



Managing Misinformation in a Humanitarian Context

Internews Rumour
Tracking Methodology

Part I: Context
Part II: Case Study

Internews
Humanitarian
Information Services
Learning Collection



The Internews Humanitarian Information Services Learning Collection communicates key lessons, best practices, and programmatic methodologies used by Internews' humanitarian teams around the world. Each methodology within this Learning Collection includes three parts: Context, Case Studies, and a How To Guide. The How To Guide is usually packaged separately for ease of use.

Internews first developed our rumour tracking methodology in 2014 in Liberia, in order to address the deadly Ebola outbreak. Since then, we've implemented rumour tracking as a way to address misinformation during humanitarian crises in numerous countries and contexts, reaching hundreds of thousands of beneficiaries. This guide was authored by Viviane Lucia Fluck, PhD, and produced with financial support from the United States Agency for International Development.

About Internews

Internews is an international nonprofit organisation that empowers people worldwide with the trustworthy, high quality news and information they need to make informed decisions, participate in their communities, and hold power to account.



This document is released under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License. 2019

All photos are the property of Internews except where otherwise noted.

Cover photo: Temporary housing for the refugees arriving in the thousands to Greece

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEFINITIONS	5
PART I: CONTEXT	6
INTRODUCTION	7
WHY RUMOURS?	10
WHAT IS A RUMOUR?	12
WHAT MAKES RUMOURS SPREAD?	13
WHOSE INFORMATION IS BELIEVED?	14
RUMOURS IN A HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT	16
Power	16
Trust	17
Flexibility	18
Accuracy	19
Accountability	20
Inclusion	20
PART II: CASE STUDIES	22
INTRODUCTION TO PART II	23
PROJECTS USING INTERNEWS RUMOUR TRACKING METHODOLOGY	23
Dey Say	24
Open Mic Nepal	26
Sak Di Sak Vre	28
Flying News	30

IN-DEPTH CASE STUDY: GREECE - 'NEWS THAT MOVES' PROJECT	32
Summary	32
Country context	33
Communication in the Greek migrant crisis	35
The Project	37
Staff	39
Collecting and analysing community data	41
Sharing community data and answers to rumours	43
News That Moves website	44
Rumours and answers bulletin	45
In The Loop	47
Social Media	49
Print outs	49
Audio	50
Other channels to share community data and answers to rumours	50
Partnerships and Coordination	51
Challenges, Advice & Recommendations	53

DEFINITIONS

Community: the affected people the project is trying to support in a humanitarian crisis. It is crucial to remember that a community is not homogenous but has relevant class, gender, language differences and power dynamics that are key to understand. Often humanitarian projects also serve host communities, which are equally diverse.

Community data: includes all the documented information community members share with the project. This includes everything from rumours and suggestions, to questions and complaints. Rumour tracking projects don't just collect rumours, but also everything else the community wants to share.

Migrants: While there are important legal differences between different terms in this guide all people on the move who have yet to complete the legal process of claiming asylum are called 'migrant'. This group includes people fleeing persecution and war-torn countries, who are likely to be granted refugee status, as well as people who are seeking jobs and better lives, who governments are likely to rule as economic migrants.

A Nepali man jogs through the debris caused by the earthquake of 2015





Part 1. Context

Interviews
Rumour Tracking
Methodology



Aftermath of the devastating Hurricane Matthew in Haiti. Credit: MINUSTAH

INTRODUCTION

“It’s ok to spend all your money on the smuggler, everything in Europe is free!”

“Anyone leaving the treatment centre alive is a ghost.
The Government told us Ebola kills you.”

“Holland is accepting all Afghan refugees.
They will come in cars and pick us up 4 at a time.”

“Why do cyclones only happen in Bangladesh?”

“There is a tiger that escaped from the Kathmandu Zoo attacking people!”

These and other rumours spread through communities in Liberia, Nepal, Haiti, Greece and Bangladesh. Social media, text messages and face-to-face conversations with friends and family fueled the fire, propelling the information through the community, and even sometimes into international media. These rumours caused anxiety, mistrust and misinformed decision-making.

Humanitarians are increasingly accepting that to deliver appropriate and sustainable solutions we need to listen to affected populations, respond to what they tell us and include them into every part of a humanitarian response ([Grand](#)

[Bargain](#); [Core Humanitarian Standards](#)). But we can’t only listen when community members tell us facts we agree with. Information is fluid, what is a ‘rumour’ to one person, may appear as a ‘fact’ to another, or completely ridiculous to a third person. It’s all about perspective, and in a humanitarian response, your perspective is going to be greatly influenced by the amount of information you have access to and how much you trust that information.

When events occur, no matter how large or small, our first reaction is to talk to someone about it. In a conflict or after a disaster, this need

for information is accelerated; people are desperate for information. The first questions after a disaster strikes are often: ‘Where and how are my loved ones?’, ‘Where should I take my family for safety?’, ‘Where can I access food?’¹ Rumours emerge under conditions marked by a combination of uncertainty, anxiety, and a lack of trustworthy information. During crisis, when our usual sources of trusted information falter and humanitarians are often cautious with sharing information because of a fear of over-promising, people do not simply just stop sharing information, instead communication continues and rumours flourish.

Affected communities are often in a disadvantaged position to access information. After a disaster, infrastructure damage and a preference of media to report *on* disaster survivors rather than *for* them further hinders communication. All this means traditional media channels often don’t reach the people most in need of information or don’t give the information needed. Hence affected communities often get their information from hearsay, from stories that circulate amongst their groups with limited means to fact-check.

Since the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia, Internews’ Humanitarian Information Services (HIS) have worked to provide people in emergencies the information they need to access aid and make informed decisions. HIS projects focus largely on providing useful, actionable information for people affected by disaster (also described as “Information as Aid” “CommsAid” “News-You-Can-Use” “Communicating with Communities” or more recently “community engagement and accountability”), based on the principle that information and communications are as critical as other forms of humanitarian aid.

In recent years Internews has been using this experience to help address rumours and misinformation in a wide variety of humanitarian crises and conflicts. It is the lessons of these projects and more than 15 years of experience of Internews’ [Humanitarian Information Service](#) (HIS) that we draw on to create this module of the Learning Collection. Our projects work to amplify the voice of those affected by disasters and conflict, make the humanitarian system more accessible and accountable and provide technical expertise in Communicating with Communities (CwC).

¹ http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/pdf/humanitarian_response_briefing.pdf

Internews Rumour Tracking Methodology consists of four key functions:

1. A mechanism to determine and document which rumours are circulating
2. An effective strategy to fact-check information and rumours
3. A variety of accessible and inclusive mechanisms to share accurate responses to rumours
4. A mechanism to share community voices with humanitarians and other stakeholders

Internews programs enable the community to access relevant and trusted information and provide community feedback to foster more inclusive decision making within humanitarian programs. These bridges are based on symmetrical two-way relationships that are attuned to listening as much as producing information and that link the national, local, and hyper-local information levels.

This Learning Collection manual offers case studies, practical instructions and a template library to implement Internews rumour

tracking methodology and through this effectively address rumours in humanitarian crisis and conflicts around the world.

This document contains Part I and Part II. Part III can be downloaded separately [here](#).

“Part I. Context” describes the importance of access to fair, accurate and actionable information; the damage rumours can do in a humanitarian context; and the value of Internews Rumour Tracking Methodology as a tool for communicating with communities and humanitarian accountability.

“Part II. Case Study” gives an overview of several Internews rumour tracking projects and an in-depth case study of rumour tracking in Greece. The case study also covers challenges and lessons learned in order to offer recommendations for future rumour tracking activities.

“Part III. How To Guide” provides a step-by-step methodology for establishing, facilitating, and monitoring a rumour tracking project in a humanitarian context as well as two training modules and a template library.

WHY RUMOURS?

When a crisis hits, the immediate needs of shelter, food, clean water and medical treatment take priority. But even with the best of planning, these services can be brought down, abandoned or mistrusted because of rumours. Thousands of people were dying in 2014 in West Africa due to the spread of the Ebola epidemic, but some treatment centres were not used by infected patients due to [rumours](#) that the treatment centres were spreading the disease. The Ebola response in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2019 is facing [similar issues](#), with rumours about vaccines causing the disease leading people to mistrust treatment centres and vaccines.

- **Information Saves Lives:** Access to accurate and timely information from a trusted source helps people make better decisions for their own lives. Having the ability to fact-check rumours allows communities to change the information and power imbalance between them, and the authorities and humanitarians involved. Access to information, therefore, can decrease the communities' vulnerability to risks by empowering them to be their own agents for change, enabling them to assess their own threat environments and engage with other parties to find their own solutions.
- **Rumours indicate hyper-local needs:** Rumours emerge at every level of the conversation. They can indicate national movements, regional shifts and hyper-local misunderstandings. This localized information gives insight into how the community feels and the motivations behind the rumour.
- **Feedback:** Rumours are a valuable feedback tool. They give insight into what the community thinks of the humanitarian response, what they do not understand, and what information gaps exist.
- **Transparency and accountability:** Tracking rumours helps humanitarian organisations be more accountable and transparent to the community because it allows them to hear the concerns of the community in their own voice. Responding directly to these concerns and using these voices to improve policies and programming makes the humanitarian response more inclusive and overall more effective.
- **Protection:** Rumours can be dangerous both within a community and to staff working in the field. Addressing rumours quickly and accurately, while allowing as wide access to the information as possible, can help to reduce community tension or misunderstandings about humanitarian practice

and intentions. A lack of information, or access to it, can be disempowering, limiting opportunities for informed decision making, and collaborative problem solving. Being uninformed can also leave affected populations vulnerable to misinformation and propaganda.

