Communicating existing and future risks: Ensuring evidence-based communication

Outcome document

Climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, Ukraine's protracted war, and the recent deadly earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria have all confirmed the systemic and interconnected nature of risk and the evergrowing impact of disasters.

In this context, enhanced cooperation, and collaboration in the area of disaster risk reduction amongst national and international entities is the key to fostering societal resilience.

Understanding risk information is the foundation of effective disaster risk reduction. Trusted, accurate and widely used risk information can save lives. But it needs to reach ‘the last mile’ - those on the frontlines of disaster risk - and lead to action to protect vulnerable communities, goods and systems. Effective risk communication is critical to ensure that risk information is understandable and accessible to all, and addresses the systemic, cascading, and compounding, nature of risk.

The Government of Romania, under the High Patronage of the President of Romania, with the support of the Secretariat of the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction (EFDRR)\(^1\), organized an action-oriented dialogue in Bucharest on 23-24 February, bringing together high-level political representatives and technical experts from the region to share knowledge, experiences, ideas and best practices on how to make risk communication more effective and accessible for all.

Building public trust through effective risk communication

- Ensuring synergies and complementarity between actors in political, economic, and social environments and first responders will boost capacities to withstand the effects of disasters and reduce disruptive actions and technologies;
- Commit to investing in enhanced risk communication as a core element of the disaster and emergency management cycle – from prevention and preparedness to response and recovery – by dedicating skilled staff and sustained financial resources.

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\(^1\) The Secretariat of the EFDRR is composed of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the European Commission, and the Council of Europe
• Draw on social listening insights to ensure that communication interventions resonate with people’s perceptions of risk. Test communication campaigns and messages with target audiences to ensure their effectiveness. Embed risk communication in community engagement and infodemic management processes so that people are empowered to take informed decisions for their self-protection.

• Map needs and capacities for addressing gaps in social and behavioral communication for risk reduction. From childhood to adulthood, build on existing school curricula and develop or adapt learning tools that are tailored to different audiences, and aim to increase access to and trust in evidence-based risk information.

• Provide scientific and academic communities with a greater role in supporting policymakers in decision making processes and official communications;

• Assist scientific communities in improving their public communication capabilities, allowing for a shared understanding of scientific and technical information among decision-makers, non-expert audiences, and the general public;

• Engage journalists on responsible and ethical reporting that reaches the public with accurate and accessible messages;

• Establish and maintain trusting relationships between institutions and the public in order to reduce people’s exposure to incorrect information;

• Promote opportunities to share knowledge, expertise, experience and good practices in disaster risk reduction;

• Engage civil society, media and academia in countering mis- and disinformation. Civil society can become an asset in the fight against mis—and disinformation campaigns through the resources it has to promote media literacy, which can expose fake news to the general public.

Using science to inform risk communication

• Map recent risk information initiatives and build on experiences for replicating good practices and scaling them up to sub-regional and regional levels;

• Monitor DRR and risk communication campaigns at national level, ensuring a whole of society and multi hazard approach;

• Engage scientific and academic communities to support policy makers in decision making and communicating to the public. Build the capacity of scientists to communicate publicly and with decision makers, ensuring that scientific findings and risks are fully understandable to non-expert audiences.

• Ensure risk communication efforts are well coordinated across government sectors and levels as well as with key stakeholders, including civil society, to increase consistency and trust. Systematically consult National Platforms for DRR and systemize the inclusion of risk communication efforts and budgets in national DRR strategies and action plans.

• Use communication technologies, including innovations, to access, share and make disaster risk data and information available for all.
In order to meet the European Union’s newly announced disaster resilience goals, relevant actions and measures must be taken under the umbrella of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism.

Finally, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge the need for solidarity amongst each actor involved in disaster risk communication efforts (politicians, authorities, NGOs, private sector, academia, media, civil society etc.) with the aim of building resilient societies.
Annex I

The Action-Oriented Dialogues are a series of multilateral and multi-stakeholder dialogues aimed at enhancing transboundary cooperation to accelerate the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. The list of proposed activities that can support implementation of the recommendations include:

- Develop a regional knowledge hub on risk communication for initiating research and leading the intergovernmental dialogue to culminate with the EFDRR 2024.
- Develop a Words into Action Guide on fostering healthy science-policy-society ecosystems for risk reduction action.
- Engaging and training youth on media literacy and promotion of trusted and accurate information.
- Foster cooperation and exchange of good practices under the framework of the European Union disaster resilience goals, specifically goal 2: “Prepare - Increasing risk awareness and preparedness of the population” with its flagship initiative “preparEU”, a pan-European awareness programme for disaster resilience.
- Promote continued dialogue among science-policy-society on disaster risk management good practices and risk awareness through the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network.
- Financial and technical support for the implementation of the recommendations, through dedicated calls for proposals and peer reviews.

*Member states and High-Level Roundtable participants are encouraged to propose their own specific actions to support making risk communication more effective and accessible

2 Knowledge for Action in Prevention & Preparedness | UCP Knowledge Network: Applied knowledge for action (europa.eu)
3 Peer Review programme (europa.eu)