

Handbook on “Citizen’s contribution to reducing risk and building resilience”

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Who should read this Handbook?

Citizens of local communities (including school children, students, retired people) with main objective to increase their knowledge on civil protection mechanisms and contribute to disaster risk mitigation through raised awareness and active participation in capacity building activities.

Take 10 minutes of your time to read this document!

Firespill Project!

The aim of the FIRESPELL project was to increase the capacity of emergency services to improve cross-border efficiency in tackling natural and man-made disasters by decreasing the exposure of the populations to the impact of hazards and increasing the safety of the Croatian and Italian Adriatic basin by improving emergency prevention and management measures and instruments.

Introduction – Lets start

It is a common perception that disasters are occurring more frequently in recent times. While it is true that certain types of disasters, such as wildfires, earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods, seem to be happening more often, it is essential to consider factors that contribute to this perception. Advances in **communication technology** and the widespread use of social media have led to improved reporting and dissemination of information. As a result, we are more aware of disasters occurring worldwide, even in remote areas, which may create the impression of increased frequency. The **global population** has been steadily increasing, resulting in more people living in disaster-prone areas. This demographic shift amplifies the impact of disasters and leads to a higher number of affected individuals. **Climate change** is a significant factor contributing to the frequency and intensity of certain disasters. Rising global temperatures have led to more extreme weather events, such as heatwaves, droughts, storms, and heavy rainfall. These changes can result in more frequent natural disasters. **Rapid urbanization** has led to the expansion of cities and towns into vulnerable areas, including coastal regions and floodplains. This urban development increases the exposure of populations to various hazards, making them more susceptible to disasters. With improved **monitoring systems** and increased **data collection** efforts, there is a better record of disasters than in the past. This allows us to identify patterns and trends, but it may also create the impression that disasters are occurring more often.

It is essential to acknowledge the **increasing frequency** of certain types of disasters and it is equally crucial to focus on measures to mitigate and

adapt to these challenges. This includes implementing effective disaster management strategies, improving infrastructure resilience, promoting sustainable practices, and addressing the root causes of climate change. Ultimately, **people are at the heart of disaster mitigation efforts**. Their active involvement, knowledge, and resilience are vital in reducing risks, minimizing the impact of disasters, and building more resilient communities. **Italy and Croatia** have experienced various impacts from disasters. Common impacts associated with different types of disasters in both countries are:

- Loss of Life and Injuries
- Displacement and Loss of Homes
- Socio-Psychological Effects
- Infrastructure Damage and Cultural Heritage Loss
- Economic Consequences
- Environmental Consequences.

How to be better prepared?

Citizens should start changing its role of "vulnerable element" to the "active stakeholder" to provide its contribution to civil protection activities within its own local communities. Citizens should avoid being passive observers and start actively contributing to the increase of the safety of themselves, their family and household, and eventually local communities.

Citizen engagement in disaster mitigation is crucial for building resilient communities.

7 key principles that could guide effective citizen engagement in disaster mitigation:

1. **Participation:** Active participation of citizens in all stages of disaster mitigation, including planning, decision-making, and implementation. Involve yourself in community meetings, workshops, and committees to ensure that yours voices are heard and your ideas are considered.
2. **Accessible and Transparent Information:** Provide accessible and transparent information about hazards, risks, and mitigation strategies to citizens. This includes disseminating information through multiple channels, such as public meetings, websites, social media, and community outreach programs. Ensure that information is easily understandable and available in local languages if needed.
3. **Capacity Building:** Empower citizens with the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to actively participate in disaster mitigation efforts. Conduct training programs, workshops, and awareness campaigns to enhance their understanding of hazards, preparedness

measures, and response strategies. Foster a culture of self-reliance and community resilience through education and capacity-building initiatives.

