



Journalist Fellowship Paper

How to prepare for high-risk reporting situations

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Contents

Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
Basic principles of emergency preparedness	6
What happens when the emergency isn't at home?	7
Networks save lives	7
Environmental emergencies	9
Earthquakes	9
Disease and pestilence	10
Weather emergencies	12
Key lessons for environmental emergency coverage	13
Political emergencies	15
Elections	15
Internet blackouts	17
Strikes and protests	18
Terror attacks	20
Key lessons for political emergency coverage	21
Women covering emergencies	22
Toolbox	24
PPE and risk analysis	24
Resources for secure coverage:	24
Verification resources	24
Resources for women journalists	25
Resources for internet outages	25
Digital security resources	26
Conclusion	27

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Introduction

Before the April 2018 riots in Nicaragua, the need for emergency response protocols never crossed my mind as a journalist.

Social media was awash with claims of assault, but in a sea of government-controlled narrative and unverified social content, where was the truth and where were the lies?

My newsroom put together a small document where we collected the names of sources we could trust in the field. And, as the mayhem swirled, I wished a manual for emergencies existed.

Months after the riots, *El Nuevo Diario*, one of the most important newspapers in Nicaragua, had declared bankruptcy. *La Prensa*, its competition, had fired more than 200 employees and was raided by police who confiscated equipment and closed the facilities. Television channels and radio stations owned by the presidential family stayed on air. We were operating in a fog of insecurity and misinformation.

When I arrived at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism three years later, it was with the intention of laying the groundwork for such a manual.

I spoke to journalists, fact checkers, trainers and activists who have extensive experience in different aspects of news coverage in high-risk situations. I've gathered their recommendations here, and include an outline of the resources and tools every newsroom should put in place before it has to deal with an emergency.

Broadly speaking, the advice is divided into preparing for environmental and political emergencies. Women journalists may need to make additional preparations, so I have included advice in a separate section.

Finally, I list out all resources I came across while working on this project. These lists are not complete, and are subject to change. But they are worth bookmarking.

Basic principles of emergency preparedness

Emergency response can be divided into three procedural phases: preparation, response, post-response.

The preparation phase takes place long before the emergency. It involves gathering resources – human, equipment, and informational – in a way that everyone on your team can access.

Human resources include staff contact information and addresses, as well as staff emergency contacts. Preparation involves assigning roles and responsibilities ahead of time. It also includes sources, contacts and guides on the ground.

Equipment resources might include: power banks, satellite phones, kevlar vests and helmets – stored centrally, maintained and accessible to all. Informational resources include: legal, expert contacts, and online resources.

Preparation should involve analysis and mitigation of potential risks. Role playing responses may be useful. Establishing what principles will guide your response in an emergency is also crucial.

The response phase involves putting your plans into motion. Assess your risk analysis against the current circumstances and adapt as necessary. Assess human resources and assign roles and responsibilities, factoring in down time by assigning shifts where possible. Assess physical and informational resources, and distribute them as needed.

The post response phase involves assessing the successes and failures of your response and adapting your plans and resources to respond more effectively in the next emergency. It also involves assessing the mental health impact to staff, and assigning resources or recovery time as needed.

Emergency response preparation should be both institutional (what the newsroom prepares) and individual (how the journalist prepares). Both institutional and individual responses should be encouraged and guided by newsroom leaders.

The preparation stage is the most complex, and yields the best results in the response and post-response phase. As Fernanda Kobelinsky, editor of Infobae América in Argentina, puts it: don't neglect the technical preparedness for the act of on-the-ground journalism. "If you can't send your story later, it doesn't make any [difference] that you've been there."

Don't leave it too late to ask questions like: What internet connection are you going to use? Where will you save the videos, audios or photos that you collect? Is the equipment charged? Do you have extra batteries?

Emergency preparedness doesn't just involve technical, practical questions, but it requires principled discussion and documentation to guide decision making in the moment. What is your mission statement and what values does your journalism want to uphold – how will this guide you on the ground?

What happens when the emergency isn't at home?

Not all emergencies – whether environmental, political or technological – will happen on home ground. Reporters travelling to report in foreign territory need specialist preparedness training.

