The Digital Leisure Divide and the Forcibly Displaced

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"Bringing to light the divide in access to digital leisure challenges the sacred tenet on which the global digital project has been built upon over decades - the belief that a good digital life for the poor would be based in work and inherently utilitarian." Arora, 2019 - The Next Billion Users: Digital Life beyond the West

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Erasmus University Rotterdam

John Warnes
Erika-Perez Iglesias

Payal Arora
Amanda Alencar
Daniella Jaramillo-Dent

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Glossary

Asylum-seeker:

This refers to "an individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided. Not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee but every refugee was once an asylum-seeker".

Source: UNHCR (2021b)

Migrant:

In this report, we use the term "migrant" or "immigrant" when it is used in the original source, in this case we understand that there would be parallels between migrants and forcibly displaced people. This umbrella term "is not defined under international law, and it reflects the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes a number of well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; persons whose particular types of movements are legally-defined, such as smuggled migrants; as well as those whose status or means of movement are not specifically defined under international law, such as international students".

Source: IOM as cited in UNHCR (2021b)

Refugee:

A person who meets the criteria of the refugee definition under international or regional instruments, UNHCR's mandate and/or national legislation. A refugee is any person who, "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [or her] nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him [or her]self of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his [or her] former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it." Article 1A(2) of the 1951 Convention OR "who is outside his/her country of origin or habitual residence and is unable to return there because of serious and indiscriminate threats to life, physical integrity or freedom resulting from generalized violence or events seriously disturbing public order." (OAU Convention and Cartagena Declaration).

Source: UNHCR (2021b)

Executive summary

UNHCR has been pursuing an agenda of enhanced connectivity and digital inclusion for the forcibly displaced. For a number of years, many of the interventions have been tied to specific developmental goals —i.e. enhanced education, use of digital financial services, greater access to information, among others. There is emerging evidence that challenges the notion that those targeted with such interventions prioritise connectivity for these purposes. Rather, the agenda highlights leisure as a key driver for adoption of digital technologies, and a critical use case for such technologies that bring indirect benefits beyond the 'virtuous' aims of humanitarian aid and development programmes globally.

In this workstream report, UNHCR and Erasmus University Rotterdam scholars document the evidence on digital leisure in the forced displacement context, highlighting issues unique to it. Based on this desk review, the main uses and potential benefits of digital leisure in refugee contexts have been outlined. It brings together evidence from research and industry reports at the global level with an emphasis on Brazil as a region of interest for the first phases of this project.

The report starts by conceptualizing the digital leisure divide as an important aspect of existing digital gaps among forcibly displaced communities. It covers the main infrastructural, cultural, and political limitations that exist for refugees' connectivity. We emphasize the vast variation in connectivity and specific contextual limitations and opportunities in different locations. Considering this, the proposed digital leisure perspective is presented with a focus on communities and their actual preferences and uses of technologies which overwhelmingly include leisure activities such as:
- one-to-one and group messaging;
- sharing of photos, videos and music;
- accessing social media;
- online gaming;
- consumption of audiovisual content;
- romancing;
- shopping.

It is also important to note their preference for mainstream platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube, as opposed to approaches to connectivity and digital inclusion that promote the creation of apps especially designed for refugee services and uses. Thus, a typology of digital leisure activities is suggested, including **entertainment, gaming, sex/sexuality/intimacy, content creation, social capital, community voice and contemporary livelihoods**. It incorporates current UNHCR policies, including its Age, Gender and Diversity Policy as well as Community-led guidelines that take a bottom-up approach to refugee connectivity and digital inclusion.

The intersectional perspective on digital connectivity, access and literacies that underlies this report provides an overview of the unique challenges that can be bridged by a digital leisure approach to digital inclusion, by emphasizing the activities and devices that forcibly displaced communities favor and access. Among the various limitations these populations face, three main intersectional aspects emerge as relevant determinants of refugee digital gaps in access and use: **gender (including male/female and LGBTQI+), age (children, youth and older refugees) and disability (physical/sensory/cognitive).** The report highlights the importance of considering a participatory, community-based approach to understand forcibly displaced communities within digital inclusion research and technological solutions, in line with various UNHCR policies.

The ways in which forcibly displaced people navigate and negotiate digital spaces offer important insights to understand how they adopt and use new technologies and the possibilities of digital leisure for sustainable livelihoods and enhanced wellbeing in forced migration contexts. According to the literature reviewed, some of the main functions of social media content creation and consumption for refugees shed light onto some of the benefits of leisure in forcibly displaced people's lives:
- Express aspirations;
- Escape from harsh realities;
- Pass the time while waiting;
- Convey desires and goals;
- Maintain memories and connections to their past;
- Connect with their family and support networks;
- Preserve and express their various identities;
- Negotiate platform guidelines and privacy;
- Enter public discourse about themselves;
- Counter existing misconceptions.

The report provides some insights to academics, industry, humanitarian organizations and the public sector on the main findings, approaches and possibilities of digital leisure as a pathway towards more fulfilling lives and expanded opportunities for people going through forced migration situations around the world, with a focus on Brazil as the specific context where the pilot research project will be deployed.

UNHCR Innovation Service Background

"I don't believe the focus on digital leisure should be considered innovation, I think it is something within people's rights, the right to leisure and rest. This is generally enshrined in international legal doctrine and more directly in specific human rights or humanitarian legal instruments."

John Warnes, Innovation Officer, UNHCR

Through assessments, UNHCR's Innovation Service has observed that much of the information gathered around connectivity usage is often wider than the scope of enquiry. For example, the GSMA report "The Digital Lives of Refugees" undertaken in partnership with UNHCR, had a primary focus on inter alia mobile financial services, mobile enabled utilities and food security. However when respondents were asked about how they used mobile devices (Fig. 4 pg 24), the most common use cases were social interaction (one-to-one/group messaging) and entertainment. In line with this, the Information and Communication needs assessment carried out in the Americas by the Interagency

Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V) in 2019 shows that 93% of respondents are using mobile connectivity services to communicate with friends and family (pg 19). Similar lines of enquiry have been taken with UNHCR's own connectivity work, focussing on goals/objectives in line with UNHCR's overarching priorities and strategic directions. This is articulated clearly in the vision statement of the Connectivity for Refugees initiative:

"UNHCR aims, through creative partnerships and smart investments, to ensure that all refugees, and the communities that host them, have access to available, affordable and usable mobile and internet connectivity in order to leverage these technologies for protection, communications, education, health, self-reliance, community empowerment, and durable solutions" - Connecting Refugees 2016

Since this vision statement, UNHCR's Innovation Service has broadened the scope of its connectivity and digital interventions and has established a Digital Inclusion programme, adopting a rights-based approach to digital connectivity that acknowledges individuals as citizens rather than simply consumers, and aims to enhance the rights of access to communication in unequal and diverse societies. A focus on inclusion and agency is in line with UNHCR's Community-based Protection approach to uphold the:

"Right of every person to participate in deciding and shaping their lives. That forcibly displaced people have the right to be included in a connected society, and to choose on what terms they connect and access digital technology." - Connectivity for Refugees Website, UNHCR, 2021

UNHCR's Innovation Service seeks to more deeply examine the factors linked to Persons of Concern's adoption and utilisation of digital technology, focussing on leisure factors that have - up till now - only been superficially examined. In partnership with scholars at Erasmus University Rotterdam, UNHCR will strive to design creative, meaningful, and sustainable connectivity interventions with the displaced populations. As such, the theme of the Digital Leisure Divide in Forced Displacement will be a research priority under UNHCR's Digital Inclusion Programme.