In the [2005 World Disaster Report](#), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) acknowledged that “People need information as much as water, food, medicine or shelter.” Numerous humanitarian standards have been established since, which show the vital role that access to information, feedback and Communicating with Communities (CwC) can play in supporting the affected populations to play a strategic role in their own recovery. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) [Task](#)

[Force on Accountability to Affected Populations \(AAP\)](#) is just one example of a committed response to providing affected populations with trustworthy, timely and actionable information.

[Internews believes](#) that access to information and communication is a human right, and a fundamental prerequisite to empowering affected communities to access services, take control of their lives and participate in their own recovery. Ensuring people have timely, relevant, accurate information created by communities themselves is critical to saving lives during an emergency response. Effective communication between aid providers and communities is still often relegated to tick box exercises in emergency responses and the potential of local media is largely underused by local community, government and international responders.

WHAT IS A RUMOUR?

According to the [Oxford dictionary](#) a rumour is 'A currently circulating story or report of uncertain or doubtful truth'. In general, a rumour is a piece of information that includes some kind of misinformation or misconception in it. However, often rumours also contain a grain of truth.

The [CDAC guide to rumours](#) distinguishes between three types of rumours: wish rumours, which are based on people's hopes; fear rumours, which are based on anxieties; and hostility rumours which are based on threats or prejudices. Of these three types, fear rumours are often more prevalent in humanitarian contexts.

Within Internews Rumour Tracking Projects, a "rumour" is defined as a qualitative piece of information documented from a first-hand

source within the community, in the language of the community, and preserved in as much relevant detail as possible. It deliberately does not limit itself to what someone might acknowledge explicitly as "a rumour" but could also take the shape of a question ("is it true that...?"), criticism ("they are keeping things for themselves...") or a general comment ("the foreigners are leaving soon anyway..."). It is key to acknowledge that behind a rumour there is often a question that needs answering and at times also a grain of truth. The first step is collecting all these different types of community data. Only in a second phase, will relevant rumours be identified from this qualitative information, and used to inform feedback reports, provide contextual analysis and close the feedback loop between humanitarian stakeholders and the community.

WHAT MAKES RUMOURS SPREAD?

What makes some rumours spread faster than others, has been the focus of many psychological and psychosocial studies. In his 2014 book, *On Rumours*, Harvard Professor Cass Sunstein writes that rumours are most effective in a community when they align with already held beliefs, when conditions are difficult or distressing, and when there is motivation to accept the rumour.

For example, after the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the one event with the largest loss of civilian life was not due to a bomb blast or an attack, but because of a rumour.

On August 31, 2005, it was rumoured that a bomb was about to explode on the Al-Aaimmah bridge in Baghdad. In this environment where people had endured years of war, fear and uncertainty, the rumour spread like wildfire causing panic and a stampede. The chaos caused by thousands trying to flee the scene killed close to a thousand people

as pilgrims were crushed and the railings of the bridge collapsed, sending people into the Tigris River. During the Ebola crisis in West Africa in 2014, rumours that treatment clinics were spreading the disease, rather than treating it, may have led to the increased spread of the disease amongst communities because people were afraid of going to the hospital. After the Nepal earthquake in 2015, it was rumoured that a tiger had escaped from the zoo and was prowling the streets causing many people to panic and want to seek shelter in their perilously damaged houses. In all of these examples, people made life altering decisions based on a rumour.

Rumours have a unique power, because they play on our fear, uncertainty and entrenched bias and encourage us to act before thinking. Psychological studies have found that when a rumour produces a strong emotional reaction, such as disgust, fear or anger, humans are not only far more likely to believe the misinformation, but to actively spread the misinformation.

WHOSE INFORMATION IS BELIEVED?

Another major factor determining the success of a rumour spreading is who you hear the information from. If the information is delivered to you by a friend or family member who you trust, or perhaps a news source that aligns with your beliefs, you are far more likely to believe that information than if it was delivered to you by someone you generally disagree with or distrust. Who delivers the information is crucial. For example, if you are in a country where the government is generally viewed as corrupt and you are told that ministers have been taking money from the health system to purchase luxury cars, you are likely to believe it. If those same ministers, who you already view to be untrustworthy, tell you that this information is untrue, you are likely not to believe them. In fact, it may even add to your initial conviction that the ministers are cheats. However, if a newspaper you trust conducts an investigation into the matter and finds there is no basis to believe the government has been stealing funds, then you are, perhaps begrudgingly, more likely to accept that information.

The emotional state of the person receiving the rumour, coupled with their existing bias and the person delivering the rumour to them will

all compound to affect how that rumour is received and how likely it is to be believed (see figure 1). Of course there are other factors which may also come into effect, such as *conformity cascades* (when a person accepts a rumour not because they believe it, but to conform with a group opinion, for acceptance or to avoid being ostracized), *group polarization* (when a group begins to uniformly have an opinion about a topic, therefore influencing other members in the group to believe the same thing) or *information cascades* (where each person that accepts the rumour as fact adds validity to the information and increases its likelihood to be accepted at face value)².

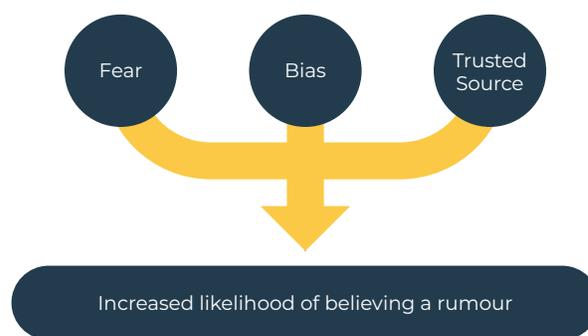


Figure 1. What Contributes to Believing Rumours

The most effective rumours are also often quite simple. Think of the most prominent misinformation you might remember over the years: bubble gum takes seven years to digest in your stomach or the

2 On Rumours, Cass Sunstein, Princeton University Press, 2014 (p89-90)

Great Wall of China can be seen from the moon. All of these things aren't true, but we hear these very simple falsehoods repeated with confidence in countries on opposite sides of the globe. [Duncan Watts](#), a sociologist who researches information spread for Yahoo, says that "Complicated ideas are not that spreadable. Ideas with content, when they do spread, lose their content." Rumours work just like a game of Chinese whispers; after they've been shared a few times, the details get lost and the message grows simpler and often detached from reality.

While rumours thrive in an environment where people are fearful, and lack access to accurate information, rumours can also be used intentionally as a tool of propaganda. There are two broad categories of rumour that are defined by the

intent behind the spread of information. Misinformation refers to false information that is spread unknowingly, and then there is disinformation, information that is knowingly false and spread to gain some advantage. In a humanitarian crisis or conflict, disinformation can be designed to agitate and divide the population or to pacify and unify it. Authorities or oppositions may "weaponize" information by disseminating outlandish lies, seeking to sow confusion and manipulate public opinion or, on the other hand, knowingly lie about the state of the economy or level of damage after an attack to calm the public.

The better we can understand the context of rumours, the better we are prepared to address them.

RUMOURS IN A HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT

A humanitarian crisis can bring together the perfect environment for rumours to flourish. As we discussed earlier, people are more likely to believe rumours if they are afraid, uncertain of their future, and feel vulnerable or lack agency in a situation. These three simple indicators could describe most people who find themselves caught in a humanitarian emergency. People may have lost their homes, friends or family members, and the normal daily norms and routines that hold societies together disintegrate.

In a crisis, a misunderstood or intentionally misleading message can cause panic, can be harmful if advocating a certain type of action or can inflame an existing conflict. Accessing trustworthy information is the key to taking control of your own survival and being able to recover. In their book 'Denying to the Grave: Why we ignore the facts that will save us', Sara E. Gorman and Jack M. Gorman argue that the issue is not merely providing information or an explanation that people understand, but moreso an explanation that makes them feel in control of the situation they are in³. Information can enable populations to assess their own threat environments and

empower community-led solutions through collaboration, negotiation, and practical solutions. It is exactly this idea that drives the Internews rumour methodology to not just tell a community whether a rumour is true or false, but rather address the questions and fears behind a rumour with fact-based actionable and practical information.

POWER

Information is power – when all available information is top-down, controlled by authorities and humanitarian agencies, the affected population can feel powerless, dictated to and excluded. Doing satisfaction surveys after humanitarian agencies have already made all the decisions, does not mean that power is shared with the community. Instead, this 'fake participation' may erode the trust of the community. When a community feels disempowered, or the presence of continual conflict and external meddling wears down trust, people may be more likely to turn to trusted, but not necessarily accurate, information sources like friends and family or commonly used websites. Friends and family generally have less reason to intentionally lead you astray, so why not believe what they tell you? Unfortunately, the information they have is not always factual. Power structures within a community or

3 *Denying to the Grave: Why we ignore the facts that will save us*, S & J Gorman, Oxford University Press 2017

even on a national level are equally important to address. Somebody from the capital city may well have their own assumptions, privileges and biases, which can mean that they do not make information accessible and inclusive. Rather than assuming that information “trickles down” through existing hierarchical structures, a project should be set up using trusted channels to allow communities to regain some control in setting the agenda and be less susceptible to the abuse of power.

TRUST

Trust is key to addressing rumours. No matter how truthful your information is, if you are not trusted by the community, this information becomes worthless.

