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MODULE 4

CONFLICT, WAR AND MAN-MADE DISASTERS



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About This Module

Module 4 covers a hazard that differs from the others in this training in how it develops. Risk can build gradually, sometimes over months, which gives more opportunity to prepare than a flood or an earthquake allows, but also more uncertainty about how and when to act.

It follows the same four-phase structure as every hazard module in this training.

This module discusses topics that may be personally difficult for some participants. People may have experienced displacement, occupation, loss of loved ones, military service, or other consequences of conflict. Others may have no direct experience but still feel anxiety discussing these issues.

A Trauma-Informed Approach

- A trauma-informed approach recognises that people's reactions to conflict are different. There is no 'right' way to respond to traumatic experiences.
- Participation is always voluntary
- Participants may choose not to answer a question or share personal experiences
- Discussions should focus on practical preparedness rather than personal trauma
- Different experiences and perspectives should be treated with respect
- Facilitators should avoid putting participants on the spot or asking them to relive difficult events
- **The aim of this module is not to discuss traumatic experiences, but to strengthen preparedness, confidence and community resilience.**

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, you will have learned:



- Recognise the common risks conflict and displacement bring, and that they are not unique to any one country
- Prepare a household plan covering documents, a go-bag, evacuation, communication and support for vulnerable people
- Take appropriate protective action if the security situation changes, including how to verify information
- Identify one household action and one community action to complete this month



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01

Understanding the Risk

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A Risk That Builds Differently

Armed conflict affects far more than the battlefield. It disrupts essential services, damages homes and infrastructure, separates families, forces people to leave their communities, and places significant pressure on health, education and social support systems.

These impacts may develop gradually or escalate rapidly, leaving little time to prepare.

Since Russia's aggression against Ukraine began in 2014, and escalated into a full-scale invasion in 2022, millions of people have experienced displacement, loss of housing, disruption of livelihoods, and prolonged uncertainty.

Ukraine

As of Mid-2026

- Around 3.7 million people remain internally displaced within Ukraine, and close to 5.9 million refugees from Ukraine are recorded globally.
- 2025 was the deadliest year for Ukrainian civilians since 2022, and casualties in the first half of 2026 rose sharply again — July 2026 was the deadliest single month since April 2022.

“65,000+ verified civilian casualties since the invasion began, including over 16,400 killed and close to 48,600 injured — the real number is likely higher”

Ukraine



As of Mid-2026

Civilian casualties continuing to climb, years into the war, is itself a lesson: the humanitarian consequences of conflict do not fade with time, and preparedness has to account for a situation that keeps changing.

“65,000+ verified civilian casualties since the invasion began, including over 16,400 killed and close to 48,600 injured — the real number is likely higher”

Bosnia and Herzegovina

1992–1995

- The conflict damaged homes, schools, hospitals, public infrastructure and local economies. Recovery continued for many years after the fighting ended, showing that rebuilding communities requires both physical reconstruction and strong social connections.

“100,000 people killed; more than 2 million displaced — over half the country's population”

Croatia

1991–1995

- An estimated 15,000 soldiers and 6,605 civilians lost their lives. Entire towns, including Vukovar, suffered extensive damage, and many communities needed years of reconstruction after the fighting ended.

“550,000 people displaced during the Croatian War of Independence”

Chechnya

1994–1996 and 1999–2009

- Hundreds of thousands were displaced, and many communities experienced repeated displacement, interrupted education, and the collapse of essential services. Many families fled to neighbouring regions such as Ingushetia and Dagestan, while others sought protection elsewhere in Europe.

“30,000–40,000 civilians killed across the First and Second Chechen Wars”

Syria

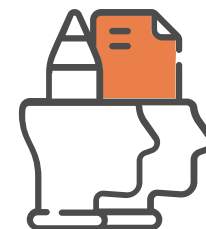
March 2011–March 2021

- Millions more were displaced inside the country or became refugees abroad. The conflict severely affected healthcare, education, housing, water systems and other essential services — showing how prolonged armed conflict can fundamentally reshape a society.

