



# Information and Communication Technologies

A navigational tool for asylum seekers as they cross Europe?

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## ABSTRACT

The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), considered as smartphones, mobile phones and on occasion computers throughout this thesis, revealed themselves to be more than a connection to family, it was a life-saving object, a journey companion for asylum seekers making the journey across Europe. The aim of this thesis is to explore and understand the importance and influence of these pieces of mobile technology over asylum seekers' decision-making process whilst crossing Europe. We draw upon data collected through qualitative methods: interviews, participant observations, reports and studies. Eight interviews were conducted with asylum-seekers and refugees, currently living in Denmark or Belgium, as well as with professionals in the field concerned with and interested in the subject.

Our collected data is framed and analysed through a specific theoretical framework, relying mainly on Latour's 'Actor-Network Theory' (1996), an approach about the significance of nonhuman *actants* in human decisions. This theory is supported by Xiang and Lindquist's 'Migration Infrastructure' approach (2014), demonstrating how a migrant is being moved by several structural dimensions and their elements. Finally, 'Social Navigation' by Vigh (2006) will supplement this whole subject approach, offering an interpretative tool with regards to the strategies deployed by asylum seekers as they migrate.

The analysis of this thesis is organised around three working-questions, supplementing the research question through three axes of exploration. We begin with an enquiry about asylum seekers' decision-making process upon their final destination country, followed by an examination regarding asylum seekers' strategies to bypass the European regulatory system and lastly we consider the means by which asylum-seekers avoid the use of smugglers to carry out their journey.

**Keywords:** *ICTs, asylum seekers, strategies, digital humanitarianism, Latour, Xiang & Lindquist, Vigh, 'Migration Infrastructure', 'Actor-Network Theory', 'Social Navigation'.*

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## TERMINOLOGY

### Asylum seekers

An asylum seeker is someone whose claim for protection and sanctuary has yet to be processed in one country (UNHCR, 2017). We mainly use the term asylum seeker in this thesis as our informants were not refugees at the time they crossed Europe.

In this research, we go further by using a clarification proposed by Robinson and Segrott who classify asylum seekers into two different groups:

- Spontaneous asylum seeker or acute refugee as someone who left his country of origin planning to seek asylum *“only on entry to the destination country”* (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.vi)
- Anticipatory asylum seeker who decides to leave the country, conscious of the circumstances, planning beforehand to leave therefore having time to *“pre-plan how and when they will leave and where they will travel to”* (Ibid.).

### Irregular migration

Irregular migration is defined as a movement that *“takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries”* (IOM, 2017). The type of irregular migration which will be looked at in this research is the way in which migrants can enter irregularly: by infiltrating a State territory without holding the required documents (Kuschminder et al., 2015, p.10).

### Transit migration

Transit migration could be defined as *“migration in one country with the intention of seeking the possibility there to emigrate to another country as the country of final destination”* (UNECE, 1993, p.7 in Papadopoulou-Kourkoulou, 2008, p.3). Even if the category of transit-migrants represents various migrant categories in itself, we will look at the asylum seekers who transit through different countries, specifically European ones, in an irregular way.

### Smugglers

The Protocol against the smuggling of migrants by land, sea and air has put forward a definition of smuggling: *“the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a*

*financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident” (United Nations, 2000, Article 3). Smuggling has a clandestine nature, helping migrants to “evade detection before, during and often following arrival in a transit or destination country” (Ibid., p.4).*

### **“European refugee crisis”**

The “European refugee crisis” officially began in July 2015. According to the UNHCR annual report from 2016, *“an unprecedented refugee crisis in Europe unfolded in 2015 as an increasing number of people risked their lives to cross the Mediterranean Sea in search of safety and protection”* (UNHCR, 2016a, p.82). In 2015, the European Union experienced an unseen pressure at its external borders, a *“never-before-seen figure”* (Frontex, 2016, p.6).

### **Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)**

For this research, we decided to specifically focus on the use of ICTs: Information and Communication Technologies. However we decided to focus on certain types of ICTs: smartphones, mobile phones and, at times, computers as they are the most accessible pieces of technologies, portable and popular - and allow access to the Internet. *“ICT encompasses both the internet-enabled sphere as well as the mobile one powered by wireless networks”* (Rouse, 2017).

### **Social media**

Throughout this research, we decided to use the role of social media as an analytical lens. Therefore, we chose to follow the definition of social media put forward by Dekker and Engbersen: *“online applications containing user-generated content, which are part of an open (or semi-open) network infrastructure enabling social networking”* (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.403). It has to be emphasised that social media can only be offered through ICTs - via applications or websites, such as Facebook and Twitter.

### **Apps**

Used as the short-term for “applications”, an app refers to a program downloaded on mobile devices, such as the smartphone (Christensson, 2012). Throughout this research, we

refer to some apps used by our informants such as Google Maps, Google Translate, weather forecast apps and a shipping radar application.

### **Digital divide**

The term digital divide will be recurrently used in this research, due to its importance for our argumentation. We decided to follow Hamel's definition of digital divide as being *"the disparity that exists in access to ICTs between, for example, countries or regions, communities, ethnicities, the sexes, or age groups"* (Hamel, 2009, p.4).

### **IT literacy**

Information Technology literacy, often paired with the digital divide, represents the different access to *"the equipment, autonomy, skill, support and range of use among people who are already online"* (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.412). The different levels in IT literacy are measured taking into account *"the individual's ability to utilize the resources they offer"* (Portes, 1998, in Ibid.).

### **Information precarity**

According to a study conducted on Syrian refugees and information precarity, this term defines *"a state in which their access to news as well as personal information is insecure, unstable, and undependable"* (Wall et al., 2017, p.242).

### **'Agency'**

Inherent to all humans, according to William H. Sewell, Jr, 'agency' is a concept which defines how an actor exercises, in various degrees, control over resources, *"which means the capacity to reinterpret or mobilize an array of resources in terms of schemas other than those that constituted the array"* (Sewell, Jr, 1992, p.20).



## INTRODUCTION

*“Every evening now, as dusk falls across the Balkans, thousands of people, thousands of miles from home, are being guided to what they hope will be a bright future, by the glow of Google Maps on the phone-cum-computer in their hands.” (McLaughlin, 2015)*

The glow of the mobile phone and its constant presence in the hands of asylum seekers has been a hot topic throughout the “European refugee crisis”. Much has been made of the fact that asylum seekers have smartphones and that this in turn must point to them not only having money, but to them not being refugees in need of asylum in Europe. The most common argument put forward, predominantly by right wing politicians and the tabloid media, is that these asylum seekers and refugees with smartphones are, in fact, terrorists and economic migrants. An article that went viral in September 2015 with the headline *“Surprised that Syrian refugees have smartphones? Sorry to break this to you, but you're an idiot”* (O'Malley, 2015) was in response to the afore mentioned rhetoric at the time.

Donald Trump, whilst on the campaign trail in Arizona prior to becoming president of the United States, questioned *“why are people in a migration having cell phones?”* (RWW Blog, 2015). These inflammatory comments reflect current populist opinion and encourage vigorous online debate, that point at asylum seekers and their use of smartphones as a means to undermine their need for asylum (Alter, 2015). A photo of a Syrian woman taking a selfie upon landing in Europe was circulated on twitter and on anti-immigration websites back in September 2015 as proof that her having a \$600 phone meant she was a rich person as opposed to someone escaping tragedy (Ibid.). To those working in the humanitarian field the two are not mutually exclusive. When we interviewed Antoine Saint-Denis he mentioned the importance of such images: *“I was struck by the photos: people were landing in the Greek Islands with phones in their bags, sending selfies to say that they are safe. It was not at all anecdotal, but something that should be considered as an extremely important fact”* (Antoine 2017, Brussels). Caroline Arvidsson, one of the co-founders of

RefugeeText<sup>1</sup>, reinforced the fact that this was not an anecdotal occurrence when she shared her observations of her time in the Balkans, conducting fieldwork:

*“Everybody was talking about the phones being the main device, the only device they were bringing with them. The first question they had: “where can I charge my phone? Where can I get a sim card? Where can I get wi-fi?” and maybe “How can I get to Sweden?””* (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen).

Indeed, we live in a world where 2 billion people use smartphones (The Economist, 2015a), which, whilst considered a luxury in western society, for those living in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, is a necessity (Alter, 2015). The smartphone has become *“a truly personal computer”* (The Economist, 2015a) that allows us to check our Facebook, the weather, receive and make phone calls as well as use the internet, access maps, a calculator and compasses, send photographs via message and check emails. Smartphones are information drips, hubs of exchange and the *“defining technology of the age”* (Ibid.).

The ‘Twitter Revolution’ is a case in point. This term is commonly used to encompass the events surrounding the Iranian election protests of 2009-2010 as well as both the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions of 2010 and 2011, important and defining movements of the Arab Spring. The use of Twitter in this instance is an example of how social media facilitates communication among people globally and allows the powerless to *“collaborate, coordinate, and give voice to their concerns”* (Gladwell, 2010). These revolutions were facilitated by the dissemination of information, be it tweets, photographs or videos, allowing the outside world to gain insight into the mushrooming protests happening across the Middle East and North Africa at the time (Landler and Stelter, 2009). Malcolm Gladwell argues that:

*“Facebook and the like are tools for building networks, which are the opposite, in structure and character, of hierarchies. Unlike hierarchies, with their rules and procedures, networks aren’t controlled by a single central authority. Decisions are made through consensus, and the ties that bind people to the group are loose”* (Gladwell, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> RefugeeText made available on Messenger, Telegram and by SMS, claiming to deliver “trusted information to any refugee with a phone”

It is noteworthy that in this context Gladwell is referring to the use of Facebook and similar apps within the scope of demonstrations and protests. However their basic use as a tool for building networks is something that has been repeatedly demonstrated throughout the “European refugee crisis”. Indeed, Time magazine wrote about this development in 2015, stating that *“refugees fleeing war-torn territory have come to rely on their phones to make a passage to a better life”* (Witty, 2015).

The use of smartphones is not something new, particularly in conflict zones or countries at war. The CIA estimates that in July 2015, prior to the “European refugee crisis”, 61% of people in Afghanistan owned a subscription to a mobile provider, with numbers in Syria estimated at 81% of people whilst in Iraq the number was as high as 91% (Central Intelligence Agency). It is more than likely that these figures have since increased. The reliance of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers on smartphones and mobile phones as they migrate across Europe is so great that the last few years has seen the emergence of organisations such as Refugee Phones, RefugeeText and the Facebook group ‘Phone credit for refugees and displaced people’, to name but a few. These organisations have been specifically designed to provide both information and tools, as well as the phones themselves, as the result of a very real need for resources with which to communicate. The latter of these organisations currently has 57,003 members on Facebook and between their foundation in October 2015 and April 2017 they provided mobile phone top ups for 22,000 people, totalling approximately £400,000 (Jape 2017, informal conversation). Such organisations allow asylum seekers to use their phones whilst on the move for varying reasons. RefugeeText allows *“refugees to know where they are going, where they will be welcomed [...] and what other types of services they can count on”* (Wendle, 2016). There is therefore widespread agreement that asylum seekers and refugees use *“their phones to navigate, access news and information, connect with home and as emotional support in a way unprecedented in the history of human wandering”* (Wendle, 2016).

The use of ICTs as a migration tool has led them to *“be one of the most important objects in the possession of a displaced person”* (Worley, 2016). Numerous newspaper articles have quoted refugees and asylum seekers as placing the importance of their phones before food, sleep or money as they travel across Europe. Comments such as *“our phones and power*

*banks are more important for our journey than anything, even more important than food"* (Alter, 2015) are widespread. Rabee Mohammed, a young Syrian from Aleppo travelling along the Hungarian border was questioned by a Time journalist as to which was more important, food or power. His response was immediate and unflinching: *"Charging my phone"* (Witty, 2015). Hala, also from Aleppo, Syria, stated in an interview for the documentary *Children on the Frontline* that her phone had everything in it: *"All my family, all my world is here. That's why I'm always holding it. I'm holding on to it like I'm holding on to an address of my own, my family. This metal device has become my whole world"* (Channel 4, 2014).

For many, *"the European refugee crisis is the first of its kind in a fully digital age, and that has changed how the exodus is unfolding. With each border crossing, there is a race to find a new signal, a new local SIM card or a public wi-fi network"* (Witty, 2015). Information and Communication Technology usage might *"increase a migrant's empowerment to make more informed decisions about routes to take, destinations to choose, preferred travel conditions and when and where exactly to cross the border"* (Zijlstra, 2017, p.176). It is within this specific context, that we, as researchers, were interested in understanding the importance of the ICTs as a migratory tool.

Taking all these factors into account we were led to the following research question:

***To what extent does the use of ICTs amongst asylum seekers influence their decisions throughout their journey across Europe?***

Within this initial question, several working questions emerged:

- 1) How does the use of ICTs affect the decision-making process underway with regard to the final destination?
- 2) How are asylum seekers and refugees navigating the European regulatory system with the use of technologies?
- 3) How do asylum seekers use technologies as a mean to circumnavigate the use of smugglers?

## METHODOLOGY

In the following section, we will discuss the methodology applied throughout our research design, the collection of our empirical data through fieldwork, and the theoretical framework.

### Research approach

Our research is based on a phenomenological approach, highlighting a specific experience, identifying phenomena *“through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation”* (Lester, 1999, p.1). Indeed, the use of ICTs as a journey guide is a new phenomenon, observed mainly during the “European refugee crisis”. The phenomenological approach requires an inductive angle to the research, *“interviews, discussions and participant observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s)”* (Ibid.). This approach is entirely relevant to this study as we rely on our informants’ knowledge about their memories and feelings with regard to their journey and their use of ICTs. Furthermore, as Lester argues, the phenomenological research overlaps other qualitative approaches such as the symbolic interactionism (Ibid.). This qualitative method is a *“study of human group life and human conduct”* (Blumer, 1986, p.1), in which you find *“human beings acting towards things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them”* (Ibid, p.2). In this study, ‘things’ are interpreted as ICTs. The symbolic interactionism also uses the concept of ‘meaning’ being defined as *“arising in the process of interaction between people”* (Ibid), definitely fitting to our theoretical framework, mainly framed by the ‘Actor-Network Theory’, based on interactions between people and ‘things’. Social interaction being the central point of our theoretical framework, Blummer describes symbolic interactionism as bearing importance in *“the fact that social interaction is a process that forms human conduct”* (Blumer, 1986, p.8). Indeed, throughout our research, we are looking at how the asylum seeker’s conduct can be monitored by interactions between the actor and Information and Communication Technology.

We used the inductive approach, as our data framed the direction of our research and analysis: *“the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data”* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.12). We started our research with an explorative lens,

gathering information from different articles, reports and personal observations on the current trends. The main appeal came from informal conversations with some of our informants. However, it can be said that we also relied slightly on a deductive angle: while waiting for interview meetings and answers from potential informants, we started searching in newspaper articles, reports, and academic essays. As Bryman highlighted in his book: *"The researcher, on the basis of what is known about in a particular domain, and of theoretical considerations in relation to that domain, deduces a hypothesis that must then be subjected to empirical scrutiny"* (Bryman, 2015, p.24). We can justify the use of a deductive approach in highlighting by the fact that *"semi-structured interviews require a certain level of previous study in the research topic area because the interview questions are based on previous knowledge."* (Wengraf 2001, RWJF 2008, Kelly in Kallio et al, 2016, p.2955)

Nonetheless, throughout the research design process of this qualitative social research, our concepts and hypotheses have been adjusted, remodelled and reconsidered at every new step and with all new data collected. Kvale identified this procedure in saying that using qualitative research constrains the researcher to determine *"a well-defined concept of what is studied and from formulating hypotheses in the beginning in order to test them"* (Kvale, 2008, p.XI).

In the first draft of our investigation, we focused our research topic on digital apps that were meant to be facilitators for asylum seekers' survival on the European route. However, with this approach being too narrow, we had to enlarge our research vision to the evolution of migrants' journeys within Europe with the arrival of advanced information technology such as previously described ICTs. Indeed, throughout the interviews we conducted, other elements were brought up by our informants, such as the recurrent use of Facebook groups by asylum seekers on the way, the way they avoided using smugglers, or communicating with the local population. All these new inputs enlarged our initial research topic.

We decided to rely on the qualitative research as it is defined as an intention *"to approach the world 'out there'"* (Kvale, 2008, p.X), and *"to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world"*

*prior to scientific explanations” (Ibid., p.XVI). But it is also determined as an approach which “embodies a view of social reality as a constant shifting emergent property of individuals’ creation” (Bryman, 2015, p.36). Qualitative research offered us a way to collect relevant information as we wanted to grasp the reality and the feelings of our informants towards their ICT usage, their attachment to this piece of technology and its meaning to them.*

## **Selection of sources and authentication of data**

*“Credibility refers to accurate recording of the phenomena under scrutiny (Shenton 2004). Thus, appropriate and successful selection of the data collection methodology in the first phase is an essential basis for the credibility of the study results (Jensen 2008a).” (Kallio et al., 2016, p.2962)*

As aforementioned, the selection of our sources first started with a deep search on academic websites. Intensive reading of reports, articles and academic researches shaped our research. We also mapped the digital apps which were made available for asylum seekers on the move, testing some of them and attempting to understand their objectives. For this research, we also decided to conduct interviews. As Kvale described it: *“The interview aims at nuanced accounts of different aspects of the interviewee’s life world” (Kvale, 2008, p.11-12). Bryman adds more on the usage of interviews to collect raw data: “the emphasis must be on the interviewee frames and understands issues and events - that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns and forms of behaviors” (Bryman, 2015, p.466). This statement echoes our case study, the event is the flight and the patterns and forms of behaviour are the use of ICTs whilst on the route.*

## **Fieldwork**

We decided to carry out qualitative interviews with asylum seekers who have made the journey across Europe, by whatever means, who had access to or owned an ICT at some point during their journey. We wanted to look at asylum seekers’ strategies to pursue their route, how their journey had been framed regarding their use of technologies. Most of our respondents made the journey after 2010, mostly between 2013 and 2015. Due to the lapsed period of time, this fieldwork will mainly rely on the *“active development and performances of ‘memory’” (Sheller & Urry, 2016, p.218).*

Most reports and articles about the use of ICTs by asylum seekers were written and published during or soon after the peak of the “European refugee crisis”, which facilitated our empirical data collection. With the time lapse between the beginning of our research and the media coverage of the “European refugees crisis” being wide spread, the multitude of studies, articles and reports have been made accessible.

Beside the information we could gather through the reading of articles and reports, we also decided to include excerpts of interviews conducted by journalists at that time. We agreed to consolidate our own empirical data gathered on our own with this secondary empirical data as we aimed at getting an insight into the use of ICTs while on the route at the time, as the interviews we conducted were relying on our informants’ recollection of ICTs usage on the route. Kallio and other authors understand this approach: *“In the case of sparse or fragmented knowledge in the literature, empirical knowledge could be used to complement and deepen the theoretical background”* (Kallio et al, 2016, p.2959).

We also chose to conduct interviews with NGOs and concerned citizens who created digital platforms or help for refugees and asylum seekers on the move within Europe or decided to shed light on certain profiles of refugees and asylum seekers through documentaries and articles. In doing so, we tried to grasp their motivations, their opinions and observations regarding the use of ICTs by asylum seekers on the European route. As Diminescu has argued, here we chose a *“transdisciplinary view”* (Diminescu, 2005, p.576), trying to grasp with engineers, designers, researchers and even refugees themselves what the stakes are of ICT usage by asylum seekers transiting in Europe.

### ***Participant observations***

We decided to add participant observations to this research as one of our informants sent us weblinks to several Facebook groups and pages. This allowed us to vary our methods of collecting data, conducting a *“‘cyber-research’ that explores the imaginative and virtual mobilities of people via their websites, multiuser discussion groups”* (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p.218).



These pages and groups have been created in order to give advice for Iraqi asylum seekers who chose to reach Europe. They are information hubs providing data on a wide range of topics: safe passage to and across Europe, advice on finding smugglers, how to avoid smugglers as well as asylum policies and the economic and social climate of different European countries. We chose to use these weblinks as data supporting our argumentation, using some of the posts and pictures shared on these pages and groups. However, as these pages and groups were in Arabic, we used Google Translate or an interpreter in order to understand the meanings of the posts. For this reason the grammar of some of the posts may not be entirely correct.

These are the links towards these groups and pages:

- <http://bit.ly/2mPAYTu> - "الهجرة الى اوربا" *"Immigration to Europe"*
- <http://bit.ly/2mscvsd> - "العراقية الجالية" *"Iraqi community in the province of Sinop Turkey"*  
سينوب محافظة تركيا في

We also participated in a seminar led by the United Nations Development Program at the UN City in Copenhagen, on the 21st of June 2017. Therefore, the data collected during this seminar, relevant to our research, will be considered here as participant observation data.

### ***Self-administered questionnaires***

Unfortunately, some of our informants were only reachable via e-mail. Adapting our research strategy to this obstacle, we decided to send a self-administered questionnaire (Bryman, 2015, p.221) to the informants who were not available for a face-to-face or Skype interview due to time or geographical constraints. Due to the format of self-administered questionnaires, the interview process cannot be as flexible as those conducted face-to-face or via Skype. The limitations of such data collection will be further detailed in our limitations section.

### ***Semi-structured interviews***

Conducting qualitative social research, we had the chance to lead semi-structured interviews with some of our informants. It was a 'must' for us, even if criticised by some academics, in order to gain credibility in our results, get more space for interpretation and

allowing us to gather more data from in-depth conversations. While doing a semi-structured interview, *“the interviewer exhibits openness to new and unexpected phenomena, rather than having ready-made categories and schemes of interpretation”* (Kvale, 2008, p.12). This openness during our interviews and in the collection of data made us remodel our research question several time in response to the information given by our different informants.

Open-ended questions are the main elements of such interviews, allowing space for *“accompanying queries that probe for more detailed and contextual data”* (Piercy, 2015, p.1). This format of interview allows a dialogue (Kallio et al, 2016, p.2960), which opens the possibility *“to improvise follow-up questions based on participants’ responses”* (Ibid., p.2955). These follow-up questions are meant to grasp the opinion of our informants, to identify the relevant information and issues, and research more on the feelings of the informant (Barriball & While, 1994, p.334).

These semi-structured interviews supported us in gathering in-depth information about our informants’ living conditions at the time of their journey within Europe, and how the use of ICTs framed their journey to different degrees. This form of interview permitted us to grasp different aspects, such as the place of technology in our informants’ life, their unique situation, and *“meanings attributed to lived experiences”* (Piercy, 2015, p.1).

### ***Informal conversations***

The inclusion of informal conversations is based on the fact that our main motivations regarding this topic had been sparked by casual conversations we had with some of our informants, before the start of our research. These informal conversations allowed us to gain information we probably would not have been able to acquire during regular interviews. Indeed, the interview protocol may create a distance, with the use of a recording device. There is more proximity in informal conversations than in formal interviews, which may allow people to speak more freely. As part of our ethical considerations, we asked the informants if they agreed on their informal conversations with us being used for this research purpose.

### ***Choice of informants***

Following our research aim and question, and in order to understand ICTs being used as a migratory tool for asylum seekers on the move within Europe, we instinctively determined criteria for selecting our informants as follows:

1. be a refugee/asylum seeker
2. to have crossed Europe seeking protection since 2012, owning or having access to an ICT.
3. as well as professionals or concerned citizens around Europe - who built up digital tools or wrote about our research topic.

We collected data from various informants, based not on their nationality, but their experience. As our curiosity concerning this subject had been sparked through casual conversations with refugees and asylum seekers during trips to Calais or Brussels, we decided to interview those who had helped spur our initial interest. We interviewed those who were keen to speak about their experiences, which can be a traumatic recollection. The aim of these interviews was to establish the significance of the use of ICTs by asylum seekers as a way to deliver aid, in every shape.

### ***Presentation of informants***

Due to the sensitivity of the interviews and the information gleaned from them, some of the names have been changed, though some remain unchanged.

**Zaid, 27 years old, from Mosul, now granted refugee status in Belgium - 2nd February 2017, Brussels.**

Zaid left Mosul in June 2014, after the arrival of ISIL in the town. He stayed in Turkey for over a year, waiting for an appointment for his asylum claim filed for the UNHCR. He arrived on the Greek Island of Lesbos, crossed Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Austria, several cities in Germany and then arrived in Brussels on the 9th of September 2015, where he is now settled and is studying.

**Ali, 28 years old, from Damascus, now granted subsidiary protection in Belgium - 26th February 2017, questionnaire responses.**

Ali left Damascus in August 2015. He travelled to Greece, and crossed the border to Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia , Slovenia, Austria, Germany and Belgium. He arrived in Belgium in September 2015 where he now lives and is doing his masters.

**Dejene, 29 years old, from Ethiopia, now asylum seeker in Denmark - 17th March 2017, Copenhagen.**

Dejene left Ethiopia in early 2015, immediately after he was released from prison. He spent 4 to 5 months in Libya, until he got on a boat from the Libyan coast towards Italy. He arrived in Copenhagen central station on the 16th of March 2016. He is still waiting for his asylum claim to be fully processed.

**Jean-Claude, 49 years, from Democratic Republic of Congo, now asylum seeker in Denmark - 24th March 2017, Copenhagen.**

Jean-Claude left RDC suddenly in February 2013. He passed through Congo Brazzaville, and then flew to Istanbul where he met with a smuggler who helped him to fly from Istanbul to Copenhagen. He is waiting for his asylum claim to be processed.

**Agob, 27 years old, from Syria, now granted refugee status in Denmark - 24th March 2017, Copenhagen.**

Agob left Syria at the end of 2013. He travelled to Turkey, on to Greece and then flew to Switzerland. From there he drove through Germany to Denmark where he was arrested and has been granted refugee status.

**Caroline Arvidsson, from Sweden, co-founder of the RefugeeText platform, head of design - 16th March 2017, Copenhagen.**

Caroline, along with two colleagues, created the RefugeeText platform, a chatbot accessible through Telegram, Facebook Messenger and SMS. It has been implemented and the first prototype was shared in April 2016.

**Antoine Saint-Denis, from France, founder of Europe for People - 10th April 2017, Copenhagen via Skype.**

Antoine Saint-Denis is the co-founder of the do-tank 'Europe for People' which concerns itself with social innovation and social protection in Europe. He also works as the manager of public policies and social innovation within the European Social Funds. He made a study of the dynamics between migrants' needs and how citizens would try to solve this gap by creating digital initiatives, like IT or ICT services. Antoine also tried to launch a smartphone app called 'Refugee Language Line', able to match migrants' needs with volunteering interpreters.

**Ömer Sami, from England, director of the documentary *"The Hands that Guide - 24 hour emergency hotline for refugees"* - 11th April 2017, Copenhagen.**

Ömer shot a documentary about Abu Amar's one-man enterprise that helps Syrians crossing from Turkey to Greece by boat, but in some cases as they transit across Europe. Abu Amar is a Syrian refugee from Damascus, paralyzed from the waist down who struggled during two years to reach Europe from Turkey, cheated by smugglers. Ömer sent us the transcript of his documentary and the interviews and shared participant observations whilst he shot the documentary.

**Jape, from England, founder of the Facebook page *"Phone credit for refugees and displaced people"* - April 2017, London via Facebook conversations.**

Jape, long-time volunteer in 'The Jungle' of Calais, where he saw that a working phone plays a crucial role in people's physical and mental safety. He therefore created the Facebook page as a shared space between refugees and donors, all over the world, in order to connect and support families in crisis.

## **Secondary Empirical data**

Our research relies in part on secondary empirical data, due to the broadness in scope of our topic and as a result of the limitations which we discuss below. The secondary empiri is based on a variety of newspaper articles, reports, videos and the transcripts from Ömer Sami's documentary *"The Hands that Guide - 24 hour emergency hotline for refugees"*, available in Appendix 5.

Although other researchers' empirical data can be valuable to our research, some limitations exist when analysing such data (Bryman, 2008, p.300). Not knowing the context of the interview, being unfamiliar with how the interview was conducted, not knowing the informants and having not interacted with them can constrain our analysis of the available data. Despite having the interview transcripts, as is the case for Abu Amar, these are all limitations that we must take into consideration when processing the data.

## **Coding**

By listening to the recordings of our interviews, we were able to analyse and process the raw data collected. The transcripts of these recordings are available in Appendix 2, Appendix 3, Appendix 4. In addition to recording the interviews, one or both of us would take notes in order to ensure the maximum capture of information throughout the process and prevent the loss of data.

The analysis of the material we gathered was mostly intuitive. We first identified the recurrent topics which we brought up during our interviews, whilst listening carefully to the recordings and reading our transcripts. The main themes of this research are introduced by working questions which will be used to challenge our assumptions. Quotations selected from our interview transcripts will illustrate or reinforce the arguments made, supported by further literature.

Some common themes emerged of our data processing and interpretation, which led us to the discovery of seven variables that were, for the most part, a pattern in the migration of our informants. These seven variables, were chosen from a combination between existing research and our empirical data and they affected our interviewees to different degrees and at different times throughout their journey. To that extent, they will vary in importance within our analysis. Throughout our analysis, we attempt to comprehend how these variables affected ICTs' influence on their journey.

We termed these variables as follows:

- *Digital divide* - “access to [...] ICTs is unevenly distributed between countries and certain social groups” (Zijlstra, 2017, p.178)
- *Language* - ability to communicate in English or with people surrounding them during their journey
- *Nature of the flight* - the thoughts and processes put into the preparation for the journey and its chosen paths. This is to be distinguished from the idea of “spontaneous refugees” which was the case for every one of our informants. “How much time and opportunity is there to prepare the flight?” (Havinga et al., 1999, p.44)
- *Information precarity* - “a term referring to the condition of instability that refugees experience in accessing news and personal information” (Wall et al., 2017, p.240)
- *Internet connectivity* - ability to connect to the internet along the journey
- *Access to social networks* - access to networks of people, both at home and within Europe, who have access to an ICT in order to communicate
- *IT Literacy* - people’s ability to use “digital technology, communication tools or networks to locate, evaluate, use and create information” (Illinois University Library, 2008).

It is important to note that it was claimed, two decades ago, that aspects directly affecting the movement of asylum seekers were dependent on several factors and variables (Havinga et al., 1999, p.44). One such variable that both we and Havinga encountered was *Nature of the flight*. Therefore, as evidenced above, some of the variables we encountered are not new, but some, such as the *digital divide*, *IT literacy* and *internet connection* would not have had such strong implications 18 years ago, at the time of Havinga’s study.

## **Theoretical approach**

Whilst conducting the interviews and gaining a specific perspective on the collected data, we felt that ‘Migration Infrastructure’ could be a great interpretative lens of our informants’ experiences with their ICTs and how they are moved by their ICT usage. Through conversations with academics, we were pointed in the direction of the ‘Actor-Network Theory’, a theory suitable to our data and our analytical lens. After reading and researching about these two theoretical approaches, we decided to include ‘Social Navigation’ as being

the possible theoretical baseline of this thesis, as we are looking at the strategies deployed by asylum seekers, with their ICTs, whilst navigating a hostile environment. The addition of the 'Displacement Economies' concept happened later in the coding process.

## **Ethical considerations**

We had several considerations throughout the process of data collection, the primary one being that many of our informants were personal contacts that we had made through our work and internship at Amnesty International in Brussels and Trampoline House in Copenhagen. We did not want our informants to feel obliged to talk to us or for the line between our working relationship and our role as academic researchers to become blurred. The fact that we already knew the majority of informants could also influence our findings; people could answer questions as a means to satisfy us and allow us to have the desired outcome for our data.

The second consideration is that we are asking people to give us an account of a time that is both difficult to remember and to talk about. We therefore ensured that the interviews were framed and viewed as "*spaces of interaction*" (Rapley, 2001, p.317) in which our informants could answer questions as they saw fit without having to relive traumatic elements of their journey towards and across Europe.

Moreover, the use of the data collected from the several informal conversations we conducted has been subjected to the approval of our informants. Indeed, we decided to ask our informants if they agreed to us using the informal conversations we had, so they could fully acknowledge what would be used from their discussions.

The face-to-face interviews we conducted have been voice recorded, in order to be able to catch the exact expressions, wording and information shared by our informants. Before each of these interviews, we asked our informants if they agreed to having their voice taped.



Finally, we also followed the demands of certain of our informants who chose to change their name. Some of them still have their asylum claims being processed and some want to protect their family still living in their country of origin.

## **Limitations**

The predominant limitation of our fieldwork and research is the question surrounding our informants being representative of the asylum seeking community at large. We interviewed a small group of informants, consisting of five asylum seekers, which of course will not reflect the journey and experiences of every asylum seeker who has travelled across Europe. In an attempt to get a cross section of different experiences we have interviewed people of different nationalities, religions and ethnicities who have migrated across Europe as a result of differing reasons, conflicts and problems. This was done in an attempt to ensure that our responses offer differing perspectives. Despite this, our conclusions and arguments can not and will not be transposable to all asylum seekers who crossed Europe in the past few years. In addition to this, there are varying ways in which to handle an ICT, which renders the personal attachment to such devices and their usage considerably different from one informant to another. Had we had more informants, the likelihood is we would have been able to discover new angles and other ways in which to use ICTs during the various routes undertaken across Europe.

The language barrier is a second, albeit equally important limitation. None of our informants is a native English speakers meaning there was a language barrier which potentially increased the risk of misunderstandings and could influence our informants' ability to express themselves and our ability to misinterpret their meaning. That said, our informants all spoke English to a high level and we ensured that, to reduce any misunderstandings, we re-phrased questions, used simple sentences and at times slowed our speech. It is also worth noting that of the two of us, only one of us is a native English speaker, which in turn further affected comprehension and fluency when talking to our informants.

A further limitation was found in the means in which we collected our data: due to busy personal agendas on both sides, some of our informants had to be interviewed through a

self-administered questionnaire, as described previously. Hence, no spontaneous follow-up questions could be asked for these participants and we also lost the natural flow of having a face to face conversation in which the tone of voice, hand movements and facial expressions can also convey meaning and feeling. Interview-talk is produced in a specific context and an awareness of that context is vital in understanding the talk, and therefore the 'data' itself (Rapley, 2001, p.317). Follow-up questions permit the interviewees *"to provide further detail concerning their perspectives and reasoning"* (Roulston, 2011, 361), *"to expand on some particular point that came up in the interview"* (Kallio et al., 2016, 2960). By not meeting in person, details and the ability to expand on varying issues were lost to us.

Moreover, besides the aforementioned limitations of this fieldwork, we have to acknowledge the fact that our informants were interviewed on their memories, on their recollection of specific moments during their journey. If our data relies mostly on recollection of specific moments, sometimes traumatic, it is because our interviewees were all settled or were waiting for their asylum claim to be processed in a European country at the time we conducted the interview. This aspect contains some limitations - is every moment and recollection fully reliable or remembered? It is probable that we did not get the whole information due to some memory lapses.

## **Obstacles**

Aside from these limitations regarding our fieldwork and data collection, we must also point out the lack of responses we faced while asking for some interviews, particularly with companies and businesses who work with technologies benefiting refugees and asylum seekers. In fact, we contacted many other organisations and informed people for this research. Despite getting in contact and them expressing their will to cooperate with us, we never heard from them after we sent our questionnaire. This could be identified as an obstacle as we waited for their responses as a useful data, and we had to quickly rethink our data collection strategy in order to gain as much as possible from our informants, taking into account the timeline of this research.

It has to be underlined that, some of our informants were reluctant to be interviewed as they felt that they did not use their phone in a way that would be relevant to our research. Therefore, our interview guide had to be changed and adapted depending on the informant we were interviewing, making our questions clearer and explaining our aim differently. We also wanted to observe how some of our informants had handled their phones when they were making their journeys, asking them to use their or our phone in order to show us which apps they had used and at what time of day they would use their phones. However, this demand was not well received as there was a lack of comprehension and perhaps a desire to not remember specific incidents.

Unfortunately, we were not in contact with actual stranded asylum seekers, and therefore could not gather information about the current use of ICTs by asylum seekers who are stranded. In order to remedy this gap in our data, we applied for a study field trip with the European Council, to follow asylum seekers stranded at the Balkan/European borders for three weeks. However, we were not accepted on this program, missing an opportunity to gather some more relevant and up-to-date data.

Finally, it is worth noting that some informants had a disposition for planning and were more talkative, descriptive and reflective of their experiences. Others were not. Therefore, we will refer to some more than others.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our choice of theoretical approaches and concepts was intuitive: each of the theories and concepts is fitting, albeit to different extents, to our research topic and the analytical logic. We decided to expand their usage and apply them specifically to our research, though we do so whilst highlighting their weaknesses, and reinforcing their strengths by tying these theories and concepts together. In formulating our research question: ***“To what extent does the use of ICTs amongst asylum seekers influence their decisions throughout their journey across Europe?”***, several theoretical approaches came to light.

The concept of ‘Social Navigation’ by Vigh is the baseline of our research, as it denotes the strategies asylum seekers deploy in order to overcome inherent obstacles on their routes. The use of ICTs as a navigational tool will be analysed here through the lens of Latour’s ‘Actor-Network Theory’, which proposes a new theoretical perspective on social actions, actors’ decisions and/or strategies. We have also decided to use the approach of ‘Migration Infrastructure’, by Xiang and Lindquist, as an interesting method to comprehend the elements and societal dimensions moving migrants. Finally, though not as influential as the above mentioned theories, we have selected ‘Displacement Economies’ by Hammar, which in turn helps to comprehend a new type of migration management.

### **The concept of ‘Social Navigation’ - Henrik Vigh**

When talking about forced migration, and more specifically about the journey itself, intuitively we tend to first think about the strategies deployed to avoid and overcome obstacles which are inherent to the route. Therefore, the concept of ‘Social Navigation’ is being used throughout this thesis as a baseline concept. According to Henrik Vigh in *“Social death and violent life chances”*, the concept of ‘Social Navigation’ refers to the various decisions and strategies that youth in Guinea Bissau have to make in order to navigate in life, as a means to avoid ‘social death’ (Vigh, 2006, p.45).

This concept is perceived in this research as the conceptual guideline, established in order to understand the reasons leading asylum seekers to utilise particular strategies when they are undertaking irregular routes within Europe. Vigh illustrates his own concept as follows:

*“When navigating we imagine and actualise a path through unstable social terrains, simultaneously moving across the next obstacle or wave and negotiating the many more to come one’s way along an envisioned course” (Vigh, 2006, p.54).*

This ‘path’, as described by Vigh, is understood in this thesis as the irregular patterns in transit-migration as undertaken by asylum seekers in Europe. Transposing this concept to our case study, asylum seekers’ situation of transiting irregularly in Europe and seeking protection, refers to *“the praxis of immediate survival as well as to gaining a perspective on changing social possibilities and possible trajectories”* (Vigh, 2006, p.52). Their ‘immediate survival’ is not only social, but also physical: avoiding drowning while crossing the Mediterranean sea, avoiding being cheated by smugglers, being caught by the police or border guards and circumventing the danger of clandestinity. The ‘changing social possibilities and possible trajectories’ are perceived here as the opportunities available to asylum seekers throughout their route: to reach their final destination, travel independently and/or safely.

Throughout our research we will examine the navigational opportunities and decisions undertaken by our informants, influenced by the use of differing ICTs. The way our informants, asylum seekers, *“act, adjust and attune (their) strategies and tactics in relation to the way (they) experience and imagine and anticipate the movement and influence of social forces”* (Vigh, 2009, p.420), whilst including ICTs in this experience. The strategies deployed by asylum seekers on the move within Europe correspond to a strategic navigation, and are, as argued by Vigh, providing *“insights into exactly this interplay between objective structures and subjective agency”* (Vigh, 2006, p.55). ‘Agency’ as defined by Sewell, Jr., is the capability to exert *“some degree of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relations to some degree”* (Sewell, Jr, 1992, p.20). Vigh agrees that ‘agency’ is not bound to *“the idea of an autonomous and absolute subject”* (Bevir, 1999 in Vigh, 2009, p.432), however, throughout his text, Vigh never refers to the other actors and elements involved in human ‘agency’. As we will expand on below, we develop Latour’s ‘agency’ perspective by approaching this concept as being constructed by other elements interacting together such as *dimensions* or *actants*, concepts further argued upon in the following sections.

We also wanted to add another perspective to 'Social Navigation' as brought up by Amanda Hammar: 'Displacement Economies'. As Vigh's concept of 'Social Navigation' does not consider the range of actors playing a role in the asylum seeker's 'agency', Hammar proposes including the ones who manage forced migration. She presents and examines the *"paradoxes of displacement"* (Hammar, 2014, p.3), creating interesting synchronism between different actors, different sites and different temporal-dimensions, all of them part of *"complex relational manifestations and implications"* (Ibid.). She approaches forced displacement paradoxes as creating new interactions, *"new physical, economic and political spaces, relations, systems and practices"* (Hammar, 2014, p.4). She defines them as spaces in which the interests of those who 'manage the displaced' emerge (Hammar, 2014, p.8): central States, non-State institutions/agencies, militaries, opposition movements, church organisations, border agencies, private enterprises as well as humanitarian and development NGOs (Ibid.). In this thesis, we will expand on the above mentioned list by looking at 'digital humanitarianism' and smugglers. Even though some are doing it unconsciously, these two *actants* are implementing a new type of displacement management, playing a significant role in asylum-seekers' 'agency' evolution; being mediated.

Therefore, this concept will be used along with two other theories: the 'Actor-Network Theory' by Latour, as well as that of 'Migration Infrastructure' as put forward by Xiang and Lindquist. To Vigh, 'Social Navigation' represents *"the phenomenon of engaging in a terrain, which at the same time engages you, in a more kinetic perspective, moving within an element, which simultaneously moves you"* (Vigh, 2006, pp. 54-55). In referring to how migrants are being moved by other elements, Vigh's notion of 'Social Navigation' ties in with the two above mentioned theories; corresponding to the *actants* introduced by Latour, but also to the five different migration *dimensions* presented by Xiang and Lindquist.

