EMN Ad-Hoc Query on NO CLOSED AHQ on use of social media (OSINT) in processing claims in connection with asylum applications

Requested by Kathleen CHAPMAN on 23rd September 2016

Miscellaneous

Responses from Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Slovak Republic, Sweden, United Kingdom, Norway (21 in total)

Background information:

The Norwegian Directorate of Immigration is in the process of exploring possibilities of establishing a system of social media checks in connection with processing asylum claims, but also in connection with other forms of applications for residence permits.
This EMN AHQ will help us to map MS practices and experience in this regard and to establish whether any MS are interested in taking part in a common effort based on best practices.

We are asking for contact information and for that reason will only post a restricted for distribution compilation. Please indicate that your response is closed.

Based on this background, the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration would like you to respond to the following questions:

Summary

Background information:

The *Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI)* is in the process of exploring possibilities of establishing a system of social media checks in connection with the processing asylum claims, but also in connection with other forms of applications for residence permits. This EMN AHQ will help us to map MS practices and experience in this regard and to establish whether any MS is interested in taking part in a common effort based on best practices. The AHQ asked for contact information and for that reason only a compilation for restricted distribution has been prepared.

Summary of responses:

1. Six responses signalled that the MS has developed a system for checking social media profiles, and another nine responses signalled that social media profiles might be checked sporadically. *Facebook* was mentioned most frequently, but several other sources were also listed in one or more responses. 2014 (by one response) and 2016 (by two responses) were given as the year when such checking was undertaken for the first time.
2. Among the MS that do check social media the response from three signalled that this would happen on a daily basis/always, while four signalled that this would happen once-a-week/frequently. For the rest such checking would be more sporadically.
3. The responses indicated that sporadic social media searches would be triggered by information provided by the applicant or police investigation; (i) in order to verify or supplement country of origin information, (ii) to clarify the applicant's identity, (iii) based on motives for applying for protection, (iv) because of credibility issues, or (v) because of security concerns.

4. Asylum applications were mentioned in a few responses as a type of case where the MS would most frequently make use of social media checks, and one response indicated that media in Arabic and Turkish were monitored most systematically.
5. The nature of the information (or type of profiles) which were most frequently sought is indicated by the reasons that triggered the search, cf. 3. above.
6. As indicated under Q1. Above, *Facebook* was indicated most frequently as the type of site searched, but a list of other sources were provided in at least one response.
7. None of the responses signalled that there had been a systematic evaluation of the reliability and/or validity of the information gained from searching social media, but several responses signalled that this information would not in itself have evidential value.
8. In 13 of the responses it was signalled that the responding MS would be interested in participating in a cooperative effort to establish best and enhanced practices for using and checking social media data the casework.

Questions

1. 1. Has your MS developed any kind of system for checking social media profiles? A – YES B – NO If yes, please provide a brief description of the routines/system and when this was started:
2. 2. How often, if at all, do you check (or make use of) social media in your casework? A – Not at all/ never B - Less than once a month C – once a week/frequently D – on a daily basis/Always
3. 3. If social media searches are only carried out sporadically, please briefly mention what if anything triggers a search, such as information from the applicant, where the applicant derives from, risk-based profiling (risk profiling outlines the nature of risks related to applications) or other systematic approaches, etc.?
4. 4. Are there any particular types of cases where your MS consistently makes use of social media? If so, please briefly list types of cases as well as which media you have found most helpful.
5. 5. Please describe the nature of the information (or type of profiles) which you check in social media.A –Only data available prima facie (ex. Facebook timeline of the given profile): Please specifyB – All data available (including overall profile activity): Please specify
6. 6. Are there any particular types of searches/sites to search that you find most useful?
7. 7. If your MS has tried out some kind of systematic approach to using social media in casework, please comment if you can, on the validity of the results and if possible, on how frequently such searches have resulted in credible/reliable information.
8. 8. Would your MS possibly be interested in, and willing to take part in a cooperative effort based on best and enhanced practice together with Norway and other MS in a long-term project for using and checking social media data in your casework?A – YES B – Possibly, need more information C- NO
9. 9. If interested in further cooperation, please provide a contact email so the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration can contact you

Responses

	Country	Wider Dissemination	Response
	Austria	No	
	Belgium	No	
	Croatia	Yes	**1.** 1. B - NO **2.** 2. B - Less than once a month, sporadically rather. **3.** 3. Social media are used as a source of information only when we have got an information from the applicant that this information could be relevant in his/her case, ex. when his/her activity in social media could be a cause of persecution for him/her or can be a source of information about the applicants situation in his/her country of origin. **4.** 4. No. **5.** 5. B - All data available (including overall profile activity), such as photos, videos, connections, whole, profile, interest groups, history search. **6.** 6. General and specific Google searches. **7.** 7. No. **8.** 8. B- Possibly, need more information. **9.** 9. ssrsan@mup.hr

	Cyprus	Yes	**1.** B - NO **2.** A - Not at all/never **3.** n/a **4.** n/a **5.** n/a **6.** n/a **7.** n/a **8.** C - NO **9.** -
	Czech Republic	No	
	Estonia	Yes	**1.** B - NO. **2.** Once or twice a month. **3.** Only when there are indications. E.g. applicants mention it themselves or information comes out from the police investigations if the applicant has previously committed a crime. **4.** No. **5.** A - Only data available on Facebook´s or some other page´s (e.g. VKontakte) public profile, also there can be a lot of information on the pictures.