Kobelinsky suggests always having documentation with you and having digital backup of that documentation. Have emergency contact numbers (editor, lawyer, other) in writing, in case your cell phone is lost or stolen. Know where the consulate of your country is, and have their contact telephone numbers.

“When I went to Venezuela for the first time, the first thing I did was see a colleague who helped me organise [and] gave me contacts,” said Fernanda. “Having a local contact is key, that is the person who helps you understand if a situation is viable. It's no use for me to go to the most dangerous neighbourhood in Latin America if I can't [get back out] because I won't be able to tell the story.”

Remember to adapt your preparedness to the situation on the ground: wearing a flak-jacket that says press may provide additional security in one place and invite attacks in another.

Networks save lives

Creating networks of local journalists who can share information and assist in verification is crucial in any disaster situation. There is a time for competition, and emergencies are not that time.

Paul Myles, editorial director of *On Our Radar* said: “We found that by creating an empowered and trusted network, we were able to get a level of access and a level of authenticity in our reports.”

It is essential to listen directly to those most affected in the community, he said. How do they perceive the crisis? What was the emotional impact? What was the

social impact? What was the economic impact? “By having a network of trained and reliable reporters, we were able to cover [the 2014 Ebola] crisis in a way that many other media could not,” said Myles. That network carried through to reporting on malaria and COVID-19, too. “It was a good example of how, if you leave behind the skills and confidence in the kind of basic reporting techniques, you can continue to collaborate with these communities long after an initial journey.”

Environmental emergencies

Environmental emergencies are characterised by their sudden onset – think earthquakes, floods, tornadoes. That they are surprising in nature does not mean your newsroom should not be prepared.

These are the emergencies that make it necessary for journalists to have a minimum level of equipment and information at all times to carry out effective coverage.

Earthquakes

On the afternoon of September 19, 2017, an earthquake measuring 7.1 on the Richter Scale shook Mexico City. It had been 32 years to the day since the 1985 earthquake that killed 5,000 people.

What differentiated the two catastrophes? In the 1980s there was a huge lack of information and in 2017 there was immediate access to too much information through social media that created disinformation chaos.

Faced with this situation, Verificado19S, a group of journalists and civil society organisations, came together to provide accurate information to the population. Located in different areas of Mexico City, they focused on different tasks to help monitor and confirm the damage caused by the earthquake.

Mónica Cruz, producer at AJ+ Verifica in Mexico, said: “This multidisciplinary team provided important data that the government did not even have: which buildings had collapsed, which buildings had cracks, how many people were trapped, and so on.” An important resource was having a network of people who could physically go to the place and say: “Yes, indeed, this building has collapsed and the rescue teams are already here doing rescue work.” Cruz said: “A reliable eyewitness would stand out among the noise of social media networks.”

Volunteer fact-checkers had to fill out a form with their observation, and each observation was shared with another group near the area to check.

Other team members focused on creating a digital map to record landslides, available shelters, buildings at risk of collapse, and food and medicine collection centres. Still others worked on the creation of a database of detailed information about needs and risks in different areas. “The informational needs changed day by day,” said Cruz, who replicated part of Verificado19S’s process for her own fact-checking team in their newsroom.

On the other side of the world, in New Zealand, Kamala Hayman, editor and journalist at Stuff, covered the 2011 earthquake in Christchurch, New Zealand, that killed 185 people and destroyed much of the city.

She said journalists worked in pairs or teams so that they could report safely as much as possible while ensuring that they had a support network in a situation where reaching the offices was almost impossible.

“Walking or moving around was really difficult, the reporters would go to our makeshift newsroom, if possible, or they would just cover what they could see from where they were, in their neighbourhood,” she said. “The other thing that was really important was batteries – a phone’s battery in particular. After the earthquake and aftershocks, many reporters ended up keeping backup batteries with them at all times.”

In Stuff newsrooms, reporters are also provided coverage packs before they go into the field so they have a sense of perspective and are prepared with the necessary resources for safe and unhindered coverage. Coverage packs might include digital tools and first aid kits, or even knowledge of the law in special cases. “We journalists have to know the law. For example, knowing that sometimes the police may try to stop you from taking pictures when you are legally entitled. It is important that people know what they can and cannot do.”

