

MIGRANT MINISTRY REPORT IN AFRICA **DURING THE** PANDEMIC CRISIS



GOOD PRACTICES
MARCH - DECEMBER 2020

2. EGYPT, SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO - THE WORK OF SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO WITH AND FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS IN EGYPT

(ALSO PROMOTE, INTEGRATE)

PROJECT NAME: The work of Salesians of Don Bosco with and for refugees and migrants in Egypt

ORGANISATION: Salesians of Don Bosco

AREA OF ACTION AND COUNTRY: Egypt

PERIOD: 2020

The following is a description of the initiatives led and implemented by the Salesians of Don Bosco with migrants and refugees in Egypt, to improve their living conditions as a vulnerable and marginalized segment in the country. This was done mainly through educational and economic empowerment manifested in literacy programmes, after school support, skills development and entrepreneurial support in order to secure livelihoods.

The Salesians run 3 centres in Egypt through which they offer their services: (1) The Salesian Technical School in Cairo, established in 1926; (2) The Don Bosco Alexandria Institute-DBAI is an educational institution established in 1924 located in the heart of the city of Alexandria; (3) The Don Bosco Salesian Church in Zaitoun, established in 1988, is a centre providing spaces of exchange between Sudanese and Egyptian youth through recreational and educational activities. On a yearly basis, the centre welcomes around 200 Sudanese and 220 Egyptian youth who benefit from psychological counselling and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

The Planning and Development Office (PDO) of Don Bosco in the Middle East is headquartered in Bethlehem. In response to the need of a country office in Egypt, a local antenna was opened accordingly in January 2018. The PDO Middle East operates in all countries within the Middle East Province including Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Egypt and Syria. The PDO is engaged in strengthening the educational offering of Don Bosco institutes, enhancing opportunities in Don Bosco youth centres and providing livelihood and social support to refugees and migrants.

During **2020**, the Salesians executed **three separate** projects in Egypt which targeted **refugees and migrants**:

A. 'The Sunrise Project for Cairo's Urban Refugees and Local Hosts' took place from 1 August 2019 to **31 July 2020**. It was **entirely** financed by the US Dept. of State and implemented by **Salesian Missions**, noting that it has been running on an annual basis since **2014**. Moreover, the PDO of the Salesians Middle East Province was the project's coordinator.

Since the beginning of the 2019 financial year, the Sunrise Project team aimed to outperform previous years. After a successful outreach and registration period, 689 beneficiaries were enrolled in the project (**85% refugees**, 53% females). This included 629 who were registered for TVET courses and 60 for the microenterprise unit. Collectively, their households represent 1,332 indirect beneficiaries. However, the spread of the global COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted the project's implementation and the achievement of target indicators. In mid-March 2020, the national government instituted a country-wide curfew and closed schools through the end of the project extension period in September.

The shutdown affected all aspects of the project, from the health and safety of holding livelihood training to the labour and market environments for finding employment and starting up micro-enterprises. As a result of the lockdowns, Sunrise staff swiftly transitioned to adapting project activities for online delivery, adjusting assistance, and heavily emphasizing health and safety precautions. The project timeline was also extended through September to allow more time for small group training activities and the coordination and distribution of much-needed cash assistance.

Objective 1: Increase sustainable livelihood opportunities for 1,200 **Sub-Saharan African refugees** and vulnerable Egyptians over the age of 16 through 3 months of market-linked technical vocational education and training.

The participants were 48% male, 52% female, 17% Egyptian and **83% refugee**. The provided courses included AutoCAD, Mechanics, sewing, oxygen welding, air conditioning, basic electricity, nursing and hairdressing. This brought the cumulative total of beneficiaries to 299 successful graduates.

Objective 2: To empower **600 participating TVET trainees** for successful employment outcomes by providing market access, entrepreneurship workshops, and valuable linkages to facilitate their transition to formal and informal job markets. Participants were 54% male, 46% female, 20% Egyptian and **80% refugee**.

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The economic empowerment and entrepreneurship training, along with the life skills and mental health training were adapted for online learning. Furthermore, topics on employability help enhance the job readiness of TVET graduates through learning CV writing, preparing for interviews and selecting a profession in the market. As an incentive for completing the livelihood training, toolkits were distributed to 195 of the highest performing trainees, 95 more than originally planned.

