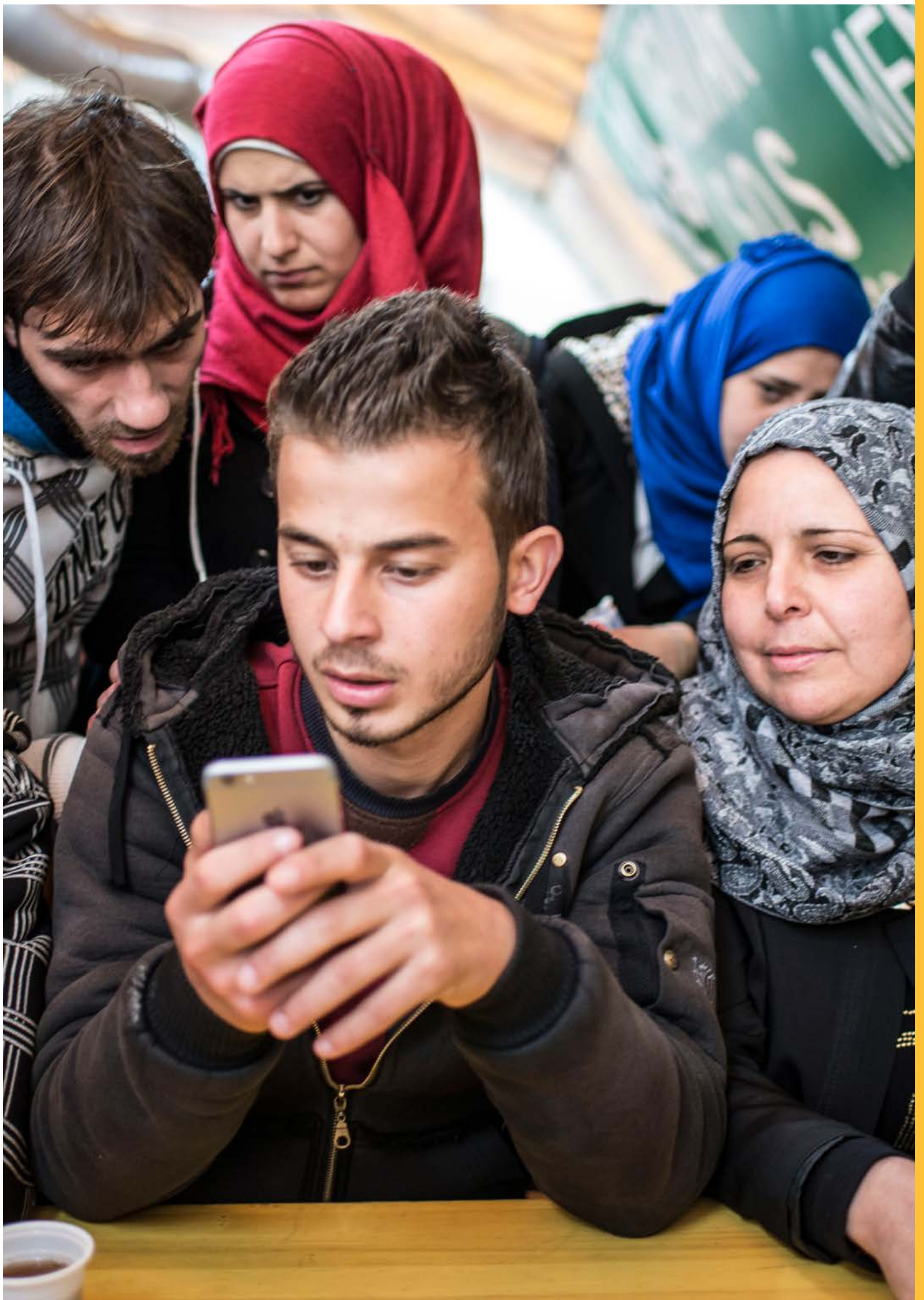




Using ICT to Facilitate Access to Information and Accountability to Affected Populations in Urban Areas

A Review of the *ServiceInfo* and *Refugee.Info* Platforms

International Rescue Committee | JUNE 2017



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Table of Contents

3	Terminology
3	Abbreviations and Acronyms
5	Executive Summary
15	Introduction
17	Platform Profiles
27	Platform Assessment
43	Conclusion
45	Annex: Assessment Methodology
47	Bibliography
47	Notes
48	Acknowledgements

COVER: Refugees, stranded in Serbia, living in abandoned warehouses behind Belgrade's bus station. Makeshift fires and mobile phones provide light. *Miodrag Cacic/IRC*

OPPOSITE: The Milas family check out *Refugee.Info* in the Sid One Stop Centre on the Croatian border, Serbia in February 2016. The family journeyed from Syria to Serbia, hoping to continue on to Germany. *Monique Jaques/IRC*

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Terminology

Client	People for whom the IRC provides, or intends to provide, services.
Humanitarian emergency/crisis	Any event (sudden- or slow-onset) or series of events that significantly threatens the health, safety and wellbeing of a community or larger population and that requires humanitarian assistance.
Humanitarian assistance	Resources/aid and action by local and/or international humanitarian actors designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and following a crisis as well as to strengthen preparedness and prevention of future crisis.
Internally Displaced Person (IDP)	A person who has fled to avoid disasters and conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations, among other reasons, but who has not crossed an international border. Because they remain within their home countries, IDPs remain under the legal protection of their government.
Refugees	People who have crossed international borders to find sanctuary for similar reasons to IDPs, but who may be unable or unwilling to return to their home countries. Refugees are protected by International Refugee Law.
Service Provider	Individuals, companies, or organisations that provide services to affected populations.
Service User	People for whom the IRC provides, or intends to provide, services. Another term referring to “clients.”
Stakeholder	Other individuals and groups in the crisis-affected area who are affected by, and can affect, the decisions that the IRC makes. This includes people in aid-recipient communities who do not receive IRC services, local governments, civil society, other organisations, etc.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations	MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
CwC	Communications with Communities	MoSA	Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs
CMS	Content Management System	OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
FGD	Focus Group Discussion	SMEP	Social Media Engagement and Promotion
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
ICT	Information Communications Technology		
IT	Information Technology		
INGO	International Nongovernmental Organisation		
IRC	International Rescue Committee		
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan		
LNGO	Local Nongovernmental Organisation		
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation		

OPPOSITE: Hamed, left, age 16, sits in a room charging his phone, at the Alexandria refugee site in northern Greece, July 14, 2016. *Tara Todras-Whitehill/IRC*



Executive Summary

There is a growing recognition among the humanitarian community that crises are increasingly happening in urban areas, requiring different methods and approaches for humanitarian response. Humanitarian actors have found that traditional approaches to aid assistance – which have often been developed for rural or camp contexts – are ill-suited to the particular challenges presented by urban settings in which crisis affected populations are often widely distributed across diverse communities with high population density. As part of a concerted effort across the humanitarian community to recognise and address the growing and unique needs of crisis-affected people in urban settings, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and partners have invested in the development and testing of information communication technology (ICT) solutions to some of the challenges urban populations face.

ICT solutions are particularly relevant for urban contexts given the unique features which they present to humanitarian actors, including:

- 1 diverse populations living in the same area with different needs;
- 2 populations which are geographically dispersed and often difficult to reach or purposefully hidden;
- 3 dynamic movement of populations that often need information on-the-go;
- 4 high number of service providers operating in close proximity; and
- 5 a higher likelihood of crisis-affected people's access to internet due to smartphone availability and internet network coverage.

ICTs offer highly diverse and/or mobile populations the opportunity to access targeted, critical, up-to-date information without having to visit a centralised location. The prevalence of ICT coverage provides humanitarian actors with the opportunity to facilitate two-way communications between dispersed crisis-affected people and humanitarian service providers, while providing crisis-affected people with the information they need to make informed decisions about how to meet their needs through access to services.

Thus far, such technologies have been used by the IRC and partners in Lebanon and Europe as part of the refugee and migrant crisis that has unfolded in these two locations, predominately stemming from large population flows out of Syria and other affected countries. The two platforms which have been developed and tested to date are *ServiceInfo*¹ and *Refugee.Info*² both of which comprise a suite of features and functions aimed at addressing the needs of affected populations in urban settings.

This report outlines the findings from an assessment of *ServiceInfo* and *Refugee.Info*, drawing on perspectives and reflections from stakeholders across the humanitarian spectrum, including affected populations themselves. The objectives of this study were to describe how these platforms work, provide recommendations for how they might be improved, and explore how these platforms might become more sustainable over time. The findings within this report are intended for both internal IRC audiences as well as external audiences within the sector interested in ICT solutions for affected populations in urban crises.

OPPOSITE: *Photos from Home* is a series of images of recent arrivals to Lesbos, Greece; in each image the person shows an picture on their phone of their home before they left. Here, the subject chooses to share an image of his home after it was destroyed. September 2015. *Tyler Jump/IRC*

Platform Features and Functions

ServiceInfo was conceived in 2014 as a pilot project in Lebanon to address a gap in:

- 1 information about services available to affected populations;
- 2 responsiveness of service providers to the needs of affected populations; and
- 3 coordination among service providers.

The platform was designed in response to an identified need for new ways of working in urban contexts, where international humanitarian organisations need to be able to quickly identify gaps in existing service provision and affected populations need accurate information about services they can access.

The *ServiceInfo* platform has three main features:

- 1 geo-located service listings;
- 2 a forum for service users to engage with each other and to provide feedback to service providers; and
- 3 information posts on key topics for affected populations.

ServiceInfo is location-aware, meaning that when a client searches for a service, the system will show those services in closest proximity to her current location, and present the services on a map in relation to the location where the client is accessing the application. The platform is accessed via a web browser or mobile device and can be used in English, French and Arabic across all features.

The *Refugee.Info* platform was co-developed in 2015 by the IRC and Mercy Corps as a protection intervention designed to help meet their clients' pressing need for reliable information and internet connectivity amidst the European migrant crisis. *Refugee.Info* was conceived as an adaptable platform designed to complement ongoing protection programming with the overarching outcome of increasing the safety of displaced men, women and children – whether they are on the move, in camps, or in urban settings.

The rationale was that if refugees have accessible information about their rights, laws and the availability of age- and gender-appropriate services, they regain power to make choices that protect themselves, their families, and each other. The software was developed based on original code from the *ServiceInfo* platform.

The *Refugee.Info* platform has two main features:

- 1 geo-located informational content and service listings; and
- 2 a social media extension (Facebook page) allowing for direct engagement with *Refugee.Info* moderators and a forum for client feedback.

Refugee.Info is location-aware, meaning that when a client searches for information, the system will show information relevant to her current location, and present any services on a map in relation to the location where the client is accessing the application. The platform is accessed via a web browser or app on a mobile device and can be used in English, Farsi, and Arabic across all features. The *Refugee.Info* team also works to ensure the appropriate resources are in place for users to access the platform by establishing internet connectivity and electricity, where possible.

The *Refugee.Info* platform has developed as a natural transition from *ServiceInfo* as the IRC and its partners seek to expand the use of an ICT platform to other contexts. *ServiceInfo* was conceived as a country-specific platform with a strong focus on service listings to address gaps in information provision, responsiveness of service providers, and coordination among service providers. It provided the IRC and its partners with essential experience and lessons that could be drawn from in developing the country- and context-agnostic design of *Refugee.Info*.

Three key factors led to the decision to transition from *ServiceInfo* to *Refugee.Info*:

- 1 context independence and scalability;
- 2 software functionality;
- 3 and work flow efficiency.

Platform Assessment

<p>Information Relevance</p>	<p><i>Refugee.Info</i> provides highly relevant information for displaced populations and does so in a way that is easily adapted for rapidly changing situations. A key lesson learned in the transition from <i>ServiceInfo</i> to <i>Refugee.Info</i> was that for information to be relevant, it needed to be timely and adaptable for changing contexts. Thus, the process of updating information needed to be as streamlined and light-touch as possible, without sacrificing the quality of the information. The <i>Refugee.Info</i> platform has developed efficiencies into the workflow while also relying on social media to facilitate real-time information exchange on an individual basis.</p> <p>However, a level of information specificity is still needed in order to be completely relevant for all users. This includes targeted content for each nationality that may be accessing the platform as well as more detailed explanations for the guidance being provided. The Facebook page, since July 2016, and blog, since January 2017, have helped to provide some of this more detailed and tailored information, however this has not led to an increase in satisfaction or use of the platform in any substantive way.</p>
<p>Information Accessibility</p>	<p><i>Refugee.Info</i> seeks to provide highly curated information through ICT media with the assumption that potential users have access to mobile and/or desktop computer resources through which to view the content. The team has realised that this assumption does not hold true in all contexts and has established wireless hotspots and electricity provision in camps and collective centres. However, these sites may not be accessible for the greater proportion of potential users living among the host population and does not address unequal ownership of mobile assets.</p> <p>While access to a phone may be challenging for some potential users, it is highly advantageous that the <i>Refugee.Info</i> platform uses Facebook as one medium through which it provides information and engages users. Facebook has been widely used by the refugee and migrant populations throughout Europe; <i>Refugee.Info</i> integrates seamlessly with that existing user behaviour and tendency.</p>
<p>Information Comprehensiveness</p>	<p><i>Refugee.Info</i> does not currently provide comprehensive service listings across the platform, but has been focusing on building out the back-end (data collection and administration processes), and the user experience on the front-end (publicly facing platform) to ensure that this information can be presented as clearly and comprehensively as possible.</p> <p>Providing comprehensive information is important not only for the information it relays, but also for building trust and reliance on the platform as a source of information.</p> <p>The level of information does not currently rise to a resource that would be a "go-to" for refugees and migrants, but has laid the groundwork through a few iterations and drawn from the lessons learned during the <i>ServiceInfo</i> pilot about the most effective ways to engage service providers and vet information.</p>
<p>Feedback Mechanism</p>	<p><i>Refugee.Info</i> does not currently have a feedback function, thus this analysis focuses on the lessons learned from <i>ServiceInfo</i>. <i>ServiceInfo</i> set out to provide a single, comprehensive system through which users can provide and receive a response to feedback. However, many service providers preferred to manage their own systems for feedback, where they have control over the mechanism. The experience during the <i>ServiceInfo</i> pilot suggested that some service providers also did not feel comfortable with having a peer agency reading negative feedback on them. As with any feedback mechanism, the degree to which a client will trust the service and use it again rests heavily on whether they receive a response to their feedback that they consider to be adequate.</p> <p>The <i>ServiceInfo</i> team deliberately set out to not enforce corrective action based on the feedback received. It thus lacked the teeth to hold the service providers accountable. However, the team did ensure that the service providers were at least confronted with the feedback. Finally, <i>ServiceInfo</i> never attained the ability to fully "close the loop". It neither publicly displaced the original feedback and the service providers' responses to the feedback on the site itself, nor was the team able to fully mediate individual responses to those who provided the feedback: individual users rarely provided names and contact details, and further, due to the limited capacity of the <i>ServiceInfo</i> team, individual follow-up with the client that provided the feedback was not always possible. Instead, the team reported back to the community in the locality where the feedback derived on the way in which the service provider responded to the feedback.</p>
<p>Sustainability: Partnerships and Funding</p>	<p>In order to provide better quality information to users and react faster to changes on the ground, the global <i>Refugee.Info</i> team develops close partnerships with the organisations in-country providing the team with content and access to users. All content available on <i>Refugee.Info</i> is sourced by one primary partner on the ground.</p> <p>To promote engagement and interest from partners and country programs in participating, the <i>Refugee.Info</i> global team is developing a collaboration strategy document outlining in detail what partners are expected to receive from the team in terms of reporting and what the partners are expected to give to the team in terms of content. This strategy will work to enhance the proximity between the <i>Refugee.Info</i> team and partners and country offices.</p> <p>As of now, funding for <i>Refugee.Info</i> is primarily through private grants at a global level. To be sustainable, <i>Refugee.Info</i> will need to develop a funding model that can be scaled up by in-country partner organisations or country programs. This model would entail a funding model that covers in-country roll-out and maintenance of the platform while also some minimal amount of core costs to maintain the global platform. Finally, any funding model for <i>Refugee.Info</i> will maintain its core principle that it is a free-to-use platform for affected populations.</p>

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed across three domains of the *Refugee.Info* platform based on the findings of the assessment:

- 1 information dissemination;
- 2 the feedback mechanism; and
- 3 the sustainability model.

