Digital innovations in humanitarian action: opportunities and challenges

Credits	2 credits ECTS
Dates	16 – 27 October 2023
Format	Online (combination of self-study time and live sessions). Live sessions are mandatory and take place 2-3 times a week, usually in early afternoon CET ***Online course requires 20-25 hours of dedicated work per week. We recommend that participants allow at least 50% of their time for the course and adapt their professional activity accordingly.***
Language	English
Fees	CHF 1'700
Course Director	Dr. Valerie Gorin – valerie.gorin@unige.ch

Course overview

Short description

Since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the use of digital innovations and new technologies is increasing to provide humanitarian assistance. While it shows the prevalence of data revolution in the aid sector, the relation of humanitarian organisations to innovations is not unprecedented. The growing involvement of tech companies in global philanthropy has only accelerated this 'innovation turn'. From crowd-sourced data used in crisis mapping to the expansion of drones to facilitate relief distribution, humanitarian innovations capture a large diversity of digital devices meant to improve needs assessments, relief and protection during disasters, conflicts and migration. Exploring the entanglements between innovation labs, start-ups and humanitarian governance, this course analyses opportunities and challenges of such innovations beyond tech utopia, to consider ethical as well as privacy and protection issues.

Objectives of the course

At the end of the course, you will be able to:

- to understand the past and current relation of the aid sector with innovations
- to assess the main ideologies that inform the innovation turn in the aid sector and the entanglements between humanitarian governance and tech philanthropy
- to discuss the involvement of the private sector through innovations labs where projects are conceived and implemented
- to question data extraction, management, and protection by humanitarian organisations
- to differentiate potential uses and sectors for digital innovations, from health to information, supply chain, cash assistance, biometrics
- to critically examine sociopolitical, ethical and technological challenges and the mitigation of digital risks

Workload

Around 20-25 hours of work each week, including:

1. Asynchronous self-study activities (such as case studies, videos, recorded slideshows, readings, etc.)
2. Synchronous live sessions

Structure of the course

- Techno-optimism: Rethinking innovation in the aid sector
- From techno-capitalism to techno-colonialism: governing through technologies
- Digital risks: ethics, privacy and data protection
- Sector 1: Biometrics
- Sector 2: Drones
- Sector 3: new information technologies
- Sector 4: Blockchains and bitcoins

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Prerequisites

Audience

- Professionals in the humanitarian, development or social sector looking to develop their competencies in digital and new technologies
- Professionals from any other sectors (private, academic, etc) who wish to increase their understanding of the use of digital innovations in humanitarian contexts
- Graduate students with relevant volunteer or intern experience, looking to undertake a postgraduate course with a view to entering the humanitarian sector

Distance Learning

- Broadband/high speed connection - 2.5 Mbps minimum.
- Please note that most weekly content and activities is accessible via phone, but a PC/laptop/tablet is preferred
- microphone and webcam

Admission requirements

1. a university qualification (Bachelor's degree or equivalent)
2. at least three years of relevant professional experience
3. excellent command of English
4. motivation working in the humanitarian sector