



UNHCR Innovation Service
Digital Innovation Programme

The **Digital Leisure** Divide and the Forcibly Displaced

Part 2: Field Research



April 2023

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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.”

Payal Arora, 2019 – The Next Billion users: Digital Life beyond the West



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Executive Summary



UNHCR has been pursuing an agenda of enhanced connectivity and digital inclusion for forcibly displaced people. In 2020, following an array of standalone efforts in pursuing these agendas – for example, through the 2016 Connectivity for Refugees Strategy – the organization began a journey to consolidate initiatives around digital transformation into a new organization-wide strategy. One priority outcome area is around digital inclusion that seeks to ensure forcibly displaced and stateless people “have equitable access to digital technology and channels and can use them to pursue opportunities for lifelong learning, inclusion in the digital economy, leisure, and solutions.”

For a number of years, many digital inclusion interventions have been tied to specific developmental goals – 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 prioritize 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 report, UNHCR and Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) scholars document the evidence on digital leisure in the forced displacement context, highlighting issues unique to that context. This report constitutes a continuation of the desk review,¹ and provides evidence from fieldwork carried out in two refugee shelters in the city of Boa Vista, Brazil – Rondon III and September 13 – at the end of 2021. **The report focuses on the main uses and potential benefits of digital leisure in refugee contexts.** It brings together evidence from Venezuelan forcibly displaced people with an emphasis on Brazil due to that country’s relevance in the human mobility context within the Latin American region.

The report aims to inform actors in the government, private, non-profit, and aid agency sectors who are interested in digital inclusion and rights-based solutions for forcibly displaced people. It provides insights about issues of **access, privacy, and trust** experienced by forcibly displaced persons while using devices and navigating connectivity in their everyday lives. It also explores the opportunities for **community-building** and **local citizenship** through content creation and connection with family, friends, and society at large. We reveal how digital leisure fosters unique opportunities for **self-realization** and shapes specific **worldviews** through their information practices in digital spaces. The possible **livelihoods** enabled by digital leisure and the **aspirational digital lives** of participating Venezuelan refugees and migrants are also explored.

This research project considers the digital leisure divide to be an important aspect of existing digital gaps experienced by forcibly displaced communities. It covers the main infrastructural, cultural, economic, legal, and political limitations that stymie the connectivity of forcibly displaced people. We emphasize the various forms of 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.
- Dating and romance.
- Shopping

In terms of digital media use, our fieldwork supports refugees and migrants’ preference for mainstream platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube in this context. This report proposes a typology of digital leisure activities including **entertainment, gaming, sex/sexuality/intimacy, content creation, social capital, community voice, and contemporary livelihoods**. It incorporates current UNHCR policies, including the agency’s Age, Gender and Diversity Policy as well as community-led guidelines that take a bottom-up approach to refugee connectivity and digital inclusion.

We take an intersectional² perspective to digital connectivity, access, and literacies. 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 barriers to access and use: **gender identity and sexuality** (including male/female and LGBTQ+), **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 engage with digital spaces offer important insights into 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 reviewed literature and our fieldwork findings, social media content creation and consumption benefits refugees in various ways. It helps them:

- Express aspirations and creative expressions.
- Escape from harsh realities.
- Feel a sense of companionship.
- Convey desires and goals.
- Maintain memories and connections to their past.
- Connect with their family and support networks.
- Preserve and build their various identities.
- Negotiate platform guidelines and privacy.
- Enter public discourse about themselves.
- Counter existing misconceptions.
- Generate potential livelihood opportunities.
- Reduce mental health issues such as depression, loneliness, and isolation.

The report offers concrete recommendations to academics, industry, humanitarian organizations, and the public sector on how to leverage on digital leisure as a critical and creative value and resource in the lives of forcibly displaced populations. Through this novel approach, we suggest pathways towards more fulfilling lives and expanded opportunities for people going through forced migration around the world, with a focus on Brazil as a relevant case study.

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 showed that 93% of respondents use mobile connectivity services to communicate with friends and family (p. 19). Similar lines of enquiry have been taken with UNHCR’s own connectivity work, focusing 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 their vision with the Digital Innovation 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 the adoption and utilisation of digital technology by the people we serve, focusing on leisure factors that have – up until now – only been superficially examined. In partnership with scholars at EUR, UNHCR has sought to design creative, meaningful, and sustainable connectivity interventions with displaced populations. The Digital Leisure Divide in Forced Displacement has been a thematic 2021–2022 research priority under the Service’s Digital Innovation Programme. These efforts contribute to the framing and implementation of UNHCR’s forthcoming Digital Transformation strategy, specifically the priority outcome area of digital inclusion.

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, including 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 data, or even directly contribute to misleading data, on these communities. This is significant, because this research base is often instrumentalized by aid agencies in their pursuit for equitable and meaningful connectivity for these targeted populations.

This report takes a holistic approach by addressing one of the key gaps facing 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 observations surrounding individuals' multifaceted 'media life'. This report seeks to address gaps in research and practice in this area of focus.

The digital leisure approach supports the natural 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.

SECTION 1: MOTIVATIONS

Research objectives

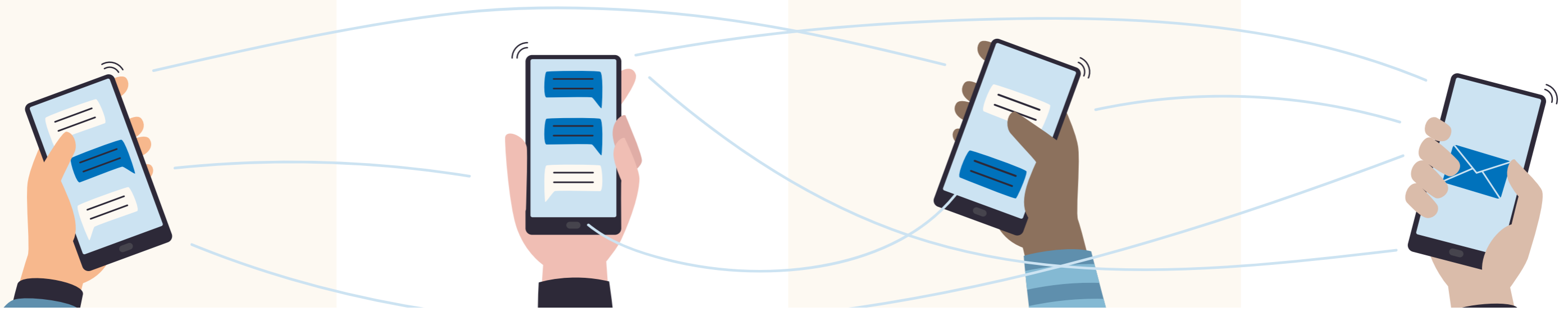
This report expands on a previously published desk research report on digital leisure.³ It brings together the literature review and the fieldwork, comprising interviews, focus groups, media mapping, and workshops for content creation carried out with Venezuelan refugees and migrants in northern Brazil in 2021. It aims to shed light onto the areas of forcibly displaced persons' lives that can benefit from a person-centered pathway to existing digital gaps. The areas of digital leisure delineated in this research project constitute underexplored areas of inquiry in refugee contexts and aspects that have largely been excluded from humanitarian response.

The research objectives that guided this project include:

- To explore how refugees perceive and define leisure activities in relation to their use of digital technology.
- To understand the role of leisure 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 critically engage with the ways in which digital leisure practices are shaped by unique forms of access, privacy, and trust among refugees.
- 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.



Key definitions

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”. (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 some parallels between the experiences of 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”. (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 a refugee is defined as a person “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)

UNHCR approaches to digital inclusion

In recent years, UNHCR has been expanding its digital inclusion⁴ goals and strategies to incorporate non-utilitarian approaches focusing on the desires of refugees for their digital lives rather than the potential economic or educational benefits of digital inclusion. The goal has been to offer sustainable delivery of services and information to refugees.⁵ By situating the everyday digital leisure of refugees at the center for social change, as evidenced in this project, UNHCR is invested in chalking creative pathways to achieve inclusion while delivering additional benefits that are key to effective, community-centered humanitarian aid. Approaches are continually evolving and the organization continues to invest in better understanding what works and what doesn’t in relation to digital inclusion programming, something that will be further consolidated through the implementation of UNHCR’s forthcoming Digital Transformation Strategy. Approaches to addressing identified gaps include, but are not limited to:

1. Closing access and connectivity gaps

- Support for commercial connectivity services.
- Assessment of communications and information ecosystems.
- Establishment of key partnerships for community-based connectivity
- Facilitation of legal access to SIM cards
- Deployment of specific interventions for the digital inclusion of people with disabilities

2. Managing literacy gaps

- Management of online misinformation and rumors
- Enhancement of digital literacy with a focus on online safety
- Protection of refugees online and their data.

3. Leveraging the opportunities of digital inclusion to provide services to refugees

- Implementation of organizational change based on community feedback.
- Provision of mechanisms for online feedback and complaints.
- Engagement with refugees through social media and messaging apps

In this report we aim to link the preferred uses of digital media by forcibly displaced people to some of UNHCR’s goals for the people the agency serves, by emphasizing the benefits and actions needed to approach humanitarian aid, development, and digital inclusion from a digital leisure approach.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The content for this section is drawn entirely from the first report on the Digital Leisure Divide and the Forcibly Displaced,⁶ however it provides important framing for the subsequent section outlining the findings of the primary research undertaken in Brazil in 2021. As such, it is included in its entirety for reference.

Main constraints to connectivity

Refugees face a series of barriers to connect and realize their desired digital lives, limiting their ability to 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 because of the profound impact it has on their experience of leisure and entertainment in digital spaces. This section maps out the connectivity landscape in refugee settings and how that shapes the media life and digital leisure practices of forcibly displaced people.

A recent UNHCR study exploring the main forms of connectivity available to refugees across diverse regions of the world identified communities' means of connectivity as well as connectivity gaps. According to that report, the main means to connect in contexts of forced displacement include mobile phones. These devices are usually older models with basic functionalities, while smartphones are used at a lower rate. The study also identified community locations as key spaces offering access to the internet. Besides the infrastructural resources necessary to access the internet, the report also points to main connectivity divides among refugees themselves, with four key aspects of identity associated with those divides: gender, socioeconomic status, access to education, and disability.⁷ Other studies point to age as an additional dimension to be considered when assessing connectivity divides.⁸

Main sources of inequality affecting digital inclusion for refugees^{9,10}

1. Socioeconomic Status
2. Level of Education
3. Location— rural/urban
4. Gender— women and girls/LGBTQ+
5. Age— children and youth/older
6. Disability — physical/sensory/cognitive

In the Brazilian context, UNHCR carried out an internal study of 78 Venezuelan refugees and migrants,¹¹ assessing 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 sharing a phone with other people. In terms of internet connectivity, 64.79% stated they had 4G connectivity using mobile data. Similarly, the R4V Information and Communication Needs Assessment found that 70% of Venezuelans 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 their main constraints.¹²

Main constraints to internet access that refugees face^{13,14} (these vary depending on specific locations):

- Affordability (device/data plan/SIM card).
- Digital 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).

Digital leisure and humanitarian futures

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.¹⁵ 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?**

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. 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.¹⁶ Additional research has found that refugees in 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.¹⁷ Their preferred phone functions include the camera, as the most common, followed by calling, Wi-Fi, and SMS.^{18,19}

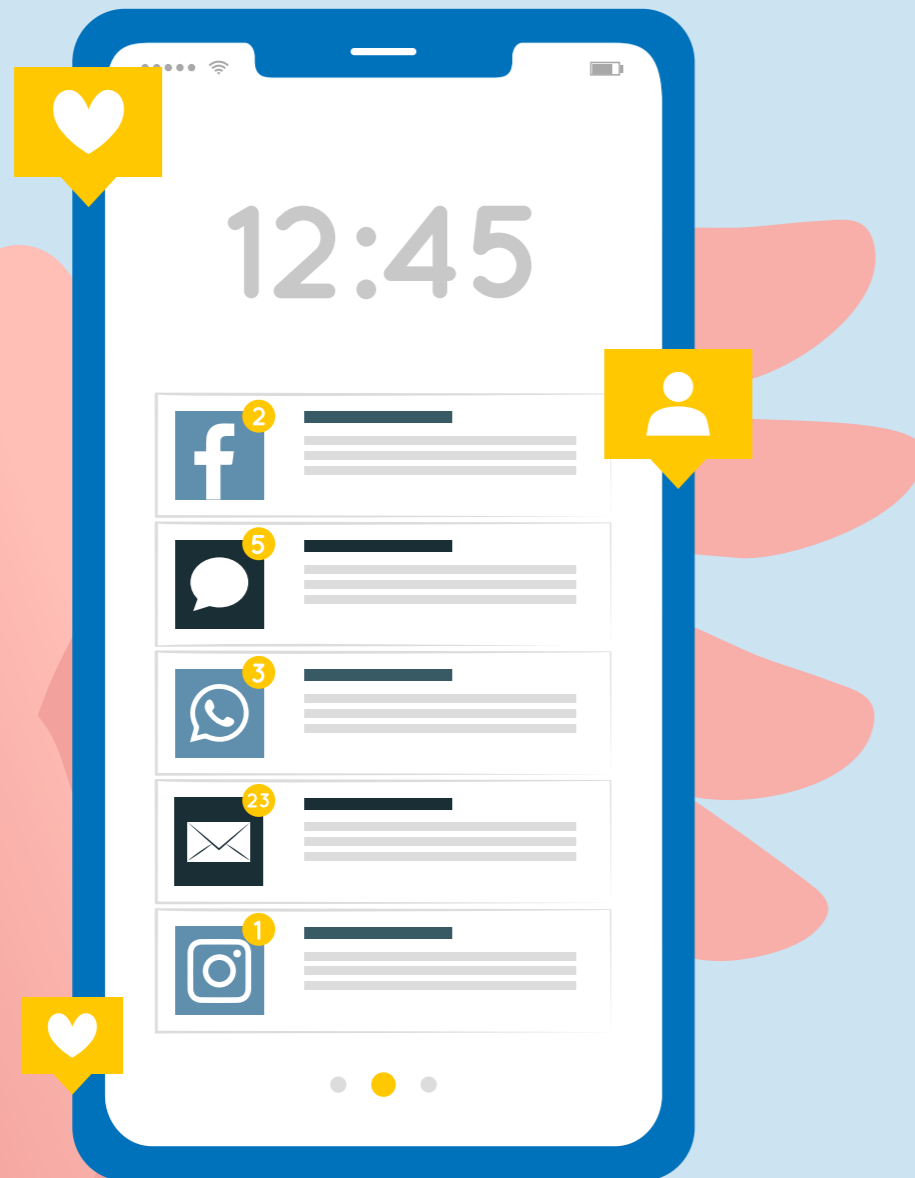
Public and private organizations have designed a large number of apps aimed at refugees with mixed reports on user figures.²⁰ Many of these apps were developed without including the perspectives or feedback of refugees, and in many cases, their software and information is not regularly updated, which limits their sustainability.²¹ Research suggests that refugees prefer mainstream social media and apps, rather than those specifically created for them.²² They prefer low-cost apps such as WhatsApp and Facebook due to these apps' prevalence and ease of use, facilitating access to relevant information and communication through refugee-led groups that respond to their specific needs.^{23,24} Research with Syrian refugees in Greece²⁵ suggests their preferred apps include WhatsApp, Facebook, and Google Translate, while use of Google Maps, Viber, IMO, YouTube, and Skype is 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, refugees in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, and Niger reported engaging in entertainment activities such as using social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter), accessing news, playing games, listening to music, and watching videos.²⁶ 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. The Line app, which resembles Skype, was also reported as being used.²⁷ A recent analytical review of 60 papers published since 2008²⁸ found that these studies report Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Google Maps, and Google Translate as being some of refugees' preferred apps. Furthermore, in a study with Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Brazil, more than half of them report calling as the main use of mobile phones, followed by the use of Facebook and WhatsApp.



