

Module 1

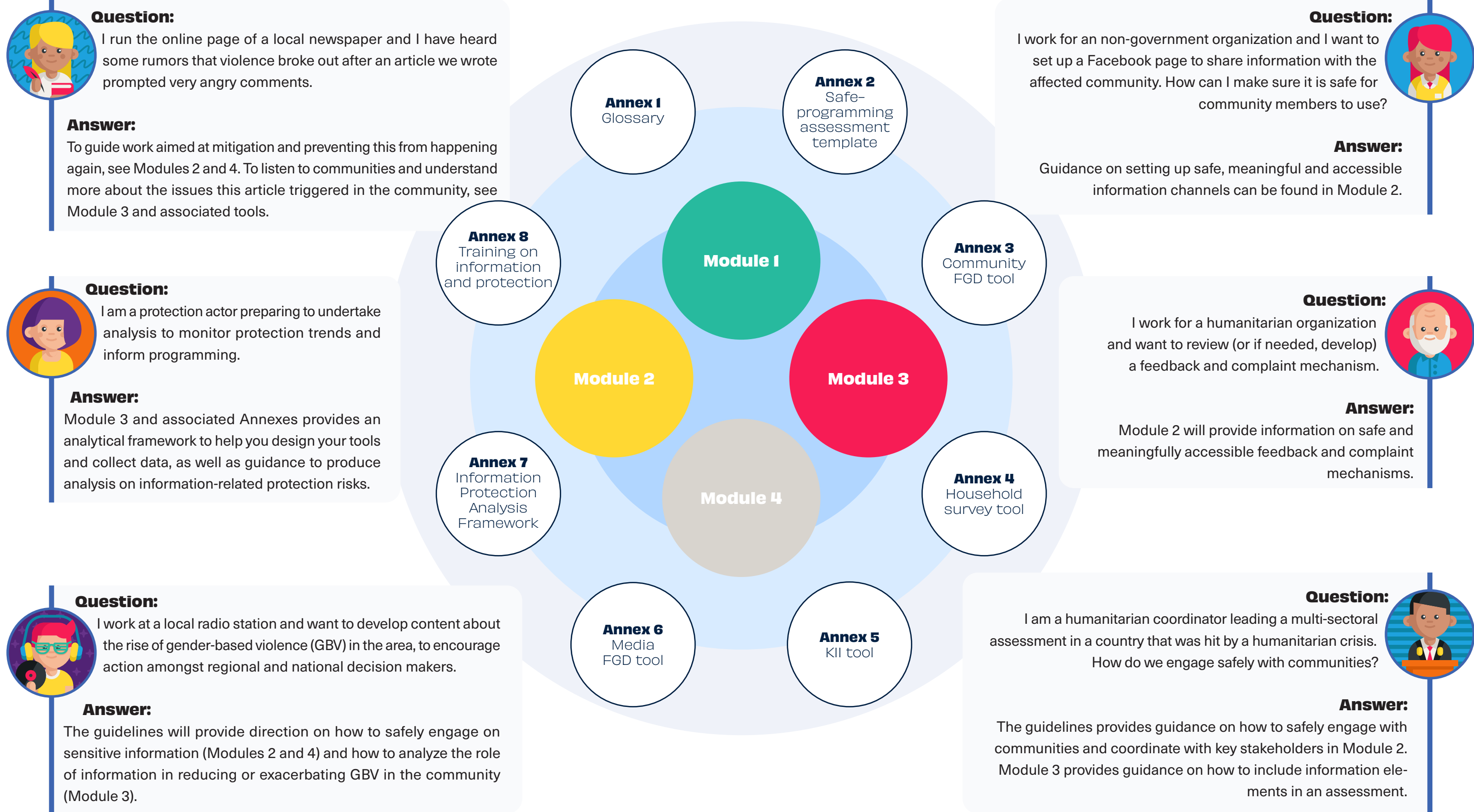
Getting started: who, why and how to be involved in building safer information ecosystems

M E K O X V R U M O R S A F E T Y K
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V U L N E R A B I L I T Y T V S O T
S F X W K P V E C O S Y S T E M N Y
G R T Z H U M A N I T A R I A N I R

Find the words

ACCOUNTABILITY	HUMANITARIAN	RUMORS
ANALYSIS	JOURNALIST	SAFETY
CAPACITY	LITERACY	SOURCE
CHANNEL	MEDIA	THREAT
DIGNITY	PROTECTION	TRUST
DISINFORMATION	RISK	VULNERABILITY
ECOSYSTEM		

Guidelines map: How do I use the *Information and risks: a protection approach to information ecosystems* modules and annexes?



