

# WHO design principles and tools to improve use and impact of WHO guidelines

November 2024



World Health  
Organization

# WHO design principles and tools to improve use and impact of WHO guidelines

## Overview

*WHO design principles and tools to improve use and impact of WHO guidelines* is a practical guide to support the design of WHO guidelines and other normative products. It starts with understanding who the end users of a guideline are, what their needs are, and what they hope to achieve by implementing a guideline. Ultimately, WHO is interested in developing products that are driven by country needs, improving implementation and measurable impact at country level.

The Design Principles and Tools are created for WHO technical staff who are responsible for the overall scoping, design, development, production, dissemination and implementation of WHO guidelines and other technical products. They provide guideline developers with resources that can be applied during conceptualization, development and writing stages, as well as during the process of adapting and implementing a guideline at country level. The Principles and Tools can enhance the ease of use of guidelines, and in combination with existing resources assist the development of technical content and promote relevant house style. The Principles apply to the work of responsible technical officers, authors, editors, and graphic designers who are involved in guideline development. The Tools include resources and templates that help put the Principles into practice. The Principles and Tools are designed to be used by different individuals, actors and/or stakeholders at various stages along the guideline development process.

*WHO design principles and tools to improve use and impact of WHO guidelines* should be viewed as complementary to existing documentation that supports the development of WHO guidelines, such as the WHO Handbook for Guideline Development, WHO Style Guide and WHO Style Guide Chapter 6, WHO Handbook for the Development of Normative Products, and WHO Brand Guidance, amongst others. Aligned with existing publications, the Principles and Tools outline approaches that have been informed by iterative co-design engagement with end users of WHO guidelines, amongst others. Aligned with existing publications, the Principles and Tools outline approaches that have been informed by iterative co-design engagement with end users and developers of WHO guidelines.<sup>1</sup>

## How the Principles were developed

*WHO design principles and tools to improve use and impact of WHO guidelines* is a set of design considerations and techniques that are informed by evidence to

1. *Improving the usability and impact of WHO guidelines: report of a WHO workshop*. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022 (<https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/365229/9789240057029-eng.pdf?sequence=1>, accessed 20 November 2024); and *Testing design principles to improve the usability and impact of WHO guidelines: report of a workshop*. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022 (<https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/372409/9789240077041-eng.pdf?sequence=1>, accessed 20 November 2024).

support guideline design and improve guideline use. They have been co-created by the Product Design and Impact Unit (in the Department of Quality Assurance, Norms and Standards, QNS) at the World Health Organization and Monash University's Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture (Department of Design).

The work is informed by insights gathered from interviews that QNS has conducted with over 70 end-users, including policy advisors, advocacy groups, WHO collaborating centers, journalists, design experts and a focus group with patient representatives. Consultations showed that lack of a systematic approach to guideline design resulted in a disjunct between the authors of guidelines and the individuals who use them. This was identified as a limitation to meaningful use of guidelines by countries.

The WHO Design Principles and Tools were developed over two years (2022-2024), in four separate co-design workshops, involving participants from 15 countries.

The first workshop (April 2022) was used to discuss how the guideline creation process can be improved to make guidelines more accessible and easier to use, thus improving the likelihood of their implementation and impact. Participants worked through a fictional scenario to identify barriers to guideline use and reviewed a redesigned guideline chapter aimed at enhancing engagement and navigation of guidelines. Their insights contributed to the development of the Design Principles.

During the second workshop (September 2022) participants worked with a fictional scenario and four personas representing professionals involved in guideline creation and dissemination. Participants assessed how the draft Design Principles could be applied in practical terms, offering actionable insights for "re-prototyping" the Principles. The second workshop also commenced creation of the Design Tools.

The third workshop (September 2023) was with WHO headquarters staff, which included experts in the areas of accessibility, clarity, translation and the publishing process. This workshop focused on the Design Principles related to accessibility, clarity and translation and participants evaluated the Design Tools that were relevant to these Principles. Workshop insights contributed to further validation of the Design Principles and the refinement of the Tools to ensure their applicability and complementarity with existing WHO tools.

The fourth and final workshop (June 2024) reviewed and validated the revised Tools related to accessibility, clarity and translation and further aligned them to WHO tools (e.g. WHO Style Guide). The workshop also discussed the need for WHO design and layout processes and technology to support the Design Tools in practice.