### **'Actor-Network Theory' - Bruno Latour**

The 'Actor-Network Theory' (ANT), as put forward by Bruno Latour, has been chosen as the major theory framing our research analysis. ANT proposes a new analytical lens of social action, influenced by the interactions between human and nonhuman *actants*. In this thesis,

we will look at ICTs as *actants*, affecting the decisions and actions undertaken by asylum seekers, to varying degrees, as they transit across Europe. ANT is claimed to be helpful in understanding moments of “*societal shifts*”, phenomena such as the involvement of ICTs in the “European refugee crisis” (Rydin, 2013, p.25), opening up “*new possibilities for those who want to understand the place of technology in human experience*” (Winner, 1993, in Walsham, 1997, p.143).

One of the key points of the ‘Actor-Network Theory’, and the reason why it piqued our interest, is the integration of the nonhuman component, which makes the analysis of human action all the more complex and relevant. Latour justifies the adding of nonhuman characters in his theory as “*the granting of humanity to an individual actor, or the granting of [...] materiality, requires paying the same semiotic price*” (Latour, 1996, p.374). The ‘Actor-Network Theory’ holds a particular interest for us as it encompasses human and nonhuman entities as “*producing new actors and new ways of acting*” (Müller, 2015, p.30). This last statement is reflected in Xiang and Lindquist argumentation about ‘Migration Infrastructure’, claiming that migration “*is more cumbersome since the social process of migration has become more complicated with the increasing involvement of non-migrant actors and growing numbers of regulations*” (Xiang et Lindquist, 2014, p.123). It is more complex to understand migration nowadays, as the variety of elements influencing the migration course is increasing, be it borders reinforcement or digital humanitarian apps.

The ‘Actor-Network Theory’ comprehends that the action performed by the actor or “*what is doing the moving and what is moved have no specific homogeneous morphism*” (Latour, 1996, p.380), the several elements comprising the action can also be “*techno-morphic*” (Latour, 1996, p.380). This techno-morphism is represented by Information and Communication Technologies, more specially mobile phones, smartphones and on occasion computers. To illustrate the relevance of ICTs usage in the decision-making process, Müller argues that with “*the ubiquity of smartphones, big data and algorithms that regulate online activities, our life worlds have already become inseparable from technology*” (Müller, 2015, p.34). Therefore these pieces of technology should be fully understood as *actants* of our daily actions and decisions. In this research, the focus will be on the decisions taken with

regard to the journey asylum seekers undertake to seek asylum in an European member state.

For Latour, understanding associations and interactions between originally unconnected components is the strongest explanation of social action (Latour, 1996, p.375), the actor is only able act thanks to an *actant* - be it human or object (Latour, 1996, p.373). The *actant*, social or material elements, human or nonhuman, is part of an association only composed of other *actants*; leading decisions over an action, described as *"a way of achieving change"* (Rydin, 2013, p.24-25). Following this idea of associations between originally unconnected components, ANT is based on the assumption that the world is *"multiple and performative, i.e shaped through practices, as different from a single pre-existing reality"* (Müller, 2015, p.31). Latour claims that ANT does not predict any actions on *"how an actor should behave and which associations are allowed a priori"* (Latour, 1996, p.374), the actors considered as circulating objects, evolving through trials and other actions (Ibid.). In this research, we attempt to demonstrate the plurality and unpredictability of the interactions between asylum seekers and *actants* such as ICTs, during their irregular journey. Latour expressed that ANT represents fluidity in relations that can be confronted with resistance (Murdoch, 1998, p.364 in Rydin, 2013, p.25). This resistance will be analysed in this research, as to how ICTs, as *actants*, may be used to a lesser extent by some of our informants. Latour even argues that ANT serves to understand *"which accounts could best define new associations that they (actors) have been forced to establish"* (Latour, 2005, p.12).

Latour himself raises the following criticism of ANT: in 1999, he put forward the notion that ANT could be perceived as a *"very crude method to learn from the actors without imposing on them an a priori definition of their world-building capacities"* (Latour, 1999, p.20). *"A theory and methodology combined"* (Washam, 1997, p.469) rather than only a theory relating to general behaviours. This particular statement could be applied to our methodological approach as we are not aiming to generalise behaviour patterns, rather we are trying to learn from our informants how they built their varying livelihood strategies within a specific context. Although we are also interested to understand the failure of network establishment (Washam, 1997, p.469), why the translation and inscription did not happen, a recurrent situation which will be presented in our analysis.



With regard to 'agency', Latour does not wish to define it as the result of the interaction between the micro level to the macro one (Latour, 1996, p.372), nor the 'agency' to the structure as proposed by Vigh (Vigh, 2006, p.55). Latour stated that if the researcher aims at interpreting "*a trajectory, a movement*" he should not rely on these opposing levels (Latour, 1999, p.17). However, in our case study, the regulatory system within the European countries holds a certain power and can therefore still impact 'agency'. That said, we do agree with his approach to 'agency', described as "*a mediated achievement, brought about through forging associations*" (Müller, 2015, p.30), connections and interactions as the central key to the analysis of human action as "*a circulating entity*" (Latour, 1999, p.17). This definition is supported by other authors, such as Sewell Jr, who describes 'agency' as follows:

*"remobilizations of resources that constitute agency are always acts of communication with others.*

*Agency entails an ability to coordinate one's actions with others and against others, to form collective projects, to persuade, to coerce, and to monitor the simultaneous effects of one's own and others' activities"* (Sewell, Jr, 1992, p.21).

Throughout our research, we intuitively thought of the interesting combination of ANT and 'Migration Infrastructure'. Indeed, the central queries of this 'Actor-Network Theory' are: "*When we act, who else is acting? How many agents are also present? [...] Why are we all held by forces that are not of our own making?*" (Latour, 2005, p.43). These questions refer directly to the focal point of the theory of 'Migration Infrastructure' - how migrants are being moved by others (Xiang & Lindquist, 2015, p.131). Thereby, when referring to "others", here, we mean *actants* as defined by Latour in ANT. Also, for Latour, the main interest behind using networks to understand actions and decisions is that it refers to "*the summing up of interactions through various kinds of devices, inscriptions, forms and formulae*" (Latour, 1999, p.17). This is how 'Migration Infrastructure' approaches migration, the movement in itself, based on dynamics of different elements and dimensions surrounding it, without making the distinction between macro and micro level essential. Likewise, with regard to 'Displacement Economies', Rydin argued that the network relations involving *actants*, such as ICTs, hold a certain power (Rydin, 2013, p.26). Such *actants* may

potentially be capable of governing actors' actions *"from a distance"* (Ibid.), such as digital humanitarians might do.

Criticism is also part of the understanding of 'Actor-Network Theory'. Reed criticised Latour's 'Actor-Network Theory' by claiming that the theory only concentrated on :

*"how things "get done" to the virtual exclusion of the various ways in which institutionalized structures shape and modify the process of social interaction and the socio-material practices through which it is accomplished"* (Reed, 1995 in Walsham, 1997, p.472).

We take this critique into account by proposing to connect 'Actor-Network Theory' and 'Migration Infrastructure' as the latter approach attempts to explain migration through all actors, including institutionalised structures, such as asylum policies, border and migration policies. We will now introduce the approach of 'Migration Infrastructure'.

### **'Migration Infrastructure' - Xiang & Lindquist**

As mentioned above, 'Actor-Network Theory' and 'Migration Infrastructure' are closely linked. In order to better grasp the commonalities between these two theories, we will now explain why we have chosen to apply 'Migration Infrastructure' to our research and which of its facets are most relevant.

Biao Xiang and Johan Lindquist do not perceive migration as a linear movement from A to B, or only the product of migrants' decisions, but rather as *"a multi-faceted space of mediation occupied by commercial recruitment intermediaries – large and small, formal and informal – bureaucrats, NGOs, migrants and technologies"* (Xiang et Lindquist, 2014 p.142). In order to understand how migration operates and more specifically how people are being moved by others, the two authors propose a new approach: 'Migration Infrastructure'. They determine 'Migration Infrastructure' as *"the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility"* (Ibid., p.124). In their text, Xiang and Lindquist categorise technologies as used by the State, by surveillance agencies as well as by refugees. For our part, when referring to technologies we are specifically looking

at the use of Information and Communication Technologies in the hands of asylum seekers, the same as referred to as nonhuman *actants* in ANT.

As aforementioned, the aim of the 'Migration Infrastructure' approach is to consider migrants as being moved by other elements, rather than by themselves. To that extent 'Migration Infrastructure' is composed of the following five *dimensions*: the *commercial* (recruitment intermediaries), the *regulatory* (state apparatus and procedures for documentation, licensing, training and other purposes), the *technological* (communication and transport), the *humanitarian* (NGOs and international organisations), and the *social* (migrant networks) (Ibid.). For Xiang and Lindquist, migration is conceptualised as "*multi-directional and self-adjusting movements*" operating as a result of the interactions between the above five dimensions (Ibid., p.132).

Each of these *dimensions* holds its own power and influence on people's movement. To that end, we have taken elements of each of the five *dimensions* to fit our research as follows:

- The *social dimension*, composed of migrant networks, is defined as the diverse communicational links between migrants, their families and their friends.
- The *commercial dimension* is described as the brokers and smugglers monitoring asylum seekers' journey across Europe.
- The *regulatory dimension* is defined as the political institutions which implement border and asylum policies (Ibid., p.133).
- The *humanitarian dimension* encompasses the organisations readily providing tools and basic needs to asylum seekers on the move, as well as civil society initiatives.
- Lastly, the *technological dimension*, in our case mostly comprising ICTs, which for the purpose of our research are mobile phones, smartphones and in some cases computers.

When looking at these five *dimensions*, it is important to note that the *technological dimension* "*perhaps the most obvious element of migration infrastructure*" (Ibid., p.135) holds significant implications when interacting with the other four. This interaction is central to the *technological dimension* in 'Migration Infrastructure' as well as to the 'Actor-Network Theory'. Every element and aspect of each 'Migration Infrastructure' *dimension* holds a specific role during a migrant's journey. Indeed as argued by Xiang and Lindquist: "*it is not*

*migrants who migrate, but rather constellations consisting of migrants and non-migrants, of human and non-human actors"* (Ibid., p.124). An approach that is mirrored by Latour stating that *"flying is a property of the whole association of entities that includes airports and planes, launch pad and ticket counters"* (Latour, 1999, p.182 in Xiang et Lindquist, 2014, p.124). Xiang and Lindquist argue that: *"Migration is not determined neither by autonomous markets, policy logic, nor according to individual migrant agency, but is rather constituted by a multitude of activities, practices and technologies that must be considered in specific contexts"* (Ibid., p.143).

As Xiang and Lindquist conclude, the use of 'Migration Infrastructure' pushes researchers to look at all aspects of each dimension: their nature, their design, their use, their role and by whom they are used, in order to understand how this particular aspect can shape the migration process (Ibid., p.143). As mentioned, our primary focus, taken from 'Migration Infrastructure', will be the *technological dimension*, composed of ICTs. Indeed, ICTs usage *"revolutionized communication between migrants, but also come to facilitate the recruitment of migrants"* (Madianou and Miller, 2011 in Xiang et Lindquist, 2014, p.135). The recruitment of migrants here refers to private companies and state agencies, much as presented in Xiang and Lindquist's case study. We will, however, be focusing on how ICTs and individuals facilitate migration. To that end the 'revolutionised communication' will be applied to our analysis, but their approach to recruitment will differ to ours, with the lens of 'Displacement Economies'. Indeed, the concept of 'Displacement Economies' approaches migration in the same manner as 'Migration Infrastructure': by making *"visible a much wider diversity of 'uninhabitants' who inhabit the multiple sites and processes of displacement"* (Hammar, 2014, p.25). These 'uninhabitants' being determined here as digital humanitarians and smugglers, as aforementioned.

In this research, one of our aims is to understand how these mainstream and popular pieces of technology can overlap and take on the role of other 'Migration Infrastructure' *dimensions*. We are expanding the application and conclusions of the 'Migration Infrastructure' approach. Therefore, we will attempt to delve further into the argumentation that the emergence of new technologic elements may hold a particular influence on migratory trajectories.

## CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Before delving into the analysis, in order to grasp the subject in its full shape, we need to gain an overview of what we are looking at. As Xiang and Lindquist have argued: *“Migration is rather constituted by a multitude of activities, practices and technologies that must be considered in specific contexts”* (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014, p.143). Therefore, in the following section, we will first illustrate the context of the widespread usage of ICTs, followed by the term ‘digital humanitarianism’ which will resonate throughout our thesis.

### Information and Communication Technologies

This thesis is focused on transit-migrants, more precisely asylum seekers on the move across Europe, seeking protection. To that end, as this research is mainly based on the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) by asylum seekers on this path, we felt it necessary to explain the emergence and describe the widespread usage of specific ICTs. The Kapa Research group has estimated that around 53,5% of refugees and asylum seekers claimed that they used a smartphone whilst migrating in 2015 (Gillespie et al., 2016, p.31). The core of our research is concentrated on the mobile phone as *“its efficiency with comparably low costs; high rates of access, distribution and use”* (Abushaikha & Schumann-Bölshe, 2016, p.194) render its widespread use easier to discern. Mobile phones are defined as user-friendly, trustworthy, in particular its portability feature (Ibid.).

The smartphone presents more diverse features in comparison to the mobile phone. The smartphone, described as a *“truly personal computer”* (The Economist, 2015a), holding advanced capabilities, is easy to handle thanks to its size and connectivity (The Economist, 2015b) leading to its increasing adoption worldwide (Lin et al., 2015, p.1). The portability of each of these pieces of technology offers *“a new kind of self and sense of perpetual communication and connectivity”* (Gillespie et al., 2016, p. 24). In 2014, around 92 people out of 100 had a mobile phone subscription worldwide (Abushaikha & Schumann-Bölshe, 2016, p.193). Today, the dissemination of mobile phones is also significant in developing countries: *“of the world’s six billion mobile-phone subscriptions, 73% are now in the developing world”* (Ibid.). In addition to this rapid increase of mobile phone subscriptions

the world over, the MIT Technology review argues that the spread of mobile phones *“appears to put smartphones on a global fast track”* (Ibid.). Although the most up to date smartphone is expensive, there is a range of cheaper options on offer; with the cheapest now being sold for less than US\$40 according to the Economist (The Economist, 2015b), and second generation iPhones available for around £25 (O’Malley, 2015). Such low prices mean that *“about half of the adult population owns a smartphone; by 2020, 80% will”* (The Economist, 2015b).

According to the CIA World Factbook, in 2015 81% of Syria’s population subscribed to mobile providers, whilst 91% of the Iraqi population owned a subscription (Central Intelligence Agency). When looking at these figures, it is therefore not surprising to be confronted with images of asylum seekers coming from Syria and Iraq using smartphones and mobile phones. Low prices of the second generation smartphones or budget Androids, combined with the fast spread of mobile phone usage led James O’Malley to conclude that *“There are more mobile phones than people in the world so chances are that anyone who can afford a phone (such as millions of Syrians) already own one”* (O’Malley, 2015). However, to date there is no data or official estimate available concerning the number of refugees owning a smartphone, meaning that without these figures, only observations that were made during this “European refugee crisis” can be utilised. As two of our informants come from Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo it is also worth mentioning the low rates of mobile phone owners in these countries. Indeed, according to the figures collected by the CIA in 2015, in Ethiopia only 43% of the population owned a mobile phone whilst only 48% of the Congolese population had subscriptions for mobile phones by July 2012 (Central Intelligence Agency). The *digital divide* is a concept which defines the diverse degrees of mobile phone and Internet penetration in the world, lower in some regions as demonstrated above (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.414).

As Hamel argued: *“Information and communication technologies and migration”*, it is necessary to be conscious of the *“disparities and inequalities on access and use that exist between groups and amongst countries because these have serious implications on many migrants’ access to ICTs and their ability to use these tools”* (Hamel, 2009, p.5). All of the asylum seekers we interviewed had access to an ICT during their journey, using it differently.

## **‘Digital humanitarianism’**

The connectivity, via national networks and wifi, and ubiquity which renders ICTs flexible, allows a certain type of aid to be more accessible. Thanks to their omnipresence in the refugee world, humanitarian agencies, NGOs and concerned citizens began to develop apps meant for humanitarian coordination (Abushaikha & Schumann-Bölshe, 2016, p.196). Humanitarian logistics can now rely on the qualities that mobile phones and smartphones possess. Using mobile phones to deliver humanitarian aid is time-saving and permits savings (Ibid., p.194), *“transforming the way that aid is being delivered”* (Coyer in NPR Staff, 2015). This use of ICTs in order to make humanitarian support more accessible is called ‘digital humanitarianism’: citizens and communities *“using technology to enable them to bring about change, positive change”* (Conneally, 2011).

The stakes of ‘digital humanitarianism’ are great, making it a pertinent and imperative case to examine (Burns, 2014, p.60). Information is a central element connecting all actors involved in humanitarian response (Altay & Labonte, 2014, p.3) and as a direct result, organisations have begun to make remarkable improvements to the information technology and communication infrastructure to facilitate better coordination and collaboration amongst humanitarian actors (Ibid.). The representative of the UNHCR Lebanon described how they managed to send a message to millions of refugees in Lebanon, by setting up a communication tree:

*“They had this other idea which came up “What about WhatsApp?” [...] He (The communication director) would send a WhatsApp message to a WhatsApp group of UNHCR colleagues in the field, and each of them has a set of outreach volunteers under them - so from 7 people we reached 70,000 people, and they reached 15,000 families in the same day”* (Seminar UNCITY, Copenhagen, participant observation).

Since then, it has also been used in order to get information directly from refugees themselves, increasing problem-solving rapidity (Ibid.). ‘Digital humanitarianism’ offers a vision of a future where significant amounts of data can be collected and used to facilitate the delivery of information in some of the most challenging settings on earth (PLOS Medicine Editors, 2012, p.1). Indeed, one of our informants, Caroline Arvidsson co-founded

a platform named RefugeeText aiming at *“delivering trusted information to any refugee with a phone”* (RefugeeText website). RefugeeText relies on knowledge from lawyers, NGOs leaders, and refugees themselves to provide up to date and correct information (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen).

‘Digital Humanitarianism’ enrolls different people, geographically or even socially distanced, to work with local knowledge regarding disaster management mediated through digital technologies (Burns, 2014, p.51), thus allowing organisations to disseminate information on a larger scale, whilst using a wider scope and ensuring they reach their target audience. Abu Amar, a Syrian refugee settled in Hamburg, helps and guides other Syrian asylum seekers through a Facebook group and via WhatsApp messages. Initially Abu Amar’s reach was on a social media level: he was the administrator of an 80,000 member strong Facebook page called *“Asylum seeker and immigration without smugglers”*, which shared general information about the journey to its followers. This has now evolved and it is noteworthy that Abu Amar owns two smartphones; one for communicating with the person he is helping and the other to look up information such as maps, weather information and shipping radars in order to help them (Ömer 2017, Copenhagen). Abu Amar uses crisis mapping: by asking for Google coordinates from people seeking his help (Ibid.).

Digital humanitarianism are acting upon situations of emergency, political crisis or social causes where a certain type of management and response is needed (Burns, 2014, p.52). RefugeeText was created after observing that *“the most striking need that came out from research was the need for information, that there is so much information out there that it’s hard to know how to navigate through it”* (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen).

Paul Conneally, public communications manager for the ICRC, states that ‘digital humanitarianism’ is showing us *“what can be done using mobile, digital technologies. Digital humanitarianism are showing that the magic of technology can bring the invisible visible and they are giving a voice to themselves, they are telling their own story bypassing the official narrative”* (Conneally, 2011).



By presenting the significance of ICT usage in the developing world, we hope that we make clear why we have decided to focus on ICTs. By presenting 'digital humanitarianism', we aim to give an insight on the different opportunities such initiatives may offer to asylum seekers transiting towards and across Europe. Therefore, after having presented the contextual background of our research, we will delve into the analysis of our research question.

## ANALYSIS STRATEGY

This section will elaborate on how we will approach the analysis, the way in which we will apply the different theories as well as the working questions we have formulated to answer our research question:

***To what extent does the use of ICTs amongst asylum seekers influence their decisions throughout their journey across Europe?***

In order to answer this research question we have decided to focus on three different components of the journey, supported by three working-questions. These three aspects will collectively form an understanding of the migratory trajectory of asylum seekers transiting towards and across Europe. The three working-questions are:

1. How does the use of ICTs by asylum seekers affect the decision-making process with regard to the final destination?
2. How are asylum seekers navigating the European regulatory system, whilst using ICTs?
3. How do asylum seekers use ICTs as a means to circumnavigate the use of smugglers?

We will elaborate below on how we will structure the answers to these working questions. Each section within the working questions will present the role of different *actants* representing a decisive element of the decision-making process in our informants' journey.

### **How does the use of ICTs by asylum seekers affect the decision-making process with regard to the final destination?**

Our answers will be formatted over five sections, with each section discussing *the role of relatives and friends, the role of social media and apps, events occurring during the journey, the role of smugglers and the role of 'digital humanitarianism'*. In each of these sections, we will look at the influence of these five *actants* within migration as well as the overarching importance of ICTs. Within each of these sections, Latour's 'Actor-Network Theory' and Xiang and Lindquist's theory of 'Migration Infrastructure' will be applied to our informants' experiences. These two theories will intertwine as their approaches both present the

decision-making process as being framed by ‘other’ elements, respectively the *actants* and *dimensions*. We have also chosen to include Hammar’s theory of ‘Displacement Economies’ as it allows us to look at the role of ‘digital humanitarianism’ and smugglers on the migration route across Europe. The concept of ‘Social Navigation’ will also be part of this chapter as an interpretative tool of our informants’ experiences.

For the most part, we will refer to literature and studies that have investigated the main aspect of this working-question, the decision over the host country such as Robinson & Segrott (2002) and Havinga & Böcker (1999) did. Despite these texts being written more than 15 years ago, their observations and conclusions are still relevant and will be used to support our arguments as well as to challenge their findings based on our collected data.

#### **How are asylum seekers navigating the European regulatory system, whilst using ICTs?**

In order to answer our second working question, we will be looking at the navigational strategies set up by asylum seekers whilst moving across different European countries, bearing in mind that they are considered as irregular migrants, and therefore illegal. Based on our informants’ narratives we will place them within Latour’s ‘Actor-Network Theory’, as well as the five *dimensions* that Xiang and Lindquist utilise in ‘Migration Infrastructure’. This, combined with Vigh’s notion of ‘Social Navigation’, will allow us to demonstrate how asylum seekers navigate, despite their irregular status, whilst exploring their varied use of technologies.

We decided to divide this chapter in four sections, similarly to the first working-question, to maintain continuity and logic. We have decided not to include *events occurring during the journey*: the events being more a result of the regulatory system, and this section would have been repetitive of others. Throughout this chapter we often refer to studies, reports and articles related to the specific subject of this chapter, the navigation of borders and clandestinity: Stoyanova (2009) and Dekker & Engbersen (2014).

#### **How do asylum seekers use ICTs as a means to circumnavigate the use of smugglers?**

To answer our final working question, we will look at the opportunities available to asylum seekers on which enable them to avoid the use of smugglers. Therefore, we have decided to

use our three theories as they intertwine in an essential manner thus aiding us to answer this question. Each of our informants' strategies will be analysed and our analysis will demonstrate how these strategies involve *actants*, as defined by Latour in 'Actor-Network Theory', echoing some of the *dimensions* of 'Migration Infrastructure'.

This chapter will be divided into three sections corresponding to *actants*, as well as elements of the *dimensions*: *the role of relatives and friends*, *the role of social media and apps*, and *the role of digital humanitarians*. The *technological*, *social* and *humanitarian dimensions* are represented in each of these sections, however the main interest of this chapter is their challenge towards the *commercial dimension*, regarding its efficiency.

Throughout this chapter, the study conducted by Gillespie et al., (2016) will often be used. This text offers a qualitative study of refugees' journey mediated by their access to social media through ICTs. We also draw on a great variety of academic texts, studies, reports and newspaper articles, offering a larger coverage of the circumnavigation of smugglers by asylum seekers, supporting our argumentation.

## ANALYSIS

### **How does the use ICTs affect the decision-making process underway with regard to the final destination?**

The main focus of this chapter is to understand the significance of current ICT usage by asylum seekers, with regard to the choice of their final destination or host country. We will attempt to demonstrate the plurality of situations and therefore ICT usage and its meaning with regard to the decision-making process.

During our interviews, the following questions were asked of our informants: *“Did you choose Denmark/Belgium as your final destination? If yes, how and why? If no, how did you end up in Denmark/Belgium?”* (Interview guide, 2). When asking these questions the technological perspective was implicit as we presumed that some informants chose their final destination as a result of information collected via their access to an ICT. This information could have been about the country, but also about its asylum policies. We discovered that some of our informants made their choice of final destination country based solely on the country’s asylum policies. Others based their choice on their feeling towards the country. Others preferred applying for asylum in a country where their friends and/or relatives were already settled. Another consideration, with regard to the final destination decision-making process, is the perception of the country as one that is *“sympathetic towards asylum seekers and had a reputation for looking after refugees”* (Robinson et al., 2002, p.44). For our informants such information was vital as they needed to gain an envisioned course, knowing what the next obstacles were going to be.

#### ***The role of relatives and friends***

*“The desire to be near to family members is one that most human beings experience, and it was perhaps to be expected that those fleeing persecution would travel to a country where they could be near people they knew and loved”* (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.39).

For our informants, the role of relatives and friends along their journey, as well as the pull factor of having relatives in the country they strove to reach, was an important one. Family, and the need to be close to them, as described in the above quote, was the reason given to

us by Agob for choosing Sweden as his final destination. It can therefore be argued that some migrants *“prefer to migrate to places where they already have contacts”* (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.402). Although Agob has settled in Denmark, due to being stopped there by the police, his intention throughout his journey was to reach his family in Sweden (Agob 2017, Copenhagen). As he moved across Europe his relatives advised him, via ICTs, on how to do so: *“my family in Sweden told me to avoid going through so many countries”* (Ibid.).

Ali stated that whilst Germany had been his first choice, he settled on Belgium as he had *“these friends who I met on my way to Europe and they work and live in Belgium”* (Ali 2017, Brussels). The experiences of Agob and Ali reflect the notion that *“the presence of family or friends can act as strong pulls towards an individual country”* but it does not seem to determine it entirely (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.5). Thus through the emergence of ICT usage and internet connection as a social medium *“it is easy to revive or make new contacts, which in turn offers access to an extensive pool of informal information and thus widens the horizons of aspirant migrants”* (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.414).

Dejene may not have chosen the same final destinations as his brother, however he relied heavily on information given to him by the latter throughout his journey: *“Actually, I do have a brother in Germany who lives in Frankfurt, so I got a lot of information through him”* (Dejene 2017, Copenhagen). Zaïd, despite having a brother in Sweden, made no mention of referring to him for information or help throughout his journey. Much like Ali he relied on friends to help him, alternating between contacting relatives and relying on social media.

For Dejene, Zaïd, Ali and Agob both the *social* and *technological dimensions* of ‘Migration Infrastructure’ were in play during the decision-making process of a host country as they were able to *“facilitate and condition mobility”* (Xiang et Lindquist, 2014 p.124) thanks to advice and guidance from their social network through the use of ICTs. This communication with relatives and friends reflects both Latour’s notion of the involvement of *actants*, but also the variable of *access to social networks*. In providing guidance and information about host countries, relatives, much like ICTs, took on the role of *actants*, mirroring Latour’s belief that humans and materials stand on an equal line (Latour, 1996, p.374). We therefore see the relationship between nonhuman and human *actants* develop through the use of

both relatives and friends and ICTs as a means to shape migrants' journeys through Europe. It must be underlined that without the use of ICTs, our informants would not have been able to gather this information from their relatives and friends. The implication that "*personal decision making is rarely a rational exercise in which people have full knowledge of all the alternatives*" (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.7) reinforces Latour's idea of the 'Actor-Network Theory', where decisions are not only the result of human will, but the interactions between the actor and *actants*. Thus, *internet connectivity* enables *access to social networks* and friends and family to be extended through apps, such as WhatsApp, Viber, Messenger and Skype, meaning the ICT, connected to internet, plays the role of a "*social medium*" (Dekker and Engbersen, 2014, p.408) or mediator as in Latour's perspective of ANT.

Despite Jean-Claude and Dejene both being 'acute refugees', Dejene had contact with his brother, whilst Jean-Claude had no relatives or friends on whom he could rely. His departure from Democratic Republic of Congo was so precipitate that he had no time to plan his journey and thus relied entirely on a smuggler (Jean-Claude 2017, Copenhagen). For that reason Jean-Claude is therefore unlike our other informants. Indeed, with regard to the role of relatives within the decision-making process he falls, for the most part, outside the scope of our theoretical framework. As he did not have an extended knowledge of ICTs and he relied on no other source of information than his smuggler, it can be said that the combination of the variables of *IT Literacy*, *internet connectivity* and *nature of flight* obstructed a possible wider *access to social networks* which all combined could influence his journey. In his case, the lack of ICT usage removed the perception of technologies in the role of *actant* from his journey. That said, he can be included in the *social dimension* as it was via his social network that he was put in contact with his smuggler: "*He was a friend of one of my friend, but yes I can call him a smuggler*" (Ibid.).

Therefore, all of our informants, with the exception of Jean-Claude, considered "*the existence of an already established community in the country of destination, or acquaintance with someone in that country to be of critical importance*" (Havinga & Böcker, 1999, p.57). These connections and relationships taking place via ICTs, that vary in their degrees of closeness and importance to the individual migrant, are of great importance when

attempting to understand the value of relatives in host countries and their impact on the migration pattern of our informants.

### ***The role of social media and apps***

*"Yahye, a 26-year-old from Somalia, uses his (phone) to check the news from across Europe each day, trying to gauge where he might be accepted" (The Economist, 2017).*

Intrinsic to asylum policies, the degree of recognition of asylum seekers and *"the ways in which countries support refugees can be important considerations"* (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.5). Throughout our research, we discovered that some of our informants gained access to this information through the medium of social media and apps, as well as through contact with friends and relatives. The *regulatory dimension* over asylum policies frames the future possibilities and opportunities open to the asylum seeker. Zaïd, who *"waited over a year in Turkey for nothing"* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels) for his asylum claim to be processed, chose the European countries in which he could apply and be quickly granted refugee status. *"I was checking on which countries are faster for paperwork and which countries are better for asylum and which countries are better after asylum"* (Ibid.).

In Zaïd's case, asylum policies and the reception conditions of asylum seekers in Belgium, Germany, Finland and Austria were his primary focus. Therefore, he asked friends over Facebook, used his smartphone, texted people, contacted Facebook pages and groups asking: *"do you know anyone who is living in Germany? Someone who just came here? How is it? What should I do? What will you do if you apply for asylum? Will you go to a camp? Will you go to a house? How are the facilities?"* (Ibid.). Zaïd found essential information on the internet and through his smartphone, regarding Belgium and the aforementioned three countries: *"Belgium? We don't know anything about Belgium. I was googling many informations about Belgium, about Germany (sic)"* (Ibid.).

Again, Zaïd based his decision on the information he received through social media, such as Facebook or WhatsApp, from friends who were already in Belgium: *"People were telling me that Belgium was the fastest in paperwork, so compared to other countries yes it is the fastest and for a guy from Mosul, they never rejected any guy from Mosul"* (Zaïd 2017,



Brussels). Through the information he collected on the internet prior to and during his journey, Zaïd may have known that, despite this, *“recognition rates for asylum-seekers in the same country of origin sometimes vary widely across different asylum countries”* (Havinga & Böcker, 1999, p.53). This is supported by Zaïd’s discovery that *“people in Finland from Mosul they are getting negatives, as well as in Austria”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels), and that for people fleeing Baghdad, the acceptance rate is considerably lower than those fleeing Mosul (Ibid.).

For Zaïd, following extensive online research, he came to the conclusion that *“Belgium was more sympathetic to the people who are really in danger”* while *“nobody wants to go to Denmark because it’s harder to accept people, there are not many people accepted”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). In addition to his own research, an acquaintance on WhatsApp told him *“you go to Belgium, you’ll get your papers in 4 to 5 months”* (Ibid.). He gained this insight into the system through both his high level of *IT Literacy* and ease of *internet connectivity* as well as his *access to social networks*. Therefore, a good image of a country respecting and welcoming refugees can have decisive repercussions on asylum seekers’ choice of final destination (Wood and King, 2001, in Hamel, 2009, p.10).

The fact that Zaïd owned a smartphone, with constant *internet connectivity*, through which he collected essential information concerning asylum policies, acceptance levels and conditions of reception, allowed him to have options regarding his final destination. He therefore navigated the different opportunities offered to him through the use of his smartphone, envisioning a new path and the upcoming obstacles inherent to asylum policies. In doing so he gained a *“perspective on changing social possibilities and possible trajectories”* (Vigh, 2006, p.52).

Caroline Arvidsson, of RefugeeText, stated that *“so much information is out there that it’s hard to know how to navigate through it, [...] it was overwhelming, [...] and very rarely translated into their language”* (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen). Authorities’ websites provide information about asylum policies, however it is not geared towards non-English speakers, and is therefore not accessible to all asylum seekers (Ibid.). This highlights the variables of both *information precarity* and the obstacle of *language* that some of our informants experienced. Reinforcing the disparity of information that Caroline mentioned, is the wide

range of available resources on social media platforms. Zaïd provided us with weblinks to Iraqi Facebook pages and groups, in Arabic, which offered localised information aimed at asylum seekers considering or attempting to reach Europe. The information contained within these groups ranged from asylum procedures in different European countries to the best routes to use (Participant observation, Facebook). One such Facebook page entitled “*Immigration to Europe الهجرة الى اوربا*” dispenses advice and guidance about several European countries. One of the posts starts as follows: “*How do asylum procedures work in Germany?*”, and then offers information about “*the first stop*”, “*some facts about asylum laws in Europe*” as well as “*Action on asylum*”<sup>2</sup> (Ibid.). Similar posts have also been created with advice on Belgium, Finland and Hungary. Based on our observations of people accessing such Facebook groups, if the level of *IT literacy* is elevated, combined with access to *internet connectivity*, then the gap created by *information precarity* decreases.

Following the approach of ‘Actor-Network Theory’, Zaïd’s smartphone represents a nonhuman *actant*, that interacts with other *actants*, human or nonhuman such as Facebook, internet and other apps. These *actants* are defined as a mediator “*placed in between two actors, (and) understood as continually modifying relations between actors*” (Latour, 1999 in Sayes 2014, p.138). Thereby, in Zaïd’s strategic approach, his smartphone and social media use represent a mediator between the regulatory State, implementing asylum policies and asylum seekers themselves. It has to be underlined that enrolling ICTs in the decision-making process, “*a body of allies*” emerges: “*translating their interests to be aligned with the actor-network*” (Walsham, 1997, p.468). Here, Zaïd’s intention of reaching a host country with open asylum policies is aligned with his use of social media and apps through ICTs.

In the case of Zaïd, he falls within several of the ‘Migration Infrastructure’ *dimensions*: the *regulatory dimension* or the way information about asylum policies is being displayed by State agencies is being challenged. In addition to this, the *technological dimension* allies itself with the *social dimension*, modifying the patterns of some migration journeys. ICTs have revolutionised communication between migrants (Madianou and Miller, 2011 in Xiang

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<sup>2</sup> [Post](#) from 19th August 2015, translation in English through Google Translate.

& Lindquist, 2014, p.135), therefore consolidating the cooperation between the *social* and *technological dimensions* in influencing migration courses.

If Zaïd is the only informant mentioned in this chapter, it is as a result of his strategic approach, mostly framed by his interest and active engagement in knowledge surrounding asylum policies. Furthermore his *IT literacy* level, his access to *internet connectivity* and to *social networks* facilitated his search for relevant information regarding his country of final destination. Throughout our interviews, Jean-Claude, Dejene, Agob and Ali reflected less on their use of social media and apps with reference to their decision-making process regarding their final destination. To that end, we do not mention them here, however, their experiences will be considered in further detail below.

### ***Events occurring during the journey***

*“The continuation of the journey is contingent upon opportunities available en route”* (Papadoulou-Kourkoula, 2008, p.3).

While transiting in different countries some of our informants decided in which host country they would attempt to claim asylum. This decision process also appears to be that the expected final destination country can change while making the journey, a choice that is reflected in the different aspects and situations in which asylum seekers may find themselves in (Ibid.).

Zaïd, whose initial choice was between four countries; Germany, Austria, Finland and Belgium, changed his mind over time while crossing certain countries (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). For him, Germany seemed like a good country to seek asylum, yet when he arrived he didn't “*felt right in it [sic]*” (Ibid.). He stated that “*even though I went to a lot of cities [...] I met a lot of Germans, but I didn't feel right because I saw this huge amount of people applying, it felt like the UNHCR again*” (Ibid.). Zaïd found himself in a situation of limbo, while transiting, not knowing where to go, his expectations confronted with the reality of the situation. To counter this, he contacted many people on social media, to seek advice and guidance supporting his changes of mind (Ibid.), highlighting once again that when the variables of *IT literacy*, *internet connectivity* and *access to social networks* are at play, the range of

opportunities may increase. The ambiguity of transiting in different countries and how it can change the course of migration can be explained as a state *“between emigration and settlement, that is characterized by indefinite migrant stay, legal or illegal, and may or may not develop into further migration depending on a series of structural and individual factors”* (Papadopoulou-Kourkoula, 2008, p.4).

Ali was initially planning to seek protection in Germany as one of his Syrian friends had settled there (Ali 2017, Brussels). However, he met a Belgian man upon his arrival in the Greek island of Samos, who later offered him a place to stay in Belgium while waiting for his asylum claim to be processed (Ali 2016, informal conversation). Despite this offer, Ali used his phone to seek more information regarding Belgium and this in turn *“helped me choose Belgium”* (Ali 2017, Brussels). Thanks to ICTs, and their *IT literacy*, asylum seekers such as Ali and Zaïd have access to expanded information sources. It is an observation that the researchers Zijlstra and Liempt also made in their study on the impact of mobile technology on irregular migration journeys. They claim that with the use of ICTs, asylum seekers *“have more capacity to process information before and after departure”* (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.176).

In the case of Ali and Zaïd, they both navigated a migratory course which, in the end, did not fit their hopes and desires. Despite gathering much information regarding asylum and reception policies in Germany and Austria, Zaïd did not feel at ease in either of these countries (Zaïd 2017, Brussels) and therefore attempted to overcome these perceived obstacles. Thus, in using their telephones to collect information about Belgium, Ali and Zaïd envisioned an *“immediate strategem for moving toward a goal”* (Vigh, 2006, p.55).

Dejene’s trajectory was also shaped throughout events that occurred during his migration. Dejene stated that whilst he did not plan to join friends or relatives in his country of refuge, his decision to reach Denmark was as a result of acquaintances made in Libya (Dejene 2017, Copenhagen). His acquaintances were two women who worked for the Danish Refugee Council, who supported him by providing him with essentials: *“So they come and help us and then they have some plastic bags that said Danish Refugee Council - and then I said I will come to Denmark, that’s only my reason”* (Dejene 2017, Copenhagen). Dejene’s contact was

minimal, though as a direct result of this interaction he decided to choose Denmark as his host country. It must be noted that Dejene never referred to any ICTs being involved in his decision-making process with regard to his final destination, despite owning a smartphone in Libya (Ibid.). It also has to be underlined that Dejene is part of what is termed as 'spontaneous asylum seekers' or 'acute refugees', meaning that the *nature of his flight* was a variable affecting his journey: "*I left my country suddenly, I did not come to Europe purposely, I was in prison, and suddenly out of prison and then I did not go to my home just I travelled to Sudan, then Libya, but then I arrived Europe (sic)*" (Ibid.). This variable, meant that he lacked time to prepare his journey and, despite having a mobile phone at his disposal, Dejene changed his migratory course, due to events that occurred whilst making the journey towards an unknown destination.

When using the 'Actor-Network Theory' as a lens with which to approach Dejene's decision-making process regarding his host country, our assumption about ICTs and asylum seekers interacting when possible is challenged. Indeed, regarding this aspect of the journey, the association between nonhuman *actants*, ICTs, as well as human *actants*, varies. Walsham claimed in his study of ANT that the theory also aims to examine "*why such networks fail to establish themselves*" (Walsham, 1997, p.469). If this interaction exists in some situations and does not in others, we observed that it is as a result of several variables: Dejene had no prior experience of *internet connectivity* in Europe combined with low *IT literacy*. In Libya he lived in restricted conditions and his spontaneous departure, or *nature of his flight* from Ethiopia limited his *access to social networks*. In Ali's case, these variables were different: his encounter during his journey changed his trajectory and he also had a smartphone connected to internet to look for information. Lastly, Zaïd, as an 'anticipatory asylum seeker', had the time to prepare his journey, knew how to handle his smartphone and connectivity, took advantage of it and had an expanded migrant network. Jean-Claude and Agob are not mentioned throughout this section as none of the hazards they encountered during their journey affected their decision-making process with regard to the country of final destination.

### ***The role of smugglers***

*“One of the key factors determining where an asylum seeker can travel to is the amount of money that s/he can afford to spend on their migration. Longer distance migration generally incurs larger payments to agents” (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.22).*

Whilst this is certainly true for some of our informants, the role of smugglers in our informants’ final destination choice is one that has varied greatly from person to person. Our collected data suggests that this is as a result of two factors: their financial resources - whether or not they choose to pay for a smuggler for the entirety of their journey, and whether or not they are ‘acute refugees’: the *nature of their flight*. It is important to note that these two factors are not mutually exclusive.

