

Public Information in Emergencies

Overview

Public information and media coverage helps IOM with:

- **Fundraising:** Independent media reporting on certain needs in a crisis and projects undertaken by IOM to address these needs can have a significant influence on donors' representatives.
- **Visibility:** In an increasingly media-driven world, visibility implies presence and effectiveness of an organization.
- **Education:** Educating the public and generating discussions around particular aspects and projects of IOM establishes the Organization's status as a reliable, accurate source of information and can generate further support.

Apart from the external site that is usually disseminated through a mailing list, other forms of disseminating information should be used. This includes: press notes, social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube), a mission website and press events.

Depending on the capacity of the country office, press note, a website, tweets and Facebook updates can be made by the country office directly. Where additional support is needed, the country office can contact the Media and Communications Division (MCD) for support and guidance.

Description

Communications Strategy

It is helpful to develop a brief communications strategy as soon as possible. This internal document outlines the **objectives, messages, audiences** and **tools** that will comprise the mission's communications activities. The communications strategy can cover the entire country office, or a specific project or response effort. While not formally required, developing a strategy is an effective practice to ensure that consistent and effective communication activities are carried out to meet a clear objective.

A Communications Strategy Template is available in the References and Tools Section. For additional reference, the IOM Afghanistan Communications Strategy (2015) is also provided as an example. IOM Afghanistan adapted the template provided to suit the needs of the mission.

Media Interviews

Successful media communications are indispensable to enhance IOM visibility, especially during emergencies. Governments, donors and persons affected by crisis are much more likely to hear about the emergency response through the media than through official documents.

In an emergency, it's important to make clear from the outset which staff are authorized to speak with the media. This is at the discretion of management, based on knowledge, experience etc. Journalists will generally want to speak to people on the 'frontline', and also have an official quote from the Chief of Mission (COM) or another senior staff member.

For media interviews, make sure that you know your subject material and prepare your message carefully. Organize your thoughts before speaking to the media, whether you're being interviewed on camera, in person or by telephone. At all times, your message should rest on three pillars:

1. Knowledge - We know what is going on and we listen
2. Caring - We feel for the people we serve
3. Action - We are doing something to help them

For more interview preparation and tips, see the [Media and Communications Handbook](#) on the intranet.

Press Notes

A press note is a key building block for establishing IOM's presence, thereby enhancing funding opportunities, especially in the early phases of emergencies. The main elements of a press note should be simple and clear and carefully name check donors, partners and host governments. Remember the basics and always include the 'who, what, where and when' of any operation. Good relationships with the media can support in distributing the information at local and international level, by using their extensive mailing lists and widely viewed press release platforms.

Press notes should be released on a regular basis to highlight IOM's achievements and keep external audiences informed. Press notes can be developed 1) to announce the beginning of a project, highlighting who the donor is and how this support is essential for the overall humanitarian response; 2) when a major activity has been completed by the country office; 3) during key dates (e.g. 6 months into the response, Independence Day etc.). News outlets will generally be more interested in the situation than IOM's response to it; therefore, it is recommended to lead with an overview of the situation, background information, key figures and quotes.

Think about your audience (global, local or regional) when drafting the text, and be sure to explain IOM's work and who we are clearly. Try to refrain from using acronyms, "project speak" or technical terms that people outside of the humanitarian response will not understand.

Press notes may be publicized through the UN system. To do so, the approved copy should be sent to MCD no later than close of business on any Monday or Thursday for timely distribution to the media at the twice weekly press briefings (Tuesday and Friday mornings) at the UN in Geneva.

For more information on how to write a press note, see the [IOM Media and Communications Handbook](#) on the intranet and in the References and Tools section.

Country Website

If there is capacity in the country office, the country website should be managed at the country level with technical guidance from the Online Communications Unit (OCU) in Manila to ensure brand consistency. The focal point will need to devote time to keeping the page updated. Web programming skills are not necessary, but the focal point will need a short tutorial on how to use WordPress or a similar content management system if they have never used this system before.

