

UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION INITIAL COVID-19 ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

OVERVIEW

The ongoing COVID-19 outbreak is an unprecedented event in modern human history, requiring the United Nations system to work as One UN to support countries.

The UN Secretary-General has asked the international community to focus on three critical areas of action: 1) Tackling the health emergency; 2) Social impact and the economic response and recovery; and 3) Recover better.

The **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030)** highlights biological hazards, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as major risks for the 21st century. While the World Health Organization has declared COVID-19 a pandemic, its underlying factors, vulnerabilities and impacts go well beyond the health sector. It is, in fact, an example of systemic risk: when a hazard leads not only to negative effects in parts of the system but also threatens the failure of the entire system. With its cascading and devastating impacts, COVID-19 demonstrates the inter-connected nature of risk today, highlighting the urgent need for a concerted global effort to accelerate risk reduction activities.

The global response to COVID-19 will yield critical lessons and unprecedented experiences that will help shape future risk reduction policies and action worldwide. **UNDRR, as the UN focal point on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), is committed to help countries, the UN system and partners learn from global, regional and country level efforts to prevent, respond and recover from COVID-19.**

This UNDRR strategy emphasizes **analysis, knowledge-exchange, partnership and advocacy** as a contribution to the UN's efforts to respond to the global pandemic. It focuses on the need to protect the most vulnerable groups, while also calling for a multi-stakeholder approach to ensure all levels of society are reached with the appropriate prevention, risk reduction, risk management measures.

This UNDRR strategy is fully aligned with the UN Secretary-General's critical areas of action to address the current pandemic.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1. **Evidence and learning on COVID-19 prevention, risk reduction and risk management** are generated and disseminated for improved policy and practice. (UNDRR Strategic Objective 1)
2. **Biological hazards (pandemics) are integrated in disaster risk reduction** and development planning and programming, including in the development of national and local DRR strategies (target E of the Sendai Framework¹). (UNDRR Strategic Objective 2)

¹ Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020

3. **UNDRR partnerships are leveraged and key stakeholders are supported** to address the impacts of COVID-19 and to support countries to recover better with a focus on the socio-economic impact on vulnerable groups. (UNDRR Strategic Objective 3)
4. **Information and advice are disseminated** to key audiences to prompt action that will prevent the spread of COVID-19, mitigate its socio-economic impacts and support countries to recover better. (UNDRR Enabler E1)

ACTIVITIES

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: Evidence and learning on COVID-19 prevention, risk reduction and risk management are generated and disseminated for improved policy and practice.

1. Case studies, lessons learned and policy guidelines on the risk management of the COVID-19 pandemic are developed and shared globally, regionally and at the country level through webinars and other mediums in particular with the Sendai Focal Points.
2. A detailed case study on COVID-19 is developed and featured in the next Global Assessment Report (GAR2022). It will examine how governments (individually and collectively) could have addressed such a systemic risk differently, so that the outbreak and its impacts could have been mitigated.
3. Regional Assessment Reports on the status of disaster risk (RARs) under development and planned to be issued during 2020-2021 by Regional Offices incorporate learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Guidance and tools are developed to support reporting on COVID-19 through the Sendai Framework Monitor.
5. Impacts of COVID-19 are collected and analyzed through the data submitted to the Sendai Framework Monitor and will support the evidence-based DRR policy making in partnership with academia and the science and technology community.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: Biological hazards (pandemics) are integrated in disaster risk reduction and development planning and programming, including in the development of national and local disaster risk reduction strategies (target E of the Sendai Framework).

1. Guidance and tools are developed and disseminated to better reflect biological hazards and risk into regional, national and local DRR strategies and strengthen systemic risk management, including in the achievement of Target (e).
2. Guidance and support provided to regional intergovernmental organisations and regional economic commissions for the management of risk related to COVID-19.
3. With UN partners, guidance and tools are developed and disseminated to strengthen incorporation of biological hazards in Common Country Analysis (CCAs) and prevention, preparedness and risk management measures into UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and joint work plans.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: UNDRR Partnerships are leveraged and key partners are supported to address the impacts of COVID-19 and to support countries to recover better with a focus on the socio-economic impact on vulnerable groups.

1. Guidance and technical support provided on the understanding and overcoming of socio-economic impact on vulnerable groups including but not limited to displaced communities engaging in UN system- wide global and regional efforts to prevent and respond to COVID-19.
2. Guidance and tools are provided to the private sector (SMEs) to develop business continuity plans and strengthen resilience-building measures.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4: Information is disseminated to key audiences to prompt action that will prevent the spread of COVID-19, mitigate its socio-economic impacts and support countries to recover better. (Enabler 1)

1. Global communication campaign ('Prevention Saves Lives') promotes focused attention on most-at-risk groups throughout all stages of COVID-19 crisis.²

² More details can be found in the UNDRR COVID19 Communications Strategy

Prevention saves lives!