In interviews, Agob and Dejene stated that other than occasional phone calls to relatives and friends, as well as limited use of social media, their main source of information was their smuggler (Agob & Dejene 2017, Copenhagen). Agob also stated that his route was to a great extent controlled by smugglers: *“I didn’t believe what he said, but I had to because I knew everyone would say the same”* (Agob 2017, Copenhagen). In Agob’s case, the smuggler offered him only one destination (in this case Italy) when he was attempting to reach Sweden. *“This might have been because the agent had already made arrangements for a group of people to travel together to that destination”* (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.21) or as Agob believes; that the flights to Sweden would have taken too much out of the smugglers profits (Agob 2017, Copenhagen).

For Jean-Claude, the *nature of his flight*, his status as an ‘acute refugee’, meant that he did not make an informed decision as to his final destination: *“The conditions that I fled were not sufficient in order to choose a country, I escaped suddenly so I should save my life first because I had big problem with our government, this way I fled so I could not choose any country (sic)”* (Jean-Claude 2017, Copenhagen). Zijlstra & Liempt’s study on the impact of mobile technology upon irregular migration reinforces the idea that *“smugglers have now begun to fulfil many of the functions traditionally served by social networks, such as providing migrants with information and influencing their choice of destination”* (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.175). This would indicate that the variable of the *access to social networks*

can be replaced by smugglers, as was the case for Jean-Claude. Indeed he told us that his ending up in Denmark was purely based on his smuggler's connections: *"The person who helped me had a contact with a Danish person in Istanbul, a man who committed me to that person, and he said the only place I can help you to reach is Copenhagen because he had his house here"* (Jean-Claude 2017, Copenhagen). This notion is reflected in Robinson & Segrott's statement that *"although these agents (in this case smugglers) make well informed decisions on the countries to which they send asylum seekers, these decisions may not reflect the choices of asylum seekers themselves"* (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.4). This in turn mirrors Hammar's concept of 'Displacement Economies', in which she states that the *"paradoxes of displacement"* create new relations and practices (Hammar, 2014, p.8). In this instance this is embodied in Jean-Claude's reliance on his smuggler's connections. The interests of this particular smuggler are being served (Ibid.), meaning that as a person who does indeed manage the displaced, we expand Hammar's list to include smugglers. This in turn further reinforces the role of the smuggler as an *actant*, which is potentially capable of governing the asylum seeker's actions (Rydin, 2013, p.26). Therefore for Jean-Claude the variable of *access to social networks* played no part in his migration, other than how he initially came into contact with his smuggler.

Our assumption, prior to conducting interviews with our informants, had been that they had relied heavily on the use of ICTs to make their choice of final destination. However despite the fact that all men owned and carried mobile technologies along their journey, Jean-Claude proved us wrong. Indeed, the interaction between Jean-Claude and his mobile phone failed to establish itself. This was predominantly due to the *nature of his flight*, but it also played into the *digital divide* as he had no access to a smartphone and thus in turn no occasion to have access to *internet connectivity*. To that end, in Jean-Claude's case, the nonhuman *actant* (ICT) does not have its place with regard to his choice of final destination.

### ***The role of 'digital humanitarianism'***

*"Some people got all the way to Denmark and then realised they weren't eligible for asylum once they got here. We wanted to provide them with information that would help them change their routes or reconsider as early as possible"* (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen).

In creating RefugeeText, Caroline Arvidsson and the two other co-founders established a chatbot<sup>3</sup> that would facilitate access to fundamental and trusted information via ICTs, in an attempt to fill the gap left by *information precarity*. These digital humanitarians aim to provide essential information regarding three different destination countries; Denmark, Sweden and Germany.

Some of our informants changed their routes as their journey progressed, be it as a result of acquiring knowledge about asylum and reception policies in the countries they were crossing or through the information collected from relatives already in Europe. For some, it was as a result of host countries not meeting their expectations. But for others, such as Jean-Claude, they most likely needed more information regarding asylum procedures: *“I did not even know that people were seeking asylum here. I asked him (the smuggler) what was seeking asylum?”* (Jean-Claude 2017, Copenhagen). Due to his lack of knowledge surrounding the process of seeking asylum, combined with his lack of familial connections in Europe or *access to social networks*, Jean-Claude had no input on the country he was taken to.

From an holistic perspective, we can draw the connections between the *technological dimension* - including ICTs - and the *humanitarian dimension* within ‘Migration Infrastructure’. Indeed, in adapting to our modern societies, it appears that due to the emergence and widespread use of ICTs, humanitarians have found a means to become more accessible to their target audience.

Curious to know if tools created by digital humanitarians would have had an impact on their journey, we invited Zaïd and Agob to try RefugeeText during their interviews. We asked them to think of themselves using this chatbot whilst making the journey to and across Europe. After using it for around 10 minutes, Zaïd said that he would have used the chatbot as it provided a lot of accurate and trustworthy information about each country and their asylum procedures (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). He added that *“because so many people don’t know these rules [...]. I would not know those unless if I was in the country, even asylum*

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<sup>3</sup> Available through Messenger, Telegram as well as via SMS.



*seekers in the country don't know that"* (Ibid.). This statement highlights *information precarity*; both the limited options available to them in terms of valid and precise information and the need for 'digital humanitarianism'.

The use of mobile technologies by digital humanitarians to spread information is challenging the *regulatory dimension* within the scope of 'Migration Infrastructure'. It confronts information put forward by nation states about asylum procedures, as their systems can be overwhelming for asylum seekers who do not speak English, as well as confusing for those looking for concise or bitesize information (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen). This, once again, denotes that the variables of *language* and *information precarity* are at play. Indeed, in their study, Zijlstra & Liempt argue that "*complex information often relates to legal permits and migration regulations provided by official institutions and are only understood by high-skilled migrants*" (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.176), making official state agencies' information less accessible to some individuals. ICTs represent a mediator between two actors, here the asylum seeker and the humanitarian. The interaction between the asylum seeker, the digital humanitarian, the information displayed about asylum policies, the different apps and the technology on its own, all within a specific context, lead to specific decisions. Indeed, Latour defined nonhuman *actants* as "*entities that merely relay force, a force from elsewhere, and direct it in a certain direction*" (Sayes, 2014, p.137).

Despite the advantages that RefugeeText provides, Agob and Zaïd both underlined the fact that friends and relatives, aware of these procedures themselves, would be the first point of contact for help (Zaïd 2017, Brussels & Agob 2017, Copenhagen). Agob stated that whilst it was useful, he probably would have simply called his uncle for this information instead of using RefugeeText (Agob 2017, Copenhagen). Yet Zaïd mentioned that the information displayed on the chatbot was "*very legitimate information*" (Zaïd 2017, Copenhagen), and added that "*instead of asking people, it is like a guideline with a legal and general administration perspectives*" (Ibid.).

Furthermore, even if RefugeeText provides accurate information, the fact that the chatbot only offers information about three different countries was a recurring criticism: "*By providing information about three countries, there is an obvious problem of not being able to*

*compare all countries*” (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen). Zaïd added: *“I would like to know more about other countries, I don’t want to feel I am restrained to go to that country because you have just three countries (sic)”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). Caroline mentioned that some people and some states may perceive RefugeeText as a tool to encourage migration (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen). In this regard, some digital humanitarians could be perceived as *“playing an active role in shaping migration destination”* (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.21). This modus operandi may produce ‘Displacement Economies’ as the information is specifically targeted (relevant to three countries, only for ICT users). The specific information displayed and made available to asylum seekers on the move, is reinforced by Hammar’s statement that *“normative humanitarian discourses and systems established to ‘manage’ the misplaced”* are implemented (Hammar, 2014, p.8). Therefore, even if digital humanitarians seem to stimulate asylum seekers’ ‘agency’, by providing necessary knowledge in order to make conscious choices, the management of displacement unpredictably opens and closes the future of the displaced when offering chosen information (Hammar, 2014, p.25).

## **Conclusion**

*“In the majority of cases, the choice of country of asylum is not a conscious, rational choice by the asylum-seeker and certainly not based on a comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of various options. Asylum-seekers do not have much choice. [...] The actual country does not particularly matter to many of them”* (Havinga & Böcker, 1999, p.49).

This statement, written 18 years ago, has been completely challenged in this chapter, offering a nuanced conclusion. With specific regard to our informants, we found that, with the exception of Jean-Claude, the country they were to end up was of great importance to them. Within this contemporary era, most of the ‘would-be asylum seekers’ and ‘would-be refugees’ have way more access to information; be it from smugglers, friends and relatives or *“information from newspapers or from rumours in the country of origin”* (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.44) or through connected mobile technologies and social media. Although we cannot generalise the consciousness of every asylum seeker regarding their choice of host country, the opportunities and possibilities brought up by ICTs are significant.

Within Latour's 'Actor-Network Theory', the strategies deployed by asylum seekers to decide their host country results from an association only composed of *actants*, in this case mobile phones, smartphones, asylum seekers, digital humanitarians, relatives, apps and internet accessibility. The interactions between all of these *actants* allow the actor to lead decisions over an action, in this case the action of heading towards their chosen country (Rydin, 2013, p.24-25).

As a result of our data collection, we can conclude that no single variable or element, no single *actant* can be accountable for "*the destination of asylum movements*" (Havinga & Böcker, 1999, p.58). Several variables come into play to understand the decision making-process with regard to the final destination: "*Which factors will determine the country of destination will depend on how much choice asylum-seekers have on their flight*" (Havinga & Böcker, 1999, p.58). As we have demonstrated, for our informants the variables of *digital divide, language, nature of the flight, information precarity, internet connectivity, access to social networks* and *IT literacy* are all at play when analysing how the use ICTs may be effective and varies greatly between our informants. Combinations of variables affect the way ICTs are being handled and therefore impact the decision-making process underway with regard to the final destination. The accessibility of ICTs opens a wide variety of options and, if these technologies were used to maximum effect, asylum seekers may acquire a significant range of choice, as demonstrated by Zaïd.

As brought up during this chapter, the conclusion put forward by Xiang and Lindquist finds its real value: the *technological dimension*, composed in this research of ICTs, holds significant implications for the journey when interacting with the other four *dimensions* (Xiang et Lindquist, 2014 p.135). Asylum seekers are moved by the *regulatory, commercial, humanitarian* and *social dimensions*, however the *technological dimension* and its democratisation moves them to a greater extent, when they fully employ it. The *regulatory* and *commercial dimensions* still influence the course of migration for some asylum seekers, albeit to a lesser extent than the *humanitarian* and the *social dimensions*, as they are accessible through the use of technologies.

## How are asylum seekers navigating the European regulatory system with the use of ICTs?

*“I would never have been able to arrive at my destination without my smartphone”* (Brunwasser, 2015).

In this chapter, we will attempt to understand the strategies deployed by our informants to counter the restrictive and unstable migration and border policies they encountered along their journey. In order to answer this question, we will first look at the factors that drive refugees and asylum seekers to transit through a country in which they could apply for asylum. Therefore, we will briefly examine the border and migration policies of the transit and host countries involved in the journey, as well as their impact on asylum seekers' migration and motivations. Some people may cross a country as originally intended. However, it can occur that this *“intention only emerges as a response to the adverse conditions in the present country of stay”* (Düvell, 2008, p.5). These adverse conditions of stay are presumed to be the border and migration policies, something that Vigh refers to when he mentions *“shifting or opaque socio-political circumstances”* (Vigh, 2006, p.52).

So why is it that asylum seekers struggle to reach their final destination of choice? There are some 'natural barriers' that frame the choice of asylum seekers regarding their final destination, such as; *“the absence of travel documents and barriers put in place by States, [...] visa restrictions, and safe third country policies”* (Robinson et al., 2002, p.4). Visa restrictions<sup>4</sup>, tightened asylum policies, common migration and border policies such as the Dublin Regulation II<sup>5</sup> and reinforcement of border controls are part of the measures in Europe that constrain the journey of asylum seekers. Liempt explains this phenomenon by characterising asylum seekers as people for whom it is more difficult to obtain the necessary

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<sup>4</sup> The European Union has a list of non-EU member countries whose nationals must be in possession of a visa. Iraq, Syria, RDC and Ethiopia, countries that our informants are from are on the list. Most asylum-seekers may not own a valid passport or due to varying circumstances (UNHCR, 1984). Therefore, it is practically impossible to apply for a regular visa. They would have to apply for a humanitarian visa in the embassy of their choice, but the delivery of such visa is quite restricted. Indeed, in March 2017, the European Court of Justice stated that European Union member states are not obliged under EU law, to grant humanitarian visas to people who wish to enter their territory to apply for asylum (Valero, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> *“This Regulation establishes the principle that only one Member State is responsible for examining an asylum application. The objective is to avoid asylum seekers from being sent from one country to another, and also to prevent abuse of the system by the submission of several applications for asylum by one person”* (European Parliament, 2011). Therefore, for asylum seekers, crossing a EU member State irregularly may put him in a situation in which he will be obliged to claim asylum in this country: *“Where the asylum seeker has irregularly crossed the border into a Member State, that Member State will be responsible for examining the asylum application. This responsibility ceases 12 months after the date on which the border has been illegally crossed”* (Ibid.).

travel documents in order to regularly cross the borders and reach the aimed-for country (Liempt, 2007, p.20).

Migration and border policies are not adapted to asylum seekers' situations, and are therefore *"engendering their transformation into illegal immigrants"* (Koser, 1998, p.185). In order to reach their country of final destination where they wish to seek protection, most asylum seekers enter the European Union by countering border controls or travelling with fake documentation (European Parliament, 2015, p.3). By using these practices, they are considered illegal, not fulfilling *"the conditions for entry, stay or residence in that Member State"* (Ibid.). Despite the fact that the Schengen Border Code has a safeguard for asylum seekers and visa requirements, *"this safeguard can be implemented only if the asylum-seeker somehow managed to reach the border"* (Stoyanova, 2009, p.54). However, to reach the border, asylum seekers have to transit through different countries, taking risks and dangerous routes such as crossing the sea, borders and forests clandestinely. The irregular aspect of their journeys puts asylum seekers in a situation where *"routes and trajectories are constantly changing and migrants make decisions on the next step based on the information and resources available to them at that particular point in time"* (Kuschminder et al., 2015, p.66 in Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.182). These changes and decisions may or may not include the use of ICTs.

### ***The role of relatives and friends***

*"When I check my phone and have messages I feel like I'm still with my family and friends. It's like my safety blanket"* (Wendle, 2016).

One of the consistent elements of our research findings, with regard to our informants, was the involvement of family and friends in asylum seekers' navigation of border and migration policies, with the help of ICTs. Our informants were able to contact family and friends, some of whom had previously made the journey, through their ICTs, in order to ask for advice and guidance. An example of this is Dejene, whose brother had *"travelled the same route, a long time ago, like 10 years ago. He arrived in Europe 6-5 years ago so he had a lot of contacts"* (Dejene 2017, Copenhagen). As Dejene's brother had previously made the journey, Dejene relied on him for information and advice as to where to go, particularly whilst in Italy, as his

brother had lived there: *“Most of the time he is gonna call or send an sms with the name of the smuggler sometimes the name of the place, especially in Italy, I don’t know anything and he was in Italy”* (Ibid.). Dejene stated that: *“at least I can get help so I can get information from my brother, so I’m not really stressed when I arrived Europe, in Italy and France, everywhere, just I don’t have family or friends, just I have plenty of information”* (Ibid.).

Dejene’s brother also acted as his translator and guide: *“my brother was my interpreter, I can write in my language for my brother and my brother is gonna write in Italian if I need help from Italian”* (Ibid.). Zijlstra & Liempt observed that their *“research also showed that migrants who lacked certain language skills were, nevertheless, able to get by through the use of mobile technology”* (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.188). This once again reflects Vigh’s concept of ‘Social Navigation’ as well as Hammar’s ‘Displacement Economies’, as Dejene used his brother as a resource, as part of a stratagem to navigate or a means to manage his displacement. Furthermore, in providing information via SMS, Dejene’s brother becomes an *actant* in his navigation of the European regulatory system, just as his phone can also be considered to be one. This communication between Dejene and his brother fulfils the *social dimension* of ‘Migration Infrastructure’ due to the communicational links between him and his relative. However, it is thanks to the *technological dimension*, represented by ICTs, that the *social dimension* could blossom.

This notion of relatives and friends enabling asylum seekers to navigate the European regulatory system through their ICT connectivity is a topic that has garnered some media coverage. A 2015 article, in The Irish Times, describes how an Afghan asylum seeker received a message from a friend telling him to avoid a particular route between Serbia and Hungary as they were being confronted by the Hungarian police: *“they would receive a picture, which would contain the time and GPS co-ordinates for the exact spot where he took it and know to avoid that route”* (McLaughlin, 2015). Al Jazeera also described mobile phones as *“a bridge”* for asylum seekers, stating that *“no other item can hold the connections to home and make a life-or-death difference like the ubiquitous smartphone”* (Wendle, 2016). One of Wendle’s informants demonstrates confidence in his ability to navigate across Europe despite becoming separated from his friends: *““We lost our friends,” says Juma, 21, before quickly returning to his screen. “But they dropped us a pin on*

*Whatsapp, so now we're trying to find them*"" (Ibid.). Despite their separation, Juma knows that he can easily reconnect with his friends thanks to his phone, which he considers to be *"the most important thing I have"* (Ibid.). These two stories clearly illustrate the fact that the connection to friends and relatives through ICTs plays a considerable role in enabling asylum seekers to cross borders, as well as to navigate migration and border policies. ICTs as an *actant* allow asylum seekers to communicate with relatives and friends and thus navigate the European regulatory system. It also denotes once again how the *social dimension* is able to flourish thanks to the *technological dimension*.

Zaïd told a similar story when we interviewed him. Throughout his journey he relied on friends for information: *"So I'm checking with my friends telling me if it is the correct path"* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). Indeed, further reinforcing the important role of friends and relatives in the journey across Europe, was a story not dissimilar to the one told above by McLaughlin:

*"One of my friends told me "Zaid, I just arrived to Vienna, and I took train from Budapest and the Hungarian government they allow people who are stuck in Budapest to cross, without taking their fingerprints". We got to Vienna we were happy, in Westbahnhof"* (Ibid.).

Due to this information being shared with him, Zaïd was able to cross the border and reach Austria. His friends' use of ICTs to communicate with Zaïd, and Dejene's brother doing the same for him, is mirrored in the 'Actor-Network Theory', as it *"examines the motivations and actions of groups of actors who form elements, linked by associations, of heterogeneous networks of aligned interests"* (Walsham, 1997, p.468). The groups of actors in this case being the asylum seeker and their friends and relatives, an association only viable and sustainable thanks to the use of Information and Communication Technologies.

This section has predominantly focused on Dejene and Zaïd as Agob, Ali and Jean-Claude made little reference to their relatives and friends other than to state that they informed them of their whereabouts throughout the journey. That said, although Agob did not plan his journey as meticulously, due to his use of smugglers, relatives and friends were still a reliable and efficient source of information. When we interviewed Agob, he stated that

when he called his relatives over Skype they had given him advice about his journey: *“My family in Sweden told me to avoid going through so many countries. Maybe one stop is ok”* (Agob 2017, Copenhagen). Contrary to this advice Agob decided to fly directly from Turkey to Switzerland and from there drove to Denmark where he was arrested after a traffic check on a motorway. It is worth noting that Agob was certain that had he had friends or relatives in Denmark his situation would have been different: *“Maybe you have a friend, if I had a friend in Denmark at that time he would tell me not to drive through Denmark and tell me about the control”* (Ibid.). During an informal conversation, Ali stated that whilst he was in Athens his Belgian friend, who he met in Samos, advised him to be faster in making the journey, as the borders were closing (Ali 2016, informal conversation). Therefore, both Ali and Agob gleaned information through the use of ICTs, further harnessing the idea of the *social and technological dimensions* being at play. It is important to note that due to the fact that the people in their social networks were equipped with an ICT and knew how to use it, many of our informants were able to make decisions regarding the irregular crossing of the borders based on their advice and guidance. The variables of *digital divide*, *IT literacy* and the *access to social networks* come into play in the scale of ICTs influence on the journey: if the family or friends or the asylum seeker do not have access to an ICT or are not familiar with its use, their advice and guidelines regarding the journey won’t be shared. Therefore, we can conclude that because of a combination of these three variables, the interaction between the actor and *actants*, such as the ICT, may fail to establish itself (Washam, 1997, p.469).

### ***The role of social media and apps***

*“How did you know that you had to behave like this? To avoid these paths, these ways of transportation?”, we asked. “Because through your entire way, you depend on your phone. Having internet is the most important thing during the way because 24/7 contact via Whatsapp, Viber and Messenger or Facebook, as well as Google Maps”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels).

Zaïd’s statement allows us to acknowledge the importance of social media and apps while migrating. During his interview, Zaïd spent a long time explaining how and why he contacted people through social media: he joined and liked several Facebook pages and groups, *“like real popular Iraqi pages, Syrian pages, so you go and check the news”* (Ibid.). These public



pages on Internet permit geographically dispersed migrants to “*remain connected through transnational networks*” (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.402). Zaïd was following people’s main questions and answers: “*where to go? why? when? how? what is the mean? (sic.)*” (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). Ali’s strategy was similar, he partially relied on information he got about the journey through Facebook groups (Ali 2017, Brussels). This emerging social media use, via smartphones, can be understood to have created “*a deterritorialized social space that facilitates communication among geographically dispersed people in migrant networks*” (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.403). On these social media platforms the information is, for the most part, published by the public, offering the latest news and rumours through “*pools of information*” (Ibid, p.403-404). These ‘pools of information’ were perceived as a decisive tool for Zaïd: “*to know how to cross a country safely, without any problems, without getting caught, you really need to ask the people who crossed before, and how was that done*” (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). Indeed, Zaïd was advised to reach a specific gas station if he wanted to hire a smuggler, but he had been warned through a WhatsApp group that this place was actually monitored by police and that ID checks were taking place there (Ibid.). Because of Zaïd and Ali’s ability to get connected on social media and apps, like Facebook or WhatsApp, thanks to *internet connectivity*, and their high level of *IT literacy*, they both counteract *information precarity*. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the fact that these information platforms are accessible in most asylum seekers’ *language* (Arabic), not speaking English is not considered as an obstacle anymore.

Zaïd used these Facebook groups and pages in order to get fast information from people traveling ahead of him, so he could compare the differences in the path they took and which one seemed to be best (Ibid.). This notion can be compared to the results from Zijlstra & Liempt’s study about the use of smartphones and their impact on irregular migration. The authors discovered that newly established contacts were “*considered more trustworthy because they have already completed the journey*” (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.188). Zaïd mainly contacted people through social media, who were making the same journey ahead of him, as these people “*offer a rich source of insider knowledge on migration that is discrete and unofficial*” (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.401). Articles<sup>6</sup> and studies have demonstrated

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<sup>6</sup> “Of his epic journey, he (Mohamed Shlash) says: “I got details about the routes from some people who [went] ahead of me and sent information back.”” (Byrne & Solomon, 2015)

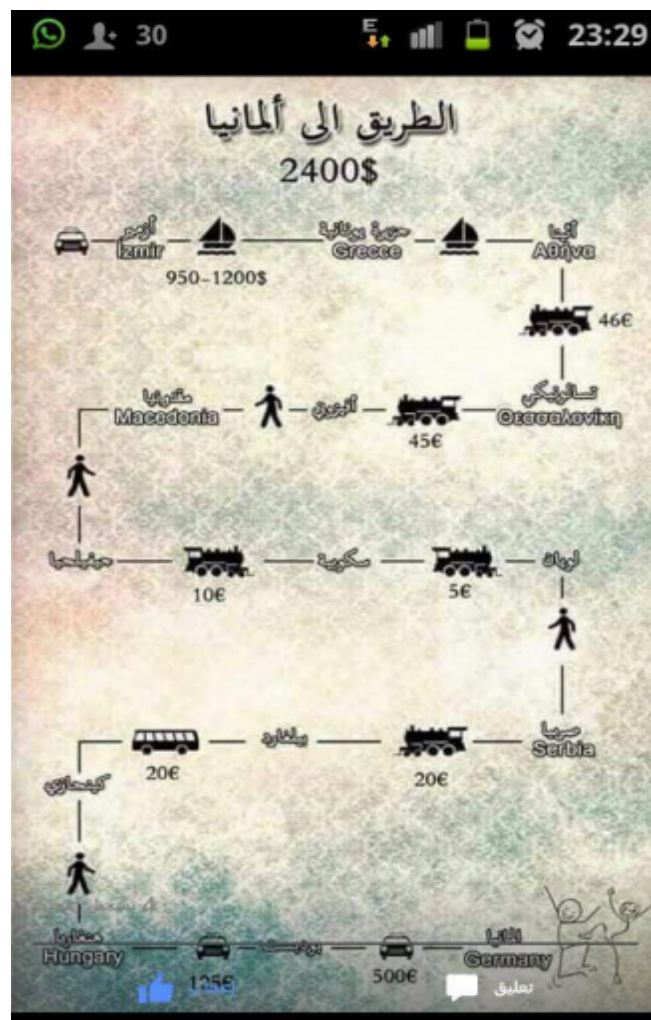
that when irregular migrants are connected with each other, *“other migrants follow, travelling the beaten paths”* (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.402), making migrants more *“‘streetwise’ when undertaking migration”* (Ibid., p.401).

Whilst Zaïd was making his way to the Macedonian border with Greece, he was informed, via Facebook groups, that rubber bullets and tear gas were being used against asylum seekers and that the Macedonian army had blocked the border (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). *“I was checking if I should go or not, leave Greece. I waited for 3 days after they blocked the border”* (Ibid.). It has been documented that Hungarian authorities attempted to trick hundreds of migrants into boarding trains that were supposedly heading to Austria and Germany, but that were in fact taking them to a refugee camp in Hungary (Price, 2015). Migrants who were on this train were able, through the use of ICTs, to inform fellow asylum seekers still at the station in Budapest, thus *“warning them against boarding”* such trains (Ibid.). This directly illustrates the notion that networks built through social media during asylum seekers’ journeys may help them *“to lower the risks that migration entails”* (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.402). This *access to social networks* counteracts the *information precarity* some asylum seekers may suffer due to an *“insecure, unstable, and undependable”* access to reliable information (Wall et al., 2017, p.242).

Ali told us that during his journey he was aware of the political situation in most of the countries he crossed, as he had done online research before his flight from Syria (Ali 2017, Brussels). Ali can be categorised as an ‘anticipatory asylum seeker’, who planned his flight and journey towards Europe, but experienced decision changes whilst making the journey. His experience demonstrates a more nuanced approach towards the use of ICTs and social media: he relied on his computer before the flight and his smartphone during the journey, but also trusted the volunteers and border guards he met to provide him with reliable information (Ibid.): *“it was through volunteers who informed us to not cross through Hungary, who I met on the borders between Hungary and Serbia, and the news we were following on the internet through twitter and other apps”* (Ibid.).

When navigating through the Facebook page *“Immigration to Europe”*, we observed that several posts were photos of maps, or drawings of European borders and countries with

specific instructions in Arabic. We asked our informant Ali to translate three posts from the this Facebook page, that can be found in Appendix 1. These maps were shared on Facebook groups and pages in order to show the way for people on the move. These maps change in accordance with the unstable political landscape regarding migration and border policies (Appendix 1). This type of informative material was also used and shared on WhatsApp groups such as the one in Gillespie’s study: *“Mapping Refugee Media Journeys”* which contained a map depicting the route from Izmir in Turkey to Germany. This map has been widely disseminated on WhatsApp groups and used by people making the journey: *“all the 53 interviewees in Paris told us that they knew this map and used it”* (Gillespie et al., 2016, p.47):



Map sent via Whatsapp by refugee interviewed in Paris in (Gillespie et al., 2016, p.47)

In the above map, as with the maps shared in the Facebook groups Zaïd sent us (Appendix 1), the names of the cities are translated into Arabic, English and Greek so the people migrating would be *“able to pronounce them”* (Ibid.). In Zijlstra and Liempt’s study, they identified the impact that such information, shared publicly and to a target audience, could have on irregular journeys across Europe, enabling *“more people to follow the Balkan route solely by depending on the information shared through published and social media, such as GPS coordinates, routes, border controls and transportation”* (Brunwasser, 2015 in Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.183). These informative materials fill the gap left by *information precarity*, enabling asylum seekers to access essential information, the *language* not being considered as a significant limitation anymore.

One app that was recurrently mentioned during our interview, was Google Maps<sup>7</sup>. In the case of Zaïd, he knew where to go without asking the locals as he mostly used Google Maps during his journey, whilst transiting between countries:

*“because if you wanna check the train station, check the time for the train, how long would take a walk especially in Hungary, crossing the borders. I need to know where is North West, where is the main street. How long is it going to take me in between this and that?”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels).

The BBC relayed the same information when they interviewed a refugee from Syria in a bus during the “European refugee crisis”:

*“it helps us to find the roads, to know if we are walking through the right road, because our friends who are earlier go they told us about the important points, so we bookmark them on the Google Maps. Without Google Maps we would be lost. Using GPS when we reach the Greece water area, to make sure that we were on the right track towards the islands (sic)”* (BBC News, 2015).

The information accessible on these social media platforms and apps may have significant impact on the strategies deployed by asylum seekers on the move. They at times influence asylum seekers’ decisions; the nonhuman *actant* relays a force which will influence decisions over a pre-determined action - here the action of crossing illegally and relying on

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<sup>7</sup> *“Google Maps is a Web-based service that provides detailed information about geographical regions and sites around the world”* (Rouse, 2013).

the information offered on social media. Nonhuman *actants* such as ICTs implement new ways of deciding and acting which are often difficult to see (Bowker and Star, 1994, p.187 in Walsham, 1997, p.469).

Therefore there is a clear connection between the application of ‘Actor-Network Theory’ and ‘Migration Infrastructure’ in this section. We can claim, once again, that we observe the migrant being moved by the *regulatory dimension*, but also by the *social dimension*, which would not have had such significance if ICTs were not democratised. However, even if all of our informants had access to ICTs, the interaction put forward by Latour in ANT, may not be applicable to each of our informants. It is for this reason that Zaïd and Ali have been the focus of this section. Xiang and Lindquist defined ‘Migration Infrastructure’ as “*the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility*” (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014, p.124). This definition entirely fits with Zaïd’s, and to some extent, Ali’s situations, as the interaction between ICTs, migration and border policies and their behaviour facilitated their access to relevant information regarding their journey.

This discrete and unofficial knowledge from social media supports some asylum seekers, like Zaïd or Ali, to deploy strategies fully adapted to the unstable environment they were navigating in thus setting up a “*praxis of immediate survival*” (Vigh, 2006, p.52). They used the opportunities offered on social media and navigational apps, thanks to their high level of *IT literacy*, to organise the most thought-through strategy.

### **The role of smugglers**

*“The rapid development of mobile technology can have implications for the relationship between migrants and smugglers. Migrants can now easily share the contact details of smugglers while on the road”* (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.177).

As demonstrated in the two previous sections of this working question, technologies have greatly influenced the ways in which our informants navigated the European regulatory system. The element that we will now explore, is the role of smugglers. As Zijlstra and Liempt’s quote above denotes, the role of smugglers has evolved as a direct result of Information and Communication Technologies that has rendered contacting them much

simpler than in past times. Once asylum seekers have left their home, Carleen Maitland of Penn State University describes their situation as being in an *“informational no-man’s-land”* (The Economist, 2017). In a space where they are vulnerable due to *information precarity*, they don’t know where to go or who to trust, their smuggler becomes their source of information.

While making the journey, Dejene’s access to ICTs consisted of his mobile phone, however, he chose to rely heavily on information given to him by his smuggler. Dejene stated that:

*“I have a smuggler who is gonna show me every place, my brother sent me many contacts, so I already paid for the smugglers so they bought food for us, but we slept many times in train station because smugglers said ‘today we cannot travel, there is a lot of control in Europe, for your ID’, only possibilities, we had to wait him (sic)”* (Dejene 2017, Copenhagen).

Zaïd also discussed the knowledge of smugglers influencing people’s journeys. Whilst attempting to cross Europe he *“met this guy from Iraq, and he told me that since the accident, nobody was crossing, ‘if I send you, you are gonna get caught’”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). The ‘accident’ to which he refers is the 71 migrants who were found dead inside a cold storage lorry in Austria, in the summer of 2015 (Marszal et al, 2015). This statement indicates that smugglers are up to date on world events affecting migration and border crossing within Europe. Indeed, digital platforms, as an underground system for recruitment and illegal border crossing,

*“are also used by migrant smugglers and irregular migrants to share information on developments along migration routes, including law enforcement activities, changes in asylum procedures, or unfavourable conditions in countries of destination”* (Europol, 2016, p.10).

It thus further confirms smugglers as people who manage the displaced and underlines the idea that *“smugglers usually have detailed knowledge about asylum policies in the areas in which they operate, as they are responsive to the opening and closing of border crossings”* (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.177).

When discussing his experience with his smuggler, Agob stated that, when it came to the information his smuggler gave him regarding his route he *“didn’t believe what he said, but I had to because I knew everyone would say the same”* (Agob 2017, Copenhagen). This statement implies that Agob felt that he had little choice, thus his displacement was managed by the smuggler and therefore his journey entered into the *commercial dimension*. Through the data we collected, we have established that it is now commonplace for smugglers to compel asylum seekers into irregular and ever changing channels due to the restrictions of the European regulatory system. Indeed *“the indications are that this channel is being monopolised by smugglers”* (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002, p.73). When Agob arrived in Zurich, he was supposed to be met by a contact of his smuggler, however nobody came and after waiting several hours he contacted his uncle, using his mobile phone, and made alternate plans (Agob 2017, Copenhagen). This abandonment is not unusual when smugglers are given authority and power over people: *“some smuggled migrants were dropped by their smugglers without any information and were completely left on their own”* (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.177). Interestingly Agob argued that there is no need for the internet or other communication services as your smuggler guides you along the way (Agob 2017, Copenhagen). However, his own experiences point to the fact that both ICTs and smugglers were vital to his journey, as he relied on them at varying points as he travelled across Europe.

The use of ICTs by smugglers to recruit migrants is also demonstrated in Hammar’s notion of ‘Displacement Economies’. In defining the paradoxes of displacement she points to the involvement of *“multi-actor, multi-sited, and multi-temporal dimensions”* which here would be smugglers, across numerous countries and via ICTs (Hammar, 2014, p.3). The exchange of money combined with the experiences of our informants supports the notion of smugglers as part of the *commercial and technological dimensions* of ‘Migration Infrastructure’. Forced migrations, such as those of Jean-Claude and Dejene, foster the emergence of *commercial dimensions*, of new actions and of creations, as demonstrated by smugglers influencing their final destinations. However, it has to be underlined that in Dejene and Jean-Claude’s situations, the *nature of the flight* is presumed to have influenced their *information precarity*, and therefore the fact that they used smugglers along the way. Both of them are considered to be spontaneous asylum seekers: their escape from their country of origin was

precipitated, not having much time to prepare the journey ahead at any time during their flight. Jean-Claude suffered as a result of the *digital* divide, whilst for Dejene it was his low level of *IT literacy* that was a handicap. Therefore, the way they envision the obstacles along their route and their decision making was left to the hands of the smugglers, who made strategies and decisions for them.

Maurice Stierl of 'Watch The Med' has likened the rise of smugglers communicating with their customers to an *"underground railroad, only that it's digital"* (The Economist, 2017). Zaïd told us that *"in Turkey and in Greece, it was mostly focused on Facebook because I was checking the possibility to find a smuggler"* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). This online search for smugglers is facilitated by Facebook and WhatsApp groups as well as by clients who formerly made the journey:

*"Smugglers who succeed in delivering their clients to the preferred destination will be considered more reliable and will therefore be more successful in obtaining new clients through the social network of former ones"* (Triandafyllidou and Maroukis in Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.177).

Furthermore, Europol published a report in 2016 reinforcing the idea that *"some migrant smugglers rely on social media to advertise their services"* (Europol, 2016, p.10). Social media posts published by smugglers often include routes to be taken as well as package deals: *"The cost of a package with travel from Turkey to Libya by air and onward sea journey from Libya to Italy costs \$3,700. For the sea journey adults cost \$1,000. Three children cost \$500"* (Ibid.). Europol argues that *"smugglers adopt their pricing models in response to developments such as increased border controls by charging higher prices for alternative and safer routes"* (Ibid.). This means of recruiting clients draws on the *social, commercial* and *technological dimensions* of 'Migration Infrastructure' as well as underpinning the notion of 'Displacement Economies' in which the displaced are managed. It also reflects Hammar's notion of the displaced being managed, as smugglers become *actants*.

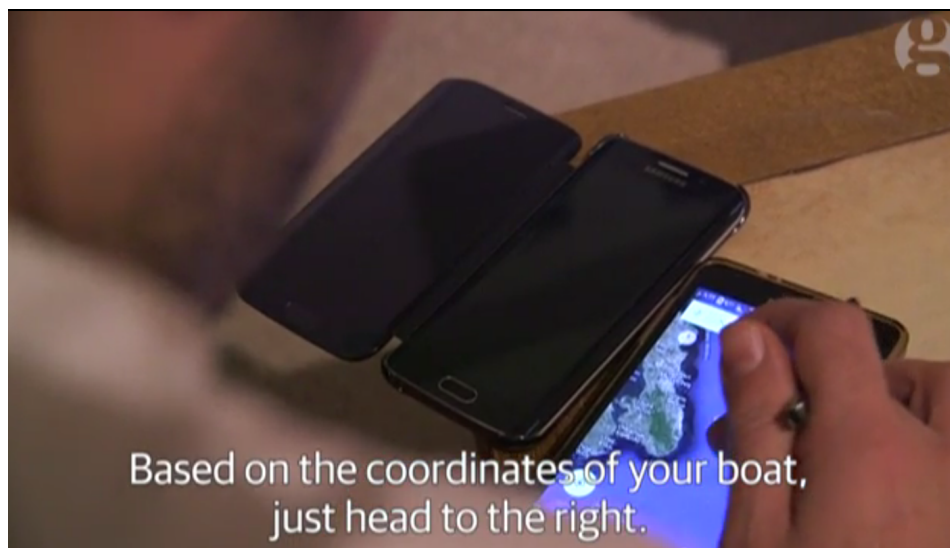
Our informants' 'agency' varies greatly from one step of their journey to another. Referring to Latour's definition of human 'agency', it is *"exclusively a mediated achievement, brought about through forging associations"* (Müller, 2015, p.30). Through this section, however, it is



worth noting that our informants who interacted with smugglers on a wider scale than others, have seen their ‘agency’ decreases as their displacement is being managed by smugglers, meaning they are not entirely mastering their decisions and actions as they navigate the European regulatory system. It may be assumed that the *information precarity* of the informants who travelled towards and across Europe pushed these informants into the hands of smugglers. Indeed, throughout our interviews with Agob, Dejene and Jean-Claude, they admitted that they were not aware of some opportunities accessible on their ICT (Agob, Dejene & Jean-Claude 2017, Copenhagen).

### **The role of ‘digital humanitarianism’**

*“We can’t leave the people like this, we have to track them down and help them. Having GPS [...] makes it really easy to track the people, and correct their course” (Abu Amar, The Hands That Guide).*



Screenshot from The Guardian. (2016, December). The 24-hour emergency hotline for Syrian refugees- video.

We consider Abu Amar to be a digital humanitarian as he decided to help Syrian asylum seekers crossing the sea towards, as well as with their journey throughout, Europe. Paralysed from the waist down, due to a shrapnel injury to his spine, and cheated by smugglers whilst trying to reach Europe for protection, he came up with the idea to set up a Facebook page, now a Facebook private group, through which he could inform people about where to go and how to get there, offering individualised advice if contacted on his Whatsapp number (Ömer 2017, Copenhagen & Abu Amar, The Hands That Guide). He

provides 24/7 guidance via his two smartphones, one used for communication and the other for Google Maps, weather forecasts and a shipping radar app (Ibid.).

His role helping asylum seekers, and more specifically Syrian asylum seekers, is significant as it is estimated that he assisted 900 boats to cross safely from Turkey to Greece. With an enlarged *access to social networks* thanks to *internet connectivity*, ICTs can become an essential guide during the journey and can be portrayed as a *“vital survival tool”* for asylum seekers to have (Byrne, 2015). Cross referencing Abu Amar’s initiative with the one RefugeeText launched in 2016, these actors definitely tried to counter the many ways in which European governments and news media failed *“to provide adequate, reliable and timely information and news”* (Gillespie et al., 2016, p.1). The ways in which authorities display information places asylum seekers in a situation of danger, when they are suffering from *information precarity*, *“leading to potential threats to their well-being”* (Wall et al., 2017, p.242). Following the assumption that if the information was too accessible it would *“change the way in which people migrate, proven to be a bigger political statement than we thought”* (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen), Caroline Arvidsson told us that *“all the information is out there, but it is not being pushed”* (Ibid.).

RefugeeText as well as Abu Amar’s WhatsApp and Facebook groups could be defined as communities of choice, of interest (Hamel, 2009, p.3; Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.404). These actors promote *“interaction and the sharing of information”* in a specific context (Hamel, 2009, p.3), accessing *“a wider range of individuals with whom we have weak or even no ties”* (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.404), but are interested in the same information. The information shared through RefugeeText is well selected, verified via different reliable actors and sources (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen), guaranteeing that they won’t *“do more harm than good if they disseminate misinformation”* (Gillespie et al., 2016, p.3). *“There are so many rumours and misinformation and stories being shared”* (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen). In reaction to this notion, the information shared through RefugeeText is the *“most up-to-date information, making sure that it is relevant, trustworthy and accurate, targeted towards individuals, personalised and translated”* (Ibid.), using the data from several refugee councils.