As for the seed grant micro-enterprise component of the project, 60 beneficiaries between the ages of 24 to 52 received \$650 in seed funding to start their small businesses. Nearly 2/3 were female and nearly 2/3 were refugees. 3/5 of entrepreneurs are their household's breadwinners. Collectively, the family members of the micro-entrepreneurs represent 305 indirect beneficiaries.

A little over half of the projects were home-based. Moreover, 75% of the entrepreneurs were able to keep working and have adapted their business during the pandemic. Finally, net profits for the micro-enterprises ranged between £100-2000 EGP, with an average of £500 EGP and nearly 1/3 of the small business owners have been able to start building up savings.

Objective 3: To improve the quality of life of 1,200 beneficiaries through coordinated health, nutrition, and wellness activities. The distribution of food vouchers and other allowances were delayed from the third quarter due to the pandemic. However, food and other assistance were modified to better meet their acute needs during the pandemic. Based on the number of training sessions attended, beneficiaries received grocery food vouchers of \$25. Additionally, 399 beneficiaries also received an extra \$118 in cash assistance to cover needs for housing, food, and hygiene. A total of 298 sanitisation kits containing PPE and hand sanitizers were distributed. The life skills component was re-designed to respond more fully to beneficiaries' needs. 149 beneficiaries attended life skills training in the fourth quarter, and cumulatively 437 beneficiaries attended life skills training. In this course, beneficiaries learned important life skills including self-awareness and communication. Also, a mental health component was added to promote positive stress reduction, healthy coping techniques, and anti-bullying practices.

The Sunrise Project has proved to encompass an array of good practices. The positive impact it had was manifested through 299 Sub-Saharan refu-

gees and vulnerable Egyptians that have acquired vocational training and successfully graduated from their respective courses; psychological support to refugees; hygiene and self-care support; and nutrition and medical support, which all had an instant and potentially long-term impact.

B. The following activities taking place in Alexandria and Cairo were financed by **Misiones Salesianas** in the framework of a comprehensive project and coordinated by the Planning and Development Office of the Salesians Middle East Province throughout 2020.

(1) Educational material (booklets, books, stationery) & school materials & clothes and shoes for poor kids: As COVID-19 has hit our beneficiaries, rendering them even more vulnerable, in order to lift off some of their financial pressure, 100 kids were supported with educational materials and stationery in addition to clothes and shoes to cover different needs. (2) Sports materials: Sports materials were purchased in order to improve the sports facilities and commence sporting activities at full capacity once the pandemic is over. (3) Financial help for medical assistance: **115 refugees** and 35 Egyptians were assisted through coverage of medicine costs, especially after the pandemic as they can't afford their medicines. Most of them are suffering from chronic diseases. (4) Food and snacks (Emergency from May): Since **May 2020**, **121 refugee** and 187 Egyptian families were helped to overcome the economic situation as most of those families lost their source of income. (5) Confronto Egypt **2020**: The confronto event is meant to be the communication bridge between the Salesians and the youth to deliver the Salesians' message and their principles. In **February 2020**, at Wadi El Natron in Egypt, the confronto was held for 3 days between 6-8 Feb. The event, which came under the slogan "Honest citizens and good Christians", was organised by the Salesians of the Middle East with the participation of 89 youths, both nationals and **refugees**, coming from different Salesian Houses in the Middle East and Italy. (6) Support: Psychological support in facing life's challenges and after-school support (Arabic Teacher & Mothers Literacy teacher) were provided, but due to COVID-19 those activities stopped in March and April 2020 respectively.

C. The project titled "**Educational Support to vulnerable Egyptian and Sudanese students**" was **supported by different Salesian NGOs and charities**, and was coordinated by the Planning and Development Office of the Salesians Middle East Province. The project took place in Don Bosco schools and institutes in Cairo and Alexandria.

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The Salesians intended to provide meaningful support to students by reducing the economic impact of education-related costs on their households, which are also considered indirect beneficiaries. The average beneficiary family size is estimated to be four members. Therefore, this support will serve around 700 indirect beneficiaries during the 2020/21 school year. In general, 4,624 indirect beneficiaries' quality of life improved through the strengthening of their children's skills and improving placement and employment opportunities, in response to a rapidly developing technological work environment. Although this particular project's beneficiaries were predominantly vulnerable Egyptians, **170 Sudanese students** between 8-18 years old attending the Don Bosco Centre in Zaitoun received financial assistance through scholarships to continue their enrolment in their respective private and public schools.

