

From Voices to Verdicts: The Role of User-Generated Evidence in Transforming International Criminal Justice

What Is the Aim of the Project?

This research project explores how smartphones and the internet are changing the way we gather and use evidence in international criminal justice. It focuses on **user-generated evidence (UGE)**, which is evidence **collected and shared by ordinary people using digital tools**. The goal is to understand the challenges and opportunities of using UGE to prosecute international crimes to develop strategies for integrating UGE into the international criminal justice system.

Why It Is Important?

With the rise of digital technology, the ability to collect evidence is no longer limited to official sources. **Ordinary citizens can now capture crucial evidence, especially in areas where traditional media and authorities are restricted or controlled**. For example, the armed conflicts in Syria, Palestine, and Ukraine have been and continue to be highly mediated, with online reports containing information related to international crimes and atrocities. Some of this information has significant evidentiary value. As a result, UGE becomes a valuable resource for the media, civil society organizations (CSOs), and law enforcement agencies, while also **highlighting the possibility of creating a more inclusive and effective international criminal justice system**.

However, UGE presents several **opportunities and challenges** for the international criminal justice system. On the opportunity side, digital content is **easily accessible**, even in closed societies and hard-to-reach places, providing insights into the acts and intent of perpetrators. The use of UGE can reduce the costs of criminal justice systems, allowing for **time and cost-efficient decision-making**. Furthermore, UGE broadens the scope of justice by including the perspectives and experiences of a wider range of individuals, ensuring that **justice is grassroots-driven**. However, there are significant challenges as well. The sheer volume of digital evidence can be overwhelming for investigation teams, leading to **information overload**. Ensuring the **authenticity and provenance** of UGE is critical, as digital content can be easily manipulated. Additionally, the collection and use of UGE must balance the need for evidence with the vulnerability of international crimes survivors and victims, ensuring **ethical practices**.

The project uses a **multidisciplinary approach**, combining insights from **law and anthropology** to examine how digitalization and democratization affect international criminal justice practices. The project will try to identify gaps and propose best practices based on the **case studies of situations of justice seeking initiatives with the use of UGE on conflicts in Syria, Palestine and Ukraine**. The research involves **legal analysis, interviews and focus groups** concerning such **stakeholders as prosecutors from the ICC, Germany, Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Ukraine, Israel and Poland, as well as CSO and tech companies** involved in these efforts.

What Will Be the Results?

The project aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how digital evidence can be effectively integrated into the international criminal justice system. Here are the expected results:

1. Identifying the **best ways to collect and use UGE**.
2. Creating **robust guidelines** to improve how UGE is used in the criminal justice system.
3. Recommending **technological tools** for verifying and analyzing digital evidence.
4. Developing **strategies for better collaboration** among international courts, national authorities, CSOs, and tech companies.
5. Making **policy recommendations to ensure the ethical and effective use of UGE** in pursuing justice.

By **addressing critical challenges and leveraging new opportunities**, the project aims to provide actionable recommendations for **enhancing justice delivery through the effective use of digital evidence**. The findings will support ongoing debates with practically derived understanding and help develop new standards for collecting and using UGE in the pursuit of justice for victims.