Disease and pestilence

As we’ve all learned over the past two years, good disease coverage requires being vigilant of claims that provide false hope. False experts come to the forefront, promising cures or unhelpful speculation or unreviewed data. The best journalism will provide timely and accurate information, as well as critical analysis.

As AJ+’s Cruz puts it: verification during an emergency requires empathy for a range of experiences. “Not everyone will know how to distinguish between a YouTube video with a mysterious voice-over and a BBC video.” Telling readers they are idiots is not an effective technique for debunking misinformation.

Cruz’s team focuses their efforts on addressing misinformation with more than 500,000 views. Chasing non-viral claims can inadvertently publicise or legitimise them.

Olivia Sohr, director of impact and new initiatives at Chequeado in Argentina, said one of the key points is speed but another is in being very transparent about what

we know and do not know. “We saw it more clearly than ever with the Coronavirus, that the evidence itself changes over time because science advances and they discover new things. At first we thought that the masks did not work or that the virus was not transmitted by aerosols. If you explain what the evidence is and why we reached this conclusion, it is much easier for the audience to understand [when new information becomes available].”

Explaining how you have reached conclusions will take extra effort, but it will also equip the audience to analyse information themselves when they encounter the next contradiction.

“When Coronavirus began in Argentina, we were in the middle of a series of Dengue cases, which is transmitted by mosquitoes, and the symptoms are very similar to those of the coronavirus. When the coronavirus appeared, a very reasonable question that many people asked was ‘is it transmitted by mosquitoes?’”

The team knew people were using Google to search for this answer. So they created and published a story that would come up in search results, but they did not promote it on the front page, or on social media networks. In this way, they could answer the fears of those who had them without spreading the fear to those who did not.

Good journalism during a health crisis doesn’t just report what people should know, it also asks what people are asking and provides reliable information before gaps can be plugged by misinformation.

Reliable data is also incredibly important during a health crisis, and this may be more challenging depending on what country you report from. Wilih Narvez, a multimedia journalist for Divergentes in Nicaragua said data during the COVID-19 pandemic was coming from four different institutions with four different sets of results. “In that case, if they said there were five deaths, it became our job to locate those five dead.”

Often, he said, the official numbers didn’t match what journalists were observing – and endless procession of funerals. In these cases, track whatever can be tracked and verified. “In the end, you may not be able to find the exact number, but you can find a number that is close to reality,” he said.

Weather emergencies

As the effects of climate change take hold, journalists need to be prepared to cover more floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts, fires, and other weather-related emergencies.

Kamala Hayman in New Zealand said the two things journalists should always have are a bottle of water and a battery for their phone. “If your phone dies, you are stuck.” Her newsroom also uses cloud-based documents to share information on the go. “We use Google Docs a lot. So we know exactly where everyone is. We keep it updated. We know who is working on which stories. Often with these things, it’s a long marathon, so you have to think about who does the night shift, and when they sleep.” Good communication and planning are key.

This is particularly true when covering disasters in remote areas. Wilih Narvaez relates a story about being deployed to cover a hurricane with no communications plan. “We were there for like three days without being able to report on what was happening. It was reckless that they sent us into the hurricane when you don’t even have a signal, when you can’t even report something.”

Safwat Zargar, a correspondent journalist for Scroll Media in Kashmir, India, learned some difficult lessons in his early days when he was covering floods: “[In hindsight,] I definitely would have gotten some kind of power backup for my devices, because the power outage actually happened that time. I would have liked a satellite phone and a life jacket, a helmet or even a canoe.”

It isn’t just material resources he advocates for, but training too. “If I had been trained on how to cover emergencies, how to handle a risk situation, maybe I could have done better reporting.”

But emergency coverage involves tough decisions that no manual can prepare you for, he said. Before being journalists we are also human and sometimes it is good to stop telling the story, to let lives be saved. “There were times when I gave up my seat on a boat to a flooded area, because that extra space in the boat could be for a person being saved. It was better to wait for the people who had already been evacuated to tell the story.”