The degree to which information is trusted can be influenced greatly by the community’s relationship with the source and the community’s perceived notion of who is setting the agenda and why. You may know that you are the world’s number one expert in disease control, but how does the community know your intentions are honourable? Access to information that is specific, accurate and from a trusted source (such as existing media, religious and community leaders etc.) is particularly important when information needs are fluid and the common communication mechanisms and patterns

Funders and members of humanitarian agencies responding to the Ebola outbreak clean off personal protective equipment in Liberia



have been disrupted. It is important to examine how communication flows within a community, as well as between that community and other stakeholders such as humanitarian actors and government authorities. With this research, we are able to identify information blockages and information influencers, while also forestalling opportunities for information to be misused.

FLEXIBILITY

Information needs in a crisis are fluid and ever changing. In the context of Greece, the early stages of the crisis represented an ‘acute’ emergency. [800,000 people](#) arrived in Greece in 2015 alone. Similar numbers continued to arrive until the EU-Turkey deal was signed. These people were arriving on shore with little information about how to access basic services and mixed information about how to move forward on the Balkan route through Europe. Rumours relating to particular routes and humanitarian services flourished. When the borders to Europe closed in early 2017, information needs of the migrants changed dramatically. Around 60,000 asylum seekers were stranded in a country they had not intended to stay in, a country that had little support or capacity

to tackle this migration crisis. The population needed both immediate information about applying for asylum along with a steady stream of information that would support and assist them throughout the process. During this phase, many asylum seekers were static in settlements around the country. In these environments, the lack of work, information, and entertainment created a perfect environment for the spread of rumours about ‘tricks’ to ease the asylum process or avoid it entirely.

Humanitarian organisations themselves are often to blame for information blockages both in providing and sourcing information from affected communities. Some feel that providing ‘too much information’ can leave them vulnerable to criticism should plans change. Humanitarian organisations and agencies often make narrow focus assessments but rarely do they perform broader investigations of information needs. More crucially, rarely are these assessments updated to account for the constantly moving information landscape.



Life jackets line the shores of Greece as remnants of the thousands of refugees arriving there

ACCURACY

Communication and rumour management during crisis situations and longer-term complex emergencies calls for consistency and accuracy to maintain that ever essential trust. Information must be timely, accurate, actionable and never contradictory.

When communication tools fail, rumours thrive. Even if a message is factual, if it is misunderstood, it can spur a rumour to spread.

An Internews assessment of the Ebola response in November 2014 found that there were over 300 different types of social mobilization or messaging systems in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. This increased effort to communicate with the community is fantastic but can be harmful if different channels share conflicting information. Hundreds of different messages

telling communities to ‘do’ one thing and ‘not do’ another can lead to a total information overload. Many of these ‘messages’ were never tested on the community and led to confusion. Rumours resulted from people taking several pieces of valid information and simply misconnecting the dots. For instance, an ‘Ebola kills’ campaign was meant to caution people to take the disease seriously, but in actuality may have contributed to people mistrusting Ebola survivors - because if Ebola kills how can somebody return from the hospital and claim to be healed? Listening to the community and coordinating our response can lead to more effective and engaging communication for all.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Another blockage in the flow of information can be humanitarians themselves. One example from the Greece context is a camp where migrants had many complaints about how the camp was being managed. However, because all situation reports relating to camp conditions were solely dealt with by the camp manager, information relating to sub-par conditions and community requests were ignored to protect the reputations of the camp management staff.

Humanitarians often have the tendency to dismiss rumours as 'ridiculous' or 'idle gossip'. But we need to imagine ourselves in the shoes of the community. For example, in Greece, there was a rumour spreading that there was a 'fee' to report a crime to the police. The majority of expat NGO workers dismissed this information, as it bore no relationship to how their justice systems worked back home. However, in this case, the information was true and impacted the likelihood of migrants reporting crimes against them. As humanitarians we often have access to all the latest information about a crisis, we sit in meetings with the 'experts' and we are allowed to ask questions to ensure we thoroughly understand

the environment we are working in. But the community frequently does not have this privilege. Often, they only have word-of-mouth or misconstrued information to base their decisions on. It is our responsibility to get better at sharing our vast wealth of information, and even more importantly getting better at listening to the community and involving them in decision making processes. We should not simply be broadcasting at the community, but working with the community to listen, understand and engage with the information to improve both the humanitarian and community response to disasters.

INCLUSION

It is key to make any rumour tracking project as inclusive as possible in order to understand and communicate with as many different people in the community. It is crucial to ensure that the project includes and is accessible to LGBTIQ, disabled, elderly, women, children and any other groups of people that might be marginalised in the languages the community prefers. This inclusion means making the project work for the people rather than going with the easiest option for the organisation. In order to capture the conversation as it is happening within the community, the Internews

rumour tracking projects set up a structure that puts a lot of weight on face-to-face communication, in local languages, with a diverse team of field staff who actively seek out the most marginalised members of the community with the least access to information channels. This way, the rumour tracking model is purposefully lowering or removing

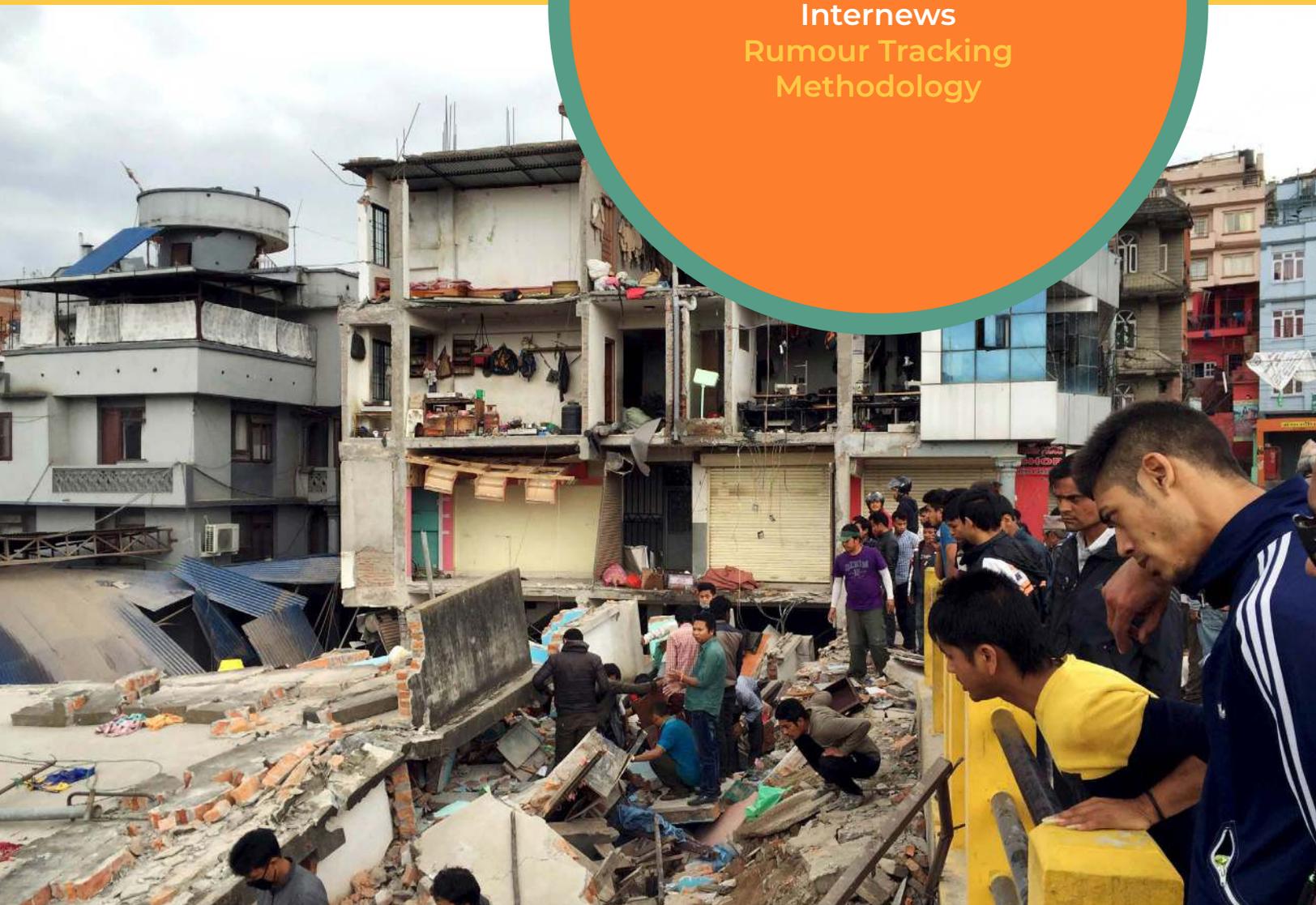
as many hurdles and deliberately including marginalised populations and more isolated members of the community. In essence, Internews' rumour tracking projects meet the people they aim to serve where they are instead of expecting them to come forward.

Nepali journalists
interview survivors
of the earthquake



Part 2. Case Studies

Internews
Rumour Tracking
Methodology



Wreckage from the Nepali Earthquake in 2015

INTRODUCTION TO PART II

Part II. Case Study describes examples and lessons learned from implementing Internews Rumour Tracking Methodology. Part II offers one in-depth case study of an Internews project in Greece (News That Moves) to give insight into the details of an exemplary project. Part II also offers a concise overview of the other Internews rumour tracking projects to date and key differences between them to highlight how to adapt and localise Internews Rumour Tracking Methodology in different humanitarian contexts.