Acknowledgements

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These resources have been created as part of the [Community Voices for Better Protection \(CVBP\)](#) project. This project aims to understand the risks associated with information in humanitarian contexts from the perspective of humanitarian field workers, specialist protection agencies and media and other information providers. Using field work conducted in 2022-23 in three locations – Iraq, Mali and Philippines – these resources work to address a gap in the understanding of, and response to risk and information.

For feedback or suggestions for the improvement of these guidelines, please contact the Internews Humanitarian Team through info@internews.org

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Key terms

A full glossary of terms can found in Annex I.

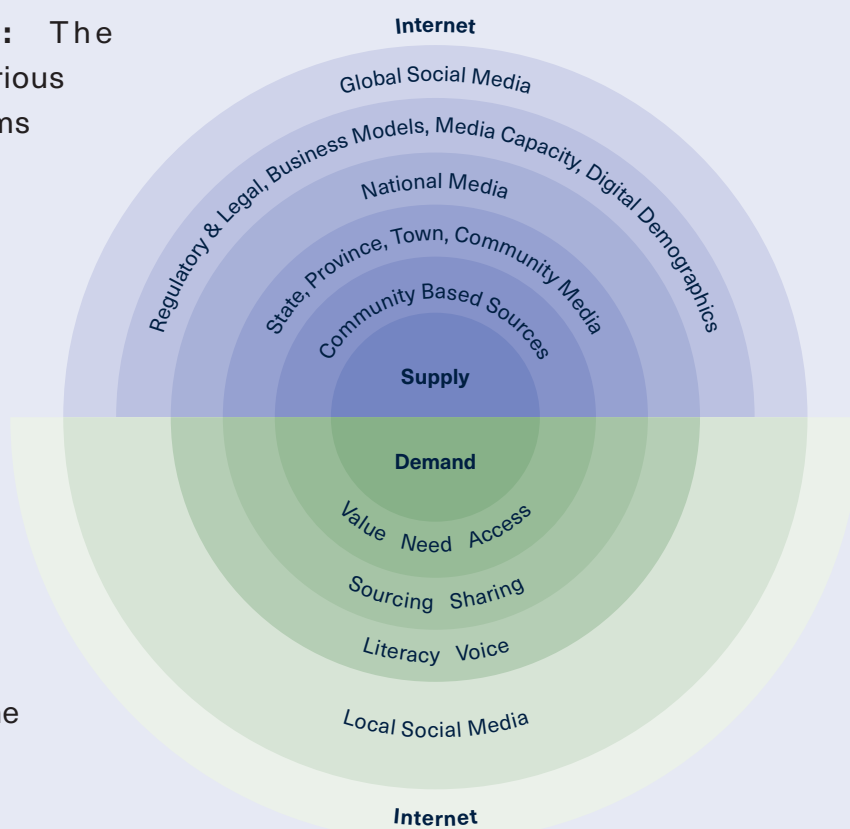
Access to information: The ability to safely create, share, seek and obtain information.

Creating information: Creating information refers to information that is curated to reach an audience beyond the immediate peer of the creator. This can be done by an individual, group, organization or professional content creators such as media outlets. It goes beyond simply sharing raw information, and involves a level of creation, curation or personal input into the form of how the information is presented.

Denial of access to information: When the freedom to create, share, seek, and obtain information is purposely “impaired in such a manner and to such a degree that it hinders the capacity of the affected communities to enjoy basic rights and fulfil their basic needs”¹.

Disinformation: The intentional dissemination of false information to cause harm; it “misleads the population and, as a side effect, interferes with the public’s right to know and the right of individuals to seek, receive, and impart information”².

Information Ecosystem: The interconnected network of various sources, channels, and platforms that facilitate the creation, dissemination, and consumption of information within a particular community, environment, or context. The ecosystem includes traditional media outlets, social media, websites, individuals, organizations, governments and other entities that contribute to the flow of information and influence how it is accessed and understood by the community or audience.



^{1,2} Global Protection Cluster – Definition of protection risks: “Disinformation and Denial of Access to information”

Information-related protection risks: Protection risks that are the consequence of a lack of information, and/or are faced in accessing, creating, or sharing information. A risk is the actual or potential exposure of the affected population to violence, coercion, or deliberate deprivation (it takes into account the threat, the vulnerability of the affected population, and the existing capacities to reduce the likelihood of the threat).

