GENEVA CENTRE OF
HUMANITARIAN STUDIES

CENTRE D'ÉTUDES
HUMANITAIRES GENÈVE

Digital innovations in humanitarian action: opportunities and challenges

Credits	2 credits ECTS
Dates	2 options: **Option 1:** 14-25 October 2024 **Option 2:** 9-20 June 2025
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	• **Full price**: CHF 1'700 • **Partner rate (MSF, ICRC)**: CHF 1'360 (20% discount) • **Special Rate for Government and NGO/CBO Staff**: CHF 850. Available exclusively to staff from local and national NGOs, CBOs, and government employees in low/middle-income countries. Proof of local employment and salary required.
Course director	Dr. Valerie Gorin – valerie.gorin@unige.ch

Course overview

Short description

Since the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the use of digital innovations has increasingly reshaped humanitarian assistance – in a supposedly faster and more efficient way. The data revolution is no longer a new topic: from crowd-sourced data used in crisis mapping to biometric technology involved in cash transfers, the expansion of drones to facilitate relief distribution or AI predictive analytics, humanitarian innovations capture a large diversity of digital devices. This course questions the entanglements between innovation labs, start-ups and humanitarian governance within two perspectives. The first part approaches the opportunities offered by this digital transformation of the aid sector by exploring the factors driving humanitarian innovation and the role of tech entrepreneurs. The second part addresses the challenges that come with a responsible and safe use of digital innovations, to consider ethical limitations and the mitigation of risks.

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 with tech philanthropy
- to discuss cooperation and collaboration with the private sector and the humanitarian innovations labs where projects are conceived and implemented
- to differentiate potential uses and sectors for digital innovations, from health to information, management, cash assistance, disaster risk reduction, anticipatory action
- to question data extraction, management, and protection by humanitarian organisations
- 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 (2-3 times per week)

Structure of the course

- Day 1: Rethinking innovation in the aid sector
- Days 2-3: The role of the private sector: from techno-capitalism to techno-colonialism
- Days 4-5: Tech for good: beyond tech solutionism
- Days 6-7: Digital gaps and rights among affected populations
- Day 8. Digital efficiency or surveillance? Data uses and digital relationships
- Days 9-10: Do no digital harm: data protection, security and ethics

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 a PC/laptop/tablet is preferred to access most weekly content and activities
- 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