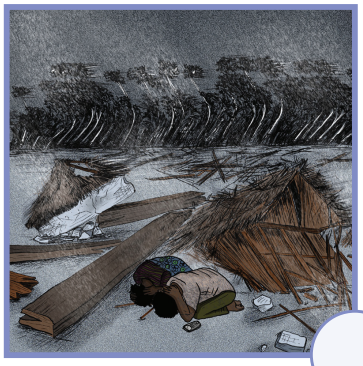
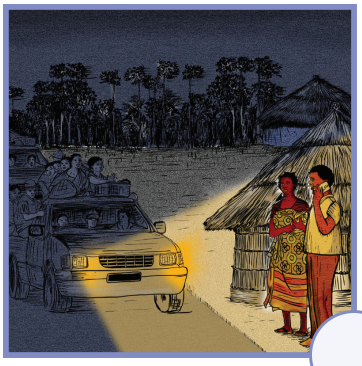
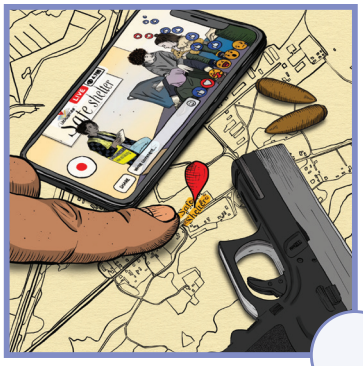
Module 4

Reducing harm: a guide for media and journalists in emergencies







Information saves lives

1. A woman journalist films an attack on her neighborhood to document abuses.
2. A media publicly shares a social media post celebrating/ promoting a shelter for women and children.
3. A family decides to remain in a disaster-prone area based on information received by a trusted source.

Information can put people at risk

4. Filming events to create information can be sensitive and could lead to the woman journalist being targeted.
5. If digital literacy is low, the media could inadvertently reveal the location of the shelter to perpetrators, putting the women and children living there at risk.
6. 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.

Internews

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

Question:

I run the online page of a local newspaper and I have heard some rumors that violence broke out after an article we wrote prompted very angry comments.

Answer:

To guide work aimed at mitigation and preventing this from happening again, see Modules 2 and 4. To listen to communities and understand more about the issues this article triggered in the community, see Module 3 and associated tools.

Question:

I am a protection actor preparing to undertake analysis to monitor protection trends and inform programming.

Answer:

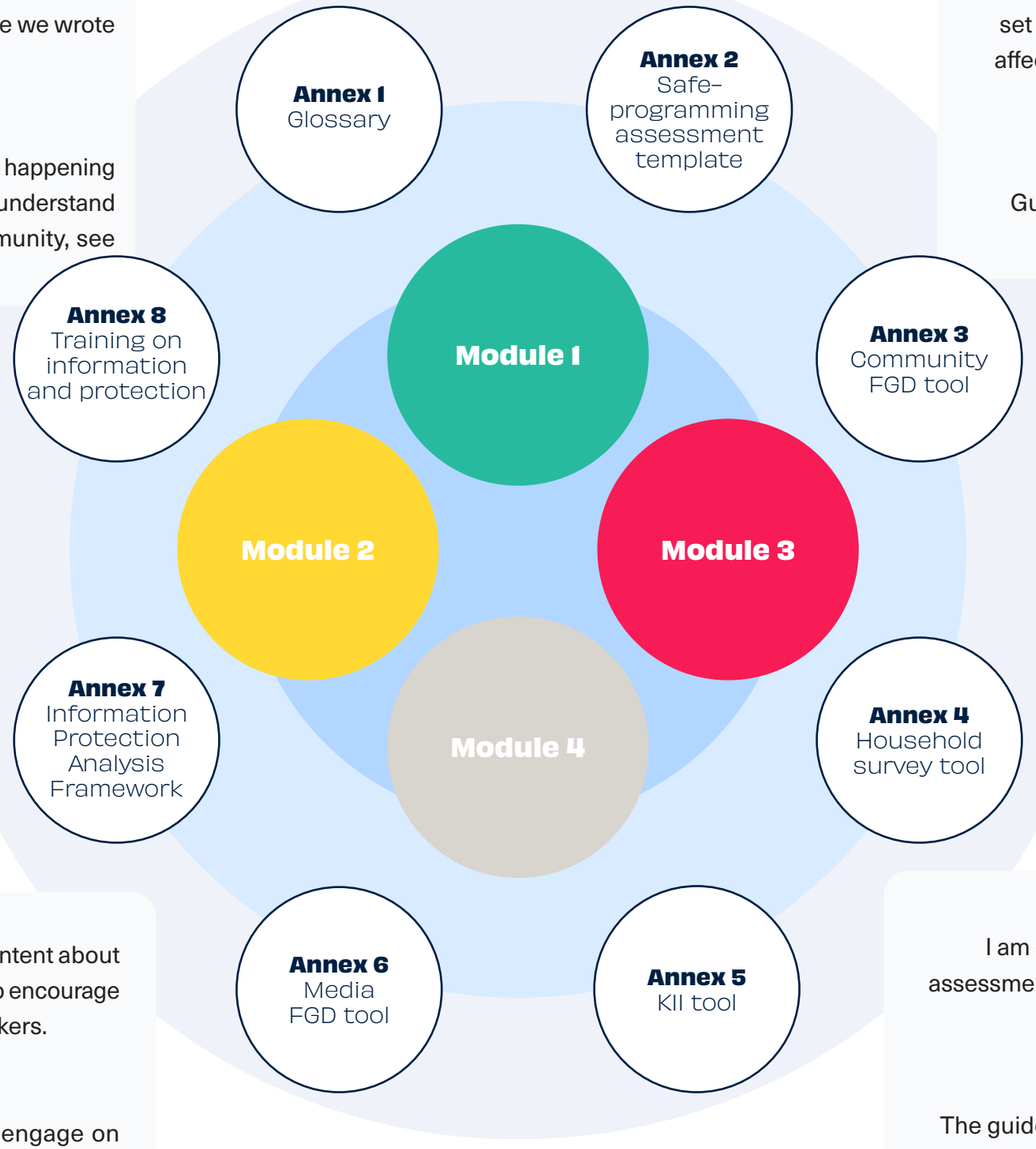
Module 3 and associated Annexes provides an analytical framework to help you design your tools and collect data, as well as guidance to produce analysis on information-related protection risks.

