

ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS WITH NGOs
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THEMATIC SESSION

BACKGROUND PAPER

Session Title: Youth and data – a game changer in urban settings
Date: 16 June 2016
Time/Room: 14:30-16:15, Room 4

Background

Today, some 60% of the world's 19.5 million refugees and an even greater percentage of the 41 million persons internally displaced due to conflict or violence live in towns or cities. Refugee populations living in urban areas are increasingly diverse, with growing numbers of refugee families, women, youth and children. UNHCR estimates that over half the global refugee population is under the age of 18 and while there is no accurate data on the numbers of refugee youth living in urban settings, it can be assumed to be a significant population. Unlike a camp, cities allow displaced youth to live anonymously, make money and build a better future. They also present dangers. In cities, refugees may be vulnerable to exploitation, arrest or detention, and can be forced to compete with the poorest local workers for the lowest paid jobs.

Urban settings make it difficult for organisations offering protection and assistance to gather and utilize accurate data about the vulnerabilities and needs of displaced youth. Unlike a camp, urban displaced populations are often scattered, making them difficult to identify. Youth tend to be very mobile, with mobility being an important livelihood or security/housing strategy, and more reliant upon their own resilience and social networks. The inability to access data about, or provide information to, refugee youth can render them effectively invisible in urban settings, not only to protection and assistance organisations, but also to each other.

Rendering youth refugees living in urban settings visible requires access to accurate, up to date, and relevant data about their specific locations, their unique resilience, vulnerabilities, and their needs. Data impacts upon all aspects of programming, from creating sufficient evidence base, to the identification of vulnerable individuals amongst the refugee youth, to implementation and monitoring. Quality data is critical to ensuring that programmes are effectively assisting those intended. Various forms of technology have proved useful in the collection and collation of information. Hand-held devices, such as smartphones and tablets, allow for contact, location and survey data collected through household visits to be up- or downloaded in real time, providing a useful picture of the changing dynamics of the urban refugee population. To the extent possible, organisations should aim to build upon the data that is already available, as data often exists among governments, development actors and on social media.

The ability for youth to achieve and exercise their rights is contingent not only upon the assistance given but also on how the assistance provided, and how information about the assistance is disseminated. If information about programmes and the availability of services etc., is not clearly communicated and remains unknown, unclear or distorted, the effectiveness of interventions will be limited. The wide use of mobile phones amongst refugee youth helps them keep connected via email, SMS and social media and allows agencies to more easily distribute information directly. Social media, in particular, has the potential to expand social networks, allowing refugee youth to find news and information relevant to them, connect with friends, family and humanitarian organizations.

The social networks that form over social media also offer significant potential for communication between urban

refugees and humanitarian organizations. In Jordan, organizations are mobilizing this potential by handing out sim-cards to Syrian refugees upon arrival, and posting information in Facebook or WhatsApp groups used by refugees to identify and access services. Challenges exist however in ensuring that engagement with youth through mobile phones and social media is context, cultural, and age appropriate, as these factors will influence how young refugees engage with apps and social media.

Smartphones are used by refugees in urban environments to seek a diverse range of information. Refugees fleeing Syria use their smartphones to share information on safe routes of passage when fleeing conflict and persecution. Using social media apps, like Facebook and Twitter, they also look for and share information about possible destinations, including what kinds of employment opportunities and other services are available and what sort of welcome they can expect from host communities. Apps like WhatsApp are essential for remaining in contact with family and friends at home.

Smartphones are also an essential tool in orienting displaced youth to new urban environments. A German company has designed the 'Welcome-App Dresden' which offers refugees information about Germany and Dresden, including general and legal advice, relevant contacts of public authorities, and information about how to access locally available services. An app called Gherbtana, made by a Syrian refugee, provides refugees in Turkey with broad range of information, including on obtaining residency, finding employment and opening bank accounts.. Other apps assist in learning languages, translating and finding accommodation.

In collaboration with PeaceGeeks UNHCR has developed a Services Advisor App for Syrian Refugees living in Jordan which aims to provide refugees with information on what services are available where. The app also enables other humanitarian organisations to refer refugees to other providers for services that they themselves cannot provide. Humanitarian organizations are increasingly mobilizing smart phones as a tool to connect refugees with essential services and resources more easily and effectively.

Smartphones and digital connectivity are essential for refugees seeking protection and safety, but they also carry risks for them. The recent research report: [Mapping Refugee Media Journeys Smartphones and Social Media Networks](#) identified a huge gap in the provision of relevant, reliable and timely digital news and information for refugees on their journeys and upon arrival in Europe. While recognizing that a growing number of digital resources designed for refugees in Europe exist, the report highlighted that they are not always adequately resourced and sustainable. They can do more harm than good if they disseminate misinformation.

Clearly, this is an area where more can be done - by UN agencies, NGOs, governments, private sector, refugees and other stakeholders – in order to better seize the opportunities of social media and information sharing networks as well as to address related risks.

Questions for consideration:

1. What opportunities do technology and social media offer for displaced populations?
2. How can they contribute to improving data on youth in the humanitarian response?
3. What new challenges arise?
4. How can youth be part of improving the data that we have on urban refugees?

Objectives of the Session:

- 1) Explore the use of technology and social media to improve data collection and inform trends to protect and empower urban youth;
- 2) Share experience, good practices and new thinking regarding the use of technology and social media to improve urban programming.

The session will give an overview of the panelists experience with data and social media, including providing a

general understanding of the opportunities and challenges to their use from a legal, political and humanitarian perspective. Time will also be dedicated to Questions & Answers.

Moderator: Kimberly Roberson, Chief of the Field Information Coordination and Support Section in the Division of Programme Support and Management in UNHCR

Speakers:

- Mr. Elvis Elwabanga Dubois, Congolese refugee in Rwamwanja refugee settlement, south west Uganda**
- Ms. Marie Gillespie, Professor at the Open University, and one of the authors of *“Mapping Refugee Media Journeys: Smartphones and Social Media Networks”***
- Rose Foran, Senior Humanitarian Liaison Officer, Internews**
- Rebecca Petras, Deputy Director, Translators without Border**