In Syria, the most common environmental disaster is drought. Rula Asad, co-founder and director of the Network of Syrian Women Journalists, used to work with people internally displaced by drought. She said it was important to build a

foundation of trust with those affected. If possible, go a couple of times without doing interviews so that they can get to know you.

Be aware of your surroundings at all times. “You have to plan an escape route – and that is valid for everything, from a natural disaster to a conflict. Think about the exit before entering any place. For me, this is a lesson learned from different contexts,” she said.

David Clinch, founder of Clinch Media and former editorial director of Storyful, said maintaining a network of sources was vital for coverage of natural disasters: knowing who to speak to in government, NGOs, and what experts could provide information – not always to put on air, but sometimes to inform how reporting resources would be deployed.

Phoebe Arnold, Fullfact’s alliance coordinator, agreed: “Identify where the best information is, and then try to make connections with those people so that you can access that information more quickly.”

A common obstacle in emergency situations is how to identify the best source amid the chaos. Should you take the word of authorities who are unreliable in non-crisis times? “Analyse the sources. Even if they have their own motivations,” said Arnold. “Are they still a useful source for giving people accurate information? I believe that an organisation can be biased, and still useful during a crisis.”

Key lessons for environmental emergency coverage

- Plan your exit before you enter.
- Recognise that communications may be knocked out and plan accordingly – have satellite phones available for staff and alternative methods of connecting.
- Every journalist should carry a back-up power source – especially for phones – at all times.
- Be clear about roles and responsibilities prior to an emergency. And plan shifts to avoid exhaustion and burnout.
 - You may be required to gather and verify data – assign resources to this task.
 - You may be required to address misinformation – assign resources to this task.
- Employ a buddy system, or dispatch journalists in teams, to support each other.
- Collaborate with other journalists and experts by calling on networks to verify each other’s information. Work with trusted networks that already have an established reputation for credibility with the public.
- Recognise that you are a human before you are a journalist: when lives are in jeopardy you may need to step back. Focus your interviewing efforts on those who are safe. You may need to build trust before you attempt an interview.
- Think about how you publish information to meet questions your audience may be asking. Beware of overwhelming an audience with information.

- Maintaining independence from parties or governments gives credibility to journalistic work, but some coordination is necessary in an emergency to avoid duplication and disruption of emergency response efforts.
- Do not neglect emotional support and psychological care for journalists in the aftermath.
- Refer to the Toolbox section for verification tools and checklists.

Political emergencies

When it comes to political coverage, to adapt the words of Gabriel García Márquez, “there had never been a violence more foretold”. But preparing for any eventuality goes a long way to freeing political journalists to continue the important work of holding the powerful to account.

Elections

One of the unique challenges of electoral coverage is countering disinformation. Olive Sohr recalls the Argentinian presidential debate of 2019, when rumours began circulating that one of the candidates was receiving coaching via an earpiece. “We managed to get photos of Mauricio's ears that same night – a photographer from one of the agencies gave us the photo of each one of his ears showing that he did not have a headset. We posted it, and we saw how the misinformation curve fell and how it stopped being shared once it was clear that it was false. This was one of our success stories.”

It pays to dedicate resources to fact-checking, and to collaborate with other organisations in this regard.

In Bolivia, a team of four people launched the Noticias de Chequea Bolivia project ahead of the 2019 election. The public was awash in low quality information and disinformation, and on a knife's edge following the scrapping of term limits that would allow Evo Morales to stand for election for a fourth term. Gabriela Weiss, a journalist and fact-checker for Noticias de Chequea Bolivia, said there was so much misinformation they did not know how to handle it. “We realised that it was going to get out of our hands.”

When a vote-counting system mysteriously stopped working for 24 hours and restarted with a questionable change in votes for Morales, citizens took to the streets to protest. The country was in gridlock for 21 days.

“We saw that one of the things we could do to help stop this was to create visual content such as banners – super visual things that are easy and striking to read,” said Weiss. “With these visuals we were telling people how to identify false news, what not to share, if you are going to share a video of a confrontation, say where you are, the time, the date, things like that, so that people really began to realise that [...] you have to pay attention to what you are sharing because otherwise it can generate more panic and more conflict.”