Digital leisure activities are among the most prevalent uses of digital technology for refugees across the globe. These activities include.

- One-to-one and group messaging.
- Sharing of photos, videos and music.
- Accessing social media.
- Online gaming.
- Consumption of audiovisual content.
- Dating and romance.
- Shopping.

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 rendered digital leisure 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 Arora²⁹ 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.³⁰ However, the possibilities of digital leisure in the forced displacement context have not been sufficiently explored. Thus, the present work becomes a relevant first step in this area of research and intervention.

Many technology-driven, top-down solutions especially geared towards disenfranchised populations, such as refugees and asylum seekers, have resulted in thousands of apps and technologies rendered useless because such communities prefer to access and use mainstream apps (Leurs & Smets, 2018). A refugee-centred 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.³¹

“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.”³²

UNHCR responds to this need through community-based protection policies that facilitate the agency’s accountability to affected people³³ (AAP). It engages 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 we serve by considering their perspectives, priorities, and needs.^{34,35} The proposed digital leisure approach furthers these important policies 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 refugees’ lives but one that can enhance development and integration. In the next sections, we start with a general overview of refugees’ access to 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”³⁶

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.³⁷ The equilibrium and overlap of work and play sheds light onto other competing paradigms including private versus public systems, and open versus closed configurations.³⁸ 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.^{39,40}



Digital leisure activities can become additional potential gateways for refugee and migrant integration in the Americas. Digital leisure, including games, chat, and apps, can provide 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.⁴¹ 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.⁴²

In Brazilian favelas, e-games such as Free Fire have exploded due to their 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.⁴³

“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

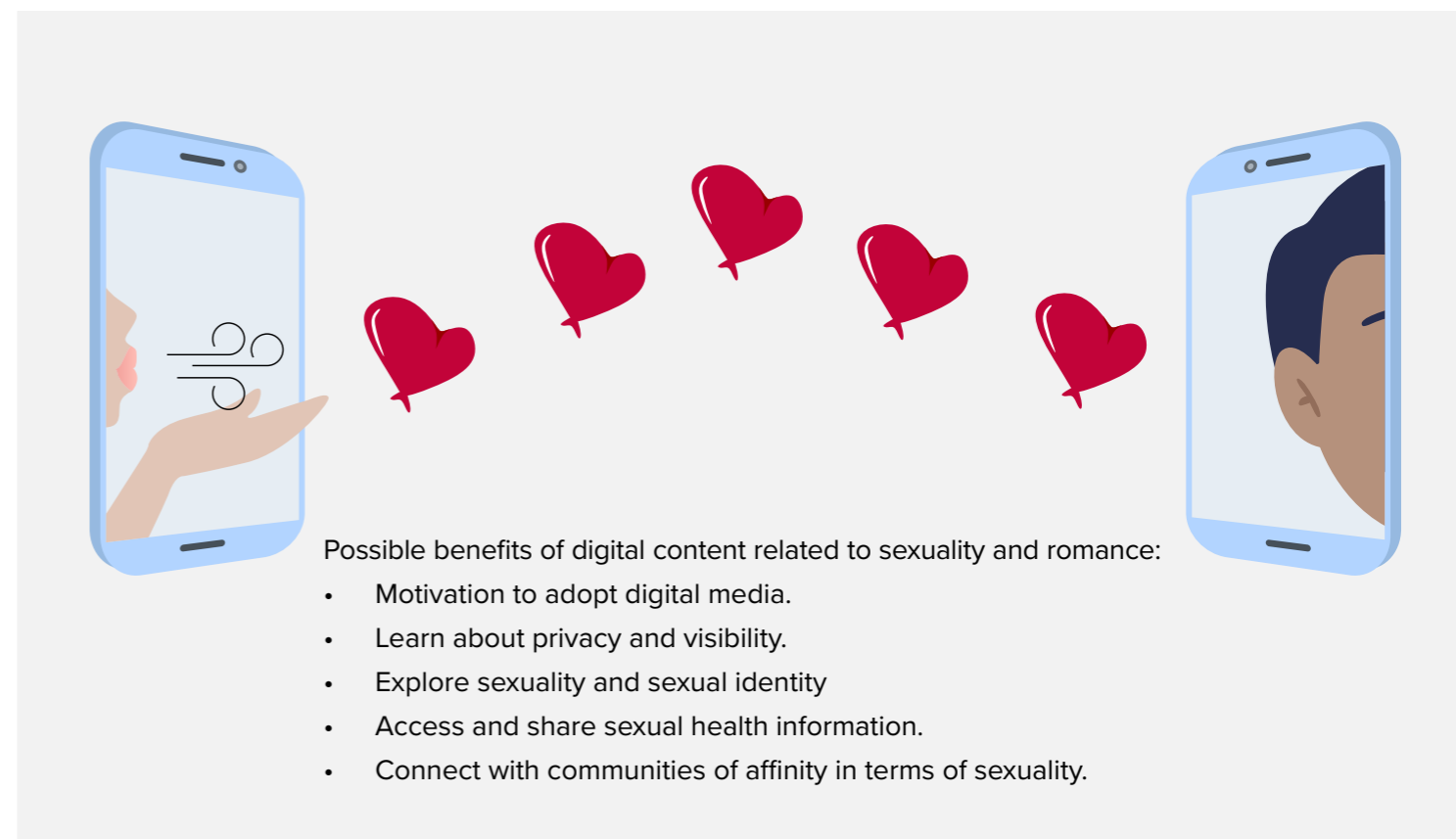
Moreover, fintech has been pointed to as one of the possible answers for refugees and those in poverty, who often cannot access financial services due to their lack of an “economic identity”, which includes the digital footprint that defines the financial history of a person. Using blockchain technology, US-based company 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.⁴⁴ Furthermore, microfinance nonprofit Kiva uses a philanthropic crowdsourcing model to expand lending opportunities to refugees, who are often considered to present too much risk for most financial institutions; the organization has also designed a digital ID solution that will enable refugees to establish a credit history.⁴⁵ 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.

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 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 inclusion⁴⁶ 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 more. In a New 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 more fully and motivating them to adopt and learn how to use language translation apps. 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.⁴⁷

Refugees identifying as homosexual have reported an unwillingness to connect with their families abroad, due to the rejection they face from them, and present different online identities to avoid having their sexual orientation or gender identity revealed on social media such as Facebook.⁴⁸ Researchers have found that Facebook groups aimed at LGBTIQ+ refugees provide these communities with important social connections and a sense of belonging, which 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 LGBTIQ+ refugees and asylum seekers prefer to participate in groups and dating apps that are aimed at LGBTIQ+ individuals in general.⁴⁹ This reflects the complex ways



in which the intersectional identities of refugees – which 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 LGBTIQ+ dating app in the country: Blued. Adapting to the Chinese government’s position on gay rights, the company diluted Blued’s sexual aspect and turned it into a space for health – one that enables LGBTIQ+ individuals to discreetly access health information that may be taboo.⁵⁰ Another example is the Grindr for Equality initiative, which works to inform, empower, and support LGBTIQ+ communities around the world – including LGBTIQ+ refugees fleeing Venezuela – by supporting local activist and nonprofit organizations.⁵¹ Through the initiative, Grindr provides information about the safe use of dating apps and activates 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 of interest 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 in the face of the taboo it represents 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).⁵²

OnlyFans and other digital platforms also offer a safer space for LGBTIQ+ individuals to open, 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.⁵³

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 in August 2021, just to suspend that decision five days later due to massive reactions that suggest that this type of content is the main source of income for the platform.⁵⁴

Moreover, access to digital content provides an opportunity for marginalized youth who may not have access to sexual and reproductive 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. 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.⁵⁵

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.”⁵⁶

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.^{57,58} 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 offline society, including different types of discrimination and dominance.⁵⁹ Power hierarchies replicating those that exist offline are often embedded into the design and technical structures of these platforms, hindering the ability of some groups to participate equally. Certain users do not enjoy the privilege of creating content without fear, or expanding one’s audience through strong, established networks, for instance.⁶⁰

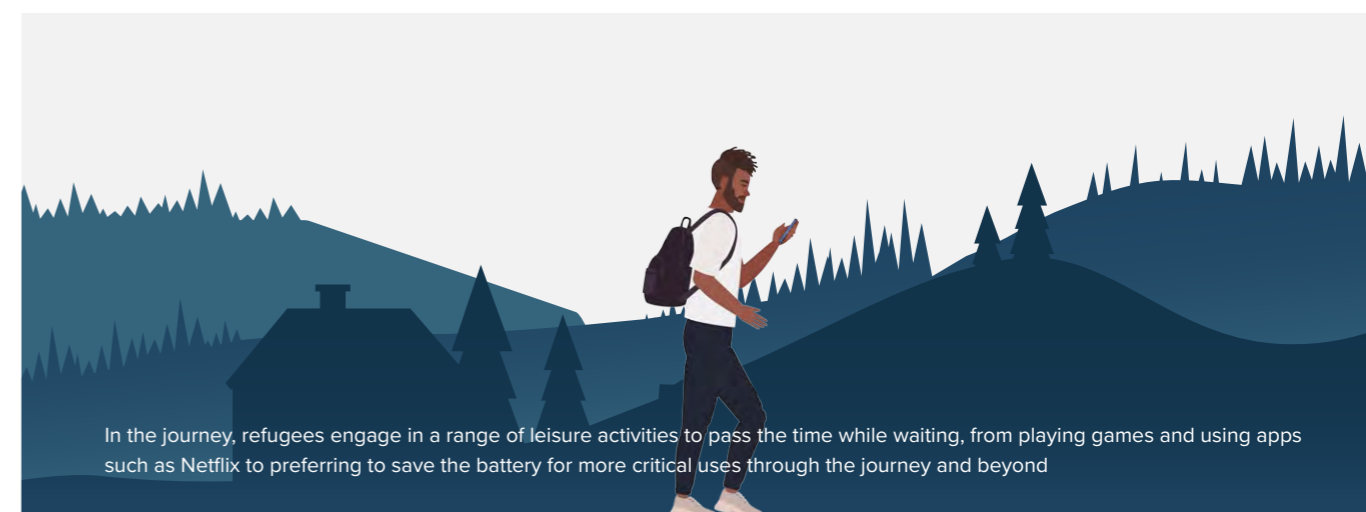
“With due diligence, social media can strengthen participation, engagement, transparency, outreach and advocacy”⁶¹

As refugees adapt and gain a sense of belonging in their hosting countries, 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.⁶² Social media spaces also enable calculated self-presentation, where the forcibly displaced can perform identities beyond their status and portray their desired selves.⁶³ 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 as strategies to counter their actual situation of scarcity and spatial limitation and convey a specific, aspirational identity that shifts from the individual to the collective.⁶⁴ In terms of community-based initiatives, “La Voz de los Refugiados” (The Voice of Refugees) is a radio/podcast project that engages members of the Venezuelan refugee community in Boa Vista to counter mis- and disinformation about various topics, including health and COVID-19, in the shelters.⁶⁵

“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 have often been described in terms of the different stages in the journey to safety.⁶⁶ 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.^{67,68} 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.⁶⁹ The use of different profiles and pseudonyms extends to their deployment of various devices and their ability to hack other profiles and accounts.



Furthermore, scholars have explored the role of social media and mobile devices for archiving and curating memories of refugee lives.⁷⁰ 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,⁷¹ which also serve to convey safe arrival to family members left behind.⁷² Mobile phones also store evidence of violence and oppression. Refugees often want to make this content visible and ensure its expansion on social media, but such evidence can involve content that may not fit within the platform’s community guidelines. Some strategies used 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.⁷³ Accordingly, the invasive policies involved in the asylum-seeking process, which often require refugees to turn over their social media handles and phone files,⁷⁴ has prompted the need for these vulnerable populations to curate and censor the contents of their profiles and devices.⁷⁵

Furthermore, policies that violate the privacy of refugees and asylum seekers are not limited to receiving nations in charge of evaluating asylum requests. Alencar⁷⁶ 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. Prolonged digital consumption for refugees and the likelihood of generating a known digital footprint might exacerbate vulnerabilities due to surveillance and privacy issues.⁷⁷

Social media content consumption and creation enables refugees to:

- 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.