Objectives and Hypotheses

The overarching objectives of the workstream are as follows:
- To explore how refugees perceive and define leisure activities in relation to their use of digital technology;
- To understand what role leisure plays in refugees' desire to adopt and utilise digital technology, including an overview of current usage;
- To critically engage with the ways in which digital leisure practices are disaggregated based on age, gender and other diverse characteristics;
- To document the creative and critical skills and literacies that are deployed in such leisure activities;
- To understand unintended risks and benefits of enhanced adoption and utilisation of digital technology due to specific humanitarian interventions with a focus on leisure.

Along with these objectives there are a number of hypotheses that the UNHCR Innovation Service is looking to interrogate through the research, specifically whether:
- Leisure use will be a key factor for adoption (both access and skills) and utilisation of digital technologies and connectivity;
- Such leisure usage can bring indirect benefits to both individuals and their communities beyond their immediate entertainment/enjoyment;
- UNHCR should re-frame digital inclusion interventions to also consider non-utilitarian use cases of digital technology that nonetheless contribute to longer-term community protection.

Main constraints to connectivity

Introduction

Research on forcibly displaced people and their digital cultures have dominantly focused on utility-driven ends, primarily tied to goals of assimilation, social surveillance/tracking, economic betterment and other aid agencies' specific agendas and outcomes. This approach negates much of their digital life, that which is consumed by leisure and play – popular media entertainment, gaming, romancing, and social networking, much like typical online users worldwide. Leisure has proven to be fundamental to social and mental well-being as it allows for unstructured time and thought (Arora, 2019), an essential gateway into self and community actualization. The restrictive lens of utility-centeredness may lead to insufficient, and even directly contribute to misleading data on these communities, which is often instrumentalized by aid agencies in their pursuit for equitable and meaningful connectivity for these targeted populations. Hence, this desk research takes on a holistic approach by addressing one of the key gaps in this demographic and their virtual life – digital leisure. While there is some primary research on how these communities engage with media platforms, digital networks and online leisure content in diverse contexts, there is a need for a comprehensive synthesis of the empiricism of their multifaceted 'media life'. This review seeks to address these gaps in research and practice in this area of focus.

The UNHCR research brief *Space and Imagination: rethinking refugees' digital access,* describes how controlled digital spaces are for forcibly displaced populations. In order to access limited Internet services with blocked websites and curated content, refugees are often required to provide their data through landing pages that give no information as to how the collected data will be used (Kaurin, 2020). These requirements also violate their rights to privacy through conditional access to connectivity which often requires them to provide their personal information, which is not truly promoting digital inclusion. These controlled digital environments limit the types of activities digital refugees' can engage in, and their preferred uses of digital technologies and devices, which include digital leisure (Alencar, 2017). For people from all social and economic strata, free and unstructured opportunities and spaces to engage with technologies seem to be key in promoting digital participation, adoption and appropriation (Arora, 2019a). Understanding digital leisure spaces from the refugee perspective becomes relevant to face existing digital divides and to achieve more sustainable lives.

In order to understand the limitations refugees face to realize their desired digital lives and take advantage of the possibilities afforded by technology, it is important to explore the constraints faced by refugee communities around the world in terms of access. This section maps out the connectivity landscape in refugee settings and how that will shape media life and digital leisure practices of forcibly displaced people.

The complex systems that enable connectivity and internet access for forcibly displaced people requires an expanded concept of digital infrastructure to better approach the specific needs and situations faced by refugees. This understanding should include the material, financial and legislative aspects that converge with sociotechnical configurations provided by corporations such as Facebook and Google, and analogue materials to replace the information that becomes inaccessible when connectivity is unavailable (Gillespie et al., 2018). Human and social networks available to refugees also constitute an important part of these digital infrastructures that enable access and connectivity through sharing devices among family members or groups.

A UNHCR internal study[1] documented the interviews with 78 Venezuelan refugees in Brazil about their access to connectivity and digital practices. In this case, 78.87% of them reported owning a mobile phone, while 73.33% of those who didn't own a mobile phone reported using other people's phone. In terms of Internet connectivity, 64.79% stated they had 4G connectivity using mobile data. Similarly, the R4V report on Information and Communication Needs Assessment found that 70% of Venezuelan refugees report having access to a mobile phone, while 79% have access to the Internet. Those who lack access to connectivity cite finances and documentation as the main constraints (R4V, 2019).

"Expanding the traditional conception of connectivity and recognising the importance of digital leisure activities for refugees is less patronizing and has the potential to make them more equal. Their needs are just like those of anyone else." Erika Pérez, Associate Innovation Officer, Americas

"Leisure, however, is deeply gendered (...). One can even argue that women's and girl's labor enables the leisure of the young males in society". (Arora, 2019a, p.13)

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1   This data was extracted from an internal survey carried out by UNHCR and AVSI in shelters in Boa Vista in December 2019.

There are constraints to connectivity that derive from the specific **intersectional** characteristics of refugees. For instance, the gender gap in mobile ownership and access is widespread but uneven among refugees and asylum seekers. Hence, aspects such as the likelihood of female refugees to own a phone when compared to their male counterparts, their media literacy in relation to the affordances provided by mobile phones, as well as social and economic limitations, constitute relevant considerations in the topic of gender-based mobile connectivity in refugee contexts. Data suggests that the digital gap among refugees is even more pronounced than in the general population. This is evidenced by examples such as Bidi Bidi camp in Uganda, where only 59% of women reported that they had heard of the internet compared to 85% of men, suggesting an important gap in awareness and familiarity with the possibilities of connectivity (Downer, 2019). In contrast, up to 90% of female Syrian refugees in Turkey own a mobile phone (Narli, 2018).

Intersectionality - A term coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, who defines it as "a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts."(Kimberlé Crenshaw as cited by Steinmetz, 2020).

Main intersectional sources of inequality affecting digital inclusion for refugees (UNHCR, 2018);

GENDER   -   women and girls/LGBTQI+;

AGE   -   children and youth/older;

DISABILITY -   physical/sensory/cognitive.

Regarding age, many of the rights and policies that are applicable to non-displaced children are also pertinent in the case of refugee children, with leisure and play as part of their fundamental human rights, and ones that are separate from their right to education and health. This makes solely utilitarian approaches to health, education and safety insufficient in fulfilling the entirety of refugee children's needs, especially those in protracted displacement situations. In this sense, a recent report by Save the Children (2020) focusing on displaced children reflects on the importance of programs that promote digital inclusion for children while considering do-no-harm principles when designing and delivering humanitarian responses to displaced minors. They also emphasize the relevance of participation and feedback from recipients to include their concerns while designing and implementing actions aimed at digital inclusion. Moreover, media literacy scholar Sonia Livingstone emphasizes the importance of reaching a balance between children's privacy rights online and the need for them to be able to engage with digital tools considering their unique vulnerabilities. Livingstone et al. (2019) also argue for moderation and support rather than restrictive control of digital play to encourage the possibilities for children to autonomously develop an understanding of risk and data-related processes.

Thinking otherwise puts refugee children at a disadvantage if the goal is for them to participate and become integrated in society and the labor market once they overcome their time as refugees and asylum seekers. As refugee children are —and should be— considered equal to other youth, it becomes paramount to think of sensible ways to enable forcibly displaced children to engage with digital technologies as part of their basic human needs and rights. This includes digital connections with their culture, language, ethnicity and nation of origin; digital media access to pass the time through play and leisure; digital social development opportunities that are comparable to those of non-displaced children their age; as well as access to digital strategies to cope with stress and uncertainty.

