

Refugees = Partners Media Round Table

**اللاجئون شركاء**  
REFUGEES = PARTNERS  
في الإنسانية، في المسؤولية

## Bridging the Data Gap between Media & Research: Challenges and Responses

Beirut, Lebanon, February 2020

### Position Statement

In the presence of several researchers and media professionals, “Refugees=Partners” organized a media round-table discussion titled “Bridging the Data Gap between Media and Research: Challenges and Responses”, on Thursday, 6 February. The roundtable aimed to discuss the availability of quantitative and qualitative data regarding socio-economic indicators of refugees in Lebanon, and accessibility to credible and up-to-date information. As well as the media’s ability to counter anti-refugees' narrative and discourse using numbers and facts.

#### **Media Roundtable Main Outputs:**

Currently, certain countries have employed identity politics and populist anti-refugee and migrant rhetoric to polarize socioeconomically marginalized groups as a means to avoid addressing their internal political and economic turmoil... Divisive discourse on refugees and migrants often relies on an agnotological approach, and features the dissemination of misinformation that are portrayed as facts.

The rise of anti-Syrian refugee rhetoric in Lebanon has induced a reluctance to integrate Syrians into any national economic development plan, which also served to exclude refugees from the labor market in Lebanon. The failure to include refugees has prevented the economy from taking advantage of the influx of the human capital and low-skilled and low-cost laborers which has resulted in lost opportunities of financial gain and the prospects to build a sustainable economy.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance to address this exclusion and to develop policies that not only incorporate the human capital provided by Syrian refugees, but also to do so in a way that compliments Lebanese host communities.

Participants also emphasized that discourse surrounding refugees primarily relies on sensationalist and often fictitious content in the mainstream media as well as in the language used by politicians. Most mainstream media outlets are funded by political parties and are thus more likely to disseminate information that is biased and complements their political agenda. The dissemination of misinformation on refugees has been reinforced by the fact that there is an absence of an accessible administrative body that provides clear and specific data about refugees that acts as an intermediary between journalists and researchers.

In addition, the voices, needs, and demands of refugees are predominantly absent in traditional media, and refugees in Lebanon are denied the opportunity to be represented in campaigns. Refugees are also reluctant to ask for their rights or to participate in advocacy out of fear of being persecuted and deported.

Alternative independent media are instrumental in deconstructing and countering the narrative surrounding Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Since independent and alternative media are not funded by politicians and political parties, they can therefore portray refugees from a different more positive and objective perspective based on facts and figures. However, facts are not enough. In order to counter stereotypes, alternative media should produce innovative content that combines both facts and humanizing techniques.

Presently, the media has encountered a change in content delivery mechanisms according to the target population. For example, targeting residents in remote and distant areas depends on their confidence in the news source. Small and limited media groups run by influencers and community leaders (Facebook and WhatsApp Groups) have become more credible to these residents in comparison with established media channels. This requires researchers and media professionals to address and monitor these developments.

Another major challenge in countering the narrative surrounding refugees is the limit in reach to broader audiences that hold different opinions and are often guided by emotions rather than facts and information. Audiences often receive misleading content and messages about refugees through social media, and often forward this misinformation to their circles, (some of which finds its way into mainstream media). Influencing this audience requires the participation of filmmakers, scriptwriters and producers in creating content that contributes to easing the hostile discourse surrounding refugees. It is essential to create coalition-based advocacy that reduces the negative perception of refugees in host communities.

It goes without saying that the recent revolutionary protests in Lebanon did not use the protracted racist and sensationalist rhetoric towards refugees. The main demands of the mass movements were not related to the deportation of refugees as a solution to end the crisis, which confirms the rise in awareness of the public and its ability to understand the critical social and political context of the reality of Syrian refugees.

In conclusion, the media round-table focused on the need to enhance cooperation between research centers, academic institutions and NGOs on one hand and journalists and traditional and alternative media on the other hand. In order to bridge the gap in the data and information needed by each party to produce studies and conduct surveys, a coalition of journalists, researchers, media professionals and academics should be formed to collaborate on developing a media strategy that is based on both facts and emotions and targets a variety of audiences on social media platforms that is suitable for audiences on social media.