Question:

I work at a local radio station and want to develop content about the rise of gender-based violence (GBV) in the area, to encourage action amongst regional and national decision makers.

Answer:

The guidelines will provide direction on how to safely engage on sensitive information (Modules 2 and 4) and how to analyze the role of information in reducing or exacerbating GBV in the community (Module 3).



Question:

I work for an non-government organization and I want to set up a Facebook page to share information with the affected community. How can I make sure it is safe for community members to use?

Answer:

Guidance on setting up safe, meaningful and accessible information channels can be found in Module 2.

Question:

I work for a humanitarian organization and want to review (or if needed, develop) a feedback and complaint mechanism.

Answer:

Module 2 will provide information on safe and meaningfully accessible feedback and complaint mechanisms.

Question:

I am a humanitarian coordinator leading a multi-sectoral assessment in a country that was hit by a humanitarian crisis. How do we engage safely with communities?

Answer:

The guidelines provides guidance on how to safely engage with communities and coordinate with key stakeholders in Module 2. Module 3 provides guidance on how to include information elements in an assessment.

Acknowledgements

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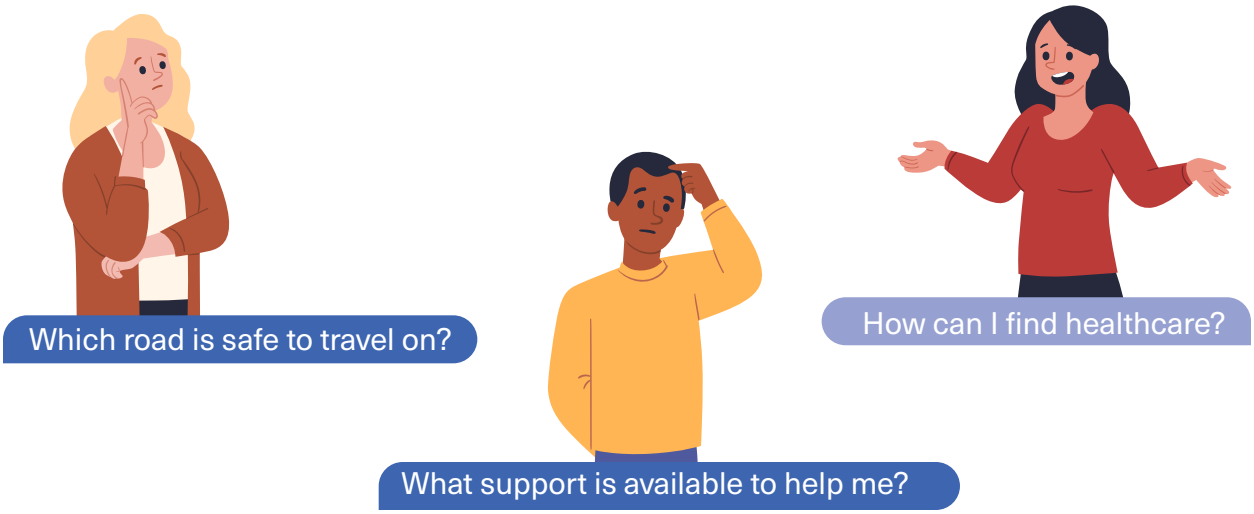
These resources have been created as part of the Community Voices for Better Protection (CVBP) project. This project aims to understand the risks associated with information in humanitarian contexts from the perspective of humanitarian field workers, specialist protection agencies and media and other 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

Module 4 contents

Introduction

This manual is designed to support journalists and other media workers who are operating in humanitarian contexts. Communities impacted by crisis have an urgent need for quality information to help them make decisions.



Media outlets are impacted by humanitarian crises in multitude of ways and face many challenges as a result. Damage to infrastructure and equipment, limitations on access to affected areas and safety concerns for both their staff all make work in these contexts more challenging. Additionally, media often find themselves in the dual role of crisis reporters *and* members of the affected community; necessitating a delicate balance between fulfilling their professional responsibilities and coping with the personal impacts of the crisis.

Media can play an essential role to empower affected communities in making informed decisions based on information that is safely and meaningfully accessible. They can highlight the needs and concerns of the community, share practical information and hold those in power to account. Media can also support initiatives that strengthen affected communities' understanding of information-related protection risks so individuals can better weigh the risks and benefits when in need of information. Media operating in these environments have a responsibility to ensure their own practices do not contribute to the risks that crisis affected communities face.

This manual provides an introductory exploration of the risks and threats communities may encounter concerning information access, generation and sharing in a crisis. It also offers guidance for media workers to understand and effectively mitigate these challenges in their reporting practices. The goal is to foster the creation of media that not only ensures the dignity of crisis-affected communities but also promotes safety and respect.

Who is this manual for?

This manual is designed for journalists, media workers and content creators who may be working in a humanitarian context. This could include local media (from the local area and who may or may not be personally affected by the crisis), national media (from the country where the crisis occurs but may or may not be from the region impacted by the crisis), and international media (reporting on the crisis for international audiences). Principally, this manual aims to support those who will be directly reporting on people impacted by crisis by interviewing, photographing or filming. These foundational principles can also serve as guidance for editors, owners, and other senior decision-makers in media, helping them consider and proactively address potential risks posed by their production practices and policies on vulnerable communities.

Why did we create this manual?

This manual is part of a suite of resources for media, civil society and aid workers that aim to help those working in humanitarian contexts to identify and mitigate risks and threats related to accessing, sharing, creating and obtaining information.