1 Information Dissemination

i Streamline workflows to ensure timely, relevant updates

Timeliness is a key component for relevant information provision. Editorial staff workflows must be as streamlined and efficient as possible with clear division of labour. The *Refugee.Info* platform is developing back-end processes to relieve the burden on staff and automate as much as possible. The staff structure should complement these processes.

ii Provide guidelines for the types of media in which to publish different types of information and in what context

In order to provide the most relevant information, different elements of the *Refugee.Info* platform, such as the main web site, blog and the Facebook community, can be utilised depending on the context and event. Standard or static information is most appropriate for the web site (e.g., service listings, information on asylum), more detailed information and discussions of critical issues are best suited to the blog, while highly dynamic information that requires direct engagement with users is most effectively addressed via the Facebook page. When replicating *Refugee.Info*, it will be important to provide these guidelines for the given context.



iii Integrate service mapping efforts with existing 3W or 4W processes

Service mapping requires a great deal of coordination and follow-up from staff. The *Refugee.Info* team has been working to establish partnerships on the ground to facilitate service mapping. It will be important for any organisation adopting the *Refugee.Info* platform to engage with existing coordination mechanisms to draw from the 3W or 4W reporting processes. Tapping into existing service reporting will help to increase buy-in from the humanitarian community, reduce burden on staff, and increase the comprehensiveness of service provider listings.

iv Develop partnerships on the ground

Related to integrating efforts with existing processes, partnerships on the ground are essential to providing relevant and comprehensive information. Coordinating service mapping and information curation with other humanitarian agencies, coordination mechanisms, and service providers will streamline the process and contribute to higher quality, more comprehensive information.

ABOVE: The IRC developed an app to help collect data on the prefab shelters and tents in the Kara Tepe refugee transit site on the island of Lesbos, Greece. IRC technology coordinator Reynaldo Rodrigues shows the map of shelters on a smartphone in September 2015.

Kulsoom Rizvi/IRC



2 Feedback Mechanism

i Increase efficiency and effectiveness of managing the feedback function

The immense amount of time that the *ServiceInfo* team spent collecting (sometimes manually), collating, verifying, and delivering feedback to service providers proved to be onerous and expensive (due to high staff time and effort). The *Refugee.Info* platform should look at ways to further automate the feedback process and promote further direct communication between clients and service providers.

ii Increase uptake and benefit to service providers

Making the feedback and response process as simple, streamlined, and useful as possible to service providers is important to building and maintaining buy-in. Many service providers already have little motivation to receive and respond to feedback, if it is not perceived to be actionable and easily addressed. In addition to increasing simplicity through further automation, the feedback should be timely and provide enough details about the reasons behind the feedback and how the client would like to see any issue addressed, for the service provider to be able to effectively respond to the feedback.

The system design also should reflect do no harm and protection principles. Different levels of privacy, depending on the sensitivity of the feedback being provided, are options that should be considered. Yet efforts should also be made – where appropriate – to enable further communication between service providers and clients so that service providers are able to obtain additional information from and close the loop with clients. Examples of systems or options that could be available to service providers to ensure these principles are addressed include requiring moderation of feedback before it is published or only making public responses to certain close-ended standardised questions, leaving responses to open-ended questions viewable only to the service provider.

v Ensure ample Internet connectivity and electricity access

To ensure the widest access for users, internet connectivity and electricity access are critical considerations. These are details that need to be identified as part of a needs / viability assessment process, and where not already available, alternative solutions provided (such as the wireless hotspots which the IRC set up in the camps in the Balkans). Without these critical elements, the platform will not provide the desired impact, thus in situations where it is not possible to provide these services, adoption of the platform should be questioned.

vi Identify ways to reach marginalised groups and individuals without access to mobile devices

Access to digital technology tends to be dependent on gender, age, and economic or education levels. Mobile devices and computers are often inaccessible or difficult to obtain for marginalised groups. Without targeted efforts to expand access to the platform to sectors of the population that do not have access to these technologies, there is risk of further isolating the most vulnerable. When conducting the needs/viability assessment, the team should identify barriers to access, and where possible, put in place strategies to promote access for the most vulnerable. The agency replicating the platform should understand the level of accessibility for these groups and identify ways to mitigate inaccessibility.

ABOVE: In February 2016, Kirk Day, IRC Regional Representative shows IRC Voice, Sarah Wayne Callies, the *Refugee.Info* website in the Belgrade park where refugees congregate. Here, IRC local NGO partners Info Park offer food, tea, coffee, wifi and information for refugees moving through Europe. *Tyler Jump/IRC*



Finally, the incentive for service providers to participate in a platform will be limited by overtly negative feedback, so the team will need to consider how to manage this risk. Service providers are often very sensitive to reputational risk given the highly competitive donor environment in many contexts. The *Refugee.Info* platform should consider ways to allow service providers to publicly reply to the feedback (much in the same way that service providers are able to do this on Yelp or TripAdvisor), in order to directly address and diffuse negative feedback.

iii Increase uptake and benefit to service users

Service users need to be able to provide feedback easily and understand how that feedback will be used. A simple user interface that offers the option of quick reaction feedback as well as more detailed reflection could be used to provide feedback options for a wide variety of service users. The feedback mechanism will only be successful, however, if service users believe that the feedback will make a difference and how it is being used. If there is little faith or understanding, service users will be less likely to use the feature, rendering it useless to service users and providers alike. It will be important thus for team's implementing ICT platforms such as *Refugee.Info* to not only work on optimising the feedback provision function, but to maximise the incentives of service providers to respond to the feedback in what clients consider to be a timely and adequate way. While there may be some hesitation from service providers about publicly available feedback, it's important to consider how useful this might be to service users. This may be a challenging balance to strike, but publicly available feedback information would have high utility for users of the platform to inform which services they wish to access.

ABOVE: In September 2016, at the abandoned warehouses near Belgrade Station where refugees are staying, hoping to make contact with smugglers and move further into Europe, one youth sits apart from the group, using his mobile phone.
Miodrag Cakic/IRC

3 Sustainability Model

i Partnerships

To date, the *Refugee.Info* platform has been primarily managed centrally by the IRC and its partners. Delegating responsibility of certain platform features or processes to trusted partners in-country will be an essential step in ensuring sustainability and scale-up of the platform.

This report outlines three options for long-term partnership delegation associated with the sustainability of the platform:

- a **additional partnerships with INGOs to integrate the current model into their existing programming;**
- b **handing off to a coordination agency to use as a central repository for service and protection-related information;** and
- c **handing off to a trusted local partner (national NGO, local government, etc.)**

Table 1 explores the benefits and challenges to each partnership approach.

Table 1: Benefits and Challenges by Partnership Type

	Description	Benefits	Challenges
INGO Partnerships	Currently, the platform is run using a model of INGO partnership between Mercy Corps and the IRC in countries in which one or both of them are operational. This model uses existing infrastructure and relationships in the country of implementation to promote and gain buy-in for use of the platform.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Positive reputation in humanitarian response contexts ➤ Resources necessary to fund or seek funding for continued application of the platform ➤ High capacity of staff to implement the platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ When the context changes, an INGO's priorities and/or funding sources may change and it may decide to terminate programming. ➤ The operating costs associated with INGOs are often much higher than national organisations and institutions
Coordination Agency	The engagement and participation of a coordination agency is key to ensuring comprehensiveness of information and collection of already existing service-related information. A coordinating agency, such as OCHA or UNHCR, could be an option for fully handing over the platform.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Would ensure that the platform was fully funded through coordination budgets ➤ Reduce staff time spent on collecting information as the process could be integrated to already ongoing coordination processes. ➤ Increase the profile of the platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Staff and overhead costs of coordination agencies are quite high ➤ Confusion of <i>Refugee.Info</i> platform with existing coordination platforms used by UNHCR and OCHA
National Partnerships	Engagement of local and national organisations or institutions is important for <i>Refugee.Info</i> to effectively capture all service provider information and to appropriately work within the context. Transferring responsibility for the management of the platform to a national NGO or institution is another option.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lower operating costs than INGOs and UN agencies ➤ Will be in country for duration of crisis ➤ Clear understanding of the context, including culture and language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ May not have the same clout in the humanitarian community as an INGO or UN agency ➤ Lower staff capacity to implement the platform, requiring a great deal of advance preparation and capacity building

Executive Summary (continued)

ii Funding

The *Refugee.Info* platform has used private grant funding and core funds thus far, ensuring the greatest level of flexibility and room for innovation. Ideally, this source of funding would continue as long as possible. However, other options must be explored to further cement the sustainability of the platform.

Options include:

- a **integrating the platform activities into existing country programme proposals for institutional donor funding;**
- b **monetising the platform;** and
- c **charging for use of the platform.**

Table 2: Benefits and Challenges by Funding Type

	Description	Benefits	Challenges
New or Existing Programmes	In this option, the costs would be embedded into a new or existing programme funded by an institutional donor. These costs would include the necessary costs to roll-out in the specific country along with some type of additional budget (percentage or fee) to cover support for the <i>Refugee.Info</i> global team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Works for countries in which there are existing programs and can help to secure the resources needed to introduce the platform to a new context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Funding may be more difficult to secure in countries in which one of the partner organisations does not have existing programming and may also have restrictions that could delay continued innovation ➤ There would likely be competition within country offices of organisations for the same funding
Monetise Platform	Another option is to monetise the platform – allowing advertisements on the platform in return for compensation for the space. The platform would receive a specific amount of money depending on the number of visits to each page.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ High potential for fundraising that could be used for further innovation and increase of scope ➤ Another opportunity for service providers to advertise their services and products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Risks the perception of the platform as a commercial entity and not in the user best interest or upholding humanitarian principles ➤ Advertisements may be inappropriate for user population ➤ May undermine the credibility of the information provided as impartial or unbiased
Charge for use	A final option could include charging for use of the platform at a discounted flat fee for service NGO providers that are seeking to provide info on their services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ With service providers investing a small amount, there may be greater buy-in to engage with the platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Risks the perception of the platform as a commercial entity and not in the user best interest or upholding humanitarian principles ➤ Risks very little interest or participation from service providers



Conclusion

The journey from *ServiceInfo* to *Refugee.Info* has provided the IRC and its partners with critical experience and lessons learned about the most effective ways to use ICT solutions in humanitarian responses for crisis-affected populations. *Refugee.Info* has had success in engaging users through the web site, blog, and Facebook page and providing timely, critical, and relevant information to affected populations. While reach through the web site has begun to plateau, engagement through the Facebook page has steadily climbed.

As the platform begins developing partnerships to implement in other contexts, content and promotion strategies by media type will be critical to expanding reach, as will focusing on outreach to marginalised or vulnerable populations not easily reached by mobile technologies. Engaging directly with service providers and ensuring the platform addresses their needs and motivations will also be necessary to future success of the platform.

Refugee.Info can benefit from the lessons learned on the feedback mechanism piloted through the *ServiceInfo* platform, ensuring that it addresses the needs and desires of service providers and service users alike. Care must be taken to address privacy and protection concerns around the feedback mechanism while balancing the utility of detailed information to service providers. ICT platforms, such as *Refugee.Info*, have the potential to provide the humanitarian community with a very powerful protection and accountability tool for affected populations. The effectiveness and sustainability of ICT platforms rests centrally on the ability of organisations to create partnerships on the ground, refine their offerings to be as accessible and relevant to its target users, and develop a funding strategy that ensures continued operation globally.

ABOVE: Photo: IRC



Introduction

There is a growing recognition among the humanitarian community that crises are increasingly happening in urban areas, requiring different methods and approaches for humanitarian response. Humanitarian actors have found that traditional approaches to aid assistance – which have often been developed for rural or camp contexts – are ill-suited to the particular challenges presented by urban settings in which crisis affected populations are often widely distributed across diverse communities with high population density.

People are affected by crises in different ways according to the diversity of social identities, socio-economic levels, and their legal status in a concentrated geographic area. The protection of vulnerable groups within these contexts also becomes much more complicated where displaced populations live among host populations and where poverty and insecurity are endemic due to challenges in identification of vulnerable groups, the diversity of potential protection risks to address, and legal frameworks that may limit access to livelihoods or services (Brown, Boano, Johnson, Vivekananda, & Walker, 2015). In response to the new challenges which humanitarian actors are now facing, those actors – both local and international – are developing new methods and testing innovative tools³ to respond more effectively to emergencies in these contexts (Brown, Boano, Johnson, Vivekananda, & Walker, 2015).

Set against a context in which affected people are often hard to access, continually moving and with limited legal protection, the need to ensure protection and empowerment of people and accountability of humanitarian actors becomes even more pressing – as well as more complex. Unlike in a camp or rural context, where services are provided by a known group of humanitarian actors – often organised through humanitarian coordination structures – in an urban context affected people may be able to access not only to the services provided by international, national and local NGOs, but also by the municipality or local government presiding over the urban area, as well as by private sector providers. With often complex and diverse eligibility criteria in place, and different fees and services available from one service provider to the next, it is important for the humanitarian community to help facilitate access of affected populations to the most relevant and appropriate service in order that they may be able to meet their basic needs. In response, multiple traditional humanitarian actors have undertaken service mappings which they use to provide affected populations with information on how to access services.

However, such approaches are often time consuming, duplicative, and the information prone to having gaps and being out of date. With the high number of actors serving affected populations – including a significant number of non-traditional actors – and where coordination mechanisms often exclude those non-traditional service providers (whether explicitly or implicitly), the relevance of Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) becomes even more significant. And, wherever services are being provided by multiple actors the need for coordinated approaches to the collection and management of client feedback and complaints also becomes more pressing.

The humanitarian community has developed frameworks of practice to address protection responsibilities of agencies to crisis-affected populations. Frameworks such as AAP and Communications with Communities (CwC) provide the foundation for the humanitarian community to remain accountable to affected populations. AAP addresses the commitment of humanitarian actors to use power responsibly by taking account of, giving account to, and being held to account by the people they seek to assist.