			6. N/A. **7.** Estonia has tried to develop a systematic approach to using social media in casework, but there are legal obstacles. **8.** A-YES. **9.** Katrin Tammekun katrin.tammekun@politsei.ee and/or Erki Vään erki.vaan@politsei.ee.
	Finland	No	
	France	No	
	Germany	Yes	**1.** B **2.** A **3.** n/a **4.** n/a **5.** n/a **6.** n/a **7.** n/a **8.** C **9.** n/a

	Country	Answer	Details
	Hungary	No	
	Ireland	No	
	Latvia	No	
	Lithuania	Yes	**1.** B – No. **2.** C – once a week/frequently. **3.** N/A **4.** If the applicant for asylum argues that an his/her activity is captured in the social media or he or she is or was an active social media participant and this activity is the main reason why he or she is applying for asylum, then social media check might be performed. **5.** B – All data available (including overall profile activity). **6.** No. **7.** No. **8.** Possibly, need more information. **9.** Migration Department under the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania Senior specialist Silvija Vingytė E-mail - silvija.vingyte@vrm.lt
	Luxembourg	Yes	**1.** No. **2.** On a daily basis/Always.

			3. Statement of the applicant.
			4. LU makes use of social media to verify the statements of the applicant. Any doubts about the statements of the applicant lead to checking in social media (Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn,…)
			5. B – All data available (including overall profile activity): General information available on the profile pages (posts, photos, videos, name, date of birth,…) but also overall profile activity (comments, pages liked…)
			6. Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, LinkedIn,…
			7. LU mostly uses social media information to confront the applicant during the interview in order to clarify his statements. In most of the cases, the information is useful.
			8. B – Possibly, need more information
			9. daniel.weiwers@mae.etat.lu
	Malta	Yes	**1.** please see attached
			2. please see attached
			3. please see attached
			4. please see attached
			5. please see attached
			6. please see attached
			7. please see attached

			8. please see attached
			9. please see attached
	Netherlands	No	
	Poland	Yes	**1.** No
			2. B - Less than once a month, Sporadically rather
			3. Social media are used as a source of information only when we have got an information from the applicant that this information could be relevant in his/her case, f. ex. when his/her activity in social media could be a cause of persecution for him/her or can be a source of information about the applicants situation in his/her country of origin.
			4. No
			5. B. Everything what we can find about applicants in the social media could be important in his/her case.
			6. No
			7. No
			8. Yes
			9. No
	Slovak Republic	Yes	**1.** Yes. Regarding the processing of asylum claims, case workers (from the Migration Office of the Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic) have no direct access to the social networks due to technical facilities of the department. However, case workers can request information on social media

			from the Department of Documentation and Foreign Cooperation (DDFC). Information from social media sources is used occasionally, on ad hoc basis, as a part of COI documentation for query responses. The social media sources are mostly supporting sources. Social media started to be checked in 2014. Regarding the process of residence granting, there is no system used for the control of social media at the Bureau of Border and Alien Police of the Presidium of Police Forces. **2.** See previous answer **3.** The social media sources are checked in the process of COI research. Such information is used in specific cases, for example if there is a lack of information needed in other sources ("traditional" sources for COI research), in case of cross-checking as secondary information, upon specific COI queries etc. From COI research perspective, the research is not risk-based oriented. **4.** No, however, case workers do not exclude that there will be a need for this in the future. As for DDFC, potentially all cases could be concerned. However, the social media are used mostly to verify applicant´s credibility as supporting sources (answering COI queries relating credibility). **5.** B) All data available All public data available can be checked. Nevertheless, not only persons´ profiles are supposed to be checked. Also the activities of political parties, public or private organization and institutions etc. can be followed using social media. **6.** Wikipedia, different blogs (WordPress), micro- blogging (Twitter), audio-visual webpages (YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram), social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn), open maps and geo-location projects (Wikimapia, Panoramio) **7.** We do not have any systematic approach. However, social media based information could be considered as credible and reliable, if it meets COI quality standards, and it could be cross-checked with other credible sources. **8.** Yes **9.** Department of Documentation and Foreign Cooperation Migration Office of the Ministry of

			Interior of the Slovak Republic blanka.timurhan@minv.sk
🇸🇪	Sweden	No	
🇬🇧	United Kingdom	Yes	**1.** No. **2.** Not at all. **3.** N/A **4.** N/A **5.** N/A **6.** N/A **7.** N/A **8.** Possibly, need more information. The UK is currently consulting on how on how to use social media, but does not currently have a plan in place. **9.** TBC. We would be interested in this once the UK has a social media plan in place.
🇳🇴	Norway	No	