasing resources for marginalised people of unjust economic structures, how do we keep what we do going? But I think that it is even more important when it comes to the people we serve, unless our programmes are sustainable in their quality, in their meeting the needs, we shouldn't be doing what we are doing. Too often all of us fall into doing the same old, same old. Sustainability means sustaining the lives of those we serve through programmes that really make a difference and I think if we do that we will find the financial support that we need.

The **second** opportunity for all of us is to more deeply involve the people we serve in our work. As I said we accompany people well, and I think there is an opportunity for us to further involve those we serve in the planning and development of programmes. How do we treat people with dignity from the very onset? A lot of times we come as experts, but those we serve are actually the experts on their own lives, and that expertise needs to be part and parcel of anything we do.

And finally a particular challenge that I'm excited about is making sure that our mission comes from the ground up. It is really important for all of us now to do our best to help local operations, local projects, local staff, local people. To have an ability to discern what they are being called to do, what the Lord is inviting us to do. Where we are called to serve best. That can be something done in Rome or in the country office it has to be done at the grassroot level, how to do that is not quite clear yet but isn't that true for all of us especially for the church right now in what Pope Francis is trying to do with synodality. To build that sense of mission and evangelisation from the ground up. It is our opportunity and challenge as well. Let me end where I began. Thank you for allowing me to be apart of this celebration. Thank you for doing what you do on behalf of migrants and refugees.

God bless! May the Lord continue to inspire all of us in our work.