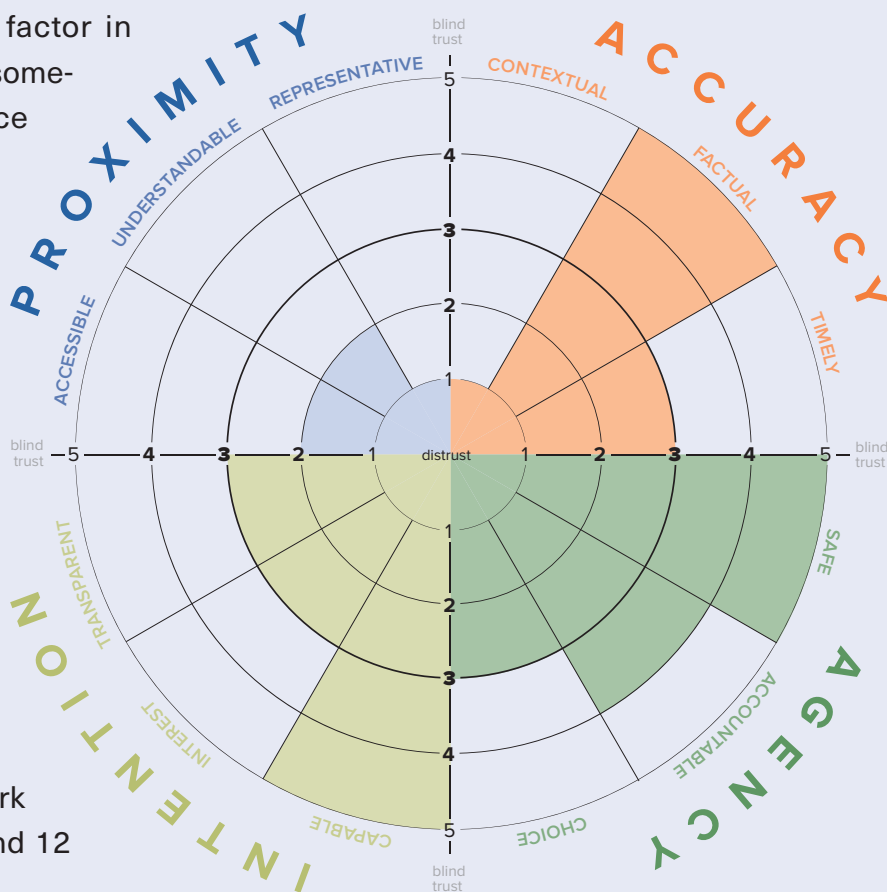
Obtaining information: Obtaining information refers to the act of receiving information (in the form of raw information or curated content) from information sources or providers (see Annex 1 for definitions of these actors), both online and offline, through any channel and in any form (verbal, written, visual, etc.).

Safe access to information: Access to information is safe when a person or group does not face risks while creating, sharing, seeking and obtaining information.

Seeking information: Seeking information refers to the act of seeking information (or content) from an information source/s or provider/s (see below for definitions), both online and offline, through any channel and in any form (verbal, written, visual, etc.).

Sharing information: For the purposes of these guidelines 'sharing information' refers to sharing information without further packaging that information in any way.

Trust: Trust is a fundamental factor in accessing information. Whether someone trusts an information source guides if they will listen to, act on, and share the information gained from that source. A lack of trust usually leads individuals and communities to not engage with a certain information source, and blind trust can result in lower levels of agency and a higher risk of mis-, dis-, and malinformation. Internews developed the [Trust Analytical Framework](#) to help contextually define and measure trust in information providers. The Framework consists of four components and 12 sub-components.



About the guidelines

Why were these guidelines developed?

Information....



.... plays a myriad of roles in humanitarian and transitional contexts, and is the first thing people need to make life-saving decisions at the onset of a crisis.



....is essential to claim one's rights and entitlements throughout a crisis, including humanitarian entitlements.



.... supports affected and displaced communities to be involved in durable solutions.



.... (the process of creating, sharing, seeking and accessing it) can create or exacerbate protection risks.



....is also used as a weapon: denial of access to information and disinformation have been identified in numerous crises as tools to deprive affected communities of access to public and humanitarian services.



.... should be seen as a tool to contribute to the meaningful protection of affected communities.