OPPOSITE: Through its Project for Local Empowerment (PLE) the IRC provides support and organisational development training to the Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee (BMWEC) in Tak Province, Thailand. PLE supports BMWEC to assume the management of special education activities including the Starflower Centre for children with disabilities.

Kellie Ryan/IRC

Introduction (continued)

In situations of conflict, civil unrest and natural disaster, people affected by crisis are exposed to acute risks of violence, rights violations, coercion, and exploitation. Individual and community protection capacities, and national protection mechanisms, are frequently disrupted or inadequate to address acute protection risks stemming from new threats. AAP guides organisations to address these issues through the responsible use of power, combined with effective and quality programming that recognises the community's dignity, capacity, and ability for self-determination (IASC Emergency Directors Group, 2015). CwC is also an essential element in ensuring accountability and transparency, which both require the effective exchange of information between affected populations and humanitarian actors. CwC is based on the principle that information and communications are critical forms of aid, without which affected populations cannot access services or make the best decisions for themselves and their communities. People working on CwC help affected populations to access the information they need and communicate with people assisting them (OCHA, 2014).

As part of a concerted effort across the humanitarian community to recognise and address the growing and unique needs of crisis-affected people in urban settings, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and partners have invested in the development and testing of information communication technology (ICT) solutions to some of the challenges urban populations face. ICT solutions are particularly relevant for urban contexts given the unique features which they present to humanitarian actors, including:

- 1 diverse populations living in the same area with different needs;
- 2 populations which are geographically dispersed and often difficult to reach or purposefully hidden;
- 3 dynamic movement of populations that often need information on-the-go;
- 4 high number of service providers operating in close proximity; and
- 5 a higher likelihood of crisis-affected people's access to internet due to smartphone availability and internet network coverage.

ICTs offer highly diverse, mobile populations the opportunity to access targeted, critical, up-to-date information without having to visit a centralised location. The prevalence of ICT coverage provides humanitarian actors with the opportunity to facilitate two-way communications between dispersed crisis-affected people and humanitarian service providers, while providing crisis-affected people with the information they need to make informed decisions about how to meet their needs through access to services. Thus far, such technologies have been used by the IRC and partners in Lebanon and Europe as part of the refugee and migrant crisis that has unfolded in these two locations, predominately stemming from large population flows out of Syria and other affected countries. The two platforms which have been developed and tested to date are *ServiceInfo*⁴ and *Refugee.Info*⁵ both of which comprise a suite of features and functions aimed at addressing the needs of affected populations in urban settings.

This report outlines the findings from an assessment of *ServiceInfo* and *Refugee.Info*, drawing on perspectives and reflections from stakeholders across the humanitarian spectrum, including affected populations themselves. The objectives of this study were to describe how these platforms work, provide recommendations for how they might be improved, and explore how these platforms might become more sustainable over time. The findings within this report are intended for both internal IRC audiences as well as external audiences within the sector interested in ICT solutions for affected populations in urban crises.

This report is divided into four main sections:

- 1 platform profiles;
- 2 platform assessment, which includes an analysis of platform effectiveness and sustainability;
- 3 platform recommendations; and
- 4 a conclusion.

Each platform will be profiled separately, while the assessment, recommendations, and conclusions will include observations and findings from both the *ServiceInfo* and *Refugee.Info* platforms. This is done to streamline the recommendations and to align with the approach that the IRC plans to take going forward in which *ServiceInfo* is subsumed into *Refugee.Info*, as the IRC's globally endorsed platform which will be further developed and promoted.

Platform Profiles

This section outlines the specific features of the *ServiceInfo* and *Refugee.Info* platforms and the ways in which they are linked. The section begins with an introduction explaining the progression in development from *ServiceInfo* to *Refugee.Info* and why *Refugee.Info* has become the primary platform through which to facilitate access to information, protection and accountability in urban and other relevant contexts.

The section then provides details on each platform outlining its:

- 1 intended purpose and background;
- 2 development timeline;
- 3 operating context;
- 4 staffing structure and activities; and
- 5 features and functions.

Building *Refugee.Info* from *ServiceInfo*

Refugee.Info developed as a natural extension of *ServiceInfo*, as the IRC and its partners sought to expand the use of the platform to other contexts. *ServiceInfo* was conceived as a platform specific to the context in Lebanon, with a strong focus on service listings to address gaps in information provision, responsiveness of service providers, and coordination among service providers. It provided the IRC and its partners with essential experience and lessons which has informed the cross-context applicability of the design of *Refugee.Info*.

Three key factors led to the decision to transition from *ServiceInfo* to *Refugee.Info*:

- 1 context independence and scalability;
- 2 software functionality; and
- 3 work flow efficiency.

The following section briefly reviews these key factors while outlining the progression from one platform to the other. Additional details will be explored in the “Platform Assessment” section of this report.

On the software side, *ServiceInfo* was architected to support only the Lebanon context, meaning that the platform itself would not support use in multiple countries. While this suited the original purpose of the platform, it did not allow for application outside of Lebanon. Regions, phone numbers, and languages, for example, required changes to the entire back-end database. As the IRC and its partners began considering expansion, these were seen as critical limitations. The *Refugee.Info* team sought to make these important elements of the platform dynamic, allowing for flexible and swift adoption across countries and contexts. The team also drew upon feedback from *ServiceInfo* users to redesign the user interface. Feedback such as the map navigation functionality being counterintuitive was used to improve the user experience for *Refugee.Info* users.

While piloting the *ServiceInfo* platform in Lebanon, the team was able to identify inefficiencies in the workflow of the platform that could translate directly into improvements for the *Refugee.Info* platform. One key example of this was that in order to accommodate large amounts of content, the *ServiceInfo* team had integrated a project management tool called JIRA. This tool issued tickets each time new content was developed (e.g. new service providers were added). While useful in allowing for tracking of content development and approvals, the process became burdensome for a small team. The *Refugee.Info* team sought to streamline this process to minimise burden on staff time.

Platform Profiles (continued)

Finally, the *ServiceInfo* pilot allowed the IRC and its partners to identify elements of the platform that were context-specific and to develop ways to make the platform appropriate for multiple contexts. There are two features of the context in Lebanon which differentiate it from many of the other countries hosting people affected by the war in Syria. Firstly, due to many Syrians (and others) lacking official refugee status and those with refugee status afforded limited legal protection, many people are unable to move freely and thus have difficulties in accessing services – let alone information about those services. Secondly, given the high number of people living in and amongst poor Lebanese communities and Palestinian refugees – many of whom have

been in Lebanon for nearly fifty years – the humanitarian community often made its services open not only to refugees from Syria, but also to vulnerable host populations. Thus, it was important that both groups had access to information about available services. Thirdly, compared to many of the migrant context in Europe, the affected population was largely static, rather than migratory. Using the *ServiceInfo* platform as a foundation, the *Refugee.Info* team was able to expand the use for a wider variety of contexts.

The timeline below outlines the development progression for *ServiceInfo* and *Refugee.Info*, illustrating how the experiences from *ServiceInfo* fed directly into the creation of *Refugee.Info*.

Figure 1: Platform Development Timeline

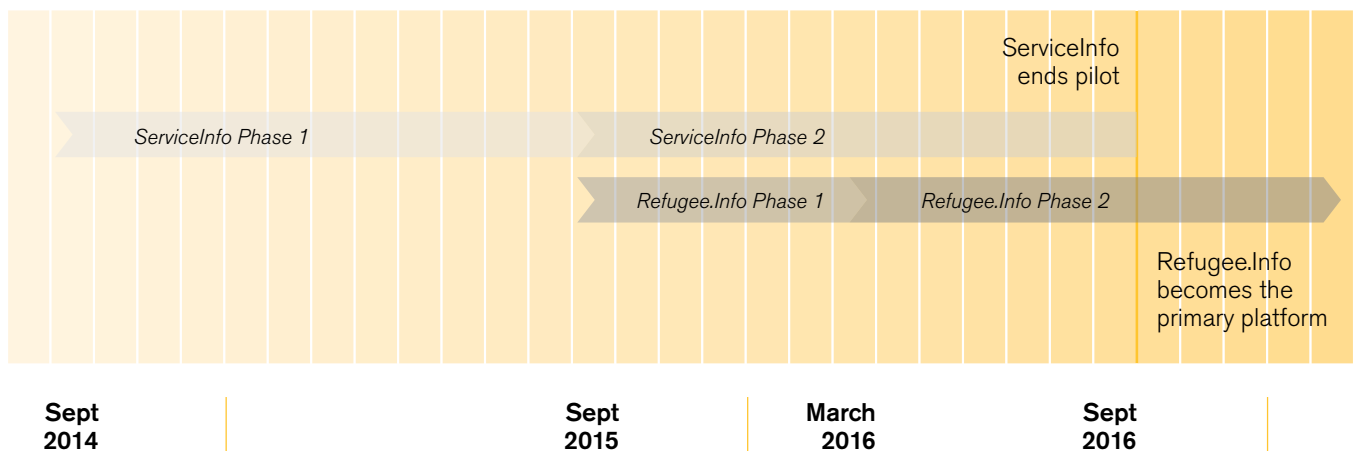
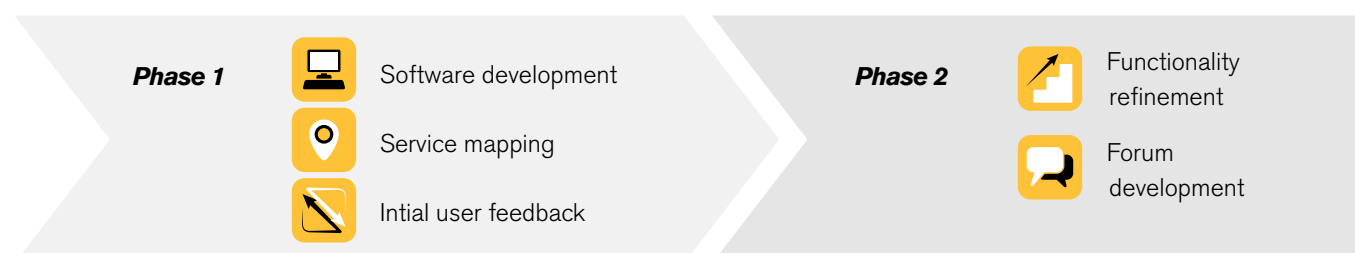


Figure 2: ServiceInfo Development Timetable in Detail



ServiceInfo Profile

Intended Purpose and Background

ServiceInfo was conceived in 2014 as a pilot project in Lebanon to address a gap in:

- 1 information about services available to affected populations;
- 2 responsiveness of service providers to the needs of affected populations; and
- 3 coordination among service providers.

The platform was designed in response to an identified need for new ways of working in urban contexts, where international humanitarian organisations need to be able to quickly identify gaps in existing service provision and affected populations need accurate information about services they can access. In the urban context, ascertaining this is not as simple as in a rural or camp context where coordination between similarly mandated agencies can take place. In urban crisis settings humanitarian actors enter into a context in which numerous services are already provided by national and local civil society organisations, the private sector, and the government. However, myriad factors render pre-existing service provision structures – national and municipal, civil society, and private sector – inaccessible to urban affected populations, including:

- 1 lack of awareness of local services and eligibility;
- 2 discrimination in service provision;
- 3 lack of capacity of local service providers to meet increased demand;
- 4 lack of financial or human resources to scale up; and
- 5 lack of technical knowledge to deliver quality services.

The platform aimed to address these issues by filling the three gaps noted above.

Furthermore, the Lebanese context provides additional challenges for humanitarian actors responding to displaced populations. Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. People fleeing the war in Syria into Lebanon are thus not legally considered as refugees entitled to protection by the Lebanese government. Given that Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is coordinating the response, rather than the Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). There is no cluster system in place through which responsibilities are distributed across humanitarian actors, but sector-based and geographic coordination does take place, facilitated by UNHCR together with the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA). The platform was developed with these specificities in mind, attempting to contribute to the coordination process and addressing the needs of host community individuals as well as displaced populations.

Development Timeline

The first phase (September 2014 – August 2015) was implemented in the Tripoli +5 area of northern Lebanon, and in Mount Lebanon, the governorate surrounding the capital city of Beirut. This phase included developing the software, promoting the platform to service providers in order to encourage their self-registration, and collecting initial user feedback on the platform functionality. The platform was refined under Phase 2, which ran from September 2015 to February 2016 and encompassed the roll-out of the platform across the country. Additional features were subsequently added, including a forum for service users to engage with each other and *ServiceInfo* moderators. (See Figure 2 on page 18.)

Operating Context

ServiceInfo operated initially only in urban areas of Lebanon serving refugee and host community populations and then expanded to serve as a nationwide platform. The platform was designed with the unique realities of the context (as described above), namely the lack of a coordinating cluster system and the need to address needs within host communities as well as displaced populations due to the lack of legal refugee status for people fleeing the conflict in Syria. In the Lebanon context, many potential users of *ServiceInfo* are technologically literate, and thus able to access information about services via their phone or a computer.

Platform Profiles (continued)

Staffing Structure

By the end of Phase 2, the staffing structure of *ServiceInfo* included a total of six full-time staff dedicated to the platform's function and content development. This included one project manager, two content management officers (one with a legal background), one database manager with experience in software development, and two field support officers who worked to promote the platform among both service providers and service users. The *ServiceInfo* team engaged IRC's field offices for initial service mappings and for support with verification of service providers.

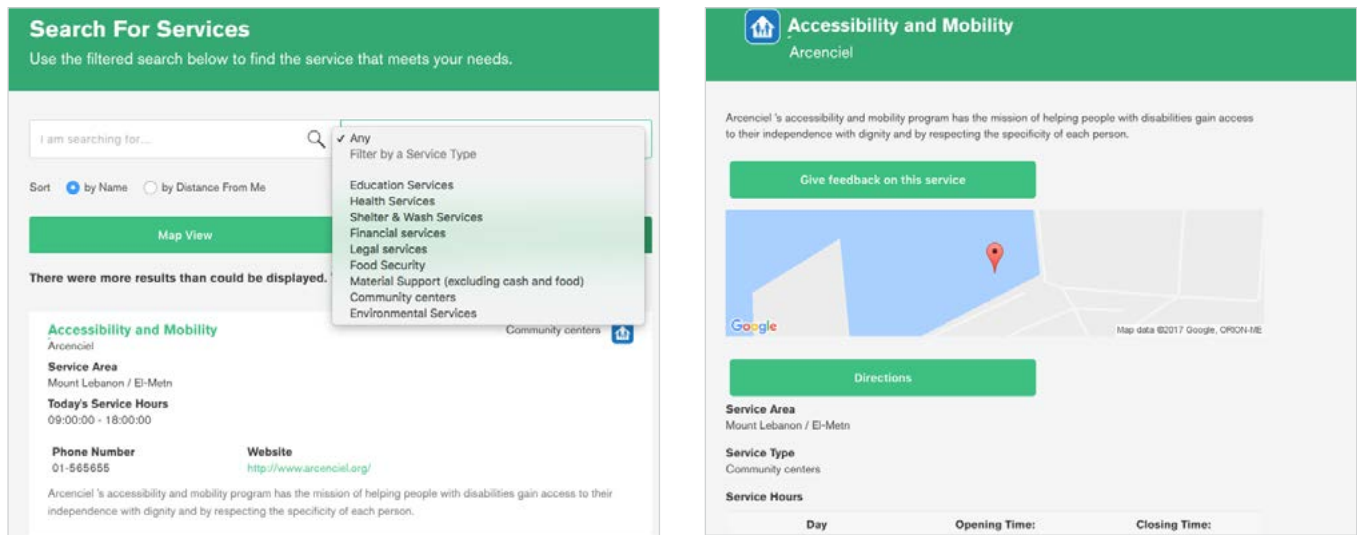
Platform Features and Functions

The *ServiceInfo* platform has three main features:

- 1 geo-located service listings,
- 2 a forum for service users to engage with each other and to provide feedback to service providers, and
- 3 information posts on key topics for affected populations.

