signpost

Empowering through responsive information services: an evidence review of the Signpost project

1. Abstract

This white paper reviews the evidence supporting and informing the Signpost project's methods on delivering a digital responsive information service. We corroborate evidence behind Signpost's work: that Signpost empowers users to make informed decisions related to their livelihood, safety and wellbeing in times of crisis. We find that Signpost meets a critical and often neglected need within the aid sector to provide trusted, timely, accessible, accurate, and context-adapted information. Additionally, with the COVID-19 pandemic underway at the time of publication, one section is dedicated to combating misinformation and how it helps build trust in communities affected by crisis.

2. Methods

A thorough evidence review was conducted drawing from academic literature in sociology and public health, gray literature from the aid sector, articles from major think tanks dedicated to international affairs and development, and articles in the media. This review focused on the themes of, building trust in information services, empowering people with information, and combating misinformation. A review of evidence generated practice in the field locations where Signpost works was then conducted by topics related to the above themes, and considered data and metrics generated by the platforms Signpost uses, baseline studies conducted in contexts where Signpost operates, and regular user surveys conducted by the Signpost teams.

3. Introduction

When faced with complex and tumultuous environments, accurate and timely information are of critical importance to affected populations. Decisions that people make for themselves and their families - often with little time or under duress - can be a matter of life and death when facing an epidemic of infectious disease, when considering whether or not to flee one's home in search of asylum, or considering how to cope in a situation of violence at home or in a community. But so often, the fact that people make decisions Recognizing the agency of affected populations is difficult for the sector which struggles to transition from a charity model towards a model that focuses on empowerment and durable solutions. The active role of populations themselves in shaping their own lives, must be considered more deeply throughout the entire arc of a crisis and is increasingly an objective in the design and delivery of an aid response. The role of information in relation to this objective is broadly recognized yet information services have yet to fully embrace the evidence base that is readily available in academic literature, in gray literature produced by the aid sector, and evidence produced by practices within the sector.

Signpost is an innovative yet simple approach towards digital information services that uses a responsive methodology and has established a strong evidence base in recent years of practice. So what is Signpost?   The Signpost project is a collaboration between the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Mercy Corps (MC) developed with the support of technology companies

including Google, Cisco, Trip Advisor, Twilio, Box, Facebook and Zendesk. Signpost is a responsive information service that uses digital information platforms to respond to information needs to populations affected by crises. Signpost reaches populations on the platforms that they already use, focuses on neglected populations, offers content in locally spoken languages, creates dynamic service maps with updated information and responds to questions and information requests from its users. Signpost is run by a team of trained frontline responders and support personnel who use journalistic and humanitarian expertise to ensure the right information delivered in the best form in an iterative manner, always stemming from the self-expressed information needs of its clients. Signpost operates with the belief that the aid sector must learn to listen, to communicate and to be responsive to what it is told by the people it endeavors to help in order to build greater agency and empowerment within affected populations.

Signpost is an adaptable program that consists of four components: bespoke information products hosted online on various platforms, connectivity via Wi-Fi hotspots to enable access to digital information, two-way communication facilitated by moderators via community-building social media channels; and regularly updated digit service maps. Since launching its flagship instance (Refugee.Info) in 2015, Signpost has expanded to five countries in Europe, has launched instances in Jordan (Khabrona.Info), El Salvador, and Honduras (CuéntaNos.org) and served more than 1.6 million individuals, providing connectivity and user-focused information in seven languages through a website, Facebook, Whatsapp, blog, and app across 8 countries. At the time of this publication, Signpost is expanding its operational footprint and its list of global partners in the private sector and the international aid sector.

2. Gaps in humanitarian information and communication

Humanitarian responses to epidemics, natural disasters, mass displacement and migration crises, and armed conflict all require strong community engagement and clear messaging on a range of complex topics to ensure success and yet, these issues require stronger solutions at sector level. A sector-wide focus on better community engagement has featured prominently in lessons learned activities in recent years and is noted in various reports in gray literature referenced below. In epidemic responses, the prevalence of misinformation that is harmful to the uptake of control measures to stem the spread of infectious disease is frequently referenced as a problem and features prominently in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this section some problems with unidirectional information strategies and the role of misinformation are briefly explored to ground the review of the evidence base for responsive information services appropriately as a solution to these problems.

2.1 Limits of Information dissemination strategies

Despite the broad evidence base available, information services in the aid sector are frequently driven by those delivering aid, rather than those affected, and methods of delivery of sensitive and complex information depend on face to face interactions, limiting access, or are static and one-way, preventing beneficiaries from tailoring their engagement with the information and restricting opportunities for feedback. This places the power to decide what information is valuable, the format

in which it is delivered, the audience to whom it is created, and how it is accessed in the hands of those implementing, rather than the hands of those who depend on it for their safety and wellbeing.