Individuals are constantly making decisions about the risks and benefits of accessing services, and access to information is no different. People affected by crises need to have safe and meaningful access to accurate information to know and exercise their rights and entitlements and participate in decisions that affect them⁴. As a result of denial of access to information, communities affected by crisis can be deprived of services and foster negative coping mechanisms. This can exacerbate other protection risks including gender-based violence, discrimination, trafficking in persons, or restriction of movements. Despite the recognition of the centrality of information needs for people affected by crises, the lack of a common, systematic, and structured approach among humanitarian actors and other information actors results in information gaps or practices that create or exacerbate protection risks for the affected communities, humanitarian workers, and other information providers.

⁴ Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability, joint initiative by the CHA Alliance, Group URD, and the Sphere project, 2014.

To address this, these guidelines aim to address gaps in two areas:

1. What can we do to increase safe and meaningful access to accurate information
2. and how should we do that in a way that ensures we are not adding risks to the community in the process.

Using these guidelines, information actors can help strengthen the existing capacity of affected communities to understand information-related protection risks, so they can interact more safely with the information ecosystem and make informed decisions. Local information actors such as local media, civil society and government play an essential role in this, and international humanitarian actors have the responsibility to contribute to that access by building trust with communities. Information actors can play a role as “mediator” or information provider by creating a safe environment to exchange information, elevate concerns with respect of privacy, and reach people who might otherwise not have access to information. By using the protection analysis guided in these modules and tools, local information actors can identify the origin of the threats and their impacts on affected communities and develop media and humanitarian interventions that will build or strengthen the capacities of those communities to eliminate or mitigate information-related protection risks.

The guidelines include templates of tools for data collection, capacity building, and safe-programming – all those tools should always be contextualized.

Who are the guidelines for?

These guidelines were developed to support a range of stakeholders who share information and engage with communities impacted by crisis. This could be an organization who runs their own feedback mechanism, an agency that does community engagement activities alongside their sector-specific program, a local radio station, actors engaged in community-based protection work, a civil society organization with a large community outreach program.

In practice, these guidelines are designed to support anyone doing community engagement or producing local information materials to understand the risks related to their information and communication strategies with affected communities, and adapt their community engagement to mainstream safety, dignity, meaningful access, accountability, and participation and empowerment of the affected communities.

Regardless of your place working with communities affected by crisis, safe and meaningful access to information strengthens the overall quality of the humanitarian response and is the responsibility of all actors in the Information Ecosystem.



What does this mean for you?

All humanitarian and information actors, including media, benefit from understanding the information ecosystem and the associated protection risks, whether it is to improve safe and meaningful access to services or to ensure accountability to the affected population.



All humanitarian and other information actors, including media, have the capacity to adjust their approaches and program designs to prevent unintended harm and promote meaningful access and participation among the affected population.

A thorough protection analysis conducted by **the Protection Cluster or protection partners** that includes information-related risks (disinformation and denial of information) and captures the role of information in exacerbating other protection risks is more essential than ever in a global context where information is used a weapon to influence and control politics and populations.



The guidelines can be used at any point in a humanitarian response and are also relevant to development contexts. They can:

- inform the design of humanitarian and media programs
- support implementation
- ensure community engagement is being done safely
- contribute to feedback and complaint mechanisms design
- ensure that audience outreach work doesn't put people at further risk
- support the development or update of data management tools for sectoral or multi-sector assessments, for protection monitoring, and within monitoring and evaluation exercises

What do we mean by information and protection risks, and how do they interact when a community faces a crisis?

Information is an essential component of any humanitarian crisis; it can contribute to mitigating protection risks and it can create new or exacerbate existing protection risks. To paint a picture:

These interactions occur within an information ecosystem, where safe access to useful information could have a positive impact on individuals, helping them remain safe or supporting them to claim their rights.



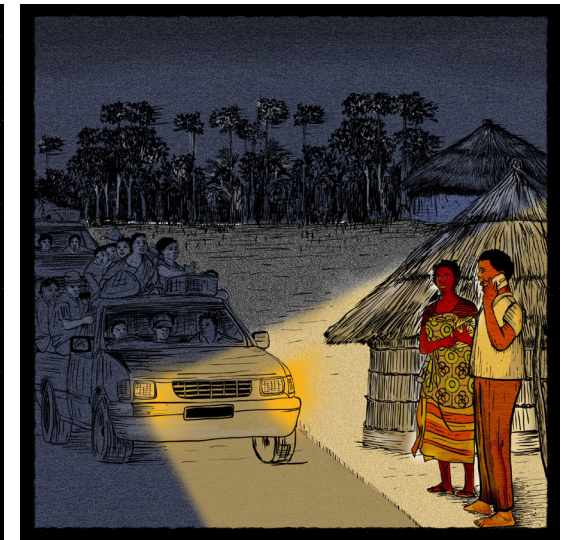
Woman films an attack on his neighborhood in the hope of justice.



