DATA TALKS OCTOBER 2017: *DATA PROTECTION AND OPEN DATA*

The second session of the data talks focused on data protection and open data and addressed the interplay between the push for protection and the benefits of openness. With the current UN Secretary-General's push to avoid fragmentation within the UN system and preventing 'silo-thinking', the discussion aims to share expertise and trends across international Geneva.

Ms Yanya Viskovich presented the International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) Handbook on Data Protection in Humanitarian Action, which was published in July 2017 in collaboration with the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Free University of Brussels). She noted that the collection and use of personal data by humanitarian actors should be carried out in accordance with international data protection standards that respect people's privacy and ensure the security of the data, upholding the 'do no harm' principle of humanitarian action. Ms Viskovich emphasised the importance of protecting people's data as well as protecting them physically in humanitarian situations. This was expressly recognised in 2015 in the Resolution on Privacy and International Humanitarian Action at the 37th International Conference of Data Protection and Privacy Commissioners (ICDPPC), which called attention to the risk that humanitarian organisations not benefiting from diplomatic privileges and immunities 'may come under pressure to provide data collected for humanitarian purposes to authorities wishing to use such data for other purposes (for example control of migration flows and the fight against terrorism). The risk of misuse of data may have a serious impact on data protection rights of displaced persons and can be a detriment to their safety, as well as to humanitarian action more generally.'

Building on the discussion launched by the ICDPPC's Resolution, and in answering one of the resolution's aims to meet the demand among humanitarian actors for cooperation to develop guidance on data protection, the Handbook on Data Protection in Humanitarian Action seeks to raise awareness and assist humanitarian organisations to comply with personal data protection standards when carrying out humanitarian activities by providing specific guidance on the interpretation of data protection principles for humanitarian action, particularly as regards new technologies. Ms Viskovich explained that the guidance in the handbook is not intended to replace compliance with applicable laws, or with data protection rules, policies, or procedures adopted by any organisation.

Throughout the discussion that followed, we heard that specific data protection challenges differ for each organisation. For example, the main data protection concern highlighted by the meteorological sector was data integrity. Climate change data is at risk of being manipulated, and the distribution of false data could potentially cause serious harm. It was noted that standardisation bodies might be able to assist data protection efforts. The discussion also addressed the opportunity of engaging the private sector in these discussions, in light of its experience with similar data protection challenges, which could provide valuable insights.
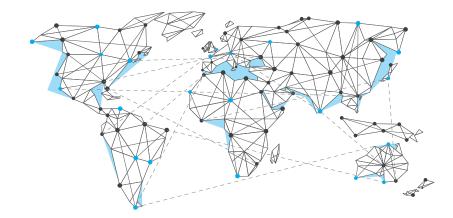
Mr Javier Teran, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), focused on the advantages and challenges of open data and data sharing. He presented OCHA's Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX), launched in 2014, which aims at making humanitarian data easy to find and use for analysis. The HDX's potential is also increased during crises, such as the 2014 Ebola outbreak and the 2015 Nepal earthquake, when data was quickly made available in usable formats and used by many humanitarian partners and policy makers. While providing the possibility for actors to access data sets from different organisations, OCHA promotes the 'culture of being responsible when sharing data', aiming to enhance the accountability of the actors uploading relevant information on its platform.

Yet, the concept of open data must be balanced with data protection, and not all forms of data should be made publicly available. On the HDX, data can be shared in three forms: public, private (accessible only by members of an organisation), and upon request, according to the sensitivity of the data provided. To address the opportunities and challenges of open and shared data, OCHA recently launched the Centre for Humanitarian Data in The Hague. Its vision is to create a future where all people involved in a humanitarian response have the data they need to make responsible and informed decisions. The focus areas of the centre are data services, data policy, data literacy, and community engagement.

To incentivise organisations to share their data on the HDX, OCHA offers a variety of data services, ranging from data standardisation to data visualisation, which in turn can be a powerful tool for storytelling. Throughout the discussion, participants added that joint efforts in sharing data – although difficult to manage – are

an essential component for success, although ensuring the necessary data protection safeguards is paramount. Important issues to consider are related to the ownership and management of data once it has been shared.

Mr Giacomo Mazzone, European Broadcasting Union (EBU), presented the new Big Data Initiative (BDI) launched by the EBU. He specified that with the shift to broadband connections, each user's access to content can be tracked while storing relevant personal data.

This collection of sensitive information represents a 'big social responsibility problem'. He explained that the BDI is currently working on four main workflows: audience measurement, media content strategy, data trust, and a strategy for preparing recommendations. The main aim is to address these issues in compliance with European regulations on privacy, big data, and cloud computing.