When the elections of 2020 arrived, Weiss said they were much more prepared. Their team had grown to 15 people, they had community managers, accounts on multiple social networks and a podcast. They also had a database of reliable sources in government and ministries.

“We knew that people were trusting us and we said: the best we can do now is not to remain silent but to use this platform that we already have to do what we are doing but in another way: fight the misinformation is our goal.”

In Mexico, Mónica Cruz said 90 organisations worked together in 2018 to produce a multi-platform, multimedia project covering the presidential elections. Much of their efforts were focused on countering misinformation through fact-checking.

“[We contributed in two ways]: the corroboration of the political discourse and [...] the analysis of the content of networks.”

Nestor Arce, director and multimedia journalist at Divergentes in Nicaragua, recommends the creation of data verification units in newsrooms. “That requires a budget and trained people,” he said. Journalists on the ground have to be trained too, and commit to working with this team, and resist sharing unverified information on their social channels.

In Sierra Leone, Paul Myles from On Our Radar worked to train journalists ahead of the 2012 election. They had to ensure not only that reports did not contain political bias, but also that local journalists were not endangered. “We weren't asking anyone to run headlong into danger. Security was key, because we knew there could be potential disruptions or violence. So we were very clear that we needed a network of 20 to 25 people from different parts of the country, but they were people located in their own communities going to their own local polls, and talking to market leaders, business leaders, women, disability communities, etc. and informing about how the elections could affect them,” said Myles.

This approach gave a more personalised and local tone to election coverage and, because journalists were working in their own communities, they knew how to avoid dangerous situations, who the key sources were and what routes to take to access information.

Internet blackouts

Sometimes governments impose internet shutdowns, slow downs, or site blocking during elections or protests. This was the case during Uganda's 2016 and 2021 elections, and Nigeria in 2021.

Nigeria blocked Twitter after it deleted tweets by President Muhammadu Buhari. In Uganda, President Yoweri Museveni banned Facebook in 2016 and 2021 after they removed fake accounts and censured government officials using their accounts for election interference.

“The government of Uganda will maintain its shutdown of the internet, Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms until the government deems they are safe from being used to inflame tensions,” a statement at the time said.

Felicia Anthonio, #KeepItOn campaign coordinator for AccessNow in Ghana, says that these moves intentionally restrict dissidents, silence criticism, repress opposition politicians and even the media and journalists. “If free and fair elections are being held, they would not have to close all channels of communication that would guarantee transparency in the process,” she said.

Felicia recommends consulting with digital security experts when the internet is slowed down or cut off. VPN may be helpful, but could compromise your security if you choose an unreliable provider. They should be downloaded in advance because once the government starts controlling the internet, you won't be able to download them.

Marianne Díaz, a Venezuelan lawyer and digital rights activist, said the first thing to do in the event of a communications blackout is to determine what kind of black out you're dealing with. If it is a complete blackout of all services, you may be able to get around it by using a SIM card from a neighbouring country.

You can also install encrypted mesh network apps like Briar (Android only) and Bridgefy or devices like goTenna. “When there is [no network coverage] there are a couple of applications that can be used to connect and communicate with people who are close by using Bluetooth or other technology that the device has,” said Díaz.

When the internet was “turned off” in Cuba, Díaz said, journalists adapted by gathering reporting during the day and waiting for the internet to turn back on briefly at night before uploading their work and communicating with each other via Google Docs.

Organisations with resources can look into setting up satellite internet, like [Starlink](#), to ensure they remain connected to the outside world.

Safwat Zargar said his office stockpiled food and downloaded hard copies of any resources they might need access to in the event of an internet blackout: for example, reference material on constitutional changes.

Strikes and protests

Strikes and protests present unique security and information challenges for the journalists who cover them. Néstor Arce found himself in the crossfire while covering Nicaragua's 2018 riots.

What started as a mild demonstration by young students, spiralled into a violent movement of protests spanning almost four years that has resulted in hundreds of deaths and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people.

"They attacked me three times in one night, and beat other journalists from other media," he said. One journalist was killed in the violence.

Always thinking about how you can prepare for this hostile scenario, Arce said. "I participated in some training in El Salvador for coverage in hostile scenarios. The program is called [Cross Risk](#). You train in various situations, such as covering an event in a hostile setting, a little first aid, a little about knowing the identification of weapons and knowing what type of shots you heard." He said the training came in very useful during those months covering the demonstrations.