COVID-19 KEY MESSAGES AND COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

Even before the world brings the COVID-19 disaster under control, we will all be demanding: “Never again.” **We can never go back to business as usual.**

The current COVID-19 disaster demonstrates what UNDRR has been advocating for years: **risk is systemic, and crises are cascading.** Disasters are rapidly producing further disaster to become more complex and deadly. Everyone is affected, but not everyone is affected equally. The elderly, people living with disabilities, gig workers and the poor and marginalised are most vulnerable. The only solution is prevention. **Prevention saves lives.**

This is why UNDRR, in line with the UN system wide advocacy effort will deploy the following communication campaign.

1. WHY UNDRR? Because this is our core business

Nothing undermines sustainable development like a disaster.

UNDRR’s mandate within the UN system is to advocate to Member States, stakeholders and partners to think and act differently about disasters, shifting focus from picking up the **pieces post disaster to risk-proofing the development cycle.**

The **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction** includes biological hazards such as pandemics and epidemics and is the only globally agreed roadmap for reducing risk. It builds on the International Health Regulations (IHR) and recognizes that **biological risk is a growing and present danger.**

We know that risk doesn’t occur in silos. We must have a joined-up response to preventing, protecting and planning for recovery: across the UN system, across borders and within governments.

While UN humanitarian agencies are focusing on response and crisis alleviation, UNDRR will support the UN system and Member States to better understand how risk works—especially how risk cascades with unexpected consequences and how to build capacities to manage this, and how to prepare for early and better recovery that prevents the emergence of new risk.

2. WHO will UNDRR engage with?

At this critical moment, UNDRR will engage with:

- the **UN system, in particular WHO**, to support our partners to reduce risk in their response and build in a risk reduction approach to early recovery
- **Member States** to help them understand systemic risk and recover better in line with the Sendai Framework
- the **public and media** to ensure dissemination of accurate messages and robust information
- the **DRR expert community** to harness their expertise to support member states to better prevent and recover better

- **the most vulnerable**, the elderly, women, persons living with disabilities, the poor and marginalised, to mitigate negative socio-economic impact on them and to ensure a human rights approach for recovery efforts to not expose people to more risk or create new risk
- **children and youth** to begin cultivating the next generation of leaders, and to ensure they are part of decision-making conversations about their future

3. WHAT will UNDRR say?

UNDRR will apply its mandate to support and advocate to Member States, stakeholders and partners to think and act differently about disaster risk reduction, shifting focus from picking up the **pieces post disaster to risk-proofing the recovery and subsequent development cycle.**

KEY MESSAGES – TOPLINE

(1) Prevention saves lives

- **Prevention saves lives:** it is never too late for countries to take significant and bold preventive actions to stop the spread...and never too early to start.
- **COVID-19 is testing our resilience:** we need to work together to support individuals, communities and economies react, rebound and recover better.
- **Viruses don't need passports** and in our global society, they thrive when we don't apply a collective and unified approach. Global systems such as trade, travel and finance interconnect more and more. We need an all of government, all of society, all of world approach if we are to defeat COVID-19.

(2) Protect the most vulnerable

- **COVID-19 does not discriminate, but its impact does.** Governments must identify the most vulnerable in their countries and dedicate budgeted resources to prevent the spread of COVID 19 and support high-risk groups, including the elderly, women, day workers and the poor; persons living with disabilities; migrants and displaced populations; and slum dwellers and the homeless.
- **A threat to one of us, is a threat to all of us.** We are only as strong as the weakest: we must leave no one behind. Developed countries with more resources available to respond to the outbreak need to attend first and foremost to the safety and well-being of their own citizens but must be international support to low- and middle-income countries that are struggling to cope with the outbreak.

(3) Back to normal is not good enough: we must recover and build back better

- **Because the nature of risk has changed: it is systemic, joined-up, and cascading.** One risk transforms into another, exposing and exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.

We see this with #COVID-19: a biological hazard making clear the precarious systems upon which trade, food, energy, transportation, and social safety nets rely. The UN flagship report on risk – the Global Assessment Report – GAR (May 2019), highlighted this.

- **So, we must fight systemic risk with a systemic approach.** We cannot work in silos. We must map risk from many angles and work in a collaborative, trans-boundary way since hazards do not respect borders or politics. Solutions are needed across sectors

such as water, sanitation and hygiene; education; health and nutrition; livelihoods; child and social protection; shelter and housing; and public open spaces.

