

Additional Insight: Trends Regarding Crowdfunding Campaigns Directed Toward the Camps¹

Given the proliferation of crowdfunding initiatives geared to connect Islamic State detainees in Al-Hol and Roj camps with funding, this breakaway section offers more insights into these campaigns. In short, this study involves an effort to track and examine a sample of fundraising initiatives that appear oriented toward supporting Islamic State detainees, namely women and minors, in the detention facilities in Al-Hol and Roj camps in northeastern Syria. At the time of writing, this sample encompasses about 40 initiatives that range from individuals and networks to organizations collecting funds. The languages featured most prominently in content by these entities are German, Arabic, Turkish, English, French, and Russian. Social media monitoring of this sample of accounts points to financial activity occurring mainly in Syria, Turkey, and Europe, but sources point to connections spanning farther afield. Examples of countries include France, Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, Russia, Indonesia, India, Maldives, and the Gulf States.²

Observations concerning platform usage from primary and secondary source material:

Social Media and Messengers: Instagram, Telegram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Signal, Signlance, Tam-Tam, Hoop, Wickr, YouTube, Twitter

Cryptocurrencies: Bitcoin, Monero, Dash

Crowdfunding and Money Transfer Apps: PayPal, PayPal MoneyPool, Virgin Money Giving, GoFundMe, GoGetFunding, Givebrite, DonationsAlerts.com, Qiwi Wallet, Tikkie.me

Money Transfer Services: Western Union, MoneyGram, Ria

Financial Institutions: During the collection period, accounts promoting fundraisers referenced various financial institutions, often providing bank details.

Other Platforms: Other observed tools include SimpleSite, Shopify, Tellonym, The Onion Router (TOR), NORD VPN, and InShot.

Dynamics and Trends

As demonstrated by the list of examples above, crowdfunding initiatives often leverage numerous platforms to promote their calls for donations, coordinate logistics, and move and obscure funds. Social media monitoring for this study focused on Instagram, Telegram, and occasionally Facebook, but fundraisers and campaigns involve a complex ecosystem of platforms.

Some crowdfunding campaigns work together to promote initiatives and connect detainees with funding online and within the camps.³ While difficult to gauge the full scope of such collaboration, it seems to center around interpersonal and logistical relationships with other fundraisers and facilitators. The prevalence of scenarios where campaigns work together and promote each other's content may be swayed by the project's data collection method, which essentially used known accounts to identify additional accounts to include in the study.

Despite some collaboration and cross-promotion between campaigns, there is also competition

1 Author's note: To view examples of the social media records discussed and references throughout this report, see the appendix.

2 See Appendix. See also "Camp," Caki blog associated with Rojava Information Center, June 16, 2021; Trew; Alexander, "Help for Sisters': A Look at Crowdfunding Campaigns with Potential Links to Terrorist and Criminal Networks," Vera Mironova, "Crowdfunding the Women of the Islamic State," Lawfare, October 29, 2020.

3 See Appendix: IMG_1762.PNG, Screen Shot 20210608.png, Screen Shot 202106082.png, IMG_1960.jpg.

between initiatives. Another researcher studying crowdfunding in the camps notes how competition in online fundraising can create real-world tension between detainees that then manifests both online and offline.⁴ Monitoring for this report noticed campaigns trying to vie for legitimacy, and it also revealed more subtle forms of competition. Some of the techniques fundraisers used to stay competitive in a saturated market include professionalizing promotional graphics, using multiple languages to engage a broader support base, and crafting new approaches to help one campaign stand out from others.⁵ Popular techniques include sharing pictures of Islamic State detainees receiving assistance, sharing stories featuring the plight of specific individuals and families, and showcasing how donations can cover the cost of particular items or services.⁶

Over the monitoring period, many fundraisers have shifted away from broadcasting specific financial information—such as banking details, including IBANs—but some still use that method. Most campaigns observed in this study use Telegram, Instagram, and Facebook to promote content to attract prospective donors, then they move to more direct communications, where fundraisers probably vet donors to some extent before providing information about how or where to send funds.⁷ Many fundraisers advertise multiple contact and payment options, likely to make themselves available to more prospective donors.⁸ Similarly, another feature of many crowdfunding campaigns is gender-segregated contact options for donors.⁹

4 Mironova, “Crowdfunding the Women of the Islamic State.”

5 See Appendix: File_081.png; File_085.png; IMG_1762.PNG; IMG_1899.PNG; IMG_1922.PNG; IMG_1928.PNG; IMG_1926.PNG.

6 See Appendix: IMG_2009.PNG; File_081.png; File_085.png; IMG_1552.PNG; File_104.png; File_075.png; File_049.png; IMG_0757.PNG; IMG_1899.PNG, IMG_1244.PNG, IMG_1935.PNG, IMG_1766.PNG.

7 See Appendix: IMG_1552.PNG, IMG_1762.PNG.

8 See Appendix: IMG_1551.PNG, File_052.png, IMG_1709.PNG.

9 See Appendix: IMG_1550.PNG, File_085.png, IMG_0735.PNG.