

THE HUMANITARIAN DATA CENTER IN THE NETHERLANDS

OVERVIEW

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The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is establishing a global Humanitarian Data Center in the Netherlands. It will be operational by early 2017 for an initial three years. The Center will support OCHA staff and partners in headquarters and the field in line with OCHA's existing mandate.

The mission of the Center is to increase the use and impact of data in the humanitarian sector. The vision is to create a future where all people involved in a humanitarian situation have access to the data they need, when and how they need it, to make responsible and informed decisions.

OBJECTIVES

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The Center will have four objectives:

- Increase the interoperability of humanitarian data through shared standards and integrated systems.
- Increase the trust and cooperation across organizations sharing data in a humanitarian response.
- Increase the capability of people to access and use data in support of humanitarian efforts.
- Engage existing and new partners in data problem-solving and awareness-raising.

PRINCIPLES

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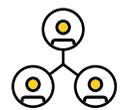
The Center will adhere to the following high-level principles:

HUMAN-CENTERED



We will follow a human-centered design approach to our activities. All user groups will be considered when designing solutions, products and services.

NETWORKED



The Center will not be the center of anything but part of a network of data-focused partners. We will seek expertise across disciplines and industries to ensure that we are understanding problems and solutions from different perspectives.

OPEN



The Center will be open to collaboration with a wide variety of partners, including through co-location where feasible. Software and standards will be open source with all code made available in public repositories.

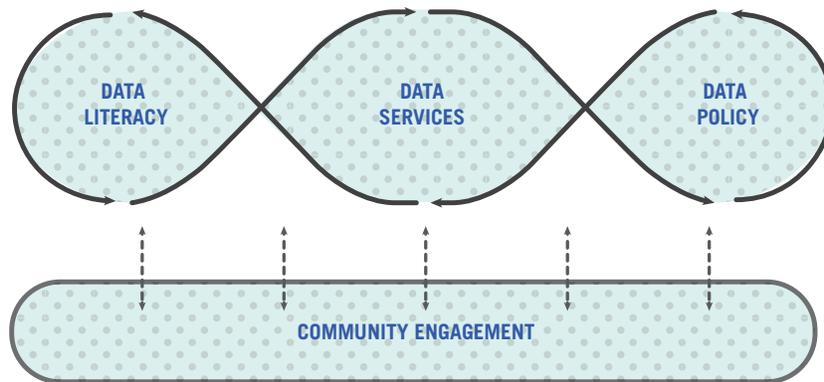
AGILE



The Center will be run with a start-up mindset. We will adapt to demand and new innovations. Projects will be developed in an incremental and iterative manner.

FOCUS AREAS

The Center will focus its activities across four areas - 1) data services; 2) data policy; 3) data literacy; and 4) community engagement. We believe that this mix of activities is mutually reinforcing: data services make data accessible so that more people can use it; data literacy improves how data is used; data policy increases data sharing and ensures data is used responsibly. And because none of this happens without people, community engagement brings more partners into the conversation and ensures a human-centered approach.



DATA SERVICES



Humanitarian partners are collecting and sharing more data than at any other time and this trend will continue as more systems, sensors and people come online. The challenge is to make sure this data can be used at the moment it is needed to inform a decision.

Data services will focus on three interdependent workstreams: a) platform management, including direct management of the Humanitarian Data Exchange(HDX) and support to other platforms; b) data standards, including the Humanitarian Exchange Language (HXL) and common vocabularies; and c) data visualization and reporting.

DATA POLICY



As more data is collected about individuals in the midst of a crisis, the risks associated with that data being mishandled increases. Safeguarding privacy and ensuring sensitive data is handled appropriately are critical issues for the humanitarian community as it becomes more data driven. The Center will support OCHA's own development of a data policy and will also offer support to partners on using data responsibly.

DATA LITERACY

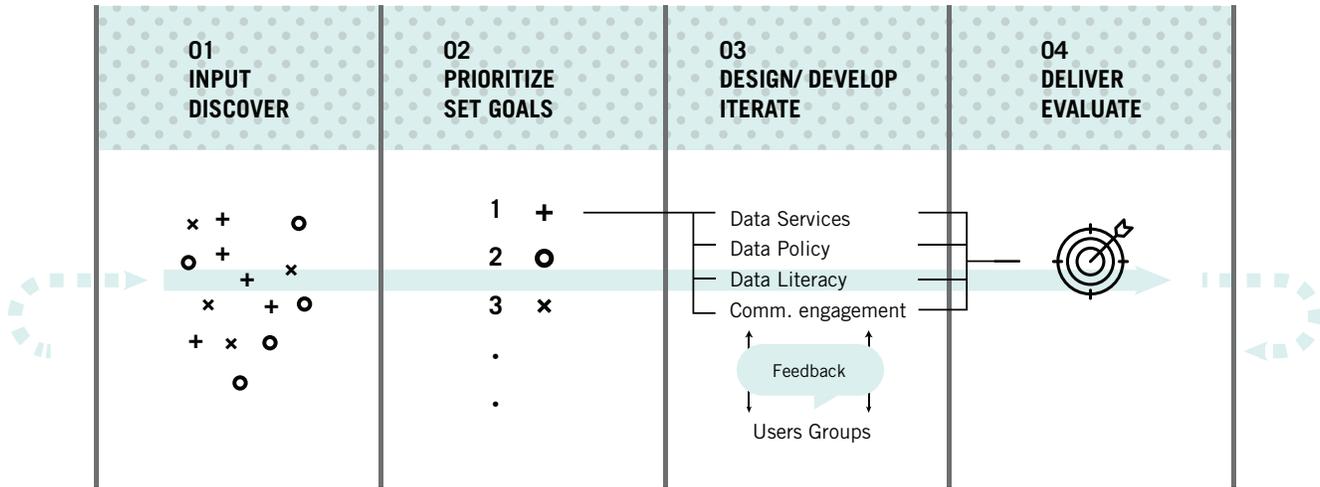


Using data must become a core competence of all humanitarians in the 21st century. This involves increasing capacity to interact with data from the point of collection to using it to create an insight. The Center will work with academic partners to develop training programmes targeted for technical and non-technical users of data. The Center will also manage a data fellows programme that will place data scientists and user experience researchers within OCHA offices and partner organizations to work side-by-side with staff for agreed time periods.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



The Center will further build and engage an active community in support of its mission and objectives. We will do this by a) creating a physical and virtual space for collaboration and communications and b) creating a transparent collaboration model for projects that are supported by distributed user groups (see visual on page 3).



Collaboration model for projects

APPROACH AND TIMELINE

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The Center’s true innovation will be in its operating model. It will be led by OCHA and include several OCHA staff but it will bring together partners from the UN, NGOs, the private sector, academia and governments to work together on common data challenges. The Center will benefit from the wider ecosystem that is being established by the city of The Hague through the launch of its Humanity Hub, a shared space for groups working on data-driven innovation in humanitarian action.

A number of participatory design workshops will be held in the fall of 2016 to inform the plan and to better understand points of collaboration, i.e. through staff secondments, data fellowships, or through activities within the focus areas.

The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs will provide initial support for the Center’s activities. Additional support is welcome through direct funding, in-kind support, personnel, and participation on an advisory board.

CONTACT

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Please send feedback or questions to Sarah Telford (telford@un.org), Chief of OCHA’s Data Services Section and lead for the Humanitarian Data Exchange.