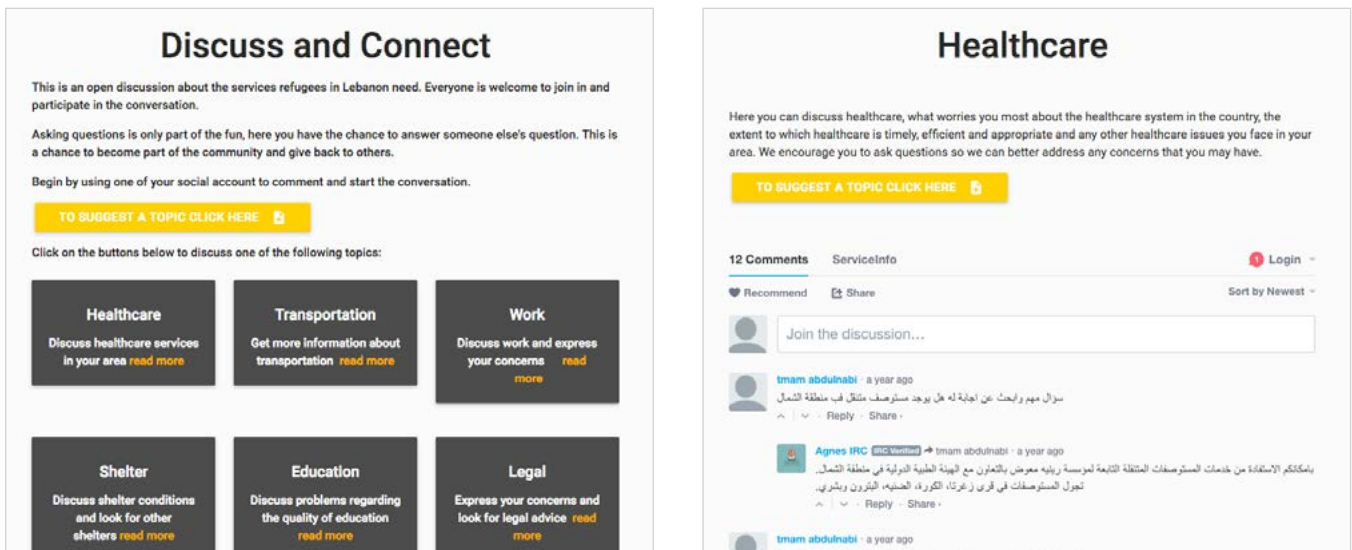
ServiceInfo is location-aware, meaning that when a client searches for a service, the system will show those services in closest proximity to his/her current location, and presents the services on a map in relation to the location where the client is accessing the application. The platform is accessed via a web browser or mobile device and can be used in English, French and Arabic across all features. Figures 3 to 5 below illustrate the three main features of the platform for service users.

Figure 3: Geo-located Service Listings



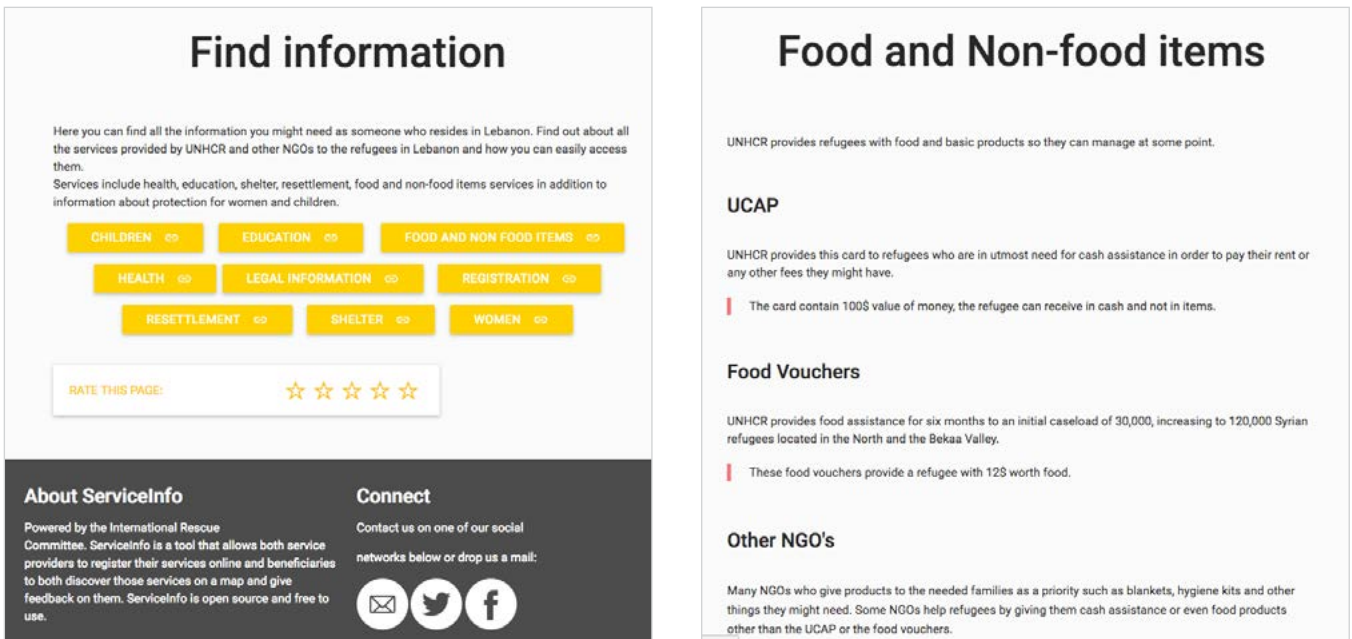
Services are listed in both alphabetical order and by distance from the location in which the platform is being accessed. Listings can be searched or filtered to provide information about the service type in which the service user is interested. The service listing includes a map of the location, opening and closing times, and the web site address of the service provider, if applicable. There is also an option to provide feedback on the specific service under its listing. This feedback form allows the user to provide identifying information if they wish to receive a response from the service provider, information about whether the service was delivered as specified, and an open text field in which the service user can provide comments about the service. The *ServiceInfo* team was also tasked with vetting and verifying service providers by visiting them in person at the location at which services were being delivered. After verifying the existence and location of the service, it was published on the site.

Figure 4: Service User Forum



Service users and service providers alike can use the forum feature on the ServiceInfo platform to discuss issues related to specific topics such as healthcare, transportation, or education. The forum was moderated by ServiceInfo staff who were able to provide answers to questions when service providers were unable to do so in a timely manner. The format of the forum feature is very similar to a social networking site

Figure 5: Key Information



The platform offers an information library across all key sectors in which service users might be interested. The service user can click on the sector of interest and find information relevant to that sector and their specific location. This includes critical information for accessing services, who is providing the services, who is eligible for the services, and explanations of the services for those unfamiliar with them.

Refugee.Info Profile

Intended Purpose and Background

The *Refugee.Info* platform was co-developed in 2015 by the IRC and Mercy Corps as a protection intervention designed to help meet their clients' pressing need for reliable information and internet connectivity amidst the European migrant crisis. *Refugee.Info* was conceived as an adaptable platform designed to complement ongoing protection programming with the overarching outcome of increasing the safety of displaced men, women, and children – whether they are on the move, in camps, or in urban settings.

The rationale was that if refugees have accessible information about their rights, laws, and the availability of age- and gender-appropriate services, they regain power to make choices that protect themselves, their families, and each other. The platform was designed in direct response to the over one million refugees and migrants that had made their way to Europe to escape conflict, persecution or poverty in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. The migrants and refugees were traveling to countries with vastly different immigration policies and services and the situation was changing rapidly, making up-to-date information about the rights, laws, and services that were available a primary need. The platform aimed to address these needs directly by providing critical information and the means to access this information. The software was developed based on original code from the *ServiceInfo* platform.

Development Timeline

The first phase was implemented from October 2015 to February 2016. As the international response to arrivals in Greece scaled up in 2015, the *Refugee.Info* team began:

- 1 developing a cloud-based software package;
- 2 collecting and collating credible and timely humanitarian information about specific camps, cities or regions; and
- 3 disseminating information through digital and programmatic channels; and
- 4 providing internet access where needed.

During the first months of the response, *Refugee.Info* provided real-time information on movement restrictions, service availability, accommodation and transit options. A team of digital editors closely collaborated with field staff and partners on the ground to collect and vet information. The platform launched on the Greek islands in October 2015, and by March 2016 was also providing information to affected populations elsewhere in Greece, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia.

The second phase of *Refugee.Info* began in March 2016 and ended in September 2016. In March 2016, border closures caused arrivals to sharply decline. Populations in transit were unable to continue on their journey and feared return, with little information and few options for safe onward movement. In response, *Refugee.Info* rapidly reshaped its content to help inform clients of their rights and procedures for claiming asylum, legal options for safe onward movement to other European countries and available services. At the same time, *Refugee.Info* rolled out a more robust social media strategy, built on its existing Facebook page.

This reflected two parallel phenomena:

- 1 the increasingly static nature of the crisis meant that website content changed less rapidly, reducing clients' need to check the site regularly for updates; and
- 2 an understanding that clients' starting point for information is social media.

The Facebook page now has over 65,000 likes⁶. It features social media-only content and fields questions from users sent through Facebook Messenger. Three Arabic, three Farsi, and one Urdu speaking moderator respond to questions using the main site's content. They also refer clients to other providers for more specific legal advice and services.

In September 2016, the team released a new version of the regular and mobile web site with a more accessible user interface, rebuilt using feedback from focus groups. *Refugee.Info* also developed a companion mobile app and shipped a low-bandwidth version for locations where connectivity is scarce (IRC, Mercy Corps, 2017).

Figure 6: *Refugee.Info* Development Timetable in Detail



Operating Context

Refugee.Info operated in the European refugee crisis, initially serving highly mobile refugee and migrant populations. This was followed by a period in which many of the refugees and migrants were more or less static within their displaced locations. Different European countries provided different displacement contexts and thus required different informational needs. Across all of the currently operational contexts, many potential users are technologically literate, and thus able to access information about services via their phone or a computer. The platform is at different stages of development in Greece and the Balkans (Serbia and FYROM) and operates with different models adapted to the local contexts.

Immediate priorities for the current operational countries include:

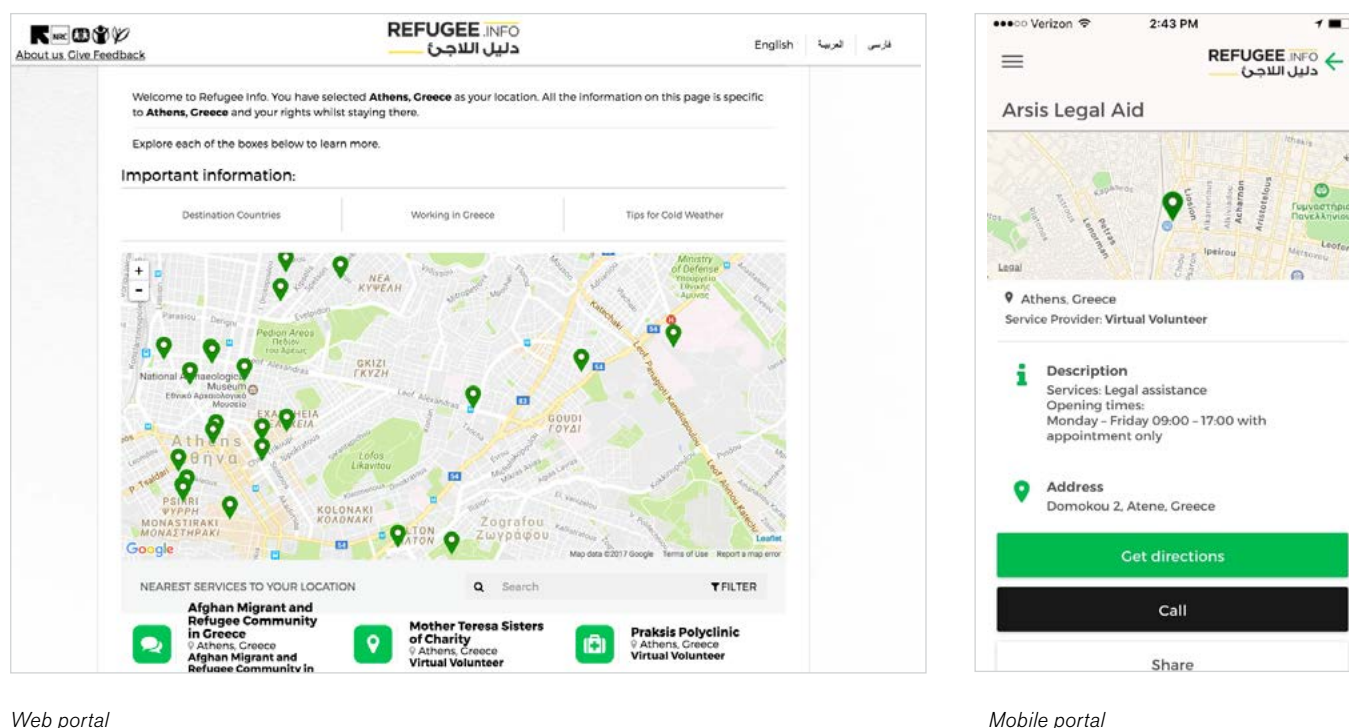
- 1 in Greece, the focus of content is around asylum and other protection information, along with other context-specific information, such as educational materials about INGOs' cash programming and Greek Asylum Service's lists for registration appointments; and
- 2 in the Balkans, the focus of the content is the mapping of services available for refugees near and around reception centres to complement the information about asylum procedures in Serbia and FYROM.

Staffing Structure

The staffing structure during phases one and two included editorial staff, one software developer, procurement staff responsible for hardware, and an acting coordinator. As the platform scaled up, additional positions were added to fill out functional roles. Different from *ServiceInfo*, these roles focused on functional pieces of the platform with more specialisation. With the development of a programme strategy and constructed as a joint venture with Mercy Corps, the *Refugee.Info* staffing structure is constructed around three functional pillars and one coordinator role all led by a steering committee. The *Refugee.Info* team is based in IRC's European Refugee Response regional office in Belgrade and consists of a mixture of IRC and Mercy Corps employees.

