



Risk Communication and Social Vulnerability

Glossary of Terms

This glossary is intended to provide basic definitions for terms relevant for risk communication and social vulnerability. Please note, these terms are nuanced and additional investigation into If you have additional words or concepts that could be added to this list, please email carson.m-k@colorado.edu.

Adaptation: In human systems, the process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects, in order to moderate harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. In natural systems, the process of adjustment to actual climate and its effects; human intervention may facilitate adjustment to expected climate. (Field et al., 2012, p. 5)

Adversity: a state or instance of serious or continued difficulty or misfortune (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a)

Climate Change: A change in the state of the climate that can be identified (e.g., by using statistical tests) by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer. Climate change may be due to natural internal processes or external forcings, or to persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use. (Field et al., 2012, p. 5)

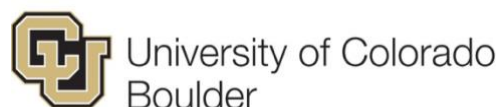
Community: a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings. (MacQueen et al., 2001) Circumstantial communities can develop from the shared experience of a natural hazard or disaster event.

Culture: The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group. *also:* the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b)

Cultural Competence: A set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. (Cross et al., 1989); The capacity to provide effective and compassionate [services] taking into consideration people's cultural beliefs, behaviours, and needs (Papadopoulos, 2018)

Cultural Humility: An ongoing process of self-exploration and self-critique combined with a willingness to learn from others. It means entering a relationship with another person with the intention of honoring their beliefs, customs, and values. It means acknowledging differences and accepting that person for who they are (Stubbe, 2020).

Disadvantaged Population: A population group at risk of education exclusion as a result of sex, location, poverty, disability, ethnicity, language, migration, displacement or other characteristics (UNESCO, 2021).



Disaster: “A disaster is an event in which societies, or their larger subunits (such as communities or regions) incur damages, losses, and disruption of their routine functioning. A disaster is observable, although may not necessarily be concentrated in time and space. Members of the public and formal emergency response agencies converge to help disaster survivors, and some individual autonomy may be lost given the emphasis on community needs. Major recovery challenges tend to follow.” (Peek et al., 2021)

Disaster Risk: The likelihood over a specified time period of severe alterations in the normal functioning of a community or a society due to hazardous physical events interacting with vulnerable social conditions, leading to widespread adverse human, material, economic, or environmental effects that require immediate emergency response to satisfy critical human needs and that may require external support for recovery. (Field et al., 2012, p. 5)

Diversity: When there is a variety of characteristics within a group, such as a neighborhood, school, community, or city. Diversity* is defined by a variety of identifiers and characteristics that, in the case of people, reflects our individuality. When the people that make up a group represent different backgrounds, perspectives, and life experiences (Creative Reaction Lab, 2018). **Note: Diversity and inclusion are not interchangeable. There can be diversity without inclusion and vice versa.*

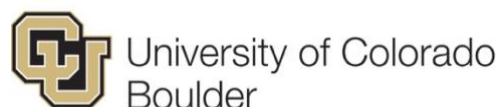
Economically Disadvantaged Community: communities that generally have fewer socioeconomic resources and thus less capacity to adapt to the challenges of climate change. Many of these disadvantages are associated with environmental racism and systemic oppression. Economically disadvantaged individuals tend to experience the highest rate of mental health issues alongside poorer overall health, reduced mobility, reduced access to health care, and economic limitations that affect access to goods and services that can help with the negative effects of climate change. (U.S. Department of Agriculture, n.d.)

Environmental Justice (EJ): the just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of income, race, color, national origin, Tribal affiliation, or disability, in agency decision-making and other Federal activities that affect human health and the environment so that people: (1) are fully protected from disproportionate and adverse human health and environmental effects (including risks) and hazards, including those related to climate change, the cumulative impacts of environmental and other burdens, and the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers; and (2) have equitable access to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient environment in which to live, play, work, learn, grow, worship, and engage in cultural and subsistence practices (Environmental Protection Agency, 2024).

