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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Implementation of Population Preparedness Guidelines on risk communication under the EU Preparedness Union Strategy

Accompanying the document

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Guidelines on Population Preparedness under the EU Preparedness Union Strategy

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Executive summary

This Staff Working Document (SWD) is designed to support European Union (EU) Member States and Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) Participating States in improving risk communication for their citizens (Action 27 of the EU Preparedness Union Strategy). It sets out **the concrete modalities through which to implement the guidelines in the Commission communication 'Guidelines on Population Preparedness under the EU Preparedness Union Strategy' (C(2026) 8250).** This guidance, while non-binding, is intended to encourage EU Member States and UCPM Participating States to develop their preparedness actions according to their own national organisation, enabling them to benefit from a collection of good practices that build on the EU's wider work on disaster prevention and preparedness.

Risk communication is a core preparedness capability that helps people to understand risks, make informed decisions and take appropriate action before, during and after emergencies. Effective approaches go beyond providing information. They support trust, participation and behavioural adaptation by offering clear, actionable guidance, addressing uncertainty and creating opportunities for dialogue between authorities, stakeholders and the public.

Preparation

Authorities should build a comprehensive understanding of how communication has a role in the different dimensions of risk management, as well as the role of communication in preparedness. They should identify communication challenges, informed by evidence on public perceptions, information needs and behavioural drivers related to risk. This can be done by bringing together risk management, communication and behavioural science expertise from the earliest stages. Risk communication should be accessible and inclusive by design and made available in a timely manner through multiple accessible formats and sensory channels, so that everyone/all members of society can understand and act on it before, during and after emergencies.

Implementation

Creating a risk communication strategy starts by defining its objectives, based on the communication challenges identified, as well as the intended outcomes of the strategy. Early on, authorities should clarify the roles and responsibilities for key functions and identify the audiences they seek to engage. Communication content should be accurate, understandable and actionable, while being tailored to the needs, concerns and preferences of different audiences. Implementation should be supported by a clear roadmap defining communication activities, channels, timelines, responsibilities and resources. Authorities should promote two-way communication and collaboration with communities, media organisations, civil society and other trusted partners to strengthen outreach, participation and message accessibility and consistency.

Quality assurance and monitoring

Quality assurance should be integrated throughout the entire communication process. Authorities should monitor progress towards planned communication objectives and the desired changes in risk awareness, attitudes and preparedness behaviours. Monitoring should include public trust, stakeholder feedback and developments in the wider information environment, including misinformation, disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI). Communication strategies should remain flexible and be regularly reviewed and adapted in response to evaluation findings, emerging risks, changing audience needs and evolving communication channels.

1. Introduction

Why was this guidance developed?

The EU Preparedness Union Strategy was adopted by the European Commission in March 2025 (Communication JOIN(2025) 130 final) in response to the evolving risk landscape and common challenges facing the EU, building also on the findings and recommendations of the Niinistö report on preparedness and readiness of the EU.

Central to this approach is strengthening population preparedness, strengthening societal resilience by ensuring that citizens are prepared, which constitutes one of the seven building blocks of the Strategy.

This SWD is one of five Commission Staff Working Documents (SWD)[1] accompanying the Commission Communication on Guidelines on Population Preparedness under the EU Preparedness Union Strategy (C(2026) 8250) which covers the following actions**:**

- Guidance under **Action 27** on risk communication (SWD(2026) 825);
- Guidance under **Action 28** on reaching a population self-sufficiency of a minimum of 72 hours (SWD(2026) 826);
- Guidance under **Action 29** on preparedness in school education curricula and training of educational staff (SWD(2026) 827);[2]
- Guidance under **Action 33** on disability inclusive emergency preparedness and first response training, a flagship initiative of the Enhanced Disability Strategy (SWD(2026) 828).[3]

It is also accompanied by the **Citizens' Report to the European Citizens' Panel** (SWD(2026) 829). The recommendations from the European Citizen Panel on Preparedness, organised in Brussels by the European Commission in March-May 2026 with 150 randomly selected citizens from all 27 Member States, have been taken into account.[4]

In the Commission Communication on Guidelines on Population Preparedness under the EU Preparedness Union Strategy (C(2026) 8250) to which the present SWD is attached, the Commission proposes the following guidelines to civil protection authorities and other agencies and stakeholders involved in disaster risk management in the area of risk communication:

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[1] Available at https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/preparedness_en.

[2] This guidance was informed by analytical work undertaken through the Technical Assistance Financing Facility for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness.

[3] Action 33 is accompanied by two TAFF Advisory Reports: Guidance for Persons with Disabilities and Guidance for First Responders.

[4] The panel discussed building a culture of preparedness through education and awareness initiatives, empowering citizens to be first responders and active participants in crisis management. The focus was on strategies that spanned aspects like health, civil society support, and media literacy, addressing the challenges of vulnerable groups and developing leaders across communities. The European Citizens' Panel on Preparedness formulated 20 recommendations, including calls for accessible risk communication, practical guidance on 72-hour self-sufficiency, preparedness education from preschool age, and support for persons with disabilities and other groups facing barriers to preparedness. These recommendations were considered in the development of this guidance.

1. Treat risk communication as a core capability for achieving citizen preparedness. Involve citizens and relevant stakeholders in designing communication to ensure that messages reflect people's needs, address barriers and provide clear, practical actions they can take.

2. Plan risk communication across all disaster risk management phases, with clearly defined roles, target audiences, spokespeople, partnerships, communication channels, exercises, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Coordinate communication efforts across authorities, sectors and stakeholders and allocate appropriate and continuous resources.

3. Take into account the different needs and tailor communication to diverse audiences, ensuring accessibility from the earliest stages of design and adapting messages, formats, channels, narratives and messengers to different socio-demographic groups and local contexts, as well as to the diverse needs of persons with physical, sensory, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.

4. Evaluate and adapt communication approaches to changing risks, audiences and information environments.

This SWD is intended to provide further, more detailed guidance based on the guidelines above. This guidance was co-created with experts from EU Member States and UCPM Participating States, civil protection authorities and other disaster risk management stakeholders, including through dedicated workshops, and written consultations to help ensure their practical relevance and applicability.

For whom is this guidance intended?

This guidance is intended for civil protection authorities and other agencies and stakeholders involved in disaster risk management. It is designed to support and reinforce existing communication strategies and practices at national, sub-national and cross-border level, while offering additional resources to foster more effective and coherent preparedness communication across the EU. It also supports civil protection authorities to promote the importance of risk communication within and between agencies, as well as fostering cooperation, mutual support and collaborative engagement. While the guidance explicitly recognises the specific needs and circumstances of persons with disabilities and marginalised and/or at-risk groups, it also adopts an intersectional approach, recognising that people may experience different or compounded barriers as a result of multiple, overlapping circumstances and characteristics.

What is the scope of this guidance?

This guidance focuses on the planning and implementation of preparedness communication activities, with the objective of building risk communication that adapts to the evolving risk landscape across Europe. It provides practical guidance for developing an effective, inclusive and collaborative risk communication strategy, complemented by takeaways and tools built on scientific evidence, existing practices and lessons learnt.

How was this guidance developed?

An evidence-based and user-oriented approach underpins this guidance, ensuring that it is relevant, actionable and adaptable. The approach draws on research (diverse sources, as indicated in the ‘Resources’ sections of the Annexes), existing good practices and lessons learnt from risk and crisis communication initiatives across Europe and beyond. It was co-created with civil

protection authorities and other stakeholders involved in disaster risk management through risk communication training pilots and a dedicated workshop held in Brussels on 9-11 June 2026. The co-creation workshop brought together representatives from 22 different Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) Member and Participating States, as well as relevant stakeholders.

How is this guidance meant to be used?

This guidance is designed as a practical resource to support civil protection authorities and other disaster risk management stakeholders with the planning and implementation of risk and preparedness communication activities. It provides an overarching structured framework for developing or strengthening risk communication strategies, complemented by a practical Risk Communication Toolbox that offers more detailed operational guidance on specific thematic areas.

A checklist provides a quick-reference tool to facilitate the application of key takeaways, and additional resources offer opportunities for further learning and capacity-building on risk communication principles, practices and common challenges.