Platform Profiles (continued)

Figure 7: Geo-located Services Listings



Web portal

Mobile portal

The platform offers information through three types of content:

- 1 service maps and profiles;
- 2 short-form critical information content; and
- 3 blog posts for more detailed information on high interest topics.

The first two areas of content are available via the web site as well as the mobile app. The blog is available via any web browser. For the service maps and profiles, the service user can click on the sector of interest from a list and find services being offered in the immediate area relevant to that sector. The user also can click on a specific service on a map to find more information about the specific service.

Platform Features and Functions

The *Refugee.Info* platform has two main features:

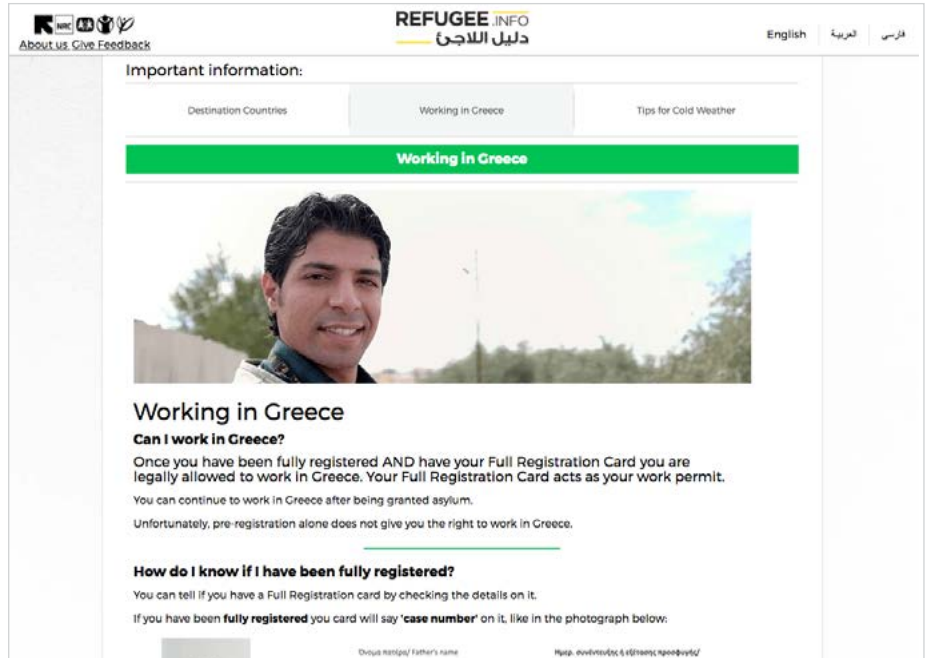
- 1 geo-located informational content and service listings; and
- 2 a social media extension (Facebook page) allowing for direct engagement with *Refugee.Info* moderators and a forum for client feedback.

Refugee.Info is location-aware, meaning that when a client searches for information, the system will show information relevant to his / her current location, and it presents any services on a map in relation to the location where the client is accessing the application. The platform is accessed via a web browser or app on a mobile device and can be used in English, Farsi, and Arabic across all features. Where possible, the *Refugee.Info* team also works to ensure the appropriate resources are in place for users to access the platform by establishing internet connectivity and electricity in the sites where refugees and migrants are most likely to access the platform. Figures 7 to 10 below illustrate the two main features of the platform for service users.

Figure 8: Geo-located Critical Information



Mobile portal



Web portal

The platform also provides critical information relevant to the populations that are accessing it and to the location from which it is being accessed. Information such as the rights in the particular country from which the user is accessing the platform and how to move safely are updated regularly to provide reliable information to users. This information can be accessed via web browser or mobile app (both user access methods are shown in the images above).

Figure 9: Refugee.Info Blog Post



The Refugee.Info platform also provides information through longer blog posts. These posts often include analysis of recent news and developments to provide more detailed information to users. The blog posts provide an opportunity for more clarification and greater explanation of complex concepts or events. These posts are often driven by interest gauged through comments and discussions on the Facebook page.

Figure 10: Refugee.Info Facebook Page



In addition to the web site and mobile app, the Refugee.Info platform engages users through a Facebook page in which news and rapidly changing information is posted by the Refugee.Info Social Media team. Users can then ask questions via direct message or comment that is then answered by the Refugee.Info moderators. At this point, engagement is mainly focused on platform promotion and information provision with some feedback functionality, but the new strategy calls for increased feedback (and potentially response) protocols to be introduced.

OPPOSITE: Ajmal Massoumy resettled to Oakland, California, from Afghanistan in October 2014. Prior to coming to the US, Ajmal worked as an interpreter for the US Special Forces. After his real name was broadcast on the radio he became a target of the Taliban. He applied for the Special Immigration Visa; a year and a half later Ajmal was approved and, soon after, boarded the 20-hour flight to California. Ethan, his caseworker from the IRC, met him at the airport with hot halal food and drove him to a new apartment already set up for him. Over the next few months Ajmal took job and cultural orientation classes, created a new family with his two Afghan room-mates and found a job at Chipotle. With the ongoing support of the IRC economic empowerment team, Ajmal has set his sights on getting his high school graduation equivalency certificate so he can enrol in college to study construction engineering and one day return to Afghanistan to help rebuild his country.

Kathryn Rummel/IRC

Platform Assessment

This section reviews the key functions of *Refugee.Info* and its sustainability, providing recommendations for replication pertaining to each functional category. The analysis draws upon observations and data from both *ServiceInfo* and *Refugee.Info*, but refers to *Refugee.Info* singularly as the platform that will be used going forward.

The functions and elements of:

- 1 information dissemination;
- 2 serving as a feedback mechanism; and
- 3 the sustainability of the platform

are discussed below along with the accompanying recommendations.

Information Dissemination

When people are displaced and require access to services to meet their basic needs, it is important that they are able to find out what services are available to them and how they may access them as easily, safely, and quickly as possible. In an urban context this is particularly challenging because unlike in a camp or rural setting, suitable services to meet their needs may be provided by myriad types of service provider: by the private sector and government actors, in addition to those provide by local, national and international

nongovernmental organisations. Many services may also not be immediately visible or known to those that may benefit from them, and they may also be geographically dispersed.

One of the main functions of *Refugee.Info* is thus to provide reliable, comprehensive and reliable information to affected populations on the full range of services that they may access; in doing so, aiming to help them to meet their basic needs.



Platform Assessment (continued)

The types of information provided by the platform may vary per location or context where the platform is deployed, but fall under these general categories:

- Life-saving protection information applicable in emergency contexts
Examples include: legal rights, information about abuse and how to stay safe, directory of organisations providing survivors with counselling and other support
- Shelter information
- Transportation and movement information
- Legal rights and procedures
- Education (formal or informal) information and related procedures
- Environmental health educational information
- Health providers and overall health messaging
- Programming-specific information
Examples include: messaging for cash programming in Greece, messaging for food distributions in Serbia
- Community-integration information, and
- Other lifestyle information

Effectiveness and Utility

The effectiveness and utility of *Refugee.Info*'s information dissemination function can be assessed using three separate indicators:

- 1 relevance of the information;
- 2 accessibility of the platform; and
- 3 comprehensiveness of the information being provided.

This section explores the extent to which *Refugee.Info* has addressed these criteria.

RELEVANCE

Refugee.Info provides highly relevant information for displaced populations and does so in a way that is easily adapted for rapidly changing situations. A key lesson learned in the transition from *ServiceInfo* to *Refugee.Info* was that for information to be relevant, it needed to be timely and adaptable for changing contexts. Thus, the process of updating information needed to be as streamlined and light-touch as possible, without sacrificing the quality of the information.



The *Refugee.Info* platform has developed efficiencies into the workflow while also relying on social media to facilitate real-time information exchange on an individual basis. However, a level of information specificity is still needed in order to be completely relevant for all users. This includes targeted content for each nationality that may be accessing the platform as well as more detailed explanations for the guidance being provided. The Facebook page, since July 2016, and blog, since January 2017, have helped to provide some of this more detailed and tailored information, however this has not led to an increase in satisfaction or use of the platform in any substantive way.

The *Refugee.Info* team has introduced workflow efficiencies to ensure timely, relevant information is published on the platform.

Two key examples of this include:

1 Removing the ticketing process that required substantive human intervention

The *ServiceInfo* team had integrated a project management tool called JIRA in order to accommodate for large amounts of content being developed. This tool issued tickets each time new content was developed (e.g. new service providers were added). While useful in allowing for tracking of content development and approvals, the process became burdensome for a small team. The *Refugee.Info* team sought to streamline this process to ensure that teams of all sizes and capacities could use the platform.

2 Introducing a platform that automates much of the translation process

The Transifex web-based platform allows for translation management integrated within the content management system (CMS) of a web site. The *Refugee.Info* platform began using this software to manage translations across the entire platform. First, content is developed in English. Then, all of the text is split into smaller chunks so that it can be translated paragraph-by-paragraph. Once the passage is translated, the staff member simply approves the translation and it is automatically pushed to the CMS to publish across all relevant pages. When this platform was first integrated as part of the *Refugee.Info* workflow, the time staff members spent on editorial translation tasks was drastically reduced. This allows for much faster turnaround for social media translations; sometimes getting important information out in as little as two hours.

These efficiencies have decreased the time staff spend on developing and publishing content, however there are still improvements that could be made to make service listings and information more relevant for users. In FGDs and surveys, users perceived there to be limited information specific to certain nationalities or sub-group as well as a lack of explanation or background for the information being provided. Given the large amounts of information being provided by myriad other sources – some trustworthy, others not – the users claimed that they needed more background details to make informed decisions about whether to trust the information. Figures 11 and 12 illustrate the number of sessions and average session duration per month since September 2016. When examining the user data since September 2016 (when the most recent substantive changes were made to the *Refugee.Info* platform), the number of sessions have decreased. While this may be an indication of the more static nature of the situation in Greece and FYROM, it also potentially suggests limited relevance of current content on the web site. A promising statistic, however, is that users are spending more time on the platform when they do use it, perhaps a result of the more detailed information that is beginning to be provided through the blog.

More positive trends can be seen in the Facebook social media extension where weekly engaged user numbers have continued to climb at the same time that new individuals liking the page has increased. Figures 13 and 14 show these statistics clearly. Figure 13 illustrates an overall increase between September 2016 and March 2017 of the number of engaged users per week (i.e. the number of unique users who clicked or created a story). Figure 14 also illustrates that the total reach of the Facebook page has continued to increase steadily during this period. This suggests that users already using the platform are finding the content more engaging as time goes on, while the reach of Facebook page has also continued to increase.

OPPOSITE: Phones are seen charging, at the Alexandria refugee site in northern Greece, August 2016. Tara Todras-Whitehill/IRC

Figure 11: Sessions per Month, September 2016–March 2017

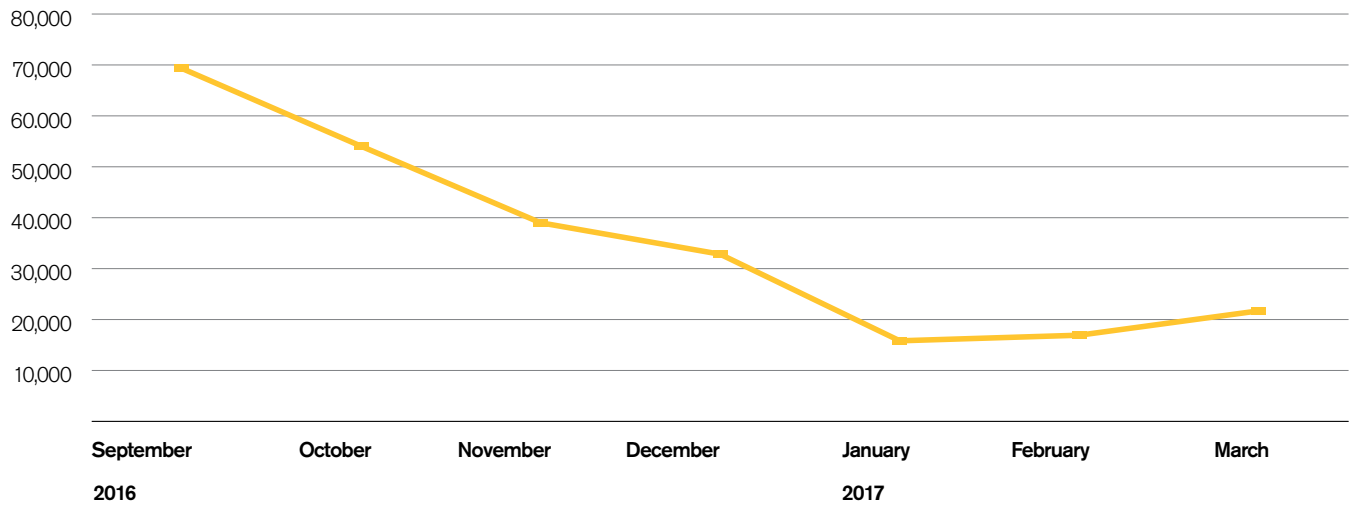
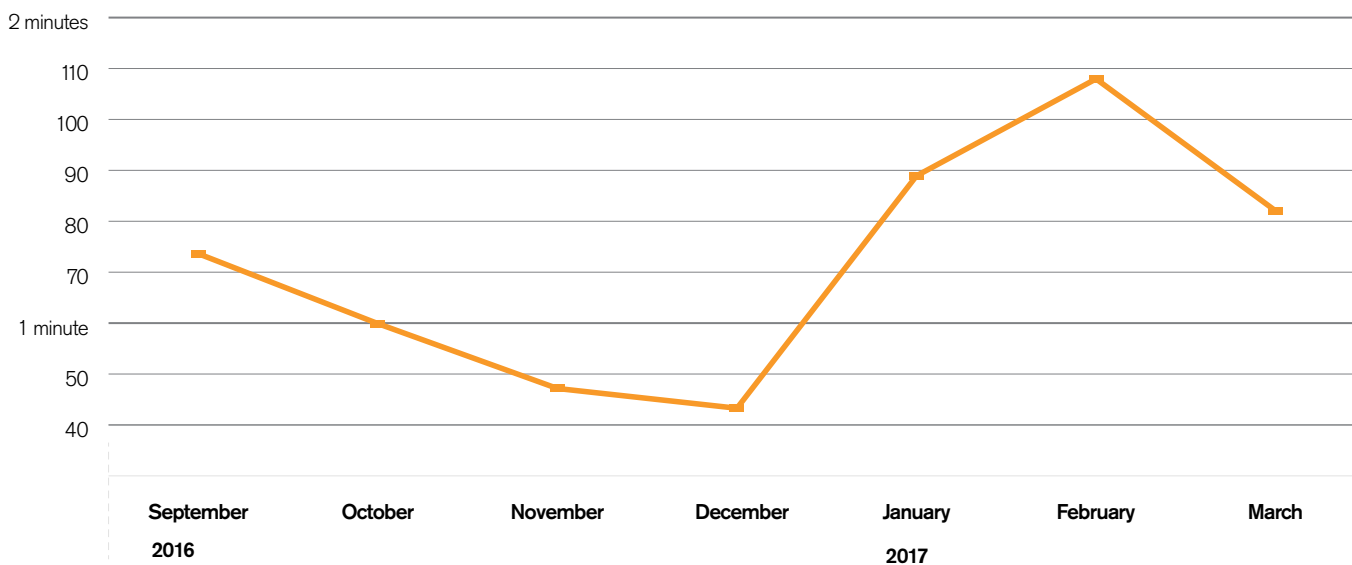


Figure 12: Average Session Duration by Month, September 2016–March 2017



While the relevance of content is difficult to measure, the *Refugee.Info* team is working on the supply side of the process to improve the speed with which the platform can provide relevant, updated information. These efficiencies have not yet led to an increase in users per month for the web site. However, the Facebook page has continued to grow in reach and engagement. In order to ensure the widest audience is reached, it will be beneficial for the *Refugee.Info* team to review the content that it intends to focus on, and the most appropriate media channels through which to publish it.