- *Module 1: Getting started: who, why and how to be involved in building safer information ecosystems* - This module is an introduction to the guidelines and includes key terminology and frequently asked questions to support all kinds of information actors in using the modules based on their needs and objectives.
- *Module 2: How to contribute to safer information ecosystems by adapting ways of working* - This module supports humanitarian organizations and other information actors, including local media, in understanding the risks their work on information may create, as well as solutions to mitigate those risks. It also covers meaningful access to information and best practices to ensure accountability to the community. Humanitarian actors will recognize the parallel with protection mainstreaming principles, other information actors will obtain resources that may be helpful to their work and facilitate collaboration with humanitarian actors.
- *Module 3: Reducing information-related protection risks: an analytical framework* - This module is designed to support humanitarian and other information actors in undertaking a protection analysis of the information ecosystem to identify activities to reduce information-related protection risks in information programming. It includes a framework that compiles the data necessary to understand information-related protection risks present in your context, and a guide to help you make recommendations based on your objectives and expertise. Local media, civil society, humanitarian actors and protection specialists will make different use of this section depending on their activities.

- *Module 4: Reducing harm: a guide for media and journalists in emergencies* - This manual is designed for journalists, media workers and content creators working in humanitarian contexts with vulnerable communities. Principally, this manual aims to support those directly reporting on people impacted by crises by interviewing, photographing, or filming. It provides recommendations to ensure media practices do not contribute to protection risks the community faces.

These resources were 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 address a gap in the understanding of, and response to risk and information. This project is funded by USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs (BHA).

What are protection risks?

The term 'protection risks' may not be one you are familiar with. Protection risks is a technical term used by humanitarian aid workers to refer to things that threaten an individual or a group. In this manual, we will refer simply to 'risks' as this terminology is more relevant to media workers. However, strong coordination between media and humanitarian aid providers is valuable in crises, so we will take a moment to explain the specifics of this terminology to guide you in your interactions with the humanitarian system, and to contribute to your understanding of Module 1, 2 and 3 which references this terminology regularly.

Humanitarians tend to categorize protection risks in three categories:

- Violence: physical attacks, sexual violence and rape, torture, killing and maiming, bombing and military strikes that target civilians
- Coercion: forced displacement, trafficking, child recruitment into armed forces and groups, slavery, forced marriage, unlawful detention, extortion, sexual exploitation
- Deliberate deprivation: denying access to humanitarian aid, destruction of civilian assets including food and water sources and markets

In a humanitarian response, aid workers organize themselves into thematic groups (called 'Clusters' or in some contexts "Sectors") to enable them to address the most pressing needs of crisis affected communities. In crises, there is often limited funding and resources available for humanitarian response. This system helps prioritize needs and allocate resources more efficiently by identifying which organizations are best suited to provide specific types of assistance. For example, projects may target food scarcity, the need for shelter or safe and clean water. For more on the Humanitarian Cluster system see here. All those clusters aim to deliver aid in a way that is accessible and safe.

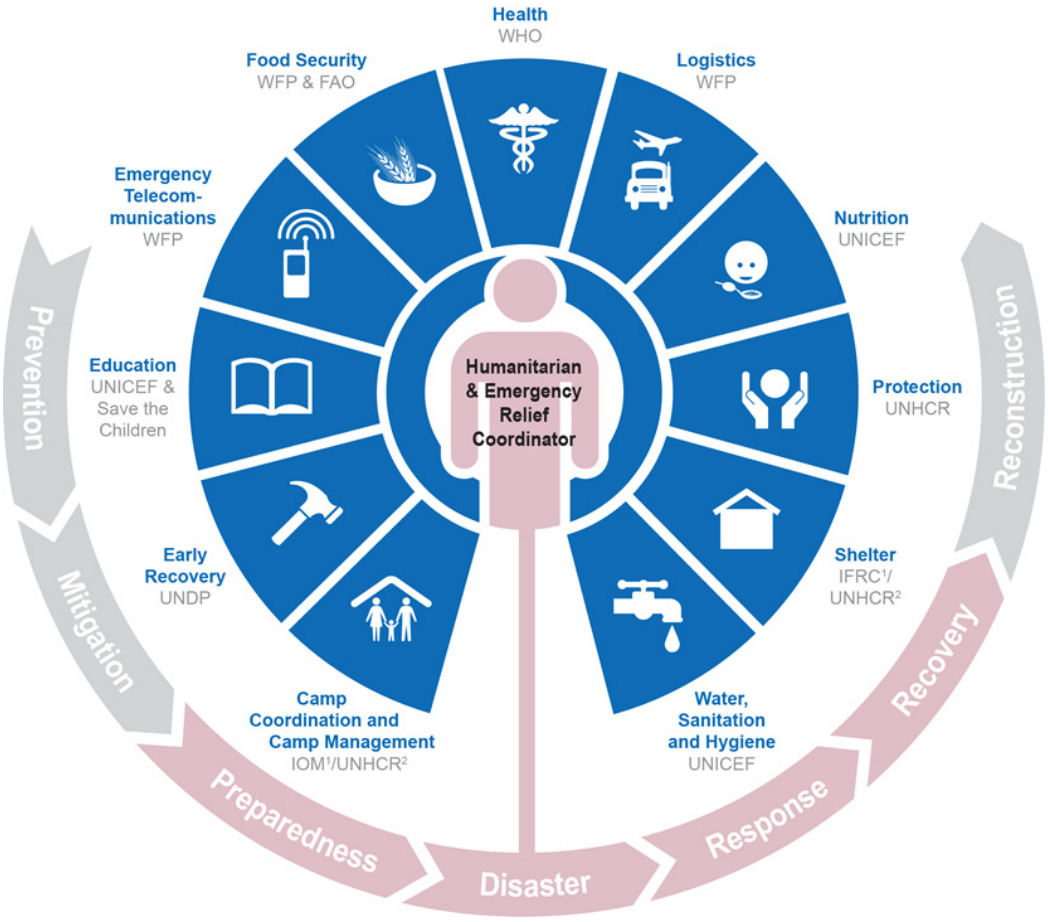


Diagram source: UNOCHA

Protection is a key cluster and area of programming in a humanitarian response. Protection workers aim to ensure that the rights of individuals in affected communities are upheld and actively work to understand and mitigate risks that might threaten them. It is important to acknowledge that in the aftermath of crises and natural disasters people often face multiple risks and hazards that are either created by, or exacerbated by the crisis they are experiencing. For example, Gender Based Violence (GBV), public violence and criminal behavior, neglect of persons with specific needs (such as elderly people or people living with disabilities), and exclusion or discrimination based on gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other grounds.