Campo and colleagues argue that "by ensuring that humanitarian information activities are designed and delivered based on the needs of affected populations, humanitarians may mitigate a wide range of potential harms, including (...) eroding the trust of affected populations and/or the legitimacy of overall response operations" (2018:11).

According to the CDAC Network Collective Communication and Community Engagement in Humanitarian Action guide to leaders and responders, key needs for information and communication remain unmet (CDAC Network 2019): communities do not feel sufficiently involved in decisions that impact their lives; more effort is needed to solicit, hear, and act upon the voices and complaints of disaster affected people; communities cannot access information to help them make decisions and regain control of their lives; the role of communication and community engagement in helping people psychologically cope with disasters is insufficiently recognised; and people affected by disaster are increasingly reliant on connectivity, and response programmes need to catch up.

Frequently, information disseminated in humanitarian contexts is general, lacking specific context of the clients and the most vulnerable among them, and all too often not delivered in the language they use most commonly. Information related to complex matters such as asylum procedures, is often written in a confusing, bureaucratic way without the audience in mind. Another challenge is the communication lag time and lack of feedback loops between high-level policymakers, aid actors operating in the field, and the clients they serve.

2.2 Misinformation

The prevalence of misinformation has not spared the humanitarian sector. Misinformation can come in many forms (Sell, Hosangadi, and Trotochaud 2020). While misinformation can be defined as lacking support by evidence and expert opinion, the broader category of untrue information includes speculative, unverified, vague, or contradictory information (Bode and Vraga 2017). Unlike misinformation, which is inadvertently false, disinformation "involves false information knowingly being created and shared to cause harm" (Wang et al. 2019:240). In particular, fake news – which can be described as fabricated information mimicking news media content – are designed with the intent to deceive the public and serve malicious disinformation campaigns (West 2017). The dissemination of misinformation and especially fake news forms a breeding ground for conspiracy beliefs, fomenting distrust in authorities and experts (Bode and Vraga 2017). As information systems have become more polarized and contentious (West 2017), misinformation has been politicized and weaponized in public health events, crisis response activities, and communication efforts that are apolitical in their inception (Sell, Hosangadi, and Trotochaud 2020).

It is hard for people to determine what information is correct because of the incredibly nuanced distinction between true and false information. Carefully and objectively verifying nuanced half-truths is costly and people tend to make judgements based on their own knowledge, experiences, and worldview (Sell, Hosangadi, and Trotochaud 2020). Rather than thoroughly evaluating the truth of information through an effortful analytic strategy such as actively seeking additional information, people often choose an easy mental processing alternative and simply draw conclusions on the basis of what feels right (Schwarz, Newman and Leach 2017). This is exacerbated in contexts of information voids and high uncertainty like humanitarian crises and disease outbreaks, when misinformation spreads rapidly (Sell, Hosangadi, and Trotochaud 2020).

Social media facilitate the proliferation of misinformation. Information spreads quickly on social media and is rarely verified by consumers (Bode and Vraga 2017). Also, social media have allowed users to mingle opinion, facts, and misinformation, clouding perceptions of truth and falseness (Specia and Mozur 2017). Additionally, social media have proved unable to self-correct effectively (Sell, Hosangadi, and Trotochaud 2020). Lastly, social media can affect the likelihood to accept information as true, since the sharing of competing information by both stronger and weaker ties may produce different levels of trust (Bode and Vraga 2017; Wang et al. 2019). While there has been a decline in trust in traditional news media (West 2017) as well as in political authorities and experts, information shared by friends on social media can impact beliefs to a greater extent (Bode and Vraga 2017).

Erroneous beliefs are difficult to correct (Arguedas Ortiz 2018; Campbell 2018:24; Wang et al. 2019). It is more difficult to correct misinformation that is emotionally arousing (Lee 2019), considered plausibly true or is deeply ingrained among the public consciousness (Bode and Vraga 2017), or for which there exists high uncertainty (Sell, Hosangadi, and Trotochaud 2020). Additionally, motivated reasoning makes it harder to correct misinformation for people tend to accept confirmatory information and reject that which contradicts existing beliefs (Bode and Vraga 2017). Corrective methods that repeat misinformation can unwittingly cause suspicion and reduce the overall knowledge about factual matters as well as the support for evidence-based health responses (Carey et al. 2020). In particular, the myth-versus-fact article format reinforces the myth by repeating or illustrating it with anecdotes and pictures, increasing the spread and acceptance of misinformation (Schwarz, Newman and Leach 2017). Another factor is that public admission of a mistake is hard: social correction can strengthen misinformation beliefs due to a desire to avoid public recognition of mistakes (Bode and Vraga 2017).