This Staff Working Document addresses **Action 27 of the EU Preparedness Union Strategy, which calls for strengthened risk and crisis communication as a key enabler of population preparedness and societal resilience across the EU**. This guidance supports the implementation of this action, providing a shared European framework to promote effective, accessible and inclusive risk communication. By integrating communication expertise with practical tips and good practice examples, it can support Member States and UCPM Participating States in carrying out risk communication that strengthens population preparedness and resilience to a broad spectrum of threats, from natural hazards to hybrid and cyber risks, contributing to a coherent approach across the EU.

Risk communication is increasingly recognised as a core component of disaster risk management and a key element of preparedness. Helping individuals, communities, businesses and authorities to understand risks, dependencies, and the dynamics of possible disasters allows them to take informed action and contributes to a more prepared and resilient society. In the context of increasingly interconnected, uncertain and evolving risks, effective risk communication must go beyond the provision of information and support behavioural adaptation, address uncertainty, foster trust in institutions, and promote dialogue and participation between authorities, stakeholders and the public. As such, risk communication is both a communication activity and a strategic capability that supports preparedness before, during and after emergencies.

Crisis communication can be considered a specific form of risk communication, applying the same fundamental principles but taking place under conditions of urgency, stress and rapidly evolving information, during and immediately following a disaster. While risk communication generally supports longer-term understanding, preparedness and engagement, crisis communication focuses on the response to the immediate situation and on enabling people to take appropriate action in reaction to an event, including through public warnings and other timely communication that enable people to understand the situation and take appropriate action in response to an event. Both are essential and complementary. **This document, however, focuses on risk communication.**

2. The role of risk communication in preparedness

The purpose of risk communication is to help individuals, communities, businesses and other relevant stakeholders understand risks, anticipate possible impacts, and adopt precautionary and protective measures to reduce harm and strengthen preparedness. Regular communication about risk can help societies take action to reduce risk and be better prepared to respond when crises occur. As interconnected risks across sectors and territories create new communication challenges, risk communication must also address uncertainty, support behavioural adaptation and help societies cope with evolving risk conditions.

Risk communication mainly takes place before a crisis, and also between crises. Crisis communication, by contrast, takes place during a crisis or emergency: its purpose is to guide affected populations and stakeholders towards appropriate protective and safety measures, support timely decision-making, and help people respond to rapidly changing circumstances.

As crises may become more prolonged, authorities need to sustain communication efforts throughout ongoing emergencies, helping individuals and communities remain aware of evolving risks and adapt their behaviour as circumstances change. In the aftermath of a crisis, risk communication can help to address consequences, capture lessons learnt, and support adaptations that strengthen preparedness for future events.

Alongside their role in building knowledge and encouraging behavioural change, both risk communication and crisis communication can contribute to building trust in disaster risk management institutions and facilitating stakeholder participation in risk-related decision-making and conflict resolution. Effective communication should therefore promote participatory and relational approaches that foster dialogue, mutual understanding, trust and collective action among experts, authorities, stakeholders and the public.

Whether before, during or after a crisis, successful communication relies on several key principles (see Box 1). Information should be accurate, timely, understandable, inclusive and accessible, with messages tailored to different audiences (see **SWD(2026)828 under Action 33**) and consistent across channels and institutions. Communication should enable two-way engagement between authorities and the public to understand concerns and information needs, while also providing opportunities for communities to share local knowledge, observations and feedback. Communication efforts should also promote coordination across sectors, jurisdictions and borders to ensure coherent messaging and avoid confusion.

Box 1. Guiding principles for risk communication

Plan risk communication across all disaster risk management phases, in both the short and long term, with clearly defined roles, target audiences, spokespeople, partnerships, communication channels, exercises, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Build trust through credible, transparent and evidence-based communication, grounded in research, behavioural insights, testing and evaluation. Communication should be delivered through trusted messengers, intermediaries, media partners, and community representatives, whilst ensuring transparency on existing efforts, decision-making processes and uncertainties.

Take into account the different needs and tailor communication to diverse audiences, ensuring accessibility from the earliest stages of design and adapting messages, formats, channels, narratives and messengers to different socio-demographic groups and local contexts,

as well as to the diverse needs of persons with physical, sensory, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, including persons with high support needs, to ensure communication that is accessible, relevant, equitable and audience-centred.

Promote participation, information sharing, co-creation and partnerships, establishing two-way communication channels and involving communities, volunteers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations representing and advocating for persons with disabilities, marginalised and/or at-risk groups, educators, local associations, private sector actors, children, young people and other stakeholders throughout the communication process.

Empower people and foster confidence through clear, actionable and practical communication, providing understandable guidance, education and capacity-building opportunities that strengthen individual and collective agency, self-efficacy, preparedness and confidence.

Monitor emerging concerns and adapt communication accordingly, tracking public perceptions, communication reach and engagement, misinformation, stakeholder needs and changing risk conditions to continuously improve communication effectiveness.

Based on evidence from EU-funded projects and practice spotlights presented by different experts through dedicated workshops and training.

Trust is a key pillar of effective risk communication. Public willingness to follow recommendations and preparedness measures depends on the credibility of the institutions communicating the risk and the measures to prevent or counter it. Building and maintaining trust requires transparency, consistency, responsiveness and openness about uncertainties. Monitoring and assessing public trust can provide valuable insights for improving communication strategies and strengthening institutional legitimacy.

Example	Main takeaways
Community Trust Index British Red Cross	Obtaining evidence on the level and variation of community trust can help to define actions and recommendations to foster and increase that trust

Factors that motivate individuals to act should be considered in risk communication strategies. People are more likely to engage in risk reduction measures when they believe that such actions are effective, when they feel capable of implementing them when they understand their own role and responsibility in managing risk, and when they trust the institutions promoting the proposed measures. Previous disaster experience, coping skills, the economic and non-economic costs and trade-offs associated with preventive actions, as well as social perceptions of risk, levels of community resilience, social support, a sense of belonging, community connectedness, and linguistic or cultural barriers, may also be determining factors. Proactively addressing these factors alongside risk communication can significantly enhance individual's preparedness.

Coordination between authorities becomes increasingly important as preparedness involves actions across the entire disaster risk management cycle. Shared communication strategies and integrated communication channels can provide a more coherent, user-centred and resource-efficient approach.

Continuous learning and training are increasingly important in a rapidly changing risk environment. Exchanging experiences, lessons learnt and good practices across countries, sectors, hazards and disciplines can accelerate institutional capacity-building and foster more effective communication, strengthening risk awareness and preparedness across Europe and beyond.

However, risk communication faces significant **challenges**. Knowledge gaps, misinformation, limited resources and diverse cultural and social contexts can influence risk perception and how people react to information. Integrating psychological and behavioural insights is therefore essential. Monitoring risk awareness, understanding audience attitudes and adapting communication accordingly are key elements of effective risk communication.

3. Building an effective risk communication strategy

Risk communication refers to the process and activity of exchanging information about risks. A risk communication strategy provides the long-term vision and operational framework that makes this communication coherent, coordinated and effective. It is not limited to developing and disseminating messages or a compilation of communication activities conducted in isolation, but, rather, is a systematic and evidence-based process that enables organisations to inform, engage and support individuals, communities and private sectors before, during and after crises. A risk communication strategy should aim both to increase knowledge and to promote informed decision-making, trust and appropriate protective behaviours, while strengthening coordination between agencies, civil society and other relevant stakeholders in support of the broader objective of increasing societal preparedness.

A practical roadmap for building an effective risk communication strategy can be organised around the following questions: ***Who and why? To whom and with whom? What? How and when?*** This approach helps to ensure that communication activities remain strategic, are purposeful, audience-centred, coordinated and collaborative, and aligned with broader risk reduction targets.

The Risk Communication Toolbox contains practical tools that focus on the most important components of a risk communication strategy. They include case studies, key insights and a list of takeaways. The individual tools build on one another and are cross-referenced where applicable, but each tool is self-contained and can be downloaded and used separately. Its modular format means that the toolbox can be updated and expanded as needed.