Given that both humanitarian protection workers and the media share the common goals of identifying, raising awareness about, and mitigating risks within their communities, this manual is designed to,

1. Assist you to identify and learn how to mitigate risks within your own work and,
2. Encourage and facilitate collaboration and coordination with protection specialists to further reduce risks for the community.

Want to know more? The Global Protection Cluster regularly monitors and tracks 15 protection risks (including Information) across emergencies worldwide. See here the 15 key risks communities in crisis face today.

What are the risks related to information?

In a crisis, people often think of food, water and shelter as being some of the most pressing forms of aid that crisis affected communities need. However, there is a growing understanding of the critical role of information as a form of aid that enhances the well-being, safety, and resilience of individuals and communities. In a crisis, people prioritize both information and the infrastructure that supports. information access. In today's world, as soon as a crisis erupts, social media floods with footage and firsthand accounts of the incident from citizen journalists close to the scene, who are sharing coverage long before traditional media can report their verified information. People want to be able to instantly turn to their friends, family or to their phones to make sense of what has happened, understand how it will affect them and know what they need to do to keep safe.

Access to information is a critical component of humanitarian response efforts, as it enables people to make informed choices and improve their overall quality of life. However, the way information is shared, accessed, obtained and created can contribute to, or help minimize risks communities face.

Key risk factors related to information in a crisis context include:

Misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation: Information can be a literal life-saver—when it's true. Misinformation refers to information that is not true. It may be shared unintentionally by people who are not aware the information is false (misinformation), shared intentionally to deceive (disinformation), or people may share correct information out of context or to directly cause harm (malinformation)[1]. You may also hear this category of harmful information referred to as rumors, fake news or conspiracy theories. This poor-quality information or information disorder can be very dangerous for communities impacted by crisis. It could encourage unsafe practices, stir violence and prejudice, prevent access to lifesaving services, confuse and further diminish someone's feeling of psychological safety.

Inadequate, delayed, or incomplete information: In a crisis, insufficient or delayed information can lead to a myriad of risks for communities. It can hinder timely decision making and prevent people from understanding how and where to access help. This delay may exacerbate suffering, increase casualties, and intensify the impact of the crisis. Insufficient information can also foster confusion, rumors, and misinformation,

[1] See 'Glossary' for a full description of the key terms used in these Guidelines + Modules

contributing to panic and chaos which could further lead to physical risks for the community.

Misuse of private data: Communities face several potential risks when trying to access lifesaving information online. They may inadvertently share personally identifiable information (PII), like their name, location, credit card details or medical records. Sharing personal information, such as their real name or location, could potentially lead to their identification by authorities or individuals from their home country who may pose a threat to their safety. PII information may be used by scammers or hackers to steal or extort money from them. Refugees and migrants may be in the process of seeking asylum or legal status in their host countries. Sharing personally identifiable information that contradicts their asylum claims or legal status could have negative implications for their applications.

Online harassment, and prejudice: Online users may target crisis affected communities through harassment, threats and prejudice based on their ethnicity, status or other characteristics. Sharing certain personal information, such as refugee status or ethnicity, may lead to discrimination or stigmatization, further contributing to psychological harm and affecting their ability to integrate and lead normal lives.

Trafficking and abduction: People impacted by crises may turn to online information sources to access transport, accommodation, or employment. Both adults and children may be vulnerable to human traffickers and smugglers who can exploit their personal information to manipulate or control them.

Language Barriers: People displaced by crises may find themselves in countries or regions where they may not speak the local language fluently. This language barrier can make it challenging to access and understand important information, such as legal documents, healthcare instructions, or safety information. This may also increase their need to rely on intermediaries or informal networks to access information. While these intermediaries can be helpful, they may also have their own agendas or biases, which can influence information access.

Risks related to the location of information: Going to certain locations to access information can be dangerous, particularly if that information is held in areas with high crime rates, conflict, or civil unrest. This risk is increased for vulnerable community members, such as women, children, people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and sexual characteristics (SOCIESC / LGBTIQ+), people with movement

challenges or disabilities, and people belonging to marginalized ethnic or religious groups. These groups may be less able to respond to the threats experienced while travelling to an unsafe area or may be targeted due to their status.

Lack of Documentation: Many people impacted by crisis may have lost or left behind important documents during their displacement. This can make it difficult for them to buy a SIM card, and as such limit their ability to access information, and undermine their capacity to make informed decisions, access essential services, such as healthcare or education, travel across borders, access employment, and establish their identity or legal status.

Censorship and Government Surveillance: In some countries, specific groups may be subject to censorship, surveillance, or restrictions on their freedom of expression and information. Accessing certain information, especially if it is critical of the government or related to politics, could put them at risk of persecution.

Deliberate communication shutdowns or restrictions from entities with malicious intentions: This refers to entities with malicious intentions who deliberately enforce communication shutdowns or information access restrictions, including internet shutdowns for particular populations, restrictions on certain websites, and the shutdown of or threats to particular media houses or media types (for example, independent media).

Journalist safety: This refers to instances of compromises or threats to journalists' physical or psychological safety. Threats can include harassment, imprisonment, and those directed by entities with malicious intentions or the public towards family members or associates of the journalist being attacked. Threats can also include unsafe environments, such as volatile post-disaster conditions or conflict situations, where threats are not specifically directed towards journalists, but they are nonetheless at risk.

Media censorship and self-censorship: Censorship refers to the suppression or prohibition of information content and providers. Reasons for censorship can include obscenity, political unacceptability, and security threats. Governments and alternative authorities, media outlets, institutions, and individuals can undertake and enforce censorship. Censorship can occur online or offline, affecting the media and all forms of information-sharing. Self-censorship refers to the act of censoring or classifying one's own discourse. This act is done out of fear of, or deference to,

the sensibilities or preferences (whether actual or perceived) of others and without overt pressure from any specific party or institution of authority. In the context of information events in humanitarian crises, the most relevant form of censorship and self-censorship for monitoring and analysis is that which results from the actions of entities with malicious intentions.

Safe and accountable media: How can our practices protect audiences?