4. **Collaboration and Partnerships:** Foster collaborations and partnerships among citizens, community organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government agencies, and other stakeholders. Encourage inclusive and cross-sectoral collaborations that bring together diverse perspectives, expertise, and resources to address disaster mitigation challenges effectively.
5. **Local Knowledge and Expertise:** Recognize and value the local knowledge and expertise of citizens. Engage community members in identifying hazards, assessing vulnerabilities, and developing appropriate mitigation strategies. Their familiarity with the local context can provide valuable insights and contribute to the effectiveness of mitigation efforts.
6. **Empathy and solidarity:** Prioritize empathy and inclusion in citizen engagement processes. Recognize the diverse needs, perspectives, and vulnerabilities within the community, including marginalized groups such as the elderly, disabled individuals, children, and low-income populations. Ensure that their voices are heard, and their specific concerns are addressed in the development and implementation of mitigation plans.
7. **Long-Term Engagement:** Foster long-term engagement with citizens beyond immediate disaster response. Promote sustained involvement in mitigation efforts by establishing mechanisms for regular communication, feedback, and evaluation. Encourage citizen-led initiatives, volunteerism, and community resilience-building activities that extend beyond specific disaster events.

By embracing these principles, citizen engagement can become a cornerstone of effective disaster mitigation efforts, fostering a sense of ownership, empowerment, and resilience within communities.

Safety culture – 10 steps approach

Citizens play a crucial role in reducing risk and building resilience in their communities. Here are some ways in which citizens can contribute to these efforts:

1. **Raise Awareness:** Citizens can actively engage in raising awareness about potential risks and hazards that their community may face. By sharing information, organizing community meetings, and using social media platforms, citizens can help educate others about the importance of preparedness and risk reduction measures.
2. **Volunteer and Support Local Initiatives:** Many communities have local initiatives, organizations, and volunteer groups that work towards building resilience. Citizens can actively participate in these initiatives by volunteering their time and skills. This can include activities like community support, emergency exercises, or participating in neighborhood watch programs.

3. **Personal Preparedness:** Individuals can take steps to prepare themselves and their families for emergencies and disasters. This includes creating emergency kits, developing evacuation plans, and staying informed about potential risks. By being personally prepared, citizens can help alleviate the burden on emergency response systems during crises.
4. **Participate in Decision-Making Processes:** Citizens can engage with local authorities and participate in decision-making processes related to risk reduction and resilience building. This can involve attending community meetings, providing input on policies and plans, and advocating for measures that prioritize risk reduction and resilience.
5. **Support Vulnerable Populations:** Citizens can lend a helping hand to vulnerable populations within their communities. This includes elderly individuals, people with disabilities, low-income households, and others who may require additional assistance during emergencies. By offering support, citizens can ensure that no one is left behind in times of crisis.
6. **Sustainable Practices:** Adopting sustainable practices can contribute to long-term resilience. Citizens can reduce their carbon footprint, conserve water and energy, practice waste reduction and recycling, and support local businesses and producers. These actions contribute to environmental sustainability and help mitigate the impacts of climate change.

7. **Engage in Training and Exercises:** Citizens can participate in training programs and educational initiatives related to disaster preparedness, first aid, and resilience building. This knowledge equips individuals with valuable skills to respond effectively during emergencies and provide support to others in need.

8. **Foster Community Networks:** Building strong community networks and connections is crucial for resilience. Citizens can foster relationships with their neighbors, establish communication channels, and promote a culture of collaboration and mutual support. This sense of community enhances the overall resilience of the neighborhood.

9. **Report Hazards and Concerns:** Citizens should actively report any hazards or concerns they come across to the relevant authorities. This includes reporting issues like damaged infrastructure, potential fire hazards, or suspicious activities. By reporting such concerns, citizens contribute to the overall safety and risk reduction efforts in their communities.

10. **Learn from Past Experiences:** Citizens can learn from past disasters and emergencies to improve future preparedness. Studying lessons learned from previous events, understanding vulnerabilities, and implementing necessary changes help communities become more resilient in the face of future risks.

By actively engaging in these actions, citizens can make significant contributions to reducing risk and building resilience in their communities, ultimately creating safer and more sustainable environments for everyone.

