



# Disaster Risk Response

## Libraries and the Sendai Framework

### *A Briefing*

#### KEY POINTS

- 1) *The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) sets out principles and actions for governments, international organisations and all stakeholders in order to reduce the risk, and impacts, of disasters.*
- 2) *The Framework focuses strongly on cultural heritage, and cultural resilience, for individuals, communities and countries. Libraries are key to this.*
- 3) *Libraries also have a major role as repositories and disseminators of health information, and provide a secondary emergency service to communities.*

Libraries play an essential role in keeping a record of human creativity and ideas. Their work in preserving them aims to ensure their survival in order to inform and inspire future generations. Yet their collections are all too often at risk if damage or destruction if or when disasters happen. Dealing with this risk is therefore a core element of library work.

Yet libraries are about more than preserving works for the long term. They also have a proactive role in managing the risk of, and responding to, disasters. In this, they make a contribution not just to the future, but to the present of their communities.

Both of these aspects of libraries' work are covered in the United Nations' Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. This briefing provides an explanation of the Framework, explanation of where it touches on the work – or the interests – of libraries, and suggestions of how it may help promote the involvement of libraries in disaster risk reduction strategies around the world. For further information, [contact us](#).

### The Sendai Framework

The [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) (2015-2030) sets out principles and actions to be taken at the local and national, as well as regional and global levels, to reduce and manage the risk and impact of disasters on all aspects of life. It was agreed by the United Nations in March 2015.

*It is urgent and critical to anticipate, plan for and reduce disaster risk in order to more effectively protect persons, communities and countries, their livelihoods, health, cultural heritage, socioeconomic assets and ecosystems, and thus strengthen their resilience.*

**Sendai Framework, Paragraph 5**

It is intended as a guide to the actions of national governments and international agencies, and a signpost for development finance institutions looking to build resilience around the world. It covers both natural and man-made disasters, and everything from earth-quake proofing buildings to developing health information networks.

The framework has as a goal to 'prevent new and reduce existing disaster risk through the implementation of integrated and inclusive

*economic, structural, legal, social, health, cultural, educational, environmental, technological, political and institutional measures that prevent and reduce hazard exposure and vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and recovery, and thus strengthen resilience'.*

Under this, as well as the action priorities (set out below), there are seven targets (reducing numbers of deaths, people affected by disasters, economic losses and damage to infrastructure and services, and promoting risk reduction strategies, international cooperation, and investment in early warning and disaster risk information).

The Sendai Framework replaces the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015), with a significant innovation being the focus on managing the risk of disasters, before they happen, rather than dealing with their consequences. This builds on extensive research showing that preparation, prevention and mitigation can make a meaningful difference.

#### **Sendai Framework: Four Priorities**

*Priority 1. Understanding disaster risk*

*Priority 2. Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk*

*Priority 3. Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience*

*Priority 4. Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to Build Back Better in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction*

## **The Cultural Heritage Angle**

The Sendai Framework, unlike its predecessor, gives a major place to protecting cultural heritage. It also promotes the 'cultural resilience' of people, communities and countries.

The framework makes two specific demands of national governments in this regard. They should work to understand the cultural heritage impacts of disasters (paragraph 24d) and promote or support the protection of cultural and collecting institutions (paragraph 30d).

#### **1954 UNESCO Convention – Key Recommendations**

Adopt peacetime safeguarding measures such as inventories, plans to deal with emergencies, and plans to move or protect heritage

Respect for national and foreign cultural property in times of conflict

Consideration of the possibility to label important buildings and monuments to avoid their destruction

Establishment of dedicated units within the military

Regarding all areas of risk reduction, it argues that all stakeholders should work together. In other words, while libraries should of course develop and apply best practices, they should also be able to count on the necessary legal and financial support from governments and funders to implement meaningful risk management and response strategies.

It is worth noting that UNESCO, through work around the [1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict](#), has long been involved in efforts to highlight and safeguard cultural property in times of war.

With the addition of an [addendum](#) in 2017, these efforts now also extend to natural disasters, meaning greater convergence between the Sendai and UNESCO Frameworks.

## Libraries as Nodes in Health Knowledge Networks

The Sendai Framework places a strong emphasis on health and reducing the negative impacts that disasters can have on this. A key means of doing this is effective access to, and sharing of, health information. This can help in understanding risks and learning how to manage these in a cost-effective way.

Health libraries have an important expertise in collating, organising, assessing and deploying this information, working between researchers, practitioners and policy-makers. They can have a unique role in gathering information from a variety of sources (from formal research to case studies or stories), and so help provide rapid, high quality contextual evidence, through initiatives such as [Evidence Aid](#). IFLA's new [Special Interest Group on Evidence for Global and Disaster Health](#) will support further exchange in this area.

This complements the existing work of libraries on health issues, from delivering public health information on the ground – for example by developing digital and health literacy, to enabling the pioneering research that will develop new cures and treatments.

## Libraries as a Secondary Emergency Service

As highlighted above, the notion of resilience is a central part of the Sendai Framework. While it is clear that doctors, fire-fighters and rescuers come first, libraries have proved themselves as welcoming and trusted community centres for citizens in the first days and weeks after a disaster. From key services, such as charging stations or WiFi access (notably through innovative means of providing Internet access), to simply a quiet place to relax, libraries can help people regroup and rebuild.

As such, libraries form part of the core of basic services that, if duly protected and supported, can ensure that life can continue as normal as far as possible. To do this, they should receive the necessary training, and work together with other government and non-governmental stakeholders.

## IFLA's Work on Disaster Risk Reduction

IFLA already underlines the importance of disaster risk reduction in its own [Strategic Plan](#). A number of IFLA's [Preservation and Conservation Centres](#) focus on dealing with disasters, including through developing and sharing materials. IFLA also runs the [Risk Register](#) – helping to ensure that valuable connections can be identified and safeguarded in times of crisis.

We also work with the [Blue Shield](#) and [UNESCO](#) to coordinate in situations where libraries and library collections are at risk. At the national level, several libraries already have disaster plans for cultural heritage: Australia, Brazil, Switzerland, USA, France, and Japan. More information about national and other strategies is available on the [IFLA website](#).

### *What can you do?*

*Find out if your country has a disaster risk reduction strategy.*

*If it does, does the strategy include cultural heritage, or the role of libraries in sharing health information or supporting communities?*

*If the strategy does not mention the work of libraries, use this brief, and information you're your own experience to argue for them to be included.*

*If there is no strategy, are there plans to create one, in line with the Sendai Framework? Can you ensure that libraries and their work is included?*

*Get involved in your national Blue Shield Committee or contact your local UNESCO office to find out what they are doing.*