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 always abide by codes of conduct for professional reporting, it is important to remember that when working with vulnerable community impacted by crisis, additional precautions may be needed.

The Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists advises journalists to "Seek Truth and Report It" and to "Minimize Harm" — obligations that are sometimes in conflict, as are the other two major obligations in the code: "Act Independently" and "Be Accountable."

Information actors have the responsibility to ensure that their actions respect the dignity of the affected population and do not cause additional harm. This responsibility applies to all activities that relate to information, and can be divided in four components4:

- **Safety and dignity:** Ensure our work does not create new protection risks for the affected communities we interact with and that we provide information and engage in a way that respects the dignity of those people.
- **Meaningful access:** Ensure the information and the services we provide and the engagement we conduct are accessible to all population groups and adapted to their individual and community needs.
- **Access to accurate information, participation, and empowerment:** Support the development of self-capacities including an individual's or a community's inherent abilities, skills, and resources that enable them to manage and address their own needs and challenges independently, including claiming their rights.

Accountability: Ensure the affected communities we work with can hold us accountable for our actions. This includes two-way communication platforms and feedback and complaint mechanisms that are community-based.

Think beyond reporting on the community, and report for the community: This requires a shift in perspective for some media working in a crisis to move beyond reporting on the crisis itself, to considering the direct information needs of affected communities who may be going to your publication for information. For instance, while the larger audience might want to know how many people are displaced by a disaster, those who are displaced want to know how to access emergency shelter, food and healthcare services including eligibility requirements and specifically when/where distributions of aid will be made. Supporting the emergency information needs of the community also includes ensuring they are aware of how they can safely and confidentially share sensitive information, report serious protection concerns or incidents, and give input, feedback or ask questions about the aid they are receiving.

Media can inadvertently contribute to the risks faced by communities through poor practices in several ways:

Privacy Violations

Poor ethical practices, such as intrusive reporting or the publication of private and sensitive information without consent, can violate the privacy rights of individuals and communities. This can have serious consequences for people's safety and well-being, especially for persecuted or marginalized communities. Media organizations that do not exercise caution when reporting on sensitive issues, such as ongoing conflicts, disasters, or public health emergencies, can inadvertently endanger the safety of individuals or exacerbate tensions and hostilities in affected communities.

Privacy violations may happen, if / when:

- a vulnerable person's personally identifiable information (PII) such as name and location is revealed (when anonymity should have been in place);
- databases of sensitive information are not securely protected (and there is a hack, or laptops and phones are confiscated)
- footage of community members is recorded without their consent when they are in a private place or a vulnerable situation (for instance footage recorded when someone is sleeping, or in hospital recovering).

This can be a challenging topic for media workers, whose natural reaction to a crisis is to quickly capture and share the horrific reality people are experiencing. Sometimes the community may even volunteer personally identifiable information, perhaps in the hope you can help connect

them with a lost family member, or because they are unaware of the implications of sharing such information. Deadlines and the need to work quickly do not negate your commitment to minimize harm and the safety and dignity of the community should always remain the priority.

Informed Consent: In a crisis, there may be more severe consequences for revealing a person's location or identity. Because of this, media workers must make even greater efforts to ensure that consent is obtained before recording and publishing any personally identifiable information. A person should not feel pressured to give consent because of deadlines and consent must be obtained in a language understood by the subject, preferably the subject's native language.

Simply asking for consent is not enough; it is vital that the implications of that consent are also fully understood by the individual. You should always explain the reach of the article/story and what anonymity can be realistically offered. For instance, someone might consent to having their photograph taken. Nevertheless, it's crucial for them to comprehend that this image could potentially be published on a public online platform accessible to a wide audience. This exposure could lead to their perpetrator identifying them, or conversely, they may be recognized as a recipient of aid, potentially making them a target for opportunistic criminals. Alternatively, they may consent to speaking with a local journalist, but may not be aware that this article could be syndicated across other national and international news networks.

Importantly, consent is not final. It can be given or withdrawn at any time.

In a crisis, many people may have experienced traumatic events, which can affect their ability to seek and process information. Because of this, the media worker has a responsibility to make an additional risk assessment as to whether including certain details in the final product could cause potential harm to the individual.

For example, if a person fleeing persecution reveals the routes they took, their name, current location (or all of the above), it is the journalist / media worker's responsibility to ensure those details are removed or de-identified in any product that might be released.

For photographers, that may mean obscuring the face of the subject, or ensuring there are no details in the background of the image that could reveal the location, including for at risk groups including those whose clinical status or social situation may carry a stigma (such as people living with HIV, sex workers or survivors of sexual violence). This should also include respecting privacy in safe places and being aware that you may be photographing someone in a vulnerable state – for instance sleeping in a shelter for displaced people or accessing medical care in an emergency hospital.

If you sense any reluctance, confusion, fear, or anger, you should stop.

Questions to ask yourself:

- ✔ *How informed do you feel about the existing threats and vulnerabilities of this individual or group? Is there someone more informed who could increase your understanding of this risk equation?*
- ✔ *How credible or speculative is the danger versus benefit of publishing the information or illustration? To whom would harm be done, and how? Who would benefit, and how?*
- ✔ *How critical is the information in helping the public understand crucial issues, make informed decisions, or create change?*

> Example:
> Media were positioned at the border region of a country, photographing individuals who were being deported back to their country of origin. Many of these people feared political persecution and had originally fled the country for their safety. In their desire to cover what was a breaking and shocking story, the media published footage and images of people streaming back into the country, clearly showing the faces of the deportees. By sharing these images online, the media inadvertently assisted the government, who was able to clearly identify a number of people, and used this information to locate and arrest them. The media did not intend to harm anyone that day, but their uninformed practices increased the risks for a vulnerable section of the community.

Interviewing survivors of trauma

In a crisis, communities may face a range of protection risks including forced displacement, gender-based violence, human trafficking and extortion. It is important for media to be aware of these threats facing the community and to ensure that their reporting on these issues does not place victim survivors at increased risk. When reporting on violence, remember the survivors have been through trauma. The way you treat them and share their story will impact their healing.