“350,209 identified individuals, civilians and combatants, killed — outside Europe, but a lesson for all”

Common Risks

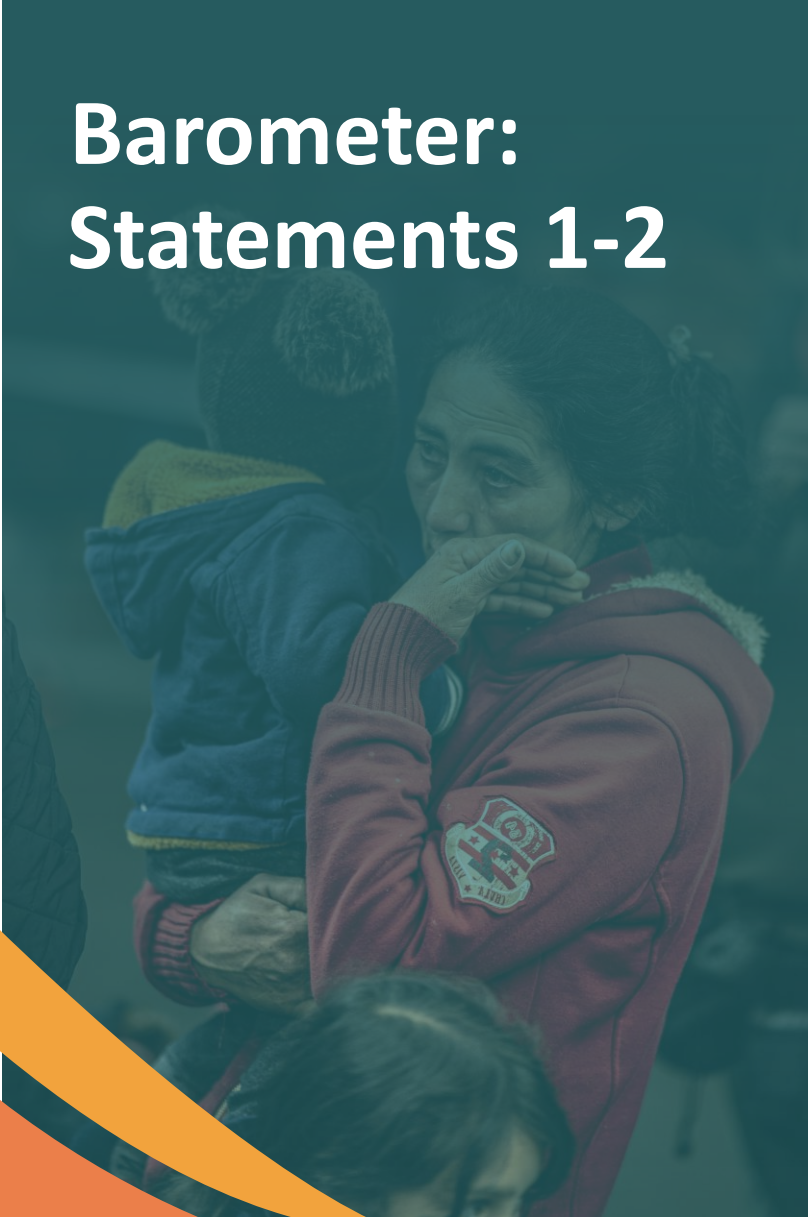
- Although every conflict is different, these experiences reveal several common risks:
- Disruption of electricity, water, healthcare, communications and transportation
- Damage to homes, schools and public infrastructure
- Displacement and family separation
- Reduced access to food, medicines, cash and other essential supplies
- Increased exposure to misinformation and rumours
- Long-term psychological, social and economic impacts
- **Preparedness does not eliminate risk**, but it helps people make informed decisions, respond more effectively, and recover more quickly.



Group Exercise: “Barometer”

- **Objective:** to test common assumptions about conflict against real experience, and correct them with evidence.
- **Duration:** 15 to 20 minutes.
- **Method:** the educator marks two opposite ends of the room ‘Agree’ and ‘Disagree.’ After each statement is read aloud, participants take their place on the scale according to their view. The educator asks two or three participants about their choice, then shares the evidence.

