

## Two ways to solve refugee crisis

Two ways to solve refugee crisis: welcome them in, and change the negative attitudes.

The so-called crisis of the refugees is in fact “the crisis of the European countries, because we are not prepared to welcome these people”, says Fr. Jean-Marie Carrière SJ, the new regional director of the Jesuit Refugee Service Europe.

Very often the media speak of the “migrant crisis”, while these people are refugees, because they come from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia and Eritrea, and they are in need of protection.

Fr Carrière visited Jesuit province in Lithuania to give a public lecture, About Refugees in Europe and Best Practices to Help Them, which took place this weekend at the Vilnius University, in Lithuania.

JRS is an international Catholic NGO, founded in the 1980s, which now operates worldwide, working on the behalf of refugees and displaced persons.

“For us, it is the first big challenge”, said Fr Carrière about the movement of refugees, coming into Greece and then moving very fast through Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary and Austria to Germany, and then to Sweden.

Having 14 offices in Europe and being represented in 20 countries in total means that the Jesuits are equipped to provide an assistance.

“Mainly all along the above-mentioned routes there are Jesuits and lay people, volunteers and staff members, who help the travel or the transit of these people. This is the main thing at the moment,” says Fr Carrière.

Refugees are continuing to arrive in Europe by boat as winter bites  
Refugees are continuing to arrive in Europe by boat as winter bites (PA)

On the European level, two important projects are carried out: the hospitality project, helping the people of a certain countries to build welcoming communities, and the awareness-raising project, aimed at countering xenophobia and racism.

“This is a big project and involves 7-9 countries at the moment. We work together to help the public opinion to change.”

He also warned about the potentiality of the media to deal with this question in a confusing manner or also some political leaders from right or far-right, who are playing it for their own political reasons.

What kind of cooperation would the JRS expect from the governments?

“We are a European net, so the team, working for this net in Brussels, does some excellent work on advocacy, helping the European legislation or the European policies to be more favourable towards the refugees,” said Fr Carrière.

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“We want two things: first, that the refugees will have safe and legal access to protection in Europe, e.g. don't find the borders closed or difficulties to ask for an asylum; and the second, to defend the vulnerable people, like unaccompanied women, pregnant women, people with trauma, etc.

“I think that there is legislation in Europe for these people, but it is not applied by the countries,” he said.

So, will the Europe eventually cope with the present crisis?

“We need to have a common asylum system, the problem of the refugees has to be the problem of the whole of Europe, not just of big states like the UK or France. It's a global question,” he said.

“The problem is that we can welcome these people, we have a capacity for that, but the process of integration takes around 3-5 years. And when I say integration, it means not to assimilate those people, but to build the future together.”

“It's a long process, but we can do it,” said Fr Carrière.

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