

# Preparing Government Contact Centres for Work During a Period of Force Majeure



## Facing a Force Majeure Situation

During a period of force majeure, which affects more than half of the country's territory, situations arise for which government authorities are not prepared and for which there are usually no instructions.

This guide lists the essential core activities that government agencies should perform to prepare for ultra-high-pressure, high-stress environments.

In the first hours/days of a force majeure situation, the following may occur:

### 1. Difficulties in communicating with the population

During periods of massive force majeure situations, two types of extremes are most likely:

- Almost complete disappearance of communications (mass accidents, deliberate damage to towers/repeaters, occupied territory, lack of radio communications, etc.) or
- Overload of the population with information (in addition to standard information flows, deliberate injection of additional information through various channels).

This may be compounded by the lack of work of the central media (death of employees, relocation, technical problems, etc.).

### 2. Disorientation

The disoriented population is trying to turn to the only source of official information - the state through its main communication channels, as a result of which the burden on them increases tenfold. At the same time, there may be employees on other government lines (for example, the Pension Fund or Social Services), with no requests from the population which would likely be unusual.

### 3. Lack of information

The lack of adequate information in the general field and the inability to obtain it from official sources can lead to the death of a large number of the population, which can lead to wrong decisions being made based on different, often contradictory, sources (such as, general panic, lack of understanding, stay at home or leave, if leaving, where, how to behave in different situations, what to take with you, etc.).

## Preparing for Force Majeure

### 1. Preparing the organisation

The absence of a single center for decision making and obtaining/exchanging information can lead to duplication of efforts, inefficiency and insufficient coordination of actions. To achieve optimal results, it is necessary to ensure a clear structure and communication mechanisms between participants in the process.

Communication processes should be organised both throughout the country and in the leading contact centre, to which the population will mainly contact.

#### What should be done in advance to prepare for force majeure?

First of all, you need to:

- Select the main/head contact centre (for example, a government hotline or contact centre of the Ministry of Emergency Situations), which will coordinate all further work
- Develop general instructions for deploying work according to the type and level of threat (preferably taking into account the amount of time required to fully launch)
- Prepare emergency channels of communication with the population.

## 2. Informing the Population

Instructions on population behavior should be both in text form and in schematic form (infographics). If an appropriate situation arises, they must be prepared to be broadcast in the media or posted in instant messengers as quickly as possible. Voice messages must also be recorded and can be listened to in the IVR.

The list of instructions should include:

- Instructions for filling an “emergency suitcase” in case of need to travel, for both adults and children’s instructions for storing water/food for two weeks, instructions for electrical autonomy for several days, instructions for a basic home first aid kit.
- It is necessary to think in advance and create “emergency” communication channels (preferably with the same name) - telephone, instant messengers, radio. Information about the existence of these channels should be regularly provided to the population, even if nothing happens - the population should know exactly where to go in the event of force majeure.
- In each city, basic distribution points for radios should be created in the event of a lack of cellular communications and the Internet (based on 1 unit per family). Or it should be possible to quickly acquire them in the country.

### Possible communication problems in the main contact centre

- Absence of a clear unified system for obtaining quick and up-to-date information in the contact centre from officials. As a result, it is difficult to create adequate scripts for agents and automated responses (clear formulation of the agent’s unambiguous questions to obtain information from the client as quickly as possible + clear recommendations).
- There is a high risk of changing/loss of information when transferring it from the main control center to the agents of subcontractors.
- This interaction is worth working out in advance with at least one of them.
- Lack of analytics of requests and lack of understanding of what type of information the population needs at a particular moment through which communication channel.
- Lack of feedback from the public (people may call to report or warn about something. This information must be collected and transmitted to the relevant authorities. The process must be prescribed and agreed upon in advance).

## 3. Appointing a Force Majeure Crisis Team in the Contact Centre

Several people must be identified in advance who, in the event of force majeure, should lead the work in the main contact centre. We recommend several, because something can happen to any given person. Whoever gets to the main contact centre first will be the main organiser of the process in the first hours.

It is this person who must make the bulk of the decisions: how the contact centre will continue to work, where the staff will be hired, what mode of operation to switch to, etc. One of the main tasks of such a person is to organise the receipt of information that can be voiced to the population from the Emergency Situations Center and transfer to it important “feedback” from the population.

Also, in the first hours the following should be provided:

- Organisation of information in the contact centre generation of text scripts
- Regular publication of necessary behavioral instructions for the population
- Assessment of the emotional state of agents, support if necessary
- Ensuring uninterrupted operation of the contact centre with a high level of efficiency
- Maximum automation of information, since the majority of requests will be standard.

## The nuances of working with personnel

Insufficient staff in the main contact centre (no way to get there, no way to connect, people leave on the way, people die...). It is not known whether it is possible to attract personnel from other contact centre's (for the same reasons).

If there is free staff somewhere, then it may be problematic to attract them to work in the main contact centre (state contact centre's may have different checks and admission systems, the issue of cybersecurity is also important - during periods of hostilities, all government systems may be under constant cyber-attacks).

Attracting external personnel requires additional funds, which are often not included in the standard budgets of state contact centre's. This issue cannot be resolved in the first days of the main load.

Unpreparedness of agents for complex stressful calls (emotional). Classic training in working in critical situations and on working to reduce stress levels should be provided, often right at the workplace.

## 4. Resourcing Options to Serve

If there are not enough staff in the contact centre (for various reasons), there may be three options for quickly attracting it.

- In commercial/government domestic contact centre's in the country
- In outsourcing contact centre's in the country
- In outsourcing contact centre's in other countries.