Equality: Equality is the state of being equal, especially in status, rights and opportunities. Equality means each individual or group of people is given the same resources and opportunities, regardless of their circumstances. In social and racial justice movements, equality can actually increase inequities in communities as not every group of people needs the same resources or opportunities allocated to them in order to thrive (Martinez, 2022).

Equity: Equity is both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, equity is achieved when a person’s identity no longer predicts the course of a person’s life, and all people have what they need to thrive, no matter where they live. As a process, equity is applied when those most impacted by structural inequity are meaningfully involved in the creation and implementation of the institutional policies and practices that impact their lives. (Andrews et al., 2019)

The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders



and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality. (EO 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, 2021)

Exposure: The presence of people, livelihoods, species or ecosystems, environmental services and resources, infrastructure, or economic, social, or cultural assets in places that could be adversely affected by a hazard. (Pörtner et al., 2022)

Hazard: The potential occurrence of a natural or human-induced physical event or trend that may cause loss of life, injury, or other health impacts, as well as damage and loss to property, infrastructure, livelihoods, service provision, ecosystems and environmental resources. (Field et al., 2012, p. 32)

"Hazard of Place" Theory: The theory that hazard risks are shaped by both geographic and social context (Cutter et al., 2003)

Inclusion: "The leveraging of difference by integrating diverse perspectives and creating a better outcome for all. Inclusion is an invitation that not only accepts differences but celebrates and embeds them." *Note: you can have diversity and inclusion are not interchangeable. There can be diversity without inclusion and vice versa. (Creative Reaction Lab, 2018)

Structural Inequality: "disparities in wealth, resources, and other outcomes that result from discriminatory practices of institutions such as legal, educational, business, government, and health care systems. Structural inequalities result from power imbalances when one group has historically set the rules that intentionally or unintentionally exclude others from access to wealth and resources" (Center for High Impact Philanthropy, n.d.).

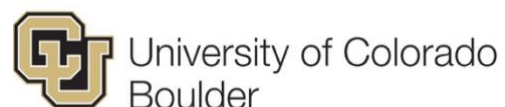
Intersectionality: A framework for understanding how social identities—such as gender, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, sexual orientation, ability, and gender identity—overlap with one another and with systems of power that oppress and advantage people in the workplace and broader community. (Ramos & Brassel, 2020)

Social Justice: The objective of creating a fair and equal society in which each individual matters, their rights are recognized and protected, and decisions are made in ways that are fair and honest. (Oxford Reference, n.d.)

Justice40 Initiative (Executive Order 14008): "A goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits flow to disadvantaged communities." This order formalizes President Biden's commitment to make environmental justice a part of the mission of every agency by directing federal agencies to develop programs, policies, and activities to address the disproportionate health, environmental, economic, and climate impacts on disadvantaged communities. (EO 14008: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, 2021)

Marginalized: "(of a person or group) prevented from participating fully in social, economic and political life because of a lack of access to rights, resources and opportunities." (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, n.d.)

Marginalization: "Relegation to or placement in an unimportant or a depowered position in society." (American Psychological Association, 2023)



Mutual Aid: Collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them...Mutual aid projects do 3 things (1) They work to meet survival needs and build shared understanding about why people do not have what they need. (2) They mobilize people, expand solidarity, and build movements (3) they are participatory, solving problems through collective action rather than waiting for saviors (Spade, 2020).

Positionality: Positionality refers to our multiple intersecting identities and how our social roles, power, and privilege influence our perceptions and experiences in research. (Evans et al., 2023, in prep)

Public: The public refers to any entity outside [an organization]. The public includes tribal and local government entities and officials; public and private organizations; individuals; institutions; study sponsor representatives; community groups; and populations of interest in environmental justice or social vulnerability considerations (modified from Gibbs, 2019).

Redlining: The [discriminatory] practice of denying a creditworthy applicant a loan for housing in a certain neighborhood even though the applicant may otherwise be eligible for the loan. The term refers to the practice of mortgage lenders of drawing red lines around portions of a map to indicate areas or neighborhoods in which they do not want to make loans (Federal Reserve, n.d.). This practice was not made illegal until the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and has widespread and long-lasting impacts on minority communities. These practices limited wealth building and resulted in communities of color being in "less desirable" and hazard-prone regions in the U.S.