While the problems above create a detrimental effect to the delivery of aid in crisis, they are far from insurmountable and a growing body of evidence sheds light on simple and effective ways of operating that should be mainstreamed in the aid sector.

3. Responsive Information Strategies Are More Effective

Scientific and practice-based evidence testifies to the greater effectiveness of responsive information and communication with affected communities in delivering the information they need in the most appropriate format. This approach further provides means to people to empower themselves, helps support them regain control over their lives, and prevents and combats misinformation. Studies reviewed below explore information services in , the response to the crisis affecting the Rohingya population in Bangladesh, the case of refugees and asylum seekers in Greece, the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Zika and yellow fever epidemics in Brazil, and various measles vaccination campaigns.

3.1 Responsive information services are proven better

3.1.1 Inclusive and relevant information serves needs at the community level

Information that is accurate but does not reflect the desires of the community is less likely to be taken up, trusted, and used by people to empower themselves (Susman-Peña 2014:25). Effective information disseminators are able to provide specific, tailored information (Campbell 2018:3) that includes the needs and feedback of communities.

The humanitarian sector has advanced a Communicating with Communities (CwC) approach that aims at improving assistance delivery to disaster-affected communities through predictable, coordinated, and resourced two-way communication. The collective model for communication and community engagement implemented in the Rohingya response offers important lessons (Buchanan-Smith and Casey-Maslen 2018:28). It establishes multi-sectoral Info Hubs operated by local staff of national (and occasionally international) NGOs and Rohingya volunteers, offering a face-to-face service providing advice and information, making referrals to service providers, and recording complaints. Additionally, it includes networks of volunteers carrying out community outreach. It also encompasses monthly bulletins which provide a snapshot of feedback collected through conversations with Rohingya refugees and nationals, community-focused group discussions, and radio phone-in programs,to analyze feedback, track rumours, check facts, and provide responses. Yet, there is room for improvement. A major takeaway is that communication and community engagement work best when instituted before a crisis. Evidence from other humanitarian and health response contexts support the idea that community needs and local practices must be addressed before the crisis and continued after it ends (Rugarabamu et al. 2020:8).

Scholarly research also suggests that communicating effectively with communities remains one of the most challenging issues of both humanitarian responses and development interventions in urban and rural settings. Zetter and Deikun (2011) argue that two-way communication methods and a system for relevant information dissemination addressing the needs of the target populations should be integrated into preparedness planning and community resilience strategies. Similarly, Barker (2001) maintains that the development sector also needs to improve communication with communities in developing countries. A range of diversified and customized development communication methods and media should be applied at the various stages of communication to reach the different target audiences. Responsive and participatory approaches that integrate development communication methods as well as media with development communication programs and strategies are key to effective community communication.

Practice-based evidence shows that language is paramount to delivering responsive information effectively in humanitarian and health responses. Accessibility issues and content presented in wrong languages limit the success of health communication (Ascuntar 2020; Kemp 2020; Marzotto 2019). A study on health communication in the Ebola outbreak in the DRC conducted by Translators without Borders (TWB) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in 2019 shows three main challenges involved in providing clear and accessible information on the disease and the response: the language responders use, the content responders deliver, and the way responders deliver it (Kemp 2020:21). Ways to improve community engagement include providing information in the languages people understand; supporting communicators to translate key concepts into accessible and accurate explanations in local languages as well as developing

tools and training that draw on their cultural expertise; and using more accessible and beneficiary-centered language, i.e., avoiding technical terminology, foreign loanwords and culturally insensitive vocabulary (Kemp 2020:24). Delivering information and communicating in the appropriate language means breaking down the responsive approach to engage with individuals – rather than making unsafe assumptions of homogeneous communities – which increases access, comprehension, and trust in information (Marzotto 2019).

Rumours and false information persisted in the initial Ebola response in the DRC, which has led to a transition from a system-wide scale-up to a community-centered approach. This approach favored a more effective community engagement and mobilization to solve challenges such as mistrust and increased resistance from the community. Indeed, the community felt alienated from decision making because of the top-down structure in place as well as the messaging and response activities unsuited to its local context and traditions. The Mercy Corps established information centers that, in addition to providing information to the community, gathered feedback about response actions, helping adaptation and adjustment to combat misinformation. Additionally, Mercy Corps extended its Ebola response areas to address community needs around basic services, including community participation through consultations, focus groups, and community action plans. Risk communication and community engagement work needs to continue even after the epidemic ends to support the post-Ebola approach and increase community resilience to fight the current outbreak and prevent future ones (Ascuntar 2020:12).