In each location, Internews Rumour Tracking methodology was used as a mechanism for Internews teams to create a platform for community voices, address critical information shortages in the community and use the provision of accurate and actionable information to prevent insecurity and unease amongst communities affected by humanitarian crises.

While Part II focuses on the “what we did” behind the project, Part III will focus on how you can set up a rumour tracking project. Please download Part III [here](#).

PROJECTS USING INTERNEWS RUMOUR TRACKING METHODOLOGY

Each of the following sections gives a brief overview of a different HIS project that used the Internews Rumour Tracking Methodology. The sections condense the key elements of each project giving an overview of the diversity of the approach, listing only the key elements and partners that were crucial to implementing the project.

DEY SAY

Country: Liberia

Type of crisis: Epidemic (Ebola outbreak)]

Running time: October 2014-July 2015

Key partners: UNICEF, Liberian National Red Cross Society, Project Concern International, PSI Liberia, Women Campaign International, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNMIL/Human Rights and Protection Section (OHCHR-UNMIL/HRPS), Liberia Peacebuilding Office – Early Warning and Response Working Group, strong consultative relationship with the Press Union of Liberia

Mechanisms to collect rumours: Toll-free SMS-based collection through Liberian Red Cross Society, radio staff

Software & tools used: RapidPro, SMS short-code

Outputs: Weekly newsletter for Liberian media, weekly humanitarian newsletter shared with social mobilization working group and humanitarian partners, journalistic training program with one-on-one mentoring, radio shows based on newsletters.

Project links:

<https://www.internews.org/story/combating-rumors-about-ebola-sms-done-right>

https://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/2017-05/Liberia_Media_Newsletter_15.pdf

<https://www.internews.org/updates/liberia-newsletter-humanitarian-responders>



CASE STUDY: DEY SAY



Alpha Senkpeni used the Information Ecosystem tool to determine information flows in Liberia during the Ebola crisis

The deadly Ebola outbreak in 2014 left tens of thousands of West Africans dead or battling with disease. Rumours about Ebola were key in hindering humanitarian support of the affected population. Internews established the 'Information Saves Lives' program in order to tackle rumours, providing answers to rumours that were fact-checked by cultural and medical experts and training journalists in how to use this information to create helpful and effective reporting for the affected population. At the heart of the project was the 'Dey Say' SMS tool ('Dey Say' refers to how people speak about rumours in Liberian English), which was developed in partnership with the Liberian National Red Cross Society, UNICEF and Project Concern International. Through a free SMS short code provided by UNICEF, hundreds of humanitarian staff and volunteers could text rumours to the central coordination hub, where the rumours were analysed through a RapidPro dashboard. Key rumours, trends and fact-checked information to answer them was then shared through two weekly newsletters: one for humanitarians and one for local media. Based on the collected rumours and information Internews also provided training to local media in order to strengthen capacity to report on all technical and institutional aspects of the Ebola epidemic.

OPEN MIC NEPAL

Country: Nepal

Type of crisis: Natural Hazard (Ghorka Earthquake)

Running time: May 2015 – February 2016

Key partners: Accountability Lab, Local Interventions Group, Nepal Red Cross, Common Feedback Project, Oxfam

Mechanisms to collect rumours: Through door-to-door visits of volunteers of Accountability Lab and Local Interventions Group, radio programs, partners' social mobilisers, social media (#quakehelpdesk), call-in centres

Software & tools used: Excel

Outputs: Weekly rumours bulletin for humanitarian partners, local government and local media in English and Newari, distributed to partner radio stations and on-the-ground volunteers to share the information back with affected communities

Project link: <https://www.internews.org/updates/open-mic-nepal>

CASE STUDY: OPEN MIC NEPAL

The collage shows five pages from the Open Mic Nepal bulletin, Issue #2, dated July 13, 2015. Each page features a map of Nepal with a specific region highlighted in a different color. The pages are titled 'RUMOURS', 'CONCERNS', 'ANSWERS', 'Q&A', and 'Q&A'. The 'RUMOURS' page discusses a rumor in Siddhipur, Lalitpur about demolishing damaged houses. The 'CONCERNS' page mentions a fear of landslides in Kashi Galun & Hansapur, Gorkha. The 'ANSWERS' page addresses concerns about government reports and VDCs. The 'Q&A' pages deal with issues like relief for squatter families and compensation for those who lost their homes.



Chautara Radio interviews a woman post-earthquake in Nepal

In April 2015, an earthquake in Nepal left millions displaced from their homes, and with communication infrastructure damaged (including many radio stations). Access to trustworthy, actionable information was scarce. In the first three months, Internews analysed the communication needs and gaps of the affected population, assessed and provided initial support to local radio stations and other partners, and built partnerships with other humanitarian responders. In July, together with Accountability Lab, Local Interventions Group and other local partners, Internews launched Open Mic Nepal, a systematic information loop that tracked rumours, investigated, and reported back to local communities through face-to-face communication and local radio stations. Based on the collected rumours and fact-checked information Internews also supported ten local radios in the affected areas in their reporting for affected populations and accessing the humanitarian system.

SAK DI SAK VRE

Country: Haiti

Type of crisis: Natural hazard (Hurricane Matthew)

Running time: October 2016 to February 2017

Key partners: UNICEF, Oxfam, Action Aid, IFRC, Radio Ginen, WFP/ETC, Ayibopost

Mechanisms to collect rumours: Talkback calls, SMS number for health workers, NGO staff and volunteers, face-to-face through staff and volunteers of humanitarian partners, social media

Software & tools used: Excel

Mechanisms to share rumours: Bi-weekly rumour bulletin for humanitarian partners and local media in Creole and French, support to local media outlets, bi-monthly feedback bulletin for humanitarian responders in English and French, weekly radio program on the national broadcaster Radio Ginen, 13 videos, 13 blogs on Ayibopost, social media (mainly facebook and WhatsApp groups)

Project link: <https://www.internews.org/updates/haiti-sak-di-sak-vre>

CASE STUDY: SAK DI SAK VRE





Haiti struggles to recover after Hurricane Matthew
Credit: MINUSTAH

In 2016 Hurricane Matthew killed 603 people, affected 2.1 million people across the island, and left 1.4 million people needing urgent humanitarian aid. After the hurricane, Internews set up a rumour tracking service which provided access to trustworthy and actionable information. On a bi-weekly basis, Internews produced a Rumour Bulletin, called “*Sak Di Sak Vre*” (“What is said, What is true” in Haitian Creole) distributed to a total of 21 media outlets and 60 different humanitarian agencies and NGOs. The bulletin included fact-checked responses to the rumours arising in the community, as well as suggestions on how to respond to those rumours in order to best fulfill the information needs of the local population. The project also shared rumours and answers to them through social media, video, blogs and a weekly radio show on the national broadcaster.

FLYING NEWS

Country: Bangladesh

Type of crisis: Population movement camp setting (Rohingya Refugee Crisis)

Running time: January 2018 – still running⁴

Key Partners: Translators Without Borders, BBC Media Action, BRAC, Centre for Social Integration, Radio Naf, WFP/ETC, UNHCR, IOM

Mechanisms to collect rumours: Face-to-face through Internews community correspondents, CSI volunteers and BRAC field staff first using the ETC connect app and then Kobo Toolbox

Software & tools used: ETC connect app, excel for analysis, Kobo Toolbox, NVivo for analysis of qualitative data

Outputs: Rumour bulletins for humanitarian partners' field staff in Burmese, Bangla and English, feedback newsletter for humanitarians in Bangla and English, narrowcast service for refugees shared by Internews community correspondents in the camp through listening groups for refugees (listening groups were held by UNHCR, through Bluetooth and WhatsApp, and online).

Project links:

<https://internews.org/resource/flying-news-rohingya-response-rumour-tracking>

<https://internews.org/resource/what-matters>

4 As of March 2019





Members of a Radio Listeners' Group listen to the podcast show 'Shanti Lai Kotha Koi' or 'Talking Peace' in Ukha, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

As a response to the Rohingya Crisis, Internews conducted an initial information needs assessment in October 2017. In early 2018, Internews set up a rumour tracking project called 'Flying News' (the Rohingya word for rumour translates as 'Flying News') in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. These HIS projects work in consortium with Translators without Borders (TWB) and BBC Media Action. The initial set up phase to recruit staff, build partnerships and develop the project based on community needs took about three months, during which the project already started first data collection and contributed to a shared newsletter with BBC Media Action and TWB. The HIS project collects community data through volunteers and partner field staff, then shares fact-checked responses to rumours both through a rumour bulletin for field staff and humanitarian partners and a narrowcast service produced by and for refugees. Based on the community data collected the project also contributes to a shared publication called 'What Matters' in collaboration with TWB and BBC Media Action. The project also trains other humanitarian organisations in how to collect and deal with rumours. Internews also set up another project through the human rights support mechanism (HRSM) to address different rumours every week through a radio show called 'Talking Peace' which is aired on a community radio station, Radio Naf, and later made accessible online and through listening groups.

Rumour tracking projects continue to be developed and implemented, such as a project in Western Uganda to serve refugees from the DRC.

