Centering Refugees, Migrants, and Asylum Seekers Experiences in Digitalization and Datafication

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ABSTRACT

Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) and related fields of research are advocating for comprehensive investigations into the role of data and data-driven technologies to ensure responsible and appropriate usage within the context of migration, particularly for refugees and asylum seekers - a domain, set to be fundamentally reformed by data-driven technologies. The growing production of new types of data about refugees and asylum seekers presents authorities with novel opportunities to incorporate such data into their decision-making processes. Similarly, the ways through which refugees and asylum seekers are seeking information about healthcare, education, housing, peer support and other services are increasingly being done in online and digital spaces. As such, this workshop aims to center the experience of refugee and asylum-seeking experiences across migration-related information systems in order to unpack the ways through which digitalization and datafication impact/transform their daily lives and vice versa.

KEYWORDS

refugees, migration, datafication, digitization, asylum

1 INTRODUCTION

Data and data-driven technologies are increasingly important for how refugees apply for protection and are resettled in their host cities. These data, along with the prevailing social, economic, and political climate of the host cities/countries shape the resettlement process. Little is known about what these data and datafication

practices are and the concrete ways in which they are brought to bear in the resettlement process. Simultaneously, we know little about how refugees navigate these digital spaces and the ways in which such datafication practices are impacting their everyday lives. The goal of this workshop is to have a conversation between resettlement agencies and CSCW researchers about the data and datafication practices that inform the resettlement process, and how these practices can be tailored to accommodate the different needs of refugees.

Datafication refers to the growing dependence on data for decision-making across various contexts of data production, creating obstacles for people to challenge or rectify data-generated portrayals of their lives [7]. Accordingly, previous studies have shown that the effects of datafication have a disproportionate impact on under-privileged and marginalized communities with restricted access to resources [5]. In this context, scholars within the field of Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) and the broader Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) community are calling for thorough examinations of the role of data in order to ensure appropriate and responsible use and thus prevent data harms [2].

The increasing production and availability of various types of data (e.g., data produced through social media platforms, geopositioning, and biometric data but also self-reported data) pertaining to displaced individuals seeking asylum have created new possibilities for nation-states, asylum authorities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to utilize such data - for example in contexts such as asylum decision-making [11] and resettlement [9]. Data about displaced individuals are continuously produced, stored, and shared by data workers across multiple casework systems [4, 10, 11]. In this process of datafication, data are assigned categorical meaning, often without the direct participation, authorization, or understanding of the ones affected. Individuals applying for asylum cannot choose to abstain from this (new) data-driven reality where they are subject to surveillance and categorization based on various new types of data, which differs significantly from the treatment received by the general population [3, 13]. In this context, research has argued for the significance of considering "the relational complexities and consequences of work practices being shaped by data and digitalization" (p. 3) when designing technologies aimed at supporting refugees and asylum seekers [10].

This workshop builds on the success of previous workshops that have considered the infrastructural challenges of resettling

refugees in their host cities [14], shared experiences and methods to overcome challenges in engaging with refugees and humanitarian organizations [18], and helped develop guidelines and a research agenda for young researchers looking to work with refugees [1, 17]. These workshops provided a space for a community of practice to grow and learn together and have resulted in multiple Interactions articles [15, 19] and a network of researchers supporting one another as they undergo research-related technology and migration. Additionally, the workshops identified the need for ongoing discussions that interrogate issues of technology and migration from the different technological perspectives at play. As such, we hope to continue these conversations at our workshop with a focus on digitalization and datafication. Specifically, our goals for organizing this workshop are to

- Bring together researchers within and beyond the CSCW community who study migration, asylum seekers, refugees and data (science) with the aim of connecting participants with others who share their research interests.
- Facilitate in-depth conversations about datafication and digitization during the event, while also seeking to support and scaffold collaborative efforts that exceed the short duration of the workshop.
- Facilitate the formation of a sub-community in CSCW.

These conversations will be led by representatives from refugee resettlement organizations and researchers who have previously worked with refugee and asylum-seeking communities. We offer more details about our background and approach in the following sections.

2   WORKSHOP THEMES

CSCW and HCI researchers have carried out studies centered within intersecting areas within refugee, migration, asylum studies and datafication through different approaches [6, 8, 10–12, 16, 20]. With this workshop, we aim to build on and contribute to this strand of research by investigating questions around (but not limited to) the following themes:

- How do new digital technologies and changing data practices in resettlement impact the daily lives of refugees?
- How might we re-design or transform digital technologies and data practices to better support refugees through fluctuating arrival cycles?
- What additional challenges are introduced and can be anticipated from the increasing use of "intelligent" technologies in resettlement processes (e.g. for profiling, monitoring, predicting, etc.)?
- How are asylum decision-makers and resettlement agencies' data work being transformed when new types of data or new types of data processing technologies (e.g. pre-trained machine learning models) are introduced? And, What are the possible (democratic) consequences of such transformations?
- What processes and technologies can we design to better support equitable access to reliable, timely information and inclusive online services (e.g. in health, education, etc.)?
- How might we design technologies that afford agency to displaced people within an increasingly datafied reality?

