UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

TOOL:

ACCESSIBLE COMMUNICATION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ensure that persons with disabilities are engaged with as partners; have safe access to timely, accurate and contextually relevant information; are able to make informed decisions on the basis of the information available to them; are aware of the means by which they can meaningfully participate and give feedback; have a say as to what types of information they need and how they receive it. Ensure that information is accessible. Use appropriate forms of communication, and clear messaging.[1]

Communicating with persons with disabilities

General tips[2]

- Speak directly and make eye contact with the individual;

- Ask the individual if they need help, offer to assist, and then ask for instructions on how to assist;

- Avoid potentially offensive terms by asking the individual what is the preferable terminology for the disability.

Sharing content

When sharing content to persons with disabilities, consider the following:[3]

- Using a tailored approach to address the specific needs (e.g. providing visual content for those that are hearing impaired);

- Provide copies of the information being presented;

- Always have a sequence and orient the individual to the information (e.g. "First, we will discuss this…";

- Periodically confirm the that individual is understanding the information;

- Give the individual time to retain the information and ask questions.

For persons with visual impairments

- Speak to the individual as you approach;

- Introduce yourself at the beginning of the interaction and indicate when you are leaving the conversation;

- Be descriptive about the information being presented;

- Offer to read any written information;

- Ask the individual if they need guidance with mobility.

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1   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Handicap International, *Need to Know Guidance: Working with Persons with Disabilities in Forced Displacement* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2011).

2   Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology Center, *Strategies for Working with People who have Disabilities* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2016).

3   International Labour Organization, *Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Vocational Training: A Practical Guide* (Geneva: ILO, 2013)

For persons with hearing impairments

- Face and speak directly to the individual;

- Use drawings, writing, and gestures to assist communication;

- Ask short and clear questions;

- If there is an interpreter present, face the individual with the hearing impairment, not the interpreter.

For persons with mobility impairments

- If the individual uses a wheelchair, speak at eye-level whenever possible.

For persons with intellectual disabilities

- If you do not understand that was said, ask the individual to repeat or consider using writing as an alternative means of communicating;

- Ask short and clear questions;

- Be patient; take time to communicate effectively with the individual.

Developing inclusive content for persons with disabilities

When developing inclusive content (e.g. information on programming, presentation materials, etc.), there are two areas which should be considered to ensure that persons with disabilities can access and understand the material:

- the presentation of text and graphics;

- services that will enable people with sensory impairments to access content;

For persons with intellectual disabilities

Content should be in an easy-to-read format. Note that easy- to- read content also benefits people who are less literate or less familiar with reading complex information.

- Easy-to-read information is:

  - information that is clear and easy to read and understand;

  - developed to support people with intellectual disabilities better understand written information;

  - written information, supported by pictures.

- uses everyday words and has no jargon or acronyms creating easy-to-read content:

  - Ensure that text and graphics appear within the area of the screen that can be clearly seen;

  - Use a clear typeface and lettering for easy on-screen reading:
    - Use a large and clear font (i.e. Arial, Helvetica);
    - Recommended font size is a 24 line minimum for body text and 18 minimum for upper-case text;
    - Use wide spaces between words;
    - Use numbers instead of words (i.e. 8 not eight).

  - Carefully choose colours and colour combinations:
    - Ensure that there is sufficient contrast between text and the background.

  - Adopt a lay-out that makes reading easy;

  - Consider using pictograms or symbols for words when appropriate.

For persons with hearing impairments

Visual content must be accompanied by an oral narrative, so consider using open captioning when developing video content.[4]

- Open captioning:[5]

  – Captions are on-screen text descriptions that display a video's content that is otherwise inaccessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing;

  – Captions are synchronized with the video image so that viewers have equivalent access to the content that is originally presented in sound, regardless of whether they receive that content via audio or text;

  – Creating open captions[6]:
    - Use a consistent style to display captions;
    - Use one or two lines of text;
    - Use a sans serif font, such as Helvetica, and proportional spacing;
    - Caption the exact wording of the video content (some edits may be necessary to facilitate reading speed);
    - Describe sound effects that contribute to the understanding of the content;
    - Use italics to indicate the narrator, off-screen voices, sound effects, and other vital information;
    - Synchronize captions with the aural content
    - Do not often change the location of captions on the screen;
    - Consult language style guide and dictionary for standard conventions regarding numbers, grammar, punctuation, and spelling;
    - Allow adequate reading time.

For persons with visual impairments[7]

Video content should include an audio-narrated description of key, visual elements.

- Guidelines:

  – Be clear, concise, conversational;

  – Speak clearly and at a rate that can be understood;

  – Prepare in advance and/or use transliterations to indicate pronunciation;

  – Learn the proper pronunciation of foreign names and words used in a production.

- Creating audio narration:

  – Deliver description in present tense, active voice;

  – Describe what the viewer needs to know;

  – Describe what is seen;

  – Take into account what the viewers already know.

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[4] If the video content only displays text messages without any sound, then open captioning may not be necessary.

[5] International Telecommunication Union, Model ICT Accessibility Policy Report (Geneva: ITU, 2014).

[6] Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology Center. *Creating Videos and Multimedia Products that are Accessible to People with Sensory Impairments* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2014). Retrieved from https://bit.ly/2OzhAub

[7] CBM, *Digital Accessibility Toolkit*