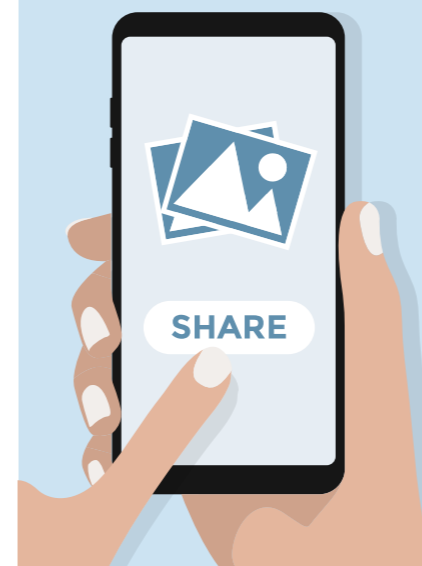
The strategies used by refugees to maintain their identities and cultures and counter existing misconceptions on social media are also relevant, and reflect the opportunities afforded by these platforms for visibility and agency for marginalized populations. Such practices have been reported across the world, with displaced indigenous Yanacóna youth in Colombia, for instance, using platforms to maintain their cultural traditions and identities.⁷⁸ Latin American migrants of various nationalities living in the US and Spain, meanwhile, leverage social media content creation on TikTok to counter harmful social media discourse about themselves, and to establish affinity with other migrants.⁷⁹ Although that research covers migrants in general, it is possible to infer that the findings are also applicable to forcibly displaced people, who may also engage in content creation to counter and connect. Other studies focusing on digital storytelling practices of Karen⁸⁰ youth have emphasized “settlement escapes” with Karen youth 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 in Karen youth content reflect “assimilationist” ideas of belonging, integration, and equality that are different from the day-to-day lives of these participants in Australia.⁸¹

*Migrants use platforms and their available functionalities to create content that embodies their belongings, to contest widespread beliefs about themselves and to use their voices by achieving visibility.*⁸²

How would refugees use their voice and build community?

Digital leisure 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.

Greene 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.



Refugees’ transnational networks of friends and family members constitute some of their main sources of social capital. Digital media has a key role enabling refugees to establish cross-border communication with their support networks, who can help them cope with offline material hardship and regain a sense of security in light of their present circumstances.⁸³ Studies in different refugee settings have shown that the audiovisual affordances of mobile phones (e.g., calling, video-chats, haptic functions, recordings) allow refugees to sustain multiple levels of digital intimacy⁸⁴ and achieve some well-being.⁸⁵ For instance, Greene shows how an entire relationship between a Syrian refugee couple was mediated through the smartphone, by frequently sharing photos and videos of their son through WhatsApp⁸⁶ “Digital co-presence” through these sharing practices in this case helped alleviate the physical distance separating 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, mobile phone affordances can enable an integrative communication environment between distanced mothers and their sons.⁸⁷ As recorded in that 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 describes how the smartphone functioned as a crucial resource of affective capital for Somali youths stranded in Ethiopia,⁸⁸ as they were able to communicate with parents who had stayed behind in a distant location (p. 15). Marino⁸⁹ 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.”⁹⁰

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.”⁹¹ Venezuelans also report the value of listening to other people’s stories in Brazil on Facebook as a source of hope for a better life in their new place. A Venezuelan woman named Maria created a personal crowd-funding campaign on 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.

“Migrants 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.”⁹²

In Jordan, Uganda, and Rwanda, some of the most reported uses of mobile devices by refugees, after one-to-one messaging, was online group messaging, including activities such as sharing photos, videos, and music, as well as accessing social networking sites such as Facebook.⁹³ Meanwhile, a recent study by UNHCR⁹⁴ 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.

Digital leisure opportunities related to social capital and voice include:

- 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.

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, living in shelter environments without privacy, technology use 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 cellular 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 notes, “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 spaces⁹⁵ The young women were constantly negotiating family cultural identity norms through their digital access, while at the same

time, being afraid of missing out on online activities, such as meeting with friends, browsing the internet and following music trends on Youtube.

A large body of research suggests that digital media are used for reinforcing positive moods,⁹⁶ 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 found that during the stage of displacement, Syrian refugees use mobile phones to navigate the journey and keep safe⁹⁷, 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.⁹⁸ 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 Diversity⁹⁹ 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.¹⁰⁰ Scholarship focusing on the digital lives of older migrants suggests that digital leisure increases their self-worth and improves their quality of life. The digital activities preferred by older migrants include digital leisure and entertainment in general, which enables them to build and maintain a social life, cherish past memories, and cope with the difficulties of their migratory experience.¹⁰¹ These results may also be applicable to older forcibly displaced people, due to some of the similarities in their experience leaving a familiar context and adapting to a new one.

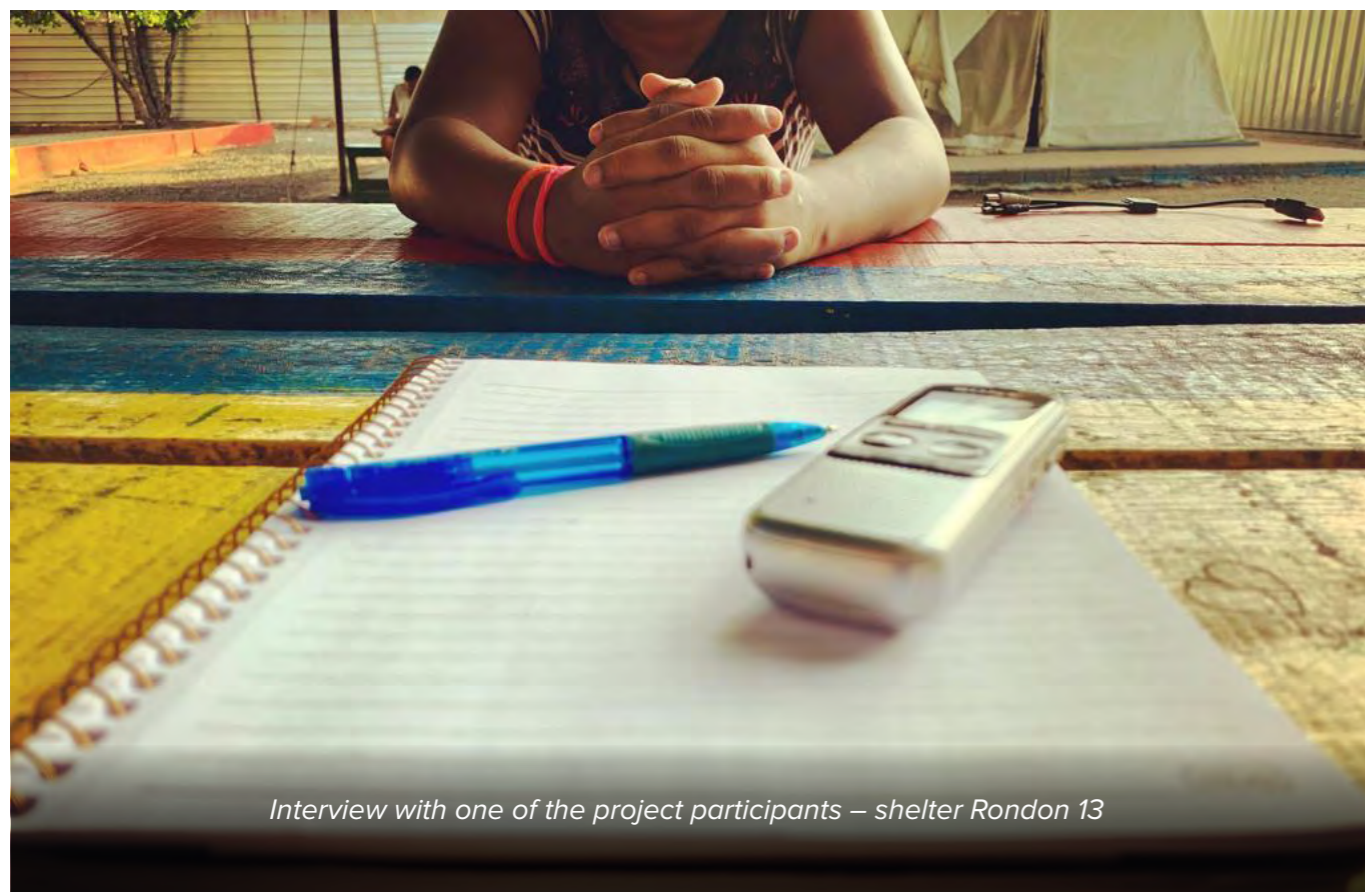
Similarly, the benefits of digital social networking for older individuals in general have been solidly documented. Research in this area suggests that the agency to engage in digital leisure helps in avoiding decline and dependency.¹⁰² Evidence on older adults’ uses of digital media illustrates their view of technologies as coping mechanisms in the face of loneliness.¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴

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.

SECTION 3: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

A note on methods

Fieldwork was performed between 25 September and 28 December 2021, in two shelters located in the city of Boa Vista, Northern Brazil: Rondon III and September 13. Identification of participants in both shelters was carried out with the support of two NGOs: Fraternidade Sem Fronteiras and AVSI. As part of efforts and actions within Operação Acolhida, these NGOs have supported UNHCR implementation in the state of Roraima (bordering with Venezuela), by managing the shelters and PITRIGs (Relocation and Screening Centres), and providing assistance and protection to refugees and migrants in the cities of Boa Vista and Pacaraima. The research methods used included interviews (15 participants); a focus group (7 participants); social media mapping (11 participants); and a one-week workshop focused on content creation with a professional videographer, during which 12 participants learned the basics of video production and storytelling for social media and produced a video on their own with the theme “My life is a story”.



Interview with one of the project participants – shelter Rondon 13

The **interviews** and **focus group** covered the different aspects of digital leisure identified in our desk research report, also covered in Section 2 of this report.^{105,106}

A **social media mapping approach** was used to assess the participants' preferred digital social networking sites, messaging apps, and their digital lives in general. This tool includes an assessment of each of these digital platforms' functions and the time participants spent on each of them.

The **workshop** entitled “How to be an influencer” aimed to give participants the tools and knowledge needed to create video content for their social media profiles. The theme “My life is a story” shaped the resulting audiovisual material, which included real, personal stories. The participants were able to work as a team and see the potential of their stories. Many of the participants did not know each other before this project, and they were able to interact during the workshops, showing great interest in the history of others.

The research team obtained **informed consent**¹⁰⁷ from each of the participants, who were all over 18 years of age.



Production of the institutional video – Shelter Rondon 1

Digital access and ownership

Access to a device was mentioned as one of the main constraints to connectivity, digital inclusion, and digital leisure opportunities among participants. **Scarcity of data and device space** resulting from challenges related to affordability were important aspects described by interviewees.

The constant balance between data and space on their devices means that forcibly displaced people often need to make **hard choices**. For instance, Esperanza, a 26-year-old wife and mother of four, explains that she and her children negotiate the space available on the phone:

“Sometimes I download apps and my kids delete them because they want space for their music. The memory space is small.”

Our fieldwork suggests that the main aspects shaping individual vs. collective access to mobile phones for participants were **socioeconomic and gendered**, similar to previous research.^{108,109} Participants reported sharing their phone with their partner, children, friends, and tent mates. Very few phones are used individually, as those who own a phone share it with others, and those who don't own a device borrow one from someone, suggesting that intimacy and privacy are scarce resources for forcibly displaced people living in shelters in Brazil, regardless of their phone ownership status.

In some cases a phone can become a **source of control** as in the case of Estela, whose own phone was stolen when she arrived at the shelter, so she started using her partner's phone. Her experience highlights the **gendered** aspects of phone sharing.

“My partner takes the phone away from me [...] because he is a misogynist, because he knows that I really need the phone, I get a lot of messages from the girls' school, and for other important things. The telephone is very important here and he knows that and takes it away from me.”

Among forcibly displaced families, parents attempt to maintain a sense of normalcy and rules even in their precarious situation. Such an arrangement for **family-based phone use** is exemplified by Gabriel and his wife, who share their phone with their four children. Gabriel explains the rules he sets to make sharing a device more effective for his family:

“First, the schedule. After 9, 10, or 11 o'clock at night, they can't use the cell phone anymore. No cartoons or anything else, because otherwise, they stay up until 1 o'clock in the morning. [...] First, we adults use the phone, then we lend it to the children to watch their cartoons or for the little games they have. Sometimes we go out and we need to distract them, so we have some little games. The telephone is like an addiction for the children.”

Refugee and migrant parents reflected on their awareness of the dangers of excessive device time for children, its possible effects on sleep patterns, and also the opportunities of digital leisure to pass the time and for distraction. Amaia, who shares a phone with her children, explained the **difficulties in setting rules**:

“We can't download a lot of things because of the balance, so sometimes I have to talk to my kids about it. Sometimes they use the phone and leave me with no balance for two weeks. But we don't have a lot of rules, I can't get them to follow them.”

Participants who don't own a phone consistently use someone else's device with freedom to download content and enjoy digital leisure activities. This is the case of Hugo (19) who shares a device belonging to his friend and her son.

“Yes, the phone belongs to my friend, she lends it to me, but sometimes she gives it to her son. I get annoyed because I use the phone daily, [...] sometimes the child doesn't give it to me.”

The opportunity to purchase and **own a device** is often dependent on the **support** from other members of the family, such as romantic partners. **Access to a job** also makes it easier for refugees to obtain a device, and changes in their life experiences – such as moving or staying in the same place for longer – may also change their access to a device and connectivity options. Alexandra (31) presents an example of access to a job facilitating access to a device:





“My partner works as a day laborer and we saved up until we were able to buy the phone.”

Her case reflects the **financial advantage** needed to access a device and also the **collective efforts** necessary to own a phone, as will be explored in the next sections. Our inquiry found that there is a shared **sense of community among some Venezuelans** created by the scarcity of devices and difficulties faced in trying to access one, which creates a network of people who engage in acts of solidarity with other refugees by lending the phone to those less fortunate in the shelter. This is also reflected by Andrea (42), who explained:

“I share it [the phone] quite a bit with my tent partner, or anyone else who tells me they need to use it.”

