

RECOMMENDATIONS
GUIDELINES FOR CRISIS COMMUNICATION ON FOOD SUPPLY AND FOOD SECURITY

EUROPEAN FOOD SECURITY CRISIS PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE MECHANISM (EFSCM)

BRUSSELS, 7 JULY 2023

This document does not represent the position of individual members or of the European Commission. The recommendations have been adopted by consensus by the expert group on the EFSCM on 7 July 2023.

As outlined in the [Communication on contingency plan for ensuring food supply and food security in times of crisis](#)¹, good communication practice during a crisis situation is essential. Good communication relies on transparent and evidence-based information, obtained from trusted networks. Food is vital for consumers, and when there are fears of shortages, this may lead to collectively counter-productive behaviours, such as the hoarding of food or inputs needed for food production. The group of experts set up by [Commission Decision 2021/C 461 I/01](#) on the European Food Security Crisis preparedness and response Mechanism (EFSCM) was tasked to elaborate and discuss guidelines for crisis communication, covering principles to be followed in a context of high uncertainty and to ensure a coordinated approach between all private and public actors.

The following recommendations by the EFSCM on crisis communication on food supply and food security will be made available and publicised so as to assist private and public actors of the food supply chain to communicate in a time of crisis:

1. **Be proactive:** Develop a crisis communication plan in advance of any potential crisis severely disrupting the food supply chain.

The plan should outline the roles and responsibilities of the crisis communication team, the communication channels to be used, the target groups of the communication and the messaging to be delivered.

Develop a single line of argument in order to avoid dissonant messages that undermine trust (“speak with one voice”). It is deemed preferable to use existing channels of communication rather than creating *ad hoc* procedures that would be only active during crises. The planning should include coordination procedures for the sharing of information (internal as well as external), foster trust and ownership, and cover appropriate training.

It is critical that significant time and effort is invested in preparing communication strategies for future crises, as this has an impact on resources, from human resources (identify and train ready to go spokespersons and potential backups, ensure business continuity which is linked to the preparedness aspect), and budget.

2. **Be perceptive:** To ensure situational awareness in times of crisis, perform a continuous monitoring of the “public mood” (what does this mean to the public, what is the public worried about, what does it think, expect, ask for...). This will help to anticipate the adequate communication action and enable empathic communication, showing solidarity and social responsibility.
3. **Be factual and transparent:** It is essential to be transparent and factual about what has happened, the steps being taken to address the crisis and potential consequences. This builds trust and helps to mitigate potential damage to the organisation's reputation. Communicate on what is known as well as what is not. Express certainties, avoid speculation and limit yourself to core messages. Additionally, clear leadership on the actions to be taken is also crucial so that any audience (public authorities, private organisations and the general public) identifies the pertinent interlocutors.

¹ COM/2021/689 final.

4. **Communicate quickly:** In a crisis, time is of the essence. The “Golden Hour” (the 60 minutes from the onset of the crisis) is crucial for the outcome. You need to act quickly to gather information, assess the situation, and communicate your response. Public authorities and private organisations no longer have days to tailor the communication’s messages.
5. **Provide regular updates:** Keep public and private actors informed of developments as they happen and on request. Regular updates help to manage expectations and reduce speculation as well as uncertainty, fear and inappropriate reactions.
6. **Tailor your message:** Different stakeholders have different needs, concerns, questions, different social context, among others, and may have special needs. Identify these not only to know in advance whom to contact in the case of a crisis but to enable tailoring your message to their specific circumstances.
7. **Use multiple channels:** Use multiple channels, including social media, traditional media, and direct communication, to communicate with the variety of stakeholders. Communicate in a consistent and accessible manner, making whichever necessary adaptations to enable effective communication with everyone. The use of “multipliers” (for example employees in retail outlets, social media influencers, etc.) to reach out to groups of actors, including end consumers, is desirable. Regular press conferences and the edition and distribution of videos may be useful to support all the information channels.
8. **Monitor media:** Media and in particular social media can be a powerful tool for communication during a crisis. Monitoring social media channels for feedback from communication on the crisis is crucial to respond quickly to any needs, questions, concerns or disinformation.
9. **Disinformation and misinformation:** It is important to state one or more sources of reliable information. It is also important to monitor disinformation (incorrect/misleading information from other sources) to make the best decision at all times about whether to try to counter/address it or not and how.
10. **Evaluate and learn:** After the crisis has passed, evaluate your response and learn from the experience. Identify what worked well and what could be improved for future crises.