Indeed, effective communication with communities is not only part of response strategies, but also a crucial component of prevention and preparedness programs. A review of the scientific evidence-based literature on Ebola outbreaks in Sub-Saharan Africa shows that effective communication is one of the major areas that needs to be addressed to prevent future outbreaks (other areas include building a community-based, one-health approach; furthering social mobilisation; and strengthening health systems) (Rugarabamu et al. 2020). In particular, the review emphasizes that responsive information and effective community engagement can ameliorate the distrust in health-seeking behaviour.

Engaging with communities includes taking action on beneficiary insight, which means an enhanced ability for the response to adapt and an enhanced delivery of information and services that the community needs. Speaking about lessons learned from the 2014-2015 Ebola response in West Africa, Baggio and colleagues explain: "near real-time data collection can offer insights on many cultural and contextual factors that could help or hinder a response and guide frontline workers' dialogue with communities" (2019:33).

3.1.2 Responsiveness builds trust

Trust is critical to information use and absolutely essential for information to have an influence on the lives of communities and individuals. Reflecting on the challenges of Ebola response in DRC, Kemp (2020) argues that tailored, credible information meeting the changing needs of people and communities is a crucial component of trust in the source and effective response communication. Evidence from other studies on the Ebola response corroborates that sustained engagement and communication with the community both help to build trust and confidence in response efforts while enabling community participation and actions (Rugarabamu et al. 2020:8-9). Particularly, increase in consumer/provider-generated information, communication technology, and mobile applications can enhance communication in emergency response. Drawing

from lessons learned in humanitarian response cases, the CDAC Network guide suggests that a common feedback mechanism easily accessible and sharing information with affected communities can address complaints and feedback. This feedback mechanism can also serve as a tool generating information for planning, performance evaluation, and decision making by all actors. By doing so, it helps build trust with and among the affected population, and enhance the credibility of humanitarian responders among stakeholders including potential partners and donors (CDAC Network 2019).

On the other hand, inefficient information and communication systems cause mistrust, undermining effective crisis response. For example, a study on asylum seekers and rumors in Greece suggests that information dissemination mismanagement can lead people to develop deep distrust in governments and organizations as well as hinder policy compliance (Carlson, Jakli, and Linos 2018:671). Damage to trust caused by misinformation and disinformation can also be detrimental to public health response efforts such as in the case of Ebola and COVID-19, for it widens the gap between effective public health interventions and public willingness to support them (Sell, Hosangadi, and Trotochaud 2020).

The role of intermediaries disseminating information locally and virtually while facilitating two-way communication constitutes another responsiveness factor that deeply influences trust in information and source.On-site and digital influencers who act as information bridges embody builders of trust in information. Recruiting and collaborating with them is essential for establishing effective communication with communities. Indeed, a study on how information helps constructing resilience suggests that building trust in information sources is critical for ensuring that information flows are healthy and can adapt to function during change or disruption (Susman-Peña 2014:17). Another study suggests that information is social and that the meaning people attach to it is shaped by the groups they belong to, with leaders and authorities having the ability to frame how information is interpreted (Campbell 2018:1). Practice-based evidence from humanitarian and health responses suggests that trust in communicators and the way they relay information affect how accurately people understand it and how firmly they believe it (Kemp 2020:23).

In regards to trust in websites, there is evidence that appropriate and useful content for the target audience is a strong cue to trustworthiness (Corritore et al. 2005:2421). A major factor promoting the perception of trustworthiness is credibility, which includes honesty, expertise, predictability, reputation, comprehensive information, lack of bias, transparency, and shared values between the website and the user. Other factors are ease of use (how simple the website is to use) and risk (the likelihood of an undesirable outcome).

3.2 Community ownership empowers and gives agency

When communities take ownership and drive information, they are more likely to be empowered by information as they activate social and emotional factors which induce people to act on it (Campbell 2018:1). That is, only information that resonates with people's needs and interests foster agency and action (Susman-Peña 2014:27).

Information promotes community resilience. Healthy information systems are a vital component of ensuring that resilience strategies engage all individuals and communities, and are essential for preparedness, response, and recovery from shocks and stressors. As Susman-Peña argues, "information fosters the capabilities and aspirations of individuals and communities: it

empowers people to take an active role in their own resilience in a sustained, systemic manner, while reducing dependency on external intervention that is typically only available for traumatic, large-scale events" (2014:18). By expanding the reach of communication and creating new spaces of engagement, new technologies and digital tools can help communities to become more informed and self-reliant, especially if they build capacity for two-way communication and inclusive decision making.