In each section, we delve into individual digital connectivity cases with a focus on individual participants, to reflect the human aspect of our inquiry. User spotlights are based on the recommendations for human-centered research approaches by GSMA.¹⁰ We adapted their results reporting recommendations to reflect the methods deployed in the present project.

Phone Ownership Spotlight - Yuli

 <p>Yuli (20)</p> <p><i>Obtained a phone a week ago.</i></p> <p><i>Before that she would borrow a phone from a neighbour every three (3) days.</i></p>	 <p>Obtaining a phone</p>	<p><i>My husband helped me buy it. He sent me money to buy one here.</i></p>
	 <p>Type of phone and Data Plan</p>	<p><i>Motorola</i></p> <p><i>Pre-paid – R\$20 (~ 4 USD) per month</i></p>
	 <p>Sharing</p>	<p><i>No, I don't share it with anyone, but I sometimes lend it to other persons who need it, because when I didn't have a phone, others lent me their phones.</i></p>

Yuli's description of her sharing practices reflect the **community perspective** on the use of devices.

It is worth noting the difference between “sharing” and “lending” a device in our fieldwork. On the one hand, “**sharing**” is more common within families and close friends: the word implies shared ownership of the phone, and collective management of space and data. On the other hand, those who let people who are not as close use their phone express mixed modes of sharing, including “**lending**” which involves lower levels of commitment and data/space management.

Evidence from our fieldwork suggests that there are **different phone sharing practices** that provide diverse modes of privacy and intimacy. These different device-use arrangements may provide insights about social, economic, gendered, and cultural gaps that affect phone use in forced displacement contexts. This typology also spotlights the digital leisure gaps that exist among refugees, as some of these arrangements are more conducive to leisure than others. Identified phone sharing practices include:

1. Co-owning: All the users of the device have the same rights in terms of time, data, memory space, and types of content consumed and downloaded. No explicit rules are set between users and if there are rules, they can be negotiated among them. Co-owning allows for the optimal choices of digital leisure and negotiated immersion in usage.

2. Enabled owning: Users are financially supported in gaining ownership of devices, often from families and partners from afar. Given this arrangement, there is a more conservative approach to digital leisure, targeted more towards social connectivity.

3. Hierarchical Sharing: One or more owners of the device have a say in the uses that are allowed, in terms of time, data, memory space, and types of contents consumed and downloaded. Although a group of people routinely use the device, there is a hierarchy among them. Parental sharing is one such hierarchy, although in this instance the owners are often ineffective at managing their childrens' digital leisure usage. Gendered sharing is more controlled, with phone owners more tightly regulating the types of leisure and the time spent on leisure activities online.

4. Occasional Lending: One or more owners of the phone manage aspects such as time, memory space, data, and contents, while each of the borrowers has limited access to use the device. While lenders have more digital leisure choices than borrowers, borrowers may be able to carve themselves out more freedom in managing their creative content through external data devices.

5. Coercive Lending: A form of sharing characterized by controlling behaviors by the owner of the phone that limit and surveil phone usage. This is the most constrained form of digital leisure and access, and is intrinsically gendered. Here, utility driven activities are most common, not by choice but due to social surveillance by users' partners.

Digital vs Physical privacy

Having understood the phone sharing arrangements among participating refugees, it was relevant to assess the **spatial choices and experiences of privacy** by participants, as some leisure activities – such as conversing with a romantic partner – require a level of privacy. Device access is often linked to specific physical locations that create allowances for select leisure activities, such as tents, areas within the shelter, and work spaces. This requires informal arrangements with friends, tent partners, colleagues, and neighbors to enable their leisure choices. Amaia (30) expresses her desire to have her own space and sense of ownership:

“Yes, I would like to have a house for my family and a room just for me, because in the tent everything belongs to everyone..”

Yuli (20) explains the importance of **respect** to inhabit these small shared spaces and the negotiation between **digital and physical privacy**,

“We share [the tent] among three and it cannot be divided. At first it was difficult but then I adapted. We learned to share and respect each other’s space [...] The other people leave the tent to use the phone and I do the same. If they are not there, then I lie down and listen to music there.”

Yuli’s case reflects that access to a phone can provide some sense of privacy to people going through forced displacement. The practice of leaving the shared physical space to use the phone suggests that digital connections and uses can provide an escape from their precarious realities.^{111,112} In this case, the physical limitations of the shelter can be escaped by connecting to loved ones or having a moment of digital enjoyment.

Another interviewee, Ana (31), discussed the fear that she and her partner have about taking the phone outside of the tent.

When [my partner] leaves for work he leaves the phone, because [...] he can be mugged. He returns at night and may be mugged. [...] People tell me to be careful because they are stealing phones out there. Not long ago, now it’s better, but they were stealing phones near the shelter when people went out to the street.

This reflects an additional aspect that participants consider in the use of devices and connectivity: their perceived lack of safety and the fear of losing their device, which in most cases constitutes a significant expense. This becomes an additional limitation on the physical spaces where refugees can use their devices.

The issue of noise was also mentioned by Ángel (20), who said:







“Sometimes there are some conflicts due to the music volume here at the shelter.”

The close quarters and ideas about respect for others and noise pollution also affect the spaces where refugees can connect and enjoy certain types of digital consumption..

Preferred apps and uses

In this section, we have aggregated data from different collection methods employed in the fieldwork to map the participants’ preferences regarding social media and digital leisure activities.

Social Media User Spotlight - Antonio

 <p>Antonio (19)</p> <p>Shares a phone and uses a range of social media platforms for different goals</p>		<p>I use Instagram to see the stories of celebrities like Ariana Grande who I’ve been following since my childhood, Taylor Swift, BTS, all of those I follow on my Instagram.</p>
		<p>I use Facebook because it’s an important platform for uploading photos and posting stories that I love.</p>
		<p>I use Twitter to be aware of important news. I need to know about celebrities and other countries.</p>
		<p>I use YouTube to watch tutorials on TikTok dances.</p>
		<p>They say I’m very good, but I still lack more practice. Since I don’t have my own phone that works for me, I learn the [TikTok] dances but never upload them.</p>

Our fieldwork suggests that for refugees and migrants who are able to access the internet periodically, **different social media platforms have different functions**. Participants reported their preference for mainstream apps rather than those created especially for them, in line with previous research assessing app preferences among refugee populations.^{113,114}

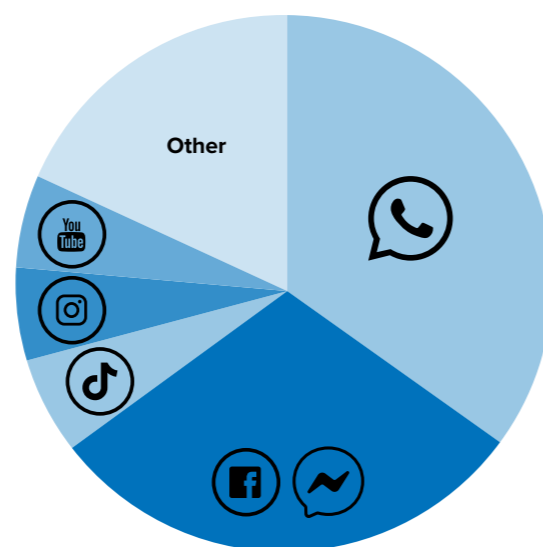


Focus group of digital maps - Rondon shelter 1

The functions and uses that Venezuelans describe for digital social media reflect the **uniqueness** of each digital space and also their **priorities** considering the **precariousness** they face in terms of connectivity and access to devices.

Collective Media Map

Note: This graph represents the collective media map by the participants, it is not intended as a quantitative representation but a qualitative portrayal of their preference and reported use of different social media platforms.



APP	Description, Function and Limitations
WhatsApp	The main social media app used by most participants. Daily access: Perceived as more private and personal. Functions: Communicate with family and friends (in Venezuela and Brazil), share voice messages, photos, and videos; access news; family groups; main digital source of information, often unverified; calling and receiving calls; accessing work and job information.
Facebook (and FB messenger)	The second social media app mentioned, daily access. Functions: Communicate with family; keep up with friends; post photos, videos and memories; access news; Watch cartoons.
Instagram	Non-daily use. Functions: Post photos; sell handicrafts. Limitations: Uses a lot of space in their phone
YouTube	Functions: Watch videos; watch news. Limitations: Uses a lot of data.
TikTok	Functions: Download videos; record videos; watch videos; access (Christian) music. Utilitarian functions: Learning.
Less Common: Kwai Twitter InShot Multi Red Face SnapTube Excel Google Google translator	Similar to TikTok to watch movie clips and get money from watching videos. News Making videos. Photos. To change one's appearance through the use of filters. Videos.

Entertainment for Well-being



This section delves into the entertainment-based uses of devices and connectivity by refugees and their reported benefits. Connecting these with some of UNHCR's goals for the people the agency serves highlights the benefits and actions needed to approach humanitarian aid, development, and digital inclusion from a digital leisure approach.

Digital leisure as a pathway to well-being

For refugees and migrants who have access to a phone in Brazil (shared or personal), two technical aspects shape many of their leisure activities: **data** and **memory space**. The scarcity of data means that they must carefully curate and select entertainment activities that minimize the need for these two resources. The space available in their phones is a defining feature that, on the one hand, limits the ability of refugees to access digital content for leisure and, on the other hand, forces them to choose different types of entertainment depending on the amount of data required.

Many of the guidelines within the Global Compact on Refugees refer to the importance of physical and mental well-being among refugees.¹⁵ In the fieldwork conducted as part of the present research, refugees explain their motivations for content consumption, describing the moments in the day when they listen to music or watch a video, their strategies to incorporate leisure in their digital lives, and the benefits afforded by digital content consumption. Most of the participants described listening to music as their preferred leisure activity. Research suggests that selecting and listening to music can help young people to achieve four goals related to social well-being: building relationships, modifying cognitions, modifying emotions, and immersing in emotions.¹⁶ The selective use of media including digital games and videos has also been linked to recovery from stress and individual coping.¹⁷

Our fieldwork suggests that music benefits refugees in different ways, including via **distraction** and **stress management**. Music is also a key part of their **connection to their culture**, and due to the **low data** and **low memory** music requires, it is accessible to most.

Hugo (19) describes his use of the phone to improve his well-being and manage his stress

"I use the phone daily, it's something I use to de-stress (...) I am always listening to music everywhere".

Alexandra (31) explains that the phone is **the only distraction** available to her and her partner, as she reflects about the moments of the day when she watches videos or listens to music. Her description suggests that music and other digital content consumption seems to **facilitate rest and downtime**. She explained:

"Right now we have no other distraction, only the phone, so we download movies and then we watch them. We also like to watch cartoons. [...] At 1 o'clock after lunch, I rest. I listen to the music on the phone"



Andrea (42)

Single.

Accesses the internet using her K44S Smartphone.

She puts \$R20 (~ 4 USD) of balance that lasts two to three days.

 Internet Access	My son-in-law works in a barbershop and the owner of the place gave me the password. I sit there and use the wifi, it's the only way. Otherwise, in three days my data will be gone. Every day I go to the barbershop.
1.96GB Data/Memory Management	I listen to [my favorite musicians] on a pen drive and on the radio. If I listen to them on my phone, I use up all my data, but with wifi I can download music.
 Music Preferences	I really like Ana Gabriel, Rocío Durcal, Vicente Fernández, Marco Antonio Solís (...) I like romantic music, rancheras. I like traditional Venezuelan music. (...) I listen to music in Spanish, I also listen to some Brazilian music.
 Moments for Music	When I go to bed or when I'm cleaning, I like to work while listening to music.

Andrea's case reflects the ways in which music consumption, as a form of digital entertainment, provides a **connection with her culture** (by consuming culturally relevant music) and **companionship** while doing housework or **before resting**. Andrea manages data and connectivity to be able to enjoy music. Her musical genre preferences reflect her cultural background.

The types of music mentioned by participants refer to their culture and interests. Some of the genres they prefer include vallenato, reggaeton, llanera, bachata, romantic, salsa, ballads, rancheras, Venezuelan music, Brazilian music, music in Spanish, music in Portuguese, Christian music. Some of the participants mentioned the role of music in their wellbeing, in maintaining their connection to their culture and practising their religion, as well as in their efforts to learn the language of their host country by listening to music in Portuguese.

Self-actualization and literacies through digital leisure

When Yuli (20) was asked about her preferred digital content searches, she stated:

“My daughter loves cartoons, she likes to watch Masha and the Bear because it is interactive. I don't let her watch a lot of cartoons, neither does my son. We must be careful with the videos we play to children. I look for things that can educate them. For example, my son who is in Venezuela learned numbers in English when he was only one year old.”

The way Yuli describes her search and content consumption patterns reflect the importance she places on her role as **caretaker of her children** with a focus on her child's consumption and preferences rather than her own, noting gender roles and the prevalence of care responsibilities for women. Moreover, the formative value Yuli ascribes to digital content is also relevant, as she has seen benefits for her children and their literacies through access and consumption of digital content.

The training and educational value of digital inclusion is also evidenced by Andrea (42), who connects her content consumption with her pastimes:

“I enjoy watching craft videos and cooking videos, so I don't lose connection with what I like”.

Raquel (25) accesses social media every day. She explains:

“For entertainment, I watch movies, but I prefer to watch things that I can learn to do. At least I learned to do eyebrows with videos, to apply eyelashes, and now I'm learning to speak Portuguese. I search for things I can learn to do.”

For these women, consuming videos becomes a **connection to the things they love**, in this case, cooking and eyebrow care. These activities also have the potential to become a source of work and livelihoods for them. They are also able to develop skills that are useful to facilitate their local integration, such as **language**.