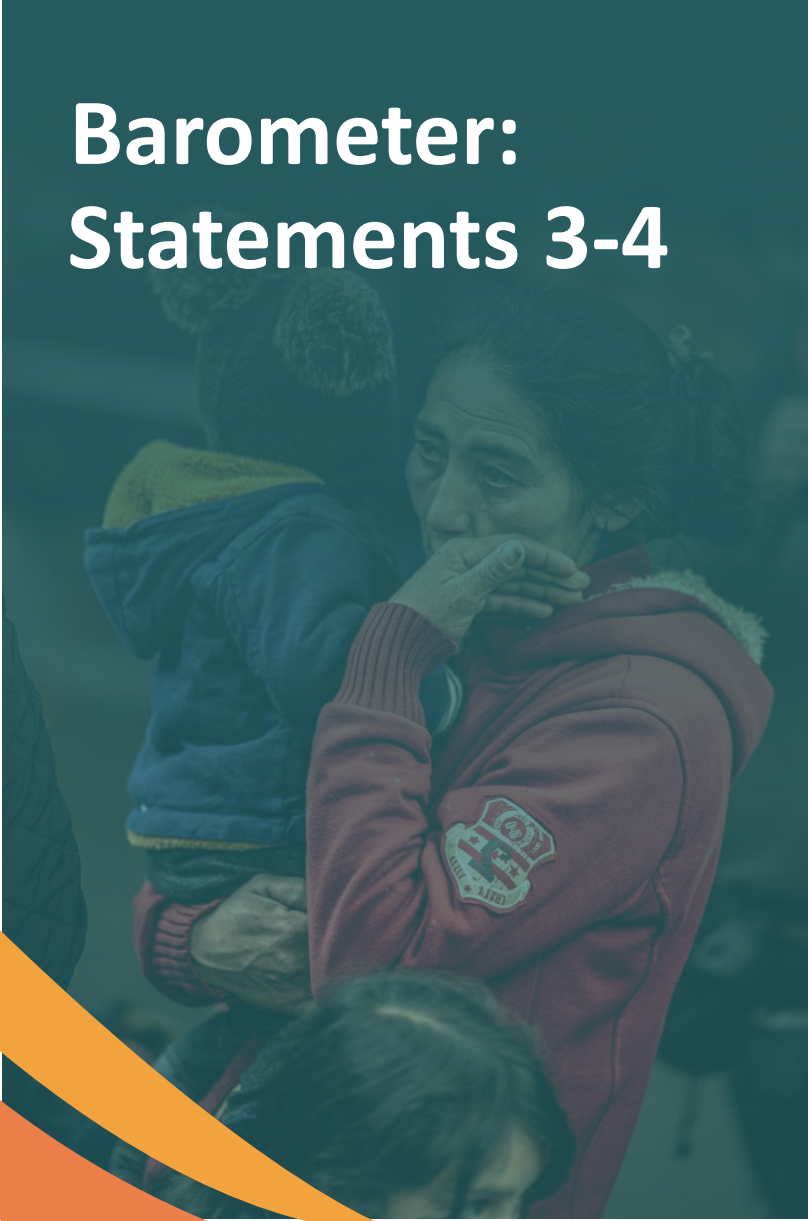
Barometer: Statements 1-2



1. When armed conflict begins, it's better to leave large cities and go to a small town. In 2022, many Ukrainians left Kyiv for the suburbs and found themselves under occupation instead. Bucha, one of those suburbs, was occupied for 33 days; the city council later reported dozens of residents had died and dozens more had been taken captive during that period. Leaving a city is not automatically safer if it moves you into the path of occupation rather than away from it.

2. During an emergency, the most important thing is to take as many belongings as possible, because they may be destroyed. In crisis situations, mobility is often more important than the quantity of belongings. A compact set of essentials makes more sense.

Barometer: Statements 3-4



3. You can leave your pets at home for a few days if you need to leave urgently. It's important to plan ahead for a pet's evacuation: a carrier, food, documents, and a safe way to transport them.

4. If everyone in the community knows each other well, a special response plan isn't necessary. Experience with emergencies shows that even close-knit communities respond more effectively when they have agreed roles, contacts and a plan of action.

Barometer: Statements 5-6

A photograph of a woman in a red jacket holding a young child. Another child is visible in the foreground, looking down. The image is partially obscured by a teal overlay and orange curved shapes at the bottom left.

5. Preparing for emergencies is the sole responsibility of the government and emergency services. The most effective response happens when responsibility is shared among government, local authorities, communities and individuals. Personal preparedness is an important part of overall safety.