3.3 Responsive information is effective to combat misinformation

A number of strategies to combat misinformation can be effective if tailored for the audience and informed by it. Regarding misinformation correction strategies, research has shown that simple, brief, and strong retractions are more effective corrective information (Bode and Vraga 2017), and that making the true information as easy to process as possible is key to an effective correction strategy (Schwarz, Newman and Leach 2017). However, as debunking misinformation can be difficult, one of the most effective practices to combat misinformation is "pre-bunking," that is, consistently exposing people to factual information before misinformation is disseminated (Arguedas Ortiz 2018). Like a "vaccine against misinformation," people who have been exposed to factual and scientific evidence-based information are less likely to believe in inaccurate information (Arguedas Ortiz 2018).

Credible information from a trusted source is vital to a healthy information service that helps pre-bunking and debunking misinformation. While government agencies, news media, and INGOs are found to be more successful in improving belief accuracy compared to social peers (Meer and Jin 2020), they need to build trust by consistently delivering responsive information and communicating with communities(Ascuntar 2020; Carlson, Jakli, and Linos 2018:671; Kemp 2020; Rugarabamu et al. 2020:8-9). In fact, the credibility of the information source is one of the key criteria people employ as they evaluate the truth of a statement, together with the acceptance by others, supporting evidence, compatibility with their beliefs, and coherence of the statement (Schwarz, Newman and Leach 2017). When credible information sources share and promote evidence-based information, polarization surrounding contentious topics is diminished between social groups(Campbell 2018).

Social media has potential to correct misinformation. Evidence from a scientific experiment on health misinformation on Facebook singles out three major reasons for that: (i) the sheer scale social media networks offer; (ii) the fact that correction occurs in proximity (temporally and spatially) to the original misinformation, increasing the likelihood that people had not had a chance to absorb the misinformation; and (iii) observational correction, that is, correction that occurs on social media where people can observe other people being corrected, may be less threatening than being corrected directly, but with all the same benefits (Bode and Vraga 2017). The same study further shows that both algorithmic correction (correction by platform via related stories) and social corrections (correction by peer users) are effective in limiting misperceptions, and that correction occurs for both high- and low-conspiracy belief individuals. Corrective information by credible sources and influencers supports correction by peers on social media and mitigates the use of motivated reasoning to discredit lack of expertise. However, trust remains a key factor, especially as the weak ties that predominate on social media entail that such corrections often occur from largely unknown others, which may not produce the same level of trust as other social relationships. The authors, Bode and Vraga (2017), recommend social media campaigns to correct health

misinformation, including encouraging users to refute false or misleading health information, and providing them with sources and evidence-based alternative accounts to accompany their refutation.

Vivid narratives 'unstick' misinformation – facts alone are not enough. As Campbell explains, "changing people's interpretation of events and facts by replacing one dominant explanation of cause and effect with another was effective in that it reduced and mitigated the innuendo's reputational effect" (2018:25). Research on the corrective health information types has shown that the exposure to a narrative based on facts is more effective than a simple rebuttal in increasing the willingness to take protective actions (Meer and Jin 2020). A controlled experiment on misinformation correction methods used by health organizations concerning the measles vaccination on social networks suggests that a corrective narrative communicating evidence-based information transparently and addressing the public's concerns has higher levels of reliability and satisfaction among both pro-vaccination and hesitant groups (Gesser-Edelsburg et al. 2018). At the same time, the experiment reveals that common information correction (the simple and often judgmental fact-versus-myth approach) helps spread misinformation and increases the belief in false information. Similarly, a study on belief in disinformation and intentions to spread disinformation on social media during a health crisis caused by the spread of an unknown virus shows that simple corrective information backfires when fear-arousing disinformation is presented, and that social media usage is a significant factor deciding disinformation and corrective information processing (Lee 2019).