IN-DEPTH CASE STUDY: GREECE - 'NEWS THAT MOVES' PROJECT

SUMMARY

Country: Greece

Type of crisis: Population movement in camp and urban setting (refugee crisis)

Running time: September 2015 to May 2017

Key partners: Save the Children, Translators Without Borders, Mercy Corps, International Rescue Committee, Action Aid

Mechanisms to collect rumours: Face-to-face interactions with Internews Refugee Liaison Officers and social media, Action Aid Cultural Mediators, online interactions documented by Internews Refugee Liaison Officers

Software & tools used: NVivo, excel

Outputs: Weekly rumour bulletin for refugees; online website to share information; dedicated online groups on Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram in Farsi & Arabic, to share and collect rumour updates, videos, audio messages, banners and print outs; weekly bulletin on community data for government and humanitarians; presentations and Communicating with Communities (CwC) workshops for humanitarian partners; weekly live radio programme in Greek broadcast on a local radio station - Aeolos 92.8 FM; and media workshops for refugees. Most products were available in English, Farsi, Arabic and Greek (with a few products also translated into Urdu).

Project links:

<https://www.internews.org/updates/news-moves-mediterranean-rumor-tracker>

<https://www.internews.org/updates/loop>

“I keep hearing about these demonstrations in Athens. Is it for us, or against us? Does it have anything to do with our situation?” Afghan woman, 16-25

COUNTRY CONTEXT

“In these sites, we have no doors to our room and there is a lot of robbery happening. We struggle to keep our belongings safe, and I always have to carry my money or important papers with me.” Afghan woman, 26-35

In 2015, more than [1 million migrants](#) arrived via boat on the shores of Europe, another 34,900 by land. Greece was still suffering from a significant financial crisis, meaning [support mechanisms in country were stretched to support the migrants](#). Most migrants entered the European Union (EU) through three primary routes: The Central Mediterranean route from North Africa to Italy, the Eastern Mediterranean route from Turkey to Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus, and the Western Mediterranean route from North Africa to Spain.

For those who arrived in Greece in 2015 and early 2016, many migrants spent just a few days in the country

LAND AND SEA ARRIVALS IN GREECE AND BULGARIA JAN TO DEC 2016



Figure 2. Two Key Migrant Routes To Greece (Source: UNHCR, 2017)

Country of Origin of Primary Groups Arriving by Sea in Greece - 2016

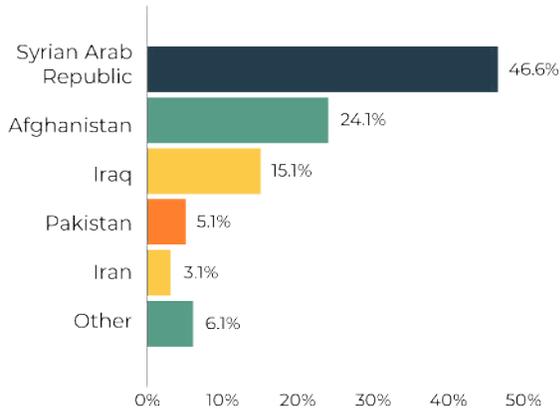


Figure 3. Source: [UNHCR, 2017](#)

before moving onwards across mainland Europe, sometimes using smugglers, others using routes widely shared on social media.

Due to the continued conflict, [Syrians made up the largest group](#) of migrants entering Greece, along with smaller numbers of Afghans, Iraqis, Iranians, Pakistani and Africans (Sudanese, Algerian and Somali mostly). Roughly 40% were children, 20% women and 40% men.

Despite the short distance between Turkey and some Greek islands⁵, many people including children drowned in the Aegean Sea, while attempting to seek international

protection and a new life in the EU. According to [IOM](#), 3,771 people died making the voyage from Turkey to Greece in 2015 alone.

On March 18, 2016, the EU and Turkey released [a statement](#) which agreed that all new irregular migrants and asylum seekers arriving from Turkey to the Greek islands, whose applications for asylum had been denied, should be returned to Turkey. This new deal slowed the number of boats arriving on Greece’s shores.

Arrivals in October 2016 were almost [99% lower](#) than in October 2015 when 211,663 crossed the Aegean (an average of 6,828 per day). It also meant that more than 60,000 migrants, many who had intended to use Greece as a stepping stone into other European countries, were now forced to either apply for asylum in Greece (which was not seen as preferable due to the economic crisis and high unemployment), return home, or attempt to smuggle themselves across Greece’s borders. By March 2017 only 10,004 individuals out of an initial target of 66,400 had been relocated from Greece under [the EU’s Emergency Relocation Mechanism](#).

5 For example, Lesbos is just 4km across the narrow Mytilini Strait from Turkey.

COMMUNICATION IN THE GREEK MIGRANT CRISIS

“We heard somebody donated cans of tuna. Everybody knew it was here, but nobody ever received any. The military took it for themselves.”
Afghan woman, 50+

Despite the efforts of humanitarian organisations, the host population, and unaffiliated volunteers to provide food, shelter, healthcare and protection, new arrivals continued to suffer from an acute lack of information. Despite the high level of media reporting about migrants, migrants still felt in the dark regarding relevant and reliable information about their situation. While the Greek and other European press often reported on news and policy decisions relating to the EU migrant response, this information was rarely reported in a language the new arrivals could understand. The press produced focused information towards the casual observer, but excluded the targeted and actionable information desperately needed by the migrant population. Knowing 3,000 migrants have made asylum applications might be interesting information for a Greek person, however, migrants needed to know, ‘where should I go and how do I make an asylum application’ or ‘is there someone that can help me translate the paperwork?’

An initial Internews assessment found that **69% of migrants** arriving on Lesbos owned a phone

or had easy access to one (65% of people that did not have a phone shared that they could access one through somebody else). A few migrant camps provided free Wi-Fi and cheap sim cards loaded with data were easily accessible. Some migrants, especially among the Syrian population, [used their phone to map their journey](#), book hotels and communicate with the coastguard before they arrived.

What information they did have, had often been provided through informal networks of friends or family members that at times were out of date, ill-informed or the willful misinformation provided by people smugglers. Many migrants reported that they were told by people smugglers that ‘everything in Europe is free’, which resulted in many families spending the remainder of their savings before they arrived. Others reportedly were told by travel agents on the Greek Islands that ferry tickets to the mainland had to be bought in combination with a bus ticket to Macedonia – a bus route they later discovered did not exist. Another dangerous rumour was that migrants should put a hole in their dinghy before they reach

the shore to prevent their boat being turned around. Rumours and misinformation are most dangerous when thousands of people make life threatening decisions based on that information.

For the migrants themselves, even if help and information was out there, they were often unsure where to find it in the camps or which NGOs or agencies to go to for which information. Humanitarians create camps that act as makeshift towns, but often decisions about how these towns should operate are made by high-level staff, speaking in foreign languages who can sometimes be culturally unaware of resident's needs, giving the affected population little insight into how these decisions are made. Fleeing your homeland, then being excluded from the decision-making process in your new 'town' can be demoralizing and confusing, and often creates a "them versus us" mentality between humanitarians and migrants, further deepening inequality.

Migrants entering Greece were not housed in large, unified camps where the information needs of the population could be assessed and addressed. As of May 2017, there were around 62,000 asylum seekers in the country housed in informal migrant settlements (provided for by NGO's), detention centres (Government run military-style camps, often with restricted movement), informal settlements or squats and private accommodation (hotels and apartments, paid for either privately or provided by an NGO). Each of these environments has different challenges and restrictions to the access of good quality information. While some formal migrant settlements provided limited, but free Wi-Fi, others did not and living conditions varied wildly between sites. Very few settlements had a system to elect individuals to represent the migrants to humanitarian partners. In this environment, rumours about the difference in treatment and asylum procedures between camps or ethnicities, which in many cases were true, caused tension and violence to rise quickly.

THE PROJECT

“Nobody hears us because there are not so many from Africa. It is hard to communicate with people if you don’t speak English, Arabic, or Farsi. French speakers are really excluded from the rest.” Congolese man, 26-35

After mapping the information ecosystem, Internews developed a program to help both migrants and humanitarians stay up to date and share vital information with each other. Internews set up a humanitarian information service beginning with rumour tracking and a website called ‘News That Moves’ (NTM).⁶ NTM was an on- and off-line service that provided migrants with the information they needed in order to make informed decisions.

The NTM project focused on three main outcomes:

- To ensure that migrants had access to as much relevant information as they needed to maintain life, dignity and make informed decisions for themselves;
- To ensure that NGOs, UN Agencies, and governments incorporated ‘Communicating with Communities’ into each stage of the migrant response for a more accountable and coordinated response; and

- To facilitate a peaceful and constructive integration with local communities that set up the basis for a sustainable multicultural society moving forward.

In the initial phase of the Rumour Tracking activities, the team was based on Lesbos where Internews produced simple banners and print outs that addressed rumours and informed migrants where they were and where to go for water, food, shelter and to register. The team produced audio messages to broadcast on loudspeakers and shuttle buses to reach migrants who could not read. This was some of the first information available for the more than 30,000 migrants that arrived on the island between September 2015 and mid 2016. Most importantly, it was the first information provided in Farsi, Urdu, Greek and English, languages that made it accessible to the majority of migrants. Internews’ audio arrival information on UNHCR buses reached more than 14,000 new arrivals as they rode the bus to the registration points. Visual information was also shared through

⁶ <https://www.internews.org/updates/news-moves-mediterranean-rumortracker>

content created for information screens in the Moria detention facility and via short ‘how to’ videos that taught the newly arrived population useful skills like how to use an ATM.

Eventually, Internews moved to Athens to enable servicing more locations across mainland Greece and the islands. With this move, the project was able to reach a much more dispersed audience through online information share and partners on the ground. Rumour tracking remained a key piece of the project throughout, whether it was responding to rumours using face-to-face conversations, messaging apps, social media or printed

communication materials to ensure rumours were deflated and important questions answered. With these materials, migrants were able to make informed and vital decisions about their lives.