In the event that there is no capacity at the country level, key publications and updates can be shared with OCU, and they can maintain the country website or update the country page on the global site from Manila.

Social Media

Social media, in particular Twitter, offers a channel by which to provide free, timely updates to audiences who no longer use mainstream media but rely on mobile devices instead. IOM encourages and supports active use of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter etc.) to widely disseminate messages in times of crisis. Remember to tweet early and tweet often on a local Twitter account and remember to tag the global account (@UNmigration) to ensure retweeting, thereby widening the audience. IOM's donors, Member States, partners and the media all monitor Twitter carefully.

Like the website, social media accounts can be managed locally if there is someone who can dedicate the proper time. Social media pages need to be regularly updated.

Twitter (with its character post limit) is a good tool for sharing statistics and figures quickly. The speed at which a tweet can spread means it's important to check figures carefully before posting. Remember that the lifecycle of a tweet is very short. It's important to tweet continuously, especially during emergencies, up to once an hour. Facebook allows for greater post length (although it's best not to exceed a paragraph or two), and is a good platform to post photo albums and other visual content to engage audiences. Keep posts short and simple overall – you can link to publications and more detailed, technical content hosted on the mission website. Instagram is also a good platform to share photos that illustrate IOM in action.

For more information please refer to the [Guidelines for the use of Social Media](#) in IOM available on the intranet and in the References and Tools section.

Media Library

Imagery has become the world's most spoken language and it is therefore essential to capture and share photographs with emotional content. Always be sure to obtain the consent of those being photographed and not to put the person at risk by publishing the photograph (especially important for vulnerable individuals such as unaccompanied and separated children and victims of trafficking).

Quality photographs taken by the mission should be regularly uploaded to the [IOM Media Library](#). In addition to being used for public information activities, photos can be used for external situation reports, donor reports, IOM appeals and other resource mobilization activities. Regularly updating the Media Library will ensure that photos are readily available for use whenever they are needed by the mission, the Regional Office, and headquarters.

When cataloging photos it is important to include information on the date and location of the activity, the type of activity and the photographer. See the [IOM Media and Communications Handbook](#) and the [IOM blog post 'Taking Photos in the Field'](#) for more information on how to take good photos.

Internal Reporting and External Communications

In an emergency response, internal sitreps are usually developed and disseminated on a regular basis. These internal reports can be a very useful resource for developing external communication messages. Where internal reports exist, be sure to access these reports to help develop external messaging.

Managing a Media Contact List

Maintaining an updated list of media contacts is essential for good media relations. In a humanitarian situation, media focal points at the country level may change throughout the response. As a result, it is important to maintain an up-to-date contact list in order to facilitate continuous communication and to ensure updates are shared with the appropriate counterparts.

Attached is a country office media contact list template that can be used to consolidate media contact information. Separate tabs for international and national media contacts are included. Note that this template can be used to consolidate contact information for any stakeholder (e.g. the template can be modified to maintain contact information of donors, partners etc.).

Relevance to IOM's Emergency Operations

Sharing information on IOM's activities in emergency response operations is essential to increasing IOM's visibility. These updates can often lead to more support from donors who regularly receive information on IOM's achievements. Well-informed media, donors and the public can be valuable allies.

Links

- [MCD SharePoint Site](#)
- [Guidelines for the use of social media in IOM](#)
- [IOM's blogspot taking photos in the field](#)

Media



[IOM's Guide to Effective Audio-visual Communications](#)

References and Tools

- [Guidelines on personal use of social media](#)
- [Country Office Media Contact List Template](#)
- [Communications Strategy Template](#)
- [Sample Media Strategy \(IOM Afghanistan 2015\)](#)

Contacts

MCD, OCU and ECO are available to answer questions and provide support. Don't hesitate to contact them for advice, particularly in the case of difficult questions from journalists, interview requests, etc.

Media and Communications Division (MCD): mcd1@iom.int.

Online Communications Unit (OCU): ocu@iom.int.

Ethics and Conduct Office (ECO): ecu@iom.int.

Document last updated: Nov 2023