

About the Message Library

People affected by disaster must have access to timely, appropriate and accurate information to help them keep themselves and their families safe and well. They should know their rights, entitlements and be able to give feedback. Responders have a duty to put in place appropriate, systematic and coordinated mechanisms to ensure this.

Our Message Library offers clear, concise and simple messages on a range of topics as templates for you to adapt and use in the context you are working in. These are intended to help you make a quick start on communicating with communities while you further develop mechanisms for on-going dialogue with diverse groups within each community.

For help contextualising and using the messages we recommend you do our e-learning course and read the following technical guidance.

E-learning

<https://kayaconnect.org/course/info.php?id=768>

Guidance

<https://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-guidance/cdac-message-library-user-guidance>

UKRAINE: Guidelines for providing harmonised information in a 'post-key message' context

LAST UPDATE: APRIL 2022

It's more important to coordinate information behind the scenes than to produce a single sector-wide message on any topic

Information sharing should be two-way and dynamic, so key messages are less useful than conversations. This information should be available to all frontline workers so they can provide it to people in real time. Through coordination mechanisms we should share the information we are providing, in part so that colleagues can understand the concerns of different affected people and in part so we can learn from each other and adapt and repurpose content provided by other agencies.

Regularly update service mappings

The number one type of coordinated information we must provide is where and how people can access our and our partners' services, including those in destination countries. Make sure this information is complete. Include at minimum the following information:

- The location of the service
- Who can access the service (and any documents you may need to bring to prove you are eligible)
- Languages in which the service is available, and during which hours each language is available
- The hours of the service, both physically and by phone or message
- Whether and how the service is accessible to people with disabilities
- Whether the service has accommodations for breastfeeding people and people with small children
- Wait times (allowing people to plan)

Gather the best locally created information

Generic messaging is not as useful as already localised information. For example, on the topic of land mines, humanitarians may already have generalised information on landmine safety, but locals may have already gathered information about the specific way landmines are used in the local context and where and how they are found in specific geographical areas. The more specific information is, the more useful and relevant, and local content creators are ideally positioned to make hyperlocal information.

Create messages to inform, not to control

Humanitarian messaging often comes in the form of directives, or dos and don'ts. But we are here to provide assistance, not to perform crowd control. Imperative messages are best left to the government. People deserve to understand all the information and get the opportunity to make an informed choice for themselves.

Include the 'why'

Humanitarian messages often tell people what to do, or inform people of decisions made within the humanitarian system, but they don't always explain why. If we don't tell people why we are asking them to take a certain action, or why we have made a certain decision, they will make their own inferences. These assumptions give rise to rumours and can erode trust between humanitarian actors and the people they aim to support.

Understand the difference between evergreen information and information that quickly expires

When creating content for affected populations, it's a good idea to try to determine how quickly it may go out of date and make plans to ensure it is updated. This can be as simple as setting a calendar alert. Information that goes out of date quickly must be updated quickly, or we risk misinforming people and compromising trust. In a conflict, almost all of our information expires quickly, leaving little room for creating static key messages.

Admit what you don't know

Humanitarian messaging often carries a voice of authority, and as such we are afraid to admit when we don't know, or when the new policy is not yet finalised but is on its way, or while a situation is changing. As a result our messages often gloss over or avoid touching on subjects where we don't yet have all the information. Sometimes we avoid sharing information at all on a particular topic just to hide our uncertainty. This leaves people to guess why we are silent and usually causes people to lose trust in us. Telling people that a new policy is on its way but not finalised, or that a situation is rapidly changing, is a way to level with the people we aim to help and build trust. Keep talking to people even amid uncertainty.

Create content on topics determined by affected populations, not by you

If you are providing information, it should be an act of service, not control. If we aim to help people meet their information needs, then we need to ask them what they need to know. In addition to topics related to physical and emotional safety, which we can assume are of interest to just about everyone, affected populations will identify topics the humanitarian sector misses or might, without the context provided by affected people, deem unimportant. Make sure you have a way to listen to people daily so that you can address their specific concerns.

HELP US KEEP THE LIBRARY UP TO DATE

If you would like to contribute to topic reviews, have found a message that needs greater clarity, or wish to create a new topic, please contact us at info@cdacnetwork.org.