Five easy steps to integrate language data into humanitarian and development programs

Data on the languages of affected people is as important for meeting their needs as data on their age and gender. This tool is a quick reference guide to your options on how to use language data at different stages of planning and delivering aid programs.

1. **Consult existing data on the languages people use in your targeted area, if available**

   Suggested resources: Language datasets on Humanitarian Data Exchange and language maps on CLEAR Global's Language Data portal

2. **Where it can be done safely, ask four questions[1] to understand the languages and communication needs of your target groups**

   Data on languages and communication needs should be treated as any other potentially sensitive data, to minimize risks to individuals and communities.[2]

Question (for surveys with individuals)	Key considerations
What is the main language you use at home?	• If time or space in the questionnaire is limited, only include this one question. • Download a predetermined list of the most common languages to

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[1] While these questions have been developed and tested to work across different contexts, we recommend working with local data collection teams to ensure that all survey questions are adapted to the local context and language(s).

[2] CLEAR Global can advise on collection, storage, and dissemination of sensitive data.

	provide respondents with answer choices and minimize data disparities caused by different spellings of the same language or different dialects that are commonly classified under one language. This should include the locally relevant sign language(s). • Allow only one answer to be selected through a drop-down menu to facilitate data analysis. • If you adapt the question, avoid expressions like "mother tongue", which can be difficult to convey in some languages and might not be relevant if people don't communicate mainly in the language they used growing up. • If the respondent has hearing or speaking impairments, consider asking this question of another member of the household to get complementary data.
Which language do you prefer to receive written information in?	• Allow only one language to be selected. • Use the same list of languages as for the first question, and ensure "none" is also given as an option for those who prefer not to receive information in writing. • Include "Braille" as an option for those who have vision impairments.
Which language do you prefer to receive spoken or signed information in?	• Allow only one language to be selected. • Use the same list of languages as for the first question. • Consider non spoken languages as a possible response (sign language in particular). If the respondent has hearing/ speaking impairments, you might want to also ask this question of another member of the household to get complementary data
How do you prefer to receive information?	• Allow only one answer to be selected. • Localize the list of possible answers for each context (e.g. in person, radio, TV, poster, leaflet, phone call, SMS).

Suggested resource: CLEAR Global's Language Data portal where you can download these and other questions, as well as language lists by country for pre-populated fields, in multiple languages and formatted to conform with OpenDataKit (ODK) standards and Kobo Toolbox, for individual, household and key informant surveys

See also: Menu of Accountability to Affected Populations Related Questions for Multi-Sector Needs Assessments, endorsed by the IASC AAP/PSEA Task Team and REACH in 2018, and 20+ language tips for effective humanitarian data collection

3. Base communication and community engagement strategies on area-specific data disaggregated by language

   Suggested resources: [MSNA data can help humanitarians communicate better with affected people: The case of northeast Nigeria](#) and [Tackling language-based exclusion in the Horn of Africa hunger crisis: Lessons from Somalia](#)

4. Use this data to identify the language skills needed in community engagement, accountability, data collection, and other program roles

   Make local language testing part of recruitment processes and provide training and guidance to support bilingual staff in translation and interpreting roles.
   Suggested resource: [Training courses](#) on humanitarian translation and interpreting

5. Monitor program outcomes on the basis of participants' main language to ensure that marginalized language speakers are not being left behind

   Suggested resource: [Risk of language-based exclusion in Hard-to-Reach Areas in Somalia](#) and [IFRC's World Disasters Report 2018: Leaving No One Behind](#) (Chapter 4)

> Communicate in languages and formats that are easily accessible, understandable, respectful and contextually appropriate for people and communities.
> - [Core Humanitarian Standard](#), Commitment 1

For more information on language data and support on data collection, analysis and visualization, visit the [CLEAR Global website](#) or contact us at info@clearglobal.org.