2020 ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment
High-Level Panel
"Improving humanitarian effectiveness through new and emerging technology and innovation: opportunities and challenges"
Wednesday 10 June, 10:00am – 12:30pm (New York time), virtual

Objectives

The global COVID-19 pandemic underscores the importance of deploying innovation and new technology to improve timely and effective response, and to anticipate risks, so as to better prepare for and mitigate them. It underlines the importance of continuing adapt and invest in new solutions to better assist the growing number of people in need of humanitarian assistance.

This panel will discuss concrete ways the humanitarian sector is improving humanitarian effectiveness in a changing landscape through use of new technology and innovation. It will showcase some examples of new technology and innovation being used in humanitarian operations while sharing best practices and lessons learned.

The panel will discuss how the humanitarian sector is positioning itself to work with partners, including national and local actors, and the private sector to identify and maximize further opportunities. It will also identify some risks and challenges associated with new and emerging technologies and how these can be mitigated, including his includes considerations of data protection, and the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

Background and themes

Many of the new and emerging technologies and innovations changing the world today hold enormous potential for improving humanitarian work to address human suffering at a scale not seen in decades. Data and artificial intelligence can be used to predict where needs will arise with greater precision, enabling governments and aid groups to act early, before needs and suffering grow. Drones can improve needs assessment and response planning and help to deliver aid to remote and difficult to access areas. Biometrics can provide digital identity and blockchains can facilitate protected and transparent data sharing and digital cash programming.

At the same time, deploying new and emerging technologies in humanitarian contexts can pose significant challenges and risks. Data protection and privacy breaches can result in abusive surveillance and targeting of individuals. Connectivity or digital literacy gaps can widen the digital and gender divides.

Panelists will share their ideas and experiences for delivering improved humanitarian results by applying new and emerging technologies and techniques, as the global landscape changes during the Covid-19 pandemic. Panelists will also discuss how international norms should be applied to ensure the protection of beneficiaries' safety and rights in the rapidly

evolving fields of technology and innovation in accordance with the humanitarian principles and the "Do No Harm" imperative.

Guiding Questions:

- How can humanitarian actors become more effective in delivery of assistance through new and emerging technologies? What are some of these innovations and how can they be brought to scale and shared with local and national actors and authorities; and regional partners to build capacity and become part of national responses?

- How are humanitarian tools and techniques impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and how are they adapting their responses? What innovative techniques will improve the targeting of assistance and increase the number of lives saved? What are the associated risks?

- How might data and analytics be used to greater effect in early action to limit the impact of disease outbreaks? How can data be used to better target the needs of the most vulnerable?

- What are the impacts, challenges and risks of deploying new and emerging technologies in humanitarian action? What needs to be done to mitigate such risks?

Panel:

Chair:

- H.E. Mr. Omar Hilale, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Morocco and Vice-President of ECOSOC

Moderator:

- Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Acting Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator

Panellists:

- Mr. Fabrizio Hochschild, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Commemoration of the United Nations' 75th Anniversary

- Ms. Valerie Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director, United Nations World Food Programme

- Mr. Balthasar Staehelin, Director of Digital Transformation and Data, International Committee of the Red Cross

- Ms. Adelina Kamal, Executive Director, ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management

- Mr. Patrick Meier, CEO, WeRobotics, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy

- Mr. Raj Kumar, founding President and editor-in-chief of Devex; and Author of "The Business of Changing the World"

- Ms. Sunita Grote, Innovation Fund Manager, UNICEF