Corrective narrative must resonate with the information needs and concerns of the affected community. Lessons learned in disease outbreaks in humanitarian contexts suggest that responsive information will be key to the COVID-19 response. An analysis of the Ebola outbreak in the DRC (2018-2020) conducted by the Social Sciences Analysis Cell suggests investing in clear, adaptive, and responsive communication in COVID-19 program development (CASS 2020). More specific recommendations on how to incorporate clear communication into the COVID-19 response include: (i) provide information on the disease as soon as possible before rumours start to spread; (ii) engage with any rumours rather than dismiss them, to try to understand their origins and undermine them with improved messaging; (iii) consolidate and streamline messaging to avoid contradictory information from multiple sources; (iv) provide detailed information in accessible language on all symptoms in the appropriate local languages, making comparisons with other symptoms and illnesses to facilitate understanding, in methods that communities prefer; (v) prepare standardised and jointly agreed answers for potential questions from communities on feedback mechanisms, and update these in response to information about changing questions and concerns; (vi) provide clear information for affected communities about response interventions and activities in a proactive and consistent manner, supporting information about what to do with explanations of why it is necessary; (vii) be transparent with the community in terms of the limitations of information or response strategies; (viii) set up mechanisms to adapt and change communication based on needs (feedback mechanisms) and avoid relying only on print materials which require regular adaptation (cost implications); (ix) de-sensationalise (normalise and de-dramatise) the disease by comparing it to other similar illnesses; (x) anticipate any misgivings to the response, such as providing justification for prioritizing COVID-19 over other epidemics such as Measles; and (xi) field-test communication tools before dissemination to avoid unintended confusion or misunderstanding.

4. Practice-based evidence generated by the Signpost Project

Since its inception, Signpost has evolved with each new instance drawing from the evidence cited above and updating methodologies progressively over its lifecycle. Each instance looks

unique in terms of its branding and the ensemble of digital tools and platforms it uses but the outcomes remain similarly successful. Beyond a basic understanding of how many people the content created by Signpost teams reaches, and how people engage, Signpost personnel also examine the impact of its service on vulnerable populations. Analysing the ensemble of back-end analytics of the various platforms chosen for information delivery and responsive moderated engagements, end user surveys designed to best understand performance, and capturing unsolicited stories posted by Signpost users, the program has proven that it is an effective solution.

4.1 Communicating with Communities

Signpost has developed an approach centered on communicating with communities and individuals. At the heart of Signpost instances is a team of moderators who respond to comments and answer messages on social media. In Refugee.Info and Khabrona.Info instances, they are a team of refugee community managers on Facebook, and in CuéntaNos.org, they are moderators answering messages through a Whatsapp-based notification and two-way communication system. As digital cultural mediators, our moderators help people find the information they need and lend a sympathetic ear. All our moderators are recruited for their high emotional intelligence and exceptional communication skills. They communicate in a way that empowers users to make their own choices. They also know how to help users guard against risks they face online. They know how to spot gender-based violence, mental health crises, and other situations that require expert guidance from protection professionals.

Because of the two-way communication with the audience, Signpost is responsive to community needs. Our content production is iterative and based on news that is relevant to our target populations as well as being responsive to the information needs of users, based on the questions they ask. At Refugee.Info in Greece, on average, 955 users communicated through messenger every month with the Facebook moderators in 2018. The monthly average number of messages received reached 6,345 messages, 85% of which came from users located in Greece, and the Facebook moderators sent on average 3,795 messages per month. In Jordan, the Khabrona.Info team has received more than 10,000 messages on topics concerning legal assistance, cash/ATM card, and registration, among others. In 2019 alone, the team responded to the 600 people who posted or sent messages to the Facebook page.

In 2019, Refugee.Info Italy launched a private Facebook group that has restricted access, andalso includes Italians as well as migrants. Here, refugees and migrants can ask questions and crowdsource answers, in a slightly different approach to information than the traditional Refugee.Info page. We've seen high engagement among Italians who support migrants with information and general advice through this unique digital space. This collaboration between Refugee.Info, migrants, and Italians in one space has helped to develop a community that can help support itself, with only a small amount of moderation and facilitation from the Refugee.Info.Italy team.

Signpost's approach has proved successful. Signpost has reached the impressive number of over 1.6 million individuals in seven languages across eight countries, including target groups such as women and youth. In Greece and the Balkans, Refugee-Info has reached 900,000 users overall. In Jordan, Khabrona.Info provided curated, trusted information to 30,768 people between November, 2017 and December 31st 2019. In El Salvador, CuéntaNos has reached 1,170 users since its official launch in August 2018.

4.2 Trust

Building the trust of our audience in the information we provide is one of the biggest impacts of Signpost. Our teams work tirelessly to find, verify, and produce accurate information and support our users in a context where trust is limited. In July 2019, Refugee.Info conducted a Facebook survey of 243 users in Greece and the Balkans, representative of the 5 language groups and 12% of whom were women. Despite the complexity of the environments in which we operate, 88% of users said they trusted the information they see on Refugee.Info Facebook page. 75% of English speakers strongly agreed with the statement. 100% of Iranians and 89% of Pakistanis said they either somewhat or strongly agreed. This is particularly significant because based on previous surveys, focus groups, and regular conversations with our audience, we know that the populations we work with are distrustful of information on social media when it does not come from peers. In Jordan, too, users trust Khabrona. After 8 months of programming, when we asked users on Facebook if they trusted the tool, 89% of users said they trusted it, and had used the tool multiple times.

