

For Immediate Release



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“AUB4Refugees” second forum: Tackling Fatigue and Building Resilience for Refugees and Hosting Communities

The “AUB4Refugees” second forum, organized and hosted by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), was held over two days, November 27-28, 2018, offering a platform to discuss the difference aspects of the Syrian refugee crisis’s impact on refugees themselves as well as host communities.

The “AUB4Refugees Initiative” was launched in September 2016 as a university-wide initiative to bring together AUB community members working on addressing the impacts of the Syrian refugee crisis. It aims at nurturing cooperation and building partnerships on campus and beyond to deal with the repercussions and effects of the refugee crisis. The initiative strives for impactful research, community-based teaching, and engaged practice. Every year, the “AUB4Refugees” Forum is held to showcase research projects and interventions that various AUB faculties, institutes, centers, and student clubs or societies have been carrying out in response to the protracted refugee crisis in Lebanon and abroad.

During the forum’s opening session, AUB President Dr. Fadlo R. Khuri said, “Lebanon—which provides protection and support to realistically a million and a half Syrian refugees, in addition to anywhere between a 175,000–500,000 Palestinian refugees, and 50,000 Iraqi refugees—has doubtless saved countless lives, and there’s a positive element to that.” He added that as a country, and as a university, “we can do better.”

“The protracted nature of the war, and the fact that some refugees have been in this country for more than seven years, indicates that we will have to do better.” He continued, “It is exactly at times like these, the role of the American University of Beirut has to be larger, perhaps larger than we had previously imagined. As an institution, we have always rallied to the cause of vulnerable groups and those who are least fortunate.”

Khuri also spoke about the commitment of AUB, through its seven schools and faculties as well as the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, “to creating a more welcoming, a more engaging, a more egalitarian and prosperous world, to act as an advocate for those who do not have other advocates.” He added, “Our faculty, staff, and students have been strong and enthusiastic supporters of the university’s vision.”

IFI Director Dr. Tarek Mitri spoke next stating that, “the process towards a global compact with refugees, almost reaching its completion, has clearly signaled the necessity of engaging academic institutions. AUB4Refugees responds to this invitation as it is meant to integrate individual research interests into a collective engagement.”

He added, “Much is said, sometimes lightly, about the dialects of fatigue and resilience. More evidence based analysis and a reaffirmation of our ethical commitment to advocate the rights of Syrian refugees and those of their host communities is a renewed urgency.”

Mitri continued, “The real problems pertaining to the Syrian refugee problem are not only related to the means of assistance. The political failure lies in the inability of the international community to address the causes and root of the refugee problem. Many countries seem to be more preoccupied in containing the refugee movement at the expense of refugee protection until conditions for their voluntary and safe return are ripe.”

UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Philippe Lazzarini also spoke at the opening session. He said, “There is something unique to Lebanon and the Lebanese who once more have demonstrated their ability to deal with the most extreme situations. I hardly can imagine any other country having such a high number of refugees per capita and showing such a high degree of acceptance and solidarity despite the anxiety and uncertainties this crisis has triggered. However, it is no secret that Lebanon is now stretched to its limits... With the protracted nature of the crisis in Syria, both Syrians and Lebanese are facing deepening vulnerabilities and struggle to make ends meet.”

Lazzarini added, “While some returns to Syria are taking place, it is clear that it will take time for major obstacles to return to be removed. This means that a large number of refugees will continue to be in countries, at least in the foreseeable future.”

He continued, “Even if the crisis ends today in Syria, Lebanon will need support in the transition phase. Meanwhile it is our collective responsibility to provide support to Syrian refugees to ensure them to live in dignity, while at the same time, we also continue to support Lebanon and the Lebanese to mitigate the impact of the crisis.”

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representative Mireille Girard delivered the final speech at the forum's opening session, saying that eight years since the beginning of the refugee crisis in Lebanon we are approaching a cross road. Unsurprisingly, strain on services and competition over job opportunities is increasing. And although Lebanon's immense resilience to the Syrian crisis remained evident throughout 2018; host community fatigue is on the increase and the debate around the continued presence of the refugees and the need to see increased returns is rising. Girard added that self-organized or group returns facilitated by the General Security are taking place at a steady pace these days; thousands have returned and it is their right. Yet, return will be gradual for a large number of refugees, key obstacles to that return remain, and they must be tackled.

This year's forum, titled Tackling Fatigue and Building Resilience for Refugees and Hosting Communities, was organized over six multi-disciplinary panels: tackling fatigue in host communities and among refugees; building resilience in health; building resilience in education; building resilient livelihoods; students reacting to the crisis; and future prospects for Syrian refugees, and the safe and voluntary return.

The forum was attended by representatives from the Lebanese government, NGOs, the United Nations, and civil society groups, who discussed ways to improve or enhance interventions that tackle the needs of refugee and host communities.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,100 students. AUB currently offers more than 120 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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