Mass media as an important tool in addressing risks to the public/society

How risks will be presented to the public is mainly determined by the mass media. The media plays a crucial role in "processes of risk revelation, the social contestation that surrounds scientific knowledge of risks, and also processes of a social challenge to 'risk society'" (Cottle, 1998, p. 5). Risks that are often found in the headlines are perceived as a constant threat to the public (Lichtenstein, Slovic, Fiscoff, Layman, & Combs, 1978; Kitzinger, 1999). Given that perception of risk can be changed in the context of new information, it can also be easily constructed. Therefore, "the mass media and the scientific and legal professions in charge of defining risks become key social and political positions" (Beck, 1992, pp. 22 23). For example, the mass media usually cover only highly dreadful disasters which leads to an overestimation of risk related to rare disasters such as terrorist attacks or nuclear accidents (Gierlach, Belsher, & Beutler, 2010).

Note: See source document for full reference.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: Communication

Disaster Phases: Prevention, Preparedness

Types of Actors Concerned: Non-active citizens, Media, National research bodies

Hazards: Natural hazards, Man-made intentional hazards, Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations

Recommendations:

- Inform citizens about the risk they may face and about possible actions and measures, they can take to reduce vulnerability and better prepare themselves
- Use cultural factors to improve the effectiveness of disaster communication

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Source

Deliverable D4.2 "Report on 'risk cultures' in the context of disasters" (page 23)

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