



IFRC Data and Digital Week

2021

IFRC Data and Digital Week
 – A connected global network transforming via digital and data activities for humanitarian response.

Over the duration of **5 days** we witnessed:

4,000

Registrations

131

Countries

137

Sessions

Up to

119

Attendees

5

Regions

REGISTRATIONS

4,000 Registrations

Thousands of active participants

131 countries registered

SESSION BREAKDOWN

137 total sessions

Almost 100 Sessions were led by a National Society

An average of **29 people** per session

TOP 3 SESSIONS ATTENDED

119 Americas *De lo presencial a lo virtual: Experiencias en América, retos y oportunidades*

102 IM and Data Processes for the biggest Cash Programme in the World (ESSN)

83 10 steps you need to take to move your training online

LANGUAGE BREAKDOWN

Sessions were delivered across **5 languages**, Arabic, Spanish, French, Turkish, English

118 Sessions were run in **English**, **28** in **Spanish**, **4** in **French**, **6** in **Arabic**

18 Sessions were run in **two or more** languages

SESSIONS PER DAY

19 Monday

26 Tuesday

38 **Wednesday** – Highest day

35 Thursday

19 Friday

137 **Total**

BREAKDOWN BY SESSION TYPE

29 "Workshops"

25 "Round-tables"

44 "Demos"

14 "Keynotes"

6 "Games/challenges"

16 "Informal meetups"

3 "Other" session types

89 Sessions with "open access"

SESSION PLATFORM BREAKDOWN (ZOOM®, TEAMS®, GOOGLE®)

64% of sessions held on **Zoom®**

31% of sessions held on **Teams®**

5% of sessions held on "other" types of platforms (**Google®, Meet®, Blue Jeans®, Webex®, etc**)

38

Highest amount of sessions

An average of

25

Sessions per day

89

"Open Access" sessions

64%

Used Zoom®

The first ever movement-wide data and digital venue for, and by National Societies

The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) hosted the first ever Data & Digital week from the 19th until the 23rd April 2021. Around 4,000 staff and volunteers from the Red Cross Red Crescent network gathered online to share, learn, and discuss data and digital innovations, initiatives and ideas.

Our Data & Digital Week aimed to help National Societies (NS) connect with each other, and the wider network, and to learn from each other's Digital Transformation efforts. The event hoped to encourage staff and volunteers across all RCRC to learn more about data and digital and how it applies to their workspaces.

There were over 130 sessions in several languages, hosted by National Societies, IFRC, ICRC and IFRC reference centres. Almost 100 sessions were hosted by National Societies. Others were hosted by IFRC, International Committee of the Red Cross, reference centers and partners, who shared sessions highlighting points of collaboration. Partners such as Accenture, DNV, Facebook, GSMA, Nasa, Nesta UK, Twilio, and Microsoft joined sessions to highlight points of collaboration now and in the future.

Session topics ranged from artificial intelligence and mobile data collection to digital volunteering and community engagement. On average, Data & Digital week sessions had an audience of around 30 people, while some workshops were smaller and informal, other sessions reached over 100 participants. There was also a Think Tank held for National Society senior leaders on how to accelerate digital transformation attended by approximately 50 leaders from around the network.

Our Data & Digital Week was a collective network effort of digital and data active ambassadors around the world sharing their examples of data and digital activities/products/services for humanitarian response. The opportunity to learn and share was paramount to the spirit of the event. We posited – **What if we hosted a 'do-it-yourself' network event on a low budget, would it be**

of value to participants? The response was overwhelming with sessions from every region of the RCRC, ICRC and IFRC network.

We wrote last year about what [we've learned about digital transformation](#) from the Think Tank Series as well as from [Climate:Red virtual summit](#). DDW gives us a chance to reflect on how we've progressed and how to keep transforming with the network. Some main themes out of the week that we discovered are below.