Difficult interviews: Retelling a traumatic story can be very distressing. Practice trauma-informed journalism. Trauma-informed journalism means understanding trauma, thinking about what a trauma survivor is experiencing before you begin your interview, and understanding how your actions (as a journalist) might impact them after the interview is over. For more resources on trauma-informed journalism, see this tip sheet from The Journalist's Resource and these tips from the DART Centre on interviewing survivors of trauma.

Service referral: One way to ensure that you are adequately prepared for interviews with people who may have experienced some kind of trauma is to make sure you are aware of any support services available to your interviewee. This could include, for example, the number of support hotlines, or the name of a protection agency providing services to this population. In sharing their story with you, people may become upset or may ask. 'What can I do? Where can I go for help?'. It is your role as a responsible journalist to ensure you are prepared to answer that question, or ensure you have someone nearby who can step in and provide support if your interviewee requests it. This also ensures your process is not simply extractive, but that it benefits and supports the community and recognizes the impact re-telling of traumatic incidents can have on your interviewees. This is a great example where ensuring you are coordinated with protection actors in your location can contribute to risk-informed practices. You could consider conducting your interview in collaboration with a local organization who provides relevant services, or ensure you have contacted them in advance to collect up to date referral information.

Reporting on children

Children are some of the most at-risk individuals in a crisis. They may be separated from their parents or family and their social network, and risk being targeted for kidnapping, abuse or forced labor, marriage or recruitment into armed forces. Simply the act of reporting on children places them at risk of retribution or stigmatization.

Always seek permission: You should avoid photographing, filming and interviewing children (under 18) without the permission of the parents or legal guardians. Interviewing a child without parental permission should only occur in exceptional circumstances, with the support of a trained child protection expert or someone closest to the child's situation who is best able to assess the psychosocial, political and cultural ramifications of any reportage. When trying to determine the best interests of a child, the child's right to have their views taken into account should be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

Less is more: In situations where a child may have experienced a traumatic event, it is good practice to refine the number of individuals present at the interview to create a safe and supportive environment that allows the child to share their experiences in a way that minimizes further emotional harm. Traumatized children are often already in a vulnerable and sensitive state. Reducing the number of people present respects the child's boundaries, allowing them to participate more willingly in the interview process. Having a large number of people present, especially unfamiliar adults, can be intimidating and distracting for them. Fewer people in the room also decreases the chances of sensitive information being inadvertently disclosed to unauthorized individuals.

Interviews should be child-centered, focusing on their needs and comfort and giving them as much control over the interview as possible. Children, especially those who have experienced trauma, may take longer to tell their story, and may not tell it in a linear fashion. Give the child time and remind them they are in control and can stop the interview at any time if they are feeling uncomfortable.

See here the DART center for Journalism and Trauma's guide to Interviewing children.

See here UNICEF's Key Principles for reporting on children and young people.

Ethical dilemma thought exercise:

In a crisis, you may feel pressure from a parent who wants you to interview, photograph or film their child who has been a victim of sexual or other abuses. The parent may feel that it is in the best interests of their child and want to share their stories in the media so their lived experience can contribute to raising awareness of the threats young people in their community face.

- ✔ *What would you do? Would you proceed with the interview?*
- ✔ *If yes, how would you ensure the child is also consenting to the interview?*
- ✔ *If yes, what preparation should you do? Who should be present?*
- ✔ *If yes, what can you do to protect the child's identity to ensure you are not risking potential prejudice or stigmatization in the community?*
- ✔ *If not, how would you explain your reasoning to the mother and the child?*

Contributing towards prejudice, division and hate speech

Avoid discrimination and stereotyping by ethnicity, language, region, race, gender, disability, etc. in the process of obtaining, processing and publishing/broadcasting facts and events. In the height of a crisis, media sometimes relies on stereotypes to quickly convey information about certain groups of people. When these stereotypes are overly simplistic or negative, they can perpetuate prejudiced beliefs and reinforce bias and, in some cases, contribute to social tensions within the community which can turn violent. For instance, when speaking about refugee communities, it is important to remember that refugee communities are not homogenous, and that someone's status as a refugee does not define their entire identity.

For more on avoiding prejudice and stereotypes in reporting, see here this guide from the Ethical Journalism Network.

While it is a fundamental principle for journalists to avoid using profane, abusive, racist, or language inciting violence, there are challenging situations where it can be hard to avoid this language when quoting someone else. In such cases, the inclusion of such language should be limited to instances where it is indispensable to the story, particularly if it has been uttered by a prominent public figure. Even then, it must be presented within the broader context of the narrative, with an explanation as to why this language can be harmful to communities.

Read more in the Ethical Journalism Network's 5-Point test for hate speech.

Conflict Sensitive Journalism

Journalists across the world face deep dilemmas when it comes to reporting on conflicts occurring in and sometimes devastating the communities they live and work in. Sometimes these conflicts play out in clashes between communities, at other times they take the form of violent attacks, often perpetrated against innocents, carried out by extremist and terrorist organizations. In all these instances, journalists must respond to the challenges of being part of a community caught up in conflict while at the same time being part of a profession that expects fair and even-handed coverage of these conflicts. The choices journalists make related to the language used, how the story is framed, or what is included or left out of their reporting can potentially increase antagonism, stigmatization and can put people further at risk.

This Internews handbook "A Conflict Sensitive Approach to Reporting on Conflict and Violent Extremism" aims to respond to some of these questions and to provide tools journalists can use that will help them report constructively on conflict.

Participating in or causing misinformation and disinformation

Poor journalistic practices, such as inadequate fact-checking or relying on unverified sources, can lead to the dissemination of misinformation (false information spread without harmful intent) and disinformation (false information spread with the intent to deceive). This can mislead communities, especially in critical situations like emergencies or public health crises and can fuel tensions between community, government, and responders, impeding access and preventing services for the community.

However, there will also be circumstances where media need to report on the rumors and misinformation circulating in their community. Misinformation, especially information that could lead to violence, division or dangerous practices should not be ignored. Reporting on misinformation without exacerbating the problem is a challenging but crucial task for journalists. Journalists play a crucial role in helping the public navigate complex information landscapes, and doing so responsibly can help mitigate the impact of misinformation.