The Risk Communication Toolbox includes:

- Risk Communication Tool 1: Crafting effective communication content.
- Risk Communication Tool 2: Choosing communication channels.
- Risk Communication Tool 3: Working with the media and other partners.
- Risk Communication Tool 4: Monitoring and evaluation.
- Risk Communication Tool 5: Countering misinformation and disinformation.

3.1 Preparation: Risk dynamics, communication needs and collaborative frameworks

A risk communication strategy is built on a comprehensive understanding of the complex and interconnected dimensions of risk dynamics, impacts and management, as well as expertise in

how communication can contribute to preparedness overall. Bringing together risk management, communication and behavioural science expertise from the earliest stages of strategy development effectively addresses the preparedness targets that civil protection authorities and disaster risk management actors seek to achieve in line, for instance, with the National and Local Risk Assessment for Disaster Risk Management reports.

Effective risk communication requires clear mandates, roles and coordination arrangements. This includes identifying who has the mandate to communicate, who convenes relevant authorities and sectors, and how risk communication connects with national risk assessments, civil protection planning, early warning, preparedness exercises and crisis management structures. Clear arrangements, including for coordination and information sharing, help ensure that the necessary capabilities are in place in advance and that communication remains **consistent, timely and coordinated** when risks emerge or evolve.

Fostering collaboration with stakeholders from the outset can help to jointly develop communication approaches that are context-sensitive and responsive to the needs of affected populations and sectors (see Box 2). The process should draw on previous experience, available evidence, good practices and, where possible, testing to understand what works, for whom, and under what circumstances. Once key communication challenges have been identified, a structured cycle can guide the definition of objectives, development and implementation of actions, and evaluation of results.

Box 2. Research and needs assessment

Effective communication is grounded in evidence rather than assumptions. Before developing messages or selecting communication channels, organisations should conduct research to understand public perceptions, information needs and behavioural drivers related to the risk, in the relevant particular context (national or subnational). Research questions can explore what people know and feel about disaster risk, the challenges they face and the actions they take. This assessment could include surveys, focus groups, interviews, social listening activities, media monitoring or stakeholder consultations. Particular attention should be paid to how different groups perceive the severity, likelihood and relevance of risks, as risk perception often differs significantly from expert assessments.

Behavioural research demonstrates that people's decisions are influenced by emotions, social norms, cognitive biases and levels of trust, as well as information. Applying a behavioural lens can inform both the research and analysis needed to understand how people interpret uncertainty, evaluate risk, make decisions and adopt proposed behaviours, and the design of the communication intervention itself. Behavioural insights should inform every stage of the communication process, from the purpose and audience research to message testing and evaluation.

3.2 Implementation: An adaptive, target audience(s)-focused risk communication strategy

Step 1. Defining objectives and roles: Who is communicating and why?

Risk communication often involves multiple actors operating at local, national and cross-border level. The co-development of risk communication strategies helps to clarify the most effective communicators for the context by clarifying roles and responsibilities for key communication

functions and ensuring effective coordination across all levels. Early coordination helps to prevent inconsistencies and communication gaps, while trusted intermediaries and community networks can play a formal role in information dissemination and dialogue, particularly when engaging marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk and their representative organisations should be meaningfully involved in the design, testing, implementation and evaluation of risk communication measures, including as trusted partners for outreach, feedback and co-creation.

The starting point is to translate preparedness challenges into clearly defined objectives. These should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). Objectives may vary depending on the phase of risk management and the target audience, and may encompass short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. Clearly defining the intended outcomes facilitates the selection of target audiences, communication methods, effective communicators, and evaluation indicators later in the process.

Step 2. Identifying audiences: To who and with whom are we communicating?

A successful strategy starts with a precise understanding of the audiences involved. Different stakeholders have different information needs, levels of knowledge, concerns and capacities to act. Preparedness objectives may target a wide range of audiences, including the general public, community leaders, specific professional groups, policymakers, media representatives, civil society, marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk, ensuring that their specific circumstances and needs are adequately understood and taken into account. This should reflect the diversity within and across these groups, recognising that they are not homogeneous and that people may experience different or intersecting needs and barriers. Tourists, people on business trips and those who regularly move across borders (and may not speak the local language) should also be considered (see **SWD(2026) 826 under Action 28**).

Step 3. Crafting communication messages and content: What should be communicated?

Message development is one of the most visible components of risk communication. Messages should be clear, accurate, relevant and actionable, while remaining adapted to the specific characteristics of the target audience. Rather than focusing exclusively on technical information, effective messages should address audience concerns, explain why main takeaways matter and clearly describe the actions people can take considering the emotional and behavioural factors influencing individuals' preparedness. Messages should balance sufficient detail with simplicity and ease of understanding and avoid unnecessary jargon. In rapidly evolving situations, transparency about what is known, what remains uncertain, and what actions are taken under a learning-by-doing approach can strengthen credibility and trust. Where relevant, messages should include accessible and practical information on available assistance, points of contact, evacuation procedures, transport arrangements, accessible shelters, continuity of support services, assistive devices and essential medication. Communication should also anticipate potential pressure points, including possible misinterpretation or deliberate manipulation, and consider existing or emerging criticisms that may require particular attention and monitoring when developing and adapting messages.

✓ FURTHER GUIDANCE IS AVAILABLE IN **TOOL 1: CRAFTING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION CONTENT**.

Step 4. Developing workplans and tactics: How and when should communication occur?

A clear roadmap should be developed to achieve the intended objectives, outlining communication activities, timelines, responsibilities, and expected outputs. Two-way and bottom-up communication activities offer opportunities for dialogue, feedback and participation, allowing organisations to better understand concerns and adapt their approaches accordingly. Collaborative partnerships involving communities and stakeholders can strengthen message consistency, expand outreach capacities and facilitate communication with populations that may be wary of official sources.

Together with external communication for the public and stakeholders, communication planning should consider internal communication to teams and partner organisations to ensure that public-facing messages remain coherent and coordinated. The selection of communication channels and formats should be guided by audience preferences and accessibility needs, acknowledging that a diversified mix of channels and innovative approaches can enhance effectiveness.

✓ FURTHER GUIDANCE IS AVAILABLE IN **TOOL 2: CHOOSING COMMUNICATION CHANNELS** AND **TOOL 3: WORKING WITH THE MEDIA AND OTHER PARTNERS**.

Box 3. Allocating budget and resources

A dedicated budget for personnel, communication materials and tools or monitoring systems is essential for the effective implementation of a communication strategy. Integrating communication activities into existing programmes improves efficiency, for example leveraging community networks like health care and youth centres, using shared communication assets and prioritising high-impact activities. Strategic partnerships with trusted organisations (e.g. NGOs, faith groups, academia, education or youth organisations) can extend outreach without substantial additional costs.

Budget planning should explicitly include resources for accessibility and reasonable accommodation, including interpretation/translation, captioning, accessible formats, testing with users, assistive communication solutions and engagement of relevant organisations. Budget planning should remain flexible, allowing organisations to adapt communication activities as circumstances evolve and new needs emerge.

Step 5. Monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement

Evaluation allows organisations to assess whether activities are reaching their intended audiences, generating engagement and contributing to desired outcomes. Beyond communication outputs (e.g. reach, participation, media coverage), indicators should provide evidence of behavioural outcomes (e.g. adoption of recommended protective measures). Systematically documenting lessons learnt and promoting continuous improvement are particularly important in rapidly evolving risk environments, where preparedness challenges and audience expectations change over time.

The structured approach provided by a risk communication strategy enables the monitoring of progress towards communication objectives throughout implementation, and to evaluate the effects of communication activities on risk awareness, perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. Monitoring and evaluation findings should be used to identify strengths, weaknesses and

emerging needs, allowing communication objectives, plans and tactics to be adjusted as required, and facilitates the integration of new and unforeseen risk communication priorities.

✓ FURTHER GUIDANCE IS AVAILABLE IN **TOOL 4: MONITORING AND EVALUATION**.

3.3 Quality assurance

3.3.1 Ensuring quality for the achievement of risk communication objectives and impacts

Quality assurance should be embedded throughout the entire process of developing and implementing a risk communication strategy. This ensures that risk scenarios and collaborative frameworks are adequately addressed from the beginning and that communication objectives, plans, tactics, and budget allocations are aligned. A successful strategy includes effective coordination and co-development across agencies and with stakeholders, message pre-testing, and the use of appropriate methods to assess risk awareness.