Our evidence also shows trust across our users. 86% of Refugee.Info respondents who had been in Greece and the Balkans for more than 2 years agreed with the statement and 89% of users who had been in the country less than 1 year said that they trusted the information. This highlights the trust from all of our users, but is especially important that the new arrivals trust the information they find. During an assessment in July 2018 in Athens, Greece, we found that users were also sharing information, which can be a demonstration of trust of the information. We know that many migrants depend on word of mouth for information, primarily from their friends and family. During the assessment, we found that 78% of our respondents share the information they found on Refugee.Info with their family members. We also found that 62% of the respondents have shared information with someone not on Facebook, which highlights the extent of our reach of e and levels of trust extending beyond social media.

Because of the team of moderators, Signpost is able to provide personalized support to refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants in Europe and Jordan. In the July 2018 Facebook survey, 87% of users in Greece and the Balkans agreed that "Refugee.Info cares about refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants and wants to help them solve their problems." In Jordan, 90% of Khabrona.Info users agreed with this statement. Users are primarily focused on documentation, and in a complex environment, people are able to receive the attention and information they need. Additionally, 89% of the respondents in Greece and the Balkans said, "I know that if I message Refugee.Info, I will get a friendly answer from someone who wants to help." This highlights the value of the two-way communication with the Refugee.Info team of moderators. It also highlights the importance of creating a relationship, or personal touch, with the clients.

4.3 Responsive information empowers our clients

Signpost delivers accurate, relevant, actionable, and timely information. 85% of users said that Refugee.Info knows which topics and issues are most important to refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants. Khabrona.Info Facebook users also agreed (85%) with this statement. In Greece and Italy, 76% of respondents believe they are better informed after using Refugee.Info. For the English-speaking respondents, mostly coming from Northern and West African countries, residing in Italy, this percentage reached 82%. 60% of the respondents said that Refugee.Info is the only

information source they have. This holds particularly true for some language groups, like Urdu speakers, 76% of whom said it was the only source.

4.3.1 Coordination

The Refugee.Info platform features an interactive map of services available for refugees in five urban locations: Belgrade, Athens, Thessaloniki, Lesvos and. CuéntaNos features an interactive map of services available for target groups across El Salvador and Honduras.

One of the primary impacts of the service map tool is acting as a coordination mechanism. The Refugee.Info map tool has become a key component of consortiums, working groups, and a widely-used tool for volunteer groups in key locations. While refugees remain our primary target audience, the mapping is also a tool for service providers, who can use it for coordination purposes or share it as a resource with their own beneficiaries.

Based on this success, CuéntaNos launched to primarily serve this mapping and coordination role. In El Salvador, CuéntaNos enables organizations, and now individuals, to search for services within their same location or within their same thematic area. Thus, service providers can better connect their beneficiaries to services they previously did not have access to. In addition, being a part of the CuéntaNos network allows for communication and coordination with the CuéntaNos information team, opening referral pathways and linkages between organizations through direct contact and outreach.

4.3.2. Greater access to services

The results of the 2018 survey conducted with users on Facebook show that 81% of respondents in Greece and the Balkans strongly or somewhat agreed that Refugee.Info provided them a better understanding of their situation. Similarly, 84% of Khabrona users agreed with the statement that they had a better understanding about their situations because of information they found on the platform.

The information people find in Signpost helps them access services. During the Refugee.Info survey in June, 60% of respondents said they accessed information about services. For most users, legal and administrative support was the highest sought information. In Jordan, the results of an endline survey show that 53% users reported that they could access services because of information they found at Khabrona.Info.

Overall, 81% of Refugee.Info users and 79% of Khabrona.Info users said they could make decisions based on the information they found on the platform.

4.3.3 People have access to information about their rights

In Europe, 73% of all respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "The information on Refugee.Info (website, Facebook, or blog) has helped me exercise my rights." Khabrona.Info also focused many posts on rights, particularly around education enrollment and registration. The Khabrona.Info team's most popular post asked users what they wanted to know, generating more than 200 comments and 2,000 reactions and clicks. The team also posted numerous times about enrollment into education programs and supporting phone numbers and forms. 130 people clicked into the enrollment form.