Translation and interpretation connects. Prioritizing inclusive events by way of support and budget for translation/interpretation is essential to connecting the network and to ensuring we can all capitalise on the insights and expertise developed around the world in this network. Given that travel is reduced or impossible during covid, digital transformation (aka online events) provides 'new ways of working' via a 'distributed network' and 'strong local actors' on our humanitarian impact. [See a previous post about Inclusive events.](#)

Connectivity means connection: Whether it is internet access, mobile/digital tools or electricity, without connectivity and access, we are not yet inclusive in our digital events. One volunteer wrote and asked if we were providing 'internet data bundles' for participants. Brilliant. Add to that – we had many participants having trouble consistently connecting to events. Future virtual events may well benefit from some budget allocation to support connectivity for some National Society members.

Colombia Red Cross's session mentioned: "Connectivity is not the same all across the country. Costs are high, incurs extra costs that can't be met for the NS. Needs improvement." Some National Societies from lower income regions also noted consistent challenges such as Internet connectivity with the opportunity to use an sms platform as a data source, concerns about how a circle of trust can be kept digitally in communities and, lastly, how to verify and keep the information flowing in a timely way.

Transforming our activities and events means addressing these challenges in creative ways.

The journey to digital savviness is ongoing. From demos to tools, there was no shortage of efforts to bring a compelling virtual session. Some folks used

Mentimeter, Miro, videos, games, art and even a participatory drawing class. Interactive and participatory design was a methodology used for about 20 events, including those for the Data Playbook v.1 and Virtual Session Labs. Interactive participatory design can work, but it still needs lots of planning, facilitation, and socialization. There were conversations, prototypes and presentations. People always left time for questions and were mindful of digital fatigue.

On the other hand, there were clearly digital event literacy needs demonstrated in the various sessions. This is ok! While the past year has digitally transformed some staff and volunteers, it will be a long road to be more digitally savvy. It takes practice and training. Before the event, we held host session clinics (with over 50 people joining) to help people with ideas for running effective online sessions. The Spanish Red Cross and Solferino Academy also gathered input for an upcoming Virtual Session Handbook to be published soon.

Overall, the National Societies who have undergone a digital transformation journey have stated that it has allowed them to have a higher acceptance of digital solutions internally and among beneficiaries, and led to the improvement of data systems to reach more humanitarian assistance in a more efficient and sustainable way.

Early effectiveness and success is beginning to show in various programs where the impact is felt and measured. In Bulgaria for example, an app was piloted for saving the lives of people in mountains, letting automatic sharing of GPS coordinates. In Lebanon, work has been done to connect with the diaspora in order to support the work of the national society and plan different interventions especially with the strenuous economic crisis. In Burundi, long term investment in technology infrastructure and leadership support for digital transformation, provided a pathway for success and a learning culture (e.g. [many staff completing a Microsoft Excel training program](#)).

Digital mentorship comes in many forms: Pilots, programs, products and services – we heard about many across languages, time zones and sectors. On a meta level, the event provided examples of success and network connections for project learning across NS. However, it also demonstrated some potential gaps or duplication in the RCRC movement. (Eg. volunteer management systems, data tools/projects/templates.) The Digital Transformation Steering Committee is undertaking digital services mapping on this, which might help

us reflect as a network on how we shift. During DDW, it was amazing to observe people connecting and exploring how they might learn and share their experiences, or, even, build on each other's collective effort. Many participants provided feedback and support for products, services and ideas. There were many examples of one NS offering to help another NS with their questions/needs. This type of digital mentorship and competency network is key to the success of digital transformation. How to balance the need to innovate and try new technology while also just doing the basics.

Bangladesh Red Crescent is building custom products/services for vulnerability and 'assets'. Bangladesh, much like PMI, Burundi and Spain all invested in a long term digital transformation plan that includes data management practices and Microsoft products at the core. As PMI indicated: **huge resources needed to onboard branches to new tools, human, financial, time and so on. It's a slow process and can take many years.**

Volunteering

As it relates to volunteers, there was high interest in how digital transformation would be able to positively impact volunteer management in the areas education, communication and innovation. It has also made it much easier for people to join as well as attract new kinds of volunteers. It contributed towards better volunteer retention, accountability, dissemination of policies, rapid assessment and information sharing. The Tanzanian Red Cross for example has been able to digitize the membership and volunteer recruitment, registration, payment of the annual subscriptions, and their system is able to generate the membership cards.

