How-to note: Making life-saving materials on COVID-19 accessible for all, including adults and children with disabilities

The issue:
According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 1 billion people, or 15% of the world’s population, experience some form of disability and encounter severe disadvantages because of the few or non-existent conditions of physical and digital accessibility.

Key behavior focused messaging on prevention of COVID-19 and available assistance may not reach people with visual, hearing or intellectual impairments if it is not provided in multiple and accessible formats.

What information should be available in accessible format?
While all information should be made accessible for all, in a context of limited resources it is recommended that the following are prioritized:

- Information about COVID-19 prevention and control (life-saving messages on handwashing, social distancing)
- Mechanisms to respond to violence (information about support available, reporting mechanisms such as hotlines)
- Information on availability of services (including testing, specialized health facilities, hotlines, support services, food banks, government subsidies)
- Distant/remote learning materials

What communication channels should be considered?
Choice of communication channels should be based on an assessment of the context and trusted channels. The most important principle is to use mix of channels so materials in different formats can be presented:

- e.g. While messages that are delivered over radio and megaphones are accessible for many, these channels exclude people who have hearing impairment and may not reach those with learning disabilities. Flyers with key messages and materials with drawings and simple language may work best in this case.
- e.g. While SMS via mobile phone (excluding smart phones) will be suitable for those who are deaf and hard-of-hearing it may not be accessible by those who are blind. Text and visual files could be accompanied by audio reading or visual content.

Note: Consider information channels that will be accessed by persons with disabilities. For example, as many children with disabilities are out of school, any information campaigns delivered through schools may not reach children with disabilities. Persons with disabilities may also have lower levels of access to social media and other technology-based platforms. There are many ways to address this gap, including engaging parents, siblings and peers to share information. Consult with local organization of person with disabilities on the best way to reach this audience.

2 Risk Communication & Community Engagement for COVID-19- Engaging with Children and Adults with Disabilities, UNICEF 2020
Different format for communication:
There are many different formats for communication:\(^3\) Written, audio, braille, pictorial, easy-to-read, sign language interpretation. Consider how the following formats can support in reaching children and adults with disabilities:

- Braille and large print for people who are blind or have low vision. When those are not available or not used by local populations, information should be provided orally (e.g. through loudspeakers in the community)
- Easy-to-read version or plain text accompanied by pictures/ diagrams, which are more accessible for people who have intellectual disabilities and also benefit many other children, including those with low literacy or who use different languages
- Written formats or video with text captioning and/ or sign language, for people with hearing impairment.
- Accessible web content for people using assistive technologies such as screen reader

Tips on producing materials in accessible formats:

1. Documents in electronic formats
When creating any document it is important that it is accessible for all audiences. In particular, due to the visual and dynamic nature of documents, it is important to make sure that they are adequately described to visually-impaired or blind users who may be using screen reader software. Consider the following to make your document accessible for all:

- When writing the document, use heading styles (rather than manually changing font), add a description to images (using AltText), adjust color contrast. These simple steps will make a big difference and allow person who is using screen reader to access and navigate your document.
- Use Word built-in accessibility checker will allow you to ensure the document is fully accessible
- Please use short Step-by-step guide to make all your documents accessible
- When developing the document, it’s important to inform the designer that the final document should be accessible. The designer has access to many online guidance, including the Adobe in Design accessibility, Adobe Illustrator.
- To make your document fully accessible for those with visual impairments and for easy access through different devices, consider to work with organizations of persons with disabilities and local service providers to develop document in ePub, accessible HTML, DAISY and Braille-ready formats

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\(^3\) For more information on accessible formats please Accessibility central page [http://www.accessibilitycentral.net/accessible%20formats.html](http://www.accessibilitycentral.net/accessible%20formats.html)
2. Alternative formats for persons with intellectual disabilities

Easy-to-read version or plain text accompanied by pictures/diagrams is more accessible for people who have intellectual disabilities and also benefit many other children, including those with low literacy or who use of different languages. Local organizations of persons with disabilities may be able to help with the production.

Main tips to consider:

- Use easy words and images that simplify the content
- Easy read documents are usually concise (e.g. UNICEF SOWC 2013 summary is 28 pages of heavy text, easy-read version is 10 pages with 5-8 key messages per page)
- Highlight content that will be useful for persons with intellectual disabilities
- Clearly state what your organization is and what is the purpose of shared information
- Go through your text, pick out the important facts and summarize what you want to say
- Simplify complex information and explain it using examples from everyday life
- Involve people with intellectual disabilities in checking the document for accessibility

Below is example of UNICEF guidance note “Considering adults and children with disabilities in COVID-19 response in easy-read format

Resources:

- A guide to produce written information in easy read, North Yorkshire county council
- A guide on how to make information accessible (easy read focus), Change 2016 Information to consider when commissioning the work to produce easy read: See Page 16 Guidance for people who commission or produce Easy Read information

3. Making videos accessible: Adding sign language and closed captions

When developing videos, it is important to consider accessibility for all users.

- Captions (also referred to as subtitles) for videos improve access to content for people who have hearing impairments, it may also help persons with intellectual disabilities. It is also useful to those who are non-native speaker of the language that is on the video. Nowadays captions are very
useful for those who accessing video content over mobile devices and prefer to turn off audio. It is recommended to build captions to all videos as automated functions that often offered by platforms are not always accurate.

- A sign language translation/interpretation track is useful for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and use sign as their primary language. A few considerations for adding sign language to the video:
   - Work with local DPO to determine which sign language to use and consider the extent to which the target population uses sign language (e.g. in some humanitarian contexts, affected populations may not have had an opportunity to learn official sign language)
   - When recording the signer consider balance, hands, face, eye level, color contrast with background
   - When editing: The box (rectangle or square) with signer preferred location is top right corner
   - The size of the box is varied, but main criteria is visibility.
   - When producing targeted materials for deaf community, signer may be in the main shot and images are in the box

Resources:

- For step-by-step guide on adding captions, please see page 16 of Bridging the Gap Inclusive and accessible communication guidelines, Bridging the Gap, 2019.
- On recording and editing sign language: Step by step Guidance on adding SL to videos from W3C consortium

4. Audio

Persons who have visual impairments rely on audio as a main format for communication. In low income countries during an emergency, life-saving information is often delivered through radio and mobile devices. When developing audio messages it is important to consider:

- The speed of the speech
- Clarity of pronunciation
- Length of the message
- Appropriate music on the background and illumination of noises
- Size of the file (especially in case it will be shared via mobile phones)

Key resources:

- Bridging the Gap Inclusive and accessible communication guidelines, Bridging the Gap, 2019. The guidelines useful information on inclusive language, some tips on behavior to relate to persons with disabilities, instructions to make accessible communication products, and requirements for the organisation of inclusive meetings and events.
- CBM Digital accessibility toolkit, comprehensive guide on making digital materials accessible
- UNICEF video training Inclusive Communication module (available in English, Spanish, French)