Quality assurance should also leverage the evidence generated through monitoring and evaluation activities (Step 5). Findings should be regularly analysed to verify whether communication objectives are being achieved, identify areas for improvement and inform future decision-making. Lessons learnt should be integrated into planning, implementation and coordination processes, in order for organisations to strengthen the consistency, relevance and effectiveness of their risk communication efforts over time.

✓ FURTHER GUIDANCE IS AVAILABLE IN **TOOL 4: MONITORING AND EVALUATION**.

3.3.2 Addressing misinformation and disinformation

Risk communication requires organisations to be prepared to address emerging risk of misinformation and disinformation, which can significantly undermine preparedness efforts and reduce the effectiveness of a risk communication strategy. Monitoring information ecosystems, proactively communicating accurate information and working with trusted partners are critical components of effective responses.

✓ FURTHER GUIDANCE IS AVAILABLE IN **TOOL 5: COUNTERING MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION**.

3.3.3 Managing uncertainty in an evolving risk context

Risk communicators increasingly face situations characterised by uncertainty, novelty or low-probability but high-impact risks that may limit public attention and learning. Openly acknowledging what is known and unknown, explaining how organisations learn and adapt their decision-making as risks evolve, and updating messages as new evidence becomes available can help to maintain public trust, and prevent information vacuums before other narratives or unverified information fill the gap. Monitoring changes in the risk landscape and anticipating emerging or increasing risk scenarios can help civil protection and disaster risk management authorities to address preparedness challenges proactively and provide sufficient time to strengthen risk awareness and foster a culture of preparedness.

4 Checklist: Putting strategic risk communication into practice

Preparation	
	Understand risks and context. Develop a comprehensive understanding of the risk dynamics and potential impacts.
	Gather evidence on audience needs, risk perceptions, barriers to action, levels of trust and communication preferences.
	Engage authorities, stakeholders and communities early. Involve the relevant authorities, stakeholders, communities and trusted partners at an early stage to shape the strategy and support its implementation. Consult organisations representing persons with disabilities and marginalised groups and/or groups at risk.
	Ensure that participation is meaningful, not limited to consultation on predefined approaches.
Implementation	
	Set objectives linked to the preparedness outcomes. Define communication objectives that are clearly linked to identified preparedness challenges and specify the behavioural or preparedness outcomes the strategy aims to achieve.
	Ensure meaningful participation. Ensure that the participation of relevant stakeholders, communities and partner organisations is meaningful, not limited to consultation or predefined approaches.
	Segment audiences and ensure inclusion. Identify and segment target audience, adapting communication approaches adapted to their specific needs, contexts and communication preferences.
	Work with trusted intermediaries and partners. Identify and engage trusted intermediaries, media partners and community networks that can support outreach, dialogue and trust-building among different audiences.
	Address the needs of groups that may face additional barriers to accessing, understanding or acting on risk information.
	Develop, tailor and test messages and materials. Ensure messages are tailored to audience needs, clearly explain both the risk and the actions people. and are tested to representative audiences and refined based on feedback.
	Test communication messages, **materials and channels** with representative audiences, and ensure they are refined based on feedback.
	Plan resources, roles and coordination. Establish a clear workplan assigning responsibilities, resources, timelines and expected outcomes.

	Ensure sufficient resources, coordination mechanisms and partnerships are in place to deliver quality communication activities that will have impact over time and across levels of governance.
	Monitor reach, gaps and effectiveness. Measure outputs such as reach and engagement. Use evaluation mechanism to identify who is and is not being reached, where communication gaps remain, and whether activities influence preparedness awareness, attitudes or behaviours.
	Use feedback and adapt continuously. Systematically collect and use feedback on public trust, perceptions and stakeholder concerns, to continuously adapt and improve communication approaches.
Quality assurance	
	Incorporate communication and behavioural change expertise throughout the design and implementation of the risk communication strategy.
	Introduce process for capturing, sharing and applying lessons learnt across organisations, sectors and communication activities.
	Establish and implement arrangements to detect, assess and respond to misinformation and disinformation before it undermines preparedness objectives.
	Regularly review and adjust communication objectives, messages and channels in response to changing risks, audience needs and evaluation findings.

5 Conclusions

A risk communication strategy provides a robust framework for defining short-, medium-, and long-term risk awareness objectives, fostering collaboration, promoting audience-centred approaches, ensuring the efficient use of available resources and enabling performance evaluation and improvement. As Europe faces an increasingly complex and evolving risk landscape, risk communication should be recognised as a strategic preparedness function that supports whole-of-society and whole-of-government approaches to resilience, rather than a standalone communication activity.

Effective risk communication is a critical component of preparedness and societal resilience. By helping people to understand risks, make informed decisions and take appropriate action, it strengthens the capacity of individuals, communities and institutions to anticipate, prepare for and respond to a wide range of hazards and threats. Successful risk communication depends on trust, participation, coordination and a clear understanding of audiences and their needs. Communication strategies should be evidence-based, inclusive and adaptable, drawing on behavioural insights, stakeholder engagement and continuous learning and adaptation.

By strategically planning and implementing communication throughout the risk management cycle and continuously measuring outcomes over time, authorities can strengthen preparedness, enhance public trust and contribute to a more informed and resilient society.

Risk Communication Toolbox

Risk Communication Tool 1: Crafting effective communication content

Effective content for risk communication is based on facts, while also considering people's values, risk perceptions and emotions. It is developed through participatory processes that involve the target group and may use storytelling to create engagement and increase relevance.

1. Research communication needs to guide content creation

Effective communication content depends on the **nature of the risk**, the **cultural context** of the region or Member State, and the **characteristics** of the target group(s). For this reason, there is **no one-size-fits-all messaging**. Content creation therefore starts with **researching target groups**, for example through a survey and focus groups, to get a better understanding of factors at the individual level (e.g. previous experience of disasters, coping and emotional regulation skills, cognitive biases) and collective level (e.g. social perceptions of risk, levels of community resilience and support, linguistic or cultural barriers), which communication content then needs to address. This research can also help you prioritise target groups based on vulnerability.

More information	• Robinson et al., *RiCA Guide for Essential Research*, 2024.

2. Characteristics of effective risk communication content

Clear	Easily understood; uses simple, unambiguous and respectful language/visuals
Interactive	Results from research, dialogue and co-creation with the target groups
Consistent	Tells a consistent narrative across channels without gaps or contradictions
Useful	Based on facts, accurate, relevant and actionable for different target groups
Engaging	Considers the emotions, values and cultural contexts of the target groups
Inclusive	Leaves no one out; tailored to the specific requirements of marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk

3. Participatory content creation with target groups and other relevant stakeholders

To strengthen **credibility, trust**, **inclusiveness** and **usefulness**, communication content should be **tailored** to each target group in a **participatory process** that involves members of the group and other relevant stakeholders. Various levels of involvement are possible, ranging from **interviews** and **focus groups** to **full participation** where members of the target group are directly involved in content creation. Establishing **long-term communication channels** with target groups also facilitates the **pre-testing** of content (point 5) and **monitoring** of its effectiveness (see **Tool 4: Monitoring and evaluation**). Accessibility of language, format, visual design, and communication choices should be considered from the earliest stages of development, rather than adapted as an afterthought (see **SWD(2026) 828 under Action 33**).

4. Use storytelling to engage target groups during the prevention phase

During the **prevention phase** of the disaster management cycle, it can be difficult for the public to imagine how existing risks may affect them in the future. Research shows that using narratives and storytelling can be an effective way to get people's **attention** and engage their **imagination.** Framing information about risks and preparedness measures in the form of a story also makes it easier for people to **remember** it later. While emotional appeals can be helpful, an emphasis on negative emotions such as fear should be avoided, with **empathy and positive emotions** stressed instead.

Storytelling can be particularly helpful in **marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk** (e.g. children, young people, and persons with disabilities) and should be **tailored** to the requirements, needs and preferences of the respective group.

Featuring interesting storylines and **relatable protagonists** is crucial for the success of storytelling. These protagonists can be **fictional** (e.g. the *Disaster!* disaster risk reduction comic books for children) or they can be **real people** (e.g. Portugal's CHAMA public awareness campaign for wildfire risk).