Other impacts have been shared that include the ability to better mobilize volunteer management in the field (via tablet or smartphone), upscaling digital activities in light of mental health challenges, improving humanitarian services, and creating global fundraising platforms that all NS can opt in to and use.

There are investments in multiple platforms and analysis on how to engage volunteers more. There are many opportunities here to share resources and learn-

ing for the benefit of all. A future event focusing on volunteering that includes strong attention to innovation, tech and new approaches may be useful.

Data and Digital week also had a number of staff and volunteers help out to deliver the event. This is a testament to the power of volunteering in a digital age. As more digital events continue, volunteers remain at the heart of all we do.

Data, Information, Knowledge: We like to say “People before data”. It is clear that data can potentially lead to information, knowledge and even decision-making. There were 31 sessions citing every aspect of the data pipeline. Data collection and data processes in highly complex responses require keen attention to data literacy and protection. From AI, to mobile data survey tools to data viz to ethics of data, data literacy, data responsibility to data management to data protection – DDW covered many of the topics. Add to that there were ‘data’ sessions which were really about the humanitarian services that we delivered (re: the 5 global challenges of Strategy 2030). As such, data is part of everyone’s job. **So while the event was about ‘digital ’ and ‘data’ as enablers, the focus was working in a digital age to achieve our humanitarian goals.**

Australian Red Cross’s data science work on fundraising and engagement is ground breaking. Their work with partners is also of note. This deserves a larger conversation on how data and digital can help shift business models. And, the big question – can it be replicated elsewhere? The UK and US also have major fundraising work. But what about smaller NS – mobile fundraising seems like a huge opportunity.

There is a challenge to find a better way to generate interest in data, and to maintain the interest of your audience while speaking about data. For example, at the COP in Marrakesh, they managed to use art as a way to communicate about climate change data and forecast-based financing. Some examples of art pieces included showing temperature changes as well as showing global mean temperatures. The Climate Centre hosted sessions to share how to connect data use and literacy with a sense of play with new methods like art or cartoons.

During the entire week, we uncovered a lot of insights around visualization. Attendees, presenters, hosts and participants were very interested in the topic of data visualization and in particular, exploring different tools (other than Power BI and Tableau) to navigate challenging contexts and information. (e.g. mind

mapping graphs). There is also an interest in data management practices and how to use data visualization in humanitarian settings and for decision-making, as well as an interest in the visual/artistic element of data visualization and how to properly engage in digital storytelling.

Both the sharing of, and the sustainment of information (and related experiences) were high on NS priority and interest lists. **National societies envisioned a future state of having data teams, embedded partner support, brand new service offerings – as well as integration of data into services of national societies.**

Mobile is everything: Much like the terms 'digital' and 'data', 'mobile' are simply the way we work now. Mobile first is key for any product or service. And, most of all, for community engagement and localization. From the [open source session with OpenDataKit co-creator Yaw Anokwa](#), to the Twilio keynote, we heard time and time again how important it is to have these tools and services be tailored by our humanitarian needs and values. Mobile innovation may be easier to develop with partners and examples like chatbots (e.g. Kazakhstan).

Your Digital Transformation – people, tools and processes

National Societies around the world were especially keen on how digital transformation could impact their day to day operations, and how it could enhance the activities in which they were already doing. There was high interest in the ability to access real time monitoring of the NS activities such as institutional info, financial info and so on (dashboard). This was especially important to assist in faster decision making.

Driving a successful digital transformation involves picking the right impact patterns for your initiative. This means a few things:

- 1 **Identifying external solutions that have been developed by other partners (and learning from them)**

- 2 **Building partnerships with partners who have necessary facilities or tools: opening new opportunities.**
- 3 **Creating a volunteer base, and investing before an emergency with volunteers to be data ready.**
- 4 **Partnering with universities**

If your organization is not sure where to begin, the NS teams in both Columbia and in Ecuador provided some incredible insights into the factors that contributed towards their digital transformation success. For example, the Columbian NS decided early on to integrate their efforts into the NS strategic framework 2021 – 2025, starting with the transformations in Strategy 2030.