## **The Design Principles**

The Design Principles to improve use and impact of WHO guidelines are:

1. Design with empathy by understanding people and their context
2. Design for living guidelines
3. Design for accessibility
4. Design for clarity
5. Design for translation to multiple languages

# WHO Design Principles

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1

## Design with empathy by understanding people and their context

Authors and designers of WHO guidelines should develop an understanding of the individuals and groups implementing a given guideline and their unique circumstances and requirements for implementation.

### Relevant Tools

- T1 Stakeholder network map
  - T2 Enablers and barriers
  - T3 Empathy map
  - T4 Guideline journey mapping
- 

2

## Design for living guidelines

WHO guidelines are trusted documents and taking a living principles approach as appropriate will strengthen this foundation within the communities where guidelines are implemented. Tools that support this Principle are in development.

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3

## Design for accessibility

WHO guidelines are developed to be inclusive of all people who use them, and every effort should be made to eliminate barriers to access.

### Relevant Tools

- T5 Annotated sample guideline chapter
  - T6 Design guide
- 

4

## Design for clarity

Authors of WHO guidelines should write with clarity, to a consistent structure, and be as concise as possible.

### Relevant Tools

- T5 Annotated sample guideline chapter
  - T6 Design guide
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5

## Design for translation to multiple languages

WHO guidelines should be written with translation in mind. International audiences bring with them a diversity of languages, cultural identities, and approaches to health and healthcare.

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### Relevant Tools

- T7 Translated sample guideline page

**Design with  
empathy by  
understanding  
people and  
their context**

**Design  
for living  
guidelines**

**Design for  
accessibility**

**Design for  
translation  
to multiple  
languages**

**Design  
for clarity**

# 1

## Design with empathy by understanding people and their context

Authors and designers of WHO guidelines should develop an understanding of the individuals and groups implementing a given guideline and their unique circumstances and requirements for implementation. WHO guidelines aim to serve people and work toward their wellbeing. They do this by recommending changes to behaviors, systems, or procedures that support health. This cannot be achieved without first deeply understanding the lived experience of the people implementing the guidelines, the contexts in which they are living and working, and the enablers and barriers they may face in the change process. By understanding how end-users will use recommendations, where possible, guidelines can be developed that respond to diverse constraints and unique cultural contexts.

<b>Tool that can help</b>	<b>Why it's useful</b>
<b>T1 Stakeholder network map</b>	This tool helps guideline developers to identify the individuals and organizations that need to be involved in the development and implementation of the guideline. This could include individual people (e.g. healthcare leaders, WHO staff), or organizations (e.g. Ministry of Health, government departments).
<b>T2 Enablers and barriers</b>	This tool highlights the enablers and barriers (infrastructure, system, policy, resources) to the development and implementation of a guideline.
<b>T3 Empathy map</b>	Supported by T1 (Stakeholder network map) and T2 (Enablers and barriers) the Empathy map helps guideline developers to understand more about the users of a guideline, what barriers they may face, and their hopes for use and implementation of a guideline.
<b>T4 Guideline journey mapping</b>	This tool helps guideline creators to identify key milestones in their guideline journey and to identify points where engagement with users and other stakeholders will be useful.

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# 2

## Design for living guidelines

WHO guidelines are trusted documents and taking a living principles approach as appropriate will strengthen this foundation within the communities where guidelines are implemented. This principle aims to accelerate the incorporation of emerging data and new peer-reviewed evidence for updating clinical and policy recommendations (where new evidence suggests that changes to the guidance are required) and allows guidance to respond to changes in context. Taking a living principles approach will improve turnaround times for updates that have delayed the development and dissemination of guidelines in the past.<sup>2</sup> Guidelines should be viewed as living and published in a form that WHO can easily update so that users always have access to guidelines that are up to date, whenever they need them.

Tools that support this Principle are in development.

2. *Guiding for impact in a rapidly changing world*. WHO Department of Quality Assurance, Norms and Standards (QNS): 2020-2021 in review. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022 ([https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/science-division/qns-report\\_2020-2021.pdf?sfvrsn=562f4ebc\\_2&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/science-division/qns-report_2020-2021.pdf?sfvrsn=562f4ebc_2&download=true), accessed 20 November 2024).