Resilience: The ability of a system and its component parts to anticipate, absorb, accommodate, or recover from the effects of a hazardous event in a timely and efficient manner, including through ensuring the preservation, restoration, or improvement of its essential basic structures and functions (Field et al., 2012, p. 5).

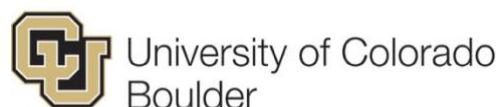
Risk: The potential for adverse consequences for human or ecological systems, recognizing the diversity of values and objectives associated with such systems (Pörtner et al., 2022).

Risk Communication: Risk communication is the real-time exchange of information, advice and opinions between experts or officials and people who face a threat (from a hazard) to their survival, health or economic or social wellbeing. The purpose of risk communication is to enable people at risk to make informed decisions to mitigate the effects of a threat (hazard) and take protective and preventive measures (World Health Organization, n.d.).

Socially Constructed Vulnerability: Rather than being purely natural, an array of social forces is widely recognized as creating disaster vulnerabilities in different groups. These social factors are historical, economic, political, societal, and cultural (Gorur, 2015).

Social Vulnerability Index (SVI): A measurement or tool constructed, usually using Census Data, to measure or define populations most at risk before, during, and after disasters or natural hazards based on characteristics of populations historically impacted by social forces or policy. The two most common SVIs in the United States are Cutter et al. (2003) and Flanagan et al. (2011). (Cutter et al., 2003; Flanagan et al., 2011)

Social Class: a major group or division of society having a common level of power and prestige on the basis of socioeconomic status and subjective social status. Often, the members of a particular social class share values and have similar cultural interests and social patterns. A popularly used classification divides individuals into an upper class, a middle class (sometimes subdivided into upper middle and lower middle classes), a working class, and people with a lower social and economic status (American Psychological Association, 2023).



Social Vulnerability: The [social] characteristics of a person or group in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recovery from the impact of a natural hazard (Wisner et al., 2003); the susceptibility of social groups to the adverse impacts of natural hazards, including disproportionate death, injury, loss, or disruption of livelihood (Federal Emergency Management Agency, n.d.-b).

Stakeholders: Stakeholders include any member of the public that might be able to affect, are affected by, or are interested in, the results of [our organization's] planning process. They are people or groups who see themselves as having rights and interests at stake, either directly or indirectly. Some people may not realize they are stakeholders, i.e., that they are affected by [our organization's work], such as those identified as socially vulnerable populations (modified from Gibbs, 2019).

Transformation: The altering of fundamental attributes of a system (including value systems; regulatory, legislative, or bureaucratic regimes; financial institutions; and technological or biological systems) (Field et al., 2012, p. 5).

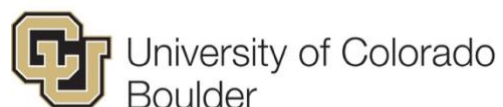
Underserved: Underserved Populations/Communities are groups that have limited or no access to resources or that are otherwise disenfranchised. These groups may include people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged; people with limited English proficiency; geographically isolated or educationally disenfranchised people; people of color as well as those of ethnic and national origin minorities; women and children; individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs; and seniors (Federal Emergency Management Agency, n.d.-a).

Values: Cultural values are core beliefs and practices from which people operate. Each culture possesses its own values, traditions, and ideals. Integrity in the application of a "value" over time ensures its continuity, and this continuity separates a value from simple beliefs, opinions, and ideals. Cultural groups may endorse shared values. However, a given individual within that culture may vary in agreement with the group's cultural values (Psychology IResearchNet, 2016).

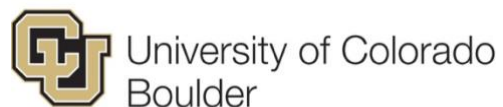
Vulnerability: The conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which **increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts** of hazards (United Nations Office of Disaster Risk Reduction, n.d.). The propensity or predisposition to be adversely affected (Field et al., 2012).

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