The three-pronged approach of static content on the web site, more detailed and continually updated information through the blog, and more direct engagement plus daily updates on the Facebook page may prove to be an effective approach, as long as there are clear guidelines for the types of content to be published on each and at which stages or type of response. Furthermore, the Facebook page may be a useful promotion tool to increase traffic to the web site and further engage users, if it is useful for the context.

Figure 13: Facebook Page Engaged Users per Week, September 2016–April 2017

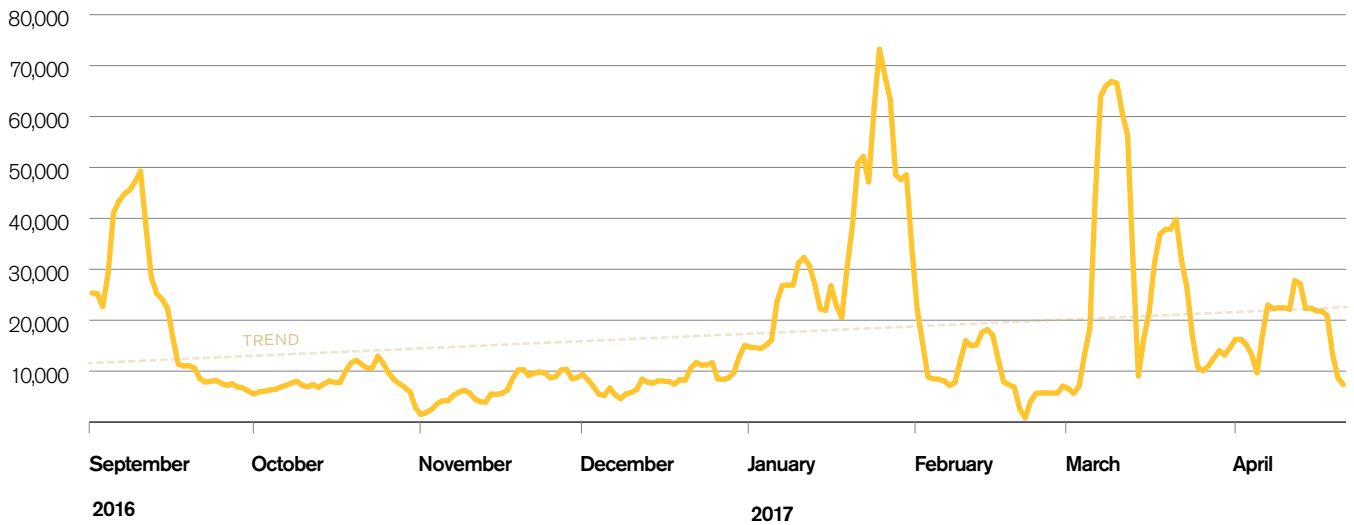
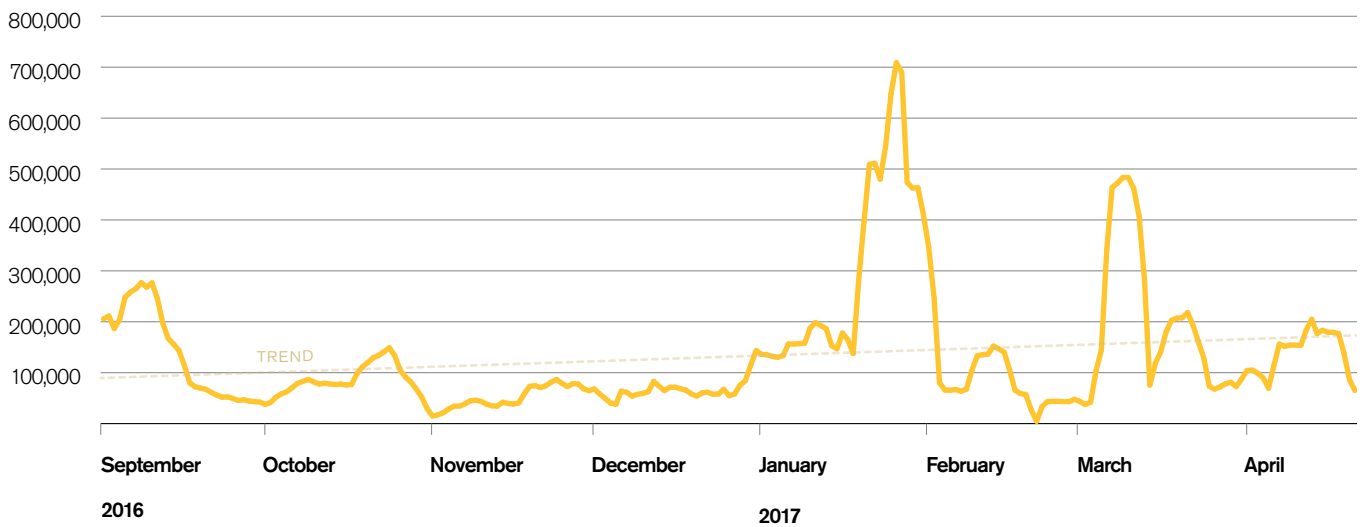


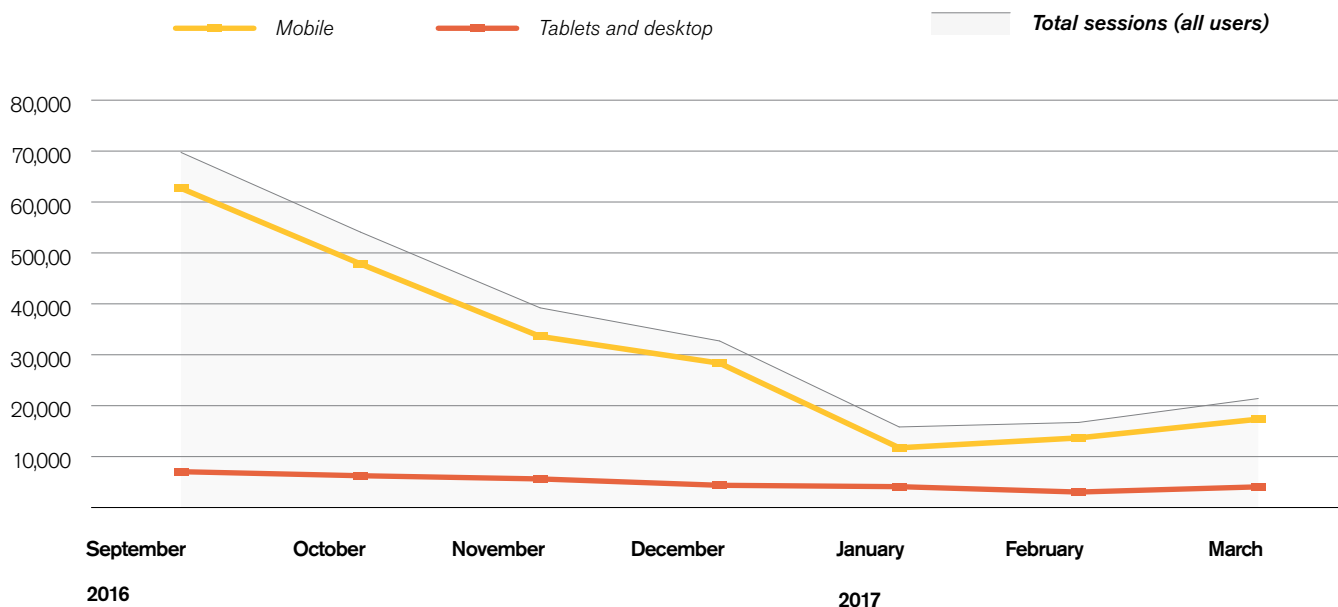
Figure 14: Facebook Page Total Users Reached per Week, September 2016–April 2017



Note: Figure 11 shows *monthly total hits*, whereas Figure 13 shows *weekly total unique users* engaged. Though the two graphs display the same magnitude on the y-axis, Figure 13 represents far more widespread usage, as it is a measure of unique users.

Figures 13 and 14 have a similar overall trend, but the **numbers are 10 times larger** in Figure 14.

Figure 15: Technology Used to Access Platform, September 2016–April 2017



ACCESSIBILITY

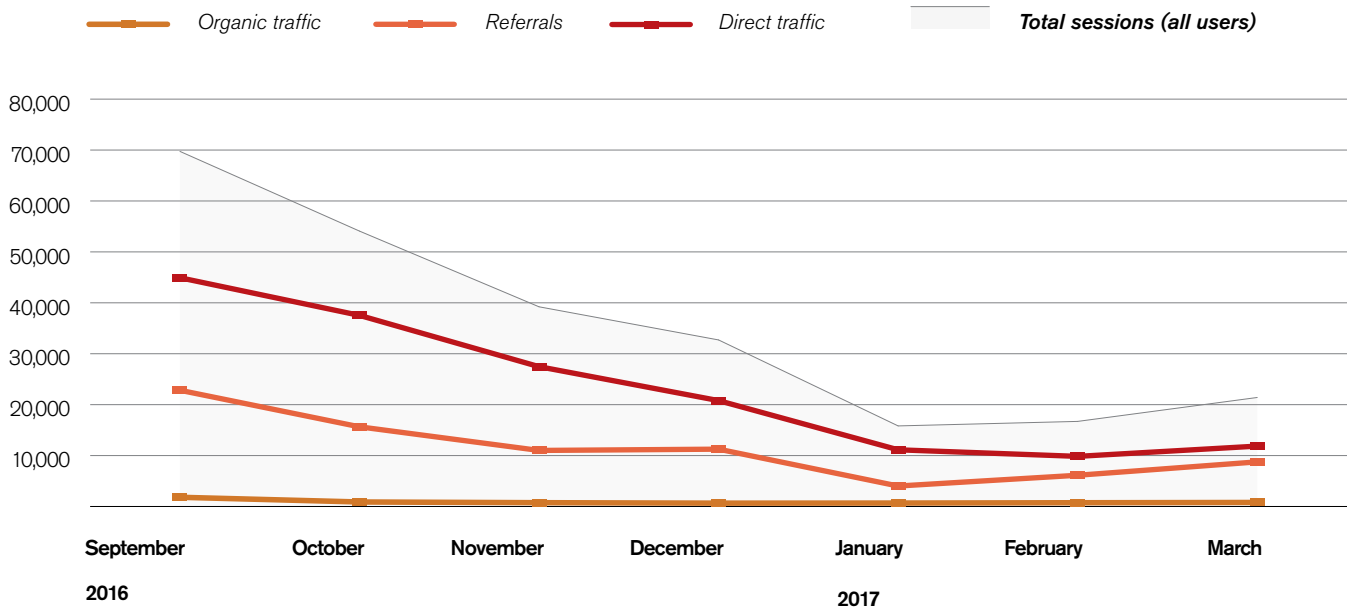
Refugee.Info seeks to provide highly curated information through ICT media with the assumption that potential users have access to mobile and/or desktop computer resources through which to view the content. The team has realised that this assumption does not hold true in all contexts and has established wireless hotspots and electricity provision in camps and collective centres. However, these sites may not be accessible for the greater proportion of potential users living among the host population and does not address unequal ownership of mobile assets. While access to a phone may be challenging for some potential users, it is highly advantageous that the *Refugee.Info* platform uses Facebook as one medium through which it provides information and engages users. Facebook has been widely used by the refugee and migrant populations throughout Europe; *Refugee.Info* integrates seamlessly with that existing user behaviour and tendency.

Users largely access *Refugee.Info* through web browsers on mobile phones. The web site is predominately accessed by the user directly typing in the URL to a web browser, while a slightly smaller proportion is accessed through referral traffic, such as captive portals (web sites that open automatically when logged on to wifi hotspots) at wireless hotspots in camps and collective centres. Figure 15 illustrates that nearly all traffic for the *Refugee.Info* platform comes from mobile phones. Figure 16 shows the relative distribution of access modes (i.e. organic, referral, and direct⁷).

While users are clearly accessing the platform, they do identify some key limitations in their ability to do so. In FGDs, many users reported electricity and wireless connection as reasons for not accessing the site more regularly. Mobile data networks are readily available in the locations where *Refugee.Info* is currently mobilised, but buying data packages is relatively expensive for many of the refugees, particularly those that have been displaced for a longer period of time and have used much of their savings. The *Refugee.Info* team has addressed this by establishing wireless hotspots and providing electricity to sites previously without, but there remain many individuals who do not live in close proximity to these sites. This is a critical element that will need to be assessed before establishing the platform in any new context.

Another concern relates to the location-aware nature of *Refugee.Info* and the gathering and transfer of personally identifying information by the platform to service providers. Providing personally identifying information or identifying the location of specific individuals could place particularly vulnerable populations at risk. This is an issue that has not yet been addressed comprehensively from either a legal compliance or ethical perspective and should be considered when adopting in new contexts.

Figure 16: Technology Used to Access Platform, September 2016–April 2017



COMPREHENSIVENESS

Refugee.Info does not currently provide comprehensive service listings across the platform, but has been focusing on building out the back-end (data collection and administration processes), and the user experience on the publicly facing platform to ensure that this information can be presented as clearly and comprehensively as possible.

Users noted in FGDs that they have used the information on rights and movement more than the service listings due to the lack of comprehensiveness. There are plans in place to build out the service listings element through a Yelp-like function that would provide detailed descriptions of the service listing and allow for user ratings. As can be seen in the case study from *ServiceInfo* in Lebanon below, it will be important that these efforts be coupled with close engagement with service providers and organisations to avoid duplication and encourage participation.

Providing comprehensive information is important not only for the information it relays, but also for building trust and reliance on the platform as a source of information. The level of information does not currently rise to a resource that would be a “go-to” for refugees and migrants, but has laid the groundwork through a few iterations and drawn from the lessons learned during the *ServiceInfo* pilot about the most effective ways to engage service providers and vet information. The workflow efficiencies mentioned above also are contributing to a greater ability for staff to focus on service mapping, information curating, and verification.

