



What your audience needs to know in an emergency: Life-saving information

Topic-by-topic guide to core humanitarian issues

INTRODUCTION

These guides are for media professionals working to help audiences affected by humanitarian crises. They give a brief overview of common humanitarian issues in emergencies. They will help you:

- Understand what kinds of problems your audiences are likely to be facing in emergencies
- Work alongside relief experts to provide audiences with accurate, relevant and life-saving information

HOW TO USE THESE GUIDES

These guides contain information on core humanitarian topics. They are intended to serve as a starting point to help you identify the kinds of issues to address in your programmes and questions to ask relief experts. To help you identify which topics to prioritise, you should speak with local humanitarian specialists. If possible, speak with your audiences as well to find out what they need to know.

When using the guides remember to:

- Consider the local situation, culture and context to make sure the information is relevant
- Consider the specific needs of different audiences (for example, men, women, the most vulnerable people)
- Check for consistency with other sources of information being provided
- Consult qualified local specialists to check the validity and relevance of humanitarian information
- Use the guides in conjunction with BBC Media Action's Lifeline Production Manual, which contains guidelines on how to do effective programming in crises



GETTY

SHELTER



What is shelter?

Shelter refers to the place where people live or stay. Humanitarian agencies working on shelter focus on three areas: shelter (that is, safe housing, tents, shelter kits), settlement (that is, camp construction and maintenance, provisions for internally displaced people) and shelter-related non-food items (such as blankets, bedding and clothes).

Why is it important?

Without adequate shelter, people can die from exposure to climatic conditions and other threats. When shelters provide a space for people to rest properly and a sense of security, they can better focus on securing other needs. Shelters are often where families interact and children are raised, which can influence wider well-being.

How can media and communication help?

You can share practical information with audiences about how to build or access temporary shelter if they have lost their homes, or where to go during hazardous times (for example, cyclone shelters). You can share practical steps and solutions for making shelters safer – using stories from community members and advice from experts.



Remember each emergency is different. Ask local aid experts to guide you on what information you should prioritise and the best advice to share with your audience in the context.



Case study



On 4 May 2015, BBC Media Action launched *Milijuli Nepali (Together Nepal)*, a special radio programme for the people affected by the earthquake in Nepal. Here, BBC Media Action interviews some of the earthquake affected families living together under a shelter.

Following the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, BBC Media Action and the World Service launched *Milijuli Nepali (Together Nepal)*, a 15-minute radio programme to help earthquake survivors. A local head teacher heard one of the broadcasts about shelter. He was teaching in a school that had been significantly damaged and knew that the lives of his 650 students were in danger of the building collapsing. On the radio programme he heard an interview that explained that help was available for anyone whose building had been damaged. The teacher phoned the contact number given on the radio, and help came immediately to demolish the building safely.



What information can I share with audiences?¹

Your audiences may need answers to the following questions to help them take practical steps to stay safe and healthy. Talk to local humanitarian specialists to get their advice. Remember that there are different groups in the community with different needs. Find out which groups in the community are the most vulnerable (for example, children, pregnant women, elderly people etc.) and what advice to give them.

What are the risks to people's lives, health and security because of poor/inadequate shelter?

- What should they do about these risks? For example, are they at risk of future hazards (aftershocks or flooding), unsafe environments, diseases, poor health?

Evacuations

- If people's homes are not safe, where should they go, when? (For example, according to the emergency, after shocks with earthquakes, flooding, cyclones etc.).
- What items should people take with them if they are evacuating?
- Where can they access other supplies? (For example, blankets, radios, lights, other)

How can people make their housing/shelter/belongings secure in disasters?

- If people still have homes, are they safe? How can they find this out?
- How can people secure their shelters if necessary? What can they use? (For example, is there strong material like galvanised metal wire or straps available locally? If not, what are the other options? How can people cover and protect their windows and other openings in the shelters from storms/winds/hazards?)
- How can people keep their valuable items safe? (For example, elevate valuable items during floods, secure loose items so they won't be blown away)

Health and security

- How can people protect themselves and their families from other risks (for example, insecure environments, crime)?
- How can they build with the most privacy and protection? (For example, where should they position the door, how can they best relate to neighbours?)
- How can they protect themselves and food/water from vectors (e.g. flies and mosquitoes)? (See WASH guide)
- How can they maintain health? (For example, get rest, get food, stay calm?)

How can people access clothes, blankets and bedding?

- For example, how can they access aid distributions?
- If they do not have access to aid, what can they do to help themselves? (For example, what materials are available locally that could be used for blankets or bedding? Have any communities found innovative solutions to help themselves?)

What are the particular risks for vulnerable groups (for example, pregnant women, elderly people, children, disabled people)?

- How can vulnerable groups protect themselves?
- How can communities support them? Is there any special help available from local groups/agencies?
- What advice is there? If in settlements, where are the safe spaces for vulnerable groups like breastfeeding women and children?

Example information on shelter and vulnerable groups

"Vulnerable people such as elderly people, people with disabilities and pregnant women should get shelter before everyone else. They need to be located close to water distribution points, latrines and kitchen facilities, as well as the health centre. You can help by making sure they don't feel isolated or unsafe, and that they can evacuate their shelter easily. All shelters should be set up to ensure the safety and privacy of you and your families. Contact XXX if something concerns you about your shelter."

¹See: https://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/8%20Key%20Messages%20Posters_Final_V1.1_A0.pdf; see also: <http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/message-library/>

The information in this document is based on the following sources:

Resources

Shelter Cluster: Key messages on “how to build back better”:

https://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/8%20Key%20Messages%20Posters_Final_VI.I_A0.pdf

IFRC, Chapter 4 Sphere Standards: Minimum Standards in Shelter, Settlement and Non-food Items. Contains some key messages for audience about safety in shelter:

http://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/95884/D.01.02.a.%20SPHERE%20Chap.%204-%20shelter%20and%20NFIs_%20English.pdf

Shelter Cluster: Information, videos, case studies relating to shelter:

<http://www.sheltercluster.org/morethanjustaroom>

CDAC message library: Generic WASH communication messages:

<http://www.cdacnetwork.org/tools-and-resources/message-library/>

Further reading

Philippines Shelter Cluster (2014). Shelter Sector Response Monitoring Typhoon Haiyan, Philippines 2013: Final Report: Monitoring Assessment 2. Available from: https://www.sheltercluster.org/sites/default/files/docs/8%20Key%20Messages%20Posters_Final_VI.I_A0.pdf

Sphere Project (2004). Minimum standards in shelter, settlement and non-food items. Chapter 4 in: Sphere Handbook: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, 2004. Available from:

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/3d64ad7b.html>

UNHCR (2007). UNHCR Emergency Handbook, 3rd edn. Geneva: UNHCR. Available from:

<https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/60439/shelter-needs-assessment>