

TIP SHEET:

Early warning systems

DISABILITY INCLUSION KEY MESSAGES

When thinking about early warning systems it is crucial to remember the full diversity of our communities throughout each stage of the early warning and response process:

- ✓ **Receiving the warning:** People with disabilities may not hear or see warnings due to their impairments (e.g., cognitive, vision or deafness). They may also miss out due to isolation, stigma, and discrimination (e.g., if information is not shared with them by other community members, or they do not attend events where warning systems are discussed and planned).
- ✓ **Understanding the warning:** If people with disabilities are excluded from disaster preparedness or planning processes, they may not know what to do even if they do receive the warning information. People with cognitive impairments may not understand warnings that use technical or unclear language. Because of barriers to accessing education, people with disabilities (particularly women and girls with disabilities) may have low levels of literacy and be unable to read.
- ✓ **Taking action to respond to the warning:** People with disabilities may not be able to take action because they may not be able to independently move to reach evacuation centres, there may be no-one to assist them, or the centres may be inaccessible for them. People with disabilities often need more time to take action, so need to receive warnings as early as possible.

THINGS TO DO TO DESIGN AN INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

- ✓ **Awareness raising:** Ensure people with disabilities, their families and communities receive information about the possible hazards which might affect them; the importance of evacuating early; what to do if they receive information that a disaster is imminent; the location of evacuation shelters; and their right to an accessible shelter.

- ✓ **Identify people with disabilities:** Draw on local disability rights organisations or disability service providers to help find people with disabilities and elderly people who live in the area. Undertake outreach and provide support like transport or sign language interpretation to ensure they are included in the decision making to develop a community early warning system.
- ✓ **Capacity:** Train National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and community disaster preparedness representatives on disability inclusion aiming to ensure awareness of the need to implement accessible early warning systems.

THINGS TO DO TO ENSURE ALL PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES RECEIVE THE EARLY WARNING

- ✓ Provide warnings in multiple formats including audible (e.g., sirens and announcements); visual (e.g., flags and flashing lights); written (e.g., SMS/text messages and electronic signs); and pictorial.
 - See the table below to check if your early warning dissemination method is accessible for people with different impairment types.
- ✓ Ensure that the volunteers whose responsibility it is to provide door-to-door warnings understand how to communicate this information in accessible ways to people with disabilities.
- ✓ Information accessibility: Use simple language and clear pictures. Work with sign language interpreters to communicate with deaf people.

THINGS TO DO TO ENSURE ALL PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES UNDERSTAND THE EARLY WARNING

- ✓ **Awareness raising:** Ensure people with disabilities, their families, and communities are aware of the purpose of the early warning system; the warning alerts and what they mean; and what to do if a warning alert is circulated among the community.
- ✓ **Clear information:** Ensure early warning messages use clear and easy-to-understand language to explain:
 - **Timing:** When is the hazard due to strike?
 - **Location:** Which areas are going to be affected?
 - **Scale:** What is the magnitude of the hazard? (e.g., level of water, wind speed, etc.)



- **Impact:** What will be the effect of the hazard on the communities and environment?
- **Probability:** What are the chances of this happening?
- **Response:** What should at-risk populations do to protect themselves?

- ☑ **Simulations:** Implement accessible disaster evacuation simulation exercises to familiarise people with disabilities with the early warnings; the process to evacuate; routes to the evacuation shelter; and the location and layout of their nearby shelters.

THINGS TO DO TO ENSURE ALL PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES CAN TAKE ACTION TO RESPOND TO THE EARLY WARNING

- ☑ Identify community members who may require assistance to evacuate. Assign community volunteers with the responsibility to find those people and assist them to evacuate. Train these community volunteers in how to communicate with people with different impairments; safe techniques for how to lift and carry people with physical impairments; and how to guide a person who is blind.

Table: Effective information dissemination methods for people with different types of disabilitiesⁱ

Methods	Accessible by people with physical disabilities?	Accessible by people with psychosocial disabilities?	Accessible by people with cognitive disabilities?	Accessible by people who are deaf or hard of hearing?	Accessible by people with vision impairments?
AUDIO (radio, sirens, loudspeaker)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
VISUAL (television news announcement, flags)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Only with sign interpreter (if applicable), captioning or transcript	Only with audio description
WRITTEN (signs on community board) (dependent on literacy levels)	Yes	Yes	Yes, with simplified messaging and images	Yes	Only with large print, Braille translation or electronic copy for screen readers
SMS/text messages (dependent on literacy levels)	Yes, if technology is accessible	Yes	Yes, with clear and simple messaging	Yes	Only with screen reading apps or for people with some vision
DOOR-TO-DOOR outreach	Yes	Yes, with preparedness	Yes, with clear and simple messaging	Only if person going door-to-door can communicate with sign language or clear visual messages	Yes

ⁱ This table has been adapted from: Women's Refugee Commission & International Rescue Committee (2015), *Gender-based Violence Disability Toolkit*, Tool #7, <http://wrc.ms/gbv-disability-tools-english>