6. After an emergency ends, a community recovers faster if residents know one another and have experience working together. In Sarajevo, after the siege ended, local initiatives, volunteer groups and civil society organisations formed the foundation of neighbourhood recovery. In Ukraine, following de-occupation, a strong sense of belonging helped communities make effective use of recovery resources.

Barometer: Statements 7-8

7. If military conflict is still far off, it's too early to prepare for it. In Syria, Chechnya and Ukraine, many people noted they did not expect the situation to deteriorate so quickly. Preparing in advance, documents, an evacuation plan, contacts, helped them respond more calmly when it did.

8. My town is not strategic, so it won't be affected by military conflict. The experiences of Ukraine and Bosnia and Herzegovina show hostilities can spread to small towns and villages. During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the town of Srebrenica, with a pre-war population of about 6,000, became the site of one of the war's most tragic events. Size or remoteness does not guarantee safety.

Barometer: Statements 9-10

A photograph of a woman in a red jacket holding a young child. Another child is visible in the foreground, looking down. The image is partially obscured by a teal overlay and orange curved shapes at the bottom left.

9. During a war, the most important thing is to secure food and water. In various conflicts, including Syria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Ukraine, documents, medicine, means of communication, cash and a pre-agreed plan of action proved no less important.

10. If mobile service goes down, you can always find a way to contact your loved ones. During hostilities in Chechnya, Syria and Ukraine, communication was often unstable or unavailable. This is why international guidelines recommend agreeing a meeting place and a plan of action before an emergency arises.

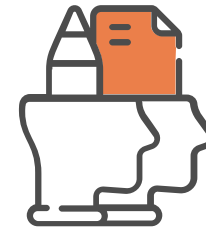
Section 1: Key Takeaways

- Conflict risk isn't unique to one country — Ukraine, Bosnia, Croatia, Chechnya and Syria all show the same patterns
- The humanitarian toll doesn't fade with time — preparedness has to account for a changing situation
- Size, remoteness or feeling far from conflict doesn't guarantee safety
- Preparedness is shared: government, communities and individuals each have a role

02

PREPAREDNESS

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Group Exercise: “Preparedness Cards”

- **Objective:** to help participants identify practical preparedness actions by developing their own solutions before comparing them with recommended guidance. Duration: 20 to 25 minutes.
- **Method:** small groups imagine their community has learned the security situation may deteriorate within 24 to 48 hours. Each group discusses one card and prepares a short checklist, then presents it in 2 to 3 minutes.
- Group 1: Documents and go-bag • Group 2: Family communication plan • Group 3: Evacuation routes and shelters
- Group 4: Reliable information and misinformation • Group 5: Community cooperation and mutual support • Group 6: Pets and supporting vulnerable people

Your Household Plan (1 of 3)

- **Keep essential documents accessible.** Passports, identification, birth certificates, medical records and insurance documents in a waterproof folder — keep both physical and digital copies in case originals are lost.
- **Prepare a go-bag.** Documents, medication, cash, basic supplies, drinking water, non-perishable food, a flashlight, spare batteries, a power bank, warm clothing, first aid supplies and a battery or hand-crank radio. Check contents regularly.
- **Know your evacuation routes.** Identify several routes from home, work and places you visit regularly, and know an alternative in case roads are blocked.

Your Household Plan (2 of 3)