Arce advises strongly against "going it alone" in high-risk demonstration coverage. It's difficult to report and gather information while remaining vigilant and aware of your surroundings. "Always have between three to four people in your coverage team," he said.

"One of the basic skills is First Aid: for a cut, a wound, a blow, all those kinds of things that can happen to you on the road."

Psychological management is important, too. "We saw dead people, injured people, people crying at funerals," Arce said. "You can feel shocked. [For example] when you see five coffins for the same family and people crying, that can shock you and you can freeze up and then you will not be able to continue making your coverage."

Bisma Bhat, journalist from Free Press Kashmir, said the psychological pressure was the hardest component to manage when she was covering protests in Kashmir. "I

was caught between protesters and the police, who fired tear gas to disperse the crowds. I was choked and my eyes were full of tears. I could barely see. My colleague took me by the hand and led me to a nearby house where the owners of the house gave me water. Then I went back to the office to write the story.”

Bhat carries a pen or pencil, notebook, tape recorder and press card. She keeps her editor, colleague or friend informed about her location. “I always walk in a group with other journalists. I carry the right equipment and keep first aid in my bag.”

Beware that danger can come from both sides, said Wilih Narvaez. And treat information received via social media with healthy scepticism – even photographs and videos. Again, verification is a primary skill in coverage.

Several interviewees made a note about equipment, and having contingency plans in place for when equipment like phones or cameras are confiscated by authorities. It is possible on most modern cameras to store copies of your work straight to the cloud. On older cameras, consider carrying multiple SD cards that you can switch out at the last minute.

Think carefully about what information you keep stored on your phone – will sources or colleagues or work be compromised if it is stolen or confiscated?

If tensions escalate, it may not be safe to stand behind either the police or the demonstrators. Instead, try to position yourself and your team between the two groups and a few metres back from the front line. A highlighted “Press” flak jacket may be useful in these circumstances.



David Clinch (formerly Storyful) suggests: “Don't trust anyone, not even yourself. Don't come with your own preconceived ideas. Try to avoid any kind of speculation or framing something that could be likely.” If someone shows you videos, ask to see the full video and ask if there are other videos. Are you sure it's not an old video? Do you need to do forensic analyses on the metadata?

Clinch recommends three steps of verification for material given to you by protestors: question the source, digitally fact-check metadata, and look for context clues. Ask the source: Do you want to be identified? Do you not want to be identified? “Release information like this should be in writing wherever possible,” he said. “Your company should have a [release] form ready; every journalist should have it ready on their phone. You should at least be able to show it to people. In some cases, what journalists do is record themselves interviewing the person. ‘Do I have permission to use your video? Can we use your information? Can we use your name?’ So preferably written, but at least recorded.”

Terror attacks

A key difficulty that emerges in the event of a terror attack is in how much information the media releases during the chaos. Kamala Hayman said the terrorist attacks on a mosque in Christchurch on March 15, 2019, taught her how thin the line was between good journalistic work and human decency.

“We sent a team and got information from eyewitnesses and for more than two hours we just relied on that data. There was no official information at all, until more than two hours later. That is a long time without information.”

Although they received plenty of information from their readers, they could not always be sure it was accurate. She advises being very careful when choosing what to report, even if the competition does otherwise.

“We made decisions in advance not to publish the names of the shooters, not to publish their live broadcast, or to cite their manifesto,” she said. “We also preferred to only publish information of which we were sure, so as not to contribute to the chaos, as there were many other media outlets that were already releasing unconfirmed numbers.”

Kamala also found it useful that the editors-in-chief of different newspapers engaged fully on how to handle the fallout of the emergency. They agreed how they would cover terrorist appearances in court, and so on. “In New Zealand the media worked together quite responsibly. We had a team on the ground, but we also

worked with reporters and photographers from other newsrooms as if we were a great national team.”

The follow-up after such a shocking and tragic event included considering the needs of journalists who covered the story. “After the terrorist attacks, we had a counsellor who stayed permanently in our building for a week, full time. And then once a week for a while after.”