The European Union has set up the Eurodac central database, *“which collects and centralises the fingerprints of all asylum seekers over age fourteen, with the aim of preventing their cases from having to be heard in several EU countries”* (Liempt, 2007, p.25). This is considered to be a means with which to control the implementation and respect of the Dublin Regulation II. However, this deterring system can be bypassed if the asylum seekers know about the regulation beforehand. Digital humanitarians have to explain the regulatory system vocabulary and its meaning: *“what is the Dublin regulation, what does it mean to be fingerprinted?”* (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen). Both RefugeeText and Abu Amar helped people to circumvent this border policy, counteracting *information precarity*. Caroline Arvidsson and the other co-founders of RefugeeText decided to share the advice on the chatbot:

*“If you aren’t fingerprinted with all 10 fingers then it doesn’t count, they can’t send you back, anything less makes it just local prints that can’t be used for anything. It’s empowering information to have even if you are stuck in a camp in Greece”* (Ibid.).

The same can be said of Abu Amar: *“When he was leading people through Hungary to avoid the police patrol, he was letting people bypass the Dublin Regulation”* (Ömer 2017, Copenhagen). Abu Amar also assists people crossing the Mediterranean, ensuring that they don’t come into contact with the Turkish coastguard or ferries. He gets this specific information through a shipping radar app: *“Abu (to camera): The app lets me check if there’s any ferries on their route so they can avoid them”* (Abu Amar, The Hands That Guide). Abu Amar’s wealth of knowledge about how to cross many European countries and which locals to bribe, in order to avoid authorities, was transmitted to asylum seekers via ICTs (Fadi, The Hands That Guide). Fadi is a Syrian refugee who was guided by Abu Amar along his journey.

Providing asylum seekers with such guidelines is a way for them to consolidate their strategy, their navigation, to reach their final destination country. Digital humanitarians support asylum seekers on their course to safety: *“simultaneously moving across the next obstacle or wave and negotiating the many more to come one’s way along an envisioned course”* (Vigh, 2006, p.54). RefugeeText offers legal and practical information: identifying people who can physically support asylum seekers on their journey, but also sharing the

asylum policies through which asylum seekers may envision the future obstacles in the country they are aiming for. When Agob tried RefugeeText, his conclusion was that it was useful, but that he would have simply called his uncle in Switzerland in order remain informed rather than use RefugeeText (Agob 2017, Copenhagen). He assumed that this kind of informative platform may be more interesting and necessary for people who do not have relatives or friends settled in Europe (Ibid.).

These two actors or initiatives put their knowledge at the service of asylum seekers, to facilitate their difficult journey, to ease and render their decisions more informed, and principally to decrease the hazards and dangers which may happen during migration (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.402). When Abu Amar advises people, contacting him through WhatsApp, he makes sure that the person he is talking to will get all the tools, both legal and practical, to reach their final destination safely: *“Abu (to Island man): I guess you can also go through Macedonia, but you need all your papers as proof. [...] Take the two (children) with you, no one will get close to you or hurt you”* (Abu Amar, The Hands That Guide). Meanwhile, in order to be sure that the information he is sharing is up-to-date, Abu Amar relies on the feedback he gets from people making the journey, be it under his advice or not : *“My group went another way and caught and fingerprinted by the Hungarian police. [...] When I told Abu Amar, he warned other groups not to go this way (sic)”* (Fadi, The Hands That Guide). Abu Amar *“uses the people in the groups to find the specifics, to understand what they’ve gone through before, to know where the police are”* (Ömer 2017, Copenhagen).

We decided to include digital humanitarians in the list Hammar established of people who have interest in *“managing the displaced”* (Hammar, 2014, p.8). Even if this management of the displaced is an unconscious action, this kind of monitoring may enhance and/or steer asylum seekers’ ‘agency’. In the case of Fadi, monitored by Abu Amar when crossing the Mediterranean sea, his ‘agency’ was enhanced by the fact that he was helped and therefore able to set up plans and strategies to reach his final destination. However, the control Abu Amar exercised on Fadi’s journey could be considered as a constraint to his ‘agency’ as he was not making his own choices. Throughout this research, the asylum seeker’s ‘agency’ is approached as being constructed by different actors, *actants* or *dimensions*, evolving thanks

to the interactions between all these elements. Indeed, if we look at the situation through the lens of ‘Actor-Network Theory’, in contacting Abu Amar in order to receive guidance, Syrian asylum seekers are creating different associations. Without the use of ICTs, Abu Amar would not be able to advise and guide asylum seekers along the way, and the same situation applies to RefugeeText.

Following Xiang and Lindquist’s argumentation, the *technological dimension* has legitimately revolutionised communication between migrants (Madianou and Miller, 2011 in Xiang et al. 2014, p.135), as well as communication to a larger extent. Once again, in this section, the *technological dimension* is necessary for the *social* and the *humanitarian dimensions* to operate fully. From another angle, the *regulatory dimension* still moves migrants, as they cannot perform a journey that is either legal or uncomplicated. However, this *dimension* does not have the same significant impact on migrants’ journeys as the *technological dimension*, when associated with the *humanitarian* and *social dimensions*, allowing asylum seekers to circumvent restrictive migration and border policies.

Unfortunately, our informants were unaware of the opportunities displayed on ICTs by digital humanitarians, such as RefugeeText or Abu Amar’s services. In the case of the latter, *internet connectivity* was required to contact Abu Amar, and this connectivity was not accessible or used by any of our informants along the way. Furthermore, it has to be stressed that both of these digital humanitarian services are only provided in Arabic in Abu Amar’s case, and only in Arabic and English for RefugeeText. Throughout our data collection, we tested several digital humanitarian apps, with a focus on travel to and within Europe. We noted a clear distinction in available languages, thus suggesting these apps were aimed at supporting particular nationalities: “Love Europe” provides information in Somali and Tigrinya<sup>8</sup>, whilst “Ref-Aid”, “Refugee Info”, “Welcome” only provide services in English, Swedish or Arabic. “Kricket”, an app set up by Techfugees<sup>9</sup> to crowdmap refugees and let them know where they can fulfill their needs, features more than 20 languages, though none of them is African.

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<sup>8</sup> Tigrinya: language spoken in Eritrea and in northern Ethiopia (Collins English dictionary).

<sup>9</sup> “Techfugees is a social enterprise coordinating the international tech community’s response to the needs of Refugees. Techfugees exists to empower the displaced with technology” (Techfugees website).

## Conclusion

*“Migrants have adopted most modern means of communication and have thus developed new tactics for mobility” (Diminescu, 2005, p.571).*

This statement, written in 2005, still resonates today as demonstrated by the information we collected from our informants. Each of the men we spoke to had access to ICTs when they made the journey towards and across Europe. We observed a wide range of use in these ICTs amongst our informants, this has been argued to be the result of variables, and their combinations. Due to a combination of the seven variables, which affected Jean-Claude, Agob and Dejene to different degrees they did not fully exploit the opportunities offered on the diverse platforms ICTs hold, and therefore were not independent in their decision-making regarding irregular border crossing.

For Zaïd and Ali who looked up information on social media and apps, we observed that they had more choice regarding the way and means they wanted to use the available data in order to navigate the European regulatory system. As pointed out by Caroline Arvidsson, institutional information is often difficult to access and understand (Caroline 2017, Copenhagen). Social media platforms thus create *“open, low-key sources of information”* meaning that *“streetwise knowledge of migration is available through ‘backstage’ channels”* (Goffman 1959 in Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.414), countering *information precarity*.

In the past, authorities were at an advantage over migrants as a result of their rapid and effective means in which they could *“communicate and coordinate action”* (McLaughlin, 2015). *“That advantage has been all but lost to these smartphone-wielding migrants with fast internet, large networks of contacts, and free or very cheap wifi”* (Ibid.). The rise in ‘streetwise’ migrants, as a direct result of ICTs use has thus enabled asylum seekers to bypass the European regulatory system in a manner that was previously deemed manageable.

However, this strategic and thought-through navigation of the European regulatory system varies depending on the existing interaction asylum seekers may create with their ICTs. Indeed, despite all our informants having access to ICTs, Agob, Dejene and Jean-Claude

decided to rely on the information provided by their smugglers. Therefore the role of the nonhuman *actant* over the decision-making process varies - if the interaction between the actor and the ICT exists, then the nonhuman *actant* may carry a leading role over an action. This reinforces the 'Actor-Network Theory' when Latour asked: *"When we act, who else is acting? How many agents are also present? [...] Why are we all held by forces that are not of our own making?"* (Latour, 2005, p.43). Therefore, in the navigation of the European regulatory system, the ICT becomes *"an active agent in the refugee crisis"* (Gillespie et al., 2016, p.23). Hammar underlines the fact that the asylum seeker occupies *"space through the best use of available if highly circumscribed resources, networks and capacities"* (Hammar, 2014, p.16). The ICT encapsulates all of this. This chapter demonstrates that some migrants may not be *"mere objects of the macro-processes that steer migration, but subjects who selectively move between different countries"* (Brettell & Hollifield, 2008 in Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.402). Indeed, the democratisation of knowledge, due to information sharing via ICTs, is perceived as *"a form of resistance to dominant structures, such as the increasingly restrictive immigration regimes of advanced societies"* (Scott, 1990 in Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.414).

## How do asylum seekers use ICTs as a means to circumnavigate the use of smugglers?

*“The whole situation, the environment, the fact that if you go with smugglers you will give everything to them, you do what they tell you, they promise you dreams that are not true because you don’t know. You have to pay money in advance, it’s a big step to put faith in someone you don’t know”*  
(Zaïd 2017, Brussels).

As investigated in the previous chapter, it is clear that the migration and border policies, such as visa restrictions, carrier sanctions and border reinforcements make the journey of *“the undesirables”* (Stoyanova, 2009, p.69) all the more complex and risky. In order to reach a place where they can ask for international protection, asylum seekers generally need someone to *“help them get out of their own country, and reach a place of safety”* (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.4). They also have to bypass a restrictive asylum and migration system (Koser, 2000, p.92) *“by appealing to the help of smugglers”* (Stoyanova, 2009, p.69). Asylum seekers’ dependence on smugglers is illustrated by the fact that *“two-thirds of migrants use smugglers to access Europe”* (Kushminder et al., 2015 in Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.175). Smugglers are perceived as agents, facilitators (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.4) or even *“white knights”* (Koser, 2000, p.92) as they hide and ease asylum seekers’ escape and journeys (Stoyanova, 2009, p.34). According to the *“Protocol Against Smugglers by Land, Air and Sea”*, the act of smuggling migrants

*“shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident”* (United Nations, 2000).

Smugglers can be involved in every step of a migrant’s journey: from the escape from the village or country, to the transit between different countries, to the settlement in the final destination (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002, p.74). They are providing a financial service, as they require *“a payment by the migrant or someone paying on his/her behalf”* (Liempt, 2007, p.40). In June 2015, journalists from The Migrants’ Files estimated that *“over the past fifteen years, refugees have paid a staggering 16 billion Euro to travel to Europe”* (The Migrants’ Files, 2015). This number has been increasing ever since. On average, the journey from Syria



to Germany cost €2,500 in September 2015 (Spiegel, 2015). This high cost of migration pushes some asylum seekers to find alternatives to smugglers. This circumnavigation of smugglers can also be motivated by other reasons, as pointed out by Zaïd above. In these situations of clandestinity, asylum seekers often have to *“give over control of migration decision-making to these paid facilitators”* (Robinson & Segrott, 2002, p.19), who often carry guns in order to coerce migrants<sup>10</sup> (The Hands That Guide).

It is, however, worth noting that most of the asylum seekers who desire to reach Europe by crossing the Mediterranean have to hire a smuggler: *“the only way to cross to Greece is with smugglers. There is no other way”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). This statement is supported by Ömer: *“some parts can’t be made without a smuggler like the crossing of the Mediterranean sea”* (Ömer 2017, Copenhagen). They can only start hoping to *“avoid using smugglers once they reach the relative safety of Greece”* (Byrne & Solomon, 2015).

### ***The role of relatives and friends***

*““We use social media, including WhatsApp, Viber or Facebook to communicate with people we know. If they are already in Western Europe, they send information back to us to help us navigate the route””* (Euractiv, 2015).

As put forward in the previous two chapters, friends and relatives have played a significant role in asylum seekers’ journeys to and within Europe. In this section we will demonstrate that contact with friends and relatives via ICTs has enabled some asylum seekers to circumvent the use of smugglers. The quote above indicates that apps and social media such as WhatsApp, Viber and Facebook allow asylum seekers to have a direct line to their families and friends and thus information regarding their route, hazards along the way and GPS mapping. An interview with Syrian asylum seeker, Omran Al-Nassr, in the Financial Times quoted him as stating that:

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<sup>10</sup> *“(message from female co-ordinator)- The smugglers have guns, and are forcing them onboard. Abu Amar (to camera)- when the people saw the waves, they didn’t wanna leave.”* (The Hands That Guide, 2016)

*“refugees from his country are increasingly hoping to avoid using smugglers once they reach the relative safety of Greece. After that many prefer instead to rely on the digital trail of news and GPS information created by friends and fellow migrants” (Byrne & Solomon, 2015).*

This reliance on family and friends, or *“experienced kin”*, for information and resources is not a new phenomenon: *“not surprisingly, some Mexican migrants to the United States count on friends and family members to guide them through the obstacles facing them at the border”* (Singer & Massey 1998 in Kyle & Koslowski, 2001, p.137). The difference in this era, and along this different migration route, is the manner in which it is done. The rise in the use of ICTs allows people to access apps and data on the move: *“messaging apps such as WhatsApp and Viber help them en route to contact [...] friends and families alike, while mapping apps ensure they don’t get lost”* (Euractiv, 2015). This constant internet connectivity to mobile devices allows *“often desperate refugees and migrants to access a vibrant support network”* (Byrne & Solomon, 2015). Indeed Zaïd told us that: *“It’s mostly Facebook, or Viber, or WhatsApp because those are the ways to communicate with your friends, family and they know other people. My friends helped me finding people”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). This therefore enables asylum seekers to migrate following advice and recommendations from friends and relatives and, as a result, potentially cut out the use of smugglers, circumventing information precarity.

Abdullah, an Afghan smuggler interviewed by Radio Free Europe, reinforced this notion when he stated that: *“we can take people beyond Serbia, since we have friends and contacts. But asylum seekers can go by themselves as well, because everything is easy now”* (Gwakh, 2015). For many asylum seekers, they have *“an entire network of people right in front of you”*, an access to a social network who have previously made the journey (Byrne & Solomon, 2015). This was the case for Dejene and his brother in Germany, Zaïd and his Iraqi friends in Turkey and Agob and his family both in Sweden and Switzerland. Ali, is an exception as, whilst he gathered information from a friend in Belgium, this contact had not previously made the journey. Ed West, a contributor to The Spectator, believes that this connectivity to family and friends is *“because satellite technology, Skype and other forms of communication allow them to stay (in contact) with people like themselves”* (West, 2016). In the past, people have been cut off from their family and friends due to the lack of access to

ICTs. Nowadays, however, *“mobile phone technology works even in most remote and rural areas and allows access even for a population with a low level of literacy and IT skills”* (Abushaikha & Schumann-Bölshe, 2016, p.196). This means that our informants need never be cut off from their former homes and thus from contacting their families (West, 2016). It has to be underlined that the *internet connectivity* allows asylum seekers to access a wider range of communication apps. This is reinforced by the fact that all our informants, with the exception of Jean-Claude, used ICTs to communicate with their friends and relatives to get advice on border policies or closures, as they migrated across Europe. Indeed, despite Jean-Claude having access to a smartphone during his journey, he never used it for guidance purposes, not knowing that this was a possibility (Jean-Claude 2017, Copenhagen).

Our informants’ contact with their *social network* via ICTs, in order to circumnavigate smugglers, varied from person to person. For Zaïd it was an essential part of his journey, for Agob, Dejene and Ali it played a small role in their migration whilst for Jean-Claude it played no role at all. For Zaïd his journey was facilitated by the use of ICTs and his contact with friends and family along the way:

*“You have people who are aware of what they are doing, “I know the way because my cousin, or my brother, or my family, just crossed from here, so I’m just doing the same thing”. So I’m checking with my friends telling me if it is the correct path”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels).

This statement is also true for Ali who, whilst in Athens, received a message from his friend in Belgium telling him he needed to make a move towards his final destination as multiple European borders were beginning to close (Ali 2016, informal conversation). This information, combined with data he collected from Twitter, Facebook and from volunteers he met along the way meant he did not rely on a smuggler to make his way across Europe. This knowledge, relayed to him via the *social, humanitarian and technological dimensions*, enabled him to access information that facilitated his migration.

This is in sharp contrast to Dejene who used a smuggler as well as relying on information from his brother:

*“Actually, I do have a brother in Germany who live in Frankfurt, so I got a lot of information through him. But I never used my phone for the destination or checked maps and stuff. [...] Only I use for calling purpose most of the time”* (Dejene 2017, Copenhagen).

This statement indicates that Dejene, therefore did, at times, circumnavigate smugglers and the information they provided him with, by contacting his brother using his mobile phone. That said, he noted that the majority of his contact with his brother was in order to gather information on smugglers: *“most of the time he is gonna call or send an sms with the name of the smuggler, sometimes the name of the place, especially in Italy”* (Ibid.). In this instance, the *commercial dimension* is at play, as Dejene’s brother facilitated his recruitment by smugglers, which in turn implies that they are managing Dejene’s displacement. In addition to this, Dejene’s use of his brother as a source of information falls both within the *technological* and the *social dimensions* of ‘Migration Infrastructure’. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that Dejene never really used *internet connectivity* to gain information about his journey (Dejene 2017, Copenhagen). This is mainly due to his lack of *IT literacy*, combined with the fact that he only had access to *“a small phone”* that had no capacity for *internet connectivity* (Ibid.).

Dejene’s case is similar to Agob’s, who used a smuggler for the first part of his journey in Europe before relying on his own contacts and connections for the remainder of his migration. Agob called his family at various points during his journey to ask for advice, either from his mobile phone or by using Skype in internet cafés: *“My family in Sweden told me to avoid going through so many countries. Maybe one stop is ok”* (Agob 2017, Copenhagen). Upon arriving in Switzerland, Agob contacted his uncle as nobody showed up at the airport to meet him, as his smuggler had supposedly arranged. In contacting his uncle, he therefore used him as a means to circumnavigate his smuggler and make his own arrangements. Although Agob did later use a smuggler, for the remainder of his time in Switzerland and then in Germany he relied on his uncle and relatives in Sweden for information (Ibid.). It is worth noting that whilst Agob circumnavigated smugglers for this part of his journey he did so out of necessity, as opposed to Zaïd who made a conscious choice to do so. This once again illustrates the idea, as put forward by Latour, that the environment pushes actors to make decisions in order to survive, as we

*“learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish” (Latour, 2005, p.12).*

Zaïd’s method, as he had no alternative, was to *“make it fit together”* by using contacts that he already had, through ties he made on social media and via apps with people who had previously made the journey, as well as with people he met along the way. These *“new associations”* thus enabled him to make the journey without the use of smugglers, associations that were only made possible through the use of his smartphone.

### ***The role of social media and apps***

*“Some people were actually trapped and had to pay money that they actually did not need to pay, like €500 to cross to Serbia, which cost you literally €100 or €50. People did not know that information, they did not check, they did not have a smartphone, they did not check Facebook, they were too scared to ask” (Zaïd 2017, Brussels).*

Using ICTs in order to travel alone, not taking the risk of making the journey with an untrustworthy smuggler or undertaking the financial burden of spending significant sums of money on smuggling agents were all mechanisms our informants employed to bypass the use of smugglers. In this section, the focus will be on social media and apps, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Translate<sup>11</sup> and Google Maps requiring *internet connectivity* to be sustainable.

The study conducted by Gillespie and other authors showed that some asylum seekers would use Google Translate on their phone, a tool which could help them *“phrase questions to ask locals about directions, about where they can find a cheap restaurant or hotel, where they can have access to wifi and power to charge their mobile battery”* (Gillespie et al., 2016, p.49). Agob used Google Translate, predominantly at internet cafés in Greece and Turkey, in order to make sure he could communicate on a basic level (Agob 2017, Copenhagen). In comparison, Dejene told us that he relied strongly on his smuggler’s advice as to where to

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<sup>11</sup> *“Google’s free service instantly translates words, phrases, and web pages between English and over 100 other languages”* (Google Translate website)

sleep, where to charge his phone and where to eat (Dejene 2017, Copenhagen). This was due to his limited understanding of *internet connectivity*, something that he stated he had little knowledge of before or during his journey: *“because I don’t know which place have wifi and difficult to connect because I did not connect to wifi before”* (Ibid.). For Dejene therefore the low level of *IT literacy* combined with both *internet connectivity* and *language* were variables that played a role in his decision to use smugglers. As pointed out by Zaïd, the smartphone and its *internet connectivity* to social media and translation apps allows people to find relevant information in their *language*, without having to ask, they just have to follow the posts they are interested in (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). It is worth noting that for some of our informants *language* was less of an issue: both Zaïd and Ali are fluent in English, therefore they found that the language barrier was less of an obstacle for them throughout their journey.

When looking at the Facebook groups and pages Zaïd sent us, they are all written in Arabic, designed at *“targeting nationalities”* (Ibid.) and confronting the issue of *language* that is so problematic for many of our informants. This allows many people to grasp the essential elements regarding which route they should take, when and how (Participant observation, Facebook). Zaïd mentioned that his *internet connectivity* was *“always really good”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels) and that the only problem regarding internet coverage was *“sometimes when you reach border point, when you have to buy another sim card, when you have to change, the cell provider is not strong enough on borders”* (Ibid.). Ali and Dejene encountered the same issue.

Google Translate, Facebook pages and groups and Google Maps are tools accessible to asylum seekers that allow them more independence and the ability to circumnavigate the use of smugglers. One such Facebook group, called *“Stations of the forced wanderers”*, which has a membership of over 100,000 people, *“is essentially a vast knowledge exchange community providing advice for those caught between smugglers seeking to exploit them and the authorities trying to thwart their journeys”* (Byrne & Solomon, 2015). The implication being that the maps shared in Facebook groups allow asylum seekers to access alternative information to that provided by smugglers. This argument is supported by Zijlstra and Liempt who claim that technological advancements *“can also be of benefit to irregular*

*migrants, who use GPS and other technology to cross borders without the help of smugglers”* (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.182).

One of the most repeated and diffused images of the “European refugee crisis”, was that of thousands of people walking in file towards European borders. Zaïd was one of these people, however, despite being part of a group he stated that: *“you double check on Facebook, on Google Maps. I was double-checking all the time”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). Even when crossing the Mediterranean sea, Zaïd checked to see if the weather conditions were favourable as described by the smugglers: *“I was checking, and it was not safe to go”* (Ibid.). These two quotes indicate that whilst Zaïd followed the migration patterns of other people and used a smuggler, he wanted to have control over his own journey and thus used his smartphone, relying on both his *internet connectivity* and *IT literacy*, to establish accurate information for himself. This was also observed by Gillespie and other researchers: *“Refugees then move from consuming content from groups or sharing it into, incorporating it into their decision making processes”* (Gillespie et al., 2016, p.64).

As mentioned in previous chapters, *“many prefer instead to rely on”* the digital news platforms, GPS information and maps created by other migrants as opposed to smugglers (Byrne & Solomon, 2015). Whilst he tested the chatbot RefugeeText during our interview, Zaïd stated: *“I would add something more: people involved with this information, actual refugees, former refugees, people who would give advice more about what you are actually gonna face”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). Omran Al-Nassr, a Syrian asylum seeker interviewed by The Financial Times in Serbia, stated that there was *“an entire network of people right in front of you”* that he could access for information online and on the ground (Byrne & Solomon, 2015). Supporting this statement, Zaïd mentioned the fact that volunteers are not always available along the route, but that there are people everywhere, physically or virtually through social media who can help you (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). Using Facebook groups and pages, or other social media platforms, containing advice from fellow asylum seekers may therefore *“strengthen a migrant’s ability to cope successfully with the adversities of migration”* (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.405). It should be stressed that for some of our informants their ability to *access social networks* was limited due to their lack of *IT literacy*, the *digital divide* and *internet connectivity*, or a combination of all three.

One of these adversities is the use of smugglers, sometimes human traffickers, who require large sums of money for a purportedly safe journey. Many testimonies, including those of our informants, shed light on the bad treatment and the terrible conditions they were forced to live in at the hands of smugglers. In order to cope with such adversity, social media platforms offer a way for migrants *“to ‘disrupt’ the smugglers’ business model: discussion groups provide information that allow individuals to circumvent the need for smugglers”* (Gillespie et al., 2016, p.28). Indeed Omran is of the opinion that *“smugglers on the land route are just an extra expense and often more risky than relying on fellow refugees”* (Byrne & Solomon, 2015). Zaïd shared his observations on how asylum seekers were cheated along the way by smugglers, some paying five times the price they would have paid if they had taken regular transportation (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). Abu Amar was also a victim of smugglers: *“He got cheated himself by smugglers several times, took his money, caught by the military, was paralyzed and had his kids, he was just so frustrated by the fact that he had to rely on these people and spend his money”* (Ömer 2017, Copenhagen). Our informants’ observations and experiences, regarding their vulnerability when using smugglers, demonstrate that real opportunities can be offered through the use of ICTs, in order to avoid being cheated. Once again, the *technological dimension* proved itself to hold significant implications when interacting with the *social dimension*, challenging the *commercial dimension* to establish itself and be able to move migrants. This perspective is supported by the International Organisation for Migration’s argument: *“migration is not only influenced by ICTs, ICTs have become global drivers of migration”* (IOM, 2005 in Hamel, 2009, p.1). Although we cannot adhere entirely to this opinion, it is an interesting one.

Social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter offer advice only, meaning some asylum seekers *“use phones to navigate their chosen routes via services such as Google Maps”* (Gillespie et al., 2016, p.11). After negotiating with a smuggler about the crossing of the Hungarian border with Serbia, Zaïd asked himself: *“so which one is better? Being caught for free or for €1000. You depend on your own”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). Underpinning this statement is another refugees’ view on the subject: *“I don’t trust smugglers enough to give them all our money. Besides, the smuggler only leads the way, but he cannot avoid the dangers that you might be confronted with”* (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.183). Indeed, Zaïd



admitted that his budget for the journey did not allow him to risk such big amounts of money, his smartphone was therefore the best alternative for him, adding that *“the desperation point pushes you towards this bravery”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels). This statement can be related to Latour’s, about the fact that new associations may emerge as forced, the environment pushing actors to create these associations to survive (Latour, 2005, p.12). Zaïd thus decided to cross the Hungarian border without the help of smugglers, but rather by using Google Maps.

One of the first times we met him, Zaïd mentioned that he would trust Google Maps more than a GPS system in a car as he succeeded in crossing the Hungarian border thanks to the app (Zaïd, informal conversation). It is possible to argue that this online help, or *internet connectivity*, enhances these asylum seekers’ agency, as *“the enrolling actant setting parameters for the agency of others; it may involve actants following given scripts set by others”* (Rydin, 2013, p.26). These *“given scripts”* echo the guidance provided on social media platforms. Following the ‘Actor-Network Theory’, the different associations forged are the interactions happening between the actor, the asylum seeker, and *actants*. Here we observe how interactions produce *“new ways of acting”* (Ibid.).

### ***The role of ‘digital humanitarianism’***

*“Abu Amar is the first person to allow people to immigrate without smugglers. There were no options before. Through all his journeys Abu Amar has learned every safe route possible”* (Fadi, The Hands That Guide).

Fadi, quoted above, made his journey across the Mediterranean and then through Europe relying almost entirely on advice and information given to him by Abu Amar, via his smartphone. This knowledge dissemination and *access to social networks* is something we have investigated through the lens of family and relatives as well as through the use of social media and apps. Now, we will turn our gaze to ‘digital humanitarianism’ and how *“refugees are able to make their own way like never before, without having to rely on the high prices and often horrendous conditions offered by people-traffickers”* (Price, 2015). This notion was reinforced by Abu Amar when he stated that *“I got the idea to start advising/helping people, to avoid being cheated by smugglers. Because it costs a lot of money”* (Abu Amar, The Hands That Guide). His frustration with the number of deaths at

sea, combined with the ruthless methods of many smugglers; such as leaving Fadi in a forest for 2 days (Fadi, *The Hands That Guide*), or allowing Agob to think he would be met at Zurich airport (Agob 2017, Copenhagen), led Abu Amar to circumnavigate smugglers by democratising<sup>12</sup> the process. For him it was *“obligation out of compassion, no other motives”* (Ömer 2017, Copenhagen) that led him to becoming a digital humanitarian.

Humanitarian logistics can now rely on the qualities that mobile phones and smartphones possess (Abushaikha & Schumann-Bölshe, 2016, p.194), meaning that asylum seekers *“are telling their own story, bypassing the official narrative”* of vulnerability (Conneally, 2011). This *“emerging ability to track movement in real-time, offers both the possibility of improved responses to conflict and forced migration”* (Taylor, 2015 in Gillespie et al., 2016, p.29), something that was decidedly clear to us in the case of Abu Amar. Many of the people who contact him via WhatsApp also continue to ask for his help, which he willingly provides, as they migrate across Europe. Fadi was one such person, who now helps Abu Amar in his humanitarian endeavours: *“Fadi, he said that all the way through Macedonia, he (Abu Amar) gave him very specific directions like: go to this forest, send me your coordinates, now go this way, now that way, he really followed on”* (Ömer 2017, Copenhagen).

For many asylum seekers making the journey across, what is to them, uncharted territory, Abu Amar is the voice of reason. Having made the same journey himself, been ripped off by smugglers and made the perilous crossing of the Mediterranean sea, for many asylum seekers looking to reach Europe, he *“is the sensible voice that these people need, he is calming. And he has done the journey also, so that’s what he always tells them - look I know what you’ve been through, it’s stressful, it happened to me and that’s how I responded”* (Ibid.). As we mentioned in the social media section of this chapter, this statement implies that asylum seekers are more likely to follow *“the beaten paths”* of other migrants (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.402), as they have more faith and trust in former asylum seekers who have made the journey before them. This connection between Abu Amar and thousands of asylum seekers demonstrates the importance of the *social dimension* of ‘Migration Infrastructure’, this contact becoming vital to a significant number of people making the

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<sup>12</sup> In democratising the process, Abu Amar tried to make his service accessible to everyone.

journey. Abu Amar also fills the gap of *information precarity* as he provides a “*sphere of information, focusing on refugees’ uses of, ability to access, and obstructions to information*” (Wall et al., 2017, p.245).

This reliance of previous migrants on the *humanitarian dimension* in this case, via the *technological dimension* is in stark contrast to the *commercial dimension* of smugglers who many of our informants viewed as untrustworthy. In contrast to Agob, who’s smuggler left him at Zurich airport, and Fadi, whose smuggler left him in a Macedonian forest for 2 days, Abu Amar ensures that the people who contact him are kept informed of changes or hazards. Fadi noted that whilst he was lost in the forest:

*“another group came and I spoke to Abu Amar using their phone and showed where we were. He gave us instructions to reach the nearest village. There he said not to talk to people, just pay at garage #3 to keep the employees quiet”* (Fadi, The Hands That Guide).

Further reinforcing Abu Amar’s role as a digital humanitarian, as well as his methods that stand in sharp contrast to that of our informants’ smugglers, Fadi stated that the group he was with was caught and fingerprinted by the Hungarian police. When Fadi informed Abu Amar of what had happened, *“he warned other groups not to go this way”* (Fadi, The Hands That Guide). This clearly demonstrates that through the use of ICTs, Abu Amar is able to relay information to asylum seekers, it could occur that they would turn to smugglers if they did not have access to Abu Amar. Abu Amar is thus allowing asylum seekers to circumnavigate the use of smugglers.

Using ICTs to deliver humanitarian aid is time-saving for both the asylum seekers at risk and the digital humanitarians and thus allows savings on both sides (Abushaikha & Schumann-Bölshe, 2016, p.194). Indeed, what Abu Amar proposes is to allow asylum seekers *“to do most of the trip by themselves, using public transport which is like 2 euros instead of spending thousands of pounds”* (Ömer 2017, Copenhagen). Asylum seekers can use Abu Amar’s advice and guidance, therefore saving money they would have used on smugglers. Abu Amar’s aim in providing 24/7 guidance for asylum seekers was driven by the idea of avoiding the exorbitantly high fees charged by smugglers. *“The more people (Abu Amar)*

*met, the more he got frustrated about these stories about smugglers, of people being cheated, wasting all of their money, drowning” (Ibid.).* When Fadi asked for his guidance, Abu Amar offered to show him the way *“half price, or with no smugglers”* (Fadi, The Hands That Guide). He learnt all the smuggling routes towards Europe, and started tracking people who got lost across Europe, as was Fadi’s case, *“guiding them in the right direction”* (Abu Amar, The Hands That Guide). Abu Amar first wanted to establish a system akin to *“‘Tripadvisor’, for people to find smugglers”* (Ömer 2017, Copenhagen). This system would allow people to avoid *“the worst smugglers, and propose the most reliable ones”* (Ibid.). Abu Amar then decided to offer his guidance and make it accessible through a Facebook page he called *“Asylum and Immigration without smugglers”* (Abu Amar, The Hands That Guide). In terms of communication, Abu Amar tries his best to be accessible to people: as an Arabic speaker, he mainly targets Syrian asylum seekers and he uses a free walkie talkie app as well as WhatsApp to communicate with people - both of which only require *internet connectivity* (Ömer 2017, Copenhagen). This setup, and the fact that WhatsApp is an encrypted app, supports the claim that mobile phones are allowing people to access humanitarian aid in an easier manner: *“own language, really accessible, guarantee anonymity and are less expensive”* (Talhok, 2016, p.4 in Gillespie et al., 2016, p.37).

When Abu Amar offers live guidance, he ensures that despite the different levels in *IT literacy* of those he is helping out, they can access as much information as possible, through whatever means available. As an example; Fadi told Ömer that he did not know that *“Google Maps was existing until he spoke to Abu Amar (sic)”* (Ömer 2017, Copenhagen). Therefore, Abu Amar sends annotated maps on WhatsApp so that those he is helping can see where they are and the direction they head in (Abu Amar, The Hands That Guide). It is worth noting that his helping the particular journey of a group or individual cannot be compared to the digital aid provided by RefugeeText. Whilst this app provides invaluable legal and practical information, it is specific to certain situations and as such is a more general tool for asylum seekers. In the documentary, Abu Amar digitally greets people when they succeed in reaching Greece safely (The Guardian, 2016). His personal investment in their well-being can be compared to a volunteer in the field who tailors their response to the individual needs of each person.

As Conneally claimed during his TedX presentation: the *“magic of technology can bring the invisible visible”* (Conneally, 2011). Indeed, this statement refers to Latour’s idea that a piece of technology such as an ICT has *“arguments, decisions and uncertainties and processual nature of decisionmaking [...] hidden away inside”* it (Bowker and Star, 1994, p.187 in Walsham, 1997, p.469). Here, Abu Amar’s actions reveal the importance of the decision-making process of asylum seekers involving the phone and *internet connectivity*. Indeed *“a lack of connectivity constrains the capacity of refugee communities to organize and empower themselves, cutting off the path to self-reliance”* (UNHCR, 2016b, p.8). Without the ICT as a significant *actant*, his help would have only been possible through a computer, a piece of technology inaccessible to many asylum seekers along the way.

## **Conclusion**

When investigating our informants’ journey and their use of smugglers, their experiences vary from one to another. Indeed, Agob chose to make his entire journey with smugglers, Zaïd on the other hand had limited funds, thus he determined to make his own path across Europe without smugglers (Zaïd 2017, interview). Although Ali was unclear as to how much preparation time he had before leaving Syria he, much like Zaïd, only made use of smugglers from Turkey to Greece. On his side, Dejene mainly relied on a smuggler he met through his brother’s advice and Jean-Claude’s journey was entirely based on his smuggler’s will and capabilities.

Our findings support the argument Zijlstra & Liempt made in their study, that *“the availability of smartphones has even made migrants so independent that they can sometimes organise their journey (or parts of their journey) by themselves, without the help of smugglers”* (Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.178). Indeed, with regard to ‘Migration Infrastructure’, the *technological dimension* is enabling other dimensions such as the *social* and the *humanitarian dimensions* to flourish, whilst blocking the way of smugglers’ recruiting asylum seekers, preventing the *commercial dimension* from evolving. However, this independence regarding smugglers can only be viable and generalised if the *digital divide* and the levels of *IT literacy*, as presented in the context chapter, did not vary greatly between our informants. This *digital divide* constrained some of our informants in having

constant access to *internet connectivity*<sup>13</sup>, to *access their social networks* fully, or build new ones through social media as they were unaware of their existence (*information precarity*).

All this information displayed on ICT screens, on social media, on a text received from a friend in Germany, via phone call received by a brother in Sweden, on an annotated map sent by Abu Amar to a group of asylum seekers lost in a forest in Europe are tools that can enable asylum seekers to become “*do-it-yourself migrants*” (Collyer, 2007, p.674 in Zijlstra & Liempt, 2017, p.178). When the opportunities offered by ICTs are handled and integrated in asylum seekers’ decisions, they may develop an independency previously unobserved. ICTs and the connections made through the enlarged migrant networks, as mentioned above, “*are bringing down the costs associated with migration*” (Hamel, 2009, p.35 ; Dekker & Engbersen, 2014, p.414) as people are circumnavigating smugglers.

It has to be underlined, as noted in the previous chapters, that variables hold a significant role in how asylum seekers, crossing Europe, handle and use their ICTs and therefore how they circumnavigate the use of smugglers. Zaïd, aware of these disparities, mentioned that:

*“The people who came with me at the same time, they paid double of what I paid because they chose the easier way, to go with the smuggler. They trusted someone to cross. I depended more on my own, because I had a better language than they do, better knowledge of smartphones than they do, I’m more patient”* (Zaïd 2017, Brussels).

As briefly touched upon by Zaïd, *IT literacy*, the *digital divide*, *internet connectivity* and *access to social networks*, *language*, the *nature of the flight*, levels of *information precarity*, all combined, demonstrate to varying degrees the nuanced use of ICTs and therefore help us comprehend why some of our informants did not have access to the same opportunities and information as others, and by default were not as independent. This argument supports Latour’s apprehension of the failing interactions, associations which are not succeeding or not happening, considering that each of our informants had access to an ICT during their flight.

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, smartphones offer a better connectivity to internet, being now “*the most popular way to browse internet* - *Ofcom report*”, now “*responsible for a third of internet access, up from 23% in 2014*” (Hern, 2015).

Smugglers still represent *“a bridge, we had to cross with or without smartphones”* (Ali 2017, Brussels). As underlined by Abu Amar, some people listen to him carefully but *“many others don't even consider listening to us, they'd rather listen to the smuggler”* (Abu Amar, The Hands That Guide). It must also be added that cutting out smugglers from asylum seekers' journey is not accessible to every asylum seeker and is a recent phenomenon.

## DISCUSSION

The influence that ICTs might have on some asylum seekers' decisions regarding their journey depends on the interaction, association and connection between the actor, the asylum seeker and different *actants*. Our initial hypothesis was that asylum seekers having access to an ICT would use it in order to create the most thought-through strategy with regard to their journey. As we delved deeper into our analytical process, we found our study of the subject proved our initial assumptions to be wrong. Indeed, whilst using the 'Actor-Network Theory', Latour advances that a network is not "*linking in some predictable fashion elements that are perfectly well defined and stable*", the *actants* being able to redefine "*their identity and mutual relationship*" at any time (Callon, 1989, p. 93 in Rydin, 2013, p.25). It is relevant to mention that every one of our informants used their ICT at different times, in different contexts, for different purposes, making it difficult to discern a common pattern in ICT use.

Nonetheless, throughout our analysis, we attempted to comprehend why the interaction between the asylum seeker and the ICT sometimes fails to enact. Why sometimes the "*imagined and immediate stratagem for moving toward a goal while at the same time being moved by the social terrain*" (Vigh, 2006, p.55) does not involve ICTs, whilst all our informants had access to one. In trying to do so, we discovered that a combination of some variables, such as *digital divide, nature of the flight, IT literacy, information precarity, language, internet connectivity and access to social networks* to differing degrees, had a great impact on whether or not our five informants used their ICT in order to guide their journey. These variables are, to some degree, linked to the concept of 'agency'. Indeed, they can be considered as structural forms obstructing or rendering the control of decisions by asylum seekers all the more complex, as we observed that, the more variables were at play, the more dependent some asylum seekers may be on their smugglers or suffer as a result of border and migration policies. It is claimed that 'agency' and its specific forms "*vary enormously and are culturally [...] determined*" (Sewell, Jr, 1992, p.20), therefore "*agency exercised by different persons is far from uniform, that agency differs enormously in both kind and extent*" (Ibid.).



To that end, we also made the observation that the more their *IT literacy* level was important, the more the ICT, the *actant*, became “*strategic through the number of connections it commands*” (Latour, 1996, p.372)<sup>14</sup>. Due to their high *IT literacy* level, we observed that Zaïd and Ali both had access to a wider range of choices regarding their final destination as they were informed about the asylum procedures and other elements concerning European countries thanks to their ICTs. We also noted that they were both more independent than our other informants, as they were aware of how to cross a border clandestinely through the information they collected via ICTs. Finally, we remarked that they were both able to cut out smugglers during their journey across Europe and able to make the journey on their own whilst being accompanied by an important social network - accessible on communication apps and social media.

