
Refugees & HCI SIG: Situating HCI Within Humanitarian Research

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DEFINITIONS & KEYWORDS

Humanitarian Organizations: Local, international and United Nations non-governmental organizations that respond to the needs of populations that are induced by manmade or natural disasters.

Digital Humanitarianism: An area of practice and research that explores the potential, use and implications of technologies in supporting humanitarian response.

Humanitarian Principles: A set of principles that guide the way in which humanitarian response is conducted. The principles are Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Independence.

ABSTRACT

Currently the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees estimates that there are around 65.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide [16]. As digital technologies have become more available, humanitarian researchers and organizations have begun to explore how technologies may be used to address refugee needs under the umbrella of Digital Humanitarianism. Interest in refugee and humanitarian contexts has also been expressed within the HCI community through the organization of workshops at conferences. While previous engagements within the HCI community have focused on our experiences of working within refugee contexts as well as developing a common research agenda, we have yet to explore how HCI research fits within wider humanitarian research and in relation to digital humanitarianism. This SIG invites HCI researchers to engage in discussions on situating HCI research within humanitarian research and response.

INTRODUCTION

With digital technologies becoming more and more ubiquitous in both developing and developed contexts, we are witnessing an increase in the use of technologies by displaced populations as well as by governments and humanitarian organizations that aim to address the needs of these marginalized populations. As digital technologies have started to play a larger role in the day-to-day lives of refugees and in the management of migration and aid provision, a new space for Human Computer Interaction (HCI) research and practice has become available. Indeed, over the years HCI researchers have engaged with refugee communities and humanitarian organizations in multiple capacities and various areas within humanitarian response. Additionally, the HCI community has come together in multiple Special Interest Groups (SIG) and workshops to explore how HCI can respond to the current refugee crisis [12], reflect on challenges of conducting HCI research in humanitarian contexts [14,15] and create a shared research agenda [2]. This SIG aims to build on discussions which took place in the aforementioned events, as well as in the insights gained, by exploring how HCI research is situated within the wider field of humanitarian research and response in this particular context. A clearer view on this matter would help HCI researchers to explore how their research responds to current humanitarian research and needs. Additionally, the outcomes of these activities are expected to explore ways to support HCI researchers' actions when working with diverse actors in multidisciplinary humanitarian scenarios.

REFUGEES & HCI: RECENT WORK**The Role of Technologies and Technological Spaces**

The establishment of computer clubs for refugees and migrants in both Germany and Palestinian camps have exemplified how such spaces allow for cultural exchange [1]. In refugee contexts, Fisher et al described how youth in Za'atari camp are hacking technologies to access information to support their families [18]. In Europe it was found that digital services are being used by refugees and forced migrants to access information to support their re-settlement however information reliability, timeliness, and complexity pose as challenges for the effectiveness of such technologies [7]. Furthermore, it has been indicated that the added pressure of always needing to

Refugees & HCI at CHI 2016

40 HCI researchers attended the first Refugees & HCI SIG in San Jose, USA. Discussions centered upon how HCI research is responding to the current refugee crisis as well as the challenges HCI researchers are facing when working in refugee and humanitarian contexts.

Refugees & HCI at C&T 2017

Building on the previously identified challenges, pertaining to conducting HCI research in refugee contexts, over 20 researchers attended a one-day workshop at the Communities & Technology 2017 Conference in France to share experiences and methods employed to overcome challenges in engaging with refugee communities and humanitarian organizations.

Refugees & Technology at GROUP 2018

In a one-day workshop held at GROUP 2018 in Florida, USA researchers came together to further discussions held at the aforementioned conferences. The workshop aimed to support HCI research in refugee and humanitarian contexts through developing guidelines for young researchers working in this field and a research agenda.

be technologically connected may result in making refugees more vulnerable [5]. Other studies have explored with refugee participants how technologies may be leveraged to improve camp infrastructure [10] and build their social capital [8].

Designing Technologies for Refugees and Humanitarian Response

HCI researchers have also extended methods commonly used in the field such as Participatory Design (PD) and co-design to design technologies to be used by refugees. Bustamante Duarte et al [6] have reported how the use of a PD enabled the creation of a safe space in which young forced migrants felt comfortable sharing their experiences as well as voicing their opinions. Furthermore, it has been shown how user centered-design and the establishment of design principles may not only support the better development of technologies for refugees but also facilitate inter-cultural design [11]. Almohamed et al [3] has highlighted how the use of probes methods elicit reflections on refugee experiences. HCI research has also focused on supporting the design for humanitarian response. The challenges of designing technologies for humanitarian response within the boundaries of humanitarian principles was addressed by Cardia et al through the development of principled approach to Humanitarian ICTs [4].

Deploying Technologies for Refugees and Humanitarian Response

The deployment of technologies for refugees has also been an area of focus within HCI research. Indeed, Talhouk et al explored the implications of audio technologies on improving refugee access to healthcare in Lebanon as well as community dynamics [13]. Furthermore, Xu et al deployed co-located media technology with an aim of increasing refugee sense of community and participation in a refugee camp in Jordan [17].

REFUGEES & HCI: SITUATING HCI WITHIN HUMANITARIAN RESEARCH

As the body of HCI research grows there is a need to explore how the research generated from this community is situated within wider humanitarian research. HCI researchers working with refugees have gathered at several HCI conferences to discuss challenges faced in engaging in research in this context as well as collaborating to create a research agenda. While this look inwards at our experiences and research interests has benefited the research community through providing guidelines for conducting research with refugee communities [14] and creating a space in which researchers can support one another, the progress within the field now warrants a look outwards. Therefore, this SIG aims to bring together HCI researchers working within humanitarian contexts to discuss how recent and current research is situated within wider humanitarian research and response. More specifically we aim to explore how HCI technological designs and methods address gaps and critiques within the field of digital humanitarianism [9]. We expect the discussion around these topics will bring insights to support HCI research in these contexts.

SIG AIMS

This SIG aims to situate HCI research being conducted with refugee communities and humanitarian organizations within wider humanitarian research and response. This will be done by discussing:

- 1) The gaps within humanitarian literature which HCI research is filling
- 2) How HCI research is distinct to the field of Digital Humanitarianism
- 3) How are HCI researchers collaborating with humanitarian organizations and researchers
- 4) How to further support HCI researchers in multidisciplinary humanitarian research

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