

Crisis information practices in Swedish municipalities regarding adaption for people with communication difficulties

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Language comprehension difficulties can cause challenges in finding and understanding information vital for public safety. Municipal employees creating societal information need specific expertise when creating and disseminating information directed to all citizens.

This study aimed to explore how knowledge and practices in the creation of municipal crisis information relate to guidelines for universal crisis information.

A survey was used to collect responses from 25 Swedish municipal employees who work with crisis information as communicators or IT strategists. The results were compared with guidelines for universal crisis information.

The analysis revealed a focus on clear and concise communication, with 60% prioritizing clarity and 16% readability through easy-to-read options. Multimodal approaches, like combining text with picture support, audio, and video, were less utilized at 8%. Local context adaptations varied. Whereas 32% reported that they create materials in other languages, the presence of cognitive adjustments was limited. Instead, they often referenced national publications.

About 40% stated that they sometimes made adaptations for cognitive or language difficulties, mainly for multilingual communities and physical disabilities. When modifications were made to accommodate physical or cognitive impairments, 75% of the resulting publications remained untested prior to distribution. In cases where testing was conducted, it was predominantly performed within the organization, with limited or no involvement of end-users.

Notably, 40% stated a lack of experience in designing accessible materials for cognitive or linguistic needs. 57% reported insufficient knowledge or time, and 37% reported lacking both. These findings underscore the need for targeted resources and training to enhance inclusive crisis communication practices.

To conclude, Swedish municipality staff require more time and training to create inclusive crisis information suitable to citizens with language difficulties, such as people with cognitive disabilities or different mother tongue.