Main constraints for refugees' access to the Internet (these vary depending on specific locations) (Casswell, 2019; UNHCR, 2021a):

- Affordability (device/data plan/SIM card)
- Literacy (devices/platforms/apps)
- Documentation (ID/Legal status/work contract)
- Available infrastructure (electricity/charging stations/data coverage/WiFi hotspots)
- Social and Cultural (access to a borrowed device/gender-appropriate behaviors/cultural and social norms)

In terms of disability, it is one of the key vulnerabilities when designing and implementing policies aimed at refugees (UNHCR, 2018). There is a significant gap in the access to devices, connectivity, mobile phone ownership and use among disabled refugees. In this sense, refugees in the Ugandan Bidi Bidi camp who reported disabilities that involved significant difficulty in one area[2] had 13% less chance to have used a mobile phone in the recent 3 months and 19% less likely to be a phone owner (Downer, 2019). The same report found that in Kiziba, the same figures are 12% for using a phone and 18% for phone ownership. Moreover, among female refugees with disabilities in Kiziba there was 7% less probability to use a phone in the last 3 months when compared to non-disabled women and 46% less likely than non-disabled male refugees. Some of the main barriers and opportunities for disabled refugees can be bridged through digital connectivity with a focus on media literacies taillored to their specific needs (Hamilton, et al., 2020). The relevance of activities related to Digital Leisure include benefits such as maintaining community connections and interaction. Other scholars have emphasized that digital connectivity also increases the possibilities of disabled individuals for civic participation, identity construction, and negotiating their cultural and socioeconomic status (Annable et al., 2007).

Social Media obstacles for Persons of Concern* (UNHCR, 2021b)

- Risks of sharing identifiable data
- Challenges related to specific social media
- Limitations related to infrastructure (access/content/user rights violations)
- Personal responsibility for individual digital behaviors
- Third-party malicious actors

*In the case of this report, Persons of Concern refer to refugees and asylum seekers

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2   The disabilities reported by participants included hearing, sight, mobility, self-care, memory, and communication

Digital Leisure and Humanitarian Futures

"Agencies and foundations that want to benefit them need to pay attention to the fact that people who live in circumstances of scarce resources are, in the most fundamental ways, just like everyone else. They are proud. They are sexual beings. They look for love. They use humor as a powerful coping mechanism (...). They hunger for entertainment. Moreover, they do not sit and wait for the market to recognize them as legitimate consumers of leisure. Instead they creatively forge ahead, using whatever technology is available to them." (Arora, 2019a, p. 49).

The traditional dichotomy of leisure and work as opposites fails to acknowledge the overlaps and shared motivations that drive people to engage with technologies. Digital spaces blur the boundaries between the two even more, as people's preferences and passions stimulate their online activities and participation (Arora, 2019a). It is also important to note that digital leisure often involves labor that derives from the data-based business models of platforms such as filling a form to provide one's data to create a profile or flagging unsuitable content on social media platforms to exemplify such intersections. In this sense, exploring digital leisure allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the digital lives of people — including refugees.

Digital leisure has been established as a central aspect in the digital lives of individuals around the world; displaced populations should not be different. The question for humanitarian agencies and governments aiming to provide more effective aid to refugees should be: Why not digital leisure?

In the next sections we interrogate some of the beliefs and preconceptions about digital leisure that have excluded it from many digital inclusion initiatives, while outlining its opportunities for development agencies and the humanitarian sector.

Would entertainment trivialize development?

Recent evidence supports the prevalence and importance of digital leisure among refugees in different global contexts. This is reflected by data that suggests that some of the most popular uses of technology by refugees involve leisure activities. Thus, the third most common use reported by refugees in Jordan, Uganda and Rwanda was entertainment, including online games, radio and videos which could involve TV and music (Casswell, 2019). Additional research has found that refugees in four countries including Jordan, Zambia,

Colombia and Greece engage in entertainment activities such as watching sports/cooking shows/series produced in their home country, listening to music, locating friends, shopping for technology/household goods, accessing news and finding a partner for marriage (Culbertson et al., 2019). Their preferred phone functions include the camera as the most common, followed by calling, Wi-Fi and SMS[3] (Kaufmann, 2018).

In terms of preferred apps and platforms, public and private organizations have designed a large number of apps aimed at refugees, which reach more than 1,500 by some estimates (Madianou, 2019). Many of these apps were developed without including refugees and their feedback, and in many cases, without updating the information and app versions, which limited their sustainability (Drew, 2021). However, research suggests that refugees prefer mainstream social media and apps, rather than those specifically created for them (Culbertson et al., 2019). They prefer low-cost apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook due to their prevalence and ease of use, facilitating access to relevant information and communication through refugee-led groups that respond to their specific needs (Culbertson et al., 2019; R4V, 2019). In this sense, Latonero, Poole and Berens (2017) found that specific apps preferred by Syrian refugees in Greece[4] include WhatsApp, Facebook and Google Translate, while their use of Google Maps, Viber, IMO, YouTube and Skype were less prevalent.

"Looking at digital leisure as a pathway to inclusion is motivated by the communities we serve. Through country assessments, speaking with refugees about their information needs, we have seen refugee and hosting communities prioritize fun and entertainment when using mobile technology – from finding out football scores to listening to music." - John Warnes, Innovation Officer, UNHCR

In a 2021 report by UNHCR in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Niger refugees reported engaging in entertainment activities such as using social media such as Facebook and Twitter, accessing news, playing games, music and videos (UNHCR, 2021a). Moreover, Syrian refugees in the early stages of integration in the Netherlands reported spending long stretches of time on social media platforms including Facebook, Youtube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, Viber and Google. Moreover, the Line app, which resembles Skype, was also reported (Alencar, 2017). In a recent analytical review of 60 papers published since 2008, Alencar (2020b) found that these studies report some of the preferred social media apps by refugees as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Google Maps and Google Translate. Furthermore, in a study with Venezuelan refugees in Brazil, more than half of them report calling as the main use of mobile phones, followed by the use of Facebook and WhatsApp.

> Most prevalent digital leisure activities among refugees across the globe.
>
> - one-to-one and group messaging
> - sharing of photos, videos and music
> - accessing social media
> - online gaming
> - consumption of audiovisual content
> - romancing
> - shopping

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3   70% use the camera, 64% use the phone for calls, 39% use wifi functionalities and 16% use SMS.
4   Latonero, Poole and Berens (2017) found that 94% use WhatsApp, 78% use Facebook, about 38% use Google Translate and Google Maps, 29% use Viber, 25% use IMO, 24% use YouTube, and 9% use Skype. They also found that daily mobile usage may aid in decreasing the probability of depression in the refugee community. In terms of the use of phone functions they report that 70% use the camera, 64% use the phone for calls, 39% use wifi functionalities and 16% use SMS.

Main platforms used by refugees (may vary depending on location):

- WhatsApp
- Facebook
- YouTube
- Twitter
- Google Maps
- Google Translate
- Instagram
- Viber
- IMO
- Skype
- Line App
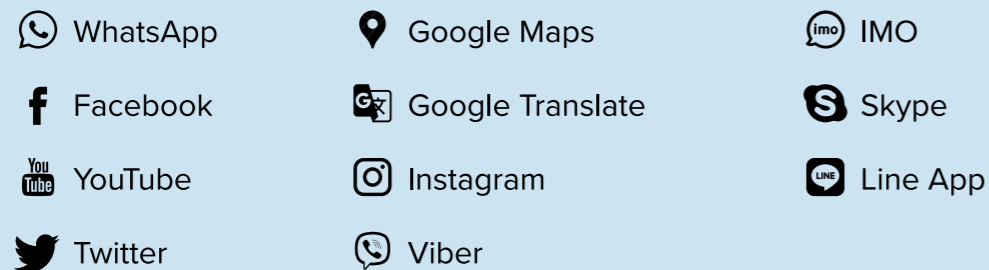
In the past, the fear that free access to technologies would lead to unsavory or illegal activities by aid recipients have rendered digital leisure as a secondary and marginal aspect in initiatives aimed at helping refugees. These beliefs have driven humanitarian aid to become more utilitarian, considering more productive goals, with problematic results, as anthropologist Payal Arora (2019a, p. 29) argues,

"To assume that everyone will use their internet access with productive intent is to assume that human beings are geared to pursue a Western notion of social progress".