Example	Main takeaways
Disaster! **Disaster risk reduction comic book for children** Croatia	• Makes preparedness **entertaining, engaging and accessible** through creative tools • Clear and **non-threatening** communication for use at home and in schools (see **SWD(2026)827 under Action 29, Section 3.3 Guidance for Educators**)
CHAMA **campaign** Portugal	• Wildfire risk awareness and mobilisation campaign that uses an **inclusive and positive we-narrative** and a whole-of-society approach • Consistent narrative across multiple channels (see **Tool 2: Choosing communication channels**) • Television ads show individuals who **learned** from past events

Developing an inclusive and positive **'we-narrative'** can contribute to a more resilient risk culture. This **collective narrative approach** uses first-person plural pronouns **('we' and 'our')** to **foster a shared identity, collective action and shared responsibility.** It shifts the focus away from isolated individuals or distant authorities by mobilising **all levels of society**, including the public, to become **active agents** in preparedness efforts, while fostering **empathy, connections** and **community**. It also prepares the population for more top-down, one-way, time-sensitive **crisis communication** during the response phase.

During the **recovery phase** following a crisis, **storytelling** can be an effective method to enable those affected to **process their experiences**. It can in turn provide others with **lessons learned** from these firsthand experiences, while **fostering empathy and solidarity**.

More information	• Hou, J., *Storytelling for disaster resilience and community engagement*, 2024. • Webster et al., *Stories are the Toolkit: Community-led Disaster Response, Recovery and Adaptation*, 2024.

5. Pre-test communication content with target groups

Pre-testing content helps to avoid low engagement, confusion/misinterpretation and unintended cultural insensitivity. Key elements such as imagery, storyline and protagonists/presenters can be **presented to selected members of the target group** to learn whether content is clear, trusted and engaging. Problems can then be resolved with **adjustments before implementation**.

6. Work with external agencies and artists on content creation

Working with external agencies or creative writers and artists can increase the impact of communication and match the production standards that target groups expect. It is important to communicate **goals**, **objectives, budget** and **target groups** clearly to such partners and to establish a regular feedback loop.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- **Research:** Conduct primary research to define communication needs.
- **Co-create:** Involve target groups and stakeholders in content creation.
- **Use storytelling:** Encourage emotional and imaginative engagement by presenting information in the form of a story featuring protagonists with whom readers can identify.
- **Be action-oriented:** Positive approaches - rather than threatening ones - can strengthen feelings of agency.
- **Pre-test:** share key elements such as imagery, storyline and protagonists/presenters with members of the target group to get their feedback before implementation.
- **Collaborate externally:** Be clear about your goals with external agencies and artists.

Risk Communication Tool 2: Choosing communication channels

Impactful risk communication depends on the development of effective content (see Tool 1: Crafting effective communication content), as well as choosing appropriate channels to implement the communication strategy and distribute that content. The choice is determined by a variety of factors, including the time and budget available, communication goals and preferences of the target groups. A combination of channels will often yield the best results.

1. Research preferred communication channels of target groups to ensure accessibility

The research phase in a risk communication strategy should include an analysis of target groups' **preferred communication channels** and accessibility consideration. This can be done using **existing data** on media usage or by conducting a survey to collect **data**. Other actors, such as civil society organisations, or volunteer organisations may offer **support**.

2. Strengths and limitations of various communication channels

Based on target groups' communication preferences, choose a suitable **combination of channels** for group members **to receive key messages multiple times** and **in different forms** (see point 3). Communication channels can be divided into several **main categories**, each with its own set of **strengths** and **limitations** in terms of **accessibility, reach, cost, audience engagement** and **level of complexity** it can convey. Authorities should use multiple accessible channels so that no single mode of communication becomes a barrier, including combinations of broadcast, digital, direct and place-based communication with accessible visual, text, audio and sign language options.

Communication channels	Strengths	Limitations
Print leaflets, brochures newspapers books	• Can include visuals and text • Can be saved for later use • Use is independent of electricity • Door-to-door delivery ensures that more people are reached • May be more accessible and preferred by older citizens	• May be less engaging than broadcast and digital media (e.g. television, social media) • Reach varies for different target groups • High reach can be expensive • Requires literacy/language competence • Content may quickly become obsolete
Broadcast radio television	• Extensive reach • Often high levels of trust among older people • Can be integrated with digital media to gain reach	• Requires technology and electric power • Limited ability to personalise content

	• Radio is the most technologically reliable medium in a crisis	• Limited options for audience interaction • Limited accessibility due to broadcasters' programming priorities • Requires high skills and budget
Digital social media messaging websites apps video games	• Rapid and extensive reach • Allows for target audience segmentation and analytics • Can be interactive • Available for future reference • Can be cost-effective	• Requires technology and electric power • Requires digital literacy • Reach varies for different target groups • Trust levels vary across media and groups • Open to misinformation and disinformation (see Tool 5: Countering misinformation and disinformation) • Often high competition for attention
Direct local events intermediaries hotlines	• Can be interactive • Can be personalised • Can build trust • Can convey complex information and build skills	• Attaining extensive reach can be expensive and time-consuming • May require training of intermediaries • Open to inaccuracy if intermediaries are unequipped • Measuring impact can be a challenge
Place-based and physical communication and information signs information boards in risk-prone areas and public displays	• Highly contextual and visible • Reaches people directly in places where risks may materialise • Can provide information before and support during an event • Can reach people who may not be connected to digital channels	• Location-specific and limited in reach • People may not notice, understand or act on the information • Generally one-way and cannot easily be updated in real time • Requires maintenance and accessibility considerations

More information	• Robinson et al. 2024. *RiCA Pocket Guide*, Chapter 'Plan'.

3. Tailor content to communication channels and target groups

To boost effectiveness, **communication content should be tailored** to target groups' requirements, needs and capabilities (see Tool 1: Crafting effective communication content), **take advantage of the strengths** and **minimise the limitations** of the chosen channels. For example, World Animal Protection's **'Thunder' campaign** combines a funny **television advert** featuring a talking dog with **social media posts** and a **website**.

Example	Main takeaways
'Thunder' World Animal Protection Costa Rica	• Campaign based on the results of a countrywide investigation to determine the level of preparedness of urban pet owners • Consistent narrative tailored to make the best use of multiple channels (e.g. 30-second, emotional television ad and informative, detailed website) • Monitored and evaluated to ensure effectiveness (see Tool 4: Monitoring and evaluation)

4. Find creative and cost-effective ways to reach target groups

Budget constraints can limit the availability of some communication channels such as television, newspapers and other media that charge high fees for ad placements. Creative alternatives may rely on **open-source content** and free **social media,** as well as on a network of **long-term partners** that can include **media outlets, non-governmental organisations (NGOs)** or **businesses** (see Tool 3: Working with the media and other partners). For example, **30-days-30-ways** is a **no-budget** campaign in the popular '30-Day Challenge' format, which tells its preparedness story across various **social media channels**, with a **website** providing more detailed information.

Example	Main takeaways
30-days-30-ways preparedness campaign UK	• Creative tool targeting the general population, including young people • Consistent storytelling across channels during September, designated 'Preparedness Month' in several countries • Sustained by hundreds of partner organisations and volunteers • Monitored and evaluated (see Tool 4: Monitoring and evaluation)

5. Choose trusted messengers and intermediaries

Communicating through a trusted intermediary or messenger can be especially effective for **reaching marginalised and/or at-risk groups** such as older adults, persons with disabilities, and children. Getting creative can help: depending on the audience and communication objectives, the use of testimonials or mascots, for example, can make risk messages more engaging and

accessible. The **Firefighter Teddy Bear, Bjørnis,** evolved from a **plush toy** given to children as a source of comfort during fire brigade operations into a **trusted ambassador** for fire safety education across a variety of channels, including **brochures, social media** and **a television show**.