4.3.4 People can make informed decisions about their safety

Refugee.Info delivers information that people use to make decisions about their safety. In February 2019, when the Refugee.Info team heard about the caravan to the Greek borders through a message on its Facebook page, the team fact-checked all the information at hand. The team came up with two clarifying Facebook posts in April 2019, listing possible legal implications for the people participating in the march and the stance of international organizations like UNHCR as well as the Greek government. 25,600 people clicked on the posts to read the information. In addition to the posts, the team has responded to numerous questions from people who wanted to know what was happening, who was organizing the caravan, if it was true that the borders would open, etc. We responded with information and facts, while not telling people what they should or should not do.

CuéntaNos has expanded to provide information about services, but also "informativos," informational articles posted to provide information for users about topics they care about. These pages became particularly relevant as the caravan situation and deportations expanded in 2018. Informativos for caravans had 1,585 pageviews in 2019.

4.3.5 People have access to information to help solve problems they are facing

According to the results of a 2019 Refugee.Info survey, 61% of respondents said that Refugee.Info helped them resolve problems or issues they were facing. In Jordan, the results of an endline survey show that users reported that 34% were able to solve problems because of information they found at Khabrona.Info.

4.3.6 Connectivity

In 2019, more than 114,000 users have connected to Refugee.Info provided WiFi across 28 sites in Greece, 14 sites in Serbia and 4 sites in Italy. The WiFi hotspots directly link users to Refugee.Info before they can begin browsing. Wifi is deployed in refugee camps as well as community centers in target locations that are accessible and free to users, both migrants as well as hosting locations. This helps service providers better do their own work as well as provide a way for vulnerable populations to connect to information or contact family back home, or even just relax and browse the internet.

4.4 COVID-19

Signpost's contextualized information at the community level prevents and combats misinformation. The coronavirus pandemic necessitates digital access to vital information services. While advice on COVID-19 is available and information overload may be impossible to avoid, there remains a gap in contextualized information at the community level, especially for vulnerable populations. The challenges which vulnerable communities face during a pandemic are compounded by new restrictions on movement, decreased services in both private and public sector and control measures to slow the spread of the virus. The ability to build trust with the populations with whom we work is further compromised in a context where community engagement cannot be implemented face to face. Signpost is delivering on its mandate in this challenging time in Italy, El Salvador and Honduras and will expand soon to Greece and Guatemala.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Italy's response quickly escalated from cautious and muted to full-on containment, enforcing all residents to remain in their houses unless they have urgent reason to leave. On February 23, the Italian government began quarantining cities, and now, in March, the entire country is on lock-down. Italy now has more than 27,000 confirmed cases, and counting. In Italy and abroad, rumors, questions, and misinformation abound. Writing a blog post and sharing across Facebook, the team quickly disseminated verified information to their followers. In an unprecedented level of engagement, the posts reached more than 100,000 people in 3 weeks. More than 18,000 people read the post and nearly 7,000 people used the Facebook post to navigate to the full blog article (which has been viewed 9,000 times in 3 weeks).

5. Towards a paradigm shift in information services

Responsive information services, exemplified in the methods, tools and performance of the Signpost project present a clear and proven solution to the problems surrounding information and community engagement in the aid sector where digital solutions are possible, even in the face of complex and rapidly evolving crises.

Scalability of the Signpost project is possible at little cost from a technology perspective as Signpost uses an ensemble of private sector and open-source technology tools that are ready for rapid deployment and have already been developed. The strong partnerships with technology companies who have long supported and shaped the project continue to improve those tools and their functionality to further adapt the program when needed. With a sensitive approach towards partnering and working with communities, Signpost will work in partnership with local CSO and other agencies which supports long-term sustainability and shifting ownership to local actors. When face to face is not possible w/ COVID-19 this approach will provide a readymade solution to digital transition of community engagement.

There remain obstacles for optimal success, particularly environments that have never benefited from connectivity, and populations who are less technologically literate as well as specific subsets of people who are less empowered to use technology safely or lack digital literacy. Inclusion strategies will require further collaboration and effort, and programming to develop stronger digital literacy skills and access to devices are being further explored. Given the nature of information flows through digital platforms, further investments in core capacities to develop guidelines and training for marketing on social media for quicker uptake of Signpost instances is also required to optimize reach and rapidly expand its user base when possible. Additional innovation is also required for new technology approaches in translating minority languages on digital platforms.

The impact of the Signpost project will become increasingly evident as scaling continues and the project delivers on communication and empowerment objectives and as the technology landscape of affected communities continues to improve. With crosscutting information services following an evidence based method, the project offers a major efficiency gain in the sector when services are better linked with those who need them. An aid deployment will achieve better results with a more decentralized feeling of ownership of an aid response through inclusion of those affected and respect of the dignity and agency of those affected will be supported through the system itself.

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Empowering through responsive information services: an evidence review of the Signpost project |

15

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