Moreover, research on digital leisure has found that it is an important aspect of the lives of marginalized populations and one that is necessary to cope with difficulties, and ultimately to achieve desirable outcomes in terms of mental health, digital skills, and sustainable lives (Arora, 2012). However, the possibilities of digital leisure in the forced displacement context have not been sufficiently explored and thus, the present work becomes a relevant first step in this area of research and intervention.

However, many technology-driven, top-down solutions especially geared towards disenfranchised populations such as refugees and asylum seekers have resulted in thousands of apps and dead technologies rendered useless because they prefer to access

and use mainstream apps (Leurs & Smets, 2018). A refugee-centered approach that considers displaced populations' preferences in the use of digital media rather than paternalistic perceptions of their digital needs constitutes a disruptive opportunity to bridge the digital divides of access and usage (Arora, 2019a).

"The digital leisure divide draws much-needed attention to motivation, driven by pleasure, sociality, and entertainment. This recognizes happiness as part of the equation of a good life, online and offline." (Arora, 2019a, p. 15)

UNHCR responds to this need through community-based policies that aim to address the need for Accountability to Affected People[5] (AAP) to engage with communities through their preferred channels, with strategies that are delineated in the UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity. These include (1) basing policy on the diverse experiences of refugees and asylum seekers; and (2) maintaining accountability to those served by considering their perspectives, priorities and needs (UNHCR, 2018; 2020). The proposed digital leisure approach brings these important policies further by considering the meanings of media and technology in the lives of refugees, as well as the complex purposes and outcomes of their uses of digital media. This approach can better capture refugees' diverse experiences with technology. It has the potential to prove that entertainment does not constitute a trivial

aspect of refugee's lives but one that can enhance development and integration. In the next sections we start with a general overview of refugees' access and engagement with technologies and highlight the opportunities of a digital leisure approach to humanitarianism.

Can refugees come out and play?

"Software affordances and constraints serve as learning challenges: users learn to play with their privacy settings on browsers and social networking sites, and learn to protest and access pirated media materials through creative means " (Arora, 2014, p. 28)

Digital spaces, once considered free and democratic, are often limited by private and commercial interests. In this context, leisure is fundamental to challenge utilitarian leanings in digital domains and balance opposing models to build, maintain and regulate the Internet (Arora, 2014). The equilibrium and overlap of work and play sheds light onto other competing paradigms including private versus public systems, and open versus closed configurations (Arora, 2014, p.4). Furthermore the spatial nature of leisure is reflected by the ways in which digital spaces —e.g. social media platforms, dating and gaming apps— enable and constraint different modes of communication, sociality and entertainment (Arora, 2014; 2019a).

"Digital leisure activities can become additional potential gateways for refugee and migrant integration in the Americas. Digital leisure, including games, chat and apps can be powerful pathways to facilitate integration into their hosting communities and rebuild their lives." Erika Pérez, Associate Innovation Officer, UNHCR, Americas

The strategies of different users to negotiate and position themselves through navigation and choice are relevant to understand how they appropriate the digital sphere and inhabit it to make it their own. In this context, the possibilities of digital platforms as spaces for self-actualization, social connectivity and civic participation are endless, but involve obscure processes of moderation and content guidelines that change periodically and affect people differently (Gillespie,

2010). Moreover, understanding (in)visibility practices by marginalized populations within digital leisure spaces has the potential to expand the general understanding of the various modes of privacy they deploy within playful activities (Arora, 2019b).

In Brazilian favelas, e-games such as Free Fire have exploded due to its low cost and ease of installation, requiring only an inexpensive, simple smartphone to be installed and helping people gain digital skills, access to a community of gamers and financial income (Miranda & Queiroga, 2021).

"I think there is a lot of general interest for leisure activities, particularly amongst youth wanting to learn digital skills and recognising the importance of being part of the digital landscape. Often when implementing connected education programmes, we hear expressions like 'thank you for helping ensure we are not being left behind, we're now part of the digital world.' There's a lot of meaning tied to digital inclusion for these communities. I also think that being able to have more access to resources for leisure activities is also quite important." Jacqueline Strecker, UNHCR Connected Education Officer

Moreover, fintech has been pointed as one of the possible answers for refugees and impoverished people, who often cannot access financial services due to their lack of an "economic identity" which includes the digital footprint that defines the financial history of a person. Using blockchain technology, US-based company named BanQu aims to offer these populations, especially across the Global South, mobile-based, portable digital identities that can provide access to an array of governmental and private services that were previously out of reach (Gadnis, 2017). Furthermore, Kiva uses a philanthropic crowdsourcing model to expand lending opportunities to refugees, who are often considered too risky for most financial institutions; they have also designed a digital ID solution that will enable refugees to establish a credit history (Kiva, 2020). A digital leisure approach to fintech may provide answers to some of the most challenging aspects of refugee lives in relation to financial and digital inclusion —through gaming and leisure.

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5   For UNHCR, the term "affected people" refers to refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, stateless people, and those internally displaced.

Why is sex, sexuality and intimacy underexplored within the refugee context?

The possibilities of digital media for dating, romance and the consumption of explicit content have been scarcely researched in refugee contexts, but insights from other marginalized populations may shed light onto practices and interests related to these intimate, digitally mediated aspects of life. Anthropologist Payal Arora argues that the poor enjoy the same digital leisure activities as their wealthier counterparts, including activities that may be seen as taboo, such as browsing pornography or using the Internet to explore their own sexuality. Arora (2019a) suggests that the lack of focus on these widespread uses of digital media is driven by funders and development agencies' fear that these activities may deter donors and government agencies in their efforts to boost connectivity and build digital inclusion. Hence, there is a concerted and narrowed steering towards utilitarian uses of digital technologies linked to social mobility. In this section we explore the opportunities offered by these underexplored aspects of marginalized communities' digital sexual lives.

For instance, digital romance can promote literacies related to media, languages and others. At a Delhi slum, teenagers use platforms such as Facebook to befriend youth of the opposite sex in other countries, prompting the use of Google translate to connect with them and motivating them to adopt and learn how to use social media platforms. In the process of engaging in online romance, they also learn about different levels of privacy offered by digital platforms and the need to delimit their different selves in these highly visible spaces (Arora, 2019a).

Moreover, refugees identifying as homosexual have reflected an unwillingness to connect to their families abroad due to the rejection they faced from them and presented different online identities to avoid having their sexual orientation or identity revealed on social media such as Facebook (Dhoest, 2020). Researchers have found that Facebook groups aimed at LGBTQI+ refugees provide them with important social connections and a sense of belonging that may be established based on their sexual orientation as well as their cultural and ethnic background. The motivations for use and participation in these groups and apps are varied and include avoiding discrimination and learning about social events as well as negotiating identity. In contrast, some LGBTQI+ refugees and asylum seekers prefer to participate in groups and dating apps that are aimed at LGBTQI+ individuals in general (Patterson & Leurs, 2019). This reflects the complex ways in which the intersectional identities of refugees that go beyond their migratory status and ethnicity are reflected in their media practices and their reasons to participate in different platforms and groups.