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# 3

## Design for accessibility

WHO guidelines are developed to be inclusive of all people who use them, and every effort should be made to eliminate barriers to access. This means that physical, cognitive, or language impairment should not impact the ability to utilize a guideline and its recommendations. Nor should location and infrastructure affect one's ability to obtain up to date guidelines. Guidelines need to be readily available and easy to find using any platform, web browser, or internet search engine and accessible versions should be easy to locate and to use.<sup>3</sup> File sizes should be kept to a minimum for faster downloads and guidelines should be readable on a range of devices from desktop computers to mobile phones and tablets. Importantly, hard copy, print-on-demand versions must remain available when necessary.

<b>Tool that can help</b>	<b>Why it's useful</b>
<b>T5 Annotated sample guideline chapter</b>	This tool demonstrates a best-practice design strategy for a guideline chapter. It supports designing for reading and comprehension.
<b>T6 Design guide</b>	This tool provides best-practice approaches for communication design elements, including fonts, color use, image use, etc. in line with WHO brand guidance.

<sup>3</sup>. *Guiding for impact in a rapidly changing world*. WHO Department of Quality Assurance, Norms and Standards (QNS): 2020-2021 in review. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022 ([https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/science-division/qns-report\\_2020-2021.pdf?sfvrsn=562f4ebc\\_2&download=true](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/science-division/qns-report_2020-2021.pdf?sfvrsn=562f4ebc_2&download=true), accessed 20 November 2024).

The image features five large numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) arranged in a slightly overlapping sequence from top-left to bottom-right. The numbers 1, 2, 3, and 5 are rendered in a medium blue color, while the number 4 is white. Each number has a small white text box attached to it, containing a design principle. The background is a solid, vibrant blue.

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# 4

## Design for clarity

Authors of WHO guidelines should write with clarity, to a consistent structure, and be as concise as possible. This involves simple and clear communication that eliminates unnecessary content and consolidates information so that end users can quickly locate it and easily determine its relevance to them. Although it is essential to maintain clear directives that are grounded in evidence, plain language should be used wherever possible, and jargon should be kept to a minimum. Concise executive summaries that highlight key messages and clearly state the intended stakeholders and/or target audience can support users. In short, say it plainly with as few words as possible.

<b>Tool that can help</b>	<b>Why it's useful</b>
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<b>T5 Annotated sample guideline chapter</b>	This tool demonstrates a best-practice design strategy for a guideline chapter. It supports designing for reading and comprehension.
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# 5

## Design for translation to multiple languages

WHO guidelines should be written with translation in mind. International audiences bring with them a diversity of languages, cultural identities, and approaches to health and healthcare. WHO guidelines need to accommodate and be inclusive of diverse users, which includes translation into all languages necessary to reach target audience(s). No matter the context the guideline will be used in, or its adaptation to a local environment, the reader experience should be the same. This means that guideline developers should consider translation throughout the development process including in their layout and document design. This will ensure there is sufficient space for languages that use more or different characters for the same word. Whether on screen or in print, and regardless of the language that the guideline is translated into, the overall meaning should be the same.

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### Tool that can help

### Why it's useful

**T7 Translated sample guideline page**

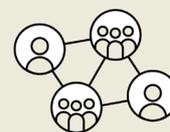
This tool provides an example of best-practice principles for communication design that accommodates translation across the six official WHO languages and Kiswahili.

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# WHO Design Tools

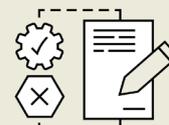
## T1 Stakeholder network map

This tool helps guideline developers to identify the individuals and organizations that need to be involved in the development and implementation of the guideline. This could include individual people (e.g. healthcare leaders, WHO staff), or organizations (e.g. Ministry of Health, government departments).



## T2 Enablers and barriers

This tool highlights the enablers and barriers (infrastructure, system, policy, resources) to the development and implementation of a guideline.



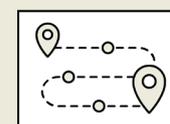
## T3 Empathy map

Supported by T1 (Stakeholder network map) and T2 (Enablers and barriers) the Empathy map helps guideline developers to understand more about the users of a guideline, what barriers they may face, and their hopes for use and implementation of a guideline.