Example	Main takeaways
Firefighter Teddy Bear Bjørnis Norway	• Creative tool that educates children and their parents about fire safety • Uses direct channels (e.g. face-to-face communication with a human-sized mascot bear) and a variety of media channels

MAIN TAKEAWAYS
• **Research, do not assume:** Target audiences' media use can vary in surprising ways. Base decisions on evidence. • **Pick channels with purpose:** Know the strengths and limitations of each. • **Stay consistent:** Coordinate messages and storytelling consistently across all chosen channels. • **Prioritise proximity:** The value of direct channels, such as face-to-face interaction, should not be underestimated. • **Choose trusted messengers:** Give priority to building trust with the target audience. For adults, this may be an authority figure, a widely respected cultural figure. For children, it may be a fictional character. • **Be creative:** Search for innovative and cost-effective ways of reaching target groups.

Risk Communication Tool 3: Working with the media and other partners

In addition to understanding the strengths and limitations of the available channels (see Tool 2: Choosing communication channels), a risk communication strategy requires building long-term relationships with journalists, media outlets and other partners. Cooperation with the press offices of disaster risk management authorities and interagency cooperation also ensures consistent and accurate information.

In a crisis, people often rely on broadcast media such as radio and television for information, rather than on government alert systems alone. Instead of waiting for the media to start reporting once a crisis has occurred, civil protection authorities can be **proactive** as part of a **risk communication strategy** to build **long-term relationships with journalists, media outlets and other partners.** Partnerships with media should support accessible risk communication, including, where relevant, sign language interpretation, captioning/subtitling, accessible visual presentation and timely dissemination of verified information in various formats.

1. Research relevant media outlets

The first step is to research the available media and gather key information about how they operate.

Type of media	Key information
• Local media • Regional media • National media • Specialist and sector-specific media	• Ownership structure (public or private) and funding. • Type and reach of media channels offered. • Types of content typically produced. • Level of trust among different target groups. • Role played in previous risk and crisis communication efforts.

Effective collaboration with the media requires an understanding of the **basic principles of media coverage**. Most print and broadcast media outlets strive to provide the public with truthful and objective information, but reporting is also shaped by **timeliness, proximity, significance and human interest,** factors that may come into play more obviously during a major crisis than in risk prevention and preparedness efforts. Ignorance, bias, or economic factors can lead to risks being **downplayed** or **misrepresented** in the media.

2. Establish long-term partnerships to develop mutual trust and standardised protocols

Building **partnerships** with selected media partners means building their knowledge of the **critical importance of prevention and preparedness** for their audiences through **regular meetings**, sharing **fact sheets**, joint development of **standardised communication protocols** and **shared goals**. Inviting journalists to **an introductory briefing** that clearly links to their audiences' interests can be a **good way of making initial contact**. **Participation in exercises, workshops and scenario simulations** can also help to foster their engagement and improve practices. Additionally, clear protocols and guidance for timely and safe reporting during emergencies must be in place. Developing these jointly with media can help build the relationship with media as a partner.

3. Collaborate with media partners on risk communication tools

Building relationships with media partners may lead to **collaboration on the production of specific risk communication tools,** such as a newspaper article advocating preparedness or a public service announcement in the form of a radio spot or video that is broadcast free of charge.

More information	• US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention – DSC, *Creating and Distributing Public Service Announcements*, 2024.

Close collaboration with media partners and creative professionals such as filmmakers can lead to more **creative formats for risk communication**. In 2021, the German TV documentary 'When the forest was ablaze' (*Als der Wald in Flammen stand*) was produced as part of the programme *Heimatflimmern* on the public broadcaster WDR, in collaboration with the fire department and the police, to draw attention to the increasing risk of wildfires following several years of severe drought.

Example	Main takeaways
Als der Wald in Flammen Stand Germany	• Television documentary uses archival footage and interviews with eyewitnesses, rescuers and helpers to educate people about wildfires. • All statements and information reported were accurate as to the status of that time. • Effectively uses storytelling (see Tool 1: Crafting effective communication content) to enable affected members of the public to share their experiences while promoting prevention and preparedness.

4. Work effectively with other strategic partners

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other organisations with specific expertise can help to bridge communication gaps. They may be able to provide more **flexible and creative messaging**, and support from a third party can add credibility to an authority's messages. In addition to **building trust** and **personal relationships**, this can help to **disseminate more coordinated risk communication** and **contribute to combating disinformation and misinformation** (see Tool 5: Countering misinformation and disinformation). Such collaborations can also make it easier to **work with tight budgets**.

5. Prepare staff for media interviews and designate a media officer or spokesperson

News and current affairs coverage are among the most common formats for reporting on risk reduction and this type of content typically relies on **interviews**. **Engaging in productive dialogue with journalists** from all interested media organisations can help the public to make informed decisions about risk mitigation. Close cooperation with the **press offices of disaster management authorities** and **interagency cooperation he**lps to ensure that information is consistent, timely and accurate. If there is no press office, a **media officer** or **spokesperson** who has completed **special training** should serve as the **official point of contact** for press enquiries and interviews. They should be able to respond **in a timely manner**, including when information is incomplete or evolving, and communicate clearly **both in situations of certainty and uncertainty**, to avoid the development of information vacuums.

6. Characteristics of effective media interviews on disaster risk

- An experienced and well-trained media officer or spokesperson.
- Clear talking points on what needs to be communicated.
- Pre-defined interview parameters within competence area.
- Clear, focused and honest answers, no overpromising.
- Avoid jargon, acronyms or terms that lay people will not understand.
- End with solutions and/or actionable advice.

More information	• UNDRR, *Common challenge: Media interviews on disaster risk*, 2026.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- **Take initiative:** Proactively engage with the media before a crisis hits as part of preparedness activities.
- **Build partnerships:** Build long-term partnerships with the media and other strategic partners.
- **Collaborate:** Seek opportunities to develop risk communication tools with partners.
- **Build trust:** Become known as a reliable source of correct and consistent information.
- **Prepare:** Develop fact sheets to share with media and protocols for interviews.
- **Define responsibilities:** Appoint a media officer or spokesperson, including for crisis situations.
- **Persevere:** Keep communication with journalists targeted, relevant and consistent.
- **Consider** media engagement during emergencies, including protocols for timely and safe reporting.
- **Respect the role of media**: News media require timely, engaging content for audiences. Approach them with appropriate content rather than expecting them to deliver your message as an obligation.

Risk Communication Tool 4: Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluating risk communication is essential to understand whether campaigns and other communication activities are having the desired effect. It also helps to stimulate audience participation and engagement, while supporting learning and the continuous improvement of communication and preparedness activities. Effective monitoring and evaluation require adequate planning before, during and after communication activities, as well as sufficient human and financial resources. Costs can be reduced by collaborating with partners and volunteers and by leveraging existing materials and data sources.

1. Risk communication is about achieving behavioural change

When measuring whether risk communication is successful, monitoring and evaluation should look beyond reach (e.g. numbers of people receiving a message) and engagement (people's reactions to it) to determine whether communication leads to the desired behavioural change. This means checking whether people are adequately prepared, take concrete action to minimise risks and act appropriately during an emergency. Behavioural change can be difficult and costly to measure.

2. Important elements to monitor and evaluate

To understand what works well in risk communication and where improvements are needed, monitoring and evaluation should engage diverse audience groups from the design phase onwards. This includes co-creating, pre-testing and assessments to make sure that narratives, messages, channels and formats resonate with different groups, including marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk, and that they are accessible, inclusive, engaging and do not induce fear without agency.

Monitoring and evaluation should include specific indicators and feedback mechanisms to assess whether groups that may face barriers or increased risks have received, understood and been able to act on the communication, including through disaggregated user testing and structured feedback from representative organisations. The pathway from communication to behavioural change is not linear. Three progressive broad groups of indicator types can be distinguished to measure whether the communication has the desired effect on audience reach, engagement, knowledge and, ultimately, behaviour.

Indicator type	Examples	What it measures
Reach	• Social media impressions • Number of people/proportion of target audience exposed to the message	Whether the intended audience has been successfully targeted and whether messages are being received across relevant channels.
Engagement	• Social media engagement with the message (e.g. number of likes, shares, comments)	Whether audiences are interacting with the messages.
Knowledge	• Number/proportion of target audience accurately describing risks	Whether audiences recognise, recall and

	and recommended actions (e.g. through a survey or interview)	comprehend risk messages and recommendations.
Behaviour	• Rates of adoption of recommended actions (e.g. participation in drills, subscribing to an alert tool) • Spontaneous further promotion of the recommended action (e.g. through additional user-generated content) • Post-emergency data on population health, casualties	Whether the behaviour of the target audience has changed in line with the messaging, both before and during an emergency.