Some companies have been able to balance romance and health for sexual minorities through digital services. An example includes Beijing-based company BlueCity, which has been able to position itself as a leading HIV health promotion platform through the development and expansion of the largest LGBTQI+ dating app in the country named Blued. Adapting to the Chinese government's position on gay rights, the company diluted the sexual aspect of the site and turned it into a space for health and one that provides a discreet space where LGBTQI+ individuals can access health information that may be taboo (Deck & Yang, 2021). Another example is the Grindr for Equality initiative, which works to inform, empower and support LGBTQI+ communities around the world by supporting local activist and non-profit organizations including LGBTQI+ refugees fleeing Venezuela (Grindr4e, 2022). They provide information about the safe use of dating apps and use their network of users for different social justice issues in each country where they work.

Digital media also offers spaces for sexual empowerment and agency for youth in oppressive contexts, which are applicable to many refugees who escape such countries. A case of interest is that of Singaporean Twitter and OnlyFans content creator Ris, who was able to monetize her humorous content about sex which is considered a taboo subject in Asian cultures. She engages in different levels of sexually explicit content by taking advantage of the autonomy provided by OnlyFans through its subscription-based model and her large following on Twitter (over 32,000) (Elliott, 2021a).

OnlyFans and other digital platforms may also offer a safer space for LGBTQI+ individuals to open up, connect with others, and escape oppressive cultures in nations where sexual diversity is criminalized. This is the case of Bolu, the son of a Nigerian politician who was able to openly discuss his homosexuality on platforms such as Instagram and expand his intersectional black and gay identities on OnlyFans, where he does not share fully nude content (Kachi, 2021).

Users of OnlyFans argue that it provides a safe space to grow and monetize pornographic and explicit content. This is reflected by the backlash the company received when it announced it would ban sexually explicit content last August, just to suspend it five days later due to massive reactions that suggest that this type of content is pervasive and preferred by platform users (Hern & Waterson, 2021).

Moreover, access to digital content provides an opportunity for marginalized youth who may not have access to sexual health information to explore their own sexuality and the changes they are experiencing. Adolescent and adult women may also access and share information about aspects such as contraception, as research in Zambia suggests (Chidimma et al., 2014). For instance, adolescents benefit from having access to communities online who may help them navigate their self-discovery process and naturalize sexual desires and gain an understanding of practicing healthy and joyful sex.

Possible benefits of digital content related to sexuality and romance

- Motivation to adopt digital media
- Learn about privacy and visibility
- Explore sexuality and sexual identity
- Access and share sexual health information
- Connect with communities of affinity in terms of sexuality

What content would refugees create?

"Social media networks can become sites for elaborating strategies of selfhood as opposed to the severe material deprivations encountered by refugees and migrants in their daily lives in the streets." (Alencar, 2020b, p.512)

The possibilities to embody and construct digital identities beyond those that are possible in offline environments are fundamental to express aspirations and escape from harsh realities (Alencar, 2020a; Arora, 2019a). These opportunities to convey desires and goals through digital content creation and expression are often not extended to vulnerable groups, who may face limitations that are similar to those that exist in society, including different types of discrimination and dominance (Arora, 2016). Moreover, in the design and technical structures of these platforms, there are embedded power hierarchies that often replicate those that exist offline and hinder the ability of some groups to participate equally, such as the privilege of creating content without fear or expanding one's audience through strong, established networks (Spencer, Schultz & McKeown, 2018).

"With due diligence, social media can strengthen participation, engagement, transparency, outreach and advocacy" (UNHCR, 2021b — Using social media in Community-based protection)

As refugees adapt and gain a sense of belonging in their countries of refuge, they often negotiate their various identities in online and offline contexts. Research has found that forcibly displaced individuals reflect on their own identity — which may include race or language — while engaging with digital apps.

In the process of signing up for dating apps, for example, racial categories are provided in a limited, pre-established list of options (Bayramoğlu & Lünenborg, 2018). Social media spaces also enable calculated self-presentation, where the forcibly displaced can perform identities beyond their status and portray their desired selves (Witteborn, 2015). Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Brazil also engage in selective self-presentation by depicting their new lives through images that include food and public sites. These strategies to counter their actual situation of scarcity and spatial limitation and convey a specific, aspirational identity (Alencar, 2020b).

"The central piece is around choice. Instead of Western organizations trying to impose assumptions on what people might need, it's about putting that choice into people's hands." Jenny Casswell, Director of research and insights for GSMA

Media use by refugees and their strategies for integration has often been described in terms of the different stages in the journey (Alencar, 2020b). In the journey, refugees engage in a range of leisure activities to pass the time while waiting, from playing games and using apps such as Netflix to preferring to save the battery for more critical uses through the journey and beyond (Alencar et al., 2019; Casswell, 2019). Thus, refugees en route are often negotiating their use of digital devices and applications to avoid detection and deportation enabled by GPS applications used by state officials, and they do this using pseudonyms, private Facebook groups and WhatsApp (Gillespie, et al., 2018). The use of different profiles and pseudonyms extends to their deployment of various devices and their ability to hack other profiles and accounts.

"Refugees en route are often negotiating their use of digital devices and applications to avoid detection and deportation, enabled by GPS applications used by state officials, and they do this using pseudonyms, private Facebook groups and WhatsApp"

Furthermore, scholars have explored the role of social media and mobile devices for archiving and curating memories of refugee lives (Alencar et al., 2019). In this sense, the affordances and functionalities of mobile phones enable capturing and collecting iconic moments in the journey regarded as joyful memories of success through arrival to the desired destination (Alencar et al., 2019) which also serve to convey safe arrival to family members left behind (Eide, 2020). Mobile phones also store evidence of violence and oppression, and refugees want to make this content visible and ensure its expansion on social media, which often involve experiences that may not fit within the platform's community guidelines. Some of their strategies to avoid content moderation include the creation of various profiles to cater to different audiences and diverse goals; another strategy involves using virtual private networks (VPNs) or messaging apps such as WhatsApp to avoid the public character of traditional social media (Leurs, 2017, p. 688). Accordingly, the invasive policies involved in the asylum-seeking process, which often requires refugees to turn over their social media handles and phone files (Witteborn, 2021) has prompted the need for these vulnerable populations to curate and censor the contents that are available on their profiles and devices (Leurs, 2017).

Furthermore, policies that violate the privacy of refugees and asylum seekers are not limited to receiving nations in charge of evaluating asylum requests. Alencar (2020b, p. 6) describes refugees avoiding the use of social media and the deployment of disposable SIM cards to escape surveillance by the governments in their native countries even after fleeing. A prolonged digital consumption for refugees and related possibilities of generating digital traces might exacerbate their vulnerabilities and existing conditions due to surveillance and privacy issues (Maitland, 2018).

The strategies used by refugees to maintain their identities and cultures and counter existing misconceptions on social media are also relevant, and reflect the opportunities afforded by these platforms for visibility and agency for marginalized populations. Such practices have been reported across the world, such as displaced indigenous Yanacona youth in Colombia who use platforms to maintain their cultural traditions and identities (Sarría-Sanz & Alencar, 2020). On the other hand, Latin American migrants of various nationalities living in the US and Spain leverage social media content creation on TikTok to counter harmful social media discourse about themselves, and to establish affinity with other migrants (Jaramillo-Dent, Alencar & Asadchy, forthcoming 2022).