## T4 Guideline journey mapping

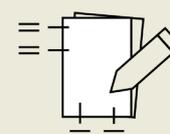
This tool helps guideline creators to identify key milestones in their guideline journey and to identify points where engagement with users and other stakeholders will be useful.



## T5 Annotated sample guideline chapter

This tool demonstrates a best-practice design strategy for a guideline chapter. It supports designing for reading and comprehension.

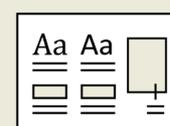
*For WHO internal use only. Not for public access.*



## T6 Design guide

This tool provides best-practice approaches for communication design elements, including fonts, color use, image use, etc. in line with WHO brand guidance.

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## T7 Translated sample guideline page

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# T1-4

**T1 Stakeholder network map**

**T2 Enablers and barriers**

**T3 Empathy map**

**T4 Guideline journey mapping**

WHO Design Tools T1-T4 support guideline developers by mapping key stakeholders, identifying enablers and barriers, understanding user needs, and planning effective engagement. They provide a structured approach to ensure guidelines are practical, user-centered, and successfully implemented.



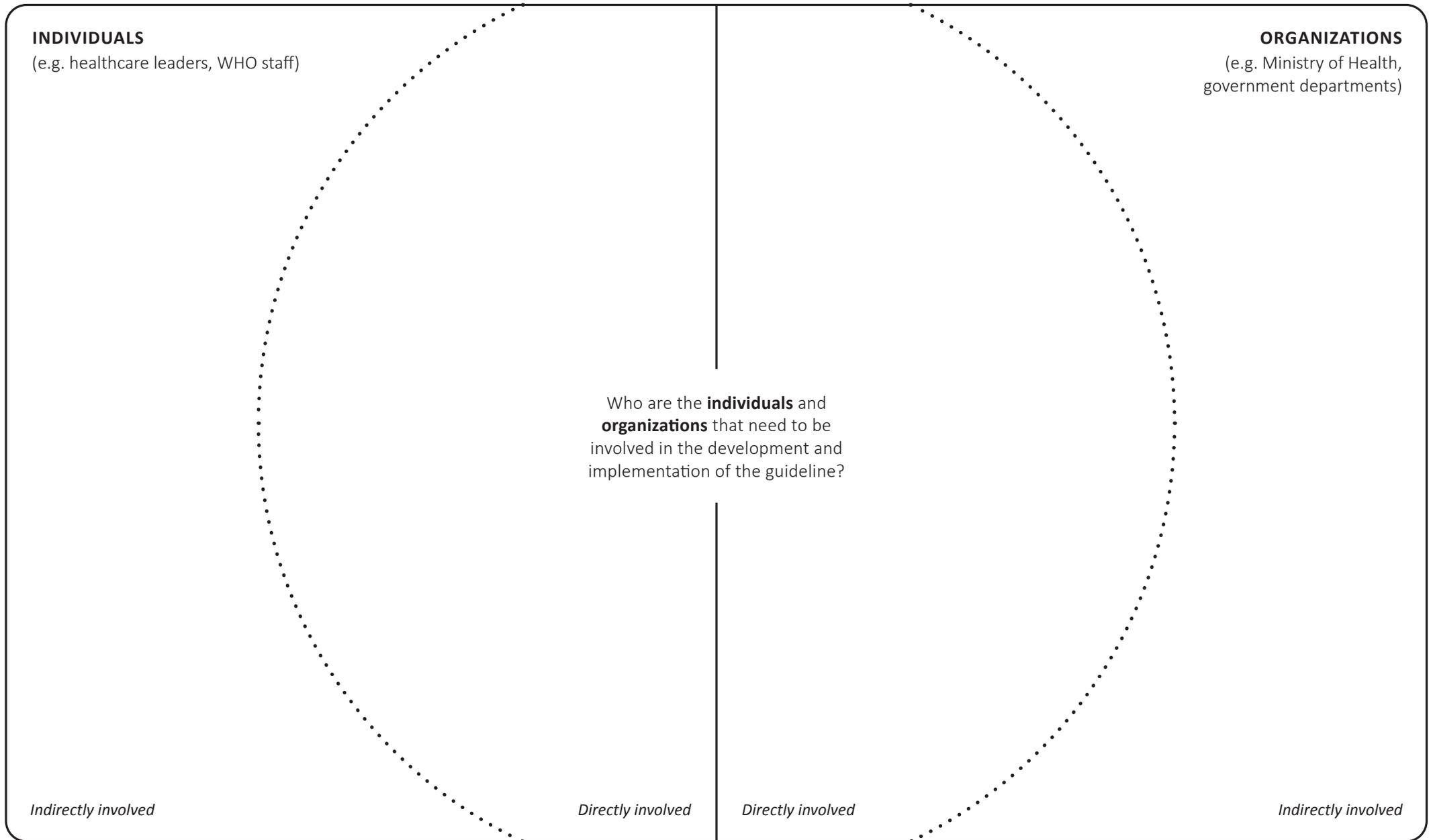
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# T1 Stakeholder network map