3   WORKSHOP FORMAT, DURATION AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS

In order to facilitate inclusive participation, the workshop will be run as a full-day hybrid workshop thus allowing participation from a diverse range of countries. Zoom will be used as a video platform with synchronous and asynchronous conversations facilitated through a dedicated Slack channel. We will also use a shared online document (e.g., Google Docs or Miro) where attendees and workshop co-organizers will document discussions, thus providing a curated space for remote attendees participating at varying time zones to engage with and respond to discussions that have already taken place. The workshop has no equipment needs beyond the usual: a room to host the event, wireless network connectivity, and a projector.

4   PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

The workshop is planned for a maximum of 25 participants (including the organizers). Detailed information about the workshop will be made available at our workshop website. We will reach out to international, interdisciplinary networks by circulating the call on relevant listservs and through social media. We invite anyone interested in participating to submit a two to four-page position paper (or equivalent material such as Zines) that addresses the workshop themes (see above). We encourage you to discuss your interest in the themes, welcoming reports of (preliminary) empirical results, theoretically oriented pieces, as well as methodological reflections. We also welcome submissions reflecting on questions related to datafication, digitization, and migration that we have not listed in our themes. Submissions will be reviewed by the organizers and accepted based on the relevance and development of their chosen topic, as well as the participants' potential to contribute to the workshop.

4.1   Pre-Workshop Plans

In order to facilitate participation prior to the workshop day, we will share all position papers/submissions with attendees so they can familiarise themselves with each other's work. We will also group attendees based on the theme of their submission. Attendees will then be invited to join a Slack channel where they can introduce themselves and will be encouraged to initiate dialogue around their submissions. The Slack channel will also be used to facilitate the online component of the hybrid workshop by acting as a meeting space for both online and in-person attendees to engage in discussions.

4.2   Workshop Day

The workshop will be clustered around 3-4 themes that we observe in the submissions we receive. These themes will also help determine the keynote speakers we will invite to the workshop. Workshop participants and keynote speakers will present their work as a dialog within each thematic cluster. Each keynote presentation will be between 30-40 minutes and participant presentations will be 5 minutes each. The tentative schedule is suggested above.

Table 1: Tentative schedule of workshop activities

Time	Activity
9-9:10 AM	Introduction
9:10-10:30 AM	Keynote 1 and participant presentations
10:30-11 AM	Break
11 AM-12 PM	Keynote 2 and participant presentations
12 PM-1:30 PM	Lunch Break
1:30 PM - 2:30 PM	Keynote 3 and participant presentations
2:30 PM-3 PM	Wrap up and next steps

4.3 Post Workshop Plans

All workshop submissions will be shared through the workshop's website. Discussions held during the workshop will be documented through note-taking and will be further communicated through an Interactions article/Blog post focused on Digitalization, Datafication and Migration. Furthermore, at the end of the workshop, we will ask attendees to participate in an activity in which we will collaboratively identify means (e.g. seminar series) through which we can further support coming together as a research community that aims to further research and practice within this area.

5 ORGANIZERS

The workshop is organized by a group of scholars with significant experience in studies of refugees and migration from an HCI and CSCW perspective:

Firaz Peer is an Assistant Professor of Information Communication Technology in University of Kentucky's School of Information Science. As part of his research, he studies issues of accountability, justice, care, and equity that manifest when building, using, and maintaining algorithmic and data infrastructures with marginalized communities. He does this by combining participatory and design based research methods with scholarship from Human Computer Interaction and Science & Technology Studies.

Trine Rask Nielsen is a PhD student at the Department of Computer Science, University of Copenhagen and part of the Confronting Data Co-lab. Her PhD research is grounded in the research fields Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW) and Critical Data Studies and is part of the DATA4ALL project. She is interested in understanding the technology-supported (collaborative) work practices and the workflows that support the asylum procedure. She investigates the social context surrounding how data about displaced individuals applying for asylum are produced, stored, and shared by and across different asylum actors, and used to inform asylum decisions.

Kristin Kaltenhäuser is a PhD student at the Department of Computer Science, University of Copenhagen and part of the Confronting Data Co-lab. Her interdisciplinary research spans the fields of data science, CSCW and critical data studies and data feminism. Taking a participatory approach, her research evolves around grounded sense-making of data in asylum decision-making in the Nordic countries, focusing especially on marginalized groups and outliers in the data. Her PhD is part of the NoRDASiL (Nordic Refugee Determination: Advancing Data Science in Migration Law) project.

Vasilis Vlachokyriakos is a Reader (Associate Professor) of Human-Computer Interaction and Digital Civics at Open Lab, Newcastle University, School of Computing and co-founder of Open Lab Athens. Vasilis' work centers on designing technologies for civic participation through participatory and action-led research. The work aims at the development of systems for collaborative service provision. Vasilis is currently an investigator on the EPSRC Centre for Digital Citizens and on the EPSRC Agency projects.

Naja Holten Møller is an Associate Professor in the Software, Data, People & Society section, Department of Computer Science, at University of Copenhagen – and the founder of the Confronting Data Co-Lab (www.confrontingdata.dk). She holds a PhD in Computer-Supported Cooperative Work from the IT University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Møller is currently a co-investigator in the *Public Administration and Computational Transparency in Algorithms (PACTA)* research project as well as the *Data for Asylum Legal Landscaping (DATA4ALL)* research project.

Reem Talhouk is an Assistant Professor in Design and Global Development at the School of Design, Northumbria University. She is also the co-director of the Design Feminisms Research Group and the Community Action & Innovation Lead of the Global Development Futures hub. Her research has centered around Design, Technology and Migration and draws on feminist, participatory and decolonial understandings.

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