[20-Minute Lightning Session] Human Rights Online: What Has Internet Governance got to do with Refugees?
Day 3, IGF2016

Background

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR 2016) estimates that over 65 million have been forced from home. Over 20 million are refugees and more than half of those are under the age of 18. Internet access and mobile phones play a pivotal role in providing information, helping families to stay connected and giving newcomers the necessary tools to being able to start a new life in another part of the world.

Considering that offline rights should be protected online (UNHRC 2014) is enough being done to ensure equal access and to protect the rights refugees and displaced people? What sort of political, technical and social cultural challenges arise in order to enable, and protect the rights of refugees online and allow their fully participate in the online environment?

Following up on the discussion initiated at this year's EuroDIG ("**Confronting the Digital Divide" Workshop Sessions**), and drawing on the work of the **Internet Rights and Principles Coalition (IRPC)** and the **Charter of Human Rights and Principles for the Internet**, this session takes a focused and practical approach to apply human rights principles to existing discriminatory structures.

hashtags: #refugeesinternet   #IGF2016

Twitter: @netrights

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Below is an informal transcript of this lightening session. Our thanks to all participants, speakers and on the floor, for their input, and thanks also to our rapporteur for recording this discussion.

[SESSION BEGINS]

[Introductory notes from Marianne Franklin]

What does HR have to do with refugees? The UN high commission for refugees estimate that 60 million people have been forced to leave their homes, of which 20 million are refugees.

Participants get a short time respond to this question. Session participants are given a minute each to respond to what human rights online have to do with refugees.

David Krystof (Freifunk Rhein-Main, Germany)
"In Germany we provide free and open Wi-Fi networks to refugees. We use existing Wi-Fi routers and add software to enable access". At the moment it is free to do so, but proposed legislation would make it difficult.

Valentina Pelliizzer (One World Platform)
Working with international organizations and the Balkan routes through which many refugees arrive to Europe. "The European Union is willing to do anything to not let them enter." With current goals such as connecting the next billion, "we got 60 million people automatically excluded."

It is also a question of accessibility: how much does it cost for a migrant to get access?

We did work on the use of drones in relation to refugees.
Many organizations are working on providing access, but many refugees are "droned".
Refugees are the next billion that will be working, but they are at the core of this issue.

Jesus Lau (IFLA Mexico):
What do libraries have to do with immigrants and Human Rights?
Libraries are one of best places to support immigrants and refugees.
Some libraries are quick to react. German, Austrian, and Nordic libraries have worked on how to provide services.

"But Mexico is known to send immigrants to the U.S.
But Mexico itself is a passage for immigration. Many Central Americans do not cross the border or are returned back from the U.S. and stay in Mexico.
It is difficult to say who is a foreigner in Mexico, we speak the same language, and share the same culture and traditions."

The library plays a big role in our biggest border city. The city has 26 libraries and they are supporting immigrants, from Latin America, but also from Haiti.
"People coming from elsewhere don't speak Spanish and are very disadvantaged.
Libraries provide support. Especially internet access."
You will see Haitians using the internet in public parks.

Luisa Ibarra (FLIP Columbia)

In Columbia, displaced are similar to refugees, because of the internal conflict.
"Many people had to flee their home. Columbia has the highest number of displaced, six million people in 2015."

"The Foundation for Press Freedom has been conducting research – mapping the internet, international subscribers, speed, and digital media.
We found that in conflict areas there is not much digital media, there are few subscribers, and low speeds". A Pacific Coast state only 500.000 people, but only [4 percent] are

subscribed to internet. "We know that *not* having it removes democratic power to speak out. It prevents access to information about what is happening back home."

[Marianne underscores why this is about Human Rights, using the example of Article 2 regarding non-discrimination and its three sub articles.
- Access
- Entitlement to dignity
- Entitlement to participate in cultural life]

Marianne:
"Why is it so difficult to have equitable access?
Why are they being denied access?
Why is that happening?"

David has something to say about providing Wi-Fi access.

David:
We are bringing Wi-Fi to refugees, in places that are different from cities. They live in big tents or small rooms. With the Wi-Fi movement, "we are doing something that shouldn't be our job" – it should be governments, local, or federal - we go directly to places and work out whatever we can.

"We really see how thankful those people are."
"We are not doing it for money, we are doing it because we believe it's the right thing and because no one is doing it."

We are hacking existing [legislation] to provide free Wi-Fi to people.
"It should be the job of people in charge, [role] of government."

Marianne:

"It's a form of violence to deny someone access to their friend networks."
"It's a form of violence to tell people what they may or may not access online."
"It's a form of violence to take away their smartphone."

We are talking about Internet Governance because we are talking about connecting the next billion.

Valentina:
"Let's talk about data ethics."
"A refugee has no right to protect his/her own data."

You can be refused to register but then you will be accompanied out of the country.
Everytime you access the internet it is recorded.
Refugees are constantly monitored, but not [with the intent] to save their lives.

What are the data ethics?
"I think that data ethics should apply to each and everyone."

Jesus:
"Access is not enough, people need skills."
Libraries are more successful because they got more resources.
Even if you are not a citizen, you have the right to privacy and other rights that in most countries are available to anyone.

We "have to tell people how to find information and where to find it, in order for them to use it."

Comment from audience:
Would like to expand on example from Columbia.
This does not only concern refugees, but also people that are displaced, also from a poor state to a richer state.

[Marianne Franklin asks for a comment and proposed action, a recommendation to move discussion forward, from participants].

Luisa:
"I would like to see the digital gap reduced so that internally displaced people in Columbia get access."

David Krystof:
"To support local initiative that do concrete work to create access to people that don't have access. All over the world we have initiatives to fight these issues."

Valentina:
"When you get back to your community, go to migrants and refugees."
It is important that they get to speak.
[We should also engage with] top level.

Migrants need to be here and hear their own voices.
"They often live in other countries in the south because the north is very careful to block them."

Jesus:
"My request is to raise awareness that everyone needs access to information – internet.
If you create content, legal, medical, market [related], that can help them to decide if they should stay [or go elsewhere].

Marianne:
As a refugee told me, anyone can be a refugee, anyone can be displaced, lose their home or livelihood: governments, and service providers need to understand that they have a duty of care in terms of internet access provision under existing and emerging human rights standards for the online as well as the offline environment.