



Language barriers in disaster situations

Practitioners specifically identified a number of perceived language barriers in emergency and disaster response, where interpreters may be required to help communicate with different groups; however, these interpreters may also pose problems of their own in communication with different cultures: “For example in plane crashes – even if in the airports many languages are spoken – all the problems arise when people do not know the local language” (G6; R8 - see source document for full reference). “What I found difficult was to speak to those people. The Tor Bella Monaca area could be compared to Rocca Tedalda, the one I mentioned before for the warehouse. We don’t have many people speaking Italian there... many languages indeed... we had this Chinese interpreter who knew only 50 idioms of Chinese, but not all the others, therefore this was a barrier” (G2; R3). Thus, translators may not be able to communicate to citizens in all situations, particularly if communication is required in multiple languages, and translators are not able to do this. Further, translators’ abilities may be limited by their knowledge of a language and are asked to translate information where they may not know the correct words or phrasing.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: [Languages](#), [Communication](#)

Disaster Phases: [Preparedness](#), [Response](#), [Recovery](#)

Types of Actors Concerned: [National civil protection body](#), [Local authorities](#), [Red Cross](#), [NGOs](#), [Military](#), [Law enforcement agencies](#), [Healthcare and emergency services](#)

Hazards: [Natural hazards](#), [Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations](#), [Man-made intentional hazards](#)

Recommendations:

- [Use trustworthy, widespread, multi-lingual, culturally appropriate and inclusive means of alerting the target population in case of disasters](#)
- [Use cultural factors to improve the effectiveness of disaster communication](#)

Source

[Deliverable D5.11 "Report on Stakeholder Assembly 2 \(Italy\)" \(page 11\)](#)

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