Jean-Claude was the one informant we spoke to who made no mention of the usefulness of his phone as he travelled across Europe. For him, his phone became a “*lifeline*” only once he reached Denmark (Jean-Claude 2017, Copenhagen). It has to be mentioned that some of our informants, such as Jean-Claude, never perceived their ICT as a journey companion in terms of guidance and advice, but more as a connection to their home and family. This angle could have been an interesting analytical lens. However, the fact that our informants relied more on the advice and guidance provided by their family and relatives already shows the strong connection that can emerge and be reinforced through their ICT use. This observation responds to the symbolic interactionism approach, examining human conduct “*towards things on the basis of the meaning that the things have for them*” (Blumer, 1996, p.2). The ‘thing’ throughout this thesis being the ICT, we can now illustrate the disparities in ICTs’ meaning for our informants.

The interaction between Jean-Claude and his smartphone only happened when he wanted to contact his family to give news (Jean-Claude 2017, Copenhagen). When Dejene first connected to the internet in Italy, it was to send a picture of himself to his mother so she could be sure he was still alive (Dejene 2017, Copenhagen). To Dejene and Jean-Claude, their ICT meant more a connection to home, to a family, what they saw as a lifeline to them

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<sup>14</sup> The number of connections here being the connection with the Facebook groups and pages, with WhatsApp groups, with friends and family, with specific apps and even services offered by digital humanitarians.

was the possibility of still being connected to their loved ones. Therefore the interaction was determined more by the symbolic meaning of a phone as a home: *“if they ever get homesick, they only have to gaze at the screen in their hand”* (Locke, 2017).

## Reflections

In this section, we will reflect on our project, focusing on what we could have done differently in relation to our methods, theory and our empirical data. We find it important to include this brief evaluation of the processes we have been through, as a means to comment on how our thesis could have been different.

Attempting to be reflective about our methodology, the first thought that comes to our mind is that due to our informants being quite diverse, in terms of nationalities, experiences, social backgrounds and at times age, the answers varied greatly. Targetting specific nationalities would have lead us to different results. As described in our contextual background chapter, Syrians supposedly have a wider access to ICTs than Congolese or Ethiopians. This would indicate that, had we targeted a specific nationality, we might have found our responses to be more unified. Targetting a specific time period such as the “European Refugee crisis”, as well as nationality, could have contributed to a very different conclusion, albeit less nuanced. Because of the diversity of our informants, no generalisation is possible as we observed a phenomenon amongst the asylum seekers we spoke to, albeit to varying degrees.

Following this last consideration, it also has to be mentioned that the emergence of digital humanitarians providing humanitarian assistance to refugees is relatively new. Testing some digital humanitarian apps, we observed that some of them were just sketches, some features not being entirely finished, available or user tested. There is a long way to go before funding and structured work emerges (Antoine 2017, Brussels). The regulatory system being harsher, the policies attempting to create more of a deterrent, as well as a difficult political situation across Europe have led Antoine to admit that the *“perception of these migrants has changed, there is less emotion, there are more interrogations, there are more hesitations, when not some oppositions”* (Ibid.). This in turn creates hostilities towards positive initiatives targeting refugees. Therefore, it would be an interesting subject to follow

up on over the years as to the ongoing changes in refugee flows and European migratory regulations.

Another consideration is the notion that *"sometimes your smartphone just doesn't have what you need"* (Bourgault, 2015 in Gillespie et al., 2016, p. 26). Just because a person has access to ICTs does not mean that it can provide them with shelter, food and warmth - it can only direct them to it. ICTs can help migrants sort through the confusion, but *"it's important to remember that no single app or technology can give refugees what they most need, which is a safe place to live"* (NPR, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

*“With growing access to ICTs and the current state of mobility of people around the world, it is easy to imagine that there exist relationships between access and sharing of information and the outcomes of migration” (Hamel, 2009, p.1).*

Our thesis was initially based on the hypothesis that Information and Communication Technologies were a ‘lifeline’, as we assumed they provided essential guidance to asylum seekers who had access to these devices during their journey across Europe. Antoine Saint-Denis was of the same opinion when we spoke to him in April 2017:

*“I don’t think we can say that the availability of technology has changed or has had an impact on the number of people who came or even on the profile of people who came, but I have the impression that these technologies have changed the ways they have been travelling and have probably contributed in a high number of cases to the qualitative aspects of their travel and has probably contributed to empowering them. So that I can guess that their dignity and their capacity to feel active and to make strategic choices have been enhanced thanks to these new tools” (Antoine 2017, Brussels).*

Based on this assumption, when interviewing our informants, we asked them whether or not they would have been able to make this journey without their ICTs. As we have demonstrated in our analysis, the answers were nuanced. For Zaïd:

*“it would have been really difficult like a blind man crossing the street without a stick, without a walking dog, without the warning signs/sounds that indicates that it is ok to cross. It is like going swimming in the ocean alone” (Zaïd 2017, Brussels).*

Dejene’s answer was remarkably similar. He used the same metaphor for his reliance on his phone: *“I do not have my phone, like a blind guy and don’t know where to go, [...] that phone was like my eyes” (Dejene 2017, Copenhagen).* Our remaining three informants stated that they could have made the journey without the phone, although Ali admitted that *“phones make it easier” (Ali 2017, Brussels)* whilst Agob stated that *“it makes it a little more difficult not having the phone” (Agob 2017, Copenhagen).* Jean-Claude was the only

informant who didn't refer to the usefulness of his phone along the journey, mentioning it as a *"lifeline"* only once he had arrived in Denmark (Jean-Claude 2017, Copenhagen).

Whilst taking into account that these answers are representative of only five people, their responses demonstrate the nuanced significance of ICTs for these asylum seekers on their respective journeys. As we have uncovered throughout this thesis, the use of ICTs greatly varies from one informant to another. We noted that this variation in ICT use had a considerable impact on the extent to which it influenced the decisions of asylum seekers throughout their journey across Europe. Whilst we cannot argue that ICTs are the driving factor behind migration, we have found that the use of ICTs influence the journeys of asylum seekers, albeit to varying degrees. Throughout the analysis, we demonstrated the variety of our informants' ICT use, exemplifying that it *"should thus not be taken for granted that ICT necessarily empowers migrants"* (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014, p.135). We observed that some of our informants could feel and be empowered via their ICT use only if a number of variables were combined and did not obstruct their access to their ICT. This nuance was also observed by Sheller and Urry: *"there are new places and technologies that enhance the mobility of some peoples and places"* (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p.207). We can therefore conclude that technologies, used in specific contexts, depending on a combination of variables, enhanced the mobility and 'agency' of some of our informants.

We have established that when interacting with two *dimensions* of 'Migration Infrastructure' - the *social* and *humanitarian dimensions* - the *technological dimension* allowed our informants to share, gather and access information that in turn facilitated their migration, all through the medium of ICTs. The democratisation of ICT usage, and therefore the increasing power of the *technological dimension* shows that migration and the way we used to understand it may be changing. As we have explained in this thesis, we have demonstrated that the *commercial* (smugglers) and *regulatory* (state regulations) *dimensions*, and their efficiency to manage the movement of asylum seekers, are being challenged with this democratisation.

This thesis also challenges Vigh's presentation of 'agency', lacking explanations as to how human 'agency' can increase or decrease, not mentioning the *actants*, elements and

*dimensions* which may have an influence on the actor's 'agency'. As presented in the theoretical framework of this research, we extend Vigh's notion of 'agency' including the variety of actors and *actants* which hold a role in asylum seekers' 'agency' and ability to navigate. 'Social Navigation' to Vigh is defined as *"the way people adjust their lives to the constant influence (in potentia and presentia) of social forces and change"* (Vigh, 2009, p.432), as *"a dialogue between agency and social forces"* (ibid., p.426). We observed that this adjustment to change in social forces can be mediated by the use of ICTs by asylum seekers, increasing their 'agency' whilst handling the opportunities their phones can provide. Zaïd and Ali, indeed, invested time and material to predict the movement of their social environment; *"how they are able to adapt to and move in relation to oncoming change"* (Vigh, 2009, p.420).

That said, following our observations and main findings, we can assume that with the growing democratisation of Information and Communication Technologies, *"not only have migratory practices been revolutionized (in particular the activation of networks, remote organization, the monitoring of movements), but also the way mobility is experienced"* (Diminescu, 2005, p.572). The knowledge accessible in asylum seekers' pockets or bags, just through a click, a message or *internet connectivity*, may change the way asylum seekers deploy their strategies with regard to the difficult journey ahead. Throughout Ali and Zaïd's testimony of their journey experience, we witnessed the role of technologies as a journey facilitator: *"making those journeys a bit less precarious and harrowing"* (NPR, 2015). The information available through Facebook groups and apps, WhatsApp conversations with friends or relatives and digital humanitarian services is of great importance to those travelling across Europe:

*"ICTs and access to the wealth of knowledge available through the Internet as we will see can be powerful sources of such information and in this sense; such information can be highly beneficial and influential for migrants"* (Hamel, 2009, p.6).

The 'Actor-Network Theory' as well as as 'Migration Infrastructure' both put forward the essential need for a break down in *"arbitrary distinctions between the social and the technical spheres"*, opening up new possibilities (Winner, 1993, in Walsham, 1997, p.473), a

new way of migrating. The relevant knowledge spread in ICTs, with regard to asylum seekers' journey, is liberating and holds *"the potential of changing "traditional understandings and ways of doing things"* (Hill, 2007, p.273 in Hamel, 2009, p.6), changing the traditional understanding of asylum seekers' journey, including the wide range of actors and *actants* holding a strong role in asylum seekers' decision-making process.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1 – Maps

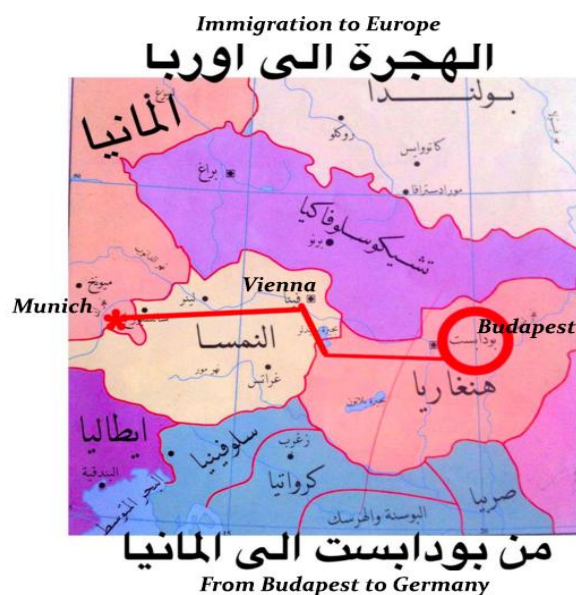
Maps taken from the Facebook page “Immigration to Europe” and translated by our informant Ali.

Link to the Facebook page: <http://bit.ly/2mPAYTu>.

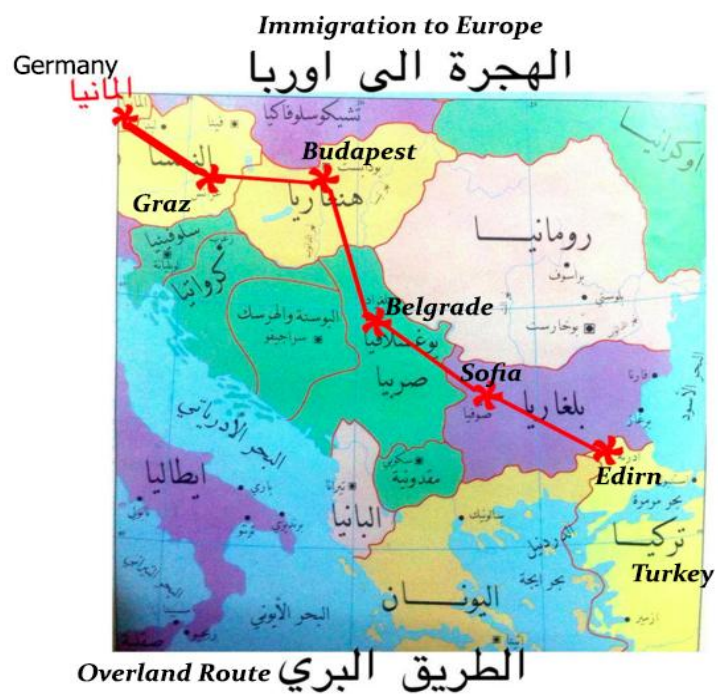
Post from the 15th of August 2015:



Post from the 16th of August 2015:



Post from the 23rd of August 2015:



## Appendix 2 – Interview guide and interviews with refugees and asylum seekers

### Interview Guide Refugees/Asylum seekers informants

Short presentation:

- Names
  - Age
  - Origin
  - Activity
- 
- *Could you make a list of the dates and countries you crossed ?*
  - *What kind of smartphone / mobile phone did you have by the time you made the journey to Europe?*
  - *Did you choose Denmark as your final destination? If yes, how and why? If no, how did you end up in Denmark ?*
  - *During your journey, did you avoid some countries or places? Why? How did you know that these places were to avoid?*
  - *During your journey, what was/were your communication tools (smartphones apps):*
    - *With your family?*
    - *Info and news sharing*
    - *Where to go, journey advices*
    - *Others*
  - *Could you have made this journey without your phone? Why not?*
  - *Did having this mode of communication facilitate your journey? If yes, how?*
  - *Does this mode of communication render the separation from your family less difficult?*
  - *Is there a resource or an app that particularly helped you during your journey? If yes, which one?*
  - *When arriving in certain countries were you aware of the political situation beforehand? If not, how did you gain knowledge on the subject?*
  - *How did you find shelter, food and/or services that provided them along the way in each country?*

- *How did you connect to national networks in each European country? And what did you think of them in terms of ease of use?*
- *Did you know where to buy the necessary material (sim card, credit top-up)? If yes, how?*
- *Did NGOs provide specific services related to mobile phones inquiries on your way (eg. UNHCR)*
- *What was the overall cost of your journey with regard to communication spending? Can you make an estimate if you do not know the exact figure (power charge, battery, sim cards...)*
- *Was connectivity to the internet essential to every part of your journey?*
- *Were there any countries and/or places in which you struggled to find internet connection?*
- *Was there wifi in the services centres you used (camps, stands)?*
- *On your arrival in your host country how did you know where to go, who to talk to?*
- *How did you use your phone to prepare for your travel? How did it help you out, or not?*
- *How and for what did you use your phone for on the crossing from Turkey to Greece?*
- *Did you struggle to charge your phone during the journey? Did you pay to use charging stations at any point?*
- *Where did you get information about the journey towards Europe? (any FB groups? Websites?)*
- *Do you know about any new apps meant for refugees to help them on the way to Europe?*
- *Did you feel empowered by the use of your mobile phone during your journey? (more independent choices, less reliant on smugglers?)*
- *Did you bring any other technology with you to Europe?*
- *Did you use any translation websites/apps to facilitate your journey?*
- *Did you take photographs along the way? When? Of what?*
- *Can you describe a typical day using your phone?*
- *Did you use your phone differently in the morning than you did in the evening?*

- *What does your phone represent to you? What was it worth on the journey? What is it worth now?*
  - *Could you imagine your journey without your phone? How would you have done it?*
  - *Other than apps, photos and phone numbers was there anything you stored on your phone that was indispensable to you ?*
- 

## **Ali Interview**

### **Self-administered questionnaire**

**Sent 23th of February 2017 - Answers received 26th of February 2017**

Short presentation:

- Name: Ali
  - Age: 28
  - Origin: Syria
  - Activity: Granted the refugee status in Belgium
- 
- *Could you make a list of the dates and countries you crossed?*
    - Lebanon
    - Turkey
    - Greece
    - Macedonia
    - Serbia
    - Croatia
    - Slovenia
    - Austria
    - Germany
    - Belgium (Date I can't remember it)

- *What kind of smartphone did you have by the time you made the journey to Europe?*

Samsung Galaxy S3

- *Did you choose Belgium as your final destination? If yes, how and why? If no, how did you end up in Belgium?*

No, Germany was first choice, due to friends in the first place, these friends who I met on my way to Europe and they work and live in Belgium, and crisis in Germany, I started to look for another options, and using the phone at that time to search for information, and find more ideas helped me choose Belgium.

- *During your journey, did you avoid some countries or places? Why? How did you know that these places were to avoid?*

Yes, Hungary, it was through volunteers who informed us to not cross through Hungary, who I met on the borders between Hungary and Serbia, and the news we were following on the internet through twitter and other apps.

- *During your journey, what was/were your communication tools (smartphones apps):*

- *With your family ?*
- *Info and news sharing ?*
- *Where to go, journey advices ?*
- *Others ?*

(whatsapp, facebook messenger, Viber) for communication // (facebook, twitter) for news // (maps me, google maps) for maps

- *Could you have made this journey without your phone? Why not?*

Yes, I would've done the journey without phone. the journey was not an option, unlike touristic journeys, this was fleeing the war and to escape so it was not an option. Phones make it easier, but there are more important elements which played roles during the trip, if I can put it in range it goes like this: having the will, knowledge and life experience, language, politic, money, people on the road (refugees and locals), smartphones, etc. as you can see smartphones are an element, but not basic element.

- *Did having this mode of communication facilitate your journey? If yes, how?*

Yes, it saves time and money. Makes it faster and cheaper. Although, using smartphones sometimes worked in the opposite way and helped the police to trace us by using GPS and network signals.

- *Does this mode of communication render the separation from your family less difficult?*

No, but it makes communication easier. Only time could make separation less difficult.

- *Is there a resource or an app that particularly helped you during your journey? If yes, which one?*

I would say the previous apps which I have listed helped equally since each one has its own time and occasion to be used.

- *When arriving in certain countries were you aware of the political situation beforehand? If not, how did you gain knowledge on the subject?*

It depends, some countries we had to be aware of the political situation, and this has been done before taking the trip itself by using normal computers and read about all the legal issues, some



countries we didn't have to know, sometimes the police on the borders help to give information on the procedures.

- *How did you find shelter, food and/or services that provided them along the way in each country?*

Communicating with locals, for me I didn't have to stay in shelters. I have done it on my own. And this was through language in the first place. Perhaps the phone's role here was not that big.

- *How did you connect to national networks in each European country? And what did you think of them in terms of ease of use?*

(Unclear question) but I don't think I had connected with national networks. But rather couple times I met volunteers face to face.

- *Did you know where to buy the necessary material (sim card, credit top-up)? If yes, how?*

Yes, it was through locals which made this as job for themselves.

- *Did NGOs provide specific services related to mobile phones inquiries on your way (eg. UNHCR)*

For me no.

- *What was the overall cost of your journey with regard to communication spending? Can you make an estimate if you do not know the exact figure (power charge, battery, sim cards...)*

Maximum 50 - 75 Euro

- *Was connectivity to the internet essential to every part of your journey?*

No. there are some areas where there was no internet network.

- *Were there any countries and/or places in which you struggled to find internet connection?*

In each country even now here in Belgium there are areas where you don't have connection.

- *Was there wifi in the services centres you used (camps, stands)?*

I didn't go to camps. But as I saw, no there wasn't because many camps were in the middle of nowhere. Without any infrastructure.

- *On your arrival in your host country how did you know where to go, who to talk to?*

Through a friend who was waiting for me, and already explained me the important steps.

- *How did you use your phone to prepare for your travel? How did it help you out, or not?*

It didn't help me in preparations.

- *How and for what did you use your phone for on the crossing from Turkey to Greece?*

I used it to communicate with sea guard to rescue us. But during the crossing it had to be turned off to avoid signals and to be caught.

- *Did you struggle to charge your phone during the journey? Did you pay to use charging stations at any point?*

No, I didn't pay. Rather I used pre-charged batteries.

- *Where did you get information about the journey towards Europe? (any FB groups? Websites?)*

FB groups which I don't remember it names.

- *Do you know about any new apps meant for refugees to help them on the way to Europe?*

No.

- *Did you feel empowered by the use of your mobile phone during your journey? (more independent choices, less reliant on smugglers?)*

No, smugglers were a bridge we had to cross with or without smartphones. Smartphones had helped but not empowered.

- *Did you bring any other technology with you to Europe?*

My laptop.

- *Did you use any translation websites/apps to facilitate your journey?*

No.

## **Agob Interview**

**24th of March 2017 - Copenhagen, Trampoline House**

Short presentation

- Name: Agob
- Age: 27
- Origin : Hasakah (Kurdistan Syria)
- Activity: Granted the refugee status, currently working in a center for disable people

- *Could you make a list of the dates and countries you crossed ?*

I've been to Turkey, Greece and Switzerland, Germany and Denmark. End of 2013.

- *What kind of smartphone / mobile phone did you have by the time you made the journey to Europe?*

I had a really fucked up phone, you can buy it for 200kr. It had a camera, but a very bad one. Not a smartphone.

- *Did you choose Denmark as your final destination? If yes, how and why? If no, how did you end up in Denmark?*

It was a mistake. My plan was Sweden, I was heading towards Sweden.

- *During your journey, did you avoid some countries or places? Why? How did you know that these places were to avoid?*

Yeah sure because in Greece you know, people always prefer, the smugglers - it's easier for them you know I wanted to go to Sweden, but it's expensive to fly to Sweden I think from Greece so they would rather buy a you a ticket to Italy which is way cheaper. Then they would say, they'll kind of convince you you know? They'll be someone who will pick you up and guide you to the next airplane - it's really easy so they will explain and then...yeah so I was told that, as he said, you can go to Sweden from Switzerland and it's really easy and there will be some people waiting for you in Zurich airport. So of course I would and I heard also that Zurich they have a really good control of their airport. Travelling with fake document it's also risky. If I was stopped in Zurich they would also say you have to stay here, they would force me to stay. The closest to Sweden was the better for me actually. Germany when he told me it was hard and not easy to Sweden and then I told him Germany. Also he says that it's the same and he says that Zurich it's close and they speak German bla bla bla.

- *During your journey, what was/were your communication tools (smartphones apps):*
  - *With your family?*

Phone. And also facebook, I went to a cafe. I used it to skype and facetime. Skype from a cafe.

- *Info and news sharing?*

Internet cafés for that. My phone had no internet.

- *Where to go, journey advice?*

Smugglers. I didn't believe what he said, but I had to because I knew everyone would say the same. It could also be true, but you could also just be lucky that day. 2 weeks after I was stopped in Denmark and some people I met in Greece went the same way and they made it to Sweden. They drove through Germany and Denmark and made it.

- *And so you were stopped in Copenhagen airport or train station?*

No no I was stopped in Esbjerg. We drove not more than an hour and then there was a control on the highway that said you to slow down your speed down to 20kms/h. There was no way to skip or go away or avoid the control so we had to go. And then there were the police checking the cars, they wouldn't check all the cars they would just look and then control or continue.

- *Do you think that having a phone made your journey easier? Why? How?*

Yes of course. Maybe you have a friend, if I had a friend in Denmark at that time he would tell me not to drive through Denmark and tell me about the control.

Also if you want to call your family and say you are safe you have arrived. And also you don't pay the money, the smuggler, you don't pay all the money before you have arrived before you have reached your last destination.

- *Did having a phone make it easier for you to communicate with your family and therefore make the separation less difficult?*

Maybe. I don't know. Like it could also be that if I didn't have my phone I would only use the computer the opposite I don't know. For some people it doesn't take more than a week to get from Syria to Sweden. Your parents know that you are on your way and it's not easy so. (just let them know when you have arrived).

- *Is there a resource or an app that particularly helped you during your journey? If yes, which one?*

No, not really.

- *When arriving in certain countries were you aware of the political situation beforehand or smugglers? If not, how did you gain knowledge on the subject?*

Of course I knew about the smuggler, because I made an agreement with him before I left my country you know and we agreed on how much I'm going to pay and all this stuff.

- *How did you find shelter, food and/or services that provided them along the way in each country? Did the smuggler help you or did you have family or use the internet?*

The smuggler I dealt with - I slept at his place for a week, I paid him enough money so I had a place to stay. He lived in Aksaray in Turkey - everything is reachable - restaurants.

- *In Zurich you stayed with your...?*

Uncle so I had help.

- *What about in Denmark?*

I was in a, not in a jail, but in a border control thing. It was Friday and I had to wait until Monday because it was the weekend. I knew I would be stuck in this place with no way out to Sweden anymore.

- *You were forced to stay in Denmark.*

Yeah I was forced and I refused to give fingerprints. I had a court appointed lawyer, he said if you don't ask for asylum in Denmark you will be in a - they will keep me for 2/3months. So I would have been sent back to Turkey.

- *Did you know where to buy the necessary material (sim card, credit top-up)? If yes, how? Or did the smuggler do it?*

I did it.

- *Did NGOs provide specific services related to mobile phones inquiries on your way (eg. UNHCR). Your case is different so were you in any camps?*

Yes in Turkey. Actually it wasn't a camp I was in a prison for 10 days or 9 days. I swam across the river from Turkey to Greece.

- *When you were in the prison did you have any access to internet or mobile phones?*

We weren't allowed to, but actually we hide the phone and then we smuggle it in and I spoke to my family and told them I was in a prison, but described it in a way that was funny.

- *What was the overall cost of your journey with regard to communication spending? Can you make an estimate if you do not know the exact figure (power charge, battery, sim cards...)*

It was really expensive to use the phone. Calling Turkey to Syria was really expensive. I don't know if i can give you a number. Let's say at least €500 both in Turkey and Greece. Because I also used the phone from Turkey to Sweden to call my family in Sweden and Switzerland.

- *And so these calls were essential for communicating with your family and letting them know how you are?*

That was the purpose of using the phone of course.

- *Was connectivity to the internet essential to every part of your journey?*

Important to maybe, not because I want to find my way myself, but to keep connection with my family and my friends. But it was pretty important actually.

- *Did you take photographs along the way? Did you store photos of your family/memories?*

I took a lot of photos - for me and to send to my family. I didn't really have photos stored on my phone, I brought a hard disk with me.

- *Were you able to charge your phone whenever you could?*

No. In the prison in Turkey I smuggled the phone in, so I obviously couldn't charge it - it wasn't easy.

- *Do you know about any new apps meant for refugees to help them on the way to Europe?*

I don't think so. Could be google map if people want to find a way themselves, but that would be really hardcore. I don't think a Syrian would know the which way is the best from Turkey to Greece because we have no idea. I knew which way was the best from Syria to Turkey even without using any map.

- *Why would a Syrian not know how to get from Turkey to Greece?*

If you are going and you have a visa and of of course you can figure it out, but if you are going illegally it would be really hard I think.

- *Did you use any translation websites/apps to facilitate your journey?*

Yeah. In Turkey I did. There was a lot of places where you, where they don't really speak English so I had to learn some word in Turkish so maybe like: "I want you", "you want" these kind of things, also in Greece.

- *What did you use? Google translate?*

Google Translate yeah. At the internet cafés. I didn't go because I want to find out the word, maybe while I am there. I'm there so I think (i'll look it up).

- *What does your phone represent to you? Was it an essential part of your journey?*

It was like more important than the money I have with me here. It was the only thing can connect me with my family, my people. If something will happen I have to call them. I also bought an international sim card when I left Syria actually, but then I threw it away in Turkey it was very expensive to use it.

- *Did you buy a new sim card in each country?*

Yeah in Turkey and in Greece, it was this Lycamobile it wasn't expensive, but the credit was expensive.

- *So for you your phone was very much a lifeline? Could you imagine your journey without your phone? How would you have done it?*

Yeah. Hhhm yeah I think it's possible. It makes it a little more difficult not having the phone.

- *Other than apps, photos and phone numbers was there anything you stored on your phone that was indispensable to you?*

Not really no.

- *You knew not to give your fingerprints in Denmark. How did you know that? Did the smuggler tell you? Did you make research so you knew what to avoid doing?*

My family in Sweden told me to avoid going through so many countries. Maybe one stop is ok. They were against that I should fly to Zurich. But...and then I didn't listen to them. I said "fuck it!" I will just make it. Because I was tired of being in Greece you know, I wasn't even that much, I didn't stayed there for there that long maybe 3 weeks. I was tired of staying there and I had to find another smuggler, the one that I was dealing with, he said that in the beginning we will have a week if I don't figure out, if you don't fly during this week then you can go somewhere else. It was like a deal. I told him how long time will I stay in Greece he said 1 week, I gave him 10 days and he preferred to have families and stuff because it was easier for them to make money. Because family with kids they just go through the control and they don't check so much, but if you are travelling alone then maybe it is more risky. So then I found another smuggler, he said Zurich and I said ok.

- *You said that your mobile phone was super simple - like a nokia. But if you can imagine yourself, but with a smartphone (like an iphone) do you think it would have been different?*

I think it would be the same. But now if I would go back to Syria and come through the same now I have learned a lot of things along the way you know so maybe I would avoid, I would say no to fly to Zurich - I would say no even to flying to Denmark. And I would maybe a little more and just fly direct to Sweden. Maybe I would offer him so extra money just to make sure you know that I'm in Sweden you know. Even though I paid a lot of money you know. We agreed on €5000, but I gave him only €3,500 because i told him if I'm stuck somewhere there will be some people waiting for me in Switzerland - there wasn't anyone I was waiting there for 5hrs, I called him and his phone was of

course off. I said ok I called my uncle and then he said just take a taxi, and I will send you my friend address, because my uncle he lived not in Zurich in Bellinzona on the Italian border so it was 3hrs. I will just give you my friend address so you can just stay there until I come.

- *So the smuggler told you to go to Zurich, said somebody would meet you?*

It was kind of easy for them maybe. It was the easiest way while I was there and then I said ok. Even my uncle said don't do it, don't come. If you want to go to Sweden, don't come to Zurich, but I did it anyway.

- *Do you think going to Zurich was why you couldn't get to Sweden? What would have been another route to get to Sweden?*

Maybe waiting a little more, more patience maybe. But I'm happy I'm not in Sweden actually, like not like I hate Sweden - I have my mother, my brothers, sister - they're in Sweden. I can't of get used to Denmark, I have a life here.

- *We asked you about these apps - can we maybe try one (Refugee text)? It's quite simple, it's through facebook messenger. (explanation of the app)*

Agob tried the app, but we were unable to both record and use it at the same time. He stated that whilst it was useful, he probably would have simply called his uncle for this information instead of using Refugee Text. Maybe a person who doesn't have any family or friends would have used it.

(Notes taken from this non-recorded part).

- *It tells you about the services in each country (DRC, Trampoline house).*

I think it's a good thing for people who don't have any contact - people who can't use computer.

**Saed:** Few people have these iPhones and can reach internet on the way also Smugglers tell people them not to do it, not to use these things.

- *The smugglers tell people not to use the internet?*

**Saed:** Yeah, because they are afraid of being caught, of being traced.

**Agob:** Depends if you are independent travelling, like staying in a hotel you just stay in your hotel and meet your smuggler the day you are travelling. (This is in reference to not needing internet or services as your smuggler guides you all along the way).

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## Dejene Interview

**17th of March 2017 - Copenhagen, Trampoline House**

Short presentation

- Names Dejene
- Age: 29
- Origin : Ethiopia

- Activity : Asylum seeker, living in a camp, Sjølsmark (?)

- *Could you make a list of the dates and countries you crossed ?*

Italy (18th February 2015) - France - Germany - Denmark (16th March 2015). Stay in Italy for a while, 2-3 days in France, Germany 2 weeks.

- *What kind of smartphone / mobile phone did you have by the time you made the journey to Europe ?*

I did have Samsung S3 – it is a smartphone.

- *Did you choose Denmark as your final destination ? If yes, how and why ? If no, how did you end up in Denmark ?*

Of course, yeah.

- *Why?*

In Libya before Italy, so when I was leaving Libya, I knew 2 danish women, they came to the place where we live, and help us like by giving the soap, clothes, medicines, and sometimes some food because while in Libya we cannot go out, to buy the medicines. So they come and help us and then they have some plastic bags that said danish refugee council - and then I said I will come to Denmark, that's only my reason.

- *During your journey, did you avoid some countries or places? Why? How did you know that these places were to avoid?*

Not good to be in Italy - life is difficult and of course I also saw it when I was there, people are sleeping in the streets, no housing, no work, no education.

- *People said that Italy was bad - is that people you've met?*

People did not say that it was bad, they said life is difficult in Italy - they are not giving you a house so people start living in the streets, no access for education which (?) so Italy was not my choice.

- *During your journey, what was/were your communication tools (smartphones apps):*

- *With your family ?*

When I was in Sudan and in Libya, just I used my phone only to call, because there is no internet access. I only I used it to call to my family. But when I arrived in Italy, some places there was wifi so I used facebook, viber and stuff like that etc.

- *Info and news sharing country you were in or other country in Europe ?*

Actually, I do have a brother in Germany who live in Frankfurt, so I got a lot of information through him. But I never used my phone for the destination or checked maps and stuff. Also most of my journey I follow a agent or a smuggler, I was following him. Only I use for calling purpose most of the time.



- *When your brother gave you advice, did he call you or did he emailed you or sent it on facebook? How did he give you the information?*

Most of the time he is gonna call or send an sms with the name of the smuggler sometimes the name of the place, especially in Italy, I don't know anything and he was in Italy. Some cities I don't remember.

- *It was your brother who gave you the number for the smuggler?*

Yes.

- *Because he had travelled the same route?*

He travelled the same route, a long time ago, like 10 years ago. He arrived Europe in 6- 5 years ago so he had a lot of contacts.

- *Could you have made this journey without your phone? Why not?*

I think not at all for me, cause I'm totally new for Europe, so I cannot do anything, also the language is better nowadays, but it was even difficult to ask someone, so the phone was completely helpful, so sometimes he would write to me a message just I'm gonna show to someone (message from brother) and then they understand and helping for what I need.

- *So your brother would tell you what to say and you just showed somebody the phone?*

Yeah, for example at some point, I needed to change a 100 dollar, so to use it in Italy I have to change to Euro and then it was difficult to explain to the people in Italy - I need this dollar to change to euro and then I tried to talk to them, I think they are tired like people ask so many so they really run away. So I talked to him and he write to me something like, also he was in Italy for a long time so he knows a bit of italian, so write to me in Italy and I will show it to one guy and then he understood and then he helped me to change that money. So the phone had a big role for me.

- *So then your brother is like an interpreter?*

Yes

- *Does this mode of communication render the separation from your family less difficult?*

Yes of course, I mean, I really I use a lot nowadays my phone especially this video calling (emo, viber) because I really need to talk to his mother, at least two or three times in a week, like also sometimes she has some problems she has to see him, she is happy. Only if I call her in audio, so I just have to put the video so yeah.

- *Is Viber the app you used the most or is there another app?*

Yes, there was a lot of apps because most of the time in my country there is internet problem, because the government sometimes they cut. So sometimes Viber is bad and I'm gonna use Imo, when Imo becomes bad I'm gonna use WhatsApp, and stuff like that.

- *So you changed between different ones depending on the connection?*

Sometimes the internet quality is not the same, makes the apps good or not, sometimes Imo is good and sometimes it's bad, same with Whatsapp. So I'm gonna choose which ones.

- *When arriving in certain countries were you aware of the political situation beforehand? If not, how did you gain knowledge on the subject?*

I mean I was in Libya, where there is no government, so it was a horrible place like so difficult to live so when I think about Europe, I was sure like maybe I will get confused but it's not like difficult, at least I can get help so I can get information from my brother, so I'm not really stressed when I arrived Europe, in Italy and France, everywhere, just I don't have family or friends, just I have plenty of information.

- *Did you do some research on DK for example? Before you arrived or no?*

I did not do anything, I left my country suddenly, I did not come to Europe purposely, I was in prison, and suddenly out of prison and then I did not go to my home just I travelled to Sudan, then Libya, but then I arrived Europe but I know what is Denmark, where is Denmark, I know a lot of things about Denmark like the football players, so I do have some information about the country.

- *How did you find shelter, food and/or services that provided them along the way in each country?*

That is thanks to smugglers, I have smuggler who is gonna show me every place, my brother sent me many contacts, so I already paid for the smugglers so they bought food for us, but we slept many times in train station because smugglers said 'today we cannot travel, there is a lot of control in Europe, for your ID', only possibilities, we had to wait him. Problem was places to stay - so challenging, but food was not really problem for me, like I can buy easily.

- *And did you have the same smuggler from Italy to Denmark?*

The same somalian guy the whole way.

- *Were you by yourself with him or there was a group?*

When we were in Italy, we were 7 and then we give him money, and he bought the tickets for us and then also give us some food. Then he told we had to be in some place together, and here someone has to be 15 meters away from me and then he gonna give us some signs when the train is come and then he enter to the train and he was also there and then we have to look him over distance, when he go out we have to follow and stuff like that.

- *There was 7 of you from Italy to Denmark?*

To France, and then some of them they stay in France, and then also he collected some people, I'm not quite sure the number, but other people to Germany so then again we follow him and in Germany we stayed for 2 weeks and called my brother, tell me to come buy a ticket and everything. And then we are also like 8- 9 people from Germany to Denmark. And I don't know where we come to Denmark, just ask someone who came to us that we had to go out, and I know the capital of

Denmark, but I waited until I heard Copenhagen, central station and I go out there. We don't know where to go out from train.

- *How did you connect to national networks in each European country? And what did you think of them in terms of ease of use?*

So I'm gonna use different sim cards. When I arrived Italy just I bought a new sim card, I think it costs 7 euros or something. And then I used until France like somewhere, and then when I arrived in Paris, just I bought a new one. just the smugglers bought the sim card for us and then in Germany my brother give me and here in Denmark when I arrived Copenhagen, just like directly to Sandholm center, no I asked someone, like I'm new I need to go to refugee camps and he said I had to take the S train, you have to use this train and you have to go out in this station then he write to me and I am using that. I asked some African guy - my better advice go to ask some black ones.

- *Did you know where to buy the necessary material (sim card, credit top-up)? If yes, how? When you needed more money on your phone, did smugglers do that?*

Always when he bought, many gave him money and it's mostly my brother he calls because I had to save money, just I'm only using for receive using only if I need for micro second and then he call me back.

- *Did NGOs provide specific services related to mobile phones inquiries on your way (eg. UNHCR)?*

You do call when we were at sea, in the Mediterranean, like cause we lost the direction and the boat problem with the engine - so we call to Italian life savers

- *How did you have their number?*

Our smugglers are gave us the number in Libya and the GPS

- *So they gave you that when you got on the boat?*

Yes to the captain.

- *Did they text it to you?*

There was a Sim card called Meda in Libya that is working until the border of Italy - so we have that one with the phone, and then smugglers draw the direction for the GPS and then you to go 3 hours directly and then turn for 2 hours right and then turn left for 3 hours and then you are going to see a sign a long long metal thing in the water that means there is the border between Libya and Italy so then he say you have to give a call.

But our smuggler he was really stupid and then drop the GPS to the water, no no not the smuggler the captain. You know when you drive the boat you don't pay to the smuggler, - but the Sudanese guy he did not know how to drive honestly, but he drove one or two time and he said he was going to drive, and then suddenly when he tried to put a woman besides him he drop the GPS to the water. And then we lost the direction, went to Tunisia, and then again we turned back, it takes 4 nights and 4 days in the water.

- *How many people were in your boat?*

420 people in the boat.

- *What was the overall cost of your journey with regard to communication spending? Can you make an estimate if you do not know the exact figure (power charge, battery, sim cards...)*

It's different from country to country -in Libya only sim card was very expensive, like 50 dinards, I think it's like 50dkk for a sim card and you pay receipt for 5 or 10 dinars. I really use to, I stay 4 or 5 months in Libya, he had to use many times the receipt during these months, to receive call from family, at least I will call one in a week.

- *So if you had to guess, maybe 100 euros total?*

In Libya, more more I used to call many many times so around 400-500 euros in Libya. From Italy to Denmark I only spent maximum 15 euros in Europe - sim cards are not expensive, like Libya but in Italy I cannot by a sim card because of registration.

- *Was connectivity to the internet essential to every part of your journey?*

I couldn't because when I arrived in Italy, there is no connection for 2 weeks between me and my family. Because when you go to sea, there is like a big house where you gonna sit there, and they take sim card phone and everything they throw it, you don't have anything, I cannot call. Just we go to the sea for four or five days, there is no connection and lot of boat are sinked in the water, my mom thought I was dead and then my brother he tried to call and explain, she never believe him, she not pick his phone. And then when I arrived Italy, I only had dollar so I need to change, I don't know how to buy sim, I don't know where. So I have to send her a photo so go somewhere and use the wifi and after she saw me she believe me. It was so important for me.

- *A proof to show that you were alive?*

Yes.

- *Were there any countries and/or places in which you struggled to find internet connection?*

Everywhere - because I don't know which place have wifi and difficult to connect because I did not connect to wifi before, not user of wifi before. So I had to go in big building, because in my country you have to go to big buildings, hotels. I did the same in Europe, go there and ask people how to connect. Like every place is not easy, only Germany it was easy.

- *Was there wifi in the services centres you used (camps, stands)?*

Big building in Italy at first - was there wifi there? Yes there was a lot of wifi. People connected.

- *So when you arrived in Italy you did not stay in a camp?*

I stayed for 4-5 days in a hotel.

- *On your arrival in your host country how did you know where to go, who to talk to?*

I have no idea, I don't where is asylum camp and just my brother explained like refugee camp.

- *How did you use your phone to prepare for your travel? How did it help you out, or not?*

I left from a prison in Ethiopia, I arrived Sudan, and then I bought a sim card in Sudan - and I know my brother, my mother phone like orally in Ethiopia. I'm also only calling for them not many people. Any saved numbers or photos. Few numbers in my mind which is important.

- *How and for what did you use your phone for on the crossing from Libya to Italy ?*

Only this captain had a phone - they took the phone away in Libya. In Italy the smuggler bought a small phone and sim card.

- *Did the smugglers explain why they took the phone away from you in Libya?*

Libya, no you cannot talk one word with Libyan smugglers, don't know why they took their phone. If you ask one word they are gonna come with body guards and sticks, and gonna beat you so no communication with them. We do call the coast guards but we were so far so they could not help us.