The Stakeholder network map helps guideline developers to identify the individuals and organizations that need to be involved in the development and implementation of the guideline.



**INFRASTRUCTURES**

(e.g. facilities, transport, technology)

**SYSTEMS**

(e.g. leadership and management, capacity, other sectors)

What are the **enablers** to development and implementation?

**POLICY**

(e.g. legislation, regulations)

**RESOURCES**

(e.g. human, financial, knowledge, in-kind)

# T2 Enablers and barriers

This tool highlights the enablers and barriers (infrastructure, system, policy, resources) to the development and implementation of a guideline.

## INFRASTRUCTURES

(e.g. facilities, transport, technology)

## SYSTEMS

(e.g. leadership and management, capacity, other sectors)

What are the **barriers** to development and implementation?

## POLICY

(e.g. legislation, regulations)

## RESOURCES

(e.g. human, financial, knowledge, in-kind)

**T3**

# Empathy map

Supported by T1 (Stakeholder network map) and T2 (Enablers and barriers), the Empathy map helps guideline developers to understand more about the users of a guideline, what barriers they may face, and their hopes for use and implementation of a guideline.

WHO / WHAT / WHERE	BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION	HOPES FOR IMPLEMENTATION
<p>Who is the user of the guideline? What is their position? Where are they located?</p>	<p>What barriers might this user face in implementing the guideline?</p>	<p>What hopes does this user have in implementing the guideline?</p>

## GUIDELINE JOURNEY STAGES

Identify key stages or milestones of your guideline journey and write them above the line (e.g. identification, development, production, dissemination, adoption, adaptation, implementation).

Use the grid lines to help evenly space out your timeline with key dates. You can assign each column a specific increment (e.g. one column per month or two columns per month), depending on the length of the stage.

2025

2026

Which guideline users and other stakeholders do you need to involve in the guideline journey? Refer to Tool 1: Stakeholder network map.

Below the line, record when and how you plan to engage with stakeholders (e.g. meetings, feedback sessions).