Kamala said recognising when to send journalists home, and making sure they had support, was part of crisis coverage and should be codified in every emergency manual.

Key lessons for political emergency coverage

- Make use of risk assessment forms ahead of coverage of a general election or protest to ensure journalists have all the equipment and knowledge required to report safely and effectively.
- If you are going to cover an emergency situation, travel in groups. One of you should always be assessing threats. Always have a contact in the newsroom with whom you can check in at regular intervals.
- Make use of the best digital security practices to ensure your devices are secure and your sources are kept safe. Turn off location tracking.
- Clear your mobile device of personal data, or take a burner phone when covering protests.
- Take something to cover your face from teargas, and pack water, masks, sanitiser and a first aid kit. Bring power banks that are fully charged.
- Write down or memorise important contact information for your newsroom, emergency contacts, and legal support.
- Store photographs to the cloud, or carry spare SD cards that can be switched out in the event of equipment confiscation.
- Have dedicated verification teams and data specialists on the team.
- Be conscious of where you stand during an emergency situation: you should not put yourself or anyone else in harm’s way.
- Refer to the Toolbox section for verification tools and checklists.

Women covering emergencies

Journalism during emergencies brings a myriad of obstacles for female journalists, and all too often the coverage becomes a hostile environment that seeks to silence women's voices and the stories they tell.

“We face different risks in covering any story compared to the opposite sex. As a woman journalist and living in a patriarchal society, you are exposed to exploitation and harassment. At some point, whenever I cover the riots, people look at me as if I have committed a sin,” said Bisma Bhat.

Although Bisma does not pay attention to what people think, she is usually aware of what is happening around her: “I always make plans when I go out for a story, such as where I have to go, who am I going to interview, which way or route I must take.”

It is worth taking additional security steps. These additional steps should not be regarded as a suggestion that women are less suited to covering emergencies but as a reflection of the increased risk of violence that they face.

Rula Asad said that the first challenge women journalists face in conflict zones is that they are automatically considered a burden on the newsroom because they may be raped or used as hostages. “They do not see us as professionals, but as a body that is weak, that can become a target or can even bring shame to the environment. So, anyone who goes to cover these communities, especially women, will not be taken seriously, in addition to the fact that the risk of having some type of sexual harassment is very high.”

The risk is higher, but the perspective woman journalists can bring in a conflict situation – and the increased access they may gain – makes it worth developing a plan for deployment.

Women journalists should be aware of how they can use clothing to either be more prepared for movement, or win trust through the recognition of cultural norms. It is almost always useful to carry a scarf to use for warmth, head covering or in a first aid situation.

If you are travelling on assignment, [portable door alarms](#) may be useful to bring with you.

Other security devices that are of use include pepper spray for deterring an attacker and a whistle for scaring off an attacker and summoning help.

Network with other female journalists to provide support where necessary.

Kamala Hayman said: “I think the biggest problem women journalists face is probably online criticism. They receive a lot of abuse on social media, or emails that are quite invasive.”

Almost a third of female journalists consider changing professions due to online attacks and threats, according to the International Women's Media Foundation. Newsrooms should be aware of this, and provide technical and emotional support when necessary.

Toolbox

PPE and risk analysis

- Personal Protective Equipment Guide:
<https://journalismcourses.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/PPE-Resource.pdf>
- Example of a risk assessment form:
<https://journalismcourses.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/IWMF-Risk-assessment-Template.pdf>

Resources for secure coverage:

- Safety guide for journalists in high-risk environments:
<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/resources/publications-and-communication-materials/publications/full-list/safety-guide-for-journalists/>
- Safety guide in protest coverage:
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374206>
- On Our Radar Toolkit: <https://onourradar.org/toolkit/>
- Journalistic Manual for Ethical Coverage of Emergencies and Disasters:
<https://apes.org.sv/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Manual.pdf>
- Fuego Cruzado high-risk coverage training <https://www.riesgocruzado.com/>