Aspirations for digital leisure

While many of the participants' aspirations for digital leisure were linked to utilitarian aims such as **entrepreneurship, job opportunities, learning, and self-realization**, they also expressed a desire for **mere entertainment** and **wind-down time** through digital connectivity. In this section, we engage with these aspirations and the prospective futures they enable, in scenarios where forcibly displaced people are able to describe more fulfilling digital lives that are closer to their **desires, hopes** and **rights**.

Aspirations for **improved livelihoods** through leisure are exemplified among participants. For instance, Yuli explains what she would do if she had infinite amounts of data:

“There are many apps that help you earn money. With time to spare, I think I would look for one of those apps to make money on the phone. [...] With an application called Kwai, you watch videos and the application gives you a percentage. When you reach 100 you get R\$1. My brother has done it. Then it converts to dollars and you have to wait for more points.”

Her knowledge of the opportunities to **make money through digital leisure** activities draw from her brother's experience. The app she mentions, Kwai, is a video sharing app whose format is similar to TikTok. It enables people to make money by watching videos, performing daily challenges prompted within the platform, or inviting people to the platform with a unique invitation code. The monetization model follows an exchange system where users collect Kwai golds that can be exchanged by real money.¹¹⁸

Hugo (19) describes his **aspirations to be an influencer**, emphasizing the resources he considers that he needs for this:

“If someone finances me with clothing, with makeup, yes I can. I could be a digital influencer. [...] I want to be an influencer; I want to influence people to have all the confidence they need. If I were an influencer, I would have my own clothing website.”

Jhonjaira (23) explained her aspirations if she had infinite amounts of data:

“I would use it to research many things. Sometimes I want to watch a craft video and I can't because I don't have the data, or sometimes I want to play a cartoon for the kids to distract them, or videos sent from school, and I can't watch them..”

Sharing the phone with children is often a limitation to forcibly displaced people who parent. They need to **negotiate** children's leisure time – for instance, watching cartoons – with their own communication needs, such as calling family. When discussing her aspirations for device ownership, Amaia (mother of four) said:

“I would like to have a tablet so my kids can watch their cartoons and not take my phone away from me. Sometimes I can't communicate with my family because they have the phone.”

Refugees and other forcibly displaced people aspire to have some sense of normalcy in their lives. Like most people, those who have experienced forced displacement yearn to be able to engage in leisure activities, and this is naturally reflected in their aspirations and wishes.

Gaming for development

In many cases online gaming reflects **traditional gender roles** within the family. Among respondents identifying as female, a few said their children and male partners played but they did not. For instance, Alexandra (31) explains, of her partner:

“He plays after he gets home from work, lies down to rest and starts playing.”

Esparanza (26) also reflects on the role of gaming in her household, noting the role digital games play in **family bonding** between her husband and their children. This shows that digital gaming can also become a **shared activity** among family members. Esparanza herself doesn't play, she says:

“But my children and my husband do. They play together. My husband seems to have been born on the internet, he loves games.”

Another example of the role of digital play in **parent-children interactions** is evidenced in the case of Amaia (30). Some parents use digital games to support their children's learning. Amaia explains that, before her phone was stolen, digital games were important to her and her daughters.

“I would also play educational games with them [my daughters]”.

In terms of the possibilities of **making money** from digital gaming, the knowledge of these opportunities follows the pattern of broader technology adoption and is heavily **heavily dependent on rumors** that circulate within the community. Andrea (42) explains that she has heard of people who made money while playing games:

“Yes, in Venezuela. My friend's sons do [make money] playing video games, but I don't quite understand it. I don't know much about technology.”

 Angel (20) <i>A 2nd division soccer player.</i> <i>Pays \$R70 (~ 14 USD) per month, with an unlimited balance to use his tablet.</i>	 Games played	<i>Soccer games, such as FIFA. I also like Free Fire and Fortnite.</i>
	 Time	<i>I have been playing for two weeks. More or less one hour per day.</i>
	 Bonding	<i>[I play] with my brother who is in Venezuela. We play FIFA together, with me here in Brazil and him in Venezuela. I also play Free Fire with them.</i>
	 Physical vs digital play	<i>Yes, I would call myself a gamer, but I play better on a soccer field.</i>

Angel's example shows the role of digital games for **long distance bonding** and as an alternative that **complements physical leisure** activities rather than replacing them. Ángel enjoys games that resemble playing soccer with his long distance friends and brother in Venezuela and Brazil, helping fulfill his need for **community** and **family** through gaming.

Long distance bonding in digital spaces

As illustrated by the gaming example, participants described the different ways in which **digital connectivity and leisure** provide opportunities to **establish a shared community** and bonding across borders, which is key for displaced people. When asked about his opinion about online relationships Hugo (19) explained:

“They are better than in real life, because you get to know each other better than in real life. You can express yourself with your whole being, something that in real life I can't do, honestly. I'm too shy, I wouldn't say anything to someone I like.”

This reflects a notion of digital media as **spaces of opportunity for shy or introverted people**. Hugo's perspective was not typical among participants, since many expressed fear about their safety online (as reflected in the next sections). But, in this case, Hugo reflects an alternative perspective of digital interactions as opportunities to engage in **meaningful relationships**.

Rita (20) describes the role of WhatsApp for her family relationships,

“It has helped me to keep in touch with my family, mainly on WhatsApp. I talk to my sister, my cousin, my mom and my son. We talk by video call. [...] I send pictures to my son and my mom also sends me pictures of him. We look alike.”

This quote reflects the importance of messaging apps and their different functions, such as video calling and the possibility to send pictures, enabling forcibly displaced people to **connect** with the closest people in their lives **across borders**. For Rita, these exchanges allow her to realize the physical resemblance she has with her son and maintain a feeling of **closeness regardless of the distance**.

Notions of privacy, intimacy and sexuality

As explained in a previous section, privacy takes on new dimensions when such a personal item as a phone is shared among family members, friends, or tent partners. Some of the participants in this study (e.g., Hugo) reported not owning a phone and, instead, sharing or borrowing one from other people. Other participants (e.g., Andrea) are the owners of a phone they share with others. This has implications for leisure activities that require some degree of intimacy and privacy, such as the consumption of pornographic content, searching for sex-related information, online romancing, among others.

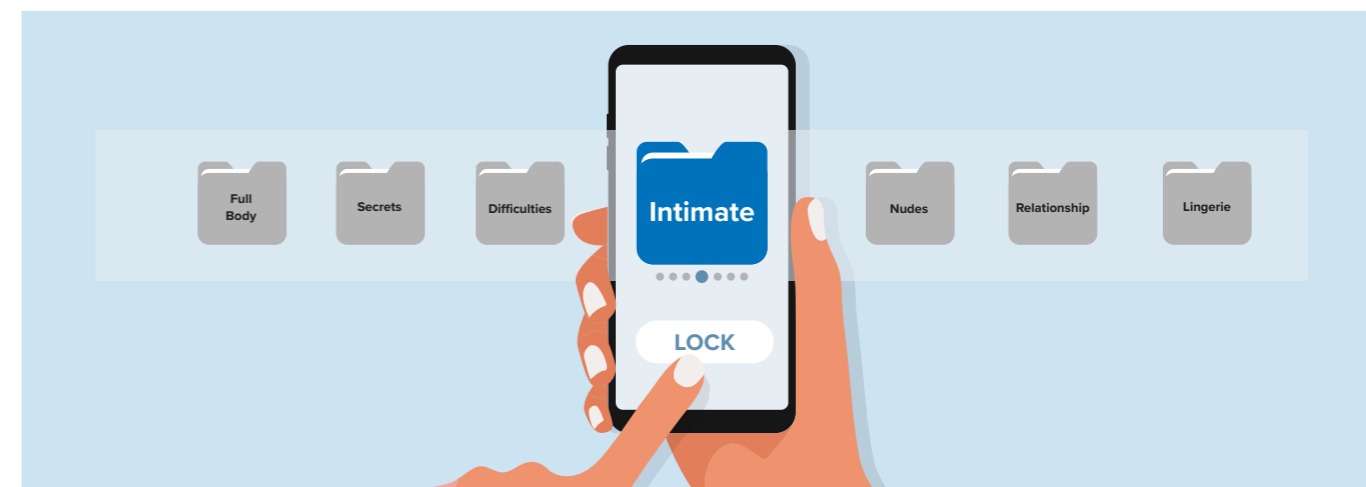
Privacy shapes many digital leisure behaviors. For instance, Rita (20), when asked whether she eliminated content from the device shared with her abusive partner, explained:

“I would erase everything so he wouldn’t see things.”

Participants were asked about the types of content they would never share with someone online or post on their public profiles. Most of the participants, particularly women, mentioned words like **intimate**, **private** and **nude** to describe the types of content they deem unshareable in digital spaces. This reflects their **awareness of the dangers** of posting certain types of content online, even though they do engage in online friendships and relationships.

They also mentioned some content they would rather not share with family – including information about the **difficulties** they are facing or their **romantic relationships** – due to shame and a desire to avoid causing concern among their family members who are abroad.

Unshareable Content Spotlight - Intimacy, sexuality, romance



Most participants in our study were very careful with the types of online interactions they engaged in due to rumors and beliefs related to the risks they may face online. Andrea (42), said:

“I am a little suspicious. I knew a person who met a guy on Facebook and it didn’t work out well for her. She decided to meet him and it was a nightmare, she had to sleep in the street and everything. They tell me to trust them, but I’m not so sure.”

Estela exemplifies the role of rumor mills in online relationships (including both romance and friendship) when she was asked whether she had met someone she liked online:








“I don’t like to do that. I have a friend who met a person on the internet and when they met in-person, the person didn’t like her. That happened in Venezuela.”

Rumor mills also shape peoples’ perceptions of the types of content that should be posted on social media. As Rita (20) reflects:

“That friend of mine who gets a lot of likes uploads photos in a top, in lingerie. But I’m not going to do that crazy stuff, because there’s a lot of harassment that comes with that. There is a lot of harassment on social media.”

Some participants are able to establish fulfilling friendships online and they are aware of the dangers and the care needed in such relationships. Antonio (32) describes how he connected online with a person from the Dominican Republic:

Online Relationship Spotlight - Antonio

 <p>Antonio (32)</p> <p>LGBTQ Community</p> <p>Shares a phone with his friend.</p> <p>He has lived at the shelter for one year</p>	 <p>Online Friend</p>	<p>Yes, a person from Santo Domingo Dominican Republic</p>
	 <p>Trust</p>	<p>I don't know if I trust him or not. I trust him very little because I don't know him in-person, I don't know what kind of person he is.</p>
	 <p>Communication</p>	<p>When we have a conversation, we talk for three or four hours about our personal things and things like that.</p>
	 <p>Emotions about online dating</p>	<p>I like to meet people, but I get scared. For security I send my location to a friend. I let them know where I am going as well.</p>
	 <p>Family support</p>	<p>I don't share it with my family because I feel ashamed.</p>
	 <p>Content Shared</p>	<p>I share photos but of my face.</p>

Digital inequalities and trust

Barriers beyond technological, financial, and logistical ones affect the digital activities of forcibly displaced people. As described above, **device ownership**, **memory space** and **data** are all relevant factors – but, in many cases, trust is an added concern that impacts digital engagement. It affects aspects such as the willingness of forcibly displaced people to **create content and share it**. Trust also impacts their attitude around using technologies such as **cryptocurrencies** as well as their **information seeking** behavior. In terms of content creation and posting, some refugees share **snapshots of their lives** for their family but carefully curate and decide who and where to share this content, in order to avoid context collapse (in reference to identity management practices). Others **convey aspirations and emotions** through content creation and social media posts but are limited to platforms that require less memory space, as is evident in the examples provided below. In most cases, **participants describe issues of trust** when explaining how they decide which people and platforms they will share content to.

Yuli (20) explains her content posting preferences as they relate to Instagram:

“Not right now because the app takes a lot of space on my phone.”

This shows how limitations related to memory space on phones also impact the likelihood of creating and posting content on some social media apps. Moreover, Yuli’s **perceptions of privacy shape her social media use**:

“On WhatsApp, which is more private and personal, I post things about my daily life, about my daughter. I don't post so much personal stuff on Facebook. Facebook is very open to people and I don't like to post where I am or what I'm doing.”

Online relationships often lead to shared content to accompany messages and online conversations. In this sense, Andrea (42) describes her online friendships, and how **data** and **content-sharing** converge in some of these connections:

“One of them, when he sees that I am not online, puts balance on my phone so I can talk to him. We talk to each other by video call and everything. And yes, we share photos, videos, and everything. He sends me pictures of his work, of his home. We talk about two or three times a week.”

Trust also shapes forcibly displaced people’s information-seeking behaviors, as made clear by participants’ comments regarding their level of **trust in information and news**. Many participants reported getting their news from a combination of WhatsApp and Facebook groups, as well as one-on-one conversations with family. When asked about her sources of news from Venezuela, Alexandra (31), for instance, said:

“I talk to my mom and she tells me things.”

Rumors are rampant and participating refugees and migrants describe the wide array of **rumors circulating online**, on topics ranging from trivial to serious. Yuli (20) describes some rumors she has heard related to beauty:

“There is fake news about products to make your hair grow longer. [...] There is fake news about skin care, for example, to remove blemishes, but they are about products that can be harmful. Likewise, fake news about things that happened but is lies.”

Financial lives, trust and rumor mills

In the last decade, digital wallets, mobile money/payments, and blockchain based technologies like crypto have been advocated by technologists. Such advocacy has, in some cases, persuaded humanitarian organizations that these tools present viable solutions for forcibly displaced people who need to access banking services that traditionally have been inaccessible to them.¹¹⁹ Identification forms such as digital IDs, trust-based networks, and app-based IDs have emerged as gateways to alternative financial services for sending and receiving money from their home countries.¹²⁰ Three Latin American countries are positioned in the top 20 in terms of cryptocurrency adoption, with Venezuela (10) and Brazil (14) as leaders in the region.¹²¹ Although the adoption of digital money is soaring and has been listed as a good alternative for remittances, our research indicates suspicion remains regarding crypto-based currencies, due to scams, rumors, lack of information, and mistrust. Moreover, the adoption of such currencies appears to be limited, generally, to young, well-educated men.