Although this research covers migrants in general, it is possible to infer that this is also applicable to forcibly displaced people, who may also engage in content creation to counter and connect. Other studies focusing on Karen[6] youth digital storytelling practices have emphasized "settlement escapes" using strategies such as the representation of ideal settlement imaginaries by prompting the creation of audiovisual content. The prevalence of iconic locations and patriotic symbols within Karen youth content reflect "assimilationist" ideas of belonging, integration and equality that are sternly different from the day-to-day lives of these participants in Australia (Gifford & Wilding, 2013, p. 567).

Migrants use platforms and their available functionalities to create content that embodies their belongings, to contest widespread beliefs about themselves and to use their voice by achieving visibility (Jaramillo-Dent, Alencar & Asadchy, forthcoming 2022).

How would refugees use their voice and build community?

Digital leisure also enables marginalized groups to maintain or increase their social capital, build community voice and establish multiple belongings while coping with challenges in their daily lives. In this section we explore the opportunities of digital leisure in this realm.

Refugees' transnational networks of friends and family members constitute some of their main sources of social capital. For this, digital media has a key role enabling refugees to establish communication with their support networks across borders, who can help them cope with offline material hardship and regain a sense of security in light of their present circumstances (Leurs, 2014). Studies in different refugee settings have shown that the audiovisual affordances of mobile phones (e.g., phone calls, video-chats, haptic functions, recordings) allow refugees to sustain multiple levels of digital intimacy (Greene, 2019) and achieve some well-being (Wall, Campbel, & Janbek, 2017). For instance Greene (2019) showed how an entire relationship between a Syrian refugee couple was mediated through the smartphone by frequently sharing photos and videos of their son through WhatsApp. "Digital co-presence" through these sharing practices in this case helped alleviate the physical distance that separated the couple due to the Syrian war, while also enabling them to maintain a sense of hope for a better future together. Furthermore, according to Twigt (2018), mobile phone affordances can enable an integrative communication environment between distanced mothers and their sons. In her study, the practice of creating and sharing video clips allowed a mother who fled Iran to create a digital archive

of memories and a sense of shared history with her daughter who stayed behind. Moreover, Leurs (2014) describes how the smartphone functioned as a crucial resource of affective capital for Somali youths stranded in Ethiopia, as they were able to communicate with their parents, even though they were left behind in a distant location (p. 15). Marino (2015) describes the ways in which digital media can become spaces for solidarity and community building among refugees, offering an opportunity for social cohesion.

"The use of mobile technologies among refugees experiencing resettlement has been associated with social inclusion and opportunities to enhance access to relevant information that can nurture their daily lives." (Alencar, 2020a, p. 7)

Creating and consuming content on social media also helps build, maintain and expand social capital. For instance, Venezuelans in Boa Vista often explore new places in Brazil through blog stories. They use blogs to share experiences online and as virtual companions as they tour to other parts of Brazil. As one participant put it: "I've read all sorts of stories, from the most beautiful to the least desired, from the funniest to the saddest. The most enjoyable part of this quest was finding one of the people who would become a great travel companion, even though he was still a virtual friend." (Alencar & Camargo, forthcoming in 2022). At the same time, Venezuelans also report the value of listening to other people's stories in Brazil on Facebook as a source of hope that made them dream of a better life in their

Functions of social media content consumption and creation for refugees:

- Express aspirations
- Escape from harsh realities
- Pass the time while waiting
- Convey desires and goals
- Maintain memories and connections to their past
- Preserve and express their various identities
- Negotiate platform guidelines and privacy
- Enter public discourse about themselves
- Counter existing misconceptions

6 Ethnolinguistic group of Sino-Tibetan language-speaking peoples.

Venezuelans also report the value of listening to other people's stories in Brazil, on Facebook, as a source of hope that made them dream of a better life in their new place.

new place. A Venezuelan woman named Maria created a personal crowd-funding campaign in social media so that she could obtain the necessary resources and support to migrate to Brazil. Through this site, Maria described how she was able to reconnect with friends and acquaintances she had not seen for a long time and who helped her overcome the fear of traveling, as these people had already moved away from Venezuela.

"Immigrants are able to connect through the use of platform affordances to express affinity towards other content creators on TikTok, by responding to existing videos and describing the similarities in their migratory experiences" (Jaramillo-Dent, Alencar & Asadchy, forthcoming 2022)**.**

Some of the most reported use of mobile devices by refugees after one-to-one messaging in three different locations —Jordan, Uganda and Rwanda— was online group messaging, including activities such as sharing photos, videos and music as well as accessing social networking sites such as Facebook (Casswell, 2019). Meanwhile, a recent study by UNHCR (2021a) in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Niger found that more than two-thirds of interviewed refugees in these countries have access to a mobile phone and that some of the main functions of mobile phones for them include connecting with loved ones, using social media and getting news. They also report sharing digital content with people from the same community, with whom they listen to music and watch videos.

In German shelters, young refugee women with their families have to share living spaces with other families and single men from different cultural backgrounds. For these young women who live in these shelter environments without privacy, the use of technology enables them to create a space that is not accessible to their parents and other family members. To access technology, these women report having four options (1) using their own phone devices (if they had one); (2) using devices of their family members, (3) using devices of friends, or (4) accessing an internet cafe. As Witteborn (2021) stated, "all these options had drawbacks in the sense that family members could intervene in their communication, friends could misuse their passwords, and internet cafes posed the challenge of moving in co-gendered spaces." The young women were constantly negotiating family cultural identity norms through their digital access, while at the same time, being afraid of missing out, such as meeting with friends, browsing the Internet and following music trends on Youtube.

> ## Opportunities of digital leisure related to social capital and voice
>
> - Connecting with loved ones
> - Sharing digital leisure with local community
> - Harnessing social media to expand business initiatives
> - Coping with difficult situations
> - Getting support and important information
> - Avoiding intellectual decline in old age

A large body of research suggests that digital media are used for reinforcing positive moods (Reinecke, 2016), especially in situations of stress. Most refugees who are faced with stressful life events are no exception and actively use their smartphones to relieve boredom and as a coping mechanism. Narli (2018) found that during the stage of displacement, Syrian refugees use the phone to navigate the journey and keep safe, while also engaging in virtual placemaking through a digital address. Upon arrival in the host country, refugees use their mobile phones to access shelter and social services information, as well as communicating with loved ones. Finally, in some regions, they use mobile phones to access news and images about the war in their countries of origin as well as to digitally archive their personal evidence of war and displacement. Another study found that refugee populations also use digital technologies for religious purposes such as access to the Quran and local churches (Culbertson et al., 2019). These uses and experiences are often context-specific and change depending on the country of origin and the country of refuge.

The UNHCR policy on age, gender and diversity (2018) identifies the increased risks of older refugees due to vulnerabilities derived from their mental and physical state, as well as discrimination they may suffer because of their age. Research in the Ugandan Bidi Bidi refugee settlement found that 39% of refugees older than 51 reported ongoing difficulties using their phone due to lack of digital and general literacies ranging from the inability to read and write, to difficulties downloading content, and remembering phone numbers, codes and

PINs (Cresswell, 2019). Moreover, scholarship focusing on the digital lives of older migrants suggests that digital leisure increases their self-worth and improves their quality of life. The activities preferred by elderly migrants include digital media consumption and online chatting that enables them to build and maintain a social life, cherish past memories and cope with the difficulties of their migratory experience (Khvorostianov, Ellas & Nimrod, 2012). These results may also be applicable to older forcibly displaced people, due to some of the similarities in their experience fleeing their countries and adapting to a new context.