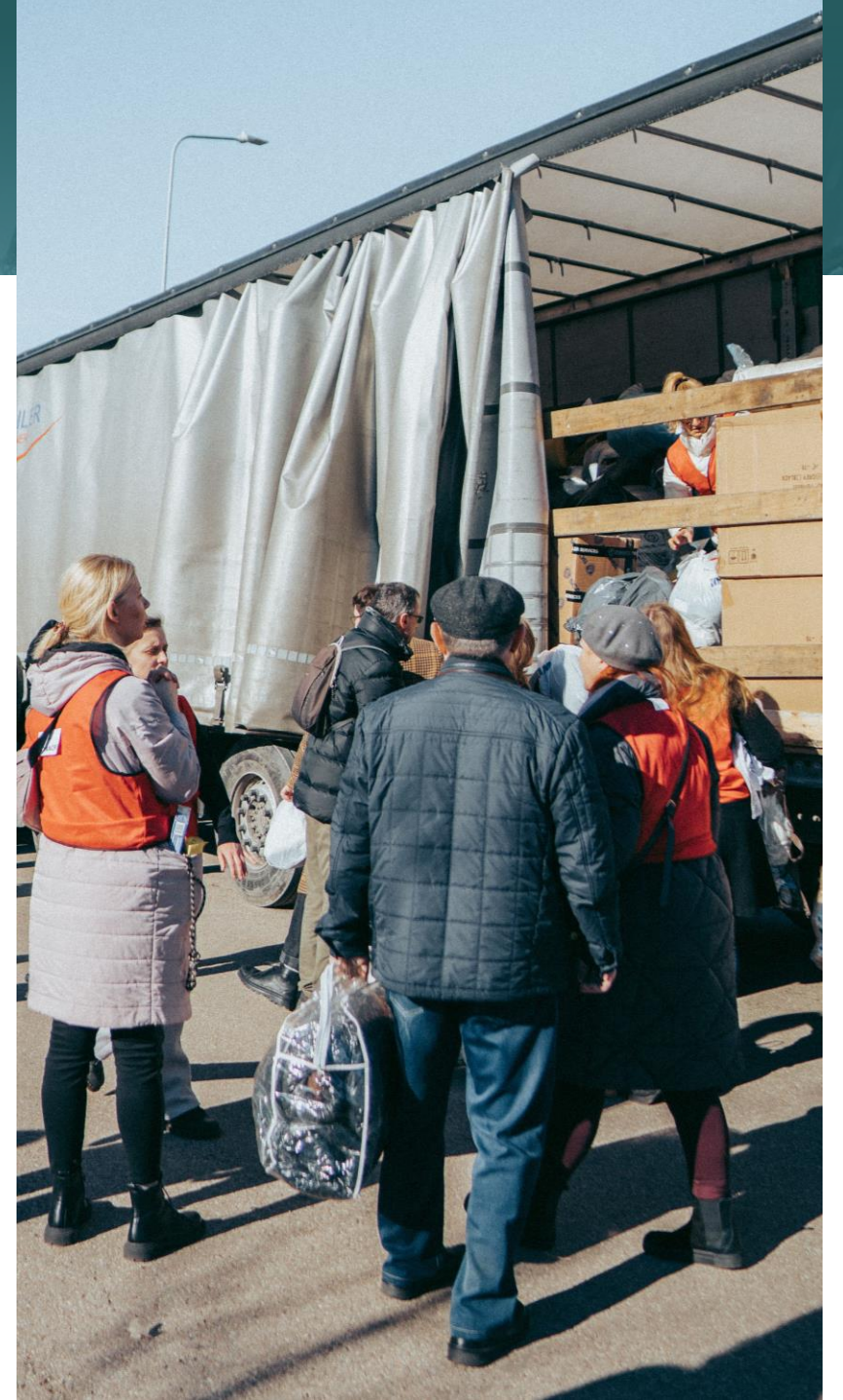
- Agree a communication plan. Decide how you'll make contact if networks go down, agree a meeting point, identify an out-of-area emergency contact, and decide who checks on children, older relatives or neighbours.
- Identify trusted sources of information. Official authorities, emergency services, trusted media, humanitarian organisations — avoid decisions based on rumours or unverified messages.
- Have an evacuation plan for your pet. Many shelters don't accept animals — identify pet-friendly locations, and prepare a carrier, food, water, medications and ID tags.
- Know how to safely turn off utilities. Gas, electricity and water, if emergency services advise it, to reduce the risk of fires, explosions or flooding

Your Household Plan (3 of 3)

- Prepare for power outages. Backup lighting, charged power banks, spare batteries, and a plan for charging essential medical devices.
- Know who may need your support, and who can support you. Identify neighbours or relatives who may need help, using the list in Module 1, Section 1.2.
- If you choose to stay, have a plan, not only good intentions. Think in advance how you can contribute safely — donating blood, preparing meals, distributing aid — and coordinate with trusted organisations.

At Community Level

- Know which local group — faith-based, residents' or volunteer — could support your household or others if the situation changed
- Agree with neighbours in advance how you'd check on each other and share verified information if communication became difficult
- Support community shelters being kept accessible, clearly identified, and maintained in a usable condition
- Support identifying and maintaining alternative power sources, such as generators, for critical facilities
- Develop a buddy system with neighbours so someone is available to care for or evacuate a pet if its owner can't





Key Actions

- **Prepare one part of your plan this month**

Choose one item from the household plan you haven't yet done, complete it, and tell one family member what you've done.