LEARNING FROM *SERVICEINFO* IN LEBANON

In Lebanon, while national NGOs and private sector service providers tended to be enthusiastic about registering their services on *ServiceInfo*, many INGOs were skeptical about doing so. They often indicated that their senior management would not give them permission to do so. This should be viewed in the context of the Lebanon response to the Syrian refugee crisis, in which multiple actors operated with their own information mapping systems, distrusting the systems which other organisations used. Humanitarian actors were also required by UNHCR to provide information about the services that they deliver into an information management system called Activity Info. UNHCR required this of humanitarian actors appealing under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), whether or not they were direct UNHCR-funding recipients. The system was viewed by many as being a reporting tool, serving little use as a tool to aid collaboration and cooperation between humanitarian actors. Furthermore, it was only accessible by traditional humanitarian actors (it didn't include the services provided to affected populations by government departments or private sector actors). The information could further also not be accessed by clients, so couldn't serve in the same way as *ServiceInfo* as a tool to directly facilitate affected populations' access to information. Because of the requirement to register their services on Activity Info, there was little motivation to do so on *ServiceInfo*.



Recommendations for Replication

Based on the analysis above, the following recommendations provide guidance for organisations interested in replicating or adopting the *Refugee.Info* platform.

1 Streamline workflows to ensure timely, relevant updates

Timeliness is a key component for relevant information provision. Staff work flows must be as streamlined and efficient as possible with clear division of labour. The *Refugee.Info* platform is developing back-end processes to relieve the burden on staff and automate as much as possible. The staff structure should complement these processes.

2 Provide guidelines for the types of media in which to publish different types of information and in what context

In order to provide the most relevant information, different elements of the *Refugee.Info* platform can be utilised depending on the context and type of crisis. Standard or static information is most appropriate for the web site (e.g., service listings, information on asylum), more detailed information and discussions of critical issues are best suited to the blog, while highly dynamic information that requires direct engagement with users is most effectively addressed via the Facebook page. When replicating *Refugee.Info*, it will be important to provide these guidelines for the given context.

3 Integrate service mapping efforts with existing 3W or 4W processes

Service mapping requires a great deal of coordination and follow-up from staff. The *Refugee.Info* team has been working to establish partnerships on the ground to facilitate service mapping. It will be important for any organisation adopting the *Refugee.Info* platform to engage with existing coordination mechanisms to draw from the 3W or 4W reporting processes⁸. Tapping into existing service reporting will help to increase buy-in from the humanitarian community, reduce burden on staff, and increase the comprehensiveness of service provider listings.

4 Develop partnerships on the ground

Related to integrating efforts with existing processes, partnerships on the ground are essential to providing relevant and comprehensive information. Coordinating service mapping and information curating with other humanitarian agencies, coordination mechanisms, and service providers will streamline the process and contribute to higher quality, more comprehensive information.

5 Ensure ample internet connectivity and electricity access

To ensure the widest access for users, internet connectivity and electricity access are critical considerations. These are details that need to be identified as part of a needs assessment process and addressed. Without these critical elements, the platform will not provide the desired impact, thus in situations where it is not possible to provide these services, adoption of the platform should be questioned.

6 Identify ways to reach marginalised groups and individuals without access to mobile devices

Access to digital technology tends to be dependent on gender, age, and economic or education levels. Mobile devices and computers are often inaccessible or difficult to obtain for marginalised groups (eg. too expensive, unavailable, or held by someone in the household else exclusively). Without targeted efforts to expand access to the platform to sectors of the population that do not have access to these technologies, there is risk of further isolating the most vulnerable. This is a detail that should be assessed as part of the needs assessment. The agency replicating the platform should understand the level of accessibility for these groups and identify ways to mitigate inaccessibility.



OPPOSITE: While these may look like portable stereos, these are items that are of immeasurable value to Syrians displaced by fighting. In northern Syria the IRC has distributed thousands of these solar-powered WakaWaka lights. People living in camps can use the WakaWaka to light their tents and to charge their mobile phones. *Ned Colt/IRC*

ABOVE: Najees held a job as a waitress in Syria, while she worked towards her dream of becoming a fashion designer. In March 2016 she was living in Idomeni camp on the northern border of Greece with her elderly mother. Here she shows a photo of the café where she worked in Damascus. *Kathleen Prior/IRC*

Feedback Mechanism

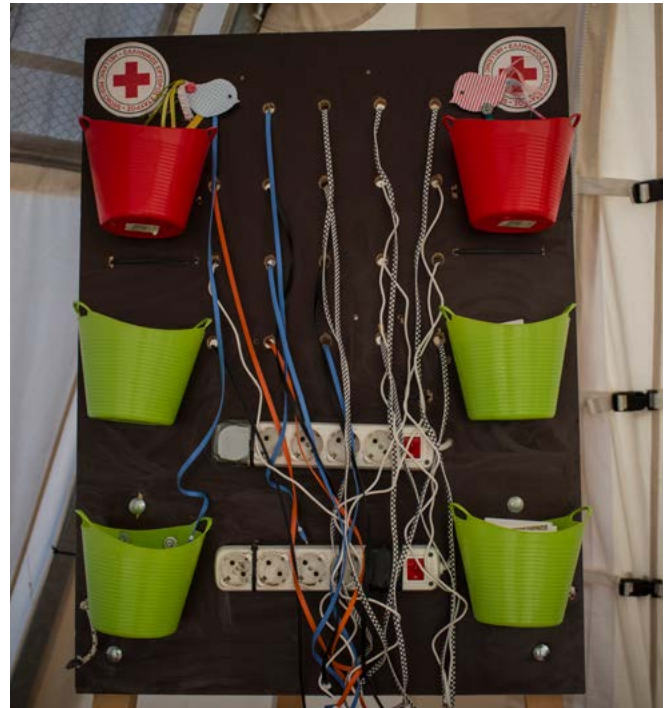
A feedback mechanism is a set of procedures and tools formally established and used to allow humanitarian aid recipients to provide information on their experience of service provider. Feedback mechanisms collect information for a variety of purposes, including taking corrective action in improving some elements of the services being provided to clients, and strengthening accountability to affected populations. A feedback mechanism is seen as effective if, at minimum, it supports the collection, acknowledgement, analysis and response to the feedback received, thus forming a closed feedback loop. Where the feedback loop is left open, the mechanism is not considered fully effective (ALNAP, 2014).

Accountability to affected populations is often challenging in the humanitarian setting. It traditionally relies on individual agencies establishing and managing their own systems through which clients can provide feedback on the services that they have used. The extent to which these systems provide accessible channels for client voice (including ensuring that clients feel comfortable directly providing feedback to the service provider in question, particularly when the feedback is not positive), and the extent to which a service provider will act upon and respond to the feedback that they have received is largely dependent on the individual service provider.

ServiceInfo sought to address some of these challenges by providing a single platform through which clients and service providers could communicate with each other. The platform attempted to promote the use of a feedback mechanism and make its use more pervasive among service providers. *Refugee.Info* is benefitting from the lessons learned through the *ServiceInfo* pilot and has been shaping its own feedback strategy to take these into account. This section will describe and analyse the feedback mechanism piloted under *ServiceInfo* and provide recommendations for how *Refugee.Info* can use this experience in developing its own feedback features.

The *ServiceInfo* platform allowed clients to provide feedback via three different methods:

- 1 directly on the web site itself using an online form;
- 2 through Facebook direct messages; or
- 3 in-person using an offline version of the online form.



All feedback was recorded as an individual ticket for follow-up by the appropriate *ServiceInfo* team member. In the case of feedback received directly through the web site, this ticket was automatically generated. For feedback through Facebook and in-person interviews, the ticket was manually entered. Each record was then reviewed by the Data Management Officer and Monitoring and Evaluation Officer on a daily basis and categorised by service provider. Wherever the feedback was unclear, the *ServiceInfo* team followed up with the service user to clarify. Following confirmation and vetting, the *ServiceInfo* team prepared a report for each service provider that clearly outlined the nature of the feedback and recommendations for ways in which it could be addressed. This report was often provided to the service provider within a week of receiving the feedback.

ABOVE: Chargers for women inside the Women's Safe Place at the Apanamo site in the north of Lesbos, Greece. Women traveling alone are particularly vulnerable and have a place to rest at Apanamo before continuing on to Mytilene.
Monique Jaques/IRC

Following delivery of the report to the service provider, a member of the *ServiceInfo* team scheduled a meeting with a representative of the service user to review the feedback and recommendations. If the service provider requested the individual, disaggregated feedback in order to follow up directly, this would be provided only in cases where it did not constitute a risk to the provider of the feedback. The *ServiceInfo* team did not actively check to confirm whether the service provider had addressed the feedback, opting to serve as a neutral communicator rather than a watchdog. *ServiceInfo* also did not directly report back to the original feedback provider to acknowledge the feedback, as it did not have the resources in which to do so. Instead, the team organised community meetings in locations in which concentrations of feedback were received, assuming that the acknowledgement would reach the original feedback provider either through the meeting or word-of-mouth.

REFUGEE.INFO FEEDBACK MECHANISM

The *Refugee.Info* team is currently discussing options and strategies for feedback features on the platform. As has been explored through *ServiceInfo* and in the recommendations below, any feedback mechanism, must provide utility to service providers and users alike, instil confidence in the system and how the feedback will be used, and ensure that protection and privacy concerns are addressed.

An earlier version of the *Refugee.Info* platform included a thumbs up/thumbs down feature with a short open-ended response option for users to provide feedback on content and the platform overall. The team found this feature to be highly under-utilised, however, suggesting that it was either not well understood or that there was little confidence that the feedback would make a difference. This feature has recently been removed while the team considers other options.⁹

Effectiveness and Utility

ServiceInfo set out to provide a single, comprehensive system through which users can provide and receive a response to feedback. However, many service providers prefer to manage their own systems for feedback, where they have control over the mechanism (i.e., the format in which the feedback is provided, how quickly they're able to follow up on feedback, and what additional features they're able to use to probe deeper into the feedback received). The experience during the *ServiceInfo* pilot suggested that some service providers also may not feel comfortable with having a peer agency being able to read negative feedback on them. This is particularly relevant given the competitive funding context that incentivises the behaviour of humanitarian actors.

As with any feedback mechanism, the degree to which a client will trust the service and use it again rests heavily on whether they receive a response to their feedback that they consider to be adequate. The *ServiceInfo* team deliberately set out to not enforce corrective action based on the feedback received. It thus lacked the teeth to hold the service providers accountable. However, the team did ensure that the service providers were at least confronted with the feedback. The fact that the highest volume of feedback was received not through clients directly providing feedback on the site, but through in person administration of the feedback form, suggests that there remained significant

progress to be made toward an end-state where all clients were providing feedback in this way. The purpose of the site is to facilitate anonymity and reduce staff time, but if the *ServiceInfo* team was essentially soliciting the feedback as one would administer a survey, then the benefit of these features was somewhat undermined. However, the team's efforts enabled clients to provide feedback who might otherwise not have been able or comfortable to do so.

ServiceInfo never attained the ability to fully "close the loop." Individual users rarely provided names and contact details, and further, due to the limited capacity of the *ServiceInfo* team, individual follow up with the client that provided the feedback was not always possible. Instead, the team reported back to the community in the locality where the feedback derived on the way in which the service provider responded to the feedback. However, there is no guarantee that the person who provided the feedback in the first instance would ever hear the response. The *ServiceInfo* team reported that the "report back" sessions were appreciated by those refugees who participated. However, the function relied on labour-intensive efforts of the *ServiceInfo* team, which required a not-insignificant amount of funding to support, even at the relatively low level of capacity at which the team was operating.

Recommendations for Replication

Based on the analysis above, the following recommendations provide guidance for organisations interested in replicating or adopting the *Refugee.Info* platform based on the lessons learned from the *ServiceInfo* pilot:

1 Increase efficiency and effectiveness of managing the feedback function

The immense amount of time that the *ServiceInfo* team spent collecting (sometimes manually), collating, verifying, and delivering feedback to service providers proved to be onerous and expensive (due to high staff time and effort). The *Refugee.Info* team should look at ways to further automate the feedback process and promote further direct communication between clients and service providers.

2 Increase uptake and benefit to service providers

Making the feedback and response process as simple, streamlined, and useful as possible to service providers is important to building and maintaining buy-in. Many service providers already have little motivation to receive and respond to feedback, if it is not perceived to be actionable and easily addressed. In addition to increasing simplicity through further automation, the feedback should be timely and provide enough details about the reasons behind the feedback and how the client would like to see any issue addressed, for the service provider to be able to effectively respond to the feedback.

The system design also should reflect do no harm and protection principles. Different levels of privacy, depending on the sensitivity of the feedback being provided, are options that should be considered. Yet efforts should also be made – where appropriate – to enable further communication between service providers and clients so that service providers are able to obtain additional information from and close the loop with clients.

Examples of systems or options that could be available to service providers to ensure these principles are addressed include requiring moderation of feedback before it is published or only making public responses to certain close-ended standardised questions, leaving responses to open-ended questions viewable only to the service provider.

Finally, the incentive for service providers to participate in a platform will be limited by overtly negative feedback, so the team will need to consider how to manage this risk. Service providers are often very sensitive to reputational risk given the highly competitive donor environment in many contexts. The *Refugee.Info* platform should consider ways to allow service providers to publicly reply to the feedback (much in the same way that service providers are able to do this on Yelp or TripAdvisor), in order to directly address and diffuse negative feedback.

3 Increase uptake and benefit to service users

Service users need to be able to provide feedback easily and understand how that feedback will be used. A simple user interface that offers the option of quick reaction feedback as well as more detailed reflection could be used to provide feedback options for a wide variety of service users. The feedback mechanism will only be successful however, if service users believe that the feedback will make a difference and how it is being used. If there is little faith or understanding, service users will be less likely to use the feature, rendering it useless to service users and providers alike. It will be important thus for team's implementing ICT platforms such as *Refugee.Info* to not only work on optimising the feedback provision function, but to maximise the incentives of service providers to respond to the feedback in what clients consider to be a timely and adequate way. While there may be some hesitation from service providers about publicly available feedback, it's important to consider how useful this might be to service users. This may be a challenging balance to strike, but publicly available feedback information would have high utility for users of the platform to inform which services they wish to access.

Sustainability Model

To date, *Refugee.Info* platform has been primarily managed centrally by the IRC and its partners with funding from private grants and core organisational funds.

The *Refugee.Info* sustainability model is based on:

- 1 identifying partners on the ground to roll out the platform in new contexts in which it would add value;
- 2 seeking fundraising efforts from co-leads; and
- 3 developing an appropriate exit strategy.

Partnerships

In order to provide better quality information to users and react faster to changes on the ground, the global *Refugee.Info* team develops close partnerships with the organisations providing the team with content and access to users. All content produced by the team is sourced by one primary partner on the ground. This partner can be any or all of the co-leads in the country, but it also could be another local nongovernmental organisation (LNGO), international nongovernmental organisation (INGO), or local government.

