Name of the committee : United Nations High Commission for Refugees
Issues : Using ICTs to improve conditions for women and girls in UNHCR refugee camps
Name of the chairs : Katia Todorov, Bartu Arik

Unprecedented challenges require unprecedented solutions: this is the reasoning behind the overall theme of FerMUN 2020, "ICTs for SDGs". Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have the potential to accelerate progress towards every one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the role of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is to maximise this potential. FerMUN 2020 is a chance for young people from across the world to come together in support of this mission.

Using ICTs to improve conditions for women and girls in UNHCR refugee camps

1. Introduction

The ability to communicate, store and access information has developed extremely quickly since the advent of ICTs. Communicating with loved ones and browsing the internet on a daily basis has become a necessity for the people of the 21st century. Especially in times of confusion, separation and chaos, people need to communicate.

There are over 25.9 million refugees, of which half are under eighteen.[1] In many refugee camps today, women and girls live in unacceptable conditions. They are subjected to violence and sexually harassed on a daily basis. They are looked down on and are unable to participate in daily activities, even to contribute to the camps. They lack sanitary materials, food, shelter; in other words, basic necessities for survival. They are in need of doctors and psychologists to consult; or simply to know where and how their loved ones are.

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[1] https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html

According to the World Health Organisation, "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Fundamentally, every person has the right to a healthy life, and it is the United Nations' responsibility to provide that for each refugee, especially women and girls who are in dire circumstances. The effective utilization of ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies) has the potential to provide a part of the solution to this problem.

2. Definition of Key Terms

Refugee: (1951 Convention) A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.[2]

Refugee Camp: A refugee camp is intended as a temporary accommodation for people who have been forced to flee their home because of violence and persecution. They are constructed while crises unfold for people fleeing for their lives. These hastily built shelters provide immediate protection and safety for the world's most vulnerable people. Camps allow UNHCR to deliver lifesaving aid like food, water and medical attention during an emergency.

ICTs: Stands for "Information and Communication Technologies." ICT refers to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. It is similar to Information Technology (IT) but focuses primarily on communication technologies. This includes the Internet, wireless networks, cell phones, and other communication mediums.

Host Country: The nation which the persecuted people seek refuge in. The host country establishes refugee camps or other systems in which they provide life saving aid such as food, water and shelter. These countries have their own distinctive regulations and policies towards the refugees.

Xenophobia: At the international level, no universally accepted definition of xenophobia exists, though it can be described as attitudes, prejudices and behavior that reject, exclude and

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[2] 189 UNTS 137

often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity.

3. What is the UNHCR?

After the creation of the United Nations, globally everyone knew about the refugee crisis as a result of World War II. Organizations and bodies such as the Internal Refugee Organization (IRO) and United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration had been formed however they proved incompetent in front of the magnitude of the crises and the number of the refugees. Therefore the General Assembly decided that a creation of a subsidiary organ was required in 1949. UNHCR has been overseeing and providing life saving aid such as water, food and medical attention to the most vulnerable people. Up to this day, UNHCR has been the leader among organizations with 16,803 personnel taking care of 92,400 refugees. UNHCR has won two Nobel Peace Prizes for their tremendous effort and success.

4. Deeper Analysis of Why Conditions are Worse for Women and Girls

Women and girls suffer endemic sexual harassment, domestic violence, and rape on a daily basis[3]. They are subjected to such violence due to many reasons such as but not limited to cultural differences, proper law enforcement. Furthermore, the lack of education caused by the absence of schools or families forbidding their daughter's enrollment in schools makes them a lost cause. The aforementioned problem combined with the lack of medical equipment for menstruating girls and women prevents them from partaking active roles within their camp, consequently decreasing their social status which increases their vulnerability and co-dependency on men.