- **Recovery must seek to build the resilience of public and private systems, and planning must start now.** The challenges presented by this disaster will form the basis for new plans and designs to ensure public and private systems are made resilient in the face of future hazards.
- **This is the opportunity to build resilience into COVID-19 recovery plans.** National and local governments must factor in biological hazards and risks in their national and local disaster risk reduction strategies (Sendai Framework Target (e))

(4) Crisis leads to opportunity

- **This crisis has given us a huge opportunity.** It makes us rethink the way we work, educate our children, and even our cultural customs. If there was ever a time to realign towards social, economic and environmental sustainability, it is now.
- **We must learn from what is working.** There may be secondary or seasonal waves and there will be more viruses and more disasters. We need to factor in governance, community resilience, and global best practice.
- **Risk does not occur in silos.** We must have a coordinated approach to understanding and reducing risk across borders and within governments.
- **COVID-19 has demonstrated the need for a whole-of-government approach** that leverages the capacities of all relevant line Ministries, including National Disaster Risk Management Agencies.
- **The scale of the disaster requires new ways of working,** and innovative partnerships to ensure interventions go to scale and efforts to prevent transmission reach down to the community level, where impact will be greatest.

4. What will UNDRR do: “PREVENTION SAVES LIVES!” campaign

(1) Main Concept

At the centre of our communication activity, we will develop a 360-degree communication campaign that spans the pandemic stages: “Prevention saves lives”.

A range of communication tools from social media messages to opinion pieces, guides for practitioners such as Words Into Action publications will be generated.

The core message – “Prevention saves lives” – will be linked to other key messages about systemic risk and cascading disasters and on how we need to recover and build back better.

Pandemics by nature move quickly through a recognised set of stages. UNDRR will be cognisant of each stage: ready to be involved in the most relevant global dialogue at each point of the journey.

(2) Main Outputs

(a) Immediate and short-term deliverables

Media and public relations

- **Op-ed: Aim to place an op-ed in an international top tier paper** by the SRSG highlighting the systemic nature of risk, the danger of cascading disasters and the importance of prevention. Transform the op-ed for placement in relevant regional media outlets.
- **Activate DIRAJ journalists** – a network of 50 African DRR journalists supported by UNDRR- to film and produce content on how African countries are preparing to face the pandemic, how they are responding, and what support they need.

Social media

- **Share the messages of the SG and WHO** targeting individuals and informing them of what to do to reduce personal risk.
- **Develop a 3-month social media campaign running across UNDRR corporate channels** (Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn [audience of 100,000+ followers], with assets provided to UN partners and other stakeholders (including ARISE private sector network, Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, Science and Technology Group, parliamentarians) for amplification on other non-UNDRR owned platforms.

Media capacity building

- **Together with [Solutions Journalism Network](#), host a series ‘how to talk about risk’ information session for journalists in different regions** to build media capacity to talk accurately about risk and how countries can start to plan to recover early.

Communication expert capacity building

- **Host a ‘how to communicate risk for behaviour change’ information session** working with public risk communication experts to develop and host a series of risk communication online webinars for professional communicators (within UN system and external), exploring how to best communicate risk for behaviour change.

Knowledge management

- **Launch the new Words Into Action guide on [Children and Youth Engagement in Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Building](#)** focusing primarily on natural hazards, highlighting lessons learned which are connected directly to COVID-19 response and action.¹
- **Curate a COVID-19 collection in PreventionWeb** to actively source best practice information, lessons learnt and publish opinion blogs from DRR experts.
- **Source a series of ‘solution stories’²** from around the world, partnering with civil society organisations and focussing on innovative ways of problem solving and reducing risk, to be published on PreventionWeb and the UNDRR website, and linked to through tweets, Facebook and LinkedIn posts.

Amplification and partnership

- **Contribute to regional ONE UN COVID-19 communication activities:** provide input and content assets for country team (UNCT) COVID-19 communication activities (key

¹ WiA Guide supplement: [300+ resources on DRR, Children and Youth](#)

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51866102>



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messages, statements for press releases). Promote UNCT social posts on UNDRR channels for wider exposure.

(b) Mid-term deliverables

Media and public relations

- **Working with Public Service Broadcasters:** As part of the ongoing UNDRR- PBU project (working with 100 public service broadcasters in 100 countries with a reach of 3 billion people) educating journalists to operate as early warning/early action advocates, build in curriculum and editorial content on biological hazards.

Knowledge management

- **Pull content from existing Words Into Action guides on [Enhancing Disaster Preparedness for Effective Response](#) and [Developing National Risk Reduction Strategies](#) and package into short films** or infographics for social media channels
- Engage experts to **draft an annex to the Developing National Risk Reduction Strategies WiA** to give practical advice on how to include a biological hazard approach when developing national and local DRR strategies.
- **Expand blogs on PreventionWeb** into a range of community-targeted activities including an opinion blog series utilising GAR and GRAF experts, including a whiteboard series around systemic risk.

Amplification and partnerships

- **Collaborate with UNRISD** (UN Research Institute for Social Development) to draft a joint paper on how to protect the most vulnerable during the outbreak/ policies for risk reduction.
- With **UNU, UNFCCC and UNRISD draft a list of lessons for DRR** including systemic risk management which could be used to develop a blog or journal commentary picking up policy implications of COVID-19 showing the need for longer term policies and procedures.