- *Did you struggle to charge your phone during the journey? Did you pay to use charging stations at any point?*

Yes, but we had a lot of extra batteries - when you travel you have to be clever and prepare everything. More than 5 batteries in Libya always charging when all are full. When I crossed especially in Sahara, I needed charge. No, not at all, never paid to charge. In Italy in the Hotel I used charging there / and the Smuggler took us two nights at his place so we charge there. And in France - there was some cafe close to the station we go there me and one guy from Mauritania and the smuggler and then we buy sandwich and then charging my phone. always I shut down his phone if not using it, open it when I call.

- *Do you know about any new apps meant for refugees to help them on the way to Europe?*

No I don't.

- *Did you feel empowered by the use of your mobile phone during your journey? (more independent choices, less reliant on smugglers?)*

Yes definitely like a lifeline. If I do not have my phone, like a blind guy and don't know where to go, so maybe he gonna go this, rotate in one area. I have no idea, to go train station I have to ask someone or call, that Phone was like my eyes.

- *Did you bring any other technology with you to Europe?*

No other piece of technology, only my phone. Also I got my phone in Sudan and I got a lot of bad bad situations through my phone I remember so not good idea.

- *Did you use any translation websites/apps to facilitate your journey?*

Yes, my brother was my interpreter, I can write in my language for my brother and my brother is gonna write in Italian if I need help from Italian. Just show to someone who is close to you and then I will show.

- *Also you could trust him because he was your brother?*

Of course, I had no any other choice.

- *Did you speak english before you arrived in Europe?*

I do but it was like so so broken. So I learned in Trampoline House.

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## **Jean-Claude Interview**

**24th of March 2017 - Copenhagen, Trampoline House**

Short presentation :

- Name: Jean-Claude
- Age: 49
- Origin: Democratic Republic of Congo
- Activity: Asylum seeker, living in Sandholm asylum center

- *Could you make a list of the dates and countries you crossed ?*

I passed through Congo Brazzaville a neighboring country - and then I fly to Istanbul, in Turkey, and then from Istanbul to here. It was in february 2013.

- *What kind of smartphone / mobile phone did you have by the time you made the journey to Europe?*

It was a Small Nokia I think so not a smartphone because at that time the iPhone was not existing in my country.

- *Did you choose Denmark as your final destination? If yes, how and why? If no, how did you end up in Denmark ?*

No, the conditions that I fled were not sufficient in order to choose a country, I escaped suddenly so I should save my life first because I had big problem with our government, this way I fled so I could not choose any country.

The person who helped me had a contact with a Danish person in Istanbul, a man who committed me to that person, and he said the only place I can help you to reach is Copenhagen because he had his house here. He was a friend for one of my friend, but yes I can call him a smuggler.

- *During your journey, did you avoid some countries or places? Why? How did you know that these places were to avoid?*

Rwanda - Uganda - Burundi (sending fighters to Congo) - not welcomed in these countries.

- *European countries ?*

Yes, I know Greece, I couldn't go there because I know that living conditions are really tough and there is a kind a racism there, so I couldn't go to Greece.

- *During your journey, what was/were your communication tools (smartphones apps):*

- *With your family ?*

No sometimes, I used to call them. You know in my country it is difficult to find internet all the days because of some electricity problems. And the only way you can reach your family is by phone so sometimes I call on the phone in order to communicate with them because they didn't know where I was and I should communicate to tell them about my life.

- *Info and news sharing?*

Neither from my phone or from my family because I left suddenly and the one who helped me told me you don't have any choice and you must go, even the flight, and the place I didn't choose any.

- *Could you have made this journey without your phone? Why not?*

Yes I could because I was in danger, even if I didn't have a phone I didn't have the choice.

- *Did it make it easier?*

Not really, because only the importance of using the phone was to communicate with my family and it was only at the end when I reached the destination.

- *How did you find shelter, food and/or services that provided them along the way in each country? Istanbul and Denmark?*

I asked people some questions where to buy the sim card, credit card, all this, by using my English language because I supposed English was international language and everywhere the most popular place you can find people speaking in english and I used it to be understand, in the airport and public places also.

- *Did you go straight to Sandholm?*

No no, I did not even know that people were seeking asylum here and when I came it was only from Istanbul that the smuggler told me that if we are lucky and we go to Copenhagen, then I may help you to seek asylum. And I asked him what was seeking asylum? He explained me there are some centers, special camps, you go there they will take care of you and explained the programs, so they will try to help you in one way or another. When we reached Copenhagen he helped me because I stayed few days in his house, he should travel to Spain and he gave me the plan how to reach Sandholm, told me you have to take the S train from Central Station...

- *Did NGOs provide specific services related to mobile phones inquiries on your way (eg. UNHCR) - top up, charging?*

Only in Istanbul, yes, in the airport I tried to charge my phone because there are some special place for passengers. And it was the only place where I charged my phone.

- *What was the overall cost of your journey with regard to communication spending? Can you make an estimate if you do not know the exact figure (power charge, battery, sim cards...)*

Not more than 100 dollars - maybe around 40 or 50 dollars, because I did not know how much money I will spend before reaching the place I'm going, and I was afraid in using much money for credit.

- *How did you use your phone to prepare for your travel? How did it help you out, or not?*

No, even that phone was not mine, it was given by the friend who helped me, he gave me that phone and the number that was used through that phone. I tried to keep it so I could communicate with my parents and family.

- *Did you bring any other technology with you to Europe?*

When I reached Europe, I used sometimes my Facebook and emails, I did that on a computer sometimes in Sandholm, sometimes here in Trampoline house.

- *Did you use any translation websites/apps to facilitate your journey?*

It was not important for me because when I was talking with my family I speak in my mothertongue, I don't need any help for that. In Denmark I'm using English, because Danish is very difficult. Make effort to explain myself in Danish.

- *Did you take photographs along the way? When? Of what?*

No, I did not get any photographs because I was afraid as I was a senior officer in my country I was afraid to be identified and arrested on the way.

- *When you wanted to prove to your family that you were okay, you did not send a selfie?*

No no, I could not use these photographs, in my country it is a danger. I know that all senior officers they are followed by security services, and I couldn't try to use my photographs and send it to my country, maybe it was a risk also for them.

- *What does your phone represent to you? What was it worth on the journey? What is it worth now?*

It was important in the way that when I reached Europe, I communicated with my family. Lifeline once I was in Denmark. Now it is a part of my life because I can't live without it, all my numbers from my friends are in my mobile phone, and all the important persons I have the numbers - a connection to all the world. All my best friends I have the numbers on my phone, and my family. My mobile is a life connection.

- *Could you imagine your journey without your phone? How would you have done it?*



Now I have a Samsung. My trip was not a normal trip because as I told you I fled suddenly I could not use all this material even if I had a smartphone, I couldn't. But if I did a normal journey, I could. Those who are doing a longer journey - I know that smartphones are really useful to them through Instagram, WhatsApp and also Facebook.

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## **Zaïd Interview**

**3rd of February 2017- Brussels, Café Pantin**

Short presentation:

- Name: Zaïd
- Age; 27
- Origin: Mosul, Iraq
- Activity: Granted the refugee status in Belgium, living in Brussels.

- *When did you leave Mosul?*

June 2014.

- *When did you leave Turkey?*

I left Turkey in August 2015.

- *Do you remember the date exactly?*

The date exactly, the 22nd or 23rd of August.

- *When did you arrive in Belgium?*

September 9th 2015 at like I think midnight.

- *Can you tell me which countries you crossed?*

After Turkey? I arrived in Greece, in an island, Lesbos. Athens, and then I think it's Thessaloniki, and then I don't remember at the border, it is the one where there is the railway. Macedonia, the borders, in between the fields, Serbia, and then I went to the camp of Pershievo, south of Serbia. And after it's Belgrade, another city in the north at the border with Hungary, I don't remember the name of the city exactly. Then to Hungary, crossing through the woods to Budapest, took the train to Budapest towards Vienna. and from Vienna I crossed by train to Munich, Stuttgart, Frankfurt, Cologne, and then Brussels.

- *Park Maximilien ?*

Oui.

- *So the first question is did you choose Belgium as a final destination? If yes, why?*

Well, the first part of it, it was not a choice it was optional to go to every country actually but the thing is Brussels and Belgium is on the far west of the European union and when you have options to go further you always try to go forward.

But the thing is because before I did the journey many people did it especially 4 months before I did, so you have many people especially on Facebook, there are many groups and Facebook pages that usually don't deal with that but they do because people are asking. Like real popular Iraqi pages, Syrian pages, so you go and check the news. So people are asking where to go and you know Europe is like huge area. People are asking where to go? why? when? you know what is the mean, what is the reason?

I noticed that there are 4 countries that are mainly offering asylum or accepting the most of people. They were Austria, and Austria is considered as the first destination, because it is the destination after Hungary and you know you don't want to get caught in Hungary. You go to Austria and then you are alright. You have a lot of refugees in Austria, most of them got caught by the police and forced to apply for asylum. At my time it was not obligatory, it was more like yeah you wanna apply ? The police was asking if we wanted to apply for asylum here you know or you have to leave? You have to do some paper stuff and then you leave legally.

Austria, Germany, Finland and Belgium. These countries are really different or not, some seems quite similar but Finland is like a scandinavian country, Germany is very industrial country, Belgium? We don't know anything about Belgium. I was googling many informations about Belgium, about Germany.

- *When did you do that ?*

About the time I was preparing to leave. While in Turkey, I applied for asylum through the UNHCR but the thing is if I was waiting in Turkey and waiting to travel to the United States, bam, Trump banned all the muslims.

At that time I was trying to save some money, and to know if I wanna go, because I was waiting for the UNHCR. But then all of my friends were travelling and you know you had to go because you don't have any friends anymore and the thing that made me stay in that country, that made me wait for asylum, they left. They were telling me "just come, many people are getting asylum". and then I asked them about time, time was important for me because I waited over a year for nothing in Turkey so the thing is I was checking which countries are faster for paper work and which countries are better for asylum and which countries are better after asylum. You know each countries are different in the way they treat refugees including asylum seekers because you know they treat asylum seekers differently than refugees. So to Finland it's difficult because it takes a lot of money to spend especially if you go with smugglers, so it's a very distant one. You probably have to cross Germany, from Germany to Sweden, to Finland, or from Poland to Finland. So it's more risky to get caught.

You know Germany, is a good country but it's full of asylum seekers especially Syrian refugees. And they prefer more Syrians to Iraqis, it's faster for them in paper work, everywhere actually not only in Germany. It's even in Belgium.

So my first destination was Germany actually, because I was like I don't mind learning German, Germany is a good country, I don't mind being there for a couple of years and then when I saw these huge amounts of people, I don't want to stay in Austria to be honest I didn't feel right.

- *So you felt it when like you went to Austria? You saw how it was ?*

Yeah yeah I saw the people and I don't know it's like when you try to play a game or gamble, you don't want to take it like when the first end and then stop. So I had the choice to go further, go more.

I went to Germany and I was like I didn't feel right in it. Even though I went to a lot of cities, I tried to go to many cities I met a lot of Germans, but I didn't feel right because I saw this huge amount of people applying, it felt like the UNHCR again.

Then I was talking to my friends using my phone with FB, texting many people, I contacted many Facebook pages and groups, telling them do you know anyone who is living in Germany? Someone who just came here? How is it? What should I do? What will you do if you apply for asylum? Will you go to a camp? Will you go to a house? How are the facilities ? Many things you can find through the Internet.

So I had a lot of information, Finland is the best before asylum seeking but it's too far away and concerned with those elements of you are more comfortable: you have better housing, better salary and as well as after asylum it's better more benefits but it's a very cold country, the language is very difficult, and you need a lot of efforts to go there.

Germany is a good industrial country, it's also good before asylum, really good after asylum but it has a lot of refugees and it's a very big country so you have to be really careful in the cities, you can't just wander around.

Austria was at a point closed and opened to asylum again. Some other countries were opened to asylum but nobody goes there because you know some people went there like France, nobody wants to go to France, most of people don't want to go to Sweden or Norway but even if those countries are better nobody wants to go to Denmark because it's harder to accept people, there are not many people accepted.

Then I heard one guy saying "You go to Belgium, you'll get your papers in 4 to 5 months" which was like wow, in 4 to 5 months? It's like nothing. But he added "but Belgium is a very small country, divided in 2 governments, and the thing is if you stay in Belgium they don't have many camps and the camps are really shitty so you don't get well paid (pocket money, allowances).

Like for example I will compare it if you live in a camp in Brussels or Belgium in general, not a social house. Most of the camps of Belgium they gave you per week 7 euros and 70 cents. Which is 1,6 euro per day which is nothing but they provide food for you. Some camps don't provide food, they give you points and you buy it with them. Our camp was more like most of the camps, provided with food and two tickets by train per month if you wanna go somewhere. So that's the conditions for Belgium but it's for 4 to 5 months.

Finland they pay you 70 euros per week, ten times more, along with a transport card. As well as in Germany, they pay you €250 per month if you are an asylum seeker. Belgium they pay you 28 euros if you are an asylum seeker. But Germany probably takes you 1 to 2 years, Belgium takes you 4 to 5 months in general.

But when I came it was very very crowded but I felt that, it was a lot of people yes true, but people were telling me that Belgium was the fastest in paper work, so compared to other countries yes it is the fastest and for a guy from Mosul they never rejected any guy from Moussoul. Not as I heard, all the guys from Mussul they got positive, at least refugee status or subsidiary protection. Well, now I'm hearing that people in Finland Mosul they are getting negatives as well as in Austria. So Belgium was more sympathetic to the people who are really in danger like if you are from Mosul they accept you. Bagdad it was more or less. But for me, all in all, it took me 7 months being in a camp, in a city close to Liege.

- *So it was not a choice, but it came to the idea of these 4 countries?*

I prioritized Germany in the beginning, but I thought that I could go more, further, why don't I go? If I had the possibility, I would have go to England, knowing the language and the culture. But it wasn't within the Schengen area so you have to go by passports you don't have that, it's risky you probably need a lot of money to cross so it was too much for me, I didn't have the money. So I stayed in Belgium and I gave it a bit of faith bcs I found a lot of good things, I met a lot of people. One of my best friend I met here. The second or the third I met my best friend in the park, while partying. He is a musician as well, we connected in 10 minutes. And also a lot of people were volunteering so it gave me more faith.

And to be honest, after staying in Brussels for a week in the beginning. I saw something very unique – most of the people I met were not Belgians, were Europeans. Like you find 3 Belgians and 7 europeans. Along with the Arabic community, muslim society as well.

You have a non religious community, a religious one, you have diversity of languages, 3 cultures, 3 religions. You have all those people who are very different and there is no problem with that. So I felt it's more where I want to be. I wanted to live in a very international world or city, I lived in Istanbul for over 4 months, I worked in a hostel for a couple of months and I was meeting ppl from everywhere and it never felt better, it felt like travelling you know? For me Brussels was like seeing all of Europe in one place.

- *During your journey, did you avoid some countries ? Did you know that you should not cross this country or...?*

The thing is you have like a route to go, a path to go, so basically the fastest way as crossing from Turkey to Greece. I wanted to cross through Bulgaria but it was very difficult. So I didn't go bcs if you go to Bulgaria, usually, it's not like Hungary where it can be dangerous to be captured, Bulgaria can be fatal because Bulgarian army or border police they are armed and they are authorized to shoot at sight.

To cross through Greece, you have to avoid going left or right, you have to go North, continue to Macedonia, to Serbia. This is the way that people use before you so you go on their trails. I was going to the borders as fast as I can. I was avoiding travelling by day especially when you are at the

border area, you avoid travelling by day. At a point, we were almost caught by the Hungarian army, I had to run away with a couple of guys, and all the of the group that was with us, approximately 30 to 40 people got captured, go to prison and forced to give their fingerprints in Hungary. If they apply in another country, they will have the Dublin thing.

So, we had to run away, and wait for a day just to lose the heat you know? And I had an argument with a couple of guys because I said that I didn't think it's a good idea to travel by night. But we always travel by night. And we can't walk to Budapest we need to take a car, and during the night we will see the cars' lights. Police expect us to travel at night so we are going to do the exact opposite. We go in public, we travel in public. We go in small groups, in 2, and we lose all the bags, bcs usually backpackers are either tourists or refugees. And tourists they have passports we don't have. And we avoided wearing old clothes. In each city we go to we go to any clothes shop and we buy new clothes, we don't have bags we only have our things, our money with us. That's how we avoided places, also the way most of people looked like or did.

The fastest way is the one I tried. If I want to go to Finland, I will avoid Denmark, or Poland. Or avoid getting into the cruise to Sweden, would avoid train. You don't avoid entirely a country, you avoid the mean of transportation, avoid travelling at a time because most people travel by night and you travel alone always.

When I was travelling to Budapest, I met some people but I quickly got separated with them bcs I don't want to be with people. Sometimes I was asking some people even the police, and with my English people won't think I'm a refugee, they would think that I am European southern European or latin or Mexican greek or I don't know, or I look like an arab, the sun was good so I look kind of an Indian.

- *How did you know that you had to behave like this? To avoid these paths, these ways of transportation?*

Because through your entire way, you depend on your phone. Having internet is the most important thing during the way because 24/7 contact via Whatsapp, Viber and Messenger or Facebook. As well as Google Maps.

When I was in Turkey I had Turkish sim card, when I was in Greece I had a Greek sim card, when I was in Serbia I had a Serbian sim card. Crossing to Budapest I did not need one. In Austria I bought a austrian sim card. It's cheaper than food, 5 euros you can survive a whole week in a country just by texting or browsing.

- *How did you get these information? On Facebook groups as you said?*

On Facebook groups, people traveling ahead of me. One week ahead of me, one day...

- *Friends?*

Yes, but also friends of friends. I was calling my friends "Dude do you know someone travelling?" "Yes, my cousin actually is in Serbia" and I was in Greece so I asked him what does he know, and he gave me his contact. So I go "Dude, I am a friend of your cousin, now in Greece" and the guy was like "Whatever you need, do this don't do that...". And I do the same when people try to come. When I

was in Hungary there was like a gas station where all the taxis are, if you go to the border you just go to the gas station and you find some taxis, you hide and you pay 200 euros to the taxi driver and he will get you to Budapest, to the train station, or to Vienna if you pay 250 per person. Like for a thousand euros, come on it's Hungary it's poor country.

There was a point where a friend of mine told me that the gas station was monitored and there was a lot of police checking, so it's a dead don't go there, don't go to that city. In Serbia, he told me don't go this way because if you go to the camps, you'll stay a lot of time, but I stayed in the camp. At my time, it was almost legal to travel from Greece to Serbia with a travel pass kind of, that allow you to stay in the country for a week in Greece, a day in Macedonia and in Serbia they scanned my fingerprints and gave me a paper which said that I could only stay 3 days. The thing that helped me was when I was in Budapest, I did not know where to cross there were controls on the train. I was trying to hire a taxi to Vienna, but very expensive, like 400 euros.

One of my friends told me "Zaid, I just arrived to Vienna, and I took train from Budapest and the Hungarian government they allow people who are stuck in Budapest to cross, without taking their fingerprints". We got to Vienna we were happy, in west banhof. A friend of mine also posted something in a group, saying that German government provided trains to cross from Vienna to Munich for free, and they were sending ships as well in Greece, there was a lot going on.

Some of my friends came after the blockage of the Hungarian border so they went through Croatia which was way easier. And less expensive, you don't need a smuggler, people were providing buses, and people were asking me how to cross Croatia, and I was like ok "go to this city, use google maps, you see it just walk and if you see someone in the street, ask him, " follow the train rail ways, you can find it on Google Maps".

- *During your journey, what was your communication tool, I mean especially your phone, but which app helped you out to contact your family first? What were you using the most, what was the easiest?*

I was using Facebook a lot to check. There was a time between Greece and Macedonia, the Macedonian army blocked the way they were shooting people rubber bullets, tear gas, so I was checking if I should go or not, leave Greece. I waited for 3 days after they blocked the border.

In Turkey and in Greece, it was mostly focused on Facebook because I was checking the possibility to find a smuggler, with my friends through Messenger to know how to find and checking news always to get what's going on and using viber to contact my dad directly. It's mostly Facebook, or Viber, or WhatsApp because those are the ways to communicate with your friends, family and they know other people. My friends helped me finding people. When I was in Turkey I was trying to find a smuggler and it was not possible to find a smuggler.

Google Maps was more in Greece to find a train station, more local areas. To be honest with you, when I was in Greece I did not wanted to just stay in it, I tried to enjoy it as well. I was like if I'm gonna tell people I crossed these countries, I'm gonna tell them that I enjoyed it. It was a sad time because how would you get the spirit to cross? You need to sheer up a bit.

Google maps was more in between these countries because if you wanna check the train station, check the time for the train, how long would take a walk especially in Hungary, crossing the borders. I need to know where is North West, where is the main street. How long is it going to take me in between this and that? Check the GPS and if you have sim card with internet, and buy an extra power bank, battery, it will last for 3 days.

Most of it was not really planned, most of it was improvised – when you reach a situation, you buy the necessary extra stuff. Change your clothes, preparing your phone and power bank. The plan is always changing on the way. You have to be up to date.

- *Do you think you would have been able to make this journey without your phone?*

Yes but it would have been really difficult like a blind man crossing the street without a stick, without a walking dog, without the warning signs / sounds that indicates that it is ok to cross. It is like going swimming in the ocean alone. For me, I would depend on someone with a smartphone, yes. Somebody without a smartphone would be vulnerable to many people, would not feel safe.

- *You felt safer?*

Yes, it was like a savior, a walking guide. For example, if we skip the asylum and refugee part, if you wanna go to a restaurant you are in Brussels, your friends tell you that they are in this street, in this bar, how do you do? You ask a lot of people, just to go there. You need to trust, you need to know the language of the people, your phone just tells you that is that and you take those streets, and it is in your language, whatever language you use.

But without a phone you need to have more faith in you, in people, risk your life, risk your journey, risk your money. To be honest, I know that for a family, for a woman, for a group of women, it is always safer to go in groups, that's the thing we used to do, but at some point you need to go alone. Without a phone you cannot go alone, because if you go alone you'll be lost. You need to check the direction, or either the sun and the stars. But that's pretty old and now we live in a world of technology so... It's a blessing and curse in the same time but when it's needed it's blessing, when it's not needed...

- *So it was necessary?*

Oh yeah yeah, it was very necessary because people, I can give you my own analysis, at least 50% of people would not do the journey if they don't have a cellphone. With the cellphone, everyone who was afraid, people were writing everything on Facebook, about the ways 'you just do that, we do that, you go to Izmir in Turkey and you will find a lot of smugglers, ask the people don't ask the smugglers where they are going to, make a group, go with the group, and when you cross, and when you are in Greece, you go away with the group or by yourself, you go to that city and do you gonna check it on the map, you check on google and then you ...'. Everything is explained, how. People know that. They were archiving or registering the whole journey, through pictures, information, checking google. You depend, it's 50% cellphone, 50% everything look food, being smart, being patient, and being brave. The phone without it, you will need to depend 150% on yourself.

- *You said that you were having guidelines on Facebook, information sharing and so on, but did you cross some of these information to make sure it was 100% sure? Because someone could just tell you to do that and then, from one day to another, it could change?*

Back in the beginning of 2015, there was no travel pass. You had to hire smugglers. And then when we had those pass, people were writing on FB like “Where do you cross to Greece?”, some people were actually trapped and had to pay money that they actually did not need to pay like 500euros to cross to Serbia, which cost you literally 100 euros or 50 euros. People did not know that information, they did not check, they did not have a smartphone, they did not check facebook, they were too scared to ask.

I always try to check my information by checking the new information on FB because you have people that has hundred thousands likes, hundred thousands followers, it was live feedback. You see people posting, now, like Ali he is in Germany, and all of his friends going like “Dude, how did you do, what did you do? Tell us everything, from A to Z”. I had some friends of mine who were in another city, they were in Izmir and I was in Istanbul, trying to get smugglers from Istanbul, and they were trying to cross to Greece with smugglers, because the only way to cross to Greece is with smugglers. There is no other way.

They told me that if they found someone they could trust they will tell me. We crossed at the same time but we did not meet. He was always a day or a country ahead of me. One day he was in Serbia and I was in Macedonia, I got stuck in Serbia because of this accident when a lot of people died in a van. And during that time I met a lot of smugglers, they took a lot of money, at least 1500 euros per person from Serbia to Hungary. And if you gonna go to Germany, you pay extra 300 euros.

The whole situation, the environment, the fact that if you go with smugglers you will give everything to them, you do what they tell you, they promise you dreams that are not true because you don't know. You have to pay money in advance, it's a big step to put faith in someone you don't know. And those people, they trade souls, they don't count you as a human but as a number. Especially on a boat, one more in 2000 euros more, so imagine 10 more on a boat. You can actually get 3 boats in one day, a lot of money in one day.

Friends were asking me why I was not working as a middle man, because a lot of my good friends were working as middleman, usually the smuggler request at least 700 dollars per person, so he is like ‘ok guys so I'm gonna give you a boat, a window to cross, and I am gonna expect from you guys to pay me something around 21 000 euros”, you say for the guy for 1000 euros, and you get 300 euros, or 400 euros if you are smart enough. The fee was 1200 euros.

You are a number to them, so how do you know you can find someone trusted enough. You either need to speak with them and be smart about it, or ask people about them. I was doing both. I stayed there for 2 weeks in Belgrade, went to a lot of chichas bars, met a lot of Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans who were actually middle men, and went to even non Arabic or refugee areas, went to nightclubs trying to expand my contacts, but what I found is at that time, I met this guy from Iraq, and he told me that since the accident, nobody was crossing, “if I send you you are gonna get caught”, so which one is better, being caught for free or for 1000 euros. You depend on your own. So he gave me my 500



euros back, because he felt bad from taking these 500 euros away from me with a fake promise, knowing the real situation.

You have to wait 2 weeks to do that. So I asked a lot of friends, and even my dad told me “if I were you, I would cross and take the train, get caught, give your fingerprints and go to Germany”. At that time Germany was letting people who had their fingerprints taken in Hungary enter the territory. Don’t make it too complicated.

With the smartphone, Facebook, experience of many people you meet, it’s like, it’s a very bad comparison, but Christopher Columbus, he would have never been able to find America without the experience of previous adventurers, previous experiences, navigations and tips. We also did that and with a bit of luck, I succeeded. The desperation point pushes you towards this bravery. You had to choose for your life. I have been in Iraq for my entire life, I tried to live before but did not succeed, but when I was at the ‘gun point’, I knew I would die or something, I was forced to do it. It doesn’t make me brave, the situation itself defines who you are.

- *What was really necessary - what kind of app? Would you have been to cross without Google maps?*

I can cross without Google Maps, but I cannot cross without Facebook.

If I have Facebook and Google Maps and I can cross wherever I want because through Facebook I can find many groups with people telling what to do, I can find many phone numbers within Facebook. Facebook and Messenger they are the same - you know, messenger is the only way to chat. Google Maps I use if I don’t depend on anyone else. Like if I depend on myself, for example when I was in Hungary I depend on Google Maps. When I was in Germany I depended on Google Maps to know the train times you know, that’s the only thing Google Maps shows you the way. Like for example when we were at sea point in Turkey crossing to Lesbos I checked Google Maps just to double check if we are really crossing to real place or it’s just a fairy land, you know? So Google Maps just gives you that comfort to know you are going the right place, whereas Facebook will provide you with a huge amount of people that are actively being in that situation and providing you with the help that you need - providing you with contacts and information you can’t find contacts and information in Google Maps. But both are dependent on the other, but Google Maps is more dependent on Facebook and Facebook is less dependent on Google Maps.

- *Is there a communication app that made the separation with your family less painful?*

It’s always been Viber. Back before WhatsApp didn’t have a voice call or video call, it was Viber. I was communicating most of the time using Viber or Messenger. My dad doesn’t have Facebook, he has Viber so I communicate always with him, weekly (twice a week or once a week) via Viber. It’s the most important app ever, for me, because it’s the only way I can contact with my family, because I contact my dad and through him I can contact the rest of my family. I contact with my younger brother through Messenger - he prefers to use Messenger, he’s always on Facebook, he’s always online. He’s 5 years younger than I, so that generation. I used Viber it is with my family, the most important one but it depends through the journey, I don’t feel like I need to use Viber, I use Facebook and Messenger more. I just call my dad “so dad, you know I just crossed the sea” and that’s it.

- *Is there a resource or an app which really helped you out during your trip?*

Facebook, Google search, Google maps.

- *When you arrived in each of these countries, did you know about the political situation before you arrived?*

Before leaving Turkey, I had a really really weak knowledge about Western Europe in general. Our culture mostly in Iraq is about probably the United States, bit of England, don't have much about European culture unless the history, about Italy, Spain, France, we know a bit. We know the mainstream stuff. You have two main resources, you check Twitter, you follow Red Cross, MSF, Doctors of the World, UNHCR, whatever, you follow the BBC, you will find a lot of reports, and at the same time you follow people who are actually travelling on Facebook like friends of mine. We don't need to know the food, neither who's the president. How to leave, and how to get in that's what we were focusing on.

- *Did you check everything before leaving Turkey, or did you check it on the way?*

I checked everything before I left, but it was changing every time I was going to a country because there was a time they just blocked it. There was a time they opened the doors for everyone, you need to improvise, because no matter how perfect the plan is, depending on a plan is not always the right answer. You need to know that there is a plan B. You need to choose what you feel right. There were many situations where I had a lot of mixed feelings, feeling lost, waiting, waiting is the worst thing ever. You have to be very patient, you can use a lot of support from friends through WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook. And to know how to cross a country safely, without any problems, without getting caught, you really need to ask the people who crossed before, and how was that done. This journey united many people, like there is a refugee trip - I am under many categories, I am a Muslim, being an Arab, an Iraqi, and a refugee. The refugee category, the refugee culture, and everyone was under that flag you know and all those people were crossing, in a mutual understanding that they were helping each other, they were a lot of people giving such information for free. "Dude if you wanna do the same do it now cause I don't know until when it will be opened", for example, two groups left before me in May 2015 and in June and told me to cross and I said no I don't have enough money, so I'm gonna wait. I quit the school after one year, went to Istanbul, wanted to know more about the smugglers and how to cross, working at a hostel. And when I reached the amount of money I had, I said I need to have at least something around 3 000 dollars or euros to feel safe.

Everyone who crossed told me that they spent minimum was something close to 2000 dollars or 1800 dollars to 30 000 dollars. Some people paid 5 000 dollars, 10 000 dollars... They had to pay extra expenses. The people who came with me at the same time, they paid double of what I paid because they choose the easier way, to go with the smuggler. They trusted someone to cross. I depended more on my own, because I had a better language than they do, better knowledge of smartphones than they do, I'm more patient.

- *How did you know about places, to stay, to eat, services on the way?*

It's not often that you will find volunteers to help but people to help you during the journey, it was everywhere. People were self-aware of that, but for example we were walking in huge groups of

thousands, especially at the borders. So you just follow the group, but you double check on Facebook, on Google Maps - I was double-checking all the time. You have people who are aware of what they are doing, "I know the way because my cousin, or my brother, or my family, just crossed from here, so i'm just doing the same thing". So I'm checking with my friends telling me if it the correct path.

But three months before, it was not like this, everyone was passing undercover with a smuggler. During my time, those four-five months of Europe being open, you can cross legally but you have to follow rules. Go to Macedonia, get the paper, go to Serbia, get the paper and so on. At each country, it would take four or five days more, and waste of time. You cross and you always double check whatever you have, follow people - double check, the smartest way to do. If you put faith in everyone, you have to take responsibilities for choosing this path. I sometimes went solo, and further reached another group of people.

- *Where did you stay?*

Usually, in Greece, there are some sort of camps but they are just places, just grounds and crowded. I bought a tent, and shared it with three other guys. I bought a backpack, a sleeping bag. In Greece, I did most of the sleeping on my sleeping bag, lucky because it was summer. In Serbia, I volunteered three days in a camp to translate. In Belgrade, I was living in a hostel and volunteering to translate. Many people were sleeping at the hostel, so I was like living in a hostel for a while. Wherever you go, make friends. If you make friends, you will get a lot of friends and you won't need to depend on yourself all the time, it was a relief, some time to relax, some time off. Most people were going to hotels, but too expensive. I was volunteering in hostels and I got free beers, free food.

- *So you talked about the sim cards, and I was wondering about the access to the national network in Greece, in Macedonia, in each of the countries you crossed? How did you find which sim card to get?*

It was super easy to find, when we were in Greece, a lot of people the people from the sim card companies, they were sending a lot of their people to promote for them in the camps, and they sent girls most of the time, not very hard to find. At the meeting points, you could find everything actually.

- *What about the top up?*

When I was crossing from Macedonia to Serbia, there was the border point and couple of villages, and you see some people selling sim cards for 5 euros. In Austria, in Vienna, I got off the train, and I got to a supermarket or someone who's selling sim cards. I asked for a sim card, and I bought a package for 10 euros, like a whole month, 3GB, 500 minutes and 500 messages. 10 euros is nothing for a journey that is like that you spend more money on transportations. 5 to 10 euros is the amount that I spent.

- *Did you find any specific NGOs which were providing specific services with sim cards, or credit top-up?*

Usually the NGOs like UNHCR and MSF, they were only providing medical care, or providing you with food, transportation sometimes, and temporary camps, but other expenses, no. The expenses were upon you. Medical, aid, sheltering, food. They don't think that we need a smartphone.

- *Do you have a range of how much it cost you?*

The sim card is for free and the package is from 5 to 10 euros maximum. So it's a fair deal. Nobody buy sim card for more than 1 euro, sim cards are always for free.

- *It is quite accessible then?*

The cheapest thing you can find on your journey is the internet. It is cheaper than food and transportation, and it is the best means which can provide you with places for food, and places for transportation. It is not a very expensive privilege.

- *What about the connectivity to internet? Is it always necessary? Did you struggle to find internet sometimes in some part in Europe?*

It was always really good connection to internet, the only problem sometimes when you reach border point, when you have to buy another sim card, when you have to change, the cell provider is not strong enough on borders.

There was a point I was crossing, and I had some euros left in my sim card, 2 or 3 euros, so we were at the point where there was no internet coverage and I had to use the extra euros that I had just to tell some people what happened. Somewhere between Greece and Turkey and I was calling the middle man who made me cross so I can give him the code so he could access my money for the crossing. After a couple of kilometers, no cellphone, no internet coverage. Different countries, different packages, different languages.

- *Was there wifi in camps you went to?*

There was none to be honest. The only wifi I noticed it was in Park Maximilien in Belgium, some of my friends told me that there was some wifi in Germany. But only the first days, because on the fourth day, they worked more on providing other stuff than wifi. I did not really need the wifi as I can pay 10 euros and get enough for the month.

Putting wifi in a refugee camps makes people who did not have wifi jealous - I don't even have wifi at my place, why will the refugees have access to it? But it was too damn slow because everyone was connecting to it. But it is already something, it is a blessing and a curse at the same time - refugees they have everything and everything done for them and now they have wifi. Like wow.

Once I was playing in a park with my guitar, and my smartphone lying on the bench, it was a Samsung Galaxy 3, not as advanced as the others at the time, and people came to me and asked me what I was doing, "Nothing, I'm just waiting for those guys to take my fingerprints, I'm waiting to apply for asylum" and they were like "so you are a refugee?" I was like Yes and they said that I did not looked like a refugee, and I responded what do I look like? What's wrong with refugees? And he go like come on like you dress well, you look good, and you have a smartphone, and you speak very good english for a refugee.

I always had this argument with people saying that. Why did you come here if you had money? Dude, most of my friends and refugees, asylum seekers here, they were really rich, we had a really good life, we had a lot of money, what is your life if you have a lot of money but you can lose it anytime? What is money if you gonna die tomorrow?

- *When you arrived in Belgium, how did you know that you had to go to Park Maximilien? Can you tell me about facebook groups?*

There were couple of groups and facebook pages that were specifically targeting nationalities, they are in arabic, they wrote about news about migration, about the roads to europe, how to cross to Europe. And you follow the ones who have the most followers, always posting about migration, groups were created at that time, now they are more neglected because it's not like before, it's more private. People don't want to show that they use smugglers, it was more publicly known.

To know about Belgium - I did not know, I was at the Central station, I did not know where to go and I was asking that guy, a Moroccan, by chance he was speaking arabic. He told me the place for all the asylum seekers and refugees, it is close to Gare du Nord, I'm gonna take you there, and I went with him. He did not want to take the charge, he drove me for free. When I was there, I took a walk and I just saw a lot of volunteers, some of them were refugees, some of them were asylum seekers, europeans, belgians.

- *On the crossing from Turkey to Greece, did the phone help you out ?*

The weather forecast was really important bcs there was a problem with the waves and the wind, and at that time there was a lot of wind so you need to know when it is safe to cross. One night when we had to go, I was checking the wind and the waves, is there gonna be a small storm, or windy? It took me two weeks to wait, and to cross - all the smugglers were lying about the weather and the heights of the waves, and I was checking, and it was not safe to go. There was a couple of times that I used the compass to be sure where I was going we were going on a mini van and we were wondering "are we going to get killed? Or probably robbed", and more on google maps. Google Maps has everything. And the time we got caught by the coast guards, we had to run, and stay a couple of nights in the forest and then you check the compass to see the main street, and to cross from that way to that way it says on Google Maps that you are here and you check when the wind is better. And in Greece you check in which part of the Island you are so you don't get lost. How long would it take you... the train station is over there.

- *What about the charge for your phone?*

You need to be smart about consuming, you don't need to check instagram and facebook posts, call your friends, I had an extra battery and a big power bank with my phone, and putting my phone always on power save mode and low brightness, and only checking internet every couple of hours. Do nothing. I always knew that there won't always be electricity points, or you can go to a restaurant, a cafe , a bar, it depends on where you are.

- *When you were in Hungary and you had to walk?*

I really was very cautious and paid a lot of attention towards my power bank and my charge, I was keeping the phone locked and waiting until I had to use it. And they were queuing just for charging.

## RefugeeText – Test

*We asked Zaïd to test the chatbot RefugeeText, as if he was back on the route. Here are his comments :*

It's a really good app, I would have used a lot of help, extra and sorrow information about each country and what is the procedure you know. Because many people don't know these rules, they need to live in couple of months in that country to understand, you wouldn't get the full information because it talks about if you wanna bring back your family, I did not know that, I needed more legal advice, legal support. About the system itself; from the administration itself and foreign affairs. To get all the information, I need to have friends who work there and have knowledge or an app like this who explain many things. I knew 90 % about the way and 10% about asylum procedures.

- *Do you think it would have helped you to choose your final destination?*

Or in the case it might have make me stay in Germany and not come to Belgium. But you never know which one is better, maybe it is better for me to stay here. Maybe if I would have stayed there, maybe I would not have the refugee status. It is a matter of luck or probability.

- *Do you think all of the information were useful?*

Yes they were very useful and very precise, very accurate. Looks like a guideline, instead of asking people, you can find it from people who are very legit, legit information. They work in an organisation, they know more, they give examples and advice out of a legal perspective, and general government perspective

Limited to 3 countries, well that's the thing because about I think Germany, DK and SW, one country out of those three was told to me that was available. At the beginning of the whole migration thing in Europe, Sweden and DK were considered for us as countries that don't accept asylum seekers. Sweden there was a time they were sending back iraqi refugees, and even if you have a strong case they don't give you asylum. Denmark as well. People like a general point of view that Denmark is a kind of racist country towards muslims, not entirely racist but they don't like muslims in general.

Germany they have a lot of legal information, but I would love to know about other countries, like I don't want to feel like I am strict to go these countries. (burden on these countries)

- *If you had to add other advice, what would it be?*

They are giving really general point of view, they are not helping you in your own story. They tell you things you acquire with experience, papers, reasons, we already kinda know that.

I would add something more: people involved with this information, actual refugees, former refugees, people who would give more about what you are actually gonna face, the time you gonna spend, you would feel more close. Because what I read now is what I can find through the Belgian government, administrations saying to us... feels very formal.

The asylum-seekers would advice me on what I really have to say, here it tells me something general. It doesn't tell me how to enhance my story, what am I expecting to have in the interviews.

- *What would you expect of an app like this?*

With the word RefugeeText I would expect that I would contact another refugee, a refugee chat, a refugee network, with refugees who all had experiences to share

- *What would you think about a refugee chat?*

We could connect more, we could define refugee culture, to be the voice of refugees..

- *A refugee chat for people crossing Europe?*

Live news to put people in contact, something called refugee experiences.

### **LOVE EUROPE app – Test**

*We asked Zaïd to test the app called ‘Love-Europe’ providing essential information for humanitarian but also integration purpose. Here are Zaïd’s comments :*

It’s amazing with the videos in Arabic, but they should have other videos with Farsi.

- *Your feedback about it?*

Real well but again it only talk about four countries. It’s limited, it’s very limited. I wish I could have read about Austria, Finland, and Belgium. And other countries as well.

- *If you were back in time, imagine you were in Greece, or in Austria or in Germany, do you think it would have been useful for you?*

Yes I would use it more than facebook,because it is easy to find the information I need. the advantage is the time, it is really, on fb it is really because you have to wait until someone post something or do something and then you’ll know. The preciseness of the information, it tells you exactly about the country, and if you ask people they would know one thing, you would not have the full amount of information you need, sufficiency.

- *Most useful feature?*

Language, and knowledge of the culture - what to do within this society, the gestures, how to be good with communicating, it gives you a lot of tips about how to behave and communicate. And as well what to expect from the country, during and post asylum procedures, as in integration, studying, working.

- *What was the less useful?*

Sometimes, it has a lot of information about the lives, the culture, people don’t have time to read that during their journey, I would be more strict about the journey. I don’t think that it has something less useful, it depends on your situation and my journey.

