

Data is a critical component of humanitarian response. The management of data relating to crisis contexts, affected people and humanitarian operations allows the humanitarian community to respond more effectively and efficiently. However, as organizations manage increasingly large volumes of data and make use of emerging technologies including artificial intelligence, they also face more complex challenges and risks. OCHA staff must be careful when handling data to avoid placing already vulnerable individuals and communities at further risk and to safeguard trust between affected populations and humanitarian organizations.

In recent years, the sector has seen the development of principles, policies and strategies for data responsibility in humanitarian action. These include system-wide guidance, such as the IASC Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility in Humanitarian Action, as well as global strategies and policies to guide data management within the UN system. OCHA's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan recognizes data responsibility as a key part of delivering on the organization's transformational priorities, and aims to position OCHA as a leader on this issue in the sector.

Despite considerable progress, the implementation of data responsibility in practice is often inconsistent within and across humanitarian response contexts. The OCHA Data Responsibility Guidelines are designed to help bridge these gaps by supporting OCHA staff to apply global frameworks for data responsibility in their day-to-day work.

DEFINING DATA RESPONSIBILITY AND RELATED TERMS

A full list of terms and definitions is available in Annex A. All definitions are aligned with the UN Data protection and privacy policy and the IASC Operational Guidance.

Data responsibility in humanitarian action is the **safe, ethical and effective management of personal and non-personal data for operational response**, in accordance with established frameworks for personal data protection.⁸

- **Safe** | Data management activities ensure the security of data at all times, respect and uphold human rights and other legal obligations, and do not cause harm.
- **Ethical** | Data management activities are aligned with the established frameworks and standards for humanitarian ethics⁹ and data ethics.¹⁰
- **Effective** | Data management activities are well coordinated and achieve the purpose(s) for which they were carried out.

Data responsibility requires principled action at all levels of a humanitarian response. This includes for example actions to ensure data protection and data security, as well as strategies to minimize risks while maximizing benefits in operational data management.

⁸ This includes the Secretary-General's Bulletin on Data Protection and Privacy Policy for the Secretariat of the United Nations, ST/SGB/2024/3 (2024) and other administrative instructions from the UN Secretariat.

⁹ Humanitarian ethics has developed as a principle-based ethics grounded in the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence that guide the provision of humanitarian assistance and protection. These principles and related rules are enshrined in various codes of conduct now widely recognized as the basis for ethical humanitarian practice, including: The Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, including the Core Standards and Protection Principles, the Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, and the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief.

¹⁰ The UN OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data **Guidance Note on Humanitarian Data Ethics** (2019) provides further background information on the relation between humanitarian ethics and data ethics.