



Personal contribution

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How Social Media can be used by and for migrants' campaigning and promoting employability

Social media has played an important role in raising awareness about the situation of the refugees and also in fundraising or popularising events, such as the hugely successful 'Walks for Syria' that were organised around the world. A lot of well-intended people have been moved by photos or stories published on social media channels and fundraised or gave donations in order to help refugees.

The Financial Times, in an article entitled 'Refugees Seek Help from Social Media', from 11 September 2015, cites a Syrian refugee who thinks "A lot of people don't know what they're talking about. Facebook ends up spreading more rumours than information".³

A few examples of how social media positively benefited refugees:

- Gissur Simonarson tweeted a photo of Syrian refugee Abdul Halim al-Attar selling pens on a Beirut street while holding his 4-year old daughter and then opened the account @Buy Pens. The campaign raised around \$200,000, with which al-Attar opened three businesses in Lebanon and employs other 16 Syrian refugees.⁴
- At Obama's appeal to businesses, crowdfunding site Kickstarter run a very successful campaign that raised \$1.77 mil.
- Two American women responded to an image⁵ on the popular Facebook page Humans of New York, and, together with the author, Anca Ponea, they started One Refugee Child⁶, an organisation that helps provide strollers and other necessities for the refugees children in Greece and Turkey.⁷
- Also through a post on the Facebook Humans of New York: the story of the father of four suffering from cancer Refaai Hamo, living in Istanbul without the right to work or access healthcare, reached the actor Edward Norton, who fundraised over \$450,000. Hamo was granted asylum in the US and met president Obama.
- In 2014, The World Food Programme run the campaign #adollaralifeline which raised \$64 mil.
- In August 2015, as a result of a Facebook post about the situation in Calais, Jaz O'Hara received an incredible amount of donations and started The World Wide Tribe⁸

Social media used to raise awareness:

- Facebook groups such as Refugees Welcome to Norway, Germany, Portugal, Austria, Slovenia etc. are very popular and have a large number of members

- In September 2012, a group of Syrian activists launched a campaign entitled “Refugees not Captive”, using Facebook, Youtube and other social media in order to raise awareness and protect Syrian women against forced marriages and other breaches of their human rights⁹
- Journalists have used their personal Twitter accounts to raise awareness of the situation on field during migrants’ journeys: Anemona Hartocollis, The New York Times [@anemonanyc](#), Griff Witte, The Washington Post [@griffwitte](#), Matthew Cassel, VICE News, Al Jazeera [@matthewcassel](#)¹⁰

However, there are also people spreading negative views on social media with regards to refugees, from accusing them of being just economic migrants, criminals, to saying they are cowards trying to escape military service.¹¹

It is also noteworthy to add that refugees use social media channels themselves in order to connect to other refugees and learn about the road ahead, routes, procedures, camp closures or weather conditions, and also to keep in contact with family or friends. According to The Times, in an article entitled “The 21st Century Migrant’s Essentials: Shelter, Food, Smartphone”, from 25 August 2015, smugglers also use social media to advertise their services, through Facebook groups such as “Smuggling into the EU” or “How to Emigrate to Europe”, “Wishing to immigrate to Europe through Libya”, “Smuggling from Turkey to Europe”. For those who don’t want to use their services, there is another Facebook group called “Smuggle Yourself to Europe without a Trafficker”. Another group called “Stations for the forced wanderers”, with over 100,000 members, is a platform where they can get advice about how to overcome problems encountered on their journeys.¹²

My research into social media amongst students focused on the activity of societies at Queen Mary University of London. Students are very eager to help and get involved and there have been a number of events that were advertised. Facebook seems to be the most popular social medium. Below there is a list of the societies that have posted on the refugee crisis:

Queen Mary STAR Society:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/129078413863652/>

QMBL Syria Solidarity Society

<https://www.facebook.com/SyriaSolidaritySociety/>

Queen Mary Amnesty International Society

www.facebook.com/groups/8207699111/

Twitter: [@QMULAmnesty](#)

QMUL United Nations Association

www.facebook.com/QMULMUN?fref=ts

Recent Events in London advertised through social media channels:

- *The Evolving Dynamics of the Refugee and Migrant Response*, 2 December 2016

Talks by Bridget Anderson, Professor of Migration and Citizenship and Research Director of the Centre for Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), University of Oxford, Elspeth Guild, Professor at Queen Mary, University of London and Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands, Ovais Sarmad, Chief of Staff, International Organization for Migration and Pamela DeLargy, Special Advisor to the UN Special Representative for International Migration

An exhibition of stories and images from the Calais camp and a performance by students from City & Islington College exploring media representations of migration and the 'Calais jungle'.

The event seeks to mark International Migrants Day.

- *Mental Health in Refugees*, 17 November 2016

In a recent analysis by the International Medical Corps (IMC), it was found that 54% of displaced Syrians had severe emotional disorders, including depression, prolonged grief disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder and various forms of anxiety disorders. In addition to having witnessed violence, death, and separation, child and adolescent refugees also experience discrimination, sexual harassment and isolation from education. Many exhibit behavioural problems such as war-related play and regression, as well as difficulties sleeping, grief, fear, speech impediments, and somatic symptoms. (UNHCR, 2015)¹³

Talks by Dr Mohammed Abou Saleh and Dr Peter Hughes, representatives of the Royal College of Psychiatrists on the Syrian Refugees Taskforce, and Dr Hashim Mohammed, a consultant psychiatrist and Clinical Director of mental health services for older people.

- *Refugee Crisis? What Crisis?*, STAR National Conference, 12 November 2016

It brought together members of STAR from universities across the country. Talks by STAR members and Maurice Wren, Chief Executive of the British Refugee Council, as well as two stories, of a young girl escaping Vietnam and an Afghan boy who started a new life in Britain.

There were also workshops that aimed at familiarising participants with the asylum procedures in Britain and helping them understand the crisis and the public attitudes.

Social media used for helping refugees find work:

- Techfugees is a social enterprise coordinating the international tech community's response to the needs of Refugees¹⁴. Among others, they strive to help refugees with recognition of diplomas and skills and integration in the host country's workforce. They are active across a variety of social media channels, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn
- In Sweden, LinkedIn created welcometalent.se¹⁵, where refugees can search for jobs using #welcometalent and other search terms that describe their skills and backgrounds
- Two German students have created a website to help refugees find work: worker.de, and they use Twitter to popularise it¹⁶
- In Finland, Journalist Riku Rantala and filmmaker Tunna Milonoff founded Startup Refugees, which hopes to connect companies and refugees as well as help refugees start their own business¹⁷
- In Germany, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, in cooperation with the Federal Employment Agency and the Goethe Institute, developed Ankommen, or "arrive" in German. The app helps refugees learn German, provides them with information about asylum applications, studying, finding jobs, as well as adjusting into the host country. It has been downloaded by over 160,000 users.¹⁸
- In Austria, lawyer Dominik Beron funded Refugees Work¹⁹, a platform that connects employers and refugees. He says: "Refugees are communicating on Facebook and WhatsApp and companies are communicating on email. So what we can do about this is we will make a chat with an integrated calendar that helps to create the universal channel for communication on our platform."²⁰

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