A youth community group publicly shares a social media post celebrating / promoting a shelter for women and children.



A member of a minority group enquires about safe roads to leave a contested area.



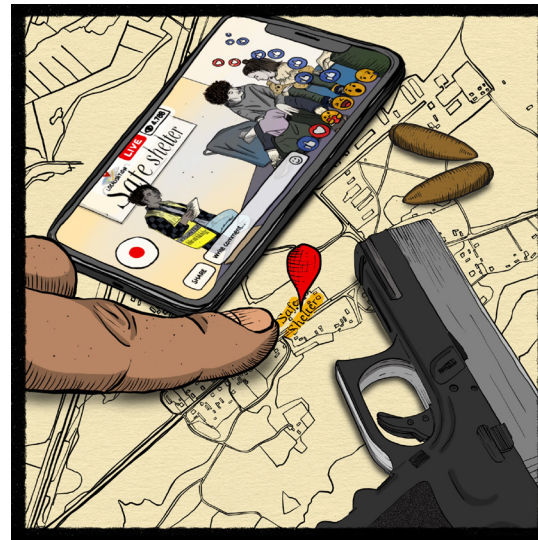
A family decides to remain in a disaster-prone area based on information received by a trusted source.

However, these interactions could also generate new protection risks, or exacerbate existing ones.

To address information-related protection risks, we need to understand what the threats are, who are the most vulnerable to those threats, and what capacities exist to reduce the likelihood of those threats.



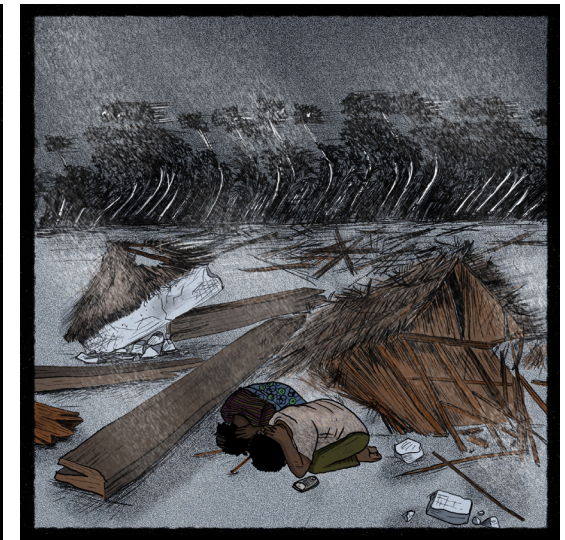
Some information can be sensitive when shared and could lead to the woman or the people filmed being targeted.



If digital literacy is low, the youth group could inadvertently reveal the location of the shelter to perpetrators, putting the women and children living there at greater risk. Or by sharing unverified or out of date information, could encourage women to take refuge in an unsafe place.



Members of a minority group may unknowingly reveal identifying information to a hostile party when discussing safe routes for movement.



A family may choose to stay in the path of danger and ignore official emergency warnings based on information from a trusted, but ultimately unreliable, source.

How do I use the guidelines?

These guidelines are composed of four Modules that can be used independently of each other. Seven annexes containing tools and templates accompany the Modules, and are linked at specific points throughout the Module content.

Module 1: Getting started: who, why and how to be involved in building safer information ecosystems. This module is an introduction to the guidelines that includes key terminology, frequently asked questions, and supports you use module 2, 3 and 4 based on your needs and objectives. You are currently reading Module 1.

Module 2: How can I contribute to a safer information ecosystem by adapting my ways of working? This module supports you to understand the potential risks associated with information and communication activities undertaken in your work, and provide solutions to mitigate those risks. Module 2 looks at meaningful access to information and best practices to ensure accountability to the community. It focuses on potential risks associated with community engagement activities, outreach, feedback mechanisms, and information sharing; and looks at risks or harms that may stem from different approaches. Humanitarian actors will recognize the parallel with protection mainstreaming principles and other actors will find resources that might be helpful to their work and facilitate collaboration with humanitarian actors.

Module 3: Reducing information-related protection risks: an analytical framework. This module supports you to undertake a protection analysis of the information ecosystem to identify activities that will reduce information-related protection risks. The first section is dedicated to a framework that compiles the data useful to understanding information-related protection risks present in your context. The second section is a guide to help you organize data for analysis and recommendations based on your objectives and expertise. Local media, civil society, humanitarian actors, protection specialists will make different use of this section depending on your activities and capacities. This module is focused on risks communities face from the crisis context itself, whether armed conflict, migration, natural or climate disaster, or other any other crisis.