- **Community level**

Identify one local group or contact you could turn to, or support, if your household or a neighbour needed help. Map your community's shelters: know where they are, whether they're accessible, and whether they're ready for use — and raise it with local authorities if you find a problem.

Section 2: Key Takeaways

- Documents, a go-bag and a communication plan come first — prepare them before you need them
- Trusted information sources need to be identified in advance, not searched for in a crisis
- Pets and vulnerable neighbours need their own plan, not an afterthought
- If you choose to stay and help, coordinate with trusted organisations — don't act alone

03

DURING THE EVENT

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During the Event (1 of 2)

- Follow official guidance on sheltering or evacuation
- Keep in contact with family through the plan agreed in advance
- Prioritise the safety of children and vulnerable people identified in Module 1, Section 1.2
- Stay connected to the community or volunteer network from Section 4.2 — support others rather than managing alone
- If you choose to stay and support your community, do so safely, coordinating with trusted organisations



During the Event (2 of 2)

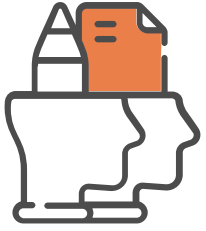
- Conserve your phone battery: limit unnecessary use, keep a power bank charged, use text messages when networks are overloaded
- Follow your preparedness plan and maintain simple routines — small, practical actions help reduce stress
- Be prepared to adapt your plans as the situation develops
- Rely on verified sources of information rather than rumour

Verify Before You Share (1 of 2)

- **Who is the source?** Is it an official authority, a trusted media outlet, or a recognised humanitarian organisation? Be cautious of anonymous posts, screenshots, or forwarded messages.
- **Can I verify it through another source?** Check whether at least one other trusted source confirms it before acting on it or sharing it further.
- **Is the information current?** Old photos, videos and news stories are often reshared as if happening now — check the publication date, location and context.

Verify Before You Share (2 of 2)

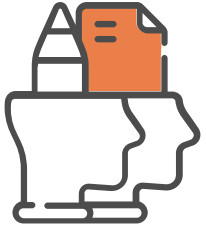
- **Throughout the full-scale invasion,** misleading posts have frequently reused photos and videos from previous years or entirely different conflicts, presenting them as current events. Checking both source and date has been one of the most effective defences.
- **Common mistakes:** sharing unverified information, waiting until the last moment to evacuate, travelling into affected areas out of curiosity, volunteering without coordination, ignoring your own safety while helping others.



Exercise: “Reliable or Not?” (10–15 min)

Method: Small groups get a set of information cards — messages someone might receive during an emergency — and discuss: would you trust it, act on it, verify it, or share it?

- **Card 1:** a neighbourhood chat message says evacuate immediately, no source given.
- **Card 2:** the regional military administration publishes an official evacuation notice on its verified channels.
- **Card 3:** a friend forwards a screenshot claiming the nearest shelter was destroyed, no date or source.



Exercise: “Reliable or Not?” (10–15 min)

Method: Small groups get a set of information cards — messages someone might receive during an emergency — and discuss: would you trust it, act on it, verify it, or share it?

- **Card 4:** a local volunteer organisation shares aid information with a link to the municipality's official website.
- **Card 5:** a social media post claims electricity will be out for two weeks, no evidence given.
- **Card 6:** the State Emergency Service issues missile-strike instructions through official channels.

Debrief: which messages were easiest to trust, and why? What signs helped you decide?

Section 3: Key Takeaways

- Follow your plan, stay connected, and lean on your community network — don't manage alone
- Verify before you share: source, cross-check, and check the date
- Old footage reused as current news is one of the most common forms of wartime misinformation
- Helping others only works if you stay safe yourself

04

AFTER THE DISASTER

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Coordination and Communication

Register with displacement or humanitarian services where relevant, and connect with existing community and volunteer networks rather than trying to manage alone.

This is a shared job, not an individual one:

The community and volunteer contacts identified in Section 4.2 are what allow support to reach people who cannot access formal services alone.

Community Example: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Following the 1992–1995 war, many communities relied on long-standing traditions of mutual assistance to rebuild homes and restore community life. A World Bank study found that in many villages, neighbours, friends and relatives organised collective efforts to repair damaged houses, often exchanging labour rather than money.