To avoid further fueling the spread of misinformation, you should avoid rushing to publish unverified claims, and prioritize thorough fact-checking. Be cautious about repeating false or misleading information, as this can reinforce it in the minds of the audience. Instead, focus on debunking or amplifying verified information. When reporting on misinformation, provide context and background information that helps the audience understand why the false information may have spread and how to evaluate its accuracy. Involve experts or credible sources who are trusted by the community who can provide accurate information and clarify misconceptions.

Importantly, be transparent about how information has been fact-checked, including which sources were used. By allowing the community to see your process, you award the community more agency to assess the available information and make up their own mind. This approach is more successful than simply labelling information as 'true' or 'false'.

For more on responsible reporting on misinformation, see this guidance from First Draft.

Lack of diversity and representation

When media outlets lack diversity in their staff and fail to represent a broad range of voices and perspectives, they can perpetuate biases and contribute to underrepresentation or misrepresentation of certain communities. Integrating the voices of crisis affected communities into media programming is essential for providing a more comprehensive and accurate representation of experiences, challenges, and contributions.

Collaborate with crisis affected people for storytelling: Partner with refugee advocacy groups, community organizations, and non-government organizations that work directly with the crisis affected population. These organizations can help connect your media outlet with people willing to share their stories and perspectives. You could consider establishing dedicated sections or segments in your media programming or publications specifically focused on their issues and stories. This ensures their voices and issues have a regular platform.

Hire correspondents from the crisis affected community: If your media outlet does not include staff who have been directly impacted by the crisis (for instance if there has been influx of refugees) you could also consider hiring correspondents from the crisis affected community. This will help you be closer to the community needs and priorities and ensure that information is shared in a safe and culturally respectful manner. You can encourage and support these community journalism initiatives with resources, training, and platforms for the community to report on issues affecting their communities.

Online platforms

The growth of digital access around the world allows information providers in humanitarian situations to communicate directly with affected people and help them talk to each other. Many of the same risks and safety considerations above apply to communication and information transmitted digitally. However, new technologies also come with new and distinct risks that need to be understood by information providers and by communities themselves.

People may not always be aware of the privacy settings on their phone or be able to navigate safe spaces to share information with you or others. While groups might be private, once they exceed a certain number and when monitoring is limited, these groups function de facto as open platforms, with little oversight on who is 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.

It is important to consider the safety and security considerations that come with digital communication and to ensure you do not place yourself or your informants at risk. Remember that digital security is an ongoing process, and it is essential to stay informed about the latest security threats and best practices.

Some things to consider:

- **Consult experts:** Seek guidance from digital security experts or organizations experienced in secure communication practices, especially in high-risk situations.
- **Carefully select the platform:** Consider using encrypted messaging apps and platforms that offer end-to-end encryption, such as Signal, WhatsApp, or Telegram. Avoid using regular SMS or unsecured email for sensitive conversations. If you must use email, consider using encrypted email services like ProtonMail or PGP (Pretty Good Privacy) encryption for added security. Consider whether one-to-one conversations or small groups conversations will be safer and more comfortable to engage with the community. If you choose a group discussion space, ensure you monitor the space carefully to ensure no unwanted people join the group who might want to cause harm to informants.
- **Verify the identity:** Confirm the identity of your informant through trusted channels before engaging in sensitive discussions. Be cautious about accepting unsolicited communication requests.
- **Limit metadata exposure:** Be mindful of the metadata associated with digital communications. Avoid sharing location data and consider using tools that strip metadata from files and photos.

- **Emergency plans:** Have a plan in place for emergency situations, including what to do if your informant's safety is compromised.

Look after yourself: Working in a crisis can also have serious impacts on media workers. Listening to and reporting on stories of suffering can impact on your own mental health – this is called vicarious trauma. Vicarious trauma can impact your relationships, your ability to work and can lead to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Working long hours and listening to and reporting on stories of suffering can also lead to burnout.

This manual from First Draft discusses how individuals and newsrooms can avoid vicarious trauma.

This tip sheet from the Headlines Network explains how to look out for signs of burnout in your colleagues.

This guide from the DART Centre is for editors and managers.

It is important to learn to recognize these signs of stress in yourself and your friends and colleagues to support each other.

More reading, references:

- UNICEF Principles for ethical reporting on children. Available at: unicef.org
- UNFPA Reporting on Gender-based Violence in the Syria Crisis – A Journalist's Handbook (2015). Available at: unfpa.org
- Internews manual, Reporting on Humanitarian crises (2014). Available at: internews.org
- UNHCR – Countering toxic narratives about refugees and migrants. Available at: unhcr.org
- UN Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) - Reporting on migrants and refugees: handbook for journalism educators (2021). Available at: unesco.org
- DART Centre for Journalism and Trauma - Resources for reporters including interviewing survivors of trauma, interviewing children, use of language (this resource is specifically aimed at working on the Ukraine crisis, but can be applied and adapted to other contexts). Available at: dartcentre.org

Safe-programming Assessment

Given all these considerations for ensuring safety and dignity of affected people, what tools are available to support assessment and understanding of these?

The safe-programming assessment (template in Annex 2) guides the process for information actors, including media, to decide on whether – for example – it is safe to report on certain content in a certain way. This exercise can be conducted by the person / team developing content (for example, reporting on a story). If the context allows, the safe-programming assessment process should always include community input.

5-step safe-programming assessment process:

1. *Clearly lay out the project:* including the locations and who is involved in the story or report. Think about the primary people you will directly interact with and the secondary people who may also be impacted by this report. For example, you may be aiming to provide information to parents, therefore 'parents' would be the primary audience or potential interviewees or subjects, and a secondary person may be the children in the household.
2. *Identify the benefits of the story / report:* this will help in weighing the benefits against the risks to decide whether the outcomes justify taking certain risks / levels of risk. Think about the benefits to individuals and the community as well as the benefits to your organization or media outlet.
3. *Identify the risks that any activity could create:* this should include risks for the different people identified in the first step, including affected communities, media workers involved in the activity, and the reputation and organizational capacity of the organization or media outlet.
4. *Identify mitigation strategies to each risk:* Think about practical and concrete solutions that can be implemented to allow the report to take place while minimizing the identified risks, including who in the organization or media outlet is responsible for acting each solution.
5. *Decide whether to undertake the report or story:* assess the benefits against the remaining risks (after considering the feasibility of the proposed mitigation strategy), does the outcome outweigh the remaining risks? Or identify aspects of the reporting process that can be changed to mitigate risks while maintaining some or all the identified benefits.