Projects "B" and "C" have had a positive impact on the lives of direct and indirect beneficiaries evident as scholarships have lifted a substantial degree of financial pressure that's levied on the economically vulnerable households whose qualifying members have been the scholarships' recipients. Financial strain was lifted with a mid- and long-term effect of preventing drop-outs and facilitating a path towards graduation. The activities undertaken are all replicable in other similar contexts.

INTERVIEW WITH:

ANGELO LAUDANI

PROJECT DIRECTOR (SALESIAN FATHERS IN EGYPT)

- Can you tell us about your work in the pastoral care of people on the move in your country of action? What was the inspiration for and vision for the work? When did you start to work on this project and what is your role?

In the institutes, we offer two kinds of pastoral assistance: pastoral assistance to the students at the school and for the Christian children who come to the Oratory at the weekend. A set of socio-pastoral activities are carried out every year with kids and youth by strengthening the aspect of evangelization. We organise spiritual activities, like Holy Mass, prayers, guidance, and religious education. During the summer, generally school camps are held by creating mixed school camps between

South Sudanese people and Egyptians, involving them in genuine competition to create integrative and collaborative dynamics. The inspiration is Don Bosco's charism, where Salesians are following the example of Don Bosco, called to the mission of caring for the youth by welcoming and educating them, as well as living in a friendly and joyful environment.

The presence of the Salesians in Egypt dates back to 1896. For the past almost 100 years Salesians have been caring for the youth who come to the Don Bosco Institutes in Cairo and Alexandria. The institutes, from the day of their foundation, have cared for immigrants. Initially they were Italian Immigrants, but now they come from a mixture of countries.

Several of the projects are implemented to support the Don Bosco Institutes in Egypt in providing high quality education and livelihood support to people of concern and vulnerable Egyptians. Within the projects, I am covering the position of project coordinator officer with the duty of ensuring that all the projects are running smoothly, on-time and within the resources available. I also design and plan the projects, monitor achievements, coordinate meetings and oversee members of the project team.

- How has the pandemic caused by COVID-19 affected your work? What were the main challenges you experienced and what main challenges have the vulnerable group of people you serve faced during the pandemic?

The operations have been severely affected in several aspects: (1) Any physical activity like TVET has been hindered and hardly implemented remotely as most components of the technical and vocational courses included a practical learning portion which required the presence of the trainees. (2) Several challenges were found in the constraints faced during our implementation phase, such as educating learners remotely (especially vulnerable groups), the training curricula not being adopted for online teaching and the difficulty of planning with a clear long-term vision because of the level of uncertainty of the pandemic. The adoption of new measures brought about a slowing down of the planned project activities stretching the timeline. Therefore, the project methodologies have been reviewed and the timeline changed, the target decreased in order to be reached to be able to serve those in remote environments. Financial resources have also been reallocated to be adopted to the contingency. (3) Due to the pandemic, all the implemented operations needed more financial resources and manpower to be able to fulfil the activities online or remotely, which expanded our financial demand. The need to be equipped with more appropriate technology devices

for working remotely - due to the lack of the necessary equipment and software to harmonize the coordination and to cover the existing gaps - has been essential to facing the shortage of useful and relevant devices. (4) With regard to the vulnerable groups, the challenges can be divided into major and minor ones. Major challenges include losing jobs and not being able to pay rent, get adequate food, access sanitation items, get vaccinated or protect themselves. Minor challenges include losing hope to continue in scholarship or not being able to focus during online sessions. They even asked to take the food vouchers as money to be able to spend them for housing purposes.

- What successes have you had in working with migrants during the pandemic?

Despite the contingency, all the target groups of the projects have been reached to have online life skills and mental health sessions. They also received food vouchers and hygiene items through other vendors we cooperated with, and the seed fund owners have been able to show their products online through a page.

- Were there any changes in the phenomenon of migration in your country of action during this period? And how did your organisation respond to these changes?

The UNHCR unfortunately stopped their operations for 6 months, except for emergency responses - where a lot of pending cases have not received reviewed cards due to the operational workload that rendered timely delivery of reports unworkable. Therefore, almost 8,000 cases have been waiting for renewal. In the last quarter, the operations started to function again quickly allowing for the renewal of a good number of cards.

- What advice would you give people seeking to assist in achieving Pope Francis's four verbs of welcoming, protecting, promoting, and integrating migrants?

The suggestion would be to be convinced of the mission of Christ by creating a good relationship with the Lord Jesus as well as having a generous heart that welcomes, protects, promotes and integrates our migrants and all the persons in need.

- What are the projects and interventions planned for future work in this area?