Module 4: Reducing harm: a guide for media and journalists in emergencies. This module is tailored for journalists, media professionals, and content creators who engage in activities like reporting on, interviewing, filming, photographing, or collaborating with crisis-affected community members to address their information needs and amplify their voices. Drawing inspiration from journalistic ethics, this module adopts a principled approach to content creation that aims to avoid exacerbating harm for vulnerable communities facing crises.

Read on for more in-depth questions to understand what you can gain from each Module.



Module 2 Overview: How to contribute to safer information ecosystems by adapting ways of working

Why should we always look at safety when engaging with the affected community?

Humanitarian actors, media and other information providers often aim to increase community engagement, participation, and accountability, which aligns with efforts to mainstream protection and make programming safer and more accountable. However, even with well-intentioned goals, it is important to be aware that *how we work* can increase or decrease risk and harm to individuals and communities. For example, not providing access to reliable information creates risks, however increased participation through people speaking up, sharing concerns, or even attending meetings also comes with risks that need to be considered and mitigated.

Community-driven initiatives – which are essential to community-led and localized approaches - may also come with risks. We can play a role in helping communities to identify and mitigate those risks by supporting community members to design and access these initiatives safely. For example, it is common for local radio stations to organize call-in shows, allowing listeners to share their perspectives, concerns and questions, live on air. At times this can include community criticism on aid efforts, where people share, for example, experiences where there has not been enough aid, the aid has come too late or is not distributed fairly. If these conversations are broadcast without practitioners or experts involved to provide insights on how the response is being organized and crucially, what is in the pipeline, these formats risk creating unnecessary antagonism and nurture distrust. In situations where people are being invited to speak out publicly (rather than anonymously), facilitators should be aware of the overall legal and political climate and make sure people are not at risk of retaliation by political actors or authorities.

Are there risks we should consider when providing information using online platforms?

The rapid growth of digital information ecosystems has enabled mass communication and provides information actors in humanitarian settings with new opportunities to communicate directly with, and facilitate communication between, affected populations. Increasingly, conversations and engagement about humanitarian aid and services happens online and in cases where there is no or low moderation, misinformation can go un-challenged, and perpetuate harmful rumors. Many of the same risks and safety considerations above apply to communication and information transmitted digitally. However, new technologies come with fast-changing and distinct risks that need to be understood by information providers



and communities. Personal privacy settings, levels of privacy in ‘closed’ groups are just some factors that can make engaging in online environments fraught for people, and particularly for people experience vulnerability. For example, while a WhatsApp group might be considered private or closed (requiring someone to give you entry), once that group’s membership size gets to the point where monitoring and shared moderation capacity is limited, these groups function as de facto open platforms, with little oversight on who’s joining and what their intentions are. Information about individuals in crisis can attract the attention of scammers, human traffickers, or other malicious entities who may seek to exploit their vulnerability for financial gain or other unethical purposes.

Why is coordination between information actors in a humanitarian crisis essential?

Because it increases safe and meaningful access to useful, accurate information. A healthy information ecosystem comprises a diverse range of information actors that have the same objective: providing safe, dignified, and meaningful ways for people to seek, access, create and share information, including in communities affected by humanitarian crises. Information actors have different strengths and require different support depending on their role, capacity and resources. Coordination between the medial, the civil society, the government, and the humanitarian community that resources and links efforts will strengthen both the humanitarian response and the information ecosystem.

What tools are available to help me adapt my ways of working so I can contribute to a safer information ecosystem?

Module 2 annex guide	
Annexes	Links with guidelines / purpose
Annex 1: Glossary of information and protection terms	Definitions of terminology used in this guidance related to protection, information, humanitarian and development concepts / work.
Annex 2: Risk assessment tool	Supports anyone working on communication, information or community engagement to identify risks and benefits of a project / intervention, and support decision-making process regarding whether a project is safe to implement in a community.
Annex 6: Media focus group discussion tool	The focus group discussion tool is designed to collect data from people working in media roles, on the four pillars of the information protection analytical framework.
Annex 8: Training on information and protection	Introduction to information and protection for humanitarian staff, media, and members of the affected community.



Module 3 Overview: Reducing information-related protection risks: an analytical framework

What is a protection analysis of the information ecosystem and how will this support my work?

