

“By 2084, the concept of refugees will have changed, and it will concern more of us”

Joséphine Goube is the head of Techfugees, an organisation started in 2015 to empower refugees through technology. She was invited to share her ideas at the Maddy Keynote 2019 where she gave us some insight on what makes our society go around.

Temps de lecture : minute

12 March 2020

In 2084, what will be the challenges for refugees?

Scientists announce that if we don't reduce the amount of greenhouse gases and pollution that we emit, climatic migrations will increase in 2050, and accelerate from then on. There is a big chance that in 2084 many of us will have been displaced because of a climate phenomenon! The concept of refugees and geographic borders will probably be completely changed.

Technology is already a powerful tool for going beyond borders. This is what we have come to believe at least at Techfugees. In 65 years, technology will give some people access to rights, information, jobs, health, education, etc. Yet I fear that others will be excluded or will be vulnerable because of their online identity if we don't respect a certain moral code.

The internet is a very political network and the question of receiving refugees is also a political one. The main worry is knowing how long civil

society will pioneer inventing technological solutions for the general public in order to respond to refugee challenges before our leaders take up the burden. I'm thinking about European leaders of course, but more generally, how will countries with a heavy political and economic weight like China, India, and some African countries or the unpredictable United States react to this new order?

Is technology one tool of many that will allow refugee populations reintegrate?

Technology is definitely a solution, but not the only. Techfugees was created in 2015 after a realisation: 93% of refugees that arrived on the coast of Greece had a mobile phone. How then can we raise global awareness of their needs and come together, with the refugees themselves, to build tools that will fill those needs and make technology a driving force in their new homes?

How can we change the ideas that employers have towards refugees (who, contrary to common belief, are often well educated)?

By meeting with refugees, through conferences like Maddy Keynote, we can adopt an educational and practical approach to their situation. In a world where more and more information, resources, goods, services, and people are circulating and being exchanged, who better than the refugees to envisage the evolution of their "business" on these new markets?

Let's not look at them as refugees, as there isn't one fixed refugee identity. Let's look at them neither as victims nor heroes, but as determined people who have been able to cope with mobilising enormous resources. Let's look at their talents and invest in their education and training.

With this goal in mind, last year in Paris we created a pilot programme to help 12 refugee women become integrated into the French technology market. A great success, this year we worked on spreading the programme through our international network.

More globally, how can we enforce the “live together” idea in today’s society?

Stop thinking that foreigners are a threat or the ones at fault and stop putting citizens against one another. Let us remember that a step forward for one isn’t a step back for another! Let’s try and find out what refugees and locals have in common.

I hope that we contribute to this every day by our advocacy work of course, but also by organising events and hackathons to gather refugees and locals so that together they can create technologies that will help people who will be uprooted tomorrow and share their designs with other vulnerable populations. This is one of our eight guiding principles.

Is technology really correlated with success for the next generation?

Half of all refugees are less than 18 years old. In order to prevent losing an entire connected generation, we must invest greatly in their education. Whether they are in refugee camps, where refugees spend on average 17 years, or they are living in a new country, learning a new language quickly and acquiring new skills through online tools like MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) is imperative. The technology world, which is more attentive to skills than a CV, can offer opportunities to young people whose foreign degrees are not widely recognised.

Techfugees is a non-profit-making organisation. Is this compatible with the startup model?

Moving quickly and breaking things is hardly compatible with the construction of a long-lasting and responsible “tech for refugees” ecosystem! Partners like Google for Startups or Schibsted, a Norwegian shareholder group, or the French Bon Coin and 20 Minutes, who have supported us since the beginning, have thankfully understood.

However, in France it's not easy to finance a non-profit organisation whose main goal is to support, motivate, and connect a community of volunteers spread across the world. Today, I am the only employee of Techfugees. So, I must juggle non-stop between searching for financial support for our operations and putting those operations into action. This isn't sustainable and we hope that our financial strategy for this year will improve the situation because it hardly has a good long-term impact on the refugees and displaced people.

What will “Tech4Good” look like in 2084?

I hope that all technology will be “for good,” or least that all companies, even if they aren't related to social issues necessarily, will be adapted for sustainable growth and solidarity. I also hope that diversity isn't measured just in terms of equality between women and men but also takes into account people's life experiences.

How do you imagine work in companies of the future?

Digital tools have already considerably transformed the way that we “work.” I think about the fact that remote work has already shaken up our

hours, spaces, and habits of work. In 2084, technical progress will have certainly alleviated the formal aspects of a professional job, particularly in sectors like engineering, IT, etc.

The need to invent a new economic model that consumes less energy and is more sustainable will certainly shuffle the cards of the world's economy as well. I would like to think that the reality of the planet's state will catch up with us and our working hours might be changed, not because of choice, but because of quotas and the availability of electricity, for example!

Will notions of work and purpose be more closely linked in the future?

Yes! This is what more and more young people are looking for: a job, but a job that makes sense and will contribute to shaping a world that is in line with their hopes for the future. How can we attract talented people to the possibility of dedicating a part of their time to working on projects that have a large impact? It is a challenge that we are working on regularly with our partners, particularly through work-a-thons to technically accelerate projects that stem from the Techfugees community.

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