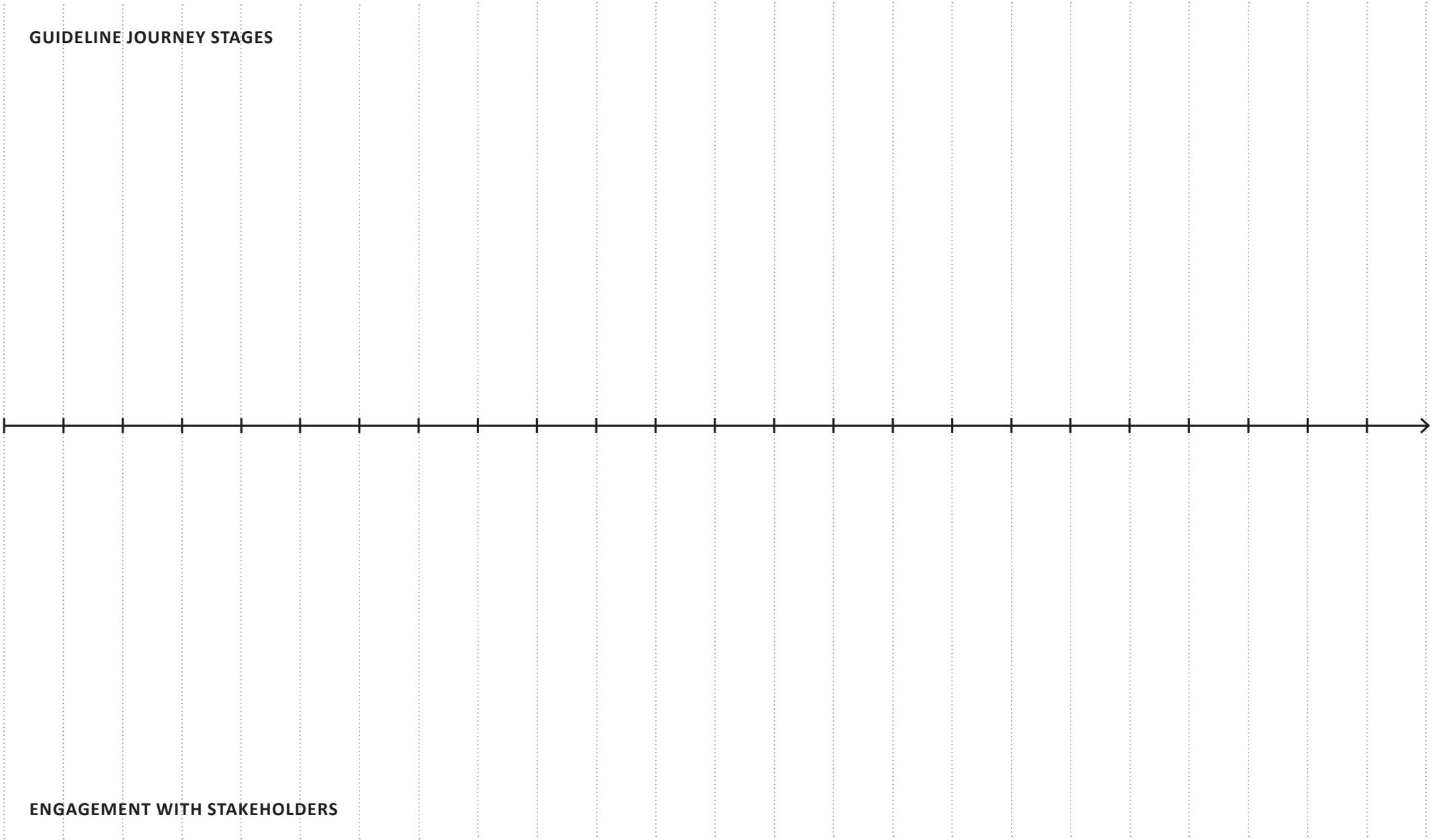
If the timeline extends beyond one page, print multiple copies of this template. Align and attach the pages to create a continuous timeline, showing all stages and engagement points. To keep track of the sequence, label each page with a page number in the bottom left section provided.

## START →

This first page is a sample with instructions. Begin your timeline on the next page.

## ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS

**GUIDELINE JOURNEY STAGES**



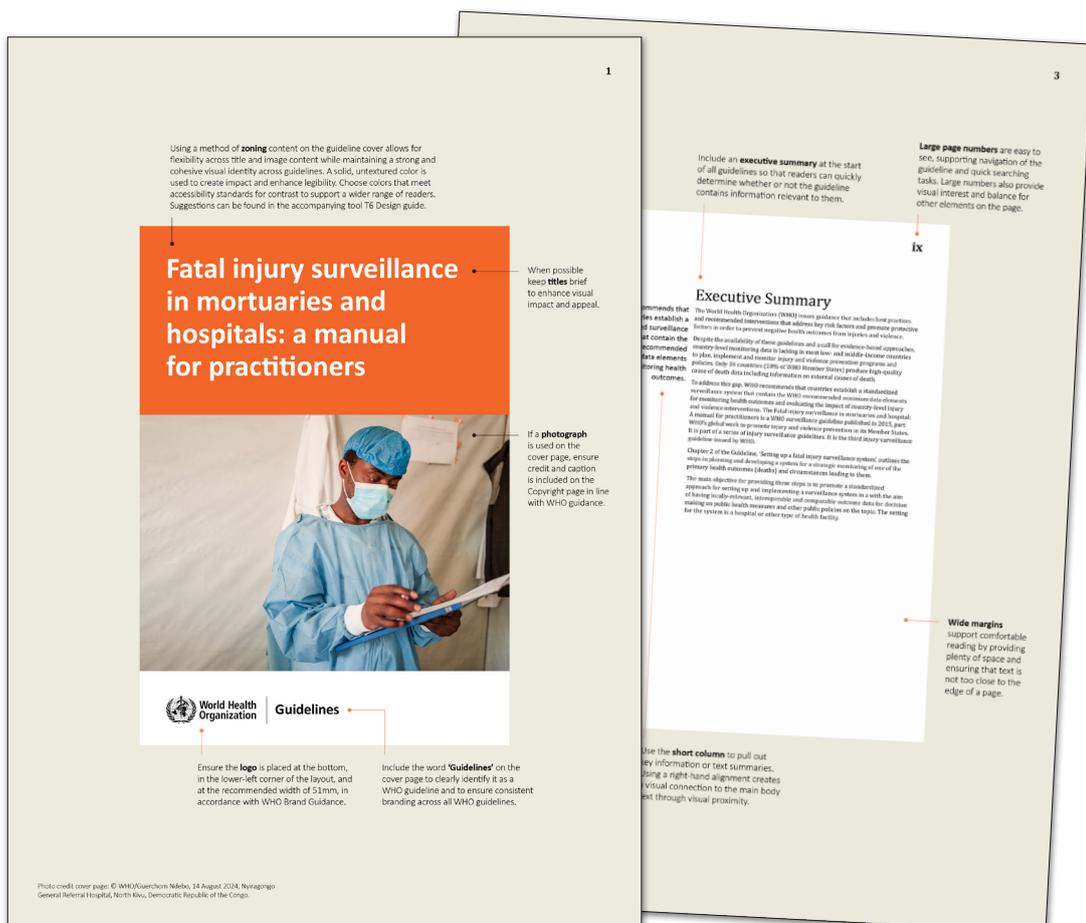
**ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS**

# T5

## Annotated sample guideline chapter

This tool demonstrates a best-practice design strategy for a guideline chapter. It supports designing for reading and comprehension.

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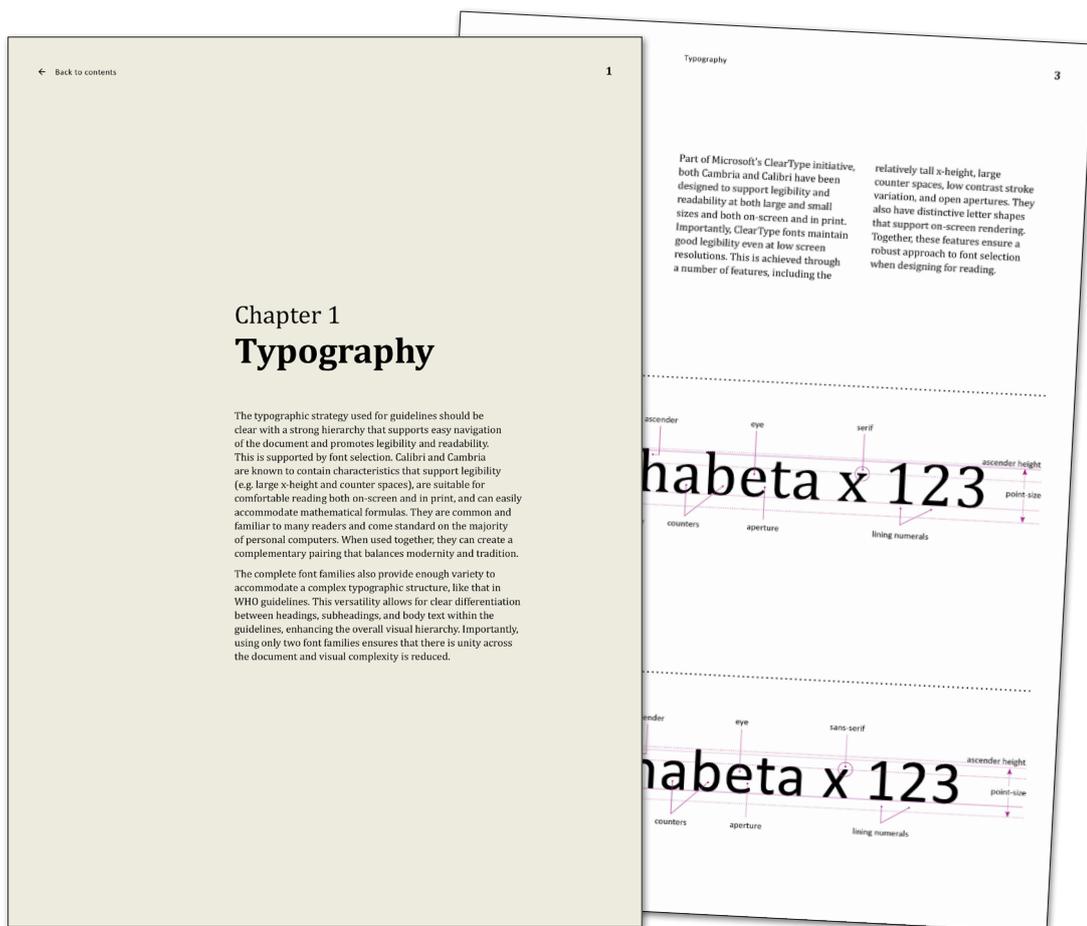