- *Love Europe and RefugeeText: would you have trusted it directly or double checked it?*

Of course, like every app, you check the comments and the ratings.

## Appendix 3 – Interviews with professionals in the field

### Antoine Saint- Denis Interview

10th of April 2017 - Brussels / Copenhagen - Skype interview

Short presentation:

- Name: Antoine Saint-Denis
- Origin: French
- Activity: Co-founder of Europe for People and working at the European Social Funds

- *Could you summarise what Europe for People is?*

My reference is about social public policies, influencing frameworks about to what extent changes in societies affect, influence and impact the big policy frameworks and concrete ways for administration to work. Given the context in 2015/2016 and given also that I am involved in what we call the SF platform which is a learning community set up by the European Commission to make it possible for the European Social Funds to work beyond borders, given that I am involved in this platform and that this transnational platform has network on migration, I did a collection of facts based in the internet, not on the ground. I only interviewed a few people, I did it with Singa, the German SAP. Not reflected in what I sent you but I still have it partially in mind.

- *How and why did you start this research regarding the use of cellphones (ICTs) by refugees and asylum seekers?*

I worked on issues of social protection and how it contributes to social well being, answering the needs of different types of population groups and different types of life situation. Now I focus more on social innovation issues, what is more marginal in our societies, but what is preparing the future. It's about new ways for different types of groups to act. There is a change in the borderlines for the big authorities, non profits actors, business and organisations. I have always had a big interest in tech, I'm convinced since the emergence of smartphones that it is not just an additional object, but it's something that has social, cognitive impacts which are tremendous. Keen and impatient to see how this will be impacting public administrations in coming years. Started with some intuition.

When I started this collection of web links mainly, I could identify a few things but I was not sure about the landscape. It's on the way of my collection that I realized that this intuition was right, and a lot was happening. I was struck with by the photos, people were landing in the Greek Islands with phones in their bags, sending selfies to say that they are safe. It was not at all anecdotal, something that should be considered as an extremely important fact. I have still not seen more in depth research on this.

I publicly announced my intention to work on an app called Refugee Language Line - organising a massive capacity to match interpretation needs from migrants with volunteers. This project was launched sept 2015 and given up in Dec 2015 - extremely complex in terms of IT service and was about to be outdated by technology itself (microsoft translate, Google translate). How we can use



technology not only to date people, to organise our time, but also to respond to the most important needs of our life.

I went to a Hackathon: quite a disappointing experience, a lot of youngsters full of energy and keen to act. Taking action implies much more than lines of code, accessing the needs and finding people in the core of the landscape, making an app in itself required structured work. The interest for me was in terms of civic movement.

- *A lot of the initiatives are just sketches or haven't been updated, 'page not found'- is there a reason for this?*

The wave of migrants, even if people are still coming, it's mostly stopping. Not what it was in august/october 2015. The perception of these migrants has changed, there is less emotion, there are more interrogations, there are more hesitations, when not some oppositions. You are not mobilised by a solidarity move, even if it remains a quite high level, it's all about project management, it's not difficult to have an idea, it's more difficult to transform the project into the service - it requires a business model.

Visible to interact to deliver services, a good IT service requires a lot of money you have to make a business model, you rely on public solidarity, subsidies, sponsorship, payment by the customers themselves. As long as you want to create something a little sophisticated and up-to-date you must have a business model. In most of the case, what was presented was good will, but not business model.

Are the people coming at the moment, who are still trying to find their way in, do they have same profile as the people who came one year and a half ago? Is the use of technology the same now as it was a few years ago? Are the same people coming?

A risk is to overestimate the use of the technological services. I would assume that google maps, messenger and whatsapp are the most used services. And when it comes to the specific services, services apps developed by NGO's - how to take a boat etc. Very smart for Google to do it in only in white with black background in order to minimise battery use.

NETHOPE - providing wifi and electricity. Showing that wifi is where the migrants are.

Social innovation competition website - european commission NESTA. They dedicated their 2016 edition to migrants.

Monique Diminescu - The use of IT by migrants - been doing the research for over 10 years. You could try to contact her as a researcher. She developed a theoretical framework that we should take into consideration. Smartphone is new, but technology is not.

- *Administration / european funding issues - opposition?*

The lack of public investment in technology and development is certainly detrimental to people. The reality is that the conditions of funding are so slow and structured that when I met a number of entrepreneurs in Brussels, the specific piece of advice I told them : you need a business model, you can't go beyond your ideas without it. Do it without public funding, you will become an administration manager - avoid this trap. Public authorities are not ready.

Lack of political will - clearly a lack of will among public authorities and a lack of capacity, a lack of know-how for public services. People are only realising that apps matter, apps are influencing the way we interact. Not only the way we date our boyfriends, the way we move in our cities and the way we go shopping. How to transform this into action is not clear to most of them.

I'm confident that the European level is more keen, because it's easier, less polemical, there is more awareness - working more pragmatically on implementing support services for people is in the interest of everybody. But pretty new for the European institutions to fund some apps.

Digiample - Developing an app to profile work competencies among the refugee population. More about integration than the journey, but it is very interesting. A new way to answer a burning social need. Public authorities need to act very swiftly and at a very early level to facilitate the work integration of migrants.

Equip employment agencies and NGO's with a tool - an IT tool and information can be shared and needs of refugees can be accessed

- *To what extent do technologies, such as ICTs, used by refugees and asylum seekers frame their journey towards and within Europe?*

I have absolutely no answer to this. I can only make assumptions, but I discussed it with Mohamad and I tried to read last year, I've not really updated this since last year - my initial impression should be confirmed by your research - It's look pretty clear, maybe I'm wrong but my impression is that these people would have come anyway - I don't think we can say that the availability of technology has changed or has had an impact on the number of people who came or even on the profile of people who came, but I have the impression that these technologies have changed the ways they have been travelling and have probably contributed in a high number of cases to the qualitative aspects of their travel and has probably contributed to empowering them - so that I can guess that their dignity and their capacity to feel active and to make strategic choices have been enhanced thanks to these new tools. It is quite likely that in some cases it has saved some lives. not anecdotal, I think it's a great impact. This use of smartphone mainly even though it has not been acknowledged in media and administrations, I made a lot of small presentations based on the collection of facts and I got pretty negative feedback, I was heavily criticized by the people from the administration who told me 'but you are absolutely foolish, you are dreaming'. This is not a social fact, there is quite a massive denial to acknowledge what is happening on the ground. Went to a refugee camp in Brussels and there's no denying that it was full of smartphones, old, in a bad state, broken, but still smartphones. There is a denial of this aspect of reality but these devices and technologies have empowered these people.

Let's also assume, I'm older, it's striking me that it's the first time that it happens, the first time that I see 2 things: 1. A number of people who rely on technology. Tech that wasn't available until 2010/2012. 2. first time that there is a pretty active pretty massive, even if it is a minority of people, mobilisation of citizens themselves who are taking action - and it was mostly organised by social medias. There are two aspects here: the use of tech by migrants and by citizens. There is clearly an interaction in between both dynamics, I do remember one of the first apps created was in Hungary in the last days of August 2015 - developed and put something at the disposal of migrants to guide

people on their way. It's not by chance that Germany as a country has been extremely active on this level.

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## **Caroline Arvidsson**

**16th of March 2017 - Copenhagen**

Short presentation:

- Name: Caroline Arvidsson
- Origin: Swedish
- Activity: IT designer, co-founder of RefugeeText

- *When was Refugee Text created? What context - migration context?*

Designer focusing on putting people first. Working as an interactional designer for some years in a company called CID. I met 2 other interaction designers, we started exploring what we could do using the tools that we had to approach the situation that was ongoing in Europe. We started travelling around Europe meeting Refugees, volunteers and organizations, civilians, citizens, societies that were affected by the situation and the most striking need that came out from that research was the need for information. The smartphone was already back in fall 2015 an enabler, as we see also in riots and demonstrations, all this type of sharing information, it triggers a lot of civic participation and allows communities to become engaged through social media, communities. What we saw was that there is so much information out there that it's hard to know how to navigate through it. Refugees would reach border hotspots and met overwhelmed volunteers at the border with questions. The people we met did not feel the information is out there, but it was overwhelming and it wasn't targeting their specific needs or situations. And very rarely translated into their language, hard to find and often not in their own languages. Refugee text was set up in 2016 with the aim to close the gap between humanitarian aid organisations and refugees - creating a tool to allow them to communicate immediately to individuals with the most up-to-date information, making sure that it is relevant, trustworthy and accurate, targeted towards individuals, personalised and translated. 1st prototype was in May 2016.

Back then Facebook hadn't released their API, so we couldn't integrate the chatbot onto fb messenger, so it was done via SMS. We saw that refugees would spend 14 hours in trains where they had space and time to inform themselves instead of prioritizing information above more critical needs.

- *By whom was it set up? Any refugee acquaintances or so?*

I have done a lot of volunteer work, I worked in an asylum centre as a Swedish teacher. I also now work at Center Sandholm as a Danish teacher. It's a place where people can come and know where to find me at a set time. We did a lot of workshops, to ping pong of organisations and support each other. Have worked alongside Trampoline House and Venligbørne. We worked a lot in the beginning with the different initiatives in Denmark. Did a lot of workshops, went through mapping the journeys refugees would do across Europe and what refugees they needed where and where

they would get that from. Three of us founding the company. Kieran is a musician and designer, Køre is design engineering and Caroline is Designer and language teacher.

We are not programmers. There is no coding, it's using a device called Text it that builds a logic tree and brings people through a flow. Everything is linked through small boxes where you put text in them. But it's not very user friendly. If you break one link then the whole system falls about. Since summer 2016, we've been collaborating with another organisation to build another software on top of this software that is user and content focused.

- *What led to the creation of Refugee Texts? Why did you see a need for Refugee Text?*

The three of us were researching individually what was going on in Europe and I was tired of reading it in the news, so I went to sicily in Sept 2015 to see what was happening on the borders of Europe. At that time, in September 2015, people started walking from Budapest to Denmark, so I felt like I was in the wrong place. We know so much about design and technology, the skills and tools that we had were all useful in this context and to use our tools and information in a different context.

- *Have you conducted studies concerning the use of smartphones by refugees on the route? If yes, what resources did you use?*

The method that we use in the training we had is to use qualitative research, to inspire your designs, so we don't collect quantitative data but we were interviewing people that were doing that, so we got data from UNHCR and different refugee councils around Europe. At the time, there was no data or statistics on the use of phones. Everybody was talking about the phones being the main devices, only device they were bringing with them. The first question they had: "where can I charge my phone? Where can I get a sim card? Where can I get wi-fi? And maybe How can I get to Sweden?"

We found that when they asked us questions when we were using phones to find the answer which reinforced our point and our design. We found this balance in between who are we supposed to inform digitally, in this chatbot and who has to speak with. Set out early to not design for that group that needed critical counselling. The most more severe cases but the massive people are mostly asking the same question, we blindly believed that because my cousin got asylum in Sweden I will also get it, and you might not leave in the same area... More complicated cases we can't answer, but it does help answer the questions of people who don't know how to find the info.

All the information is out there but it is not being pushed.

- *Did you test your services out on groups or individuals?*

We always prototype the designs we do. The service that we launched in Spring 2016 was far from ready and the main goal of it was to make sure that the information in it was adjusted and correct. Since we did not had a digital service to support that need, we were calling legal councillors, sometimes on daily basis, to make sure that the information was up to date, they would then call Refugee Text if the information changed. We have 2 target groups: The people that use the information and the people that provide the information. They both need to use the system for it to work. It has to be updated, trustworthy for refugees. We were testing with both groups. We were connecting with a community in Syria through a friend of a friend and they tested a service on the ground there, and they would give us feedback. That was very tricky. Much easier to sit with

someone while he uses it and watch them using it in person and ask questions. Those follow-up questions got lost in the distance.

We also tested it with groups of asylum seekers in Copenhagen and Malmö. They could give feedback on how the phrasing of the language resonate with them. Somebody pointed out that we hadn't put transgender in the gender choices, being able to have that type conversation in a bigger group of people was extremely helpful. I always wanted to test it on the go, but you can't walk alongside a refugee and ask them to do it. And we would have probably been involved into something illegal.

- *Was there any advertising towards refugees on the move? How did you know that it was used by refugees who were doing the journey?*

We had networks all over Europe, either volunteers that we had met and kept in touch, with that we sent fliers to or just sent a link to the service via e-mail. They had seen the service, used it themselves and could then recommend it. We need to know if people are outside or inside Europe or in Greece. We stripped down the information on those 3 factors. We could see in our data collection where people were in terms of those 3 factors. We have had the most users in Europe, which makes it difficult to push for services outside Europe. We don't have the network so trickier to push for the service there.

- *Why through messenger, message and telegram ? Why not other apps?*

Now it's possible, but when Facebook released the API we couldn't integrate it into WhatsApp. We started out with SMS, that's also why messages are long - we need to provide them with as much info and content as possible for them to answer questions in as few answers as possible. They would receive 45 messages and they would send maybe 7 answers. Facebook messenger allowed us to have a completely free service for the user, but the NGO would pay to connect the chatbot with messenger. We had an assumption that people are scared of sharing their identity, but throughout our testing we found out that it was almost the opposite, they used the conversation as evidence of identity/timeline of their trip. Anything they can use to add to their timeline, would help build their case for asylum during their interview.

- *Which one was the most used? Because of the 1euro fee on SMS?*

Messenger was by far the most used application. People didn't really use telegram, it was our first platform, first prototype for us to see how we could use an online platform. It's hard to say because the API was released during summer and meant we could push it in very different ways. SMS and Messenger were pushed in very different ways. Before we had flyers and stickers, but now we can just send a link online via email and on Facebook groups. Almost impossible to set up a service with local service - None of the companies wanted to collaborate - not even Telenor France with Telenor Holland. Absolutely agree that it was seen as a platform that encouraged migration and these companies didn't want to be a part of it. NGOs have information that they hold back because they know that if they release it it will change the way in which people migrate. Proven to be bigger political statement than we thought. Especially pushing for the pan European platform was impossible - especially in terms of funding.

- *Internet cover struggle?*

People of course will struggle to find wifi - not feedback that we have had. There is also the SMS service so people can use that too.

- *How often do you update the information you send out to ensure it's reliable?*

One of the reasons why it was so often in the beginning is because we hadn't got the language right, figuring out how to formulate the information we were providing people with: eg. used to say "all syrians get asylum in Sweden" now it is "x% got asylum in 2015". If something drastically changes, then we would change. A lot of it has been about formulating sentences in which the information remains up to date. It's more about highlighting some factors and then say this is what will happen to you. Now we don't do it that often, we just did an update with Michala Bendixen from Refugees Welcome. We made a google sheet where we put all the information, allowing her to rewrite the text until our own software is done.

- *How do you get the information that you share? Reliability? Which NGOs?*

Michala Bendixen - they were spending time in Trampoline House and she was a person they spoke to a lot. She is also a test person for the software. Swedish Migration Council and same in Germany.

We have used Refugee Councils for info for individual countries. In Fall 2016, we built a chatbot for UNHCR Nordic / Northern Europe - they have 20 lawyer volunteers answering the phones all day. People that are calling are usually in Italy, they are calling to figure out if they can travel to northern Europe. When we put it on facebook we were using info from NGO's but for them, we have also built chatbots through the websites. Allows for a lot of people to get answers and for people who did not need one to one legal counselling to be able to have their questions answered by this chatbot. The information comes from them, we made a logic tree and made a chatbot - will launch on new website.

- *Why only Germany, Denmark and Sweden?*

We were here, also because we saw that this is where people were aiming to go. Everybody we met, if it wasn't somebody that had a family member in Austria or in Spain, they wanted to go further North. Some people got all the way to Denmark and then realised they weren't eligible for asylum once they got here. We wanted to provide them with information that would help them change their routes or reconsider as early as possible. Rumors spread fast, and if it's not likely to get asylum in Austria then I'm not gonna take that risk, I'm gonna go over and where most people from my community had got asylum before.

About asylum rules in these 3 countries would help people make decisions and realise what they are undertaking. By providing information about 3 countries, there is an obvious problem of not being able to compare all countries. It comes across as Refugee text encouraging migration to these 3 countries - which is probably why we don't get funding. We had meetings with the Refugee Council in Ireland - we need to give people information about how to integrate into society. We had conversations with France and the UK around the Calais situation. There is so much misinformation, it is a big task as for every country added we have to make sure that the information is up to date. The idea of pan-European service is not likely, people don't want to talk to each other and communicate and help each other: politics, organisations and fear of encouraging migration get in the way.

We are working with an organisation on the ground in Greece - they source a lot of their information from UNHCR. So much easier to get funding if we say "this organisation is on the ground, we just need to help them branch out".

We have now taken a step back from Refugee Texts - we are now called Social Projects and we provide varying services, chatbots being one of them. It's not necessarily only refugees, we want to make different systems better - change the way things work.

- *Have you had feedback on how the service is working? Effectiveness?*

We get feedback: emails through our website. We hear from people in the asylum centres, I met who heard about it in Sandholm. We also get feedback from the actual service system - like yesterday I received an email about the demographics about the people who used the service. We also had a guy who had used our service and ended up in Ireland and video'd himself giving feedback on the service and at the same time endorsing it.

We also get feedback from people aren't refugees, they are saying it is a lot of text. Parallel track to build trust: If I ask where you are, it'll put you on edge so you need to give reasoning for asking such a question. It is also stored on your phone so easy to get back to the information.

- *Do you know of any flaws? Anything that could be improved?*

A lot! A technical one is that I would prefer to interact with the screen - as it's messenger people can use on a computer and a phone. If we could use the screen so there was integration of images and maps - I would like for it to be more intuitive.

Quartz - they have a news app- It's very interactive with speech bubbles etc. Being able to click back. When we build the one for Greece we know that there is wifi so we can shorten down the messages and don't have to make them so long for fear of taking up GB. There have been a lot of compromises, but it being more intuitive. We have this stupid long german number, we tried to get a 5 digits one, that people could use regardless of your location, but it's impossible to use it for anything else than charity or European song contest.

- *Within the current migration policies, thousands of refugees are currently stranded in camps / borders - is there any project which are now obsolete due to this change?*

There are 60,000 refugees stuck in Greece and also people moving in through Italy, just going a little bit under the radar. 50/80 people coming to Sandholm a week, 500 people a day arriving from Sept 2015 on the peak. A lot of the information that we have is about learning your vocabulary and what that means: what is the dublin regulation, what does it mean to be fingerprinted. If you aren't fingerprinted with all 10 fingers then it doesn't count, they can't send you back, anything less makes it just local prints that can't be used for anything. It's empowering information to have even if you are stuck in a camp in Greece. There are so many rumours and misinformation and stories being shared. If we had continued working 100% on refugee text it would look very different, there is no reason to take it down as it still has users, it's not obsolete. We are not further developing it. From a day to another with the Turkey deal we were having conversations with the UNHCR in Geneva, and from one day to another, no we can't go into this because all of our funding is focused on Greece now. It's difficult to navigate in such changing landscape.

- *Another language than Arabic? It has limitations and restraining the number of people who could use it?*

Stagnated system now. Now we have a collaboration with Translators Without Borders, to be able to build the prototype we said English and Arabic. It's mirroring the software of TWB. It would take us much more time to get every translator a time to update the information - can we let an information gap online?

- *New updates adapted to the current border / asylum policies?*

We decided not to have any route information to be able to underline that we aren't trying to help people to bring people to Northern Europe. Having that info would contradict that, but as people were moving towards Sweden we integrated that info to prove that it was true.

- *Other NGOs / start-ups: Techfugees and its hackatons?*

We've heard of them and been part of a few workshops. We've been invited to a conference, Hackathons are more for people who have ideas that they haven't yet implemented. We've built relationships in conferences and take part in that. We were invited by Google to go to the European Union as an example of what can be done.

Funding is running low unless it's regarding integrational projects. The next challenge is how to support these people and allow them to integrate.

- *Are you aware of the possible negative consequences of using personal data / internet for refugees on the move? Tracing? Dependency?*

Funding from CID and smaller organisations, but not official. Crowdfunding. Not met a single volunteer who doesn't hierarchize the information they give volunteers for asylum processes.

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## Ömer Sami Interview

11th of April 2017 - Copenhagen

Short presentation:

- Name: Ömer Sami
- Origin: British
- Activity: Student and documentarist

- *So how do people hear about Abu Amar?*

Words of mouth, but I guess I should start with his entire story. At the start, he was living in Damascus as a construction worker, home decoration. On his way to work -this shell was dropped and not really common at that time, and some schrapnel went into his spine and paralyzed from waist down. And from that point, he needed therapy which he couldn't get in Syria, so he had to leave Syria for Turkey. And from Turkey he just kept on trying to leave for about two years. The Egyptian military took him back and so on. And the more people he met the more he got frustrated,



about these stories about smugglers, of people being cheated, wasting all of their money, drowning, and I need to make a 'Tripadvisor' for people to find smugglers. So democratize the process, and then they can do most of the trip by themselves, using public transports which is like 2 euros instead of spending thousands of pounds.

So he started this group which was called 'AS and immigration without smugglers', he got 80,000 followers on FB, then the smugglers saw what he was doing, they felt threatened so they started posting pornographic photos on his page, so then FB shot down the group. Over a night he woke up and lost 80,000 contacts that he could not get back.

So he built another private group, it's pretty much the same thing but private but with few people. He is followed by 10,000 people and of course behind that 10,000 there is like passing, waiting.

When he made it private, he used the combination of that, sending mass message like "don't leave Greece, the weather is really rough", or posting articles and stuff like that. In combination with its whatsapp. But it's mostly on Whatsapp that he advises people. I don't know how his telephone number has got so many people but I guess when they are in these camps or people are stuck, people pass it on. At one point, he tried to change the telephone number and he couldn't handle it, and he added all the contacts he had back.

He is sort of addicted to helping out, partly because of his conscious, when he has to turn off his telephone, another message come and partly bcs he finds his calling. When he finally got to Germany, he lived with his wife, his mother, his father and his kids, and his young brother, and the kids go to school, he is still at home, he should be doing therapy, but his work prevents him from doing much as he should.

- *How did you hear about Abu Amar?*

There is a NewYorker story called 10 borders written by Nicholas Shimdel - epic journey of a syrian refugee , he is the story of one guy's journey from Syria to Europe and he referenced Abu Ammar, and said along the way this guy sent me animated maps, and he described shortly what Abu Ammar does. I just got really curious, wrote to Nicholas, he sent his phone number, it took me 3 weeks before he actually answered. We agreed to go and I met him.

- *Is he still running this operation or has it been affected by the Turkey deal?*

Yes, he is. He has internal conflict with his injury, his doctors keep saying that he needs to get out and exercise more, I think he wants to give more responsibilities to his helpers but he can't really stop, this project he started, he needs to follow through. Every night before he goes to sleep, he gets another texts.

- *Turkey EU deal?*

I spoke with him after the film and he said, bcs I started this page to start raising money for him - he said actually less people are leaving, less people that he is in contact with, the biggest need now is the people who are in the camps. I'm pretty sure, I raised 4,000 pounds and he sent it to its family in Lebanon. For his operation, he can count of State support from Germany, but they are the ones who need support. He doesn't have wifi to he pays a pretty big telephone bill.

- *What was it that peaked your interest in making a film about him?*

When I first read about him, it was just the fact that it was like a one-man operations who had completely put himself into something without organizations behind him; it's easier to take part in that with organizations. Obligation out of compassion - no other motives. Then I found out that he had been a construction worker and I couldn't imagine an English constructor turning into a Saint. Ordinary man turned into a saint.

- *How long did you spend with him for the making of the film?*

3 to 4 days there and I spent the night once.

- *When you met Abu Amar, did he always have his phone with him?*

Two phones - one is the communication one he is speaking to people with, and on the other he is looking up information, so most of the time he is on the phone or writing, and then looking at maps, weather report or anything on the other one.

- *In your opinion could he do what he is doing without a phone?*

I guess he could do it with a laptop - if you had skype, whatsapp on the laptop but your phone has to be in close proximity. I guess you could do it through facebook messenger, call people on facebook messenger, but he is pretty much planted at home because he can't move without someone pushing him on a wheelchair, so if he had the money he would build a work station or something.

The strange thing is that Fadi said that he didn't know that google maps was existing until he spoke to Abu Ammar. You would assume that people could do that themselves and having maps and GPS, to find out their own information, but I guess most only use whatsapp, some of them only call. He has this life stream, he accompany people all along the journey so he can get this feedback loop, from the people who want to leave to the people who are leaving, and the ones who have arrived.

- *Do you know of any flaws/drawbacks to what Abu Amar is doing?*

When I made this charity page - someone said that I needed to specify that it's for children and women that he helping, mostly families and not like ISIS recruits. Which I never thought of and you could be suspicious with that, he doesn't know the people who he is helping, he could be facilitating some movement of people. But on a humanitarian basis, they can't discriminate.

When he was leading people through Hungary to avoid the police patrol, he was letting people bypass the dublin regulation. I spoke to a lawyer and it is not really illegal what he is doing because he is not physically transporting them but only giving them advices, so not able to be prosecutable, but you could say that he is kind of a smuggler.

He is very sensible in the way he advises people. If the sea is big, he just says wait, Europe is not running away from you, you don't have to go now, and in that way he is the sensible voice that these people need, he is calming. And he has done the journey also, so that's what he always tells them - look I know what you've been through, it's stressful, it happened to me and that's how I responded. Fellow syrians respect it. Reliving every time he speaks to them.

- *Why did he decide to help people? How did he come up with this idea?*

He got cheated himself by smugglers several times, took his money, caught by the military, was paralyzed and had his kids, he was just so frustrated by the fact that he had to rely on these people and spend his money. He just thought that there could be a better way and preventing people from getting cheated like he did, by smugglers. It's not difficult to make a facebook group.

- *Can only smartphone owners contact him?*

FB group could be anyone, but less likely that it would be through a laptop accessible in these conditions. I can't be certain.

- *How do people get his phone number?*

After he closed down the public group, he opened a private one and through he must have give his phone number available

- *Does he do this alone or does he have anybody helping him?*

14 people - there are mostly people who abu ammar has guided to Germany, not necessarily to Germany but people who have got in contact with him and they just wanted to help. Some of them are still in Syria, in Greece, in Turkey, in Germany. He calls them His helpers, they will talk with other refugees he is establishing conversations with.

Mostly works on whatsapp, he has huge list of groups. They have a status where Green is 'ready to go', yellow is waiting, Red is like stuck in Turkey. He has thousands of messages - he will start by prioritizing them and behind each group there is a group of people. So they will say we are ready to go on this boat, and sometimes he will call one of the helpers and say "oh just keep an eye on these, or calm them down, send them weather reports, wave reports.

He seems to know them pretty well, I don't think he has met all of them, just people who decided to help them. But like Fadi, who is in his house and helping him, they are sortof friends.

- *Only Arabic?*

He doesn't speak english, so target audience is mostly to be syrians. There is also this connection to his country, oh the syrian people is suffering and they need my help, quite linked to his home. In this sense, people speak about Brotherhood a lot. So I don't know if you discriminate between different muslims but I guess if they all speak arabic then it's fine.

- *Do you know which apps he relied on specifically or the most?*

There is the meteorological website he uses, but he compare Google maps with this weather forecast, and he's trying to guess where the wind is coming in. He also uses a Shipping radar, which locates the different ships around, people would say 'There is this light in front of me what is it? Is it coastguards?' and he can see if it's a state owned vessel or a shipping cargo, just the category of ship it is. The people in pretty bad situation ask 'we need to know when the coastguard is coming' and he would say let me just check, there is state owned ship coming towards you so I guess it must be. He also calls the coastguards in that area, he also uses google coordinations for that. He uses the people

in the groups to find the specifics, to understand what they've gone through before, to know where the police are. In the film, they are people who land on a military island, I think it is just by using google maps that you see the name, it's not like one compact app.

- *What does he ask from these people to fully help them (GPS coordinates, videos, number of people on the boat, engine characteristics)?*

He just saved this guy contact as desert island, sometimes he doesn't even know the names. They will send him the GPS coordinates, via whatsapp (drop a pin). They send videos and he also say send me videos and photos so I can push coastguards to act. I don't know how he sends them to the coastguards, also just to see how the situation is he will just say 'Show me photos to see where you are', there is like videos of people on the boat sometimes just to see the Engine problems - videos so he can help.

He uses this walkie talkie app, I guess it is also free and you send each other messages. There is a necessary internet coverage, I don't know what the app is called but you can create your own channel on it. Whatsapp - voice recording. Not ordered in any ways - he lost everything.

- *Do the coastguards know him?*

Yes, I think so because he always calls the turkish and greek, they know him. Very rarely the Italians. It's mostly people leaving from Turkey, he always try to encourage them to go that way. They were all going from Turkey to Greece.

- *Is there a specific limitation to what he is offering? How long he can help people?*

He will help as long as people will still ask his help - throughout the long journey. Pretty big undertake. Fadi, he said that all the way through Macedonia, he gave him very specific directions like go to this forest, send me your coordinates, now go this way, now that way, he really followed on.

- *But how does he know all this information?*

Through the people he helped I guess. It is the similar path again and again. I have no idea how he got the precise information. I think someone must have told him about this, feedback from people so he can add all the informations to update.

- *Have you spoken to other people concerning the use of smartphones by refugees on the route? If yes, who?*

Only Fadi in details, also Agob, but I don't speak too much about that. And the people I met in there I don't speak with them about that.

- *Do you know of any useful apps that have come out recently specifically aimed at refugees and asylum seekers?*

Watch the med alarm - live updates and I don't know how many people are using it.

- *How do you think Abu's system could be improved if at all?*

You could design an app that add all of this, with the Red Cross, everything in one, like the weather information, the coastguards, the coordinates, he has to keep switching in between every apps.

I guess, you could have it more public, all the stuff displayed at the time to avoid the same questions being repeated. People ask the same questions along. Probably pay more attention when he says it personally that people should not leave now, that's what differentiate him from those apps or organizations, he can relate to them and sure that it has an impact on them. He could get paid for this job, he could have all these people in the room, sometimes he would be why is nobody updating me on these people's conditions?! Patchy feedback loops.

- *Did anyone contact you after watching the documentary with their own experience?*

No I think it's mostly Guardian readers - most of them said that they discovered something they didn't know. I think it's the case of most of documentaries about refugees, even in Trampoline, people would be brought to these films and people would be like, I have already been through this, why would I watch it again?

- *What were the reactions of the public (if you had the chance to host a debate)?*

I've screened at human rights festival in Belfast - I want to wait for the festival to respond. I'm waiting to get back as many answers. You can look at the comments on The Guardian or on the Facebook page, there were some horrendous comments.

- *Do you think that some people might view Abu Amar in the same way as a smuggler?*

That's what people said on The Guardian - this guy is a human smuggler, traffickers, even not the extreme would brought up that "Are you aware that he is some sort of a smuggler?", I don't think that's what he is bcs he is not profiting in any way, for him it is like humanitarian aid or assistance at least.

- *Does his use of all the apps cut out of smugglers?*

It's more about democratizing a process to a certain extent and giving the most information as possible. When it's avoidable he can cut them out, but some parts can't be made without a smuggler like the crossing of the Mediterranean sea. Helping Fadi, with the bus and walking, it really helped Fadi. He can avoid the worst smugglers, and propose the most reliable ones. It's not cut them out completely unfortunately. He is allowing people to make their own journeys as much as possible.

- *Research question : to what extent do technologies used by asylum seekers and refugees frame their journeys towards and within europe?*

Chain effect - if he has guided one and it was a success he would use the same route to inform other people. I don't know what it is like for people who don't use Abu, how much it frames of their journey. I have no idea.

I know from people in Denmark arriving to asylum centers, the power of hearing rumors is strong. - conspiracy theories are almost more power than official sources. Whenever the Danish government update something on the website people will interpret it. Can make people do insanely stupid things, believing in the stories.

People around you, the people who have arrived already giving the information to their family and ideas are circulating. Preconceptions. Afghan family here - oh no you don't want to go to Hungary or something.

I guess mobile phones are prime resources - a chain of help. News sources - people dying on this route and then deciding how to avoid this route. Not a rational decision but more like an emotional one.

Listening to Abu Ammar calls, people would still go even if he said they should not, he would get so frustrated. Some of them are coerced to leave. Family would be split up, the boat will go regardless of the conditions. Smugglers use the telephone networks to find 'clients'. Abu Ammar must have been a threat.

## **Appendix 4 – UN City seminar - participant observation**

### **Participant observation : Seminar “Innovative Development and Humanitarian Assistance”**

**21st of June 2017 - UN City in Copenhagen**

Recording performed during the workshop “Digital inclusion of refugees through ICTs - Connectivity (UNHCR)”. The parts which are transcribed here are parts of handwritten notes, and some from the recording.

***Interlocutor:** UNHCR Lebanon representative*

Examples from Lebanon where innovation was used to solve complex issues: the first one was how connectivity was used to access livelihood and education - METAKALA - arabic courses (demand and offer) - paid job for the refugees, there is no competition with the lebanese people.

Another example was how do we send messages to millions of refugees ? Numbers is a very sensitive in Lebanon, challenging a message through the public television or local media could spark a lot of tensions between the communities - how do we tell to our beneficiaries that there is this new protection concern, new policies - if you go to the media on TV people will be like “wow they can take our agriculture or construction job”.

Build an application, ask refugees to download it (idea) and then they had this other idea which came up - what about whatsapp?

He established a communication tree - and we had our field offices - so he would send ‘hey there is this new thing you have to know about - health providers’ important messages which can mean life or death, he would send a whatsapp message to whatsapp group of UNHCR colleagues in the field, and each of them has a set of outreach volunteers under them - so from 7 people who reached 70,000 people, and they reached 15,000 families in the same day.

We tested it once and we were able to reach 50,000 people - so now it’s being used as a two-ways communication - to be aware of some situations in some parts of Lebanon and then we need to validate the information. So in order to validate this information we would send to this person sending a message to this network and we will get the information really quickly. It’s solving the problem of communication of refugees, and shows the importance of communication and connectivity.

***Interlocutor:** Morgen from BLUENOTE*

What are the barriers to connectivity? What are the barriers you run into as the UNHCR?

***Interlocutor:** UNHCR representative*

Regulatory barriers in relation to the government - controls on who is able to provide this?

Infrastructure question and costs. Financial barriers - very expensive. If the government doesn’t want you to do something, then it doesn’t happen - (Jack lebanon) a balance in between what the host community has and the refugees have. We need to find a balanced offer to make sure we don’t

give free sim cards to refugees while the host community can't afford it. It will create tensions. But it is possible."

***Interlocutor:*** *Morgen from BLUENOTE*

UN should have some bargaining power to get access to the internet?

***Interlocutor:*** *UNHCR representative*

Bottom line of argumentation. As UNHCR we use our bargaining power to be sure that people can remain, we do not try to push for other envelopes. We start at the bottom line so Syrians can still flee Syria and be welcomed in Lebanon.



## Appendix 5 – “The Hands that Guide” transcript

As a matter of transparency, we decided to share the document as it was sent to us. We did not effectuate any transformation or change on this document; we just used it as secondary empirical data.

### ABU AMAR – TRANSCRIPT

#### DAY 1

##### Summary

*Abu receives a message from a man who's group has arrived on an island, but don't know the name of it, and have troubles sending their location. They've been stuck for 4-5 days without food or water. We discover they are on a military island, which is why their location services are blocked. With fierce weather on the horizon, Abu talks with co-ordinators to arrange for supplies to be sent before the storm hits.*

##### Characters:

Abu Amar – lead

Alaa – female co-ordinator

Mohammad – male co-ordinator

Dr. Ahmed?

Juan – male co-ordinator

Island Man (aka Abu Aiyman)

00:00:03:14

00:00:11:11

Island man (message): May peace be upon you, may god bless you, and you be happy.

00:00:11:11

00:00:20:10

Island man (message): My dear friend, tomorrow I am leaving tomorrow early in the morning, around 9

00:00:20:10

00:00:31:10

Island man (message): I'm going to Istanbul, for 3 days, then start moving again. pray for me.

00:00:31:10

00:00:41:10

Island man (message): I thank you for everything. you've been there for me all along. And all those for whom my recording won't reach in the next period.

00:00:51:10

00:01:12:19

Island man (message): In a week or 2 I'll continue with our activity. There are 300 people on this Island, don't know what it's called

00:01:12:19

00:01:24:19

Island man (message): We've been here 4-5 days, haven't eaten or drunk anything, so if you know any way to contact the Red Cross, let me know

00:01:27:19

00:01:38:15

Abu: Which Island, Farmacos, or? What's the latitude and longitude?

*Abu receives a message from a co-ordinator*

00:02:27:22

00:02:27:23

Co-ordinator (message): Peace upon you, how's it going? We've been talking to (x), who's phone's off and he's not replying.

*Abu calls Island man. We can't hear the response.*

00:03:37:23

00:03:42:24

Abu (to Island man): Right now there's a storm, which will last for 5 days.

00:03:42:24

00:03:48:24

Abu (to Island man): So it's better to wait 5 days until you leave.

00:03:50:24

00:04:06:24

Abu (to Island man): I'm not telling you to do anything, I can't take responsibility for you and your wife. But when you leave, let me know and I'll follow you.

00:04:06:24

00:04:19:24

Abu (to Island man): Take all cautions and may god take care of you.

00:04:19:24

00:04:38:24

Abu (to Island man): Wait 5 days until you head to Athens. Just try to wait and go then.

00:04:38:24

00:04:42:24

Abu (to Island man): ok, ok ok, it's up to you.

00:05:00:24

00:05:12:00

Abu (to Island man): I guess you can also go through Macedonia, but you need all your papers as proof

00:05:12:00

00:05:19:00

Abu (to Island man): Now they only give acceptance to Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans

00:05:19:00

00:05:28:00

Abu (to Island man): Til now I don't know, but there's alot of refugees heading to macedonia

00:05:48:00

00:05:51:01

Abu (to Island man): So it's really important to have all your papers with you.

00:05:55:01

00:06:14:02

Abu (to Island man): Take the two (children) with you, no one wil get close to you or hurt you. May god be with you. And let me know when you're in turkey. May god be with you.

*Abu listens to various messages*

00:06:49:02

00:07:03:03

(message) I arrived, thanks god. May you guys never miss my voice

00:07:15:03

00:07:21:04

(message) God saved us and gave me the courage to drive the zodiac (boat).

00:07:24:04

00:07:27:05

(message) We just arrived on land and are gunna start walking now

00:07:35:05

00:07:38:06

(message) Havent started moving yet, but when we do you can start tracking us

00:09:00:00

00:09:14:01

(message) who's gonna be tracking us?

00:13:11:01

00:13:20:02

Abu (to island man) You guys are on the wrong island. You think you are on Farmacos but you guys are on Kaios

00:14:16:02

00:14:17:03

Abu (to co-ordinator) Is there a chance I can communicate with the people on the island?

00:14:17:03

00:14:37:03

(co-ordinator): Ayman has contacted the people on the island, who couldn't send a location, but sent some pictures to identify it

00:14:37:00

00:14:43:03

Abu (to co-ordinator) Is the number you were using still working?

00:15:50:03

00:16:01:04

Island man (message): I just sent you our current location and a photo. you need to tell us what to do, as the waves are getting higher

00:16:40:04

00:16:46:05

(Co-ordinator): "Hey abu amar, just called them, and they're still afraid, they havent eaten or drunk anything since yesterday

00:16:49:05

00:16:50:06

Abu (to co-ordinator): Send me the number

00:17:00:06

00:17:00:07

(co-ordinator): They are on Kaois, with rocks on the upper coast

00:17:10:07

00:17:19:08

If there's more trouble, we need to call the Greek, not the Turkish, coast guard

00:18:50:08

00:18:54:09

Abu (to co-ordinator) Hey, who's tracking the people in Kaois now, and why didnt you guys call the coast guards til now?

00:18:54:09

00:18:55:09

Abu (to co-ordinator) Did you call them?

00:19:20:09

00:19:20:10

Abu (to co-ordinator) When did this happen?

00:19:40:10

00:19:40:11

Abu (to co-ordinator) What happened with them?

00:20:41:11

00:20:41:12

Abu (to co-ordinator) Then it's ok, just tell the guards about their current position on the island.

00:20:50:12

00:20:56:13

Abu (to co-ordinator) Why? it's ok, ok

00:21:09:13

00:21:13:14

Abu (to co-ordinator) They aren't responding

00:21:13:14

00:21:21:14

Abu (to co-ordinator) Ok so let me know if there's something new. We cant leave the people like this, we have to track them down and help them.

00:21:45:14

00:21:55:15

(message from male co-ordinator) Those were about 100 people, as people have the numbers have been increasing

00:21:55:15

00:22:05:15

(message from male co-ordinator ) When we communicated, they said they hadnt eaten or drunk anything, an the number of blankets was very low. And theres lots of women and children.

00:23:00:15

00:23:11:16

(message from female co-ordinator) I spoke with them at 2am, and they said there is a ship coming to pick them up.

00:23:16:16

00:23:16:17

(texting on screen) "why is their line busy when no one's calling them?"

00:23:25:17

00:23:25:18

Calling contact: "abandoned island"

00:24:11:18

00:24:11:19

(texting on screen) "where is Dr. (x). Why are all the links you're giving me a failure today?"

00:24:50:19

00:24:50:20

Island man (message): (trying to pronounce island name) Farma-cos, farma-cina, farma-suno

00:25:08:20

00:25:17:21

Abu (to male co-ordinator): Hey Mohammad, you sent me a location of Farmacos island, but what Rim sent me was from Kios

00:25:17:21

00:25:18:21

Mohammad (co-ordinator): I don't know where we are exactly but we've been told it's a military island - farmacos, farmacosini

00:25:20:21

00:25:20:22

Abu: Farmaconisi - it's a military island. It has a church and soldiers

00:25:50:22

00:25:50:23

Mohammad (co-ordinator): He's trying to send me the location, but it's being blocked because it's military

00:25:53:23

00:25:53:24

No, no no it's working and we have your co-ordinates

00:26:05:24

00:26:06:00

Mohammad: Is there any other way I can help them?

