



Global Protection Forum 2025

Concept Note

Session 3: Protection in the digital age: Integrating technology related risks and advancements in protection work

Wednesday 12 November, 14.00-15.30 CET

Lead/Co-Lead: ODI & GPC

Background

Digital technologies are an integral part of contemporary life, including the daily lives of people affected by armed conflict, other situations of violence or other humanitarian settings such as displacement. New and digital technologies are reshaping the conduct of warfare and how protection actors respond to humanitarian emergencies. Digital technologies offer the *potential* for dynamic and inclusive responses, the scaling of community engagement, and the enabling of people's resilience by improving their access to services. At the same time, these changes in society and in the protection operational landscape comes with new or amplified protection risks

This thematic session is the first Global Protection Cluster session that focuses on the range of uses of new and digital technologies, and the role these technologies play in shaping the protection environment and response. Digital risks impact the rights, safety and dignity of people affected by armed conflict and can include specific risks to people in situations of vulnerabilities such as children. The inclusion of digital risks as protection risks in the revised Professional Standards for Protection Work (PSPW 2024, Chapter 8) highlights the importance for protection actors to integrate protection risks related to use of new and digital technologies in protection strategies and responses.

Digital technologies can enable protection operations in ways that can save lives in conflict and disaster. The integration of digital transformation and tools into operational responses has offered greater flexibility and reach for affected communities and frontline responders who are displaced/on the move. This transformation enabled humanitarians to consider how technologies can enhance inclusion, resilience and connectivity.

At the same time, data, electronic devices and digital tools are increasingly used in ways that expose individuals and communities to additional risks and harms. Harmful Information is amplified through digital platforms and applications triggering violence and discrimination. People experience cyber enabled violence and online coercion, including from parties to armed conflict. Digital harms, including image-based abuse, doxing and harassment online enable physical psychological and financial harms to people. Cyber activities as well data and AI driven tools are increasingly integrated in conflict as states and non-state actors leverage new and digital technologies such as drones or digitally enabled information campaigns.

The use of digital technologies is ever embedded in day to day lives, humanitarian action and in the conduct and behaviour of parties to armed conflict, and other emerging actors such as cyber actors or tech-companies. It is imperative that protection actors integrate digital risks in their strategies and that approaches are adapted to meet these rapidly changing realities.

Objective

This thematic session will explore opportunities and threats enabled by new and digital technologies in protection operations. The panellists will discuss important adaptations for protection actors to consider. The session will provide listeners with an introduction to digital risks as protection risks and encourage listeners to understand digital technologies, reflect on digital risks and integrate these considerations in their work, so they can achieve protection outcomes and prevent unintended harm to people they serve.

Note to panelists

The session aims to provide audience members with a diverse overview of digital technologies and tools of relevance in humanitarian settings and protection responses. Interventions reflect the different digital tools and use to consider their related risks and harms. This session encourages panelists to consider digital technologies as having a high influence on the protection environment and promotes a reflective view of digital technologies that promote protection outcomes and Do No Harm.

Guiding issues

This thematic session, focusing on technology and protection, will consider

- Digital technologies as an enabler of protection responses, reflecting on changes to community led responses, community resilience and national response capacity.
- Reflection on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the required safeguards and policies to responsible use by humanitarian actors.
- Digital risks and related harms to and consequences for people in armed conflict.
- New technologies and how their adoption is changing armed conflict and humanitarian access.

Agenda

Time	Session Components
14.00 – 14.10	Opening Remarks and Introduction of the panellists
14.10 – 14.15	Introducing digital risks as protection risks
14.15 – 14.35	Digital technologies as an enabler of humanitarian action
14.35 – 14.50	Artificial Intelligence: reflections on ethical and principled adoption
14.50 – 15.15	Digital risks and humanitarian consequences
15.15 – 15.25	A reflection on protection action in the digital age
15.25 – 15.30	Closing Remarks