The objective of this type of protection analysis is to provide recommendations to inform organizations' and information actors' ways of working in a way that increases safe and meaningful access to accurate information. To identify those recommendations, we need to understand what are the risks that people face: what threats people are facing, who in the community is most vulnerable to those threats, and what capacities exist to remove or reduce that threat.

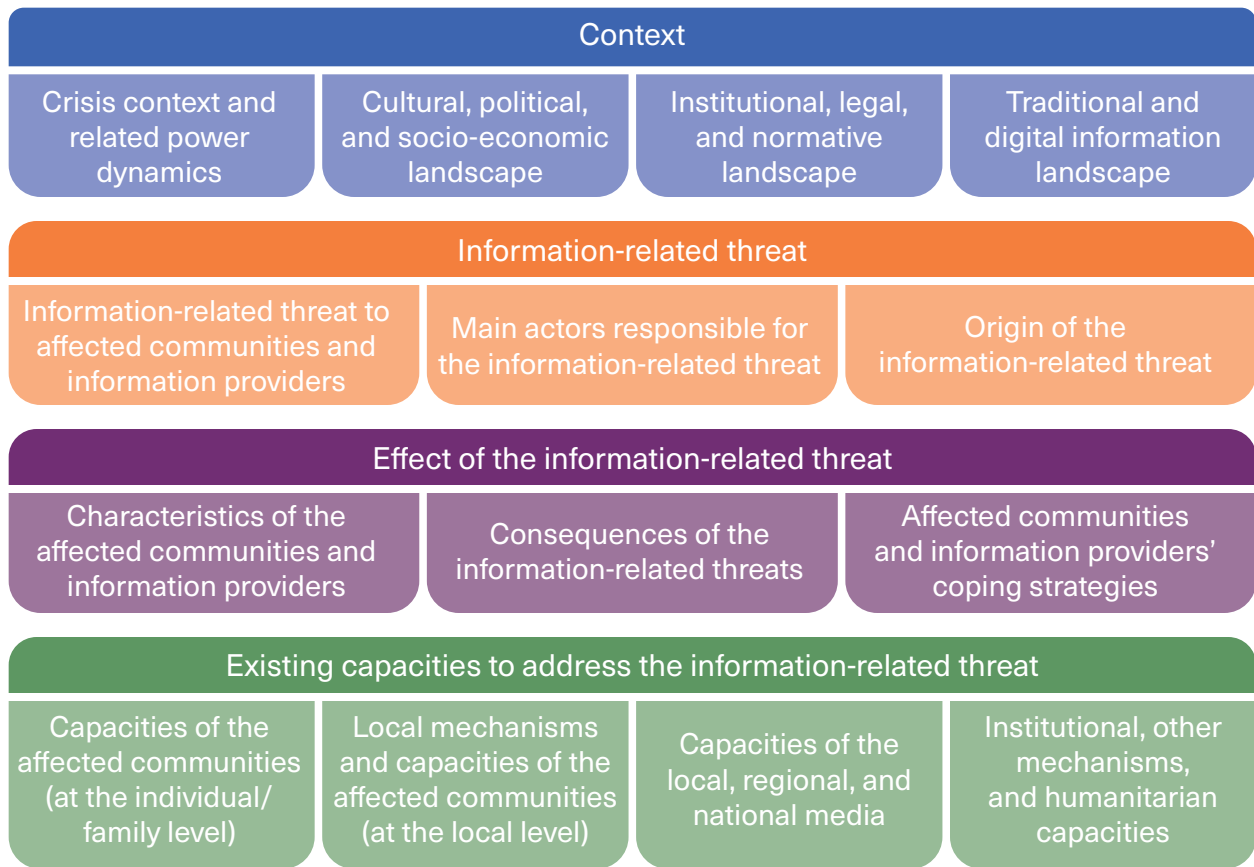
Example of findings of a protection analysis of the information ecosystem:

- ✓ Denial of access to information: *A woman journalist living in a conflict area has written a piece on the security situation in her region. She needs to walk several kilometers to access internet because the non-state armed group that controls the area destroyed all communication infrastructures to block information from circulating in and out of the region. The journey is particularly unsafe for women, but she prefers to travel alone to avoid putting anyone else at risk. The woman is assaulted on her way to access internet to complete her report. Denial of access to information forced the woman to take risks to create information, resulting in gender-based violence.*
- ✓ Disinformation: *As a typhoon approaches, many people in an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) community is refusing to evacuate their temporary shelters in a camp setting to take shelter in a safer location. A protracted disinformation campaign targeting the credibility of the government and the lack of independence of the humanitarian actors has impacted people's trust in those sources, and therefore in the emergency messages coming from government and humanitarian agencies. Many people believe the evacuation efforts are a strategy to relocate IDPs to less favorable region.*

What is the information protection analytical framework about?

