

## **2021 Economic and Social Committee Humanitarian Affairs Segment**

### **Improving and Safeguarding the Humanitarian Data Ecosystem**

**OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data, International Organization for Migration, and the  
International Rescue Committee**

**Friday 25 June, 12:00 – 13:30 (Geneva time) – link to join below**

This is one of the virtual side events to be convened on the margins of the ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS), which builds on this year's HAS theme: *“Strengthening humanitarian assistance to face the challenges of 2021 and beyond: mobilizing respect for international humanitarian law, inclusion, gender, innovation and partnerships”*.

#### **Background and objectives of event**

The past decade has brought enormous progress in the use of technology and data to improve humanitarian action. Data and analysis being produced have not only increased in volume but also in quality, accuracy, and interoperability. Significant efforts are also ongoing to ensure the humanitarian data community can become more accountable and responsible.

Despite these improvements, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for more and better data, especially in crisis contexts, and the value of predictive models in informing humanitarian response strategies. As [pilot initiatives around the world](#) have shown, using data and models to trigger anticipatory humanitarian action can be faster and more dignified than traditional humanitarian response. But [realizing the full potential of this approach](#) requires a renewed investment in responsible data sharing infrastructure and improved human capacity. It also requires that humanitarians consistently ensure safe, effective, and responsible data coordination and data governance in the complex ecosystem of humanitarian response operations, which puts the rights and needs of beneficiaries at the center. The humanitarian system must consider who is using data technologies, tools, and guidance, and the impact that data demands have on local and national civil society organizations.

In this ECOSOC HAS side event, representatives from the OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data, the International Organization for Migration, the International Rescue Committee, and Emerging Impact will discuss the opportunities and challenges in improving the global humanitarian data sharing ecosystem, while sharing practical solutions and recommendations for the future of data in the humanitarian space.

While presenting on data gaps, innovations, and investment, special consideration will be paid to responsible data use as the personal data of those living in humanitarian contexts, particularly

protection data, must be collected, analyzed, used, and shared with the utmost respect and highest standards of confidentiality.

### **Discussion points or guiding questions**

- Challenges:
  - Where are humanitarian data gaps most pronounced, and how can these gaps best be addressed?
  - What are the biggest concerns around the use and sharing of data? How has the push for more and better humanitarian data been felt by humanitarian organizations and beneficiaries, and how has it impacted their work and rights?
  - How have local and national NGOs used new technologies, guidance and tools around data? What demands have been placed on local and national NGOs and have they been supported to meet those demands?
  
- Solutions and Recommendations:
  - How can the international community most effectively invest in data collection and data sharing infrastructure?
  - What does data coordination mean and how could it strengthen our collective data responsibility in humanitarian operations on the ground?
  - How can local and national NGOs be empowered to benefit from data collection and data analysis?
  - What tools and practical guidance are available for humanitarians on responsible data handling?
  - What progress is being made at promoting the data skills and capacities of humanitarians, including for local and national NGOs?
  - What progress is being made at promoting responsible use of data?
  
- Next Steps:
  - For both data practitioners and the broader humanitarian community, considering all the progress made on humanitarian data in the past decade, what should be our focus for the next decade?

### **Key concrete action points and recommendations/take away messages**

- Predictive analytics has the potential to transform humanitarian response from a reactionary to an anticipatory system, allowing humanitarian organization to act *before* a crisis to mitigate or avoid an expected shock. However, models are only as good as the data they rely on, and globally we are still missing about 50% of the data needed to respond effectively in countries experiencing humanitarian emergencies.
- Filling gaps in critical data should be a top priority for all humanitarian and development actors. Governments, humanitarian organizations, and regional development banks thus need to invest

in data collection, data-sharing infrastructure, and the people who manage these processes. Likewise, these stakeholders must become more adept at responsibly sharing their data through open data platforms and that maintain rigorous interoperability standards.

- A data coordination function within the humanitarian inter-agency coordination structure is a necessity more than ever before. With the increasing volume of data generated and the use of advanced technology, humanitarian actors are navigating uncharted territory of increasingly complex implication of data collection, use, and analysis to the affected population. A data coordination function will promote responsible, coherent, and inclusive country-level data strategy, cooperation, and systems.
- While acknowledging positive progress in discussions and increased attention given around the role of data in driving forward the medium and longer-term agenda, humanitarian actors must maintain continued commitment and focus in improving data primarily aimed to inform emergency response operations and immediate delivery of assistance to people in need.
- The push for more and better data collection, sharing, analysis and use must include an equally strong push for data responsibility, security and ethics. The highest standards of confidentiality and consent, and to ensure the rights of clients to own and control their own data, can and must be maintained by all actors who work with clients' data, and without which, we put clients and staff at risk.
- To ensure that data protection is a fact, not a buzzword, the humanitarian community must invest in systems that have inter-agency governance, standardization and coordination; data literacy within displaced populations; and strengthened accountability mechanisms across all sectors and areas of expertise.

### **Format of the side event**

This will be a moderated virtual panel discussion followed by questions and comments from participants. Substantial time will be reserved for interactive discussion with the panel.

### **Chair and moderator**

- Sandra Hart, Co-Founder, Emerging Impact

### **Panel composition**

- Annalisa Brusati, Director for Country Support, Violence Prevention and Response Unit, International Rescue Committee
- Kendra Drousseau, Country Director, World Vision Vanuatu
- Nuno Nunes, Global Coordinator for the Displacement Tracking Matrix, International Organization for Migration
- Godfrey Takavarasha, Data Manager, OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data

### **Background Material**

- [The State of Open Humanitarian Data 2021](#)
- [Overview of Data Grids](#)
- [IASC Operational Guidance: Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action](#)
- [Perspectives from IOM-DTM on IDP Data: Recommendations for the Consideration of the High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement](#)
- [Finding a Balance: How to Use Sensitive Data Ethically](#)
- [You Want to Use that Data How? Four Ways to be Responsible with Sensitive Data](#) (video)

### **Connection details to join the event**

To register for the event, please visit [bit.ly/ECOSOCHAS21-data](https://bit.ly/ECOSOCHAS21-data).

### **Contacts**

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