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[3] https://www.unhcr.org/5a3bb9b77.pdf

5. Problems Which May Occur

Understanding Regulations

The policies and regulations of host-countries towards refugees must be fully understood before taking any action. For example host-countries restrictions towards access to SIM cards have prevented the provision of mobile networks to the refugees by UNHCR (UNHCR, 2018b, p.10). "Also, refugees which have been trained by UNHCR did not have full access to the local labor market due to the lack of legal provisions and mobility" (Anderson, 2013, p.25).

Financial Sustainability

It is important to know that the integration of ICTs to refugee camps are not cost-effective at all times when the scarcity of resources and equipments are added in the equation. Therefore innovative cost-reducing techniques such as energy conservation or generation methods must be used (Anderson, 2013, p.26). The Community Technology Access (CTA) Centres initiated in several countries by UNHCR have been using solar powered energy generators in order to reduce energy usage (Microsoft, 2010, pp.2-3). Another method of cost-reducing could be turning free services into paid services, but this reduces the accessibility of the services.

Long-term:

ICT related strategies must be made to last in order to fully benefit refugees. In order to achieve this, cost plans must be made, including allocations for personnel and equipment. Also problems such as potential natural disasters, and malfunctioning equipment must be taken care of rapidly and efficiently. A report has stated that malfunctioning equipment in refugee camps such as computers and phones are often not repaired (Tauson & Stannard, 2018, p.53). The ability to repair equipment is essential for the sustainability of these strategies.

Security and Privacy Issues

Refugees should be educated on digital privacy and security, for reasons such as but not limited to account theft and fraud. Many refugees are digitally illiterate and therefore unable to understand or protect themselves from cyber-threats (Pakzad, 2017, p.10). Refugees may also be legally at risk if they share personal information online (UNHCR, 2016, p.20).

6. Evaluation of Previous Solutions

UNHCR Community Technology Assets (CTA):

By CTA's centers refugees have the chance of enhancing their self-reliance by enrolling themselves into IT, language, life skills or online school classes (Anderson, 2013, p.22). In addition to learning, they also use communication softwares in order to contact their family from around the globe or other refugee camps. An estimated amount of 20,000 people benefit from it in different ways (Anderson, 2013, p.22). A refugee from Rwanda benefitted from the CTA center by starting a video-editing business with the knowledge he acquired from the center itself (HIP, 2013, p.23). Another example is a group of refugees in Georgia have been hired as secretaries with their CTA IT certificate (Anderson, 2013, p.24). Some encountered problems were regarding repairments of the computers. Consequently, CTA centers integrated women back to society by giving them job and education opportunities while also allowing them to connect with their loved ones.

NaTakallam:

NaTakallam is a website which offers partners to speak foreign languages with, as well as editing and translation services. They also hire refugees as language teachers or speaking partners online. It is a great money-earning opportunity for Arabic speaking refugees in Turkey, Egypt, Germany, and Lebanon. Local NGOs support this organization to resolve payment and teacher qualification issues. The teacher and the

student mutually benefit greatly from NaTakallam because while one earns money the other enhances their language skills at a low cost (UNESCO, 2018, p.60). NaTakallam also provides monetary support to the refugees who plan on completing their formal education (Sara, 2017, para.3). All in all, refugees have earned 420,00 dollars[4] through this program. This type of platform gives refugee women the opportunity to significantly improve their living standards, liberating them from dependence on the camp and on men.

Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL):

JWL is a non-profit organization which provides tertiary education to refugees within a span of three months and rewards them with Academic Diploma of Liberal Arts. JWL has set up learning centers in Kenya, Jordan and Malawi, where 25% of the program is taught via computers in centers. A total of 5000 people, half of which are women, received education from this program, and 619 refugees from ten countries went through the professional program. According to an online survey, the participants drew attention to the need for consistent internet, extra classrooms (UNESCO, 2018, p.60).

Connect to Learn (CTL):

CTL is a platform where teachers in Domiz refugee camp in Iraq keep track of the camp's literacy count, and where they can upload their experiences and compare them with teachers in other camps. This can improve the already existing education services, thus improving the education of refugee women.

Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER):

BHER trains teachers in the Daadab refugee camp of Kenya in order to enlarge their education quotas. In addition to this they also provide education via tablets with digital articles and textbooks.

InZone:

InZone is a project of the University of Geneva in which digital technology is used to provide higher education. This project is currently active in the camps of Dadaab, Kakuma and Azraq. In the first two camps, a solar-powered virtual-learning classroom called Learning Hub is being run by the refugees. This hub allows its participants to "become interpreters in crisis situations using digital devices" (InZone, 2018). The camp in Azraq has collaborated with MIT and are producing quality material and designs for mobile education applications (UNESCO, 2018, p.61).

Refugee Code Week (RCW):

Refugee Code Week is an intense 16 week bootcamp which equips its participants with 21st century assets such as software coding skills. RCW 2017 educated 13,448 participants in Egypt, Greece, France, Iraq, Jordan, Sweden, Iraq, and Turkey. 57% of the participants were refugees and 50% of the refugees were women.

Other coding and digital skills training inside and outside camps

Turkey: The Karam Lab (**https://www.karamfoundation.org/karam-house/**) is an educational course for Syrian refugee youth to build their creative and entrepreneurial skills in design, technology and engineering through hands-on training in the use of computers, 3D printers and laser cutters.

Greece: Astro-Lab (**http://astro-lab.org/**) provides refugees and host-community members training in the use of technologies for the innovative design and production of new products.

Jordan: The FabLab Irbid (**https://www.fablabs.io/labs/fablabirbid**) offers Jordanian and Syrian entrepreneurs access to digital fabrication facilities for technical prototyping, as well as a global knowledge-sharing network to enhance learning and collaboration.

Jordan: **ReBootKamp** (**http://rbk.org/**) is a four-month coding boot camp for refugees and host community members. It also supports students and introduces them to career networking through mentorship from tech professionals.

Source: UNCTAD, Policy Guide on Entrepreneurship for Migrants and Refugees, 2018, p.65

Examples of digital resources and training centres for refugee entrepreneurs.

7. Possible Solutions

These solutions address three key areas: Access to technological equipment, access to sessions with psychologists, access to basic medical and hygienic information, calling help during urgent situations.

With the touch of a button, we are able to connect to the world. We can facetime our friends, google any question etc. According to Business Green there are currently 125 million smartphones going to waste. When compared to the current 25.9 million refugee count by the UNHCR, the answer is quite apparent. A mechanism to provide unused mobile devices to refugees can be considered as a possible solution. This way, one of the connectivity issues would be resolved while also reducing waste. The distribution of phones would improve the situation greatly.

In terms of access to psychologists, solutions must foresee problems which may occur due to the large number of refugee women and girls, and language barriers. Group

sessions with an online psychologist could be considered. According to Conolly Counseling people may feel more confident during group sessions because they are all going through the same or very similar emotions or problems. Group sessions would also allow women to gain new perspectives and share their strategies of dealing with everyday problems. While creating a sense of belonging this would also help them solve or perceive everyday problems differently. Some disadvantages would be related to the lack of confidentiality and privacy. Individual sessions might prove to be more effective in some cases; however, the outreach potential of group sessions contributes to their efficiency.

Many women and girls within the refugee camps do not have access to consultations with doctors due to the lack of doctors, or due to the massive amount of people who require medical services. If they were able to access sanitary and medical information, some medical problems could be directly avoided. This could be achieved through simple applications and databases, using accessible terminology in the native language of the refugees in order to avoid language and health literacy barriers.

According to the UNHCR's Legal and Protection Policy Research Series, besides the lack of resources and the remoteness of the camps, the general source of failure in providing security within camps is limited monitoring. This problem may be resolved by the distribution of alarm-enabled devices throughout the camp. A similar method has been used in Turkey for women subjected to domestic violence. A red button which was directly connected to the nearest police station was given to them by the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. If need be, the women pressed it and the police were on their way. Instead of the consistent surveillance of a large camp, precise alarms could help solve the problem more efficiently.

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