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on Emergency and Security Services

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**CONCEPT NOTE**

**(Presented by the Government of Ecuador)**

Emergency and security systems, or those who deliver such services in each country in the Americas, face intense work and high levels of exposure to a variety of incidents caused by natural, anthropogenic, criminal, physical and mental health, public health, and other threats, which the public reports to an emergency number or through some other communication channel enabled to that end.

**Guide for Establishing and Strengthening National Emergency and Security Systems**

Faced with this scenario and the need to respond effectively and promptly with quality service, Ecuador’s Integrated Security Service – ECU 911, which chairs the Subsidiary Technical Group on Emergency and Security Systems, spearheaded the development of a Guide, in collaboration with Costa Rica’s 911 Emergency System, Paraguay’s 911 Emergency System, Mexico’s National Information Center, and the Dominican Republic’s 911 National Emergency Care System and Security, and with coordination provided by the OAS Department of Public Security. The Guide offers a series of recommendations that are based on the professional, technical, technological, administrative, and operational experience of those who were involved in its drafting, to guide the development and strengthening of these types of systems in the region’s countries.

At the First Meeting of the Subsidiary Technical Group on Emergency and Security Systems, the countries involved in the drafting, review, and validation of the Guide will have the opportunity to present it to the permanent missions and to other similar systems or agencies operating in OAS member countries.

Presentation of the Guide for Establishing and Strengthening National Emergency and Security Systems will provide a framework for discussion, exchange, and learning on several current and relevant issues in connection with the operation of these types of systems, or which impact their functioning.

**Adaptation and resilience to COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted public and private entities to take operational, administrative, health-related, and other actions. Emergency and security systems themselves have had to adapt processes, procedures, and tools in order to address COVID-19-related emergencies.

The implementation of a dashboard for displaying data on emergencies and incivilities related to the public health emergency to guide decision-making, developing video analytics software for social distancing using drones, using public address systems in public spaces where crowds have been detected, mental health support or assistance for first responders, developing specific action protocols, and developing digital communications campaigns to publicize biosecurity measures and counter misinformation, disinformation and fake news, among other measures, represent deterrent and reactive interventions to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19.

Adaptations, improvements, and innovations have been made in this context and so it would be both fitting and important for emergency and security systems or similar agencies in the region to share their experiences so they can begin to embrace experiences that could support emergency responses in future pandemics or similar high-impact events at the national and sub-national areas, and zones.

**Misuse of the emergency number**

Emergency and security systems have adopted a single number—generally 9-1-1—to be able to respond to emergencies and coordinate responses with agencies on the ground. According to the data, however, emergency lines are sometimes used inappropriately or abused. Misuse of emergency lines has serious and negative consequences in terms of human lives, staff burnout, unnecessary use of resources, and economic costs.

In light of this problem faced by the region’s emergency and security systems, and in order to lessen the improper use of the single emergency line, a series of targeted measures and actions can be adopted:

* Devise regulations that make it possible to suspend the phone service or block the phone number from where false calls are being made to the 9-1-1 emergency line, within an objective period of evaluation.
* Work with mobile phone operators to send text messages warning users about the improper use of emergency services so they will take the necessary precautions and avoid having the phone service suspended.
* Implement an automatic script for calls classified as “Misuse of service,” in order to eliminate congestion on the emergency line more quickly.
* Conduct statistical analyses to identify telephone numbers that repeatedly make false calls to the service to design awareness-raising strategies in communities where the highest concentration of such calls has been identified.
* Media campaigns on the proper use of the 9-1-1 emergency line and institutional open-door campaigns to inform the public about the institutional management model and the services being provided to the community.

Given the harmful consequences of improper use of the emergency line, it would be crucial to explore common and standardized metrics at the regional level for detecting misuse; learn about the strategies and initiatives being adopted in different countries to prevent and reduce this type of calls; and present outcome results obtained from the implementation of these strategies and initiatives.

**Inclusion and accessibility**

***Responding to emergencies involving people with disabilities***

The Guide for Establishing and Strengthening National Emergency and Security Systems in the Member States of the Organization of American States (OAS) refers to the need of making these types of systems more inclusive and accessible, particularly for persons with disabilities. Chapter 5 of the Guide offers a series of general guidelines on preparing inclusive protocols and procedures for dealing with emergencies that affect this population group in situation of vulnerability. Chapter 6 discusses the need to train operators and dispatchers on how to activate and implement those protocols and manage such emergencies. Lastly, Chapter 9 discusses the adoption and use of technological tools to facilitate and improve communication when handling these types of emergencies.

The need to act based on principles of inclusion and accessibility to effectively reduce the conditions of vulnerability and risk faced by people with disabilities calls for an understanding of the strategies, actions, and tools being adopted by emergency and security systems or similar agencies in the countries of the region. In a quest for data-informed and evidence-based solutions, this topic also opens the opportunity to discuss adequate metrics and methodological designs for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the initiatives being implemented.

***Responding to emergencies involving people with mental health issues***

Chapter 5 of the Guide for Establishing and Strengthening National Emergency and Security Systems also offers guidelines to draft protocols for emergencies involving people with mental health issues, which the pandemic has exacerbated. From call handling and triage, to dispatch and referral, to psychological first aid support, to response by units on the ground, all teams must be prepared and trained to deal with this sort of emergency. A lack of training on how to deal with these types of incidents can aggravate the risk for the individual and for those coming to their aid.

This matter compels reflection on the guidelines, criteria, and standards that should be observed when responding to these types of emergencies and on the kind of training and specialized support that emergency and security systems should receive to be adequately prepared. Given the high levels of tension, stress, and emotional burden/exhaustion some incidents entail, the mental health of emergency and security system personnel must also be protected. In this regard, it would be useful to understand some of the measures and actions these systems have implemented to prevent and address mental health issues and to help those who work in emergency response and assistance become more emotionally resilient.

***Violence against women and domestic or family violence***

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, some countries have seen a rise in cases of violence against women and domestic or family violence. Restrictions on movement, quarantines (lockdowns), closures, and curfews imposed by governments to contain the spread of the virus and infections have forced women, children, and adolescents to live with their victimizers. Additionally, because of the constant surveillance and risk of retaliation, it is likely that victims of these types of violence have not been able to call to report it and seek help, meaning the number of incidents has been underreported.

Daily, emergency and security systems receive emergency calls related to gender violence and domestic and family violence. Given the current circumstances and heightened risk due to lockdowns and restrictions on movement, these systems have had to join forces ore reinforce links with specialized agencies to propose protocols (covered in Chapter 5 of the Guide) and mechanisms or adapt technologies to prioritize assistance to victims of these sorts of violence and prevent femicides.

The development of applications or the use of codes and signs for reporting, first response psychological support or assistance, and the design of specific protocols for action are just some of the innovations the pandemic has hastened and made available to victims. Since all countries are, to a greater or lesser extent, impacted by these types of violence, it seems timely and appropriate to share information on the progress made by emergency and security systems when it comes to reporting, recording, handling, and prosecuting these cases must be created.

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