### Commercial/government domestic contact centre's

During a period of force majeure, almost all commercial and a number of state-owned service centres (pension, social, utility, etc.) have no load at all, but staff may be present there. It makes sense to select several large contact centre's in advance (with the exception of telecommunications ones, since they will be busy) and conclude an agreement with them on possible cooperation.

It is best to do this with state contact centre's, because in this case it will be much easier to resolve security issues. It must be remembered that if force majeure is of a high level, then you may not be able to find a sufficient number of personnel throughout the country as a whole.

The essence of the agreement: during the period of force majeure, in the event of corresponding request from the main contact centre, they must unite into a single system with a single control center and a single "knowledge base". In order for this to work as quickly as possible, you need:

- Commercial/Government domestic contact centre's
- Select and coordinate work in advance with the relevant contact centre's (taking into account the fact that during a force majeure period the number of requests may increase at least 10 times)
- Integrate solutions in advance or connect only those contact centre's that work on the same solutions as the main one
- Prescribe in advance the processes for connecting, managing and exchanging information, which will take into account the personnel access system and the information security system for remote workplaces of the added contact centre's

### Outsourcing contact centre's in the country

It is necessary to think in advance about the possibilities of the main contact centre's working with outsourcing contact centre's (possibly adopting appropriate legislative norms).

Select and coordinate work in advance with the relevant call centers (taking into account the fact that during a force majeure period the number of calls can increase at least 10 times).

Integrate solutions or connect only those contact centre's that work on the same solutions as the main one.

Prescribe in advance the processes for connecting, managing and exchanging information, which will take into account the personnel access system and the system for protecting information from remote workstations of the added contact centre's.

### Foreign outsourcing contact centre's

It is necessary to think in advance about the possibility of the main contact centre's working with foreign Outsourcing contact centre's (possibly adopting appropriate legislative norms). Select and coordinate work with specific outsourcing call centers in advance (taking into account the constant availability of relevant languages and the fact that during a period of force majeure the number of calls can increase at least 10 times). To search for ACCs, you can use information from local specialised associations.

Integrate solutions in advance or involve only those contact centre's that work on the same solutions as the main one.

Prescribe in advance the processes for connecting, managing and exchanging information, which will take into account the personnel access system and the system for protecting information from remote workstations of the added contact centre's.

## 5. Nuances Related to Technology

The most technologically advanced state contact centre should be selected as the main one (usually 911 as the most equipped or located in the most secure place with the possibility of autonomous work and employees living there for several days). The contact centre must have a multi-level system of redundancy and duplication, as well as an enhanced cyber protection system.

The reserve system of the main contact centre must necessarily include:

- Additional Internet channels (3-4 landline + 2-3 Starlink-type systems)
- Large electric generators with a fuel supply for at least 2-3 days of operation
- Stock of laptops/Chromebook and headsets for remote additional staff/volunteers
- Supplies of food and water for a week (their delivery may be paralyzed for a while).

Contact centre equipment should be as flexible as possible for quick integration and be able to configure remote workstations in large numbers.

Access channels in the contact centre must be able to carry a significantly larger load into the contact centre than usual, and work with both voice and text messages.

If different contact centre's are connected, a common chat should be created (in messenger) for quick communication and resolution of operational issues.

In a contact centre, it is advisable to use a system that will provide the agent with information about the client's location.

The contact centre should develop an extensive system of informing agents in accordance with their skills (it is possible that all emergency services, including medical services, could be combined into a single contact centre). Also, the agent should have the opportunity to convey an important conversation from the point of view of obtaining information to a specific addressee as quickly as possible.

In addition, the contact centre should develop instructions and training for people who have never previously worked as contact centre operators and are now joining on a volunteer basis. This is especially true for behavior in a stressful situation, when they communicate with people in shock or in a particularly dangerous situation (they do not always have to do this on their own, but they must know who and how to switch the conversation to).

Also, the contact centre staff should have psychologists on duty who, if necessary, will join in the work at any time of the day.

## Nuances related to technology

The challenge of quickly integrating different contact centre's into a single system can lead to loss of information and an inability to properly support and govern the actions of the workforce. Remote working may be required, and some organisations still do not have the infrastructure to transfer agents to remote work. In a force majeure situation, it may be critical for agents to quickly see a person's location.

**These are the basic activities that must be performed to prepare the state contact centre for work with extremely high levels of workload and stress.**

## About ECCA

The European Customer Contact Alliance, ECCA, was founded in 2023 in response to contact centre association leaders across Europe coming together to share best practice and to raise the profile of the contact centre industry across Europe.

ECCA is a collaboration network for national customer contact membership bodies across Europe with a focus on supporting the members of these associations through building relationships across Europe.

It's flagship event is the celebration of excellence at the European Contact Centre & Customer Service Awards, which has been recognising contact centre and customer service operations since 1999. The winners of these awards share their stories through The Exchange.

Association Partners benefit from giving their members the opportunity visit Sites of Excellence (award-winning customer contact operations) across Europe and working together on key strategic initiatives.

## About UCCAI

UCCAI (Ukrainian Contact Center Association) started its work on April 30, 2010. The UCCAI has been actively involved in European market research and has been regularly conducting its own. Twice a year, the UCCAI holds an industry conference, which is repeatedly attended by European market representatives.

Due to recent events in Ukraine and the need to preserve the industry, the association is undergoing major structural changes and complete renewal, including rebranding and new communication channels. Despite the existing difficulties, contact centers continue their work and actively adapt to new conditions.



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