Similarly, the benefits of digital social networking for older individuals in general have been solidly documented. Research in this area suggests that the agency to engage in digital leisure helps in avoiding decline and dependency (Hebblethwaite, 2016, p.99). Evidence on older adults' uses of digital media illustrates their view of technologies as coping mechanisms in the face of loneliness (Çarçani & Mörtberg, 2018). Additionally, low-cost mediated entertainment — including music, movies, games, cooking content and mental exercises— made possible through digital connectivity, can reduce social tensions and provide a much needed disconnect from reality (Kukier, 2021, p. 77).

An agentic view for older adults is necessary as part of a Digital Leisure approach that is centered on the needs of diverse refugees, considering their digital practices and preferences together with their intersectional vulnerabilities.

Digital Leisure and Contemporary Livelihoods

"Leisure continues to be a central motivating force behind low-income communities' adoption and use of digital media." (Arora, 2019a, p. 14)

"Life in the camps (...) can be very difficult and monotonous for each and every refugee. There are very few or no specific leisure (...) activities for them, and this factor helps explain their greater need for social media tools as a means to cope with anxiety at the center." (Alencar, 2017, p. 1595)

"The goal with this work examining the possible benefits of digital leisure is to understand whether it should be an integral part of a protection response"- John Warnes, Innovation Officer, UNHCR

What livelihoods would digital leisure offer refugees?

Technology has been championed as the answer for many of today's societal issues and inequalities. This is reflected by the digitalization of humanitarian aid aimed at refugees and the emergence and prevalence of digital solutionism (Madianou, 2019). Approaches aimed at harnessing the possibilities afforded by technology have traditionally considered its utilitarian facets (Arora, 2019a). Meanwhile, digital play has become more and more embedded in every aspect of people's lives, including the future of work (Zimmerman, 2015 as cited in Arora, 2019b). Some technologies developed for forcibly displaced populations, acknowledging the power of play, have attempted to include a gamified design and logic, but controlled digital environments have proven ineffective (Madianou, 2019). However, free play opportunities for refugee populations to navigate ordinary tasks such as consuming audiovisual content, gaming, engaging in romance and socializing are scarce. This is problematic, considering that the process of sensemaking enabled by digital leisure, where users learn and negotiate the rules of the game is paramount for technological adoption and a more competent use of the media, especially considering existing power structures reflected in technological design that replicate and perpetuate social inequalities (Arora, 2019b). Research and recent news on digital leisure suggest that these have the potential to generate unexpected livelihood opportunities for marginalized populations such as refugees and asylum seekers, pointing to their relevance for development in terms of digital and financial inclusion.

> The three digital divides (access, literacy and leisure) are not dependent on each other nor progressive, they develop in ways that may be unexpected (Arora, 2019a).

"Looking at the digital leisure divide is really important because it brings out the rights-based component of closing digital gaps and the idea that accessibility should not be conditioned." Oliver Lough, Research Fellow, Humanitarian Policy Group

It is important to note that digital leisure is interwoven with socioeconomic empowerment and the same devices and ICTs that enable "desirable" entrepreneurial, educational and integrative activities also provide access to social connectivity, mediated flirting and sexuality, consumption and production of audiovisual content, among others. The social mobility aspirations enabled by participation on social media are reflected in friending and following practices, which include known and unknown people nearby including celebrities and people of a higher socioeconomic standing (Rangaswamy & Arora, 2015 p. 620). Thus, excluding digital leisure from policy and practice that aims at bridging the digital gap, limits the aspirational possibilities for refugees, while precluding them from economic opportunities related to digital play. Such opportunities include content creation, which can lead to possibilities to monetize one's profile and content; digital commerce; crowdfunding and crowdsourcing; and the development of their own technologies in response to the specific needs of their community.

For instance, a recent study by UNHCR (2021a) found that in specific cases, refugees in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Niger reported using their phone to expand their business and generate an income, including Facebook and WhatsApp-based commercial initiatives, while 35% of them reported using mobile money transfer services. This reflects how social media connections can enable entrepreneurship to flourish in refugee contexts and fintech empowers and enables financial literacies and growth.

In this digital media ecosystem, play and gaming offer entrepreneurial opportunities to creators and gamers, who can monetize these leisure activities. An example is popular 26-year-old Twitch esports streamer Ibai Llanos who has inspired new forms of fandom and has attracted a following of 5 million due to his commentary of football games and broadcasts of popular videogames. He is now a leading figure in the sports and esports commentary industry (Schwartz & Cholakian Herrera, 2021). In the case of Philippine streamer RK Secretario, he was forced by the pandemic to shift from his work as a rice feed seller to monetize his gaming, playing a popular Vietnamese smartphone game called Axie

Infinity, which has enabled him to make $2000 for one hour of play a day. This game is most popular in the Philippines and Venezuela due to the possibilities to earn real money through the blockchain payment scheme it offers (Elliott, 2021b). It also exemplifies the current opportunities offered by fintech within gaming platforms, by offering new monetization possibilities and financial literacy for marginalized groups through virtual money and cryptocurrencies (Finextra, 2021).

Moreover, content creation on social media can be more than a means for entertainment; it can also become a source of income that provides enhanced livelihoods for marginalized populations. An example is illustrated by brother and sister Santan and Savitri Mahto, who started their TikTok account in 2018. From their humble life in a rural Indian village, they attracted 2.7 million followers and were able to earn good money, until TikTok was banned in June, 2020. Although Instagram and Facebook have replaced TikTok for Indian creators, these platforms are seen as more elite, where a more polished image is presented (Sharma, 2021). Thus, the possibilities offered by TikTok for marginalized populations have been taken away from microinfluencers such as these Indian siblings. Moreover, research on immigrant tiktokers in the US and Spain sheds light on some of the opportunities for empowerment and activism offered by this social media platform, suggesting that immigrants who gather a relevant audience on TikTok engage with political topics that affect them, shed light on injustice and emphasize their rights as they integrate in their new country (Jaramillo-Dent, Contreras-Pulido & Pérez-Rodríguez, 2022).

"Immigrant influencers have multidimensional online personas, they deploy platformed strategies to present controversial political content and deploy creative approaches to moderation. Their content models the 'correct' ways to be an immigrant and take action, reflecting their own unique microcelebrity styles." (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022)

A shift to more political content following civil unrest in Peru has made former Instagram fashion influencer @salandela grow her following by more than 70,000, attracting several brands and major campaigns who are attracted by her authenticity and political commentary

and exemplifying the opportunities to exercise political influence and activism while earning an income (Ledgard, 2021).

In this context, UNHCR Innovation Service provides, through a call for proposals, a space for UNHCR operations to test new ideas and approaches to promote the digital inclusion of forcibly displaced persons. Given UNHCR experience in working hand in hand with community members and structures, operations were interested in exploring the possibility to leverage the online presence of relevant community members to enhance protection outcomes within their communities-this is working with community-based social media influencers.

For instance, in Kiziba and Mahama camps in Rwanda, more than half of the population is under the age of 24 years old. In the context of COVID-19, where most sports and recreational activities were suspended for significant periods, the operation witnessed an increase in protection issues affecting youth, such as early pregnancies, school dropout, and drug and alcohol consumption. To explore new ways of reaching out to youths using various means through social media, UNHCR Rwanda applied to the 2021 Digital Inclusion Call for Proposals to fund a project to better engage and communicate with youths via trusted community-based influencers, broadening their skills and employment opportunities as well. To date, training was conducted for a total of 50 youths (25 each from Kiziba camp and Mahama camp) to become 'community-based social media influencers'. These participants were tasked with sharing relevant information from UNHCR with their communities, and fighting online mis- and disinformation. During the training, the youths learnt about journalism, how best to use social media platforms, how to record and edit photos and videos, interviewing and online safeguarding, and legal issues.