The project was staffed by a multi-lingual team with a strong presence in Athens who frequently traveled around the mainland and across the Greek islands to interact with refugees all over the country. Based on the community data collected on- and offline the project produced several different outputs that were shared with the affected community and humanitarian stakeholders (see figure 4).

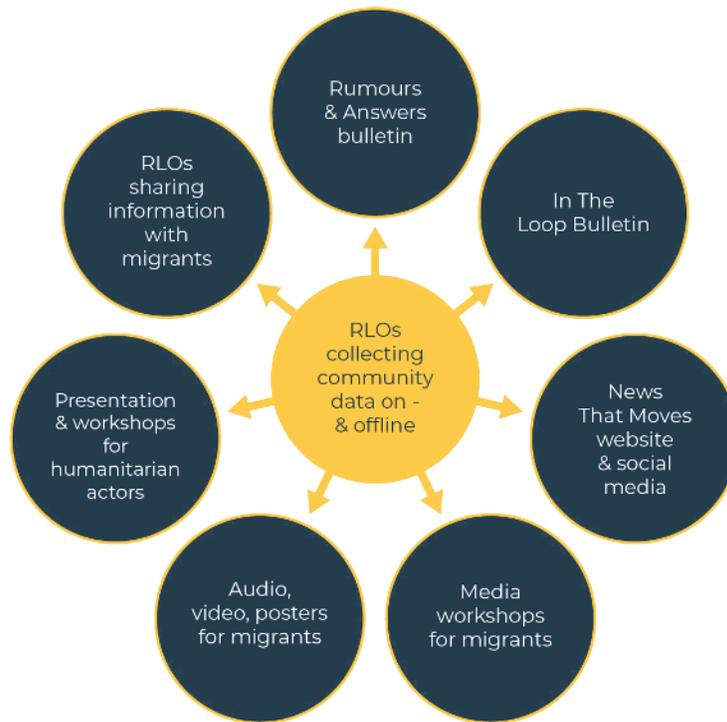


Figure 4. Outputs of the News That Moves Project

STAFF

“I asked for a baby crib, but I didn’t get one. I am keeping my child in a plastic box now and she is only 20 days old I wish I could bring her one to keep her safe.” Syrian woman, 26-35

At the core of the project were a team of **Refugee Liaison Officers (RLO’s)**. These RLO’s spoke Arabic, English, Urdu, French, Greek (the host community language) and Farsi fluently and were able to interact with the migrant population, listen to their concerns, answer their questions and collect rumours. It was important that these staff also spoke English and/or Greek fluently, as that allowed them to easily interact with the majority of the humanitarian community and assist others in the office in understanding the information collected from a linguistic and cultural perspective. **As many of the team came from a migrant background themselves, they were able to gain the trust of the community quickly to deliver actionable information and respond to their concerns.** The team worked both in the field and online through social media channels and the NTM website.

The RLO’s worked closely with a team of **Greek Liaison Officers (GLO)**. The GLO’s role was to form close ties with the Greek Government and other Greek sources of factual information

to be able to accurately respond to the questions and rumours being sourced by the RLO’s. This team had strong skills in analysing complex legal and policy information and translating and clarifying the information to make it more accessible and actionable. The GLO’s also worked to ensure government authorities were aware of the project’s purpose and to secure access to migrant populations living within sites across the mainland and islands.

The **Humanitarian Liaison Officer (HLO)** established connections with the vast network of humanitarian and volunteer agencies working with the refugee and migrant community in Greece. If the RLO’s were the face of the organisation in the field, the HLO’s represented the organisation in the meeting rooms. The HLO explained the purpose of the organisation, presented research and feedback to humanitarian responders and demonstrated the project’s efforts to benefit and complement the work of the Ministry and other humanitarian agencies.

The **Humanitarian Feedback Analyst** studied the information and data being collected by the RLO's to discover key trends and focal issues amongst the migrant population. This role involved finding the 'human' inside layers of complex data and helping humanitarian organisations and authorities to better respond to emerging trends. This role also helped develop reports to monitor and evaluate the project aims and outcomes.

The **Graphic Designer** made sure that the valuable information that had been collated could be presented in an appealing manner prioritizing functionality, readability, and accessibility. Too often useful information is presented badly with design as an afterthought. Visual language can be as important as written language and it requires a specialist designer.

The **NTM core team** ran the website used to support the information generated by the project. This involved selecting rumours and humanitarian information to be posted as well as regularly reviewing, translating and posting articles that included useful information to refugees and migrants along the Balkan route. As the majority of the team was from the migrant community, they were able to, more intimately and intuitively, communicate online. Social media is as intimate a communication as an in-person conversation and requires equivalent language and cultural skills.

The **NTM administrative group** included the Project Director, Operations Team Leader, and Administration Officer. This group worked to support the core team, establish partnerships, and build capacity for the technical implementation of the project objectives.

Refugees give feedback and ask questions about the most recent News that Moves bulletins in Greece



COLLECTING AND ANALYSING COMMUNITY DATA

“We arrived to Greece 9 months ago and our asylum appointment will take place on the 13th of January, but no one told us where the appointment is! Where should we go?” Syrian man, 36-49

The majority of community data was collected face-to-face with migrants in their mother tongue, documented and, whenever possible, responded to immediately. Additional data was collected through social media.

In addition to translation, the Refugee Liaison Officers (RLO's) were trained to **use cultural and linguistic clues to read between the lines of what a migrant was saying** and ask questions to ensure the interpretation of their words was accurate and meaningful. All RLO's were encouraged to try and make interactions with the migrant community as casual and non-threatening as possible, and to always ensure to contact any migrant quickly with actionable information relating to whatever question, comment or rumour they may have submitted.

RLO's interacted daily with the migrant population both on the islands and the Greek mainland. Their key questions were simple; ‘What information do you need?’,

‘What rumours have you heard?’, ‘What do you think about the humanitarian services being offered to you?’ and ‘How is life for you right now?’ **These open-ended questions allowed migrants to talk about what is important to them, rather than working within a tightly defined list of topics important to humanitarians. Through this model, the team was able to collect community data but also directly address rumours in discussions with migrants.** Community data was collected in notebooks and then entered into a **Rumour Tracking Form**⁷. This document worked to create a central record of information gaps, rumours and issues raised throughout the entirety of the project and helped identify trends and developments. The document did not collect names or other personal details, but noted ethnicity, age, camp location and the question/comment/feedback/rumour. This database provided a powerful data set for analysing growth and spread of rumours and trends.

⁷ A cleaned Interactions Spreadsheet can be downloaded from: <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/feedback-and-rumors-migrants-greece-dec-2015-feb-2017>

Migrants were sometimes reluctant to complain directly to the organisations helping them as they either feared repercussions or previous experience with humanitarian organisations had caused them to think that “no one would listen to us or do anything about it”. **By not delivering any material services, the Internews project had the advantage that people felt they could share complaints without the fear of any negative impact on receiving aid.** Using the information gathered from these conversations, Internews published ‘In the Loop’, a weekly bulletin that provided updates for the humanitarian community, allowing them to learn about these concerns anonymously and adapt their programming as necessary. This knowledge allowed humanitarian agencies to work with migrants in developing and implementing solutions, thereby integrating them in the aid delivery process. This way, migrants were no longer solely the passive recipients of aid but rather active change-makers in the humanitarian response. The project also held regular seminars and workshops for NGO’s and agencies to create a collaborative atmosphere for

solutions to be discussed, including those gathered by the RLO teams from the refugees themselves.

The RLO’s, Greek Liaison Officers (GLO), Humanitarian Liaison Officer (HLO), and Humanitarian Feedback Analyst met once a week to discuss the information collected and determine the most common rumours to be addressed and questions to be answered. The team assessed rumours in terms of prevalence in the community and risk that it might present to both the community and humanitarian workers. **Bringing together the staff that collected the rumour and the staff that would then fact check or analyse the information ensured there was no misunderstanding of the linguistic or cultural context of the conversation in which the statement was expressed.** This qualitative discussion of the data held by actual staff working on the ground was critical to responding to the most essential information needs. This weekly meeting was also an opportunity to explore information that should be shared with the humanitarian community relating to information gaps, service provision and emerging trends.

SHARING COMMUNITY DATA AND ANSWERS TO RUMOURS

“There are new people coming here. They only move here to this camp because they know we receive money cards here” Afghan man, 36-49

Based on the collected community data, the project produced several regular outputs to address rumours and answer questions for migrants and inform humanitarians.

Internews responder refers to the humanitarian information in the News that Moves bulletin to help two young refugees in Greece





Refugees celebrate arriving to shore in Greece after their long journey fleeing the violence in their home countries

NEWS THAT MOVES WEBSITE

“Syrians get everything. We all know this. They think we are a burden. But you see the Afghans and Iranians, if they see a Syrian in need, they will still help them regardless of how little we have” Iranian man, 36-45

The News That Moves website brought together useful information including the full catalog of Rumours and Answers bulletins, In the Loop publications, services guides and a number of news articles relating to the refugee and migrant experience in Europe. The website was available in English, Greek, Farsi, and Arabic. Topics ranged from pre-registration and asylum procedures

to conditions in refugee camps to changes in policy of the each EU country. Newsthatmoves.org had a monthly readership of around 20,000 people. On top of that, the news updates were directly linked into the refugeeinfo.eu website ran by IRC & Mercy Corps, and the volunteer-app from IFRC used by the Greek National Red Cross Society.