Rumors impact the willingness of refugees and migrants to use certain technologies, including cryptocurrencies. Although many participants reported familiarity with **cryptocurrencies**, issues of **trust** and **fear** were key in their (un)willingness to try such financial options. Rita (20) explains:

“I don’t have a bank account, but I have heard about cryptocurrencies in Venezuela, but not here. In Venezuela they told me that it was a scam, that many people used it to swindle people. I’d prefer not to use it; I am afraid of losing money.”






Hugo (19) also explains that he is familiar with digital financial alternatives but is also fearful:

“Yes, there are pages that give digital money for content you upload, but I’ve never done that because I don’t like it. It could be pirated. You may be robbed.”

Instead of using more novel financial options, such as crypto, many participants preferred to use **human intermediaries** who charge high transfer fees and exchange rates so they can leverage these novelties for them. In many cases, intermediaries use crypto because of the challenge to transfer money from Brazilian accounts to Venezuelan accounts. Ángel (20) explains that he found a person to transfer money for a fee:

“the guy who works nearby is reliable. He charges 10% of the amount.”

Finance and banking user spotlight - Raquel

 <p>Raquel (25)</p> <p><i>Lives with her partner and has four children but only 2 live with her.</i></p> <p><i>The other 2 children live in Venezuela.</i></p> <p><i>Works as a kitchen assistant.</i></p>	 <p>Bank Account</p>	<i>No not here [in Brazil]</i>
	 <p>Sending and receiving money</p>	<i>I send money to my children in Venezuela. There are people working downtown who transfer money to Venezuela.</i>
	 <p>Cost of the transfer</p>	<i>They tell me that it is now 730 each Real, then I send at least \$R40 - \$R50 - \$R100 (between 8 - 20 USD) and they exchange it for bolivars for my family.</i>
	 <p>Knowledge of crypto</p>	<i>I have heard, but I do not know much.</i>

José Alberto (61) describes his familiarity with cryptocurrencies, which is also based on **other people’s experiences**. His familiarity with investment economics and experience in the Venezuelan stock market make him **more trusting** of crypto and willing to try it:

“I have heard about cryptocurrencies, I have a friend in Venezuela who bought bitcoin and did very well. He bought it for about USD 8,000 and sold it for USD 40,000. [...] I would like to participate in that because I have already moved money in the Venezuelan stock market some time ago. I like economics.”

Understandings of influencer culture and internet celebrity

Participants were asked about their perspectives on influencer culture and whether they see themselves as potential influencers. In general, their answers reflected their knowledge of different aspects of what it means to be an influencer, from the **number of followers**, to **specialized content** and **tutorials**, to the possibilities of **making money** by **selling products** or by establishing **collaborations with brands** online. They also mentioned their **fears** in the face of possible frauds.

Ángel (20), when asked about his perceptions, aspirations, and experiences with influencers, reflected the belief that influencer status is defined by the number of followers:

“Yes, I would like to be [an influencer]. I think I already am because I have many followers.”

In reality, the definition of influencers as content creators who have a large number of followers is contested, with research suggesting that it is more important to be authentic and prompt interactivity than to have large follower metrics.^{122,123} For instance, **minority influencers can have an impact** without the need for large follower counts.¹²⁴ In other geographic regions, minority influencers such as immigrants and immigration activists aiming to inform and help people on the move have become prominent supporters and agents of change for current and prospective migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. They do this by raising awareness of topics of interest for their community and providing information on the rights of immigrants and strategies to face injustice in their day-to-day lives, as well as providing information on what to expect for their new lives in a new country.¹²⁵ In Brazil, Haitian content creators have been able to counter beliefs about themselves through digital storytelling.¹²⁶

The **instructional** and **expert** notions of internet celebrity are also present in the participants' statements. When asked whether she would like to be an influencer, Raquel (25) states:

“Well, mostly I would like to make videos on how to perfect and do eyebrows. Some people know how to do eyebrows, but not perfectly, and I have already practiced how to do them perfectly.”

Raquel is an example of a woman who wants to display her skills online, creating content and teaching others how to do it. Her perception of the value of beauty-related video content derives from her own consumption practices and her learning process. She also has an understanding of the educational possibilities of digital content. Raquel's case illustrates two forms of aspiration, one that goes beyond the connectivity and another beyond resource-related limitations she experiences as a refugee. Communication scholar Duffy defines this as aspirational labour, which focuses on how content creators capitalise on their passions to make a living online.¹²⁷

Raquel's conception of internet celebrity is based on perfecting skills and sharing them with others, at the intersection of **self actualization** and **content creation**. It also reflects her familiarity with the process of becoming an internet celebrity from just recording and posting things she enjoys and knows how to do.

Women who experienced forced displacement, like Raquel, face issues to access sustainable connectivity, limiting their possibilities and capacity to create content. During the workshops, Raquel had little data on the phone and she could not download the video production app used in the editing sessions. This was the first time Raquel attended a course about digital content and she revealed that most of her Facebook posts were about memes, Christian messages, and family photos. After Raquel completed the course, she started posting photos of her work as a beauty professional.

The possibilities of content creation and internet celebrity for improved livelihoods is reflected by Hugo (19), who describes his understanding of influencers and their possibilities to make money through **brand collaborations**,

“Well, in social media, everything is for sale. For me to be famous, a given company must sponsor me and I must promote their stuff in order to make money. For example, if I get Garoto to give a box to me and I make that box go viral on my social media, I move myself to the top..”

The stories refugees choose to tell

During the “How to be a digital influencer” workshops, participants learned video production techniques from the resources available inside the shelters. The workshops were centered on the participants and the goal was to have them plan and design their own productions. For communication purposes, a WhatsApp group was set up to deliver the course materials. This modality enabled one participant to finish her video and submit it even though she had moved to another city. The group helped create close connections among the participants.

Symbolic Storytelling Influencer Spotlight - Yolanda

<p>Yolanda (45)</p> <p>Left Venezuela because her job working with the firefighting department did not enable her to support her children's education.</p>	Interests	Among other things, I like to bake cakes, make candy, cheese breads and all those things.
	Visual plot	Shot from the top; wooden table, limes, eggs, sugar. Photos of family and id cards to tell the story of her family.
	Voiceover	Parents married and divorced. She married and divorced. Conveys the value of family.
	Symbolism	Sugar and condensed milk for happiness; love is symbolized by caramel; lemon for difficulties; mixing together when people get together, marry or have children; cracking eggs for separations.
	Quote from video	In 45 minutes the flan is ready, sweet and delicate, like hope in life, affection or a smile. Love, peace and music...a guitar. And sharing with my children: a flan. The victory of a family.



Screenshots of Yolanda's video

Raquel (25) arrived at the shelter from Venezuela five months ago. She uses her phone to access social media and watch videos. In terms of her digital practices, she especially enjoys watching tutorials to learn things such as the Portuguese language and beauty tips, particularly how to do eyebrows.

Although she consumes videos from YouTube, Raquel has never uploaded a video, but she sees the possibilities in the creation of videos to teach and learn skills. In fact, the video she created during the workshop (Fig. 1) included a tutorial on how to do eyebrows step by step. In addition to a detailed explanation of the process, Raquel included an influencer name and a brand for her channel.



Screenshot of Raquel's video

Lucía (30) traveled to Brazil due to health issues and the lack of medical access in Venezuela. She suffered from endometriosis and needed surgery. She works with Adra/UNICEF as a WASH officer¹²⁸ at the shelter. She traveled with her husband and they recently divorced. She has been in Brazil for four years. She enjoys watching funny videos and religious content that promotes reflection.

When asked about the possibility of making a living as a digital influencer by creating videos she answered:

“I don’t know, but my dream is to make videos, because my story is hard to tell. I went through five surgeries and God lifted me up. Many people are in the same situation, I had two heart attacks and God raised me up and many things happened. When I arrived here, I was in very poor health. There are things I want the world to understand, that if they are experiencing difficult things, they need to have faith in God..”

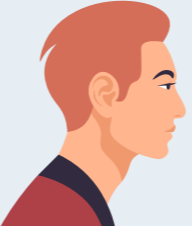
Her story is one of extreme difficulty and resilience, a story she feels compelled to share.



Screenshot of Lucía's video

Lucía wants to motivate others and help them overcome their own difficulties. She is aware of the value and importance of her process to empower others. Inspirational contents like the one produced by Lucía constitute an important aspect of digital leisure, in the sense that they can help people cope with difficulties and achieve desirable outcomes in mental health.¹²⁹ This kind of content is widely shared among refugee communities as a “digital resilience tactic”.¹³⁰ Consequently, it is important to highlight the potential of these creative contents and their associated practices to become a form of digital work. For instance, Lucía's desire to make and share motivational and inspirational videos reflects her desire to be an influencer for those who face similar struggles.

Motivational Influencer Spotlight - Hugo

 <p>Hugo (19)</p> <p><i>LGBT man who is excited to be in Brazil because he sees it as “a super top spot for LGBT people, for liberation and self-love, and a place with a lot of respect.”</i></p>	Proud of post	<i>A picture I took expressing that I felt very lonely. That picture made it to the top, 20 people loved it. I liked that picture because it was the only one in which I felt I valued myself. It was with that picture that I understood that I have to value myself as a person</i>
	Favorite SM features	<i>I like filters with music, when I make videos on Reels or TikTok, I first like to record them making movements with my face. People like it because they say I'm very funny and very sexy with my expressions.</i>
	Aspirational influencer profile	<i>If someone finances me with clothing, with makeup, yes I can. I could be a digital influencer (...) I want to be an influencer, I want to influence people to have all the confidence they need (...) If I were an influencer I would have my own clothing website..</i>
	Quote from video	<i>I know that life will always go on, there will always be changes but if you look forward you will never stumble</i>



Screenshots of Hugo's video

Esperanza (26) traveled from Venezuela with her husband and four children. When asked about her profession in Venezuela, she responded that she helped her husband with his business as a barber and fixing telephones.

She acknowledged the possibility of making a living through social media but she said she had never tried to do it. When asked about the content she shares on social media she said:

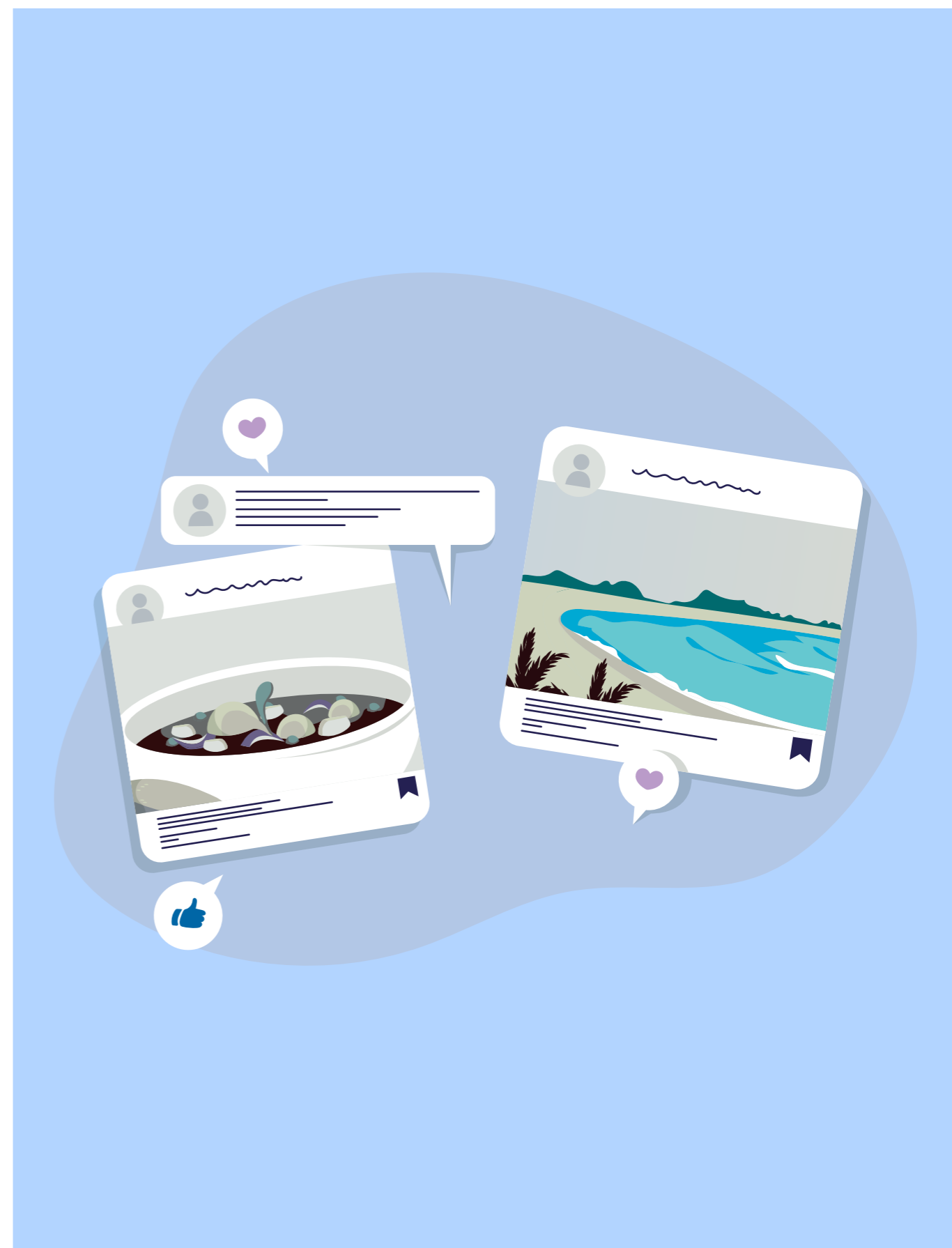
“Posts giving hope and strength to people, for Venezuelans coming here or still there. I also post pictures of my kids, so my mom can watch them grow up.”

During the workshop, Esperanza created a video devoted completely to her husband as a hardworking man and his dream of having his own barbershop in Brazil.




