

THE WORKING DRAFT OF THE OCHA DATA RESPONSIBILITY GUIDELINES



OCHA

centre for humdata

As OCHA and its partners process increasingly large volumes of data, we also face more complex challenges related to assessing and managing data risk. Many organizations have developed policies focused on personal data, but guidance on the management of other forms of sensitive data has been lacking. **The Working Draft of the OCHA Data Responsibility Guidelines** (‘the Guidelines’) aim to help fill this gap.

The Guidelines focus on all humanitarian data managed by OCHA. They are intended for OCHA staff and supporting personnel who are authorized to manage humanitarian data and related resources at the country, regional, and global levels.

Data responsibility entails a set of principles, processes and tools that support the safe, ethical and effective management of data in humanitarian response. The Guidelines are informed by an internal staff survey, interviews with colleagues from across OCHA, field and academic research, and a close review of existing UN and partner guidance.

The Guidelines contain the following components:

- Principles for responsible management of sensitive non-personal data;
- Practical guidance in the form of key actions and related templates (such as Information Sharing Protocols and a Data Responsibility Plan) for use by OCHA staff across the data management process;
- Instructions for the responsible use of specific tools frequently used across OCHA for data transfers, storage and other purposes, and;
- An accountability structure for the implementation of the Guidelines.



STEPS IN THE DATA MANAGEMENT PROCESS

The Guidelines define **sensitive data** as data that, if disclosed or accessed without proper authorization, is likely to cause:

- **harm to any person** (such as sanctions, discrimination, and security threats), including the source of the information or other identifiable persons or groups; or
- **a negative impact on an organization’s capacity** to carry out its activities or on public perceptions of that organization. Data from these different categories will have varying levels of sensitivity depending on the context.

One of the main objectives of the Guidelines is to help staff better assess and manage the sensitivity of the data they handle in different crisis contexts. Irresponsible or inappropriate processing of data in humanitarian contexts can place already vulnerable people and communities at greater risk of harm. This is of particular concern when humanitarian actors handle sensitive data. While personal data can categorically be considered sensitive, determining the risk of non-personal data is more challenging.

Recognizing this complexity, the Guidelines include an Information and Data Sensitivity Classification model (pictured below) to help colleagues assess and manage sensitivity in a standardized way. This classification draws on a range of existing classifications, including the Secretary-General’s Bulletin on ‘Information Sensitivity, Classification and Handling’.

Information and Data Sensitivity Classification		
Sensitivity	Definition	Information and Data Sensitivity Classification
Low or No	Information or data that, if disclosed or accessed without proper authorization, are unlikely to cause any harm or negative impacts to affected people and/or humanitarian actors. ⁵	Public
Moderate	Information or data that, if disclosed or accessed without proper authorization, are likely to cause minor harm or negative impacts and/or be disadvantageous for affected people and/or humanitarian actors.	Restricted
High	Information or data that, if disclosed or accessed without proper authorization, are likely to cause serious harm or negative impacts to affected people and/or humanitarian actors and/or damage to a response. ⁶	Confidential
Severe	Information or data that, if disclosed or accessed without proper authorization, are likely to cause severe harm or negative impacts and/or damage to affected people and/or humanitarian actors and/or impede the conduct of the work of a response. ⁷	Strictly Confidential

The Working Draft of the Guidelines is **open for feedback** from OCHA colleagues and humanitarian partners. The Centre is working closely with a number of OCHA field offices to refine and test the Guidelines in several country contexts over the next six months. Once adopted, the Guidelines will exist as a living document and will be adjusted in response to technological advances and contextual changes. To learn more, explore the following resources:

- [Working Draft of the OCHA Data Responsibility Guidelines](#)
- [Centre for Humanitarian Data - data policy page](#)
- [Video message from OCHA and ECHO on the importance of data responsibility](#)

For more information, please email centrehumdata@un.org.