A Digital Odyssey

The **bumpy road** to digital livelihoods for forcibly displaced people
Introduction

With historic numbers of people forcibly displaced around the world, millions of families and individuals are compelled to seek work in unstable and challenging circumstances. Meanwhile, the digital economy – in other words, economic activity that is enabled by and conducted using digital technology – is an increasingly important livelihoods generator.

At UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, we believe digital technology is an important tool, with the potential to deliver economic empowerment and self-reliance for refugees. But forcibly displaced and stateless people also face challenges and potential risks as they seek to engage in the digital economy. These include a lack of decent working conditions, digital protection risks, legal limitations to their safe engagement, and the digital divide.

A joint project run by UNHCR’s Innovation Service and the International Labour Organization aims to investigate and address these risks and opportunities. As part of this PROSPECTS Partnership Project on the Promotion, Inclusion and Protection of Refugees in the Gig Economy, we conducted a series of initial research initiatives and workshops to understand the challenges facing refugees who are working to access digital livelihoods.

The stories in these comics were inspired by information gathered during these activities. The characters featured here do not represent real individuals, nor are their stories intended to directly mirror any of the real experiences shared with us. Instead, these stories convey some of the risks and challenges commonly encountered by forcibly displaced and stateless people as they try to access the digital economy.

Marie’s story

With historic numbers of people forcibly displaced around the world, millions of families and individuals are compelled to seek work in unstable and challenging circumstances. Meanwhile, the digital economy – in other words, economic activity that is enabled by and conducted using digital technology – is an increasingly important livelihoods generator.

At UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, we believe digital technology is an important tool, with the potential to deliver economic empowerment and self-reliance for refugees. But forcibly displaced and stateless people also face challenges and potential risks as they seek to engage in the digital economy. These include a lack of decent working conditions, digital protection risks, legal limitations to their safe engagement, and the digital divide.

A joint project run by UNHCR’s Innovation Service and the International Labour Organization aims to investigate and address these risks and opportunities. As part of this PROSPECTS Partnership Project on the Promotion, Inclusion and Protection of Refugees in the Gig Economy, we conducted a series of initial research initiatives and workshops to understand the challenges facing refugees who are working to access digital livelihoods.

The stories in these comics were inspired by information gathered during these activities. The characters featured here do not represent real individuals, nor are their stories intended to directly mirror any of the real experiences shared with us. Instead, these stories convey some of the risks and challenges commonly encountered by forcibly displaced and stateless people as they try to access the digital economy.

Marie’s story
Amina's story

It was hard enough to believe my dreams of being a nurse were possible. And now, I feel like I'm about to lose it all. Why isn't anything going right?

Luna, I'm sorry, I can't help you in this. I'm stuck here in this situation. I'm not sure what to do next.

I can't believe this too. I've been trying so hard to make things work. I thought I was making progress. But now, I'm not sure if I can keep going.

What's the point? I've been pushing myself to the limit, but it feels like nothing is working in my favor.

Luna, I regret the decisions I've made. I hope you can understand your situation.

...we will dictate a timely solution at hand.
Omar’s story

PROSPECTS OPPORTUNITY FUND
2023 UNHCR & ILO
THE DIGITAL ODYSSEY

Hey, you say you studied computer science, right?

Yes, but what's the point? I mean, what's going to happen next?

You don't look like the kind of person who just wants to keep working.

Check out this ad! It's about cybersecurity professionals. You might be interested.

Hey, Omar, what's happening?

Hey, I heard about this new scheme.

Hey, Omar, what's going on?

Hey, Omar, what's going on?

They arrested him, he might be up to something.

HUNDREDS OF YOUNG IRAQIS
CAUGHT UP IN FRAUDULENT SCHEME!

We're going to need some evidence to contact them next.

We, I mean, who are you anyway? I'm not sure what you're talking about.

We, I mean, who are you anyway? I'm not sure what you're talking about.

We, I mean, who are you anyway? I'm not sure what you're talking about.
Bilal’s story

Cool, project was voted for.

Cool. You know I’ve been wanting to start a new blog. I think it’s a great idea to have an account on my digital platform.

Actually, do you think I should make it?

Two weeks later.

Hey, man! It just got a new feature on the digital platform. Have you checked it out yet?

Hey, what if I just not a single person used this?!

Well, I just got it.

Two weeks later.

Hey, man! Just got a new feature on the digital platform. Have you checked it out yet?

Hey, what if I just not a single person used this?!

Well, I just got it.

Two weeks later.

Hey, man! Just got a new feature on the digital platform. Have you checked it out yet?

Hey, what if I just not a single person used this?!

Well, I just got it.

Two weeks later.

Hey, man! Just got a new feature on the digital platform. Have you checked it out yet?

Hey, what if I just not a single person used this?!

Well, I just got it.

Two weeks later.

Hey, man! Just got a new feature on the digital platform. Have you checked it out yet?

Hey, what if I just not a single person used this?!

Well, I just got it.

Two weeks later.

Hey, man! Just got a new feature on the digital platform. Have you checked it out yet?

Hey, what if I just not a single person used this?!

Well, I just got it.

Two weeks later.

Hey, man! Just got a new feature on the digital platform. Have you checked it out yet?

Hey, what if I just not a single person used this?!

Well, I just got it.
These stories highlight just a few of the many challenges and risks that forcibly displaced people face when attempting to engage in the digital economy. Such risks can confront individuals at any stage of their journey into digital work, and they can have a devastating impact on both personal safety and livelihood outcomes. In response, and in alignment with our protection mandate, UNHCR has mainstreamed a focus on digital safety throughout the activities developed under the PROSPECTS Partnership Project on the Promotion, Inclusion and Protection of Refugees in the Gig Economy.

Connect with us

 unhcr.org/innovation/prospects

 @unhcrinnovation

 UNHCR Innovation

 hqinnad@unhcr.org