Screenshot of Esperanza's video


For Esperanza she sees it as important to support her husband in realizing his aspirations as part of her own personal goals. She reflects an example of the ways in which many women devote their lives to their family. It is interesting to note the difference between this participant's story and those of Raquel and Lucía. The latter two crafted their videos to tell their own stories and become the main characters in their own narrative. Esperanza, meanwhile, devotes her entire video to the story of one member of her family, her husband. This also supports previous research arguing that different modes of content creation online perpetuate established constructions of gender¹³¹ In this case, when given the opportunity to create content, Esperanza chooses to mediate her life story through that of her husband.




SECTION 4:

KEY TAKEAWAYS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

 PERSPECTIVES - Shifting mindsets on practices and people
Digital leisure is key for self-actualization and a crucial motivation for people to adopt new technologies and applications.
Digital leisure helps refugees cope with challenges related to displacement and intergration and explore potential livelihood opportunities.
Digital entertainment activities are also opportunities for learning and sharing languages, skills and explore personal interests for refugee communities.
Digital content creators at all levels can facilitate bottom-up approaches to voice aspirations and interests of refugee communities through storytelling
Digital storytelling helps refugees distance themselves from common stereotypes as victims or perpetrators and feeds into their self-worth.
Storage is a crucial limiting factor for refugees engaging in digital leisure, which shapes their preference for music versus videos and WhatsApp versus other more data-heavy applications.
Cultures of sharing and paying back are key to connectivity and leisure among refugees.

 PRACTICES - Doing things differently in concrete ways
It is important to provide digital and physical spaces for digital leisure, considering the needs for safe and private spaces needed by some members of the community, such as girls and women.
Long distance bonding and content creation enabled by digital connectivity can be expanded for cultural archiving among refugee communities.
Facilitating free and open content creation among refugees is key for them to find new livelihoods.
Promoting and providing access to a wide range of musical genres for refugees can free up some space in their devices for other leisure activities
Acknowledging payback cultures and sharing modalities to design better connectivity programs.
Establishing collective systems to check disinformation and fake news, engaging members of refugee communities as key actors in these initiatives.

 POLICY - Speaking to aid agencies and governance bodies
Acknowledging the importance of misinformation from refugees' countries of origin and their impact in the digital habits of communities in the host country.
It is necessary for organizations working with refugees to situate digital leisure spaces and activities as central to their community-building initiatives.
Aid agencies and government bodies need to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of digital leisure spaces as more than sources of information.
Humanitarian agencies should provide more freedom and open connectivity for refugees to experiment with digital leisure more freely and openly achieve development goals.
Aid agencies need to shift from their current role as digital content creators to enablers, mediators and nurturers by providing easy access to digital connectivity, and legitimating narrative creativity among refugee communities.
There are opportunities for humanitarian agencies to partner with digital storage providers and promote digital archiving of refugee stories as a form of cultural preservation.
To achieve development goals in the field of digital connectivity it is key to involve parents into child-centered initiatives.

Conclusions

Beyond the infrastructural limitations that constrain connectivity and access among refugees, it is important to note that physical and digital spaces are key for more freedom in digital leisure and other online activities. In this sense, **providing opportunities for refugees and migrants to consume and produce digital content more freely is key to** achieve various desirable outcomes such as **self-actualization, integration into the digital economy, connection with their country of origin, cultural archiving, well-being, and self-expression**, among others. In this sense, it is important to consider the unique ways in which Venezuelan refugees in Brazil use technologies and devices – including payback culture (notions around favours being returned) linked with sharing/lending practices – when designing and deploying humanitarian aid and programmes that involve digital spaces and may require privacy or individual access.

As evidenced in this report, refugees and migrants have a lot to say and are better-equipped than ever to tell their stories. It will be relevant, looking forward, to find ways to integrate community-based approaches to storytelling. What is said about forcibly displaced communities, and how, should be led by members of these communities and shaped by their desired formats and platforms.

Information-based issues are still present across the fieldwork and in conversations with participants. According to our data, **word-of-mouth remains a key source of information** that is considered reliable by the community; this brings both opportunities and limitations. Refugees rely on community-based information networks to understand and make decisions around, for instance, the best remittance system, what is happening in their country, and the safety or privacy of digital tools. The importance of community-based trust systems should be considered when planning future initiatives or programmes aimed at reaching refugees in this region.

In short, we acknowledge the importance of current digital approaches – ones that became essential at the end of the 20th century, e.g., enabling computer access, CV preparation, job hunting – remain important use cases of digital technology.

However, we pose that, in many ways, the humanitarian sector has not moved a long way from these despite user habits evolving and changing at rapid pace. Now in the third decade of the 21st century, dynamics in digital spaces have begun to fundamentally reshape society further necessitating a reconception of what digital means in the humanitarian space. Digital technology can support individuals' self-actualization, identity exploration, creating meaning through activities, storytelling, expression – with or without an economic incentive.

A nuanced and “human” approach to digital leisure can serve to balance and complement current digital initiatives focused on efficiency and value.

In the next section, we provide a series of recommendations based on our fieldwork and observations of participants throughout the workshops, videos, focus groups, and interviews.



Recommendations

1. Physical spaces for digital leisure as essential for self-actualization:

Leisure is not trivial. It is fundamental to what makes us human. It goes beyond escapism and passing time. It is a critical pathway to self-discovery as it allows for experimentation, play, improvisation, and learning. It has become a key motivation for people to adopt new technologies and applications. In terms of physical access, agencies should not just facilitate affordable access to data and devices but also invest in designing diverse and creative physical spaces where these activities can be carried out individually and collectively. Physical inhabitations can impact the choice and nature of digital leisure activities. With little physical privacy, it is challenging to optimize the use of digital tools to foster intimacy and experiment on content creation without social judgment. Women and girls will particularly benefit from private and safe spaces, due to gendered norms on digital usage.

2. Digital aspects of access and connectivity:

In terms of the digital spaces for connectivity, social media platforms have become digital public spaces where institutions disseminate information and services essential for institutional building and governance. In this light, organizations need to situate digital leisure spaces and activities as central to their community-driven initiatives, if they are to foster sustainable solutions to chronic problems faced by displaced communities. This is critical for displaced populations who face multiple and complex challenges in their everyday lives. Digital leisure helps them cope with displacement and integration challenges, enables them to reconnect with their loved ones, build community, re-invest in their identities, and explore potential livelihood opportunities through these networked structures.

Our findings suggest that agencies need to further acknowledge that digital leisure spaces are multifaceted and complex, and it is necessary to go beyond current reductive perceptions of social media as mere information spaces. Moreover, as reflected by our fieldwork, social media platforms reflect a depth and multitude of interaction and sociality opportunities. Refugees are watching TikTok videos to learn about beauty, dance, and languages. They are taking advantage of the smaller data and space requirements of short videos and music files, and they are bonding with their long-distance loved ones through games and other digital communities. These existing community practices can be expanded by humanitarian agencies to achieve relevant development goals.

3. Leverage on content creators for sustainable outreach:

Over the decades, one of the few ways leisure has been legitimated in development initiatives is through “edutainment” programs, with varying degrees of success. The balance between entertainment and educational content is hard to navigate and requires skilled content creation to sustain engagement. While many such programs have been top down, in the recent decade, partnerships have emerged with NGOs and refugee-serving organizations to create engaging content. This study takes this further by allowing the people we serve to be generators of their own content. Tuning in to the diverse storytelling going on within social media platforms is an organic and effective way for aid agencies to inform themselves of the different concerns, aspirations, and opportunities of communities.

Further, identifying influential content creators among displaced populations and partnering with them can help to amplify important information from agencies regarding their programmes and, simultaneously, ensure they are informed about community perception of such programmes, forming an essential feedback loop. Our research evidences and expands on the importance of initiatives such as UNHCR’s background note on Community Based Social Media Influencers,¹³² which describes the relevance of connecting with community nano-influencers (those with 1,000 to 5,000 followers) who can help humanitarian agencies reach communities in ways that are more significant and person-centered. Our research and leisure-based approach suggests influencers’ social media content doesn’t necessarily need to be instrumentalized or have a direct social benefit. Allowing content creators more freedom and creativity may lead to positive outcomes, such as experimenting with monetizing their content, ushering in alternative livelihood opportunities, development of unexpected digital skills, serving as role models, etc. Aid agencies need to shift from being content creators to enablers, mediators, and nurturers, by providing easy access to digital connectivity and legitimating the spectrum of creativity that emerges through leisure as these communities strive to figure out future possibilities in places of precarity.

4. Content creation allows sharing of expertise and storytelling in their terms

Expertise through sharing of niche skills online even if not monetized can generate respect and self-confidence. The idea that despite dire circumstances, refugees have something to offer the world, feeds into self-worth and may generate the confidence needed to build their lives again in their new countries. Moreover, these digital storytelling efforts help re-humanize their communities for the global public – breaking away from common stereotypes of refugees as victims and perpetrators. Refugees’ creative adoptions of technologies can potentially mobilize resources beyond their own personal uses and needs and shape the future of their own communities. This has already started in initiatives such as UNHCR’s Project Unsong,¹³³ which collects stories by creative collaborators at the global level in different formats such as non-fiction essays, science fiction, poetry, art and illustration.

Digital spaces provide additional modes to tell refugee stories with music, video, and interactive elements to expand existing initiatives such as Project Unsung. In other words, our research suggests that a shift is needed where the narrative of forced displacement ceases to be dominated by humanitarian actors and these narrative spaces are returned to the communities, who have become better equipped than ever to tell their story. We need to move towards refugees telling their stories their way, on their terms.

5. Music as a data-efficient leisure activity for mental health:

Music can be downloaded on a pen drive or to a personal device and needs far less data than videos. Our research shows that, for these reasons, it is a particularly popular leisure pathway for connecting with others. Our participants report the power of music for social connection, reducing depression, and enabling coping during adverse circumstances. Christian music preferences push us to reconsider the role of religious organizations in the effort to promote refugee well-being and community support. The fieldwork carried out for this project suggests that some digital leisure activities can be taken forward with lower levels of investment. Music emerges as a low-cost leisure activity to improve emotional state, maintain cultural connections, and strengthen well-being, self-expression, and personal identity.

6. New forms of governance for inclusive and fair digital connectivity:

When it comes to the provision of free access to digital connectivity for displaced populations within camps and shelters, questions about who the access to digital connectivity is for, where it comes from, how it is established, and what data is collected while using these services become relevant. We argue that digital connectivity initiatives in refugee settlements should not serve to further reinforce vulnerabilities and inequalities in these locations. Humanitarian organizations should be cognizant of how governance decisions around communal facilities can impact the power inequalities between themselves and communities, and among members of the communities they serve.

All elements – including any third parties, such as NGOs or private sector connectivity providers – need to carefully consider designs that promote social participation, rather than hinder or restrain it. This can be achieved through meaningful dialogue with communities directly about governance of such facilities, as well as through practical measures that can be put in place to reduce central control and oversight that may have privacy implications (e.g., practices to wipe data and restrict capturing of unnecessary data from users).

7. Building participatory approaches to digital leisure for refugee wellbeing:

The findings and insights provided in this report can serve as a framework that can be adopted by organizations beyond development agencies who wish to build out digital programming with a humanitarian, development, or social impact component. We demonstrate that participatory approaches and a focus on user preferences and needs, per the methodology of this research, play a vital role within humanitarian programming within and beyond digital leisure. This bottom-up approach can pave the way forward for recognizing the potential of digital leisure literacies and practices among refugees to provide support to their community and beyond.

8. Digital archiving as a form of cultural preservation:

The lack of storage space on mobile devices is a common problem experienced by refugees, which forces them to make tough choices about what elements of their everyday life to archive. As people are displaced, leaving behind memories, sometimes digitally capturing those memories on their device is all they can do to retain to tell their story to future generations and to remind themselves of their heritage. This problem can serve as an opportunity for aid agencies in partnership with cultural organizations and digital storage providers to support and initiate digital memory projects as a form of cultural preservation and even revival. For important and sensitive information, current solutions include RedSafe,¹³⁴ but that platform only covers documents such as IDs and other official digital files. It would be interesting to expand these services to other functions, such as cultural archiving and personal memories, which are critical for identity building and belonging. These initiatives can also include providing information about free and low cost storage options online. Here, researchers and practitioners should also consider how attributes such as resilience, coping strategies, aspirations, and migration experiences can be reflected in refugees' digital memory archive projects.

9. Rethinking traditional methods of information gathering:

Typically, researchers analyze social media interactions, download applications, and store audio-visual content on mobile phones to understand people's digital lives. However, these methods are flawed and inappropriate for marginalized groups, including displaced populations, due to shared mobile devices, gendered norms that self-censor the nature of online engagements, and a lack of data storage capacities. If we want to gain a more truthful understanding of these populations to build sustainable programs and policies, we should create opportunities that can stimulate ways to bring out a wider spectrum of enactment beyond the typical frameworks and approaches offered. Interview techniques deploying "What if?" questions capture people's aspirations – which is arguably a fairer benchmark to measure their capacity than their current status quo. Aspirational media maps in this study proved to be an effective tool for understanding refugees' relationships to technologies beyond simplistic and utilitarian forms of use and access. Where consent is given, a deeper analysis of user habits may give more depth of what truly matters to them and what kinds of memories feed into their digital media portfolios.

Participatory workshops – like the one conducted for this research on “How to be an influencer” – is just one technique of contributing to the payback culture that is prevalent within communities, by forming a fair exchange value for the time and effort they spend to educate us on their needs and wants. Workshops and other human-investment approaches to doing development research shifts these efforts from being extractive to enhancing. After all, it is well known that people in human mobility situations often face survey fatigue and get little insight on how their contributions have shaped policy, programmes, and their everyday lives. Moreover, bottom-up, participatory designs like that of the digital leisure approach proposed here, are more in line with the need for accountability outlined in UNHCR’s Accountability for Affected People Operational Guidance toolkit.¹³⁵ By investing in participants by creating value in terms of community building, upskilling, and other meaningful pathways, we can learn about them in an ethical and more holistic manner.