The future project will focus on improving the living standards and inclusiveness of 'people of concern' and vulnerable Egyptians by giving a contribution to the expansion of their socio-economic opportunities through better education and protection interventions. This will be done by continuing to offer Technical and Vocational Education Training, career guidance and soft skills training, entrepreneurship skills, psychological counselling, healthcare and basic necessities. High attention will still be given to train animators and catechists to create a more welcoming and integrated environment at the Oratory between Egyptians and refugees by involving them in interreligious and intercultural dialogue and sports.

- Is there anything else relevant or a hope or wish that you would like to share with us?

That the Church will be able to be faithful to the evangelical values and mission even when the odds are against it.

This good practice can be also categorized according to Pope Francis' verbs: Promoting and Welcoming to a lesser extent.

10. UGANDA, SALESIANS OF DON BOSCO REFUGEE SERVICES - REBUILDING LIVES AT PALABEK REFUGEE CAMP (ALSO PROTECT AND INTEGRATE)

PROJECT NAME: Rebuilding lives

ORGANISATION: Salesians of Don Bosco Refugee Services

AREA OF ACTION AND COUNTRY: Palabek Refugee Camp, Uganda

PERIOD: 2020

The presence of refugees is a moral, social, geo-political reality in the world of today. It is also a pastoral issue in the Church.

At this present time in the world, a significant number of human beings are at the mercy of host countries and of particular communities for their much-needed basic necessities for survival. But at the same time, hosting refugees remains a big challenge for everyone, both the wealthier and the underdeveloped nations, including Uganda.

Uganda is one of the leading countries in hosting refugees. It not only **welcomes** neighbours who are in war and conflict, it also opens its doors to people from distant countries. There could be political reasons for welcoming refugees, but the credit goes to ordinary citizens who are welcoming and adapting themselves to hundreds and thousands of neighbours who are refugees in dire need for survival. Amidst the controversy surrounding the number of refugees in Uganda, we can reliably say that they are a little over 1,000,000, who are sheltered in the border districts of the country.

According to the UNHCR Uganda Comprehensive Refugee Response Portal, as of 30 November 2021, there are currently 1,563,604 refugees sheltered in Uganda. Of the total number of refugees currently in Uganda, 145,400 are staying in Palabek, Lamwo District and 953,630 are from South Sudan. There are several other settlements in Mid-Western and South-Western districts housing refugees from Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. It is believed that there are about 10,000 urban refugees in Kampala, besides numerous others in other urban centres in Uganda. The gazetted places of refugees are called **settlements** rather than camps because people are allowed to live there for

many years and if they wish to live there in perpetuity, they are free to do so. The refugees will never be asked to leave, unless by voluntary repatriation. It is not an exaggeration to say that no other country in the world has this magnanimous hospitality. But it is also important to pay attention to the challenges of the integration of these settlers with the natives. Salesians began their pastoral and educational services with the refugees very informally in June 2017 when Palabek refugee camp was just opened. Refugees were pouring in from South Sudan almost every day, empty handed. Young women were holding only little babies as their only belonging. Unaccompanied children were frantically looking for their parents. Amidst this, Salesians began their ministry with the motto: Rebuilding Lives. It was all about rebuilding people's dignity, families, education, livelihood and their faith in God, which was shattered.

In the Palabek Settlement, several agencies are involved in providing food, education and other needs of livelihood. Salesians of Don Bosco are offering the much-needed psychosocial support, life-skills for youth through Vocational Training and pastoral care for thousands of Christians. Salesians are also running four nursery schools for over 1,000 little children who have not been taken care of by anyone. Our newly constructed Vocational/Technical Training Centre offers not only life-skills but the hope of living better lives, finding a career and organizing a peaceful life in the near future. Currently, there are 6 Salesian confreres who literally share the challenging living conditions of refugees. The psychosocial project, training programmes and peace education for catechists, youth leaders and animators are a regular feature, and not forgetting the daily oratory in several corners of the settlement keeping youth happy and engaged. Conversations with refugees reveal that conflicts and wars in their countries are due to intolerance among tribes, lack of leaders in communities and civil societies and a lack of civic sense and skills for life. On the contrary, here in the Salesian establishments, however humble they are, we bring together young people who belong to several tribes and societies who forget all their differences and enjoy each other's company and become brothers and sisters. In the area of sustainable livelihood, Salesians of Don Bosco Refugees Project in Palabek Refugee Settlement in Lamwo, northern Uganda, began its agricultural programme with the aim to strengthen and train the refugee families and the local population so that they can improve their food security, earn their own income and thus lead a self-determined and healthy life independent of food support from external sources like the World Food Programme (WFP).