Similarly, Chile was interested in identifying and training key online community influencers to support the delivery of UNHCR´s protection response given the increasing influx of forcibly displaced people entering into the country through regular and irregular entry points in 2021. The lack of information about the geographical and climate conditions, as well as integration opportunities in the country, along with the increasing

Fifty youth from Kiziba and Mahama camp, displaying their training tools for the Community-Based Social Media influencers project in Rwanda

fake news circulating among the channels most used by refugees and migrants was generating mistrust in official sources and local authorities. To achieve this, UNHCR partnered with Universidad Central de Chile (UCEN), which hosts a Social Media Observatory, as well as with Fundacion Mapocho, an organization working with community leaders providing them with the tools to become change agents. During the first phase of the project, UNHCR and Universidad Central carried out a mapping exercise to identify social media influencers for the Venezuelan community in the country on TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Over 100 influencers were initially mapped out of which 20 were finally selected for their alignment with UNHCR values and activities in Chile. These influencers count with a heterogeneous number of followers ranging from 5,000 up to over 100,000. The Fundación Mapocho, jointly with UNHCR, conducted interviews with the selected

influencers to better plan the structure and content of the training course. During these interactions, several priority topics have been identified, such as data protection and security, self-care, psychological first aid, and referring mechanisms in place of potential persons in need of support from humanitarian organizations. To date, the training with the community influencers is underway and in March 2022 UCEN Journalist and Communications professors will offer a session to the influencers on strategic communications.[7]

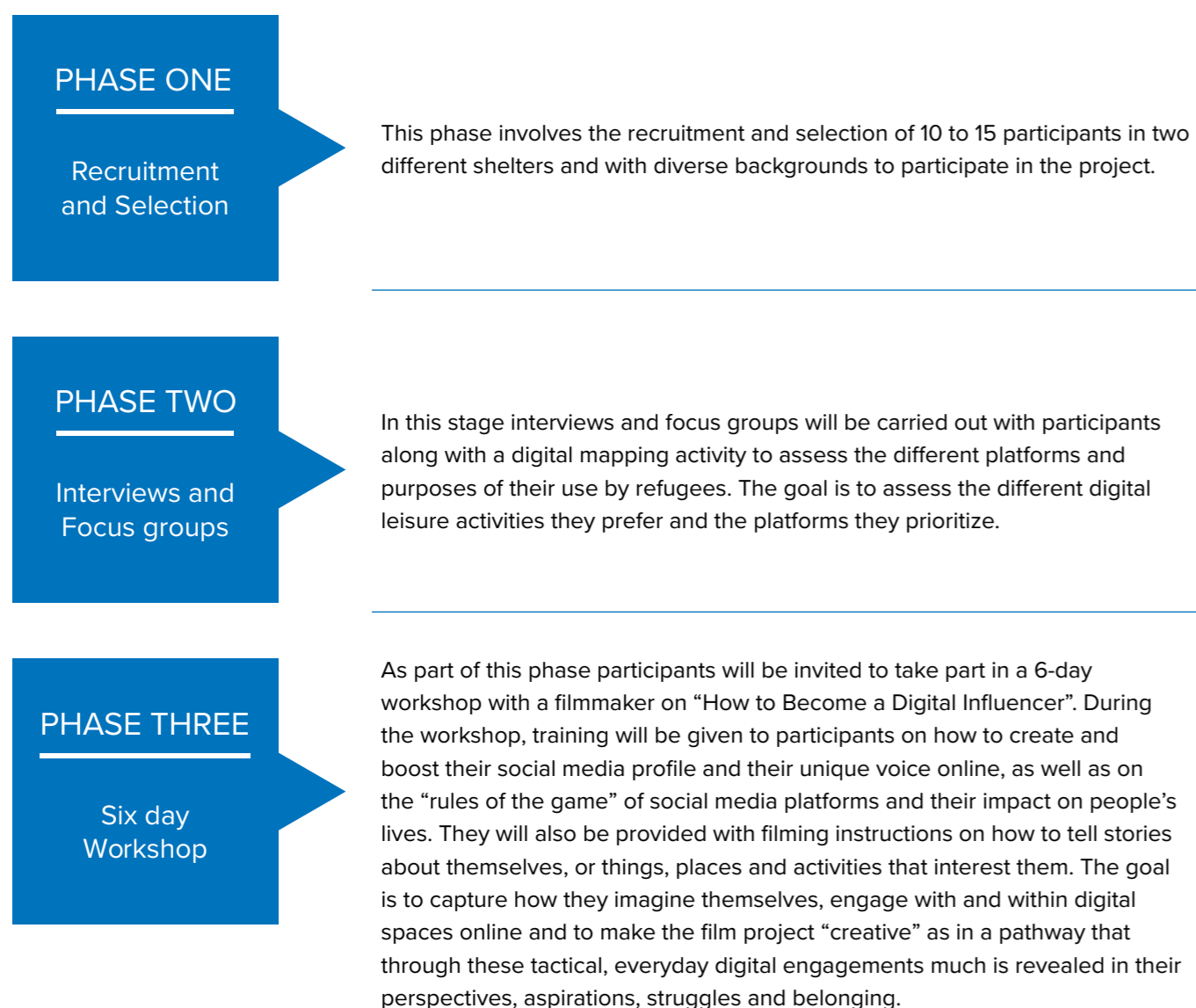These examples reflect the range of bottom-up initiatives by which the poor and other marginalized populations create opportunities for themselves through digital leisure, instrumentalizing available technologies, opening a wide range of possibilities for other groups, such as refugees and asylum seekers.

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7   More information about this project is available on the dedicated website: https://redliideresdigitales.com/

What is next?

The digital leisure approach supports the diverse ways in which people navigate digital spaces and provides new opportunities to expand existing policies that ensure accountability and community-based responses to the need for digital inclusion. This may offer an opportunity for marginalized populations such as refugees and asylum seekers to take some control and autonomy of their lives, and to develop in ways that may be unexpected, with dignity and freedom. Digital leisure may shed new light onto the areas of refugee's lives that can benefit from a person-centered approach to bridge existing digital gaps. The five areas of digital leisure delineated in this report constitute underexplored areas of research in refugee contexts and areas that have largely been excluded from humanitarian response.

In the next months the team will conduct fieldwork in refugee shelters in Northern Brazil in three phases:

PHASE ONE

Recruitment and Selection

This phase involves the recruitment and selection of 10 to 15 participants in two different shelters and with diverse backgrounds to participate in the project.

PHASE TWO

Interviews and Focus groups

In this stage interviews and focus groups will be carried out with participants along with a digital mapping activity to assess the different platforms and purposes of their use by refugees. The goal is to assess the different digital leisure activities they prefer and the platforms they prioritize.

PHASE THREE

Six day Workshop

As part of this phase participants will be invited to take part in a 6-day workshop with a filmmaker on "How to Become a Digital Influencer". During the workshop, training will be given to participants on how to create and boost their social media profile and their unique voice online, as well as on the "rules of the game" of social media platforms and their impact on people's lives. They will also be provided with filming instructions on how to tell stories about themselves, or things, places and activities that interest them. The goal is to capture how they imagine themselves, engage with and within digital spaces online and to make the film project "creative" as in a pathway that through these tactical, everyday digital engagements much is revealed in their perspectives, aspirations, struggles and belonging.

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hqconref@unhcr.org