RUMOURS AND ANSWERS BULLETIN

“Holland has said they will take us all; their people will drive here and pick us all up. They are just waiting to have enough cars to transport us.”
Afghan woman, 26-35

The goal of Rumours and Answers⁸ was to provide accurate answers to the most common or most relevant rumours, concerns and questions, each week, across Greece. This weekly digest, investigated and addressed rumours collected from migrants. It provided factual information, verified through Greek authorities and humanitarian sources, distributed in refugee sites across Greece to a total population of around 60,000 refugees. One commonly reported rumour was addressed each day between Monday and Friday on newsthatmoves.org and then amassed in a weekly bulletin. The bulletin was published in Arabic, Farsi, English and Greek and distributed in both hard and soft copy.

The project did not make a judgment call on whether the information provided to migrants through this service was then used to make ‘good’ or ‘bad’ decisions. The purpose of the project was not in any way to tell migrants ‘what to do’. It is impossible to understand the variability of pressures and life experience that influence the decision making of a person. More importantly, by not having an agenda, avoiding judgment and patronisation, and genuinely considering the audience as people with their own agency, a more trusting relationship between the project and the migrants was established.

8 <https://internews.org/updates/news-moves-mediterranean-rumor-tracker>

RUMOURS + Answers

issue 66 | 24 April 2017



Rumour #1

“If your asylum claim is rejected, you have five days to be deported and get money for it, but if you don't, they will deport you immediately after five days with no money and no help, and you have to pay for your ticket yourself.”

Answer

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) confirmed to News That Moves that people hosted on the Greek islands of Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Leros and Kos, who have entered Greece after March 20th, 2016 and whose asylum request has been rejected, have five days to either:

- Appeal against the rejection decision;
- Or, ask for assistance from IOM for voluntary return to their home country, if eligible.

The above conditions do not apply to vulnerable cases. If you don't appeal, or you don't apply for voluntary return, you may be returned to Turkey.

For more information:
goo.gl/xvnHCC

Rumour #4

“The Asylum Service can't consider the applications of siblings as one, if one of them is married.”

Answer

The Greek Asylum Service (GAS) confirmed to News That Moves that if two siblings are both adults (over 18 years old), then their applications for asylum are usually examined separately, regardless of whether either sibling is married.

However, if one of the siblings is a minor, travelling together with his/her adult sibling, then both cases can be examined as one, if the adult sibling is appointed by the public prosecutor that s/he is the representative of her/his sibling. This process is usually assessed through the First Reception Service and the request is in written form. If both siblings are minors, their applications will be examined as one or together with the rest of their family, if present.

For more information:
goo.gl/gLLMfG

Rumour #2

“We are in Samos and are delaying our asylum applications, in the hope that new rules will be introduced that will ensure our eligibility for asylum in Greece.”

Answer

There is no official information that there will be any new decisions about eligibility for asylum in Greece. If you reached Greece after the 20th March 2016, and have not applied for asylum in Greece, then you are illegally staying in the country and the authorities have the right to arrest you and return you to Turkey, if they conclude that Turkey can be considered as a 'safe country'.

For more information:
goo.gl/YIMi4d

Rumour #5

“The Asylum office told me that I am not entitled for asylum in Greece and it's better not to apply, otherwise I will be deported to Turkey.”

Answer

Any foreigner or stateless person is entitled to apply for asylum in Greece, if they are afraid to return to their country of origin or previous residence.

However, if you arrived to the Greek islands after March 20th, 2016, the Greek authorities will first examine the possibility to return you to Turkey, if Turkey can be considered as a 'safe country' for you.

If the Greek authorities decide that you should return to Turkey, then you have five days to file an appeal. You will have the right to be helped by a lawyer.

For more information:
goo.gl/22wi3s

Rumour #3

“The 99.9 percent of the Moroccans who are living in this camp [Vathi, Samos] have been refused asylum. That's why we want to go to another city, where things are different for the Moroccans.”

Answer

Regardless of your nationality, you have the right to apply for asylum in Greece if you are afraid to return to your country of origin or previous residence.

The location where you submit your application does not affect your chances of being granted international protection. The asylum procedures are common to all regional asylum offices.

Specific nationalities have a lower than 25 per cent recognition rate in Greece. These countries include Morocco, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Tunisia and Algeria.

For more information:
goo.gl/Z10yti

All of the rumours are collected among refugees passing through Europe. By identifying misinformation and hearsay and responding to it with relevant, factual information, NewsThatMoves aims to keep the refugee population at the forefront of our communication response.



Things can change quickly

Check newsthatmoves.org for news you can use.



Got a question?

Ask us on newsthatmoves.org

Also on [Facebook.com/newsthatmoves](https://www.facebook.com/newsthatmoves)



IN THE LOOP

In the Loop⁹ (ITL) was a first weekly and then bi-weekly update that kept humanitarian actors informed of key trends affecting migrants, based on community data collected. The publication was presented to humanitarian organisations and the Greek authorities to support them in making their projects more responsive. It highlighted both unique and general themes in order to represent dominant concerns and highlight minority voices. The release of the publication was paired with a humanitarian presentation at cluster meetings and other relevant meetings, as well as discussion sessions aimed at addressing the problems highlighted.

ITL inadvertently highlighted problems that were made worse by the lack of information, for instance, the lack of knowledge migrants had about the practical and administrative issues preventing NGO's from doing more. In circumstances like these, NGO's need to understand the wider perception problems in order to help breach

the information gaps that cause them. On a regular basis, special editions of ITL identified and covered topics that became apparent over time from trends in the data. These editions led to seminars or workshops where these issues were discussed in depth. For example, in collaboration with Save the Children, the Internews team produced a special edition highlighting concerns raised by children, entitled "Our Eyes, Our Future, Our Dreams". Edition #40 of ITL analysed the increasing vulnerabilities of single men. In the rush to assist what could be described as the 'traditional' vulnerable groups (i.e. women, children, elderly), it was found that single men were being isolated from both their communities and humanitarian support which was contributing to feelings of isolation, persecution and an increase in mental health issues and substance abuse.

This publication was distributed through humanitarian meetings and emailed to a mailing list of more than 700 people (including more than 50 different NGO's).

9 <https://internews.org/updates/loop>

Main concerns:



we do not have interpreters

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN IN THE ISLANDS

Refugees and migrants report frustration over the lack of credible interpreters to help them address their concerns. This has caused a wide array of problems, including applying and following up their asylum process. In Leros

for example, some refugees have reported being ordered to leave without being offered appropriate translation assistance to help them explain their case and express their concerns. This also suggests essential social ser-

vices and programs run by several organizations are failing to meet the needs of the refugees simply because they are not communicating in a language the refugees and migrants understand.

“ Many times, we want to talk to lawyers but we can't because we do not have interpreters and the lawyers don't understand us.
- Pakistani male, 18-25, Leros ”

“ There are no interpreters in the hospital we are going to and we spend all day and night waiting. No one cares about why we are there because we don't know the language.
- Syrian female, above 50, Chios ”

it is because we spent too much time in here and the tough situation makes us forget all our history

RESETTLEMENT CRISIS DRIVING REFUGEES MAD

Growing uncertainty in the asylum process along with reports of deteriorating conditions are contributing to mental health problems faced by refugees living in the islands.

Reports gathered by ITL indicate an alarming number of incidents of self-harm and serious psychological stress. Recently, a man living in one of the camps in Chios, reported-

ly set himself on fire. Other refugees report experiencing memory loss when attempting to document their journey in the asylum interview.

“ We have lost our memory, we don't remember anything and it makes our interview to pass badly, it is because we spent too much time in here and the tough situation makes us forget all our history.
- Palestinian female, 26-35, Leros ”

“ He drank from the gas and spilled it all over his body, the police did nothing until he put himself on fire, but then it was too late.
- Syrian male, 26-35, Chios ”

the water tank here is very dirty

LACK OF POTABLE WATER IN LEROS: “They do not give us enough drinking water”

Many refugees and migrants complained heavily about the lack of potable water available in the Leros sites. Some reported that not enough bottled water is being

distributed and they have to drink the water from the tanks, which is unclean. They told ITL, the tank water has a reddish colour and is not appropriate for human

consumption. They are asking NGOs and organisations to provide them with better access to safe water to meet their needs.

“ The water tank here is very dirty. The water has a reddish colour. We mentioned this many times but no one really cares to do something.
- Palestinian male, 36-49, Leros ”

“ Water is a real issue here; they do not give us enough drinking water. When I finish the bottle, I go drink from the sink while it is dirty. But what can I do? I need to drink water, I am a human.
- Pakistani male, 18-25, Leros ”

INTERACTIONS IN 6 LOCATIONS

- Age groups: below 18: 3% / 18-25: 53% / 26-35: 24% / 36-49: 13% / over 50: 7%
- Gender: Female 12% / Male 88%
- Languages: Farsi 25% / Arabic 61% / other 14%

% indicates the proportion of face-to-face interactions that relate to the listed topic

For more information, see newsthatmoves.org

This issue of **In The Loop** is based on 383 interactions recorded by Internews Refugee Liaison Officers and Social Media Editors. Interactions are documented in line with a set of common standards, and themes are developed inductively using content analysis techniques. A combination of general and unique themes is presented in order to represent dominant concerns and highlight minority voices.