00:26:15:00

00:26:15:01

Abu (to mohommad) Give me a number so I call them

Mohammad: ok ok right away.

00:27:26:01

00:27:26:02

Island man (message): We're going to die of hunger and thirst.

00:27:33:02

00:27:33:03

Abu (to co-ordinator): C'mon mohammed, send the number so i can communicate with them!

00:27:45:03

00:27:45:04

Abu (to co-ordinator): How come the army are around them? Why are they on an abandoned island?

00:28:14:04

00:28:24:05

(message from co-ordinator): From yesterday, 8am, we were almost not alive (?)

00:28:32:05

00:28:53:06

(message from co-ordinator): The journey started around 6, and Rim woke me up around 7 to start tracking them.

00:29:26:06

00:29:42:07

Abu (to Island man): Hello, Abu Aiyman, its Abu Amar. Which island is it - farmaconisi or what?

Island man: - Yes farma...

00:29:42:07

00:29:47:07

Abu (to Island man): It has a church and a help-point?

00:29:50:07

00:30:02:08

Island man: Once we arrived, the army caught us and we cannot move.

Abu Amar: The army there is very nasty

00:30:02:08

00:30:11:08

Island man: we're hungry, starving and they're not bringing us anything.

Abu Amar: let me explain how it works

00:30:11:08

00:30:16:08

Abu Amar: The ugly truth is that the soldiers only get their stocks re-supplied every 4 days

00:30:16:08

00:30:35:08

Abu Amar: There's a seriously strong storm coming, that's why nobody can reach you. It's very dangerous.

00:30:35:08

00:30:46:08

Island man - but it's calm here!

Abu Amar – that's only in turkey, where you are! I can hear the kids are really afraid.

Island man - so if the sea stays the same for 3-4 days, are we gunna starve to death?

00:30:57:08

00:31:12:08

Abu Amar – Don't worry my friend, i'm gunna keep calling the coast guard to make sure they take it seriously.

00:31:12:08

00:31:13:08

Abu Amar – Send me a video and I will send this to the organization. Immediately.

00:32:12:08

00:32:21:09

*Abu replays the message they sent on arrival island, 5 days ago*

"Hey all, we've arrived safely, thanks for your help. Thanks god"

00:32:21:09

00:32:22:09

*Abu texts Fadi, another co-ordinator*

Fadi - I was asleep, because it wasn't my shift, and I don't speak english.

Abu Amar – guess it was ms. Asmaat's shift.

Fadi - yeah they send this yesterday, not today

00:35:01:09

00:35:10:10

Abu (to camera): They've been stuck on this millitary island for 5days without food/water

00:36:41:10

00:36:59:11

Abu (to island man): Hey my friend, i've received your pictures and video.

Island man – You don't know how hard it is to survive here.



00:36:59:11

00:37:14:11

Abu (to island man): Trust me, I know what it takes to get through this. I've been through it myself.

00:37:14:11

00:37:23:11

Abu (to island man): Let us pray for those stuck there, that they don't suffer more than the past 5 days. Keep me updated with all the changes, so keep your phone battery safe, and use it as little as possible.

00:37:23:11

00:37:35:11

Abu (to island man): You will need it in the next days.

00:37:35:11

00:37:36:11

Island man: Thank you, goodbye.

00:37:36:11

00:38:25:11

(message from male co-ordinator): Hey guys, the people are stuck on a military island, which is why they can't send their location

Two of the men tried to test the theory, sending it to one another, but every time it sent a random location.

00:38:48:11

00:38:57:12

(message from female co-ordinator): When I spoke to him last time, he told me he'd spoken with a lot of organization but no one was able to help him

00:38:57:12

00:39:03:12

Abu (to female co-ordinator) But no concrete measures were taken! It's not like we need them to send us their location - we already know.

The location is not the problem,

00:39:15:12

00:39:30:12

Abu (to female co-ordinator): it's the army that is! They give them one meal every 4 days. They have to take them to another bigger island first, then to Greece

00:39:30:12

00:39:38:12

Abu (to female co-ordinator): Send me the pics of the kids so we can push them to act

00:41:22:12

00:41:30:13

Abu (to camera): This is the app that lets you follow how the sea conditions

00:41:30:13

00:41:51:13

Abu (to camera): When it's red it's dangerous. So you shouldn't travel. The waves are like a meter and a half.

00:41:51:13

00:41:59:13

Abu (to camera): There's a lot of people who listen, but many others don't even consider listening to us. they'd rather listen to the smuggler.

00:42:28:06

00:42:32:07

Abu (to camera): Some people think Europe is running away.

00:42:50:07

00:42:56:08

Abu (to camera): believe me, if they don't listen, a lot of bad stuff happens that breaks your heart in pieces

00:43:21:17

00:43:35:18

Abu (to camera): We need a break. C'mon give me a break!

00:47:12:04

00:47:20:05

Abu (to camera): God willing, I will start therapy in a week

00:47:44:05

00:48:02:06

Abu (to camera): One of the hardest things you can do in your life, which has hurt me so much, is that when you are trying to guide people they dying at the same time.

00:48:03:06

00:48:12:07

Abu (to camera): with women screaming, children crying....

One moment the person driving the boat just dies, the next moment another person dies. And so on. It's the same repeating pattern.

00:58:02:24

00:58:15:00

(message from co-ordinator) Hey, please post a warning on your page to stop more people from coming toward this island (people are stuck on)

00:59:12:00

00:59:12:01

Abu: oof!

01:01:44:22

01:02:20:23

Abu (to camera): The good thing about the group is the history, which lets us go back and check if anything has happened. To see where they were last, which helps to find them later on. They track all the men, women and children.

01:03:56:10

01:04:27:11

Abu (to camera): The (FB) group is called Migration and Asylum without Smugglers. The number of members was 80,000. But people started posting pornographic photos. Why do this? so 20k people reported it, and it was shut down.

01:04:27:11

01:04:28:11

Abu (to camera): So I woke up in the morning and it was just shut down. Had to make another one.

01:52:28:11

01:52:54:12

Abu (to camera): Having GPS and the favourite stars makes it really easy to track the people, and correct their course

01:53:53:12

01:53:53:13

Abu (to camera): They're getting on the boat and I start talking to them.

01:55:07:13

01:55:21:14

Abu (to camera): It's one small zodiac (small boat) and there's 50 people inside it.

- did everyone make it?

- yeah we were tracking all of them.

01:55:26:14

01:55:39:15

Abu (to camera): Even Amar (his son) can do this job now

01:55:45:15

01:55:52:16

Abu (to camera): When somebody sends us his current location, we start drawing the map so they can follow it.

01:56:48:16

01:56:58:17

Abu (to camera): That's a picture of the zodiac.

01:57:28:17

01:57:28:18

Abu (to camera): the journey (turkey-greece) takes 2.5h, but we track them minute by minute

02:05:50:10

02:05:50:11

Abu (to camera): One time I had to go to the hospital because I just couldn't take the pressure anymore.

02:06:10:09

02:06:25:10

(omer)-pressure?

Abu (to camera): - yeah of course. unconsciously I begin to feel like I'm cracking.

02:06:38:10

02:06:48:11

Abu (to camera): A person was talking to me, and I heard another person talking to him, asking him to check on someone, but they just said leave him be, he's dead. I'm just like listening to this, what am I supposed to do?

02:06:48:11

02:07:00:11

Abu (to camera): Can you imagine a person in the front saying to a person behind him, hold x, hold x, but the one in the back says, can't you see? he's drowned

02:07:00:11

02:07:01:11

Abu (to camera): It was a really tough situation.

02:07:10:11

02:07:10:12

(arabic idiom..)

02:08:10:12

02:08:21:13

me: what makes you carry on?

Abu (to camera): I've been so tired I changed my Turkish number a couple of times, and on whatsapp. But I couldn't resist helping.

02:08:48:13

02:09:10:14

*Abu replays old recordings*

(message from boat passenger): The smuggler keeps driving and water's coming in, they won't take us back. What do we do?

02:09:10:14

02:09:29:14

Abu (to camera): This trip, 3 died out of 33/34. Everytime I hear this mayday, it really moves me.

02:10:23:14

02:16:59:15

*Abu talks about guiding on land from Macedonia*

02:21:12:15

02:21:12:16

(message from female co-ordinator) Guys, you gave me 2 locations, which one should I send the coastguard to?

02:21:29:16

02:21:40:17

(message from female co-ordinator) Yesterday, when I gave the pictures that Amer send to me to Juan, he said they're on an island nearby called Nina

*Abu's Daughter arrives and begins massaging his paralysed leg*

02:21:51:17

02:21:56:18

(message from female co-ordinator): Why, Abu Amar, did... happen?

02:21:56:18

02:22:03:18

Abu's daughter : I am Tala

(message from female co-ordinator) if it's not 8 o'clock its ok"

02:22:03:18

02:22:12:18

(message from female co-ordinator) He told there was a report of 120 people and the army is surrounding them, and they are going to starve to death

02:22:17:18

02:22:21:19

Abu's daughter: Do you want the (massage) power on 9? 9?

02:23:17:19

02:23:43:20

Abu (to co-ordinator) Did she go to him? Did she? Did she go to him?

02:23:53:20

02:23:58:21

(message from female co-ordinator) Ok, so I'll be waiting for you until you are with him, then call me

02:26:52:21

02:26:53:22

(female co-ordinator) Hello

Abu -hello

(female co-ordinator) - ive spoken with the police on the abandoned island and they told me they cant send help because of the bad weather, but in 30mins they are going to do this.

02:27:16:08

02:27:23:09

Abu - 1 sec, just wait, have to check something. call me on whatsapp on my second number.

02:27:23:09

02:27:24:09

(female co-ordinator) ok bye.

02:27:30:09

02:27:30:10

Abu calls two people to try and co-ordinate between them

Abu (to man) Buddy, listen, on the other line i have another girl, Alaa from our organisation

02:27:30:10

02:28:00:10

Abu (to woman) slow it down

02:28:00:10

02:28:01:10

(female co-ordinator) Abu Amar, it's so hard to do this, I'll tell you and you tell him.

Abu: no, no, we're still with you.

02:28:11:10

02:28:20:11

(female co-ordinator) they cant send any boats now concerning the safety of boats and people. But they are gunna send food in 30mins.

02:28:20:11

02:28:21:11

*Abu Amar repeats what he's heard (to man):* ok, they cant send any boats now concerning the safety of boats and people. But they are gunna send food in 30mins.

02:28:35:11

02:28:35:12

Abu (to female) Alaa, You hear me? you go now

02:28:35:12

02:28:50:12

Abu (to Island man): In 30 minutes they're sending food. Thats the only thing we can do and get right now.

02:28:50:12

02:28:53:12

Island man - what about the boats?

02:28:53:12

02:28:54:12

Abu (to Island man): That's all we can do right now, because of the bad weather and there's so many of you.

02:29:02:12

02:29:04:13

Island man – at least, for children!

02:29:04:13

02:29:10:13

Abu (to Island man): I understand where you're coming from, but they can't because of the bad weather. They're going to do their best to supply you with food.

02:29:17:13

02:29:26:14

Abu (to Island man): Dude, step by step, we're both doing what we can.

02:29:26:14

02:29:31:14

Abu (to Island man): You guys now have food! Just wait for the boat.

02:29:33:14

02:29:40:15

Abu (to Island man): I'm doing absolutely everything I can, without restraint

02:30:02:15

02:30:08:05

Island man – What about the boats though?

02:30:08:05

02:30:14:15

Abu (to Island man): Let me explain. We called the coast guards of the abandoned island, they gave us a number, and they told us

02:30:14:15

02:30:26:15

Abu (to Island man): in exactly 30minutes, you guys will have food and drinks. And there are no boats because of the bad weather conditions

02:30:26:15

02:30:29:15

Island man: God willing

02:30:29:15

02:30:32:15

Abu (to his son): Go, go to your room)

02:30:32:15

02:30:40:15

Abu (to Island man): Go on then, I'll keep following you guys.

02:30:40:15

02:30:54:15

Abu (to camera): Oh, poor them, they don't have food or water. so cold someone close the door

02:45:38:13

02:45:48:14

*Two co-ordinators interact with one another*

(female co-ordinator): I'm also here. I'm Rim, I'm here too.

02:45:48:14

02:45:49:14

(male co-ordinator): She's left half an hour ago. The engine speed is 35. The height of the waves are 90-110.

02:46:14:01

02:46:37:14

Female: I think the petrol is not very pure, so the engine has stopped.

Male: I don't think it's the petrol, I think it's been overfilled.

02:46:40:14



02:46:52:14

male: I remember there were 45 on board, and 2-3 children more.

02:47:06:14

02:47:10:14

Abu (to co-ordinator): Are these people stuck or can they keep going?

02:47:10:14

02:47:19:14

male - I believe they've just begun.

02:47:19:14

02:47:28:14

male - They went for half an hour and then got stuck.

02:47:28:14

02:47:38:14

Abu (to co-ordinators): There are 2 things: it might not be the petrol, i think the fan might be dirty or the engine might've overheated

02:47:38:14

02:47:46:14

Abu (to co-ordinators): If it's the second, just wait 5 mins for it to cool down.

02:47:46:14

02:48:04:14

Male: Just got some information. The problem is not the engine overheating.

02:48:04:14

02:48:20:14

Abu (to co-ordinator): The fan input might be blocked or dirty, so that's why it's not working. Tell him to check the hole.

02:48:20:14

02:48:34:14

Abu (to co-ordinators): If it's a new engine, then wait 5 min. But if it's old, then check the fan.

02:48:34:14

02:49:36:14

*Abu repeats instructions*

02:49:36:14

02:49:46:14

Male: It's not a huge problem, so if we can solve it there's no need for the coast guard.

02:49:46:14

02:50:03:14

*Abu repeats previous instructions*

02:50:03:14

02:50:14:14

Male: Once I contact them I'll get back to you.

02:50:14:14

02:50:26:14

Female: Dr. Ahmed, remember to check the weather to see if it's ok for them to wait there.

02:50:26:14

02:50:37:14

Abu (to co-ordinators): Who's the group who's in charge of this journey?

02:50:37:14

02:50:58:14

Male: It's me and (...) in charge til 12am then the other group will replace us

02:50:58:14

02:51:20:14

(co-ordinators names)

02:51:47:14

02:51:58:15

Abu (to co-ordinators): Ask those responsible what the engine make is - Yamaha, Suzuki, Italian or Chinese?

02:52:11:15

02:52:22:16

female co-ordinator: The waves are between 90-140cm, and the wind is from West to East

02:52:27:16

02:52:38:17

Abu: Oh, that's very high. Just tell me what make the engine is so i can solve this problem

02:53:07:17

02:53:30:18

(repeating)

02:53:44:18

02:53:50:19

female co-ordinator: Yamaha 35.

Abu –Yamaha!

02:53:58:19

02:54:03:20

Abu - Ok ok where are you exactly?

02:54:03:20

02:54:30:20

Abu (to camera): The people don't want to go because of the weather, but the smugglers are forcing them to leave.

Their journey is from here to there, so when they get to this point the waves are really bad.

02:54:54:20

02:55:11:21

Female co-ordinator: I just talked with the people on the boat and told them to throw their belongings overboard.

02:55:14:21

02:55:14:22

Male co-ordinator: call.

02:55:30:22

02:55:31:23

(message from female co-ordinator)- The smugglers have guns, and are forcing them onboard.

Abu Amar (to camera)- when the people saw the waves, they didn't wanna leave.

02:56:03:23

02:56:15:24

Abu Amar (to camera): They saw the waves and didn't wanna go, but the smugglers are holding them at gun-point.

02:56:20:24

02:56:23:00

Abu Amar (to co-ordinator) Did they get on the boat under the threat?

02:56:36:00

02:57:24:00

Male co-ordinator: Their journey was supposed to begin at 6am, but they saw the waves and refused. Then the smugglers threatened them with guns.

02:57:57:01

02:58:02:02

Abu (to camera): These people are in the group I created.

02:58:09:02

02:58:17:03

Abu (to camera): Sometimes we've had no contact with those guys on the sea.

02:58:19:03

02:58:26:04

Abu (to camera): There are 3 groups, with 3-4 in each one.

02:58:38:04

02:58:45:05

Abu (to co-ordinators): Ok guys just keep me updated step-by-step.

02:58:59:05

02:59:05:20

Male co-ordinator: They (people on boat) haven't got back to us yet.

02:59:24:20

02:59:28:21

Abu (to camera): There's a huge storm right now.

02:59:31:21

02:59:43:22

Abu (to camera): It's coming from the Med to the greek island. It's a very risky situation right now. This is the storm point, and the waveheight is 3,70 metres tall

03:00:17:22

03:00:44:23

Male co-ordinator: This is a really unique journey and sea state. Instead of 10, we need to check in every 5min. They have to surf with the waves not to capsize.

*Abu's 7-y-old son arrives and stands watching him*

03:00:44:23

03:00:58:23

Female co-ordinator: Ok dr. ahmed, we will check every 5min, and get back to you. No new news on the engine.

03:01:10:23

03:01:21:24

Female co-ordinator - The engine started working again.

Abu - Ok Ok, bravo

03:01:42:24

03:01:48:00

Male co-ordinator: I'm confirming the details on the journey...

03:01:48:00

03:01:54:00

Male co-ordinator: The passengers did indeed board the boat under the threat...

03:01:54:00

03:02:01:00

Male co-ordinator: The engine stopped working because the boat was too heavy...

03:02:01:00

03:02:06:00

Male co-ordinator: We intervened just at the right time to help them get it working again...

03:02:06:00

03:02:18:00

Male co-ordinator: And we've decided to check them every 5 mins just to ensure they're safe...

03:03:18:00

03:03:26:01

Abu (to co-ordinators): Ok, bravo. keep checkin on them, and keep me updated.

03:04:29:01

03:04:35:02

Abu (to camera): The app lets me check if there's any ferries on their route so they can avoid them

*Abu's little brother (11y-old) joins to watch as well*

03:04:46:02

03:05:04:03

Male co-ordinator: I've just checked their route and there's a big ship en route. so i hope they don't cross paths.

Abu's son: this is the boat path

03:05:15:03

03:05:24:04

Abu (to camera): We can see the fishing boats too, so if anything happens, we can contact them to ask for help.

*Another Journey begins*

03:06:12:04

03:06:36:05

Male co-ordinator: There's another journey that's just begun. Can two other people keep following the first one?

03:06:36:05

03:06:47:05

Abu (to coordinator) Send me an update on where they second group are now.

03:07:22:05

03:07:38:06

Abu (to camera): This is the point where the 2nd group is started their journey, from Lesbos.

03:07:38:06

03:08:03:06

Abu (to camera): First I've gotta check navigation now to see how many big ships there are.

Abu's son - how many are there!?

03:08:23:06

03:08:29:07

Abu (to camera): For this one, the waves are only 60cm

03:08:56:07

03:09:04:08

Abu (to co-ordinator): They're starting at Assos, and the waves are approx. 60cm

03:09:48:08

03:09:55:09

Abu (to co-ordinator): Dr. Ahmed, are you with me? hello hello?

03:09:55:09

03:10:08:09

Male co-ordinator: Alaa and Juan are following this journey.

03:10:11:09

03:10:17:10

Abu (to male co-ordinator): You didnt give me any info about this journey

03:11:39:10

03:11:47:11

Abu (to male co-ordinator): You haven't given me any info about this journey. How many people?

03:11:39:10

03:11:47:11

Abu (to male co-ordinator): Just send me a summary.

03:12:37:11

03:12:47:12

Abu (to male co-ordinator): Just wait a second and I'll get back to you.

03:13:48:12

03:14:19:13

Male co-ordinator: Regarding the first journey, everything is sorted now.

03:14:23:13

03:14:31:14

Abu (to male co-ordinator): Try to get me information about the second journey that goes from Assos.

03:14:43:14

03:14:54:15

Abu (to camera): There is a really rough sea. It's like they think Europe is running away from them.

03:14:59:15

03:15:14:16

Abu (to camera): Didn't we tell you not to start this journey!? Didn't we tell you not to start this journey!?

03:15:37:16

03:15:55:17

(message from boat) The boat is 8.5m. We are 54 people in total, with 9 children and 15 women.

03:15:55:17

03:16:04:17

Abu (to camera): Oh, 54 people..! and the waves...60cm. God bless them,

03:17:03:17

03:17:13:18

Abu (to son): Amar, go to your room! to your room! and close the door after you.

END OF DAY 1

## DAY 2

### Summary

*Helping Abu Amar at his house is Fadi, who Abu Amar directed every step of the way from Turkey to Europe. Now he helps Abu Amar in his operations.*

### Characters

Abu Amar – lead

Fadi – former groupie, current assistant

Boat man – (aka Suzdar)

Male co-ordinator 1

Male co-ordinator 2 (aka Ramadan)

.....

*Fadi tells the story of his journey to Europe, under Abu Amar's Guidance*

03:24:04:00

03:25:04:01

Fadi: First thing I went to Turkey, so I came to Europe and the first place was Mercin (Turkey). I was there for 2 months, because every time I tried the Turkish guard pulled me back.

03:25:08:01

03:25:15:02

Fadi: I contacted Abu Amar on FB and told him I must go to Libya to get to Italy

03:25:15:02

03:25:28:02

Fadi: But it's very risky, because out of 3 boats of 300 people only 1 made it.

03:25:28:02

03:25:37:02

Fadi: So Abu Amar agreed not to go that way.

03:25:37:02

03:26:12:02

Fadi: He told me to go from Turkey to Greece, which I didn't know about.

Only thing was you have to pay the smugglers in Esmir.

And others to get to Macedonia.

And others to get to Serbia.

And others to get to hungaria.

And others to Croatia.

And others to Germany.

03:26:12:02

03:26:25:02

Fadi: It's very expensive. About 6000 eu. I didnt have it, so my only solution was Libya, which was 2000.

03:26:25:02

03:26:50:02

Fadi: So I told Abu Amar my only option was Libya. But he said I will show you the way half price,or with no smugglers.

03:26:50:02

03:26:58:02

Fadi: So I left Ezmir, and the boat sunk.So we came back (to turkey)

03:26:58:02

03:27:06:02

Fadi: I got back to Abu Amar and said I wouldn't try again. Our contact stopped for a while. But I tried it again, but we got completely lost with 50 people on board. It was dark, winter time.



03:27:21:02

03:27:56:02

Fadi: So I whatsapp'ed Abu Amar who said to send my position every 2 min, so he could guide us toward land, until we saw light from the greek island.

03:27:56:02

03:28:06:02

Fadi: He helped us so much. We had no clue where we were, and no-one knew how to use gps.

03:28:06:02

03:28:25:02

Fadi: I didn't know anything about google maps... We eventually reached the island, then Greek mainland

03:28:25:02

03:28:50:02

Fadi: So I asked family to send money to smuggle from Macedonia, and they did. But we got left in a forest for 2 days.

03:28:50:02

03:29:07:02

Fadi: We had choice but to wait, because we'd given all our money away and my phone died.

03:29:07:02

03:29:21:02

Fadi: Another group came and I spoke to Abu Amar using their phone and showed where we were. He gave us instructions to reach the nearest village.

03:29:23:02

03:29:57:02

Fadi: There he said not to talk to people, just pay at garage #3 to keep the employees quiet.

03:29:57:02

03:30:16:02

Fadi: There they bought a ticket to another village.

03:30:16:02

03:30:38:02

Fadi: (And the same all again all the way through Macedonia).

03:30:38:02

03:30:56:02

Fadi: The smugglers take 3000 euros just for that.

03:30:56:02

03:31:19:02

Fadi: So we arrived in Serbia, where we had to pay another smuggler to get to Bulgaria, which is part of Dublin treaty.

03:31:19:02

03:31:37:02

Fadi: I asked Abu Amar how to get through without smugglers - there was 2 ways.

03:31:37:02

03:31:54:02

Fadi: One group followed his instructions and got saved.

03:31:54:02

03:32:08:02

Fadi: My group went another way and caught and fingerprinted by the Hungarian police. Then they left us and I headed to Germany.

03:32:08:02

03:32:30:02

Fadi: When I told Abu Amar, he warned other groups not to go this way.

03:32:30:02

03:32:31:02

Fadi: (talks about his FB page)

03:32:33:02

03:32:51:03

Fadi: Abu Amar is the first person to allow people to immigrate without smugglers. There were no options before.

03:33:13:03

03:33:25:04

Fadi: Through all his journeys Abu Amar has learned every safe route possible, and has received many threats from smugglers.

03:33:32:04

03:33:48:05

Fadi: When I got to Germany I joined Abu Amar's group to help him, as he has so much pressure.

*They begin talking of the day's plans*

03:51:28:05

03:51:32:06

Fadi: Today we have around 28 journeys, might become more later.

03:52:16:06

03:52:25:07

Fadi: Today there's a lot of pressure, because of the poor weather conditions over the past days.

03:52:25:07

03:52:40:07

Fadi: So it puts more pressure on us to guide them. All of the groups are working through the night until tomorrow midday.

03:54:00:07

03:54:13:08

Fadi: It's very important to communicate the weather with people, because the smugglers always lie to them.

03:54:13:08

03:54:25:08

Fadi: It's really important to communicate the weather with people.

03:56:50:08

03:56:54:09

Abu Amar: It's not an easy job. it's really psychologically taxing/challenging.

03:56:54:09

03:57:11:09

Abu Amar: Sometimes when you're following a journey, you receive recordings from people crying, or sinking

03:57:11:09

03:57:24:09

Abu Amar: You receive these, it puts a lot of strain on you. All you can do is wait for help to arrive, until the coastguard comes

04:00:20:09

04:00:25:10

Abu Amar: Out of all the people we follow, about 90% arrive safely.

*Abu Amar plays grateful messages from people who've arrived safely*

04:03:44:10

04:04:00:11

(message to Abu Amar): We are so grateful for your care and guidance! You are great!  
God Bless you.

04:04:02:11

04:04:19:12

(message to Abu Amar): Good Morning. God bless you. I was on 11 o'clock journey. We've arrived safely, so I want to thank you so much for your care and guidance.

*Abu Amar's 11 year old brother brings 3 lego boats to the table: a police boat, a ship, and a pirate dinghy.*

04:39:37:12

04:39:51:13

Abu (to boat man): Focus, my friend. Are you in danger? Tell me what's up. Have you called the coastguard?

Boat man: I don't know where we are. Even if we call, we don't have a location.

04:39:51:13

04:40:06:13

Abu: Ok. How many people are you?

04:39:51:13

04:40:06:13

Abu: Is the engine working?

04:39:51:13

04:40:06:13

Boat man: working? yes.

Abu: Ok. sit close to the driver.

04:40:06:13

04:40:13:13

Boat man: I can't hear you

Abu: Sit closer to the driver so I can instruct you!

04:40:13:13

04:40:31:13

Boat man: what?

Abu: Sit closer to the driver!

04:40:13:13

04:40:31:13

Abu: And contact me via the whatsapp group!

Boat man: ok ok I'll send you my position.

04:40:31:13

04:40:46:13

Abu: I will show you exactly how to proceed. But the two co-ordinates are on the same axis. There is a red light in front of you - that's from the island. Just follow that.

04:41:20:13

04:41:23:14

Boat man: Is this the right way?

04:41:20:13

04:41:23:14

Boat man: Is this the right way?

04:41:23:14

04:41:43:14

Abu: Yes yes good. In front theres a red light from the island. On your right there are some other red lights from the airport.

04:41:23:14

04:41:43:14

Abu: But send your exact location.

04:42:38:14

04:42:45:15

Abu: Ok ok, make a sharp right because you're heading in the wrong direction!

04:43:30:15

04:43:46:16

Boat man: We are in real danger now. Tell us if we're heading the right way, I beg you.

04:43:46:16

04:43:52:16

Boat man: In front of us is a light. Is the other one the coastguard?

04:44:02:16

04:44:09:17

Abu: I sent you an annotated map, did you see it?

Boat man: yeah yeah I did

04:44:09:17

04:44:26:17

Abu: It showed where you are and the direction you must follow.

Boat man: you told me to head right, but it seems there's a village there?

04:44:26:17

04:44:32:17

Abu: Yeah that's the greek island.

Boat man: Is it really?

Abu: Yes that's it!

04:44:32:17

04:44:45:17

Boat man: but there's some lights to my left too!

Abu: No no no! that's Turkey!

Boat man: I don't know my right from my left now.

04:44:45:17

04:44:50:17

Abu: Just focus with me. Just head right from the location you sent me.

04:44:50:17

04:45:01:17

Boat man: There's a boat heading toward us, is that the coast guard?

Fadi: Might be a fishing boat?

04:44:50:17

04:45:01:17

Abu: I will check now.

04:45:15:17

04:45:15:18

(coming from boat) It might just be a normal ship!

04:45:22:18

04:45:50:19

Boat man: -Abu Amar? Just tell me what it is so I can calm people down!

04:45:22:18

04:45:50:19

Boat man: On my right there are some low-lying lights- a village. On my left there are some tall lights. Where shall we go?

04:45:50:19

04:45:51:19

Abu: Good. God bless you. Continue right!

Boat man: Did you check the boat?

04:45:50:19

04:45:51:19

Abu: Just checked and it's a state-owned boat. So it could be.

04:46:16:19

04:46:22:20

*repeats about lights*

04:46:22:20

04:46:51:20

*more guidance...*

Abu: follow the yellow light in the corner

04:46:51:20

04:47:01:20

Abu: Just follow that light in far right corner. Then you'll be in good stead.

04:47:01:20

04:47:11:20

Boat man: Ok I'll follow that light.

04:47:01:20

04:47:11:20

Abu: Good I'll keep tracking you.

04:47:20:20

04:47:23:21

Abu: Just keep in contact via the group.

04:47:28:21

04:47:41:22

Abu (to Fadi): so this is where they're heading

04:48:06:22

04:48:06:23

Abu (to Fadi): Is it ok?

04:48:22:23

04:48:50:24

Abu (to Fadi): They're heading toward the red light, but the yellow light is here.

Fadi: Ok just let them go and then re-direct them.

04:49:00:24

04:49:11:00

Abu (to boat man): Your direction is very good now. Keep going.

04:50:09:00

04:50:21:01

Abu (to boat man): I see what your seeing. There are some lights - from the airport. There's an organisation there that will welcome you.

04:50:21:01

04:50:26:01

(sound coming from boat) - Just let me talk with goddamn guy (Abu Amar)!

04:50:26:01

04:50:59:01

*repeating*

04:50:59:01

04:51:05:01

Abu: Ok, go, go on. Every 5 min send me you location.

04:51:35:01

04:51:44:02

Abu (to Fadi): They sent a new location and they're to the right of the airport.

04:51:53:02

04:52:14:03

Abu (to Fadi): There are no boats visible on the application, so it might be a coastguard.

04:51:53:02

04:52:14:03

Fadi: or fishing boat?

Abu (to Fadi): No not at this time.

*They call another co-ordinator*

04:52:34:03

04:52:48:04

Fadi (to co-ordinator): Is there any organization that can welcome them them on the greek island?

Abu (to Fadi) – No, they've only just set of from turkey! ' .

Just see if there's anyone on the right side to guide them.

04:53:08:04

04:53:15:05

Abu (to co-ordinator): Keep an eye on them, because aren't in a good situation. So if something happens we can call for help.

04:53:15:05

04:53:16:05

Fadi (to male co-ordinator) Just keep an eye on the group. they're updating us there.

04:53:49:05

04:54:00:00

Abu (to co-ordinator 'Ramadan) Keep an eye on the journey that just began from the Turkey, because their situation isn't good.



04:54:00:00

04:54:13:00

Fadi (to Abu Amar): here's the organisation, on the right, so I'll try to guide them toward there.

04:54:33:00

04:54:45:01

Abu Amar (to Fadi): Just send the new location. they're in good direction.

04:55:45:01

04:55:45:02

God willing, you're doing well. keep it up.

04:55:45:19

04:55:51:02

Boat man (message): "Abu Amar, the waves are getting higher"

04:56:26:02

04:56:33:03

Abu (to boat man): Just sit next to the driver and update me on whatsapp

04:58:12:03

04:58:25:04

Abu (to boat man): When you're steering, just turn gently right, not too much.

04:58:30:03

04:58:49:04

Abu (to boat man): Ask the smugglers about the engine spark - so if it stops working, you can pull it. Or just wait 5 minutes. Don't let people put their legs on the petrol hose.

04:58:51:04

04:58:57:05

Abu (to boat man): And most importantly, the people to your right and left must be on our whatsapp group.

04:58:57:05

04:59:15:05

Abu (to boat man): Yeah, trust god. God be with you.

05:00:08:20

05:00:12:21

Abu (to camera): Tell him to stop filming. I want to pray now.

05:03:25:05

05:03:25:06

*engine sound*

05:03:51:06

05:03:51:07

*people on boat singing*

05:05:42:07

05:05:43:08

Boat man: I've sent you location on your group.

05:05:56:08

05:06:11:09

Abu Amar (to boat man): Ok, the location of the organization is to the far right of the airport. I can't send people there because it's 7km further.

05:09:11:09

05:09:11:10

*Abu Amar plots a series of boat locations on map*

05:12:08:10

05:12:17:11

Abu (to fadi): what's the height of the waves?

Fadi: 20-30cm

05:13:25:11

05:13:34:12

Fadi (to Abu): The waves are a bit higher on Assos

05:13:41:12

05:13:50:13

Fadi (to Abu): Why don't we just ask Hadoui to make the waves smaller!

05:17:42:13

05:17:52:14

Boat man: We're here!

Abu: Did the coastguard get you?

Boat man: yeah yeah!

Abu: Thanks god for your safety.

05:18:29:14

05:18:33:15

Abu: Ok, good luck.

05:21:28:15

05:21:33:16

Fadi (to Abu Amar): Where shall measure the distance from?

05:27:41:16

05:27:55:17

Abu (to boat man): Suzdar, as soon as the coastguard arrives just tell me.

05:32:34:17

05:32:48:18

Boat man: ("Suzdar") we're a little stressed out, waiting the coastguard to arrive. The waves are a bit higher now.

05:32:50:18

05:33:00:19

Abu (to boat man): Calm down, it's not high. It's okay now.

05:34:22:19

05:34:22:20

Boat man: Is the coastguard far away?

Abu: They'll be there in 10 minutes.

05:34:54:20

05:35:05:21

Abu (to boat man): It's the Turkish one! Not the greek. *(they have barely made it off Turkish land)*

05:34:54:20

05:35:05:21

Abu (to boat man): You're still in Turkish sea.

05:34:54:20

05:35:05:21

Abu (to boat man): Calm everyone down and let the women and children off first.

05:35:26:02

05:35:37:22

Boat man: The coast guard just arrived!

Abu (to boat man): Thanks be to god.

05:35:42:22

05:35:45:23

*Abu repeats message*

Boat man: The coast guard just arrived!

05:35:59:23

05:36:20:24

Abu (to boat man): Tell the people there's a storm tomorrow for the next 3 days, so they shouldn't leave. Thank god for your safety.

05:36:39:24

05:37:08:00

Boat man: they (coastguard) are here but they're just taking photos of us.

Abu: That's the way they are. They always do that. just a wait a few mins. They'll take your photo then collect you.

05:37:08:00

05:37:19:00

Boat man: Why are they are doing this for God's sake!

05:37:30:00

05:37:33:01

Abu (to Fadi): So the trips is finished or what?

Fadi: No.

*A new journey begins*

05:39:50:01

05:39:50:02

Abu Amar (to group member): You have 18 km until you reach the greek island, so stay calm, it's only 1.5h and the sea conditions are fine.

*Back to original journey*

05:42:23:02

05:42:39:02

Abu (to boat man): Suz, suz, suz, tell me what happened? They rescue you or still taking your photos?

05:42:39:03

05:42:42:02

Boat man: *comically impersonates the Turkish coastguard*

END OF DAY 2

#### INTERVIEW

*Abu Amar sits in the physiotherapy room, talking about why he left Syria, his journey to Europe, beginning his organization, and his current situation.*

.....  
Let's start.

05:54:49:17

05:54:54:17

I'm here to do the physiotherapy, because I was injured in war. So I'm here for the rehabilitation.

05:54:58:17

05:55:03:17

My spine was injured and I became paralysed. When the doctor removed the shrapnel, he said I was temporarily paralysed from the hip down. It means I have a spasm in the spinal cord.

05:55:17:17

05:55:20:17

Now I'm in Germany, in the process of recovering.

05:55:20:17

05:55:30:17

The doctor says I need the therapy to become better and walk at some point.

05:55:47:17

05:55:56:18

I was working in decorating/constructing American kitchens. I was doing windows and I had a workshop in house-fitting

05:56:02:04

05:56:04:19

I was doing temporary roofing, like this one.

05:56:04:19

05:56:09:19

So I worked in decoration.

It was a normal day, and I got shelled on the way to work.

Bombing wasn't common there then.

05:56:41:20

05:56:50:20

But from time to time, there were bombings there.

05:56:50:20

05:57:01:08

Then some shrapnel entered my 10th spinal column.

05:57:23:08

05:57:44:09

(why did you leave?) The war. It became excruciating. I couldn't move house because of my spine.

05:57:45:09

05:58:00:09

I was searching for therapy, but there was nothing there. It's fucked up.

05:58:02:09

05:58:08:10

The shelling was like rain. There were bombs falling from above. May God forbid.

05:58:25:10

05:58:39:05

I left Syria. When I decided to leave I sold my car, which was 3000usd then I travelled to Jordan with my family.

05:58:39:05

05:58:47:18

A guy promised me a Greek visa, but it didn't work.

05:58:47:21

05:58:57:21

So I went to Egypt instead.

I was there for 3 months. Then the smuggler promised to take me to Italy from Iskanderia. We were about to leave, but the Egyptian military caught us.

05:59:08:21

05:59:12:21

Me and my kids, who are 5&6, were 3&4.

05:59:13:21

05:59:17:19

They handcuffed us all, even the little kids, like adults.

05:59:17:19

05:59:21:19

We were all put in prison in Dhajila. For 15 days.

05:59:21:19

05:59:30:19

Then we were deported back to Turkey. We had to pay 600usd each

05:59:30:19

05:59:43:19

So the smuggler gave us back the money while we were in prison,

05:59:30:19

05:59:43:19

and we used it all to return.

05:59:43:19

05:59:56:19

After returning to Turkey, we were in Istanbul, then to Mersin for a month. Then to Anatolia, where we stayed.

05:59:56:19

06:00:11:22

In Anatolia, I started my activities because I had time to learn the Afghan, Algerian and Tunisian smuggling routes.

06:00:11:22

06:00:25:22

I got the idea to start advising/helping people, to avoid being cheated by smugglers

06:00:25:22

06:00:32:22

Because it costs a lot of money,

06:00:32:22

06:00:41:22

I started to help people who were lost in the forest, guiding them in the right direction.  
And to follow people in the sea

06:00:44:22

06:00:54:15

Sometimes I'd suddenly get emergency calls from people stranded at sea who were sinking

06:00:54:15

06:00:59:15

So then I founded my organization: Asylum and Immigration without smugglers.

06:00:59:15

06:01:15:15

Now I've got 15 other volunteers who follow the journeys from start to finish, and we've made a hotline for the Greek and Turkish coastguards

06:01:15:15

06:01:21:15

It's good that I could make it because the Syrians are in danger, so they really need to flee.

06:01:21:15

06:01:34:15

It's hard to leave the country and leave everything behind, but it's too dangerous to stay.

06:01:34:15

06:01:45:15

I want to use all my time to help the Syrians to flee the country and find a better future, especially for the kids.

06:01:45:15

06:01:50:15

The majority of the kids have psychological problems now.

06:01:50:15

06:01:59:08

And the majority of the young have diabetes and high blood pressure from shock.

06:01:59:08

06:02:19:12

The Syrians are suffering, God bless them. So from now on, I want to keep helping them to eliminate the smugglers and their cheating, and the people drowning.

06:02:19:12

06:02:30:12

By doing what we do, and taking emergency calls, we prevent boats from sinking.

06:02:31:05

06:02:41:02

After spending 2 years in Turkey, I decided to go to Europe in the same way.

06:02:41:02

06:02:49:02

We went by boat to Greece with a smuggler, but it was me that drove.

06:02:50:02

06:02:59:03

From Greece, we made the journey to Germany, where I've been for 6 months now.

06:04:12:03

06:04:21:07

I started when I was in Turkey because I had the time, and now I'm in Germany.

06:04:21:07

06:04:35:00

Helping became a habit. I just can't imagine people seeking help without doing anything.

06:04:35:00

06:04:37:00

I'm addicted now.



06:04:37:00

06:04:45:06

Everyday I'm checking to see if there are journeys that need guidance.

06:04:47:06

06:05:00:07

As long as there are Syrians fleeing, I am here to help them. I have the time because of my injury.

06:05:01:24

06:05:15:12

Our organization properly formed 6 months ago, and in that time we've followed around 560 journeys.

06:05:15:12

06:05:24:12

We're following 99% of all the journeys leaving.

06:08:22:12

06:08:49:04

Our journey has had a big psychological impact on the kids. When we got to the Greek island, my eldest Amar was just 5, and he started crying saying, now we are safe.

06:08:49:04

06:09:27:04

It had a big effect on him. He was just 3 when we first tried in Egypt and went to Prison for 15 days. And when we were deported to Turkey, living toughly for 2 years. We tried to flee many times, but were arrested each time. That had a huge impact on their psyche.