It is important to measure levels of trust and credibility, as these influence whether people engage with the communication and adapt their behaviour. Monitoring and evaluation should also allow the detection of misinformation and disinformation campaigns, which can seriously undermine risk communication efforts (see **Tool 5: Countering misinformation and disinformation**).

More information	• See SWD(2026)828 under Action 33 and the accompanied TAFF advisory reports

3. Know the baseline

Before the risk communication activities begin, it is useful to use similar indicators to those described above to establish the status quo, or the baseline, enabling the degree of change to be measured later. Ideally, a baseline analysis is undertaken at design stage of the risk communication strategy, measuring existing behaviours, resilience levels, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions necessary to set relevant goals, choosing the most appropriate formats and channels, and tailoring communication messaging.

4. Different methods, tools and sources to monitor and evaluate

Monitoring and evaluation can draw on different methods, tools and sources, depending on the budget and type of risk communication activity. It is important to maximise the use of readily available data directly linked to the communication, such as website traffic, app downloads and alert tool subscriptions. This can be complemented by data that can be retrieved with relatively simple tools, such as media monitoring, content analysis, social media listening and web scraping (using an automated process to extract large amounts of data from websites).

Other sources such as administrative data and official statistics can also provide useful insights into relevant trends and behaviours. Targeted consultation activities such as interviews, focus groups and surveys require some investment but can help to identify which elements of the communication are most/least effective, and whether and why behavioural change is taking place. A **mixed approach** works best, combining qualitative methods that provide in-depth insights with quantitative methods that show broader trends and common perceptions.

5. Cost-effective ways to monitor and evaluate

Monitoring and evaluation need to be properly budgeted, but costs can be reduced by making good use of existing resources. Relevant information can be drawn from existing data sources, such as the Eurobarometer on disaster risk awareness and preparedness of the EU population, as well as proxy indicators such as official statistics on public health, insurance data, volunteering and trust in government and media.

Where new data is needed, community and volunteer-supported data collection can help to make this more feasible while simultaneously ensuring their engagement. Existing monitoring and evaluation tools and templates, for example those used by other countries or international organisations, can reduce design costs if they can be adapted. Provided they are used properly, with full human oversight and in compliance with relevant data protection laws, artificial intelligence (AI) tools can offer cost-effective ways to analyse large quantities of data.

Example	Main takeaways
Io non rischio Italy	• Volunteers can help to reach recruit target groups, including at-risk groups, for interviews and follow-up surveys • Monitoring and evaluation can be scaled up by using volunteers to cover activities and locations that would otherwise be difficult to access • Volunteers require robust briefings in advance to minimise bias and improve the reliability of data collected
Regular large-scale surveys to measure individual preparedness Estonia	• Track preparedness regularly: repeated surveys reveal trends and the effect of interventions • Segment the audience: results show which groups are less prepared and why • Measure both outcomes and barriers: combine preparedness levels with obstacles, awareness, and information channels

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- **Set a baseline:** Establish the status quo and measure what changes.
- **Measure behaviour**: Look beyond reach, awareness and engagement; assess whether people are actually preparing and acting differently.
- **Use a mix of methods**: Combine surveys, interviews, focus groups and existing data to understand impacts, trends and barriers.
- **Engage different groups:** Engage with diverse audience groups. Check whether risk communication reaches different target groups effectively, including those most at risk.
- **Leverage existing resources:** Use existing data, templates, volunteers and simple tools where possible.

- **Learn and adapt:** Use monitoring and evaluation findings to continuously improve, adapt and strengthen risk communication activities.

Risk Communication Tool 5: Countering misinformation and disinformation

Misinformation and disinformation can undermine preparedness and emergency response efforts by creating confusion, eroding trust and reducing public willingness to follow risk reduction and safety recommendations. During emergencies, misinformation and disinformation may spread quickly both online and offline across digital and traditional media. Civil protection authorities and other disaster risk management actors need to monitor the information environment, communicate proactively, shape public understanding and work with trusted partners to promote accurate, evidence-based information.

1. Understanding misinformation and disinformation

While misinformation and disinformation differ in intent, they both have the potential to shape public behaviour (e.g., disregard life-saving instructions from authorities) and undermine both preparedness and response activities. Although understanding the differences between the two can help authorities to assess information risks, in practice response decisions should be guided by the potential harm and reach of the information.

Type	Definition	Example
Misinformation	False or misleading content **shared without harmful intent** though the effects can still be harmful	People share false information with friends and family in good faith - for example sharing a parody news article through social media, that they believe to be true.
Disinformation	False or misleading content that is spread with an intention to deceive or secure economic or political gain and which may cause public harm	A malicious actor manipulates statistics on a sensitive topic as part of an effort to obtain wide-spread support of specific political views.

Source of definitions: COM/2020/790 final on the European democracy action plan

Authorities may also face **foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)**, which is a mostly non-illegal pattern of behaviour that threatens or has the potential to negatively impact values, procedures and political processes. It is a manipulative activity conducted in an intentional and coordinated manner by state or non-state actors, including their proxies inside and outside of their own territory.

In the case of FIMI, competent authorities would need to be informed when taking action, so the response process might differ from that of misinformation or disinformation. The EEAS flagship initiative EUvsDisinfo, established in 2015, exemplifies the European Union's efforts to proactively address FIMI campaigns affecting the EU, its Member States, and countries within its shared neighbourhood. The European Democracy Shield also outlines relevant measures for whole of society cooperation to build resilience against such challenges; relevant measures include not only strategic communications but also policy and other instruments.

2. Building resilience before misinformation and disinformation spreads

Preventing and mitigating the impacts of misinformation and disinformation starts before such content appears. Building public knowledge and strengthening media and digital literacy can help people critically assess information, identify trustworthy sources and recognise misleading or false content, including before and during emergencies. Concerted efforts can be made to reduce the risk, identify emerging concerns and respond in a timely and proportionate manner. Key actions include:

- **Work with the media:** Long-term partnerships with journalists and media outlets can help to increase the consistency and accuracy of messages during a crisis. These relationships are best established before crises occur and can support the rapid dissemination of accurate information, help to address knowledge gaps, and strengthen public trust during emergencies (see Tool 3: Working with the media and other partners).

- **Leverage civil society expertise and networks:** Fact-checking organisations, volunteer networks and other trusted civil society organisations can help to identify emerging rumours, reach marginalised and/or at-risk groups, promote media literacy and amplify accurate information. Establishing partnerships before crises occur can strengthen resilience to misinformation and disinformation and support a whole-of-society approach to preparedness.

- **Promote media and information literacy:** Helping people develop the knowledge, skills and competences to understand how information is created, shared and manipulated can strengthen resilience to misinformation and disinformation. Public awareness initiatives and educational activities can help individuals to critically assess information, identify trustworthy sources, recognise misleading or manipulated content and make informed decisions before and during emergencies. This should take account of the evolving information environment, including social media, influencers and generative AI. The Guidelines for teachers to foster digital literacy and tackle disinformation provide practical approaches for developing these competences, particularly among children and young people (see also **SWD(2026) 827 under Action 29**).

- **Inoculate against misinformation and disinformation**: Interventions that expose people to simplified examples of common manipulation techniques (e.g. emotionally manipulative language, false dichotomies, impersonation of official sources) can improve their ability to recognise manipulative content. Interventions such as short games, videos or messages should be repeated periodically.

- **Establish and sustain trusted communication channels:** People are more likely to rely on and share information from their preferred communication channels. Maintaining reliable and diverse channels before emergencies occur helps to establish trusted sources of information that can be activated during crises (see Tool 2: Choosing communication channels).

- **Communicate early and acknowledge uncertainty:** Silence from authorities can create spaces that are quickly filled by unverified information. Share accurate information as early as possible to build credibility and prevent information gaps. Be clear about what is known, what remains uncertain, and what is being done to find out more. Transparency about uncertainty and timely corrections can help to maintain public trust.

