



Geneva Centre for education and research  
in humanitarian action

Centre d'enseignement et de recherche  
en Action Humanitaire de Genève



HUMANITARIAN  
ENCYCLOPEDIA

## Annual report 2019

### I. Introduction and highlights

In 2019, the Humanitarian Encyclopedia entered a new phase and began to implement the vision laid down in 2018. The main aspects of that vision were: defining humanitarian actors as the primary users of the HE, selection of English as the first language, and decision on the [129 concepts and associated concepts](#) that will constitute the HE.

[Prof. Karl Blanchet](#), as designated director in October, assumed the direction of the HE project. He took over from Prof. Doris Schopper the position of Director of the Geneva Centre for Research and Education in Humanitarian Action (hereafter, the Center) in December. Following his first meeting with the Advisory Board, Prof. Blanchet reviewed the HE concept.

The revised HE concept stresses the collaborative approach of the HE and its platform will provide 1) concept entries, 2) discussion forum for concepts (without entries), 3) humanitarian organisation database, and 4) concept references.

### II. Activities to develop the HE

#### Construction of the Corpus

For better comprehension, using linguistic analysis can enhance the concept explanations. The analysis is based on a corpus built from documents issued by key stakeholders in the humanitarian sector. The corpus was completed in mid-2019, with the inclusion of over 5,000 relevant documents – 311 general documents,

552 strategic documents, and 4,331 activity reports. It consists of 71 million words.

[Associated researchers](#) at the University of Groningen, University of Granada, and University of Geneva have begun to analyse the corpus.

The elements observed through the linguistic analysis include existing concept definitions, the frequency of use, the distribution and the use of the term in context, associated concepts and possible nuances of meaning. It also offers some insights into observable differences in ways organisations use the same concept.

#### Research for concept entries

Expert authors from the Scientific Committee use the linguistic analysis as a reference to help them explain the concept in the humanitarian context. In 2019, experts committed to producing the first set of concept explanations: 'accountability', 'capacity' and 'capacity building', 'climate change', 'development', 'dignity', 'evidence', 'forced displacement', 'independence', 'localisation', 'neutrality' and 'impartiality', 'NGO', 'resilience', and 'vulnerability'.

By the end of 2019, the two draft concept explanations were complete: 'evidence' and 'dignity', with the rest due in early 2020. These pilot concept explanations provide a solid basis from which to refine and scale-up the drafting process in 2020-22 to reach the target.

#### Revamped HE Website

The [Humanitarian Encyclopedia's website](#) was revamped in June 2019. This new version provides spaces for updates and hosting the [humanitarian organisations database](#) (HOD), and

other useful [information resources](#) for humanitarian actors.

### **Humanitarian organisations database online**

In addition to concept entries, the HE provides the HOD, with information of over 2'500 humanitarian organisations, for a better comprehension of the humanitarian 'ecosystems' at multiple levels, and the diversity of actors. In 2019, ongoing work of contacting organisations in the database began, to ensure their information is up to date, collect feedback and encourage their interaction with the database.

### **Development of the HE online platform**

In autumn 2019, the University of Geneva (UNIGE) – within their 'digital humanities' – started supporting the HE online platform. UNIGE had developed the 'core' of the platform allowing capturing a variety of research data related to concept analysis and the HOD. This list of core elements had to be reviewed, following the revisited HE concept. The detailed structure and elements of the platform (ontology) are being defined in 2020.

### **III. Governance**

ACAPS, InterAction, and WFP joined the Advisory Board of the Humanitarian Encyclopedia project. The [Advisory Board](#) comprises 21 humanitarian organisations operating in different levels and from all regions. Each organisation of the Advisory Board contributes their expertise to the overall development of the Humanitarian Encyclopedia. They also ensure that it is grounded in the reality of institutional and operational challenges.

On 2 December, the Advisory Board had its fourth meeting. The Board agreed on the broad strategic direction presented in the knowledge management strategy, and the need to review the HOD, and the overall vision of the Humanitarian Encyclopedia. The knowledge management strategy states ways that the three key HE outputs – the 129 concepts, HOD, and a concept reference collection – can sustain knowledge growth, knowledge connection, and knowledge preservation, and facilitate building a

learning culture in the long run. A plan of action will follow when the platform is taking shape.

Funding: The government of Germany joined those of Switzerland and Luxembourg in supporting the project. In addition, we were successful in securing funding from a Swiss foundation. This indicates donors are convinced by the benefit of the project for the humanitarian sector.

### **IV. External representations**

The HE team was active (with debates and/or exhibitions) in international fora for HE awareness raising and collecting feedback from humanitarian organisations. The Centre presented the HE in:

- The Geneva Triologue (Geneva, 21 January),
- Humanitarian Networks & Partnerships Week (Geneva, 4-8 February),
- Launch of the Research Network on Humanitarian Efforts (Oslo, 7 March),
- The Humanitarian Affairs Segment of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (Geneva, 24-26 June), and
- The 33rd International Red Cross and Red Crescent Conference (Geneva, 9-12 December).



### **V. Acknowledgement**

Prof. Doris Schopper, retired from her Director function in September 2019. Prof. Schopper, who launched the HE in mid-2017, had endeavored in its development and brought support from various actors. We thank Prof. Schopper for her relentless effort and acknowledge with appreciation her contribution to the HE development.