**BRIDGING THE GENDER DIGITAL DIVIDE: The *Signal Program on Human Security and Technology* contribution to the *UN High Commissioner for Human Rights* report**

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The [Signal Program on Human Security and Technology](http://hhi.harvard.edu/research/signal?page=1) (Signal Program) at the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) works to advance the safe, ethical, and effective use of information communication technologies (ICTs) during humanitarian and human rights emergencies. This work is guided by the [Signal Code](https://signalcode.org/), the identification of five rights related to information in crises.

Within the Signal Program, the Population and Mobile Technologies (PMT) area of focus is dedicated to quantifying the role of ICTs in crises. *The PMT area of focus incorporates an intersectional approach throughout all phases of research to illuminate individual characteristics mediating vulnerability in crises, specifically, gender*. The overarching goal of PMT research is to contribute evidence regarding the realization of the information-related human rights in crises set forth in the Signal Code.

**Telecommunication and Migration Study**

ICTS, and particularly mobile phones, are facilitating one of the largest migrations in human history – the European Migration Crisis. Reliance on mobile phones is a defining characteristic of both migrants and organizations providing humanitarian assistance. However, mobile phone ownership ranges from less than half[[1]](#footnote-1) to 89%[[2]](#footnote-2) among Syrian refugees, with little known about interactions between gender and mobile phone ownership.

To address this gap in evidence about the gender divide in mobile phone ownership, the PMT area of focus led the Telecommunication and Migration (TAM) Study, with support from the [International Data Responsibility Group](http://www.responsible-data.org/fellowship.html) and fellows. The TAM Study is a survey assessment of mobile phone use and ownership among 135 refugees in Greece. Results show that *women are significantly less likely to own a mobile phone* in their home country and in Greece (75% v. 93%, p<0.05; and 67% v. 95%, p<0.05, respectively). Moreover, mobile phone was associated with an important mental health outcome: depression. *Each additional day an individual used a mobile phone in the past week is associated with a 7-percentage point reduction in their probability of having depression* (p<0.05). The [preliminary results](http://www.responsible-data.org/annual-report.html) and full findings of the TAM Study, in press, aim to inform the gender-inclusive use of ICTs in crises.



1. UNHCR (2015) Syrian refugee arrivals in Greece: Preliminary questionnaire findings. Available from: <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/documents.php?page=2&view=grid&Country%5B%5D=83&Type%5B%5D=14> [Accessed 20 October 2016] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Maitland, C. & Xu, Y. A Social Informatics Analysis of Refugee Mobile Phone Use: A Case Study of Za’atari Syrian Refugee Camp. in (TPRC, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)