New and existing partners are categorised into the following levels:

- 1 **Co-leads**
Co-leads are responsible for the strategy, high-level management, operations, and fundraising for the platform. Currently, only the IRC and Mercy Corps operate at this level, but it is part of the team's long-term strategy to gather support from multiple organisations.
- 2 **Editorial partners**
These partners have access to the entire *Refugee.Info* back-end, and are able to produce and translate their own content. The core *Refugee.Info* team provides editorial partners with an injection of funding, a detailed step-by-step guidance, along with access to all assets used for promotion, and gives editorial support when needed.

- 3 **Content partners**

These partners also receive an injection of funding, and are offered the privileges given to Editorial Partners, but they may elect to defer part or the entire editorial process to the *Refugee.Info* team.

- 4 **Content volunteers**

These partners provide the team with content, and have access to the materials the team produces, but cannot produce anything with the *Refugee.Info* brand.

- 5 **Validation volunteers**

These partners assert the veracity and validity of the content.

The driver of the development of the platform is the needs of the programs being delivered by the partners. As an example, in addition to the web and social media presence, the team focuses on helping organisations promote computer literacy by setting up information technology (IT) corners in community centres. These centres have proven a success in the Balkans, and the team will expand this concept to allow partner teams to deliver informal education content to youth affected by crises. Additionally, the team plans to position the platform as a cloud-based "information hub" for refugees and migrants partnering with other platforms to seamlessly deliver content from multiple sources.

To promote engagement and interest from partners and country programs in participating, the *Refugee.Info* team is developing a collaboration strategy document outlining in detail what partners are expected to receive from the team in terms of reporting and what the partners are expected to give to the team in terms of content. This will be part of a highly detailed strategy document that will serve as a key resource for agencies interested in adopting the platform. This strategy will work to enhance the proximity between the *Refugee.Info* team and partners and country offices. Workshops will be performed quarterly in which all partners can participate and discuss their strategy. The outcome of these workshops will be a revised and invigorated collaboration strategy document (IRC, Mercy Corps, 2017).

In order to ensure that the platform continues to address the needs of the displaced population that it serves in a sustainable and relevant manner, the *Refugee.Info* team will develop an exit strategy in consultation with co-leads and other partners on the ground.

Platform Assessment (continued)

The exit strategy can be defined as one of two types:

1 Partial exit

The day-to-day management is fully handed over to local organisations, governments, or coordinating bodies (e.g., UNOCHA, UNHCR, etc.). The *Refugee.Info* team will be involved in maintaining those relationships, but the entire publishing workflow is performed through partners.

2 Full exit/shutdown

In a case where needs are no longer present, or not chronic, and there are no competent organisations to take over the operations of the platform, the *Refugee.Info* team will gracefully shutdown the pages in the context. Using the example of Slovenia during the migration crisis, the team initially combined all location pages into one country-wide page relaying the information that the migration was no longer allowed and once traffic was close to zero, the page was discontinued.

Table 1: Benefits and Challenges by Partnership Type

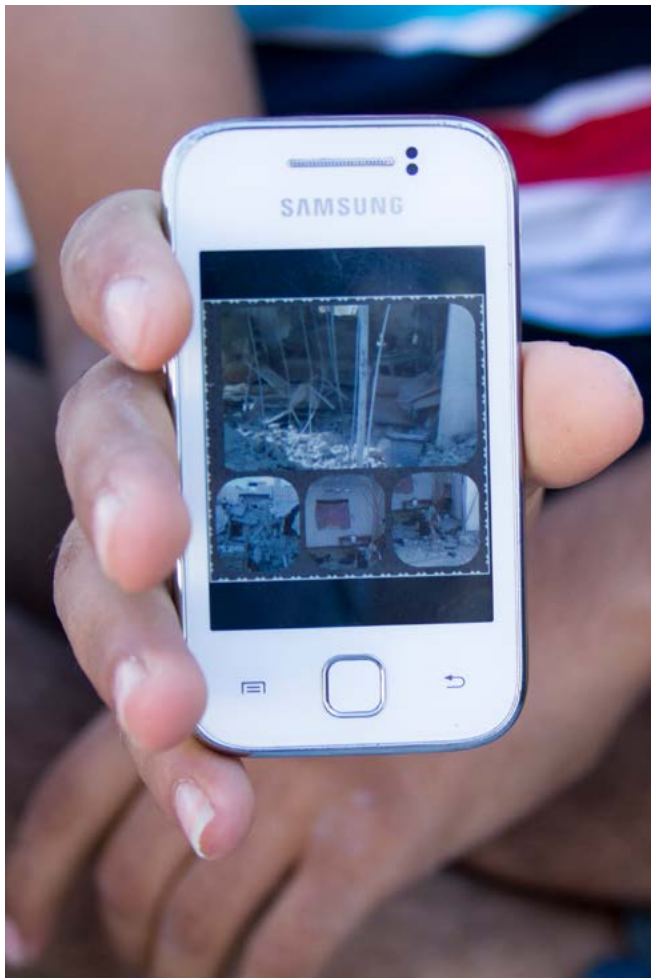
	Description	Benefits	Challenges
INGO Partnerships	Currently, the platform is run using a model of INGO partnership between Mercy Corps and the IRC in countries in which one or both of them are operational. This model uses existing infrastructure and relationships in the country of implementation to promote and gain buy-in for use of the platform.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Positive reputation in humanitarian response contexts ➤ Resources necessary to fund or seek funding for continued application of the platform ➤ High capacity of staff to implement the platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ When the context changes, an INGO's priorities and/or funding sources may change and it may decide to terminate programming. ➤ The operating costs associated with INGOs are often much higher than national organisations and institutions
Coordination Agency	The engagement and participation of a coordination agency is key to ensuring comprehensiveness of information and collection of already existing service-related information. A coordinating agency, such as OCHA or UNHCR, could be an option for fully handing over the platform.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Would ensure that the platform was fully funded through coordination budgets ➤ Reduce staff time spent on collecting information as the process could be integrated to already ongoing coordination processes. ➤ Increase the profile of the platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Staff and overhead costs of coordination agencies are quite high ➤ Confusion of <i>Refugee.Info</i> platform with existing coordination platforms used by UNHCR and OCHA
National Partnerships	Engagement of local and national organisations or institutions is important for <i>Refugee.Info</i> to effectively capture all service provider information and to appropriately work within the context. Transferring responsibility for the management of the platform to a national NGO or institution is another option.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lower operating costs than INGOs and UN agencies ➤ Will be in country for duration of crisis ➤ Clear understanding of the context, including culture and language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ May not have the same clout in the humanitarian community as an INGO or UN agency ➤ Lower staff capacity to implement the platform, requiring a great deal of advance preparation and capacity building

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPLICATION

Delegating responsibility of some platform features or processes to trusted partners in-country will be an essential step in ensuring sustainability and potential scale-up of the platform.

This report outlines three options for long-term partnership delegation associated with the sustainability of the platform:

- 1 additional partnerships with INGOs to integrate the current model into their new or existing programming;
- 2 handing off to a coordination agency to use as a central repository for service and protection-related information; and
- 3 handing off to a trusted local partner (national NGO, local government, etc.) who can continue operating the platform at a lower cost.



Funding

To secure long-term sustainability of the programme, the *Refugee.Info* platform will need to develop a strategy to transition from a globally funded model to one that is driven by funding identification at a country level. As of now, the *Refugee.Info* platform is reliant on dedicated funding to support its core team due to the need for centralised and cohesive moderation of content and service providers along with in-country costs to support implementation in a specific country. Any funding model for *Refugee.Info* will maintain its character as a free-to-use platform for affected populations. Users do not pay any fee to access the information on *Refugee.Info*.

The two main costs to run *Refugee.Info* are the global core team costs and the in-country costs:

- The *Refugee.Info* global Core team consists of staff, contractors who provide support to the development of the platform, legal advisors who provide with legal validation of content, moderators who parse and handle client feedback, and country office support.
- At a country level, *Refugee.Info* requires dedicated staff to manage content and connectivity projects. The content team will be involved with the sourcing and parsing of information and service listings in the context where *Refugee.Info* is deployed, and the connectivity team will be responsible for assisting on deployment of connectivity for affected populations. A prototypical country team would require 1-3 staff members dedicated fully or partially to the programme depending on what features are activated in the country. The estimated cost for deployment in a country includes personnel and in-country materials (e.g. tablets for kiosks, flyers, stickers, printing costs, etc.), which typically ranges from USD 50,000 to USD 200,000 depending on factors such as type of implementation, size of staff, and staff allocation to the programme.

LEFT: From the *Photos from Home* series, taken on Lesbos, Greece, in September 2015. Using their mobile phone, the subject shares a photo of their home, now reduced to rubble.
Tyler Jump/IRC

Table 2: Benefits and Challenges by Funding Type

	Description	Benefits	Challenges
New or Existing Programmes	In this option, the costs would be embedded into a new or existing programme funded by an institutional donor. These costs would include the necessary costs to roll-out in the specific country along with some type of additional budget (percentage or fee) to cover support for the <i>Refugee.Info</i> global team.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Works for countries in which there are existing programs and can help to secure the resources needed to introduce the platform to a new context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Funding may be more difficult to secure in countries in which one of the partner organisations does not have existing programming and may also have restrictions that could delay continued innovation ➤ There would likely be competition within country offices of organisations for the same funding
Monetise Platform	Another option is to monetise the platform – allowing advertisements on the platform in return for compensation for the space. The platform would receive a specific amount of money depending on the number of visits to each page.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ High potential for fundraising that could be used for further innovation and increase of scope ➤ Another opportunity for service providers to advertise their services and products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Risks the perception of the platform as a commercial entity and not in the user best interest or upholding humanitarian principles ➤ Advertisements may be inappropriate for user population ➤ May undermine the credibility of the information provided as impartial or unbiased
Charge for use	A final option could include charging for use of the platform at a discounted flat fee for service NGO providers that are seeking to provide info on their services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ With service providers investing a small amount, there may be greater buy-in to engage with the platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Risks the perception of the platform as a commercial entity and not in the user best interest or upholding humanitarian principles ➤ Risks very little interest or participation from service providers

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REPLICATION

The *Refugee.Info* platform has used private grant funding and core funds thus far, ensuring the greatest level of flexibility and room for innovation. Ideally, this source of funding would continue as long as possible. However, other options must be explored to further cement the sustainability of the platform.

Options include:

- 1 integrating the platform activities into existing country programme proposals for institutional donor funding;
- 2 monetising the platform; and
- 3 charging for use.

OPPOSITE: Refugees charge their phones at the Moria refugee site near Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, Greece on Thursday, October 8th, 2015. Once refugees get processed and get papers after their arrival in Lesbos, they can exchange money and buy ferry tickets to get to Athens.

Tara Todras-Whitehill/ IRC

Conclusion

The journey from *ServiceInfo* to *Refugee.Info* has provided IRC and its partners with critical experience and lessons learned about the most effective ways to use ICT solutions in humanitarian responses for crisis-affected populations.

Refugee.Info has had success in engaging users through the web site, blog, and Facebook page and providing timely, critical and relevant information to affected populations. While reach through the web site has begun to plateau, engagement through the Facebook page has steadily climbed. As the platform begins developing partnerships to implement in other contexts, content and promotion strategies by media type will be critical to expanding reach, as will focusing on outreach to marginalised or vulnerable populations not easily reached by mobile technologies. Engaging directly with service providers and ensuring the platform addresses their needs and motivations will also be necessary to future success of the platform. *Refugee.Info* can benefit from the lessons learned on the feedback mechanism piloted through the *ServiceInfo* platform, ensuring that it addresses the needs and desires of service providers and service users alike. Care must be taken to address privacy and protection concerns around the feedback mechanism while balancing the utility of detailed information to service providers.

ICT platforms, such as *Refugee.Info*, have the potential to provide the humanitarian community with a very powerful protection and accountability tool for affected populations. The effectiveness and sustainability of ICT platforms rests centrally on the ability of organisations to create partnerships on the ground, refine their offerings to be accessible and relevant to its target users, and develop a funding strategy that ensures continued operation globally.





Annex: Assessment Methodology

Data Collection

The following section outlines the types of methods used to collect data for the assessment, the information each instrument was designed to capture, the technology used to employ each instrument, and the sampling framework.

Mixed Methods

The assessment utilised four separate methods for data collection that contributed to the desired objectives:

- 1 a desk review of available literature pertaining to urban response and IRC programming as well as a review of the functionality and user statistics of each platform;
- 2 key informant interviews with current and former project staff;
- 3 surveys with platform users in Beirut and Tripoli; and
- 4 focus group discussions (FGDs) with current users of the platforms that aimed to capture a deeper understanding of their needs, opinions, and recommendations.

KIIs were conducted in English via Skype. FGDs were conducted in the local language (Arabic, Farsi, or French) and notes were taken in English by IRC staff.

Sampling Strategy

A total of five informants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format, while 116 individuals participated in the FGDs. FGD participants were largely sampled using convenience and purposive sampling techniques; thus, this analysis does not attempt to generalise to the larger user population. All results are indicative of the populations from which individuals were sampled and provide a clear snapshot of the perspectives of these populations.

OPPOSITE: Young refugees staying in warehouses near Belgrade Station, Serbia, gather at night, lit by fires and mobile phones, November 2016. *Miodrag Cakic/IRC*

Table 3: Sampling Overview

Country of Origin	Focus Group Discussions			Surveys			Key Informant Interviews		
	Sex		Total	Sex		Total	Sex		Total
	M	F		M	F		M	F	
Syria	14	23	37	0	0	0	0	0	0
Afghanistan	29	36	65	0	0	0	0	0	0
Iraq	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cameroon	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mixed	5	5	10	26	17	43	4	4	8
Total	49	67	116	26	17	43	4	4	8

Challenges and Limitations

There were two challenges experienced during the data collection and analysis stages of this study, which may limit the accuracy, precision, or validity of the analysis:

➤ Research continuity

The data were collected over a long period of time (over one year) and management of the process changed hands a few times over the course of the research process. While data are considered sound, there is a possibility of loss of analytical insight and comprehensiveness of observations.

➤ Research scope

Given the wide reach of the two platforms and the number of staff involved in implementing each, the number of key informant interviews may not accurately reflect all humanitarian actor perspectives. With this said, a great effort has been taken to draw on a diversity of viewpoints.

BELOW: A young refugee staying at the warehouses near Belgrade Station uses his mobile phone. *Miodrag Cakic/IRC*



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Notes

1 <https://ServiceInfo.rescue.org/>

2 <https://www.Refugee.Info/>

3 For a directory of new initiatives on
urban humanitarian response see:
<http://www.urban-response.org/directory.aspx>

4 <https://ServiceInfo.rescue.org/>

5 <https://www.Refugee.Info/>

6 As of April 21, 2017

7 *Organic* Referred by search engine (e.g. Google)

Referral Referred by social media or blogs

Direct Access by directly typing in
URL or from a bookmarked page

8 3W reporting process is led by OCHA to outline the
operational presence by sector and location within an
emergency. It is short for “Who does What, Where”.
4W reporting entails “Who, What, Where and When.”

See links here for more information:

<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/applications/tools/category/3w-who-does-what-where>

and:

<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/nepal/article/whos-doing-what-where-and-when-4w>

9 As of April 21, 2017

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