The information protection framework provides a common structure for the analysis of protection risks related to information. The framework should be adapted to particular context and to the objectives of a specific analysis. The framework provides guidance on thematic areas (context, threat, vulnerability, capacity) that need to be considered when designing tools for analysis. Analytical questions in the guidelines and data collection questions across several methodologies in the annexes support this design.





Do we need to use the entire information protection analytical framework (all pillars and sub-pillars) to do our analysis?

Once you identify why you want to understand protection risks related to information, look at the table in the previous question and see which pillars and sub-pillars are the most relevant to your needs. What information do you already have from existing assessments and what information do you need to better understand the context, the threat, the affected community that might be more or less vulnerable to that threat? What information do you need to find solutions to reduce those risks: for example, does the community need support with information literacy, are local media and humanitarian actors already working together to strengthen the information ecosystem, does the government understand and monitor disinformation?

Remember that the objective is not solely to identify the problem (the threat and its negative effects) but to identify solutions to improve safe and meaningful access to accurate information.

How do we use the guidelines to update existing data collection tools?

The information protection analytical framework is a good starting point to identify information needs that you could add to your existing tools, to strengthen your analysis of the information ecosystem and related protection risks. You can also monitor trends to assess whether your current tools are already covering key information needs. Do not forget to look at other available resources produced by the Government, civil society, media, and humanitarian organizations in the contexts you are working in – there is often a lot out there!

What tools are available in the guidelines to understand the protection risks related to information?

Module 3 annex guide	
Annexes	Links with guidelines / purpose
Annex 1: Glossary of information and protection terms	Definitions of terminology used in this guidance related to protection, information, humanitarian and development concepts / work.
Annex 3: Community focus group discussion tool	The focus group discussion tool is designed to collect community data on the four pillars of the information protection analytical framework.
Annex 4: Household survey tool	This tool can be used to conduct a survey with a specific community or the wider population to understand how they create, seek, and share information. It is aimed at helping identify where people may face risks in doing so.
Annex 5: Key informant interview tool	In-depth one-on-one interviews with selected information providers within the affected population and the host community will provide an opportunity to obtain information on protection risks that might have been too sensitive to be discussed within the focus group discussion (FGD).
Annex 6: Media focus group discussion tool	The focus group discussion tool is designed to collect data from people working in media roles, on the four pillars of the information protection analytical framework.
Annex 7: The information protection analytical framework (IPAF)	Print out of the IPAF
Annex 8: Training on information and protection	Introduction to information and protection for humanitarian staff, media, and members of the affected community.

Module 4 Overview:

Reducing harm: a guide for media and journalists in emergencies

Why is there a dedicated module for media and journalists?

This Module is designed for journalists, media workers and content creators that are working in a humanitarian context with vulnerable communities. The Module aims to support those directly reporting on people impacted by crisis by interviewing, photographing or filming and provides recommendations to ensure media practices do not contribute to the protection risks the community faces. Though Modules 1, 2 and 3 are also relevant to media, we recognize that media will have particular questions, skills, experiences and goals in their work that are distinct from humanitarian and protection actors, and therefore a tailored Module to pinpoint particular areas of relevance in this work has been developed.

Why is protection analysis and risk reduction relevant to media and journalists?

The responsibilities that exist for all information actors to address gaps in the understanding of, and response to information-related protection risks align with the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists. Journalists and other media workers face unprecedented ethical pressures during times of crisis, whether that be conflict, in the aftermath of a natural disaster or any other crisis that has significantly impacted the lives of communities. While all media should work to ethical standards and abide by codes of conduct for professional reporting at all times, it's important to remember that when working with a vulnerable community impacted by crisis, additional precautions may be needed.

Module 4 annex guide

Annexes	Links with guidelines / purpose
Annex 1: Glossary of information and protection terms	Definitions of terminology used in this guidance related to protection, information, humanitarian and development concepts / work.
Annex 2: Risk assessment tool	Supports anyone working on communication, information or community engagement to identify risks and benefits of a project / intervention, and support decision-making process regarding whether a project is safe to implement in a community.
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Annex 8: Training on information and protection	Introduction to information and protection for humanitarian staff, media, and members of the affected community.

End of Module 1