Refugees pitch tents across the island of Lesbos, Greece while they wait to hear news about asylum

SOCIAL MEDIA

The project maintained two Facebook pages in [Farsi](#) and [Arabic](#) and a Telegram group (popular with the Afghan community). The Facebook pages, in particular, were a popular resource for the community to submit questions and rumours and directly receive fact-checked replies. Pages were populated, moderated and monitored to ensure only factual information was shared and used in conversation with the refugees. It provided a platform for migrants to voice their concerns and get information, closing the feedback loop. At the time of the closure of the project, the Facebook pages had more than 55,000 followers combined. The RLO team also created a number of videos aimed at highlighting interesting residents in the refugee camps and their skills, to encourage social cohesion.

PRINT OUTS

Each week the project created a professionally designed one-page printed version of the five most relevant rumours (and their answers) of the week. This document was translated into English, Arabic, Farsi and when deemed relevant, also Urdu and French. The publication was handed out by the RLO's as they visited refugee and migrant settlements, shared by partners on key locations and was also downloadable from the NTM website.

AUDIO

To further address barriers in accessing information due to illiteracy, each week the RLO team created an audio program. The program discussed the most common rumours of the week, the fact-checked response, and explained any terms in the asylum process that may be confusing or unknown. The audio podcast was produced in Farsi and Arabic and was available via the NTM Facebook pages.

HUMANITARIAN DATA EXCHANGE

Internews believes that open data has the ability to greatly improve humanitarian response. Access to this qualitative data can help humanitarian aid organizations learn from previous responses and ensure that they continue to include the affected community throughout their programs. Internews has collected qualitative data from each of its rumour tracking responses and continues to share it openly through [Humanitarian Data Exchange](#)

OTHER CHANNELS TO SHARE COMMUNITY DATA AND ANSWERS TO RUMOURS

Additionally, the team continued to use their communication skills to support the psychosocial needs of the migrant population through a number of workshops that focused on storytelling for resilience. By using photography, storytelling, filmmaking and radio workshops, the newly arrived population found another way to express their concerns in their own words and support a peaceful integration process within the local communities in Greece.

The project also incorporated opportunities for humanitarians to come together to better understand key trends and work together to create solutions to problems. This allowed the team to discuss each issue in greater detail than the publication length allowed and to facilitate a positive and constructive debate to allow migrant voices to impact the humanitarian response directly.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COORDINATION

“I didn’t get the monthly cash cards of 90 euros for the past three months. I have been borrowing money to cover my daily expenses. Everyone is getting his money on time but not me, why? No one is explaining to me why they are doing so and neglecting my existence here?” Pakistani man, 26-35

Given the limited funding and capacity, partnerships were essential in enhancing the quantity and scope of collected data. Over the lifespan of this project, Internews partnerships included:

- **Action Aid** - cultural mediators for gathering feedback;
- **Care** – policy recommendations to respond to single male vulnerabilities highlighted in edition #40 of ITL;
- **Greek Refugee Forum** - planning town hall Q&A meetings in Athens and listening posts at various official camps around Attica, targeting migrants who are unable to read;
- **International Rescue Committee/Mercy Corps** – disseminating news-updates from News That Moves and In the Loop through their joint website refugeeinfo.eu
- **IOM** – assistance developing community feedback mechanisms within migrant settlements.
- **Mercy Corps** – producing content for 7 TV screens set up at the Moria detention center on Lesbos;
- **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)** - for facilitating site visits and assessments in several sites in northern Greece and on the island of Chios; collaborating on photography and storytelling workshops with migrants in northern Greece; forming a youth group in Oreokastro to help diminish tensions among youth;
- **Save the Children** - produce a special child-focused In The Loop; create video birthday greetings with migrants in Kara Tepe, Lesbos;
- **Translators without Borders** – translation assistance for NTM, Rumours, In the Loop;
- **UNHCR (EASO/Greek Asylum Service)** - audio arrival information on Lesbos and in Athens;
- **UNHCR** – planning production of a light-hearted video tutorial on how to use Greek ATM machines

for refugees (based on concern that many refugees cannot read Greek or English and were having difficulties accessing ATMs);

- **IFRC** – including the News That Moves updates in their app for Red Cross-volunteers

Refugees surround Internews staff with questions and concerns while he hands out cards with more information in Greece



CHALLENGES, ADVICE & RECOMMENDATIONS

“All UNHCR translators are Iranian and speak Farsi, not Dari. So, when we complain in our interview about the way we were treated in Iran, they don’t translate it, they refuse. I’m sure they are saying something else. Some of them don’t even understand what we are saying because when we explain, they look confused and ask so many questions. Please make sure people find out about this. How can I explain what I have been through properly when I have to depend on a translator who I don’t trust?” Afghan woman, 26-35

At the start of the project, the fast-moving refugee population challenged the Internews model of working with and for the affected population. As refugees were only spending 24 to 48 hours in one place and were fully focused on moving on to their desired destination country, they seemed unmotivated to participate in activities in Greece. However, by working with former migrants and recruiting team members from the countries of origin, it quickly proved that even the shortest of interventions was appreciated. Migrants indicated they were happy somebody “spoke their language.” Once it was explained how the project aimed to help them and future migrants, participation became possible and the information services were highly appreciated.

By working with trusted “liaison officers” from the affected population, participation is facilitated and requires less time and effort from the affected population, without claiming to be their representative.

As with all projects of this nature, there are many lessons to be learned from this experience. One of the most evident lessons was the need to explain the goal of the project right from the beginning to all partners. While it may be tempting to concentrate on providing ‘messaging services’ during a chaotic initial period, the need for two-way communication and explanations about what ‘rumour tracking’ is and why it is beneficial to the affected population and the humanitarian

community requires a concerted effort to bring potential partners on board. This would include securing long-term access to relevant refugee facilities and accommodation areas for program activities to take place.

Raise awareness on project goals with all stakeholders

The information gathered was disseminated in a very wide variety of methods and media to truly create News that would Move with the population both in terms of location but also in terms of their information needs. The media products, as often as possible, were also created by the refugees and migrants, after training with Internews, so that they were more culturally effective and therefore more widely disseminated. This was achieved by having budgeted for a variety of short-term trainers to be available at various times during the project. An example of this approach is a carbon monoxide awareness video that was viewed over 21,000 times within a couple of weeks, when a previous effort (based on traditional NGO 'messaging' techniques) on the same topic produced only 1,500 views over a couple of months. A side benefit of this was increasing the capacity of refugees who took part as well as generating a potential human resource for the future.

Create a flexible budget that allows for adaptation according to the needs of the community

Initially Internews was not a registered NGO in Greece. This created several problems including gaining official access to some migrant camps and sites. Migrants living in these restricted sites were still able to interact with the project and source information via the social media pages and the website, but until access was granted it was hard to reach the migrants who either did not have digital access or preferred face-to-face interactions.

Start registration process as a priority, create partnerships that allow access through other organisations

Another area which needs to be expanded is the use of person-to-person and face-to-face communication with both refugees and humanitarian partners. In many crisis situations, establishing credible information services is a real necessity and often it is a word-of-mouth recommendation which carries the most weight. A project such as this cannot ignore

this most basic, and trusted form of communication. While the use of media such as posters, broadcasting, and social media are also critically important, the power of face-to-face and word-of-mouth communication cannot be overlooked, especially in the early stages of any crisis.

Find multiple ways to communicate with community members face-to-face

While a lot of efforts were put into face-to-face communication, it was clear that a lot of activity in the refugee information ecosystem was happening online. Rather than considering social media another channel to “push out” more information, the Internews team approached social media as another platform for individual communication, with the same sensitivities around trust, managing expectations, and nuanced and relevant language skills, and as such establishing continuous two-way communication.

Social media is first and foremost social, and interactions online should focus on two-way communication rather than disseminating information

In many of the refugee sites, camp management had not established any mechanisms for the population to provide feedback, complain or have their concerns responded to in a formal way. As the rumour tracking project would also benefit from migrant sites having such processes in place, future projects should prioritize working with camp management to establish regular community meetings to allow community voices to be heard. This open and transparent approach to camp management and humanitarian service delivery would also prevent the inception of many rumours base on miscommunication or misunderstanding of humanitarian process and policy.

Implement formal feedback and complaints mechanisms

Rumour tracking requires a strong back-office operation so that facts can be checked and verified swiftly. The space for rumours to spread and mutate grows rapidly in real-time and the fact-checking operation must be able to cope with working to close this gap. Therefore, a multilingual fact checking team must be in place as soon as possible, and fully up and running by the time rumour tracking operations start. The Greek project was fortunate to have a strong team, skilled in unpicking complicated legal and

policy information. Future projects should consider further expanding this 'back end' team to ensure more rumours can be responded to.

Establish a multilingual fact-checking team early during set up

The project relied heavily on face-to-face interactions and online/social media interactions. While this allowed for impressive qualitative interactions to be collected by the Refugee Liaison Officers and for online interactions to be collected from other locations, the methodology did restrict access to the project. Those with literacy challenges could only access the project if an RLO visited their site, and, especially in the final months of the project, site visits were restricted to those that were in and around Athens or on the islands.

The number of RLO's also meant that face-to-face interactions in these locations would only be collected every few weeks from each location. While Internews did reach out to multiple agencies to provide training for their field staff and in return receive regular fact-checked and actionable information, it proved hard to convince higher level leadership to step into a more formal partnership. However, the produced outputs were shared across multiple locations, and on multiple platforms, proving that the project was appreciated among partners. Under the START review work-shop, the Internews project also received the highest number of points through a peer-to-peer review process.

Increase efforts to include multiple partners in the rumour tracking process early to increase scope and scale of the project



INTERNEWS

E-mail:

info@internews.org

www.internews.org

www.facebook.com/internews

Twitter: @internews

Press Enquiries: press@internews.org

