



## DIMECCE Research Project Presentation of Research Findings, Brussels, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2015

Defining and Identifying Middle Eastern Christian Communities in Europe (DIMECCE) is a two year HERA (EU) funded collaborative project involving the University of St Andrews (Scotland), Roskilde University (Denmark), University of Lodz (Poland) and The Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (Belgium). DIMECCE explores migrant experiences of Coptic, Assyrian/Syriac and Iraqi Christians in the UK, Denmark and Sweden focusing on three strands – the internal dynamics of the communities, their engagement with state and societal actors at the institutional and everyday level in the case study countries, and transnational links including those with their Middle Eastern countries of origin.

Sweden has the largest Assyrian/Syriac diaspora in Europe with over 120,000 and a Coptic community estimated at around 8,000, the UK has over 20,000 Copts and 10,000 Iraqi Christians (including Assyrians) and Denmark has around 500-600 Copts and 3,000-3,500 Iraqi Christians. Based on interviews, focus groups and participant observation in specific fieldsites – London and Kirkcaldy in the UK, Copenhagen and Aarhus in Denmark and Stockholm and Södertälje in Sweden, the following findings and observations can be of relevance to those engaging with these communities:

- Middle Eastern Christian communities are not monolithic. There are diverse views on many issues and community representatives including clerics may only speak for some of their community.
- As with other migrant communities, national integration policies have provided different opportunities for organising.
- Middle Eastern Christians respond to multiple identities and engage with these on different levels.
- The issue of language use within the church and the community is an important issue raised within the community particularly relating to including the second generation and newcomers and links to national and religious belonging.
- Maintaining and strengthening ties with mainstream churches is seen as helpful in assisting the communities to negotiate their new surroundings and develop ecumenical ties.
- Levels of state/public/media awareness, misrecognition, racial discrimination are common themes which can adversely affect feelings of belonging. This is closely related to views held amongst the communities that European states should be supporting and protecting Middle Eastern Christians. Examples such as the Swedish Parliament acknowledgement of the fact that Armenians, Assyrians, and the Pontic Greeks were subjected to genocide (called Seyfo by Assyrians/Syriacs) during WWI are seen as extremely positive.
- The Middle Eastern country of origin remains important to most Middle Eastern Christians but physical return is viewed primarily as a holiday, visiting family or religious sites and for most who arrived in Europe due to refugee flows, return is not envisaged aside from some Assyrian political activists who call for a safe haven in Iraq.

For more information, see: <https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/dimecce/>, [www.facebook.com/dimecce](http://www.facebook.com/dimecce) or contact [dimecce@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:dimecce@st-andrews.ac.uk)