Family plan for emergencies

Many emergency services are advising citizens to create a family plan as an important step in ensuring the safety and well-being of your loved ones during emergencies. Here are some key elements to consider when developing a family plan:

Emergency Contacts: Compile a list of emergency contact numbers, including local authorities, medical facilities, and utility providers. Also, establish an out-of-area contact person who can serve as a central point of communication for family members if local phone lines are disrupted. **Evacuation Routes:** Identify primary and alternate evacuation routes from your home and establish meeting points outside the immediate vicinity in case family members get separated. Familiarize yourself with the emergency evacuation plans specific to your community.

Shelter-in-Place Plans: Determine safe areas within your home where you can take shelter during emergencies such as severe weather or chemical incidents. Ensure everyone knows these locations and what supplies are needed, such as a first aid kit, food, water, and flashlights. Familiarize yourself with public shelter locations in your neighborhood and local community.

Communication Plan: Establish a communication plan to ensure that family members can stay connected during a disaster. This may involve designated meeting spots, using text messages instead of phone calls to conserve battery power, or utilizing emergency communication apps or social media platforms.

Emergency Supplies: Prepare an emergency supply kit that includes essential items such as non- perishable food, water, medications, batteries, a flashlight, a radio, and a first aid kit. Regularly check and refresh the supplies to ensure they are up to date and in good condition.

Special Considerations: Take into account any special needs or considerations for family members, including infants, elderly individuals, individuals with disabilities, or pets. Ensure you have necessary supplies, medication, and a plan in place to address their specific needs.

Practice and Review: Regularly practice your family emergency plan through drills or simulated scenarios. This will help everyone become familiar with their roles and responsibilities, identify any gaps or areas for improvement, and build confidence in executing the plan during an actual emergency.

Remember, each family's plan will be unique based on their specific circumstances and location. It's important to regularly review and update your family plan to accommodate changes in family dynamics, contact information, or community resources. Additionally, stay informed about potential hazards and emergency protocols in your area by following official guidance from local emergency management agencies.

Where to begin – preparedness is a key to success

Citizens can take various steps to enhance their disaster resilience and be better prepared for emergencies. Here are some key areas citizens can focus on to become more disaster-resilient:

- **Learn about the hazards and risks** that are prevalent in your area. Understand the potential impact of disasters such as earthquakes, floods, wildfires, or severe weather events.
- **Stay informed** by monitoring official sources of information, local emergency agencies, and weather forecasts.
- **Educate yourself and your family members** on the appropriate actions to take before, during, and after different types of disasters.
- **Develop a family emergency plan**, as mentioned above, which includes communication strategies, evacuation routes, and meeting points.
- **Prepare an emergency supply kit** with essential items like food, water, medications, copies of documents. Consider the specific needs of family members, including children, elderly individuals, individuals with disabilities, or pets, and plan accordingly.
- **Acquire basic first aid** and CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) training. These skills can be crucial in providing immediate assistance to injured individuals until professional help arrives (i.e., have information where is the nearest Automated External Defibrillator AED device in your community).
- **Support initiatives that promote resilient infrastructure and building codes** in your community. This can include advocating for stronger construction standards, flood-resistant design, earthquake and fire-safe practices.

- **Foster emotional resilience** by developing coping mechanisms, practicing self-care, and supporting each other during and after a disaster. Emotional well-being is essential for effectively managing stress and recovering from traumatic experiences.

By taking these simple proactive measures, citizens can improve their own preparedness, protect their families and communities, and contribute to overall disaster resilience. Remember, preparedness is an ongoing process, and regular review and updating of plans and skills are essential.

And finally

We hope that guiding notes of this Handbook will help you (not design to scare you) on how to become active stakeholder in your local community for disaster mitigation activities.

Every citizen has the ability to contribute in some way to reducing risk and building resilience. By taking proactive steps, sharing knowledge and resources, and working together, citizens can make a significant difference in their communities' ability to mitigate and recover from disasters.

Citizen's contribution to reducing risk and building resilience starts now!

Thank you for taking the time to read this Handbook. You can now share it with your family members and neighbors.

Good luck, take care and stay safe!