10. Recognizing payback cultures when designing connectivity programs:

Where connectivity interventions have been undertaken to enhance personal device access or use, these have commonly equated one device with one owner, one user. The data gathered for the present report suggests that different forms of shared ownership and usage of devices need to be further understood in the design of future projects. In such contexts of limited resources and connectivity, efforts made to increase opportunities for individual ownership are seen as social progress. However, among displaced populations and other groups living in situations of persistent precarity, even when some individuals make headway socio-economically, there is a payback culture that continues to foster the lending of devices, even beyond the family unit. Acquaintances like tent mates, colleagues, and neighbors become proxy family members and should be incorporated into our imagining of collective ownership and digital engagement. This complicates how we should view individual versus shared ownership and connectivity.

It is important for humanitarian organizations to acknowledge the inevitable reality of device sharing and lending, among other dynamics, and adapt programming according to this reality. For instance, bespoke applications may need to be installed/uninstalled on transfer of device from one individual to another, meaning web-based apps may provide for greater continuity.

11. Incorporate parents into child-centered initiatives:

In the last decades, popular initiatives from Sugata Mitra and Nicholas Negroponte¹³⁶ have led to a burgeoning of child-centric models for digital development. Current programmes often focus on formal education structures to engage with parents and children but it is important to consider how digital spaces blur the limits between formal and informal spaces – and the key role of families in supporting more holistic approaches to digital inclusion that consider safety as fundamental. In displaced contexts, for instance, parental control over devices is an effort to achieve normalcy in family life. It is an essential coping mechanism and helps appropriately socialize their children to digital norms in spite of the adverse circumstances. To invest in children, we need to invest in the family, given the extensive negotiation over when and how devices and data are shared and used.

12. Facing misinformation by being present and empowering the community:

Since social media platforms including but not limited to WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are key portals of misinformation, grant agencies should focus on being present in these digital spaces and operating in ways that empower the community members they serve. This can be done by engaging with refugee leaders and influencers, in line with UNHCR guidance on Using Social Media in Community Based Protection,¹³⁷ and generating partnerships that enable collective checking of contents that raise suspicion among the community, in collaboration with fact checking and other information-based organizations. Some platforms, including WhatsApp,¹³⁸ provide guidelines in various languages to prevent the spread of disinformation, a greater focus could be given to forcibly displaced people and the information that is relevant to them. Previous interventions by companies such as Google have focused on educating the general public on disinformation about refugees,¹³⁹ while fact-checking organizations such as Poynter have proposed systematic processes to identify and counter disinformation about refugees as well as a global database on refugee-related disinformation.¹⁴⁰

More initiatives to tackle information aimed at refugee communities in collaboration with the communities themselves would represent an important development. There are various factsheets and guidelines to minimize the sharing of misinformation among refugee communities,¹⁴¹ but these focus mainly on external actors who play a role in sharing information to these communities. It is necessary to expand these to initiatives to include community members in a more significant way. Aside from bringing direct benefits to the community, inclusive, refugee-centered interventions can help elucidate the mechanisms behind fake news spread and how to address it among the affected communities.

13. Word of mouth, misinformation, and information practices:

Digital leisure activities often converge with the consumption and sharing of information. In this sense, our fieldwork suggests that a lot of refugees’ digital practices are shaped by their beliefs and trust structures. Refugees find it challenging to get news about their hometown or to try emerging technologies that may make their lives easier, such as cryptocurrencies. Refugees use the same platforms for leisure and information – for instance, WhatsApp is used to communicate with loved ones, consume videos and music, and to get trusted information about what is happening back home.

It is important to note the guidelines provided within existing UNHCR policy documents – such as the Using Social Media in Community Based Protection Guide,¹⁴² specifically the factsheet on “Influencers and how to choose them” – and expand the implementation of these practices across different refugee contexts. The suitability of different models to track and counter mis- and disinformation should be considered. For instance, the establishment of stand-alone rumor tracking systems would be beneficial in cases where rumors have a key role in information-seeking practices. This system relies on a network of trusted people that are influential in the community to “reinforce and support existing information nodes”¹⁴³ The first step for aid agencies is acknowledging the

importance of misinformation emerging from refugees' countries of origin and the impact of such misinformation on the digital habits of communities in host countries. The second step is to find ways to facilitate and contribute to reducing these while noting the complex network of actors involved..

14. Increase awareness of digital risks:

Refugees use different social media platforms and apps to make sense of their new surroundings and navigate their hosting environment on their own terms. However, many are not aware how their data is collected by the digital platforms they use, including WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger. In line with the UNHCR Using Social Media in Community Based Protection Guide, it is important to carry out risk assessments that contextualize the case of refugees coming from specific countries and their information needs in their new locations. There is an opportunity that researchers and aid agencies need to meet by engaging refugees in discussions about data collection via their mobiles phones and social media platforms. Rather than only training refugees how to use their social media accounts, websites, or digital devices, the goal is also to provide people with access to relevant information that can enable them to critically reflect and make informed decisions about their own digital and data practices.

ANNEX 1

SESSIONS FOR THE WORKSHOP “HOW TO BE AN INFLUENCER”

Session 1 – Welcoming session

- Icebreaker and welcome to the program: participants met the whole group and introduced themselves.
- Discussion about passion: participants shared different perspectives around their passion and the messages, themes, topics that best represented their passion.
- Setting social media profiles in preferred platforms. Establishment of ethical ground rules about the privacy of the material to be shared during the program, among other aspects.

Session 2 – Content creation: The 5 elements of a story

- Characteristics of digital storytelling.
- Five main elements of a good story: the narrative question, the purpose, the voice, the mood, and the audience.
- Participants start building the story they want to tell.
- Watching popular video contents on social media for inspiration.
- Story prompt: Create a story about anything you are passionate about or reflects your future aspirations, interests, and needs.

Session 3 – Content creation: Editing 101

- Exploration and definition of the elements of participant's stories.
- Participants have the opportunity to play with video and photography, editing material created by themselves, from scratch. In addition, we will briefly explore the technical components of an audio-visual piece (sound and image) and how to use them in favor of our story. For the enthusiasts, we will also explore other types of filming tools, such as green screen background, screen recorder, etc. Also, how to do more with less - how to optimize the digital tools you have to get the best results.

Session 4 — Creating a script

- In the next 2 sessions participants learned different techniques to create all the material needed for their audio-visual piece.
- This session returns to the basis of participants' stories: the narrative.
- The instructor posed key questions for reflection: How do I communicate what I want to say? What images and what sounds do I need? In what order should I organize them? And what methodologies exist for this?
- Participants learned the basics of scriptwriting and explored the concept of non-linear narratives to discover that there is no single way to tell the same story.

Session 5 — Production, production, production

- At this point of the program participants have learned and practiced with different filming and editing techniques.
- Participants will have their script ready, as well as the material needed to bring their piece to life!
- In this session participants began to edit and produce their audio-visual piece with guidance to solve technical questions while they worked on their piece.

Session 6 — TroubleShooting: challenges in dealing with your followers

- In this session, the group explored together how to deal with difficult followers and unwelcome comments.
- This session explored the range of challenges that content creators face and how they have dealt with it.
- We proposed strategies and tactics of managing such negative behaviors through real world examples.

Session 7 — Full Circle

- This session started by sharing the status of participants' productions so far.
- It was an opportunity to talk about their process, hear feedback from others, but also enrich the pieces with other participants of the group.
- At the end of this session participants will have their first short film reflecting their own passion, perspectives, future aspirations, and so on.
- This session will serve to decide together if and how these creations will be shared. For instance participants will decide if they want to share them with their friends and family, local communities, civil society, policy actors, and others.

ANNEX 2

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Three main themes

Personal stories:	Leisure practices:	Communication networks and platforms:
These narratives could be told through participant's media engagements online or by using the media map to find out about their motivations, aspirations, concerns and visions for themselves and their families/communities.	Participants are asked about their everyday lives, sociability, placemaking, belonging, entertainment, gaming, romancing, the work that goes into 'play,' and the possible monetization of their digital leisure and opportunities of livelihoods	We seek to tie participant's everyday digital leisure practices within the larger context of digital media networks and platforms. We investigate their awareness in their digital practices as they relate to privacy and surveillance, the usage of their data by different organizations, how platforms work, and their strategies of circumvention, digital upskilling, digital curation, and self-presentation).

Part 1: Introductory questions (Rapport)

- Where were you born in Venezuela?
- Have you lived in different countries before coming to Brazil?
- Why did you come here?
- What is/was your profession in Venezuela? Did you manage to work in your area in Brazil? What are the main barriers to find employment here?
- How long have you been living in Boa Vista (Brazil)? Have you always stayed in this shelter since you arrived in Brazil? Where else did you go? Do you live with your family? If not, where does most of your family live?
- Where would you ideally like to be?

Part 2: Leisure practices

Questions about entertainment

Content consumption; piracy cultures; edutainment; placemaking and belonging; socio-linguistic diversity and diverse media narratives

- What are your favorite social media apps and why? How often do you access them? Which kind of devices do you use? What kind of data plans do you have? What would you do [with media and devices] if you had infinite amounts of data? Which media preferences do you always search for e.g., movies, memes, websites?
- What is your favorite movie? TV shows? Why? Is there a character you love? Why? What are your favorite kind of music? How do you get to know what's the latest albums from your favorite singers? When do you usually have time for watching your show or listening to your music? Where do you watch these shows? Is it hard to get access to them? If so, what do /can you do to access such content?
- What's your preferred language(s) for these programs? Do you also consume shows in different languages?
- Do you save any of these shows or music? Where do you save this content?

Questions about sexuality, romance, and intimacy

Pornography and dating cultures; taboos and safe spaces, companionship; healthcare and self-care; interpersonal surveillance and online romance

- Do you share phones or SIM cards? If so, what would you do [with media and devices] if you had a phone for yourself (not shared with family)?
- What would you do [with media and devices] if you had a private space where you could use media by yourself? What aspects of your media use do you delete or hide from other members of your family or your community?
- Have you ever met someone you like when online? How did you meet? Has this ever resulted in a relationship? Are you in an online relationship? Where is he/she from? Tell me more about that person. Do you share this with your family /friends and if not, why? Do you trust this person? What do you share with this person? Photos? Videos? Do you livestream? Have you received/given money to that person? Have you met this person in real life? What are your feelings generally towards meeting someone online for a romantic relationship?
- Do you share your password with your girlfriend/boyfriend? Do they also share their passwords? Do you share your password with anyone else?
- If you have any questions about getting intimate with your partner or other issues related, who do you normally go to? Or is there a site that you use?

Questions about self-actualization

Profile curation and identity formation; reputation building & new livelihoods; aspirational cultures and mobility

- Can you show me your social media profiles that you most use? What kinds of content do you post for these accounts? Is there a lot of work that goes into it? can you describe to me a content you are most proud of that you created? Did it get a lot of attention? Why do you think that was the case? Are there things you will not post? Why? Do you think you can make a living out such content creation? Why or why not?
- What do you think are the most useful features of your favorite app that you use to help you make and share your content? If you could change or improve the app to help you to share easier or reach out to people or make your content, what would these changes be? (filters? Emoticons? Reaching out to followers?)
- Do you follow any specific people/account/profile on your favorite social media apps (ask which ones – Instagram/youtube/facebook etc). Is this person an “influencer”? (ask to show the profile/account to you) What's so special about this person? What's some of your favorite posts by this person? Do you think they make money from their content online?
- Would you like to be an influencer/ Would you consider yourself an influencer? Why or why not? Do you know anyone who makes money by being online? What are the best apps to use for getting a lot of followers? Do you have concerns about this monetization of content – making money out of your online content?
- Also, there is a lot of concern about physical appearance and beauty in Venezuelan culture so we may want to find a way to assess whether some of these leisure practices involve looking for beauty tips or fitness...etc. (also think about some other possible cultural aspects that may have an effect here)

Questions about gaming and gamification

Community-building and motivational usage; learning and negotiation of spaces/rules/constraints; possible pathway to fintech, education, and other services

- Do you play online games? How long have you been doing this for? What kind of games do you play? Do you have a community already online? What's your role with this community? How many hours per day /week do you invest in sustaining this community? What do you get out of it? Would you call yourself a gamer? Does it cost to be part of this community (if so, how much per month?)
- Have you been made to play educational games by the aid agencies? Are there specific apps that you are told to download? What are your thoughts about them?
- Do you have a bank account? How do you normally receive and send money? Have you heard of bitcoin or cryptocurrency? Do you know anyone/others use these currencies? What are your thoughts about them? Would you use them if you could?

Questions about social capital and community voice

Sociality and kinship; collective leisure and shared digital tools; network building; mental health through sustained social connections, news consumption

- How has the media helped you keep in touch with friends and relatives? Do your friends and family have access to a digital device connected to the Internet in Venezuela? How often do you use media technologies to communicate with them?
- What kinds of content do you share with family or friends, or other social groups online? What types of content do you not share with them and why?
- How did you use (digital) media before you moved to Brazil and how has it changed? What do you do to keep yourself informed about what is happening in Venezuela? Do you follow any specific media program or platform for getting news from Venezuela?
- Do you have friends in Boa Vista, or in other parts of Brazil? How did you meet them? Do you keep in contact with them online? How often do you speak to them? What activities do you often do together with your friends?

Part 3: Aspirational questions

Aspirational questions were asked at different moments in the conversation to center participants' desired digital lives in an ideal scenario (in terms of digital connectivity).

Endnotes

- 1 UNHCR. (2022). The Digital Leisure Divide and the Forcibly Displaced. <https://bit.ly/3O44m60>
- 2 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 on TIME. <https://bit.ly/3jDLLzR>).
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- 5 UNHCR Innovation Service. (2021). Connecting with confidence: Managing digital risks to refugee connectivity. <https://bit.ly/3atXpNc>
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- 8 UNHCR. (2018). Policy on age, gender and diversity. <https://bit.ly/3yDWDUH>
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- 12 R4V. (2019). Information and Communication needs assessment. <https://bit.ly/3lxYDIU>
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