One resident of Krepšić, in the Brčko District, recalled that during the harsh winter of 1996, residents helped each other rebuild homes and restore electricity despite extremely limited resources. Residents also organised collective repair of apartment buildings, often coordinated through condominium councils that had existed before the war.

The Study's Conclusion:

communities with stronger local networks and traditions of cooperation were better able to organise recovery, even when government services and external assistance were limited.

Community Example: Guatemala

Following the 1996 Peace Accords, Guatemala established mechanisms to ensure civil society played an active role in recovery.

The Civil Society Assembly brought together Indigenous organisations, women's groups, churches, trade unions, human rights organisations and academic institutions to contribute to peace negotiations, and the Commission to Follow Up the Peace Agreements monitored implementation and encouraged cooperation between government institutions and civil society.

The Result:

these participatory structures helped build public trust, supported reconciliation, and increased local ownership of recovery and democratic reform.

Community Example: Croatia

Following the 1991–1995 war, more than 500,000 people were displaced, and thousands of homes, schools, hospitals and public buildings were damaged or destroyed. As displaced families gradually returned, recovery depended on cooperation between municipalities, local civil society organisations, volunteers and residents.

Vukovar suffered some of the most extensive destruction of the war; after the peaceful reintegration of Eastern Slavonia in 1998, reconstruction involved local authorities, residents, civil society, the UN Transitional Administration, and international donors.

Community organisations supported returning families, restored schools and community facilities, and created opportunities for dialogue — rebuilding trust alongside physical reconstruction.

The Common Lesson



Although every conflict is different, experiences from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guatemala and Croatia point to a common lesson:

- **Communities recover more effectively**

When local people, civil society organisations, volunteer networks and public authorities work together.

Strong social connections and community leadership help restore essential services, support vulnerable people, and strengthen long-term resilience.

Digital Tools and Misinformation

Propaganda and rumour circulate quickly in this kind of environment.

Verify information through established humanitarian or official sources, and use secure channels to communicate where possible, using the same verification questions from Section 4.3:

- Who is the source
- Can you verify it elsewhere
- Is it current?

Psychological Dimension

- Trauma, grief, displacement and prolonged uncertainty affect people in different ways and on different timelines — there is no ‘right’ way to react. Anxiety, sadness, anger, numbness, difficulty sleeping or concentrating are all common responses to highly stressful events.
- Support from family, friends and community is an important protective factor, but it does not replace professional psychological care when needed. If distress persists, becomes overwhelming, or interferes with daily life, encourage seeking support from a qualified mental health professional.
- In Ukraine, professional psychosocial support is available through ‘How Are You?’, Veteran Hub, La Strada Ukraine and the Ukrainian Red Cross Society.

Short-Term Actions

In the first days after a disaster, focus on meeting immediate needs: access safe shelter, obtain clean drinking water and food, seek medical care if needed, replace essential medications, contact family members, and register for available humanitarian assistance if required.

Avoid returning to damaged buildings or affected areas

Until authorities confirm it's safe to do so.

Long-Term and Sustaining Solutions

Community rebuilding and the sustained social connections described in Module 1, Section 1.6 support long-term recovery. The Bosnia, Guatemala and Croatia examples all show this in different ways: mutual assistance networks, participatory recovery structures, and cooperation between residents, civil society and authorities.

The strongest long-term recovery builds something more resilient than what was lost, not just a return to how things were.

Section 4: Key Takeaways

- Recovery works best organised, not solo — register, connect, coordinate
- Bosnia, Guatemala and Croatia all show the same lesson: strong social connections drive recovery
- There's no 'right' way to react psychologically — and support is available
- Long-term recovery is a community project, sustained over years, not a single event



ONE RISK. ONE ACTION. ONE QUESTION.

Before you finish this module, three short prompts to take with you.



Closing Reflection

One Risk

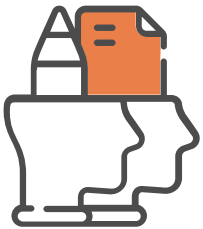
Name one verified source of information you would follow if the situation in your area changed.

One Action

Name one part of your preparedness plan from Section 4.2 you will complete this month.

One Question

Name one thing you still want to know. Bring it to the next module.



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