- **Identify communication vulnerabilities:** Authorities should assess where misunderstandings or misleading narratives are most likely to emerge due to specific vulnerabilities (e.g. politically sensitive or highly emotional topics). Understanding these vulnerabilities enables

organisations to anticipate risks, proactively pre-bunk and prepare communication responses in advance.

- **Prepare communication protocols and resources:** Developing communication protocols, key messages and coordination mechanisms before an emergency can support rapid and consistent responses when an emergency arrives or misleading information emerges. Roles and responsibilities for communication, monitoring, escalation and approval processes should be clearly defined beforehand.

- **Monitor the information environment:** Regular monitoring of broadcast and digital media can help to identify emerging narratives, information gaps, rumours and misleading claims before they become widespread. Monitoring should focus on broader narratives, public concerns and changing information needs, and should pay particular attention to unanswered public questions.

Example	Main takeaways
Who Influences Your Attitude? (Danish only) Denmark	• Raising awareness of manipulation techniques can strengthen resilience before misinformation spreads. • Public awareness campaigns can reduce vulnerability to future misinformation and support societal preparedness.
Virtual Operations Support Teams (VOST) Portugal	• Volunteer networks can help to identify misinformation and disinformation before they become widespread, support the dissemination of verified information and reinforce official messages across communities and social media. • Partnerships established before emergencies occur are more effective during periods of heightened information uncertainty.
Matilda.es WhatsApp Chatbot Spain	• Providing simple verification tools through widely used platforms can help individuals to quickly check suspicious content and reduce the spread of misinformation and disinformation. • Directing users to verified information and fact-checked content can strengthen trust in reliable sources during emergencies.

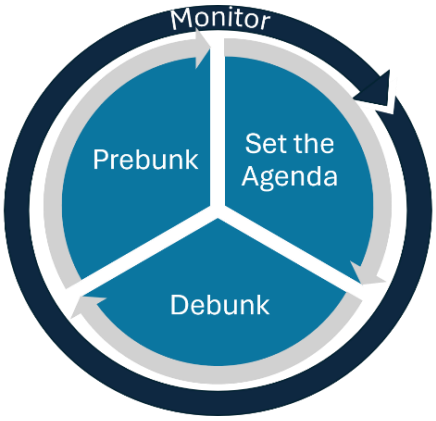
3. Take action against misinformation and disinformation

3.1. *Assess whether and how to respond*

Not all instances of misinformation and disinformation require a public response. Before taking action, authorities should assess its potential impact on preparedness, public trust and emergency response efforts, as well as its level of visibility and reach. Responses should be proportionate to the risk and should be designed to reduce harm while avoiding the amplification of false or misleading narratives. Concrete criteria such as the speed of spread, movement across platforms or communities, pick-up by influential accounts or mainstream media and potential to change protective behaviours can help to define when a public response becomes necessary.

3.2. Choose an appropriate response

Ongoing monitoring of the information environment should inform the choice of response. Depending on the nature, reach and potential impact of the misinformation and disinformation, authorities may decide to prebunk, set the agenda, or debunk misleading information.



Prebunking aims to build resilience by proactively addressing misconceptions, explaining manipulation techniques and providing accurate information early. It prioritises manipulation techniques over specific claims or topics, as technique-based inoculation can be generalised. Prebunking messages should be repeated and refreshed, as effects decay over time.

Agenda-setting involves providing timely, accurate and transparent information on emerging issues before false narratives become established.

Debunking involves directly correcting misinformation and disinformation. Evidence-based debunks lead with the accurate information, warn before briefly mentioning the false claim (stated once only), explain why it is false or the manipulation technique it uses, and close by repeating the accurate information. Debunking is most effective it comes from trusted messengers, is paired with clear guidance on what people should do and is repeated across channels.

More information	• Lewandowsky et al., The Debunking Handbook, 2020. • European Commission, Countering information manipulation, 2026. • European Commission, 6 tips to spot and stop information manipulation, 2026. • Council of Europe, Information Disorder - Freedom of Expression, 2026. • World Health Organization (WHO), Infodemic management resources, 2026. • United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), Harmful information in disasters: Risk communication for safer decisions (Guidance note), 2026.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

- **Trust**: Build trust and communication networks among target groups, authorities and other relevant stakeholders before a crisis occurs.
- **Be first, be honest**: Communicate early, express empathy and openly acknowledge uncertainty - silence leaves information voids that misinformation and disinformation fills.
- **Listen**: Monitor relevant channels regularly and flag emerging concerns and information gaps early.
- **Prepare**: Agree (and test) roles, responsibilities and communication procedures in advance.
- **Partner**: Build a network of trusted media, the scientific community and civil society organisation contacts that can be activated when needed.

- **Respond proportionately**: Before responding, assess whether the issue requires action and choose the least amplifying and most effective intervention.
- **Learn and adapt**: Review each communication after any major intervention and continuously evaluate and adjust the approach accordingly.

Glossary

Behavioural insights

Perspectives drawn from behavioural sciences, such as psychology, economics, sociology and other fields that investigate human behaviour, such as how we process information and make choices. This includes understanding the affective and cognitive processes, beliefs, perceptions, knowledge and intentions underlying behaviour and information processing.

(Source: adapted from Dupoux et al., 2025; Kroese et al., 2026)

Cognitive biases

Cognitive biases are mental shortcuts that people use to process information quickly. While often useful, these shortcuts can systematically influence how risks are perceived, interpreted and acted upon, affecting preparedness and decision-making. They are based on systematic patterns of deviation from rational judgment, whereby individuals construct subjective interpretations of reality that can lead to inaccurate judgments, distorted perceptions or suboptimal decisions. Tendencies to quickly forget the lessons of past disasters or to underestimate the likelihood that losses will occur from future hazards are among the decision-making biases affecting disaster preparedness.

(Source: Da Silva et al., 2023)

Disinformation

False or misleading content that is spread with an intention to deceive or secure economic or political gain and which may cause public harm.

(Source: COM/2020/790 final on the European democracy action plan)

Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI)

A pattern of behaviour that threatens or has the potential to negatively impact values, procedures and political processes. Such activity is manipulative in character, conducted in an intentional and coordinated manner. Actors of such activity can be state or non-state actors, including their proxies inside and outside of their own territory.

(Source: JOIN/2025/791 final European Democracy Shield: Empowering Strong and Resilient Democracies, footnote 9)

Misinformation

False or misleading content shared without harmful intent though the effects can still be harmful, e.g. when people share false information with friends and family in good faith"

(Source: COM/2020/790 final on the European democracy action plan).

Risk communication

The interactive process of exchange of information and opinions between individuals, groups and institutions about a risk or potential risk to human health or the environment. Any risk communication effort must have an interactive component, if only soliciting information about the audience at the beginning or evaluating success at the end.

(Lundgren and McMakin, 2018)

Storytelling

Storytelling is the act of telling or writing stories or narratives to reveal the elements and images of a story. Storytelling is universal to the human experience. Typically, stories are told for entertainment, for information purposes or for educational purposes, as they allow us to share information in a memorable way while encouraging recipients' imaginations.

(Source: National Geographic, 2025)

Marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk

Individuals or groups who face barriers, exclusion, discrimination, limited participation, or unequal access to information, services, resources, protection, and decision-making processes, or who may experience disproportionate impacts before, during, and after emergencies, disasters, armed conflict, and humanitarian emergencies due to attitudinal, social, economic, environmental, institutional, health-related, or other factors. The term recognises both the challenges these groups may face and their capacities and contributions to resilience. Depending on the context, this may include persons with disabilities, older persons, children and youth, women and girls, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, displaced persons, ethnic and linguistic minorities, Indigenous Peoples, sexual and gender minorities, persons living in poverty, and other groups.

(Source: UNDRR, 2017; WHO, 2022; UN CRPD, 2006)

We-narrative/collective narrative

A 'we-narrative' in risk communication is a collective narrative approach in which first-person plural pronouns ('we' and 'our') are used to foster a shared identity, collective action and shared responsibility. This shifts the focus from isolated individuals or distant authorities to a united group that faces a risk together. (Source: Das, Becker and Doyle, 2025)

Annexes

Resources

The content of this guiding document was informed by a variety of sources, including:

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Additional resources

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