



# Foreword

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In every crisis I have witnessed – and in every response by the International Red Cross and Red Crescent network to a disaster, public health emergency, mass population movement or the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict – information is as essential as food, water and shelter. It guides people to safety, connects them to loved ones and gives them the knowledge to safeguard themselves and their communities.

But information can also cause harm. When false, misleading or deliberately manipulated, it can deepen fear, fuel discrimination, obstruct humanitarian access and cost lives. We have seen this too often: during disease outbreaks, when rumours outpace health advice; after disasters, when mistrust hampers aid delivery; and in armed conflicts, when inflammatory narratives escalate violence.

Harmful information is not new, but today it moves with unprecedented speed and reach. Digital platforms open vital channels for community voices, yet also provide fertile ground for lies. In this environment, trust is fragile.

In humanitarian contexts, harmful information flourishes where trust is weak. Trust strongly influences whether people believe harmful information, share it and spread it – shaping its impact and reach. Harmful information thrives on fear and uncertainty, weakening the relationships that make humanitarian access and action possible. Without trust, people are less likely to prepare, seek help or follow life-saving guidance; with it, communities act together, absorb shocks and recover more effectively. Maintaining trust is not optional – it is a humanitarian necessity.

The *World Disasters Report 2026* calls on governments, humanitarian actors, media, technology companies and communities, to recognise that the trustworthiness of information is a matter of life and death. Just as we plan for logistics, shelter and health care in emergencies, we must also plan for the information environment. This requires investing in community engagement, prioritizing listening over speaking, building resilience against harmful narratives and consistently upholding humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence in every interaction and message.

In 2024, 32 Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers and staff were killed while on duty; in 2025, a further 27 lives were lost. This is a painful reminder of the risks borne by those who put humanity first, often in the most dangerous circumstances. Their deaths underscore the urgent need to protect humanitarian staff and volunteers, and to safeguard the space they need to save lives. Anything that deepens mistrust, fuels hostility or turns the emblem of protection into a target must be confronted with urgency. Honouring their memory compels us to meet this crisis with urgency and resolve.

Hope must also be part of our response. Harmful information thrives on fear and confusion, but hope – rooted in trust, solidarity and human dignity – can be just as contagious. Balancing threats with hope and fostering narratives of agency and possibility offers a vital counterforce. Around the world, communities respond to crises not only with resilience but also with creativity and compassion, often leading the way in finding solutions. By amplifying authentic stories and voices, we do more than counter falsehoods: we inspire action, strengthen trust and remind people that even in the darkest moments, there are paths forward.

The IFRC and its member Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have always worked at the heart of communities, earning trust through presence, transparency and respect. In today's information crisis, this role matters more than ever. Our commitment is clear and unwavering: act with humanity and based on evidence, uphold trust and put people

in need first – so that in moments of fear and uncertainty, the voices that carry furthest are those that heal, aid and protect. Each of us has a role to play. By staying informed, questioning, verifying and amplifying only what is trustworthy and constructive, we strengthen the information environment and ensure that hope speaks louder than harm.