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Refugee camps or settlements in Africa are overwhelmed by children who often form over 80% of the refugee population. Given these statistics, Palabek Refugee Settlement houses at least 25,000 children who are below the age of 13. They are often underfed, suffer malnutrition, and lack basic security and protection. During COVID-19 lockdown, their schools, though they were much improvised, are now closed. Having no entertainment and opportunity to meet friends, they are pushed to stress which they could not articulate. Knowing their plight, Salesians began to reach out to them through youth-friendly and educative activities, but still keeping COVID-19 guidelines to protect their health. Salesians reached out to over 400 children and young people on a daily basis. Some of the activities were even geared to income generation and putting up structures for future use. Young people planted grass in playfields, planted hundreds of trees, prepared kitchen gardens, recorded songs and videos for Coronavirus awareness, took part in road drives on coronavirus education, revised their lessons, took part in indoor games, drawing and painting, exchanged library books, and visited some friends who were sick and in particular lockdown situations. Don Bosco pioneered face mask production and was very innovative not only in the Palabek Settlement, but in the whole of northern Uganda and the nation. A group of 20 girls successfully produced at least 10,000 face masks of different shapes and sizes. We continue to produce more and distribute them free of charge.

INTERVIEW WITH:

FR. LAZAR ARASU

DIRECTOR (SALESIANS - PALABEK REFUGEE SERVICES
IN UGANDA)

- Can you tell us about your work in the pastoral care of people on the move in your country of action? What was the inspiration for and vision for the work? When did you start to work on this project and what is your role?

Pastoral work has been the foundation of the Salesian presence in Palabek Refugee Settlement, situated in Lamwo district in the northern end of Uganda. It is truly making alive the saying of Jesus, "They are like

sheep without a shepherd..." Refugees from South Sudan began arriving by the thousands from April 2017. They were left without any spiritual and psychosocial support for over two months, until 18 June 2017 the Salesian presence began taking root with a Holy Eucharist celebrated by myself, Fr. Lazar Arasu, in a very casual manner. Perhaps this Mass is a significant Eucharistic celebration in my priestly ministry. The following words of an elderly woman leader moved me to live with them. She said, "Father, we don't know your name, we don't know what you do, we don't know where you come from, but you came to see us, please don't abandon us, come every week to pray with us". After these heartfelt words, she wept. Seeing her tears made several others cry. This made me come every week and eventually I resigned from everything I was doing, and I came to live with them. The call of Pope Francis to reach out to the migrants and the special emphasis given by the Salesian Society stand as my inspiration and encouragement to get engaged in refugee ministry. Despite many challenges, this ministry is urgent and meaningful. It is serving the most downtrodden, neglected and poorest of the poor.

The blessings of that single Mass celebrated with a group of about 100 people, who were mostly young, became the foundation of a huge pastoral work with several thousands of people who are hungry for spiritual nourishment packaged together with a consolidated psychosocial accompaniment.

- How has the pandemic caused by COVID-19 affected your work? What were the main challenges you experienced and what main challenges have the vulnerable group of people you serve faced during the pandemic?

We could not discharge our duties effectively as we had to respect COVID-19 restriction guidelines as provided by the State. With the closure of schools and recreational facilities, refugees, having no entertainment and opportunity to meet friends, are pushed to stress which they could not articulate. During this COVID-19 epidemic we have witnessed a surge in teenage pregnancies, defilements, child marriages, and induced abortions. In reality, this is gender-based violence (GBV) committed against girl children. Failures in getting basic needs make the girl child more vulnerable than their male counterparts. Lack of crucial needs such as sanitary pads, inner garments, and hygiene materials push them to make decisions against their personal values, sexual ideals and their study and plan for the future. Unscrupulous men with loose morality and boys in their mischievous behaviour take advantage

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of girls' vulnerability, make them fall into teenage pregnancy, early marriage and others push them into complications of reproductive health. Here in the refugee situation, there are instances where two or three teenage girls are living together and one falls into teenage pregnancy; one teenage youth defiles three girls and they all find themselves pregnant; a married man with wife and children lures a girl with much needed material things and "marries" her; teenage mothers who are no longer in relationship with the fathers of their children easily 'fall in love' with much older men for care and support.

This good practice can be also categorized according to Pope Francis' verbs: protect and integrate.