

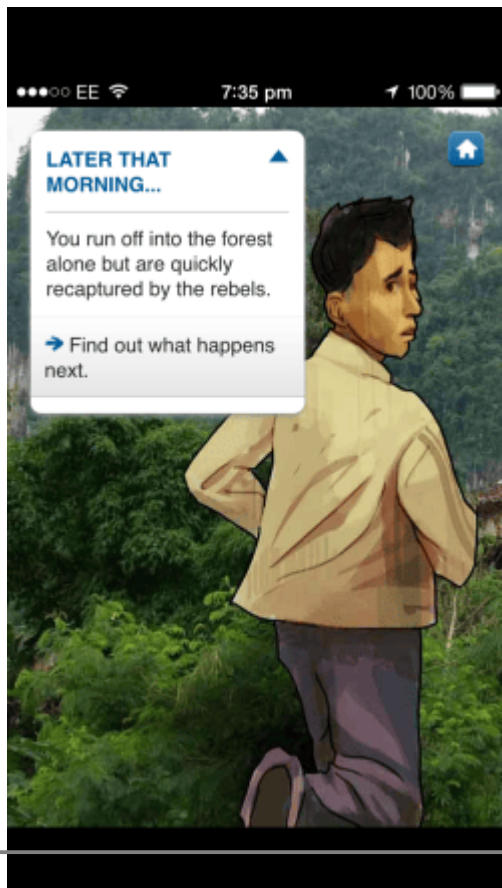


Refugees have smartphones too

Description

Pictures of refugees with smartphones proliferate in the press and online â?? sometimes with captions suggesting that smartphone owners display an affluence that excludes them from sympathy or support. There are nearly as many smartphones on the planet as there are people, and refugees have them too.

But smartphones have become essential tools for survival. Like affluent, free-roaming tourists, refugees draw on GPS enabled smartphones, and online information sources to navigate travel routes, and in some cases just to survive. Of course, refugees on the move also communicate with each other, officials, and with supporters back home. People traffickers also present online. Thankfully, they have to compete with online apps and web sites designed to assist independent travellers, rather than exploit them.



Smartphone app by UNHCR
(United Nations Refugee Agency).
It's a decision game to help
people understand the plight of
refugees.

Journalists who scan the Internet for news and evidence remark on these digital migrations. According to the *New York Times*, "In this modern migration, smartphone maps, global positioning apps, social media and WhatsApp have become essential tools. Migrants depend on them to post real-time updates about routes, arrests, border guard movements and transport, as well as places to stay and prices, all the while keeping in touch with family and friends."

Virtually invincible

Many residents within more stable urban environments depend on their smartphones too. Sometimes we embark on journeys without a firm plan, show up just in time, or late. We know we can phone someone in a crisis. With a smartphone we are invincible. Perhaps such connectivity encourages movement, and confidence, sometimes over-confidence, amongst people fleeing conflict.

Citizens in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and elsewhere deployed mobile phones and social media to gather solidarity around protest during the so called Twitter Revolutions, and with varying outcomes. Perhaps we are now witnessing a GPS-inspired mass movement. But there's little that's virtual about this digital migration.

Intrepid travellers need food, shelter, transportation, security and access. The digitally savvy nomad also has to address a new set of material concerns – somewhere to recharge your smartphone, the resources to top up your phone card, a cellular network, and Wi-Fi if possible.

Along with peculiar materialities come particular practices. There are reports of individuals roaming through crowds acting as Wi-Fi beacons. Any of us can bear the cost of cellular data access and act as a free Wi-Fi hotspot for others, if they are close enough.

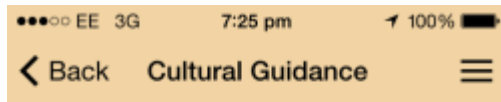
This July, along with thousands of others, I happened to pass through Budapest's central train station. I couldn't help notice the large numbers of East Africans then milling around the lawns next to the taxi ranks at the station. Later on we trained past Calais and entered the Eurotunnel, knowing that less than a mile away refugees were looking for opportunities to make the passage to the UK by some means or other.

The contrast is stark – the free-roaming European tourist versus the struggling refugee, channelled, blocked and corralled. Amidst such tragedy and desperation who would dare take mobility for granted – or smartphones!



Links

- Welcome refugee [pages on Facebook](#). [UK page](#). (You need a Facebook account to view.)
- Refugees Welcome Information: <https://refugeeswelcomepad.wordpress.com>
- Brunwasser, Matthew. 2015. A 21st-Century migrant's essentials: Food, shelter, smartphone. *The New York Times*, (25 August 2015) [Online](#).
- Dubinsky, Zach. 2015. For Syrian refugees, smartphones are a lifeline — not a toy. *CBCNews*, (12 September 2015) [Online](#).
- O'Malley, James. 2015. Surprised that Syrian refugees have smartphones? Sorry to break this to you, but you're an idiot. *The Independent*, (13 September 2015) [Online](#).
- Rutkin, Aviva. 2015. Tech helps refugees make journey — and survive when they arrive. *New Scientist*, (7 September) [Online](#).
- Solomon, Erika. 2014. Siege recipe site helps blockaded Syrians to keep eating. *Financial Times*, (9 May 2014) [Online](#).



What are typical german manners and traditions?

Germans are usually quite friendly but reserved people. Please note a few hints for everyday communication and contact:

- If you need any help please do not hesitate to ask for it.
- It is common to greet others with a hand shake.
- Make sure to keep a distance of at least one arm's length from your opposite.
- It is impolite to enter the personal space of others or use their possessions without an invitation.
- If you are invited into someone's flat you should not enter any room without their permission or help yourself with food or drinks.
- It is very important to be in time. If you are not able to attend a meeting make sure to cancel it in advance.
- Take care to use polite phrases like
"please -- Bitte"
"thank you -- Danke"
"hello -- Hallo" or

Refugee welcome app for the city of Dresden.

Category

1. Travel

Tags

1. migrant
2. Refugee

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