Verification resources

- A toolkit to combat misinformation, censorship, toxicity, and violent extremism: <https://jigsaw.google.com/>
- Resources to combat misinformation: <https://firstdraftnews.org/research/>
- Free training: <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/training/>
- Case studies of media manipulation for training in identification:
<https://mediamanipulation.org/>
- Google Information Checker (browser and check marker):
<https://toolbox.google.com/factcheck/explorer>
- Deep Fakes and how to identify it:
<https://gijn.org/2018/05/28/what-to-watch-for-in-the-coming-wave-of-deep-fake-videos/>
- Information verifiers map: <https://reporterslab.org/fact-checking/>
- Guide to combat misinformation:
<https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/anti-misinformation-actions/>

- The World in Data (information and open data with free access): <https://ourworldindata.org/>
- Verification tools for Spanish journalists: <https://portalcheck.org/periodistas/>
- How to know where a video was recorded? (ES) <https://youtu.be/jWiM6CtTTVE>
- Identify old videos used out of context: <https://yandex.com/>
- Identify images used out of context:
 - [Google Images](https://images.google.com/): <https://images.google.com/>
 - [Redeye \(extension\)](#)
- Review a closed website: Wayback machine - <https://archive.org/web/>
- Measuring virality <https://www.crowdtangle.com/>
- Verification methodology:
 - <https://global.ajplus.net/verifica/metodologia>
 - <https://chequeado.com/metodo/>
 - <https://africacheck.org/fact-checks>
 - <https://chequeado.com/latamcoronavirus/>
- Reference framework to combat misinformation in incidents: <https://fullfact.org/about/policy/reports/incidentframework/>

Resources for women journalists

- Free course of strategies for women journalists on how to carry out safe coverage: <https://journalismcourses.org/course/reportingsafely/>
- How to respond to workplace harassment: <https://www.ihollaback.org/respond-workplace-harassment/>
- Global trends in digital violence against women journalists: <https://en.unesco.org/publications/thechilling>
- Resources to combat digital violence against women journalists: <https://www.iwmf.org/programs/online-harassment/>

Resources for internet outages

- Witness Blog and Resource Library:
 - <https://blog.witness.org/>
 - <https://library.witness.org/product-tag/internet-shutdown/>
- #KeepItOn campaign and the manual on internet outages:
 - <https://www.accessnow.org/internet-shutdowns-and-elections-handbook/>
 - https://www.accessnow.org/keepiton/#KIO_Toolkit

- Recommendations during internet outages:
<https://jigsaw.google.com/the-current/shutdown/>
- How to choose the right VPN:
<https://ssd.eff.org/en/module/choosing-vpn-thats-right-you>

Digital security resources

Protege.la is a platform created by SocialTIC in Mexico, an organisation dedicated to research, training, support and promotion of digital technology and information for activists, journalists and civil society.

They have created a set of protocols for ensuring digital security:

1. Protect your devices (cell phone, computer, recorder, camera). Have back-up devices, encrypt your documents, and always run the most updated version of your operating system available.
2. Use secure communications in chats, video calls and file sharing. They recommend identifying the safest digital communication spaces and learning how to configure the most common platforms.
3. Configure your social network privacy settings (your personal and professional accounts).
4. Locate support networks (physical, digital, legal, emotional). Create a directory of contacts, media and organisations that can support and guide you in the event of an incident. Share this directory with your team and update your contacts regularly.
5. Prepare your security protocol for before, during and after and digital attack, as well as prevention and response actions.

Access the complete kit and other tools here:

<https://protege.la/seguridad-digital-para-cobertura-kit-de-recursos/>

Conclusion

Through this process, I have realised that no printed version of an emergency manual – the one that I so craved while covering violence in Nicaragua – will ever be complete.

While I hope the basics covered here inspire newsrooms and journalists to think about their own plans, the truth of the matter is emergency preparedness requires constant risk analysis, preparation and creative problem solving on the ground.

But beyond that truth I also see a key theme that emerged repeatedly in the advice on these pages. It was the power of human networks in an emergency situation.

Around the world, key lessons in emergency preparedness and response by journalists are learned every day – and lost. I would like to see the creation of an interactive digital network of emergency response journalists.

This network would connect journalists with the support and expertise they need, as well as a manual that collects their findings in searchable form. Imagine the value of this network to new generations of journalists in search of best practices.

In a digital age of information overload, a networked solution is missing.