In Ecuador, they took the approach of using design thinking to identify if an idea will work. They focused first on helping people understand the problem, in order to generate ideas. From there, they built out innovation systems that addressed different components. For example, they designed boot camps for volunteers to help develop their own ideas. They also create co-working spaces where there's support to going from an idea to a sustainable project

Challenges and opportunities

Digital and data driven activities don't come without risks, ethical dilemmas and protection issues. Fortunately there were discussions like [Digital Dilemmas](#) via ICRC, "Can We Talk About Humanitarian Accountability in Tech?" via American Red Cross and "Developing a Data Protection Policy: Lessons from Kenya RC" with 510 (an initiative of Netherlands Red Cross.) We have just scratched the potential learning and sharing on these essential topics such as [Innovation benefits and risks: balancing the aspects.](#)

Broadly speaking, various NS's have experienced other challenges, such as integrating their existing systems to new needs – requiring significant investment and a total overhaul of systems. There are requirements to think through such as training costs, IT needs and other hidden infrastructure challenges. Norway

RC specifically has come up against challenges with getting different systems to work together.

One participant mentioned that there is a barrier for innovation due to strict IT practices and sought guidance on how to transform their organization. Some participants mentioned that learning was not prioritized. They expressed hope to have future events that allowed them to connect and learn with NS and RCRC. Peer to Peer Learning and networking in RCRC can make a huge difference in the effectiveness and connectedness of our work. Some organizations have learning weeks. While Data and Digital Week was one topic, there is something to be said about a large organizational push to support transformation. The potential for skill-sharing and upskilling across the network is significant. For example, the IFRC Communications department is running digital communications skillshares on Youtube, LinkedIn, etc.

In the case of integrating intelligent robotics and AI into the workforce, there lies a deeper unresolved challenge around culture, regulations and ethics. Specifically, there is a fear of employee privacy, fear of job replacement, unproven claims of effectiveness, violation of regulations, lack of regulations, unwarranted surveillance, professional ethics and other concerns in the workplace.

Technology itself will not solve all of an organization's challenges. While it is a major component, it's important to put technology at the service of the people; technology is one part but not everything . It is possible to facilitate exchange of experience and resources across the network and with external partners with limited resources available. This requires full-time and concentrated teamwork by a dedicated group of people.

New ways of working

DDW demonstrated “new ways of working” together as a network. And, it helped us support our collective Strategy 2030 goals . Transformation means ensuring that there is **internal Alignment and agreement** on the issues which are being solved. Specifically, audiences and presenters stated that it was critical to ensure having full buy-in internally from all stakeholders and participants to do the project. For all groups throughout the week, this insight appeared to

be the most obvious but also the largest to overcome, as there are often conflicting agendas and priorities within an organization, which are often a deterrent to the success of the digital transformation project.

What is our understanding and approach of **working together – both culturally and organizationally**. It became clear during the week that organizational issues are huge and one of the greatest challenges to digital transformation success.

1 Competency Networks aka Communities of Practice

Convening is our role: Data and Digital Week provided a small window into some staff and volunteers who have access and were keen to learn and share on this topic. This leads to the larger quandary: **how will IFRC and the RCRC transform to truly engage and connect such a vast audience of 13.7 million volunteers and half a million staff?** Other digital events reach 40,000 and more. Baby steps are needed to get there, but this event demonstrates how we might need to further engage the network using digital tools and practices.

2 Connect

To facilitate and encourage peer-to-peer learning beyond timezones, session recordings are already being made available for everyone to watch. [Enjoy the Data and Digital recording playlist](#).

We'd love to hear your thoughts on DDW and to explore how we might build on network momentum to realize the goals of Strategy 2030. Get in touch solferino.academy@ifrc.org.

And, to get in touch with the latest and greatest of digital transformation activities, send an email with the subject line "Connect to DT" to ian.odonnell@ifrc.org. We are happy to add you to the mailing list and/or the MS Teams network.



IFRC's Data and Digital Week - 2021