# T6

## Design guide

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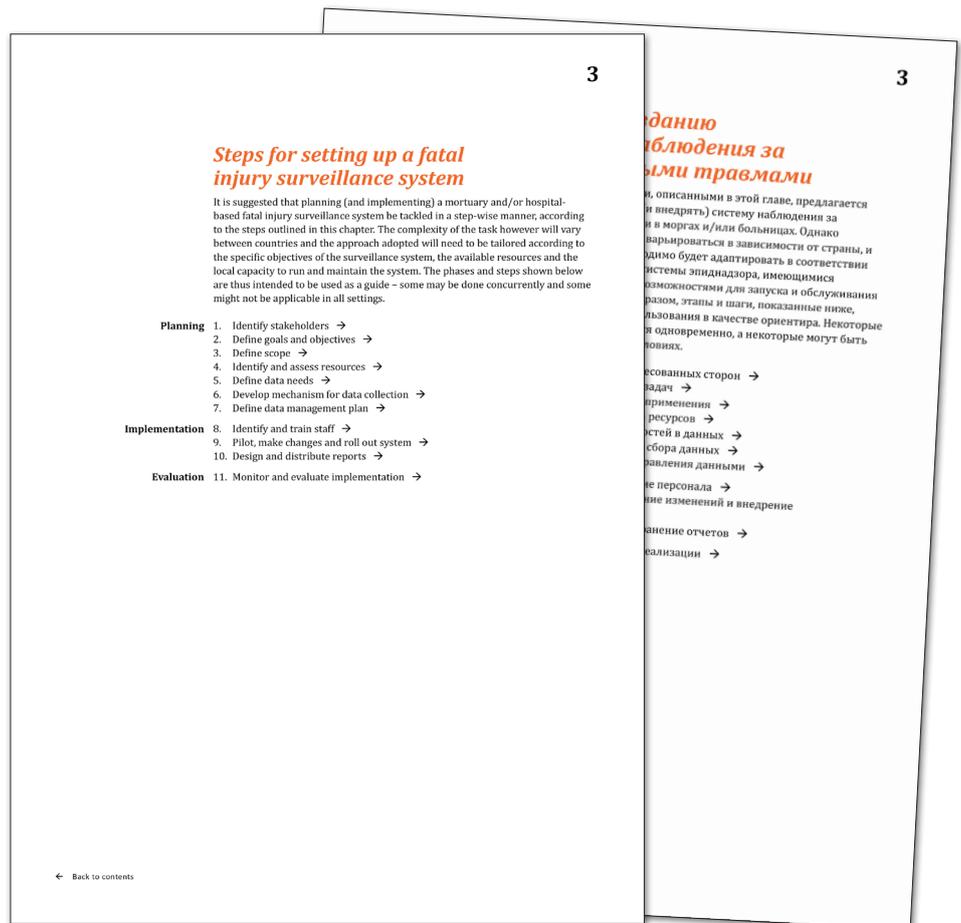
# T7

## Translated sample guideline page

This tool provides an example of best-practice principles for communication design that accommodates translation across the six official WHO languages and Kiswahili.

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English  
Arabic  
Chinese  
French  
Russian  
Spanish  
Kiswahili



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20 Avenue Appia  
1211 Geneva 27  
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[who.int](http://who.int)

Product Design and Impact Unit

Quality Assurance, Norms and Standards Department

Email: [pdi@who.int](mailto:pdi@who.int)