Example of safe-programming assessments

(for the template, see Annex 2):

Project:		
A local radio show covering the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM): "Since FGM is part of a cultural tradition, can it be condemned?" is open to live questions from the audience and hosts medical and legal experts, traditional and religious leaders, and government representatives.		
Benefits	**Risks for all stakeholders**	**Mitigation strategies**
- *Contributing to the elimination of FGM by providing a space to debate the cultural, religious and legal elements framing the practice* - *Raising awareness about FGM health consequences for girls and women and disseminating information about health centers that can provide specialized medical care and mental health/psychosocial support* - *Providing an opportunity for the audience to share its experience and ask questions about FGM*	- *Audience: participants might disclose personally identifiable information (PII) while calling into the show and be targeted as a result (including stigmatization, violence)* - *Guests and journalists: might be targeted as a result of sharing a controversial opinion in opposition to traditional beliefs* - *Local radio: the office might be targeted by people from a community that practices FGM and is offended by the broadcast*	- *Ahead of participation, inform all participants about the risks of sharing information that would help in identifying who and where they are, and encourage anonymity. Offer the option to record questions or testimony ahead of the live show to allow edits to protect their identity.* - *Ensure all guests and journalists are aware and comfortable with the risks of participating in a debate on this topic* - *Coordinate with key stakeholders, including the head of the identified community that practices FGM, to increase buy-in, and invite a diverse set of guests to represent the whole community*
Decision:		
Mitigation strategies are sufficient, to protect individual callers, staff and the organization so the show can go ahead.		

Project:		
A local organization is creating a public social media account to share information about their achievements delivering humanitarian assistance, including pictures of affected community members.		
Benefits	**Risks for all stakeholders**	**Mitigation strategies**
- *Increasing transparency around the fair use of humanitarian funding* - *Increasing the organization's visibility among community members and local authorities to strengthen buy-in, improve safety of staff and support effective programming* - *Raise the profile of the crisis internationally and support the advocacy and fundraising aims of the organization*	- *Audience: the affected community members could use the platform to request support or share sensitive information, disclosing PII that could put them at risk, raising expectations for services that are not available through this organization and / or do not have established referral mechanisms* - *Audience: individuals in hiding may be recognized in a picture and their location be inadvertently disclosed* - *Audience: a user could be targeted for speaking up about a sensitive topic (noting that some population groups are more vulnerable to threats based on gender norms, belonging to marginalized group)* - *Organization: automatic translation of social media post might lead to misunderstandings for the audience* - *Organization: lack of capacity to respond to questions and requests of the audience might open the space to frustration, misinformation and rumors, creating tension with and mistrust in the organization*	- *Include visible guidelines on the social media page to raise awareness on the risks of disclosing PII and sharing sensitive information online* - *Choose pictures that do not identify members of the affected community, and ensure that all staff are trained and respect informed consent (including explaining the reach of social media to population groups with low digital literacy)* - *Develop internal guidelines for the moderation of social media messages on the account and choose to turn off commenting on sensitive posts* - *Recruit staff who can produce posts in multiple languages to avoid automatic translation* - *Recruit and train enough staff to moderate the group (respond to comments and private messages), or disable those two-way communication options if they cannot be reasonably monitored*
Decision:		
Review the communications approach to include a two-way communication component, including ensuring sufficient capacity for staff to monitor the social media account, and ensure training on monitoring and protection. The social media page should not be launched until all mitigation strategies are in place.		

Scenarios:

Use the scenarios below to test your knowledge and consider what you could do to respond to the situation and ensure you do not place the community at risk.

Scenario 1

You are informed that a woman who has been badly assaulted by soldiers has been brought to a nearby hospital. While the survivor is willing to speak, they fear being identified and are clearly angry, exhausted and traumatized from the experience.

What would you do?

Things to consider:

- How can you respect the survivor's consent and emotional well-being?
- How can you protect her identity to prevent reprisals and further harm?
- What level of detail is necessary to convey the gravity of the issue without sensationalizing?
- How can you provide resources and support for the survivor and the wider audience that might also face this risk?

Scenario 2

In the midst of a humanitarian crisis, you are covering the experiences of refugees seeking safety and shelter. You wish to capture impactful photographs that convey the gravity of the situation. However, ethical dilemmas arise regarding consent. The refugees may be vulnerable, traumatized, or unable to fully comprehend the safety implications of being photographed.

What would you do?

Things to consider:

- How can you obtain informed and voluntary consent?
- Should you prioritize telling the story over obtaining consent?
- If consent cannot be obtained, what other creative approaches could support your storytelling?

Scenario 3

You are dispatched to cover a humanitarian crisis affecting children who have been displaced from their homes. You recognize the importance of shedding light on the children's experiences, and the greater risks they may face in a crisis. Many children have been separated from their parents and are now entering a refugee camp without a carer and a specialist child protection agency has set up a safe space for the children to play in during the day. An 8-year-old child you have seen playing at the center approaches you and asks for an interview, what do you do?

Things to consider:

- Is it appropriate to interview the child without their parents' consent? Are there any alternatives?
- How can you ensure the children's well-being and mental health aren't compromised during interviews?
- How might the power imbalance between the journalist and the children affect their responses?

Scenario 4

You are covering a humanitarian health crisis where misinformation is rampant, exacerbating the situation. The misinformation is also fueling prejudice towards an ethnic minority living in the area who are being blamed for the outbreak of the virus. In some cases, this prejudice has escalated to violent attacks on people in this group. You feel compelled to debunk false claims and provide accurate information to the affected population.

Things to consider:

- How can you correct misinformation without inadvertently amplifying it?
- How can you ensure the ethnic minority's viewpoints are reflected without further exposing them to harm?
- Should you identify the sources of false information, potentially exposing them to backlash?

End of Module 4