Consider vulnerable groups when designing and implementing disaster response measures

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Efforts of disaster managers in the response and recovery stages often disregard the special needs of vulnerable populations. During and after a catastrophic event, vulnerable populations may include individuals with disabilities, pregnant women, children, the elderly, prisoners, ethnic minorities, people with language barriers, and the impoverished. Inadequate preparation for the needs of vulnerable populations can lead to catastrophic consequences. Without appropriate assistance, vulnerable individuals may not be able to evacuate as instructed, reach points of distribution for medical countermeasures, and understand written or verbal communications during an emergency or find suitable housing if their residences are destroyed during a disaster. A failed emergency response could also cause the government to suffer humiliation and the public to lose faith in those responsible for its welfare. This is why disaster managers should have a special focus on vulnerable groups when designing their disaster response and disaster recovery protocols, identify and make available the necessary resources to, efficiently, address the needs of vulnerable groups.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: Policy Makers, Disaster Managers

Disaster Phases: Response, Recovery

Types of Actors Concerned: Non-active citizens, National civil protection bodies, NGOs, Red Cross

Hazards: Natural hazards, Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations, Man-made intentional hazards

Cultural Map Entries:

- Disaster management plans should be in line with language and other specific requirements of ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups
- Vulnerable groups needing priority assistance during a disaster
- Special procedures for children during response and recovery phases
- Actors involved in disaster management for vulnerable groups in Bulgaria
- Description of the project: 'Prepared Together for Disasters, Emergencies, and Crises' (Bulgaria, 2013-2015)
- Specialised assistance tools developed by the German Red Cross for people with special needs
- Preparedness actions for all vulnerable groups during heat waves
- Description of the 'Handbook on home care for the elderly' developed by the Italian Ministry of Health for heatwave situations
- Comunitat Valenciana' is a public service in the Valencian region that receives emergency calls in Valencian, Spanish, English, French and German
- Links between age and gender and the vulnerability hypothesis
- Social vulnerability influences risk perception at the community level
- No one-size-fits-all strategy in order to explain social vulnerability in different countries and disaster phases
- Cross-cultural differences such as skin colour, gender, and education, define the social vulnerability of the society
- Orphaned children as a vulnerable group
- Elderly individuals as a vulnerable group
- Homeless individuals as a vulnerable group
- Resistance to adopting security-related maintenance measures as a vulnerability in a disaster
- Vulnerable groups in the Maltese setting
- Danger in elderly people overestimating their physical abilities during a disaster
- Foreigners and tourists as vulnerable groups in a disaster
- The vulnerability of stigmatised groups in case of a disaster

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- Children who are alone at home during a disaster see as a vulnerable group
- Communicating risks to elderly individuals to enable evacuation
- Importance of communicating information and practices related to disaster prevention
- Practitioner perceptions of elderly citizens who overestimate their own abilities during a disaster
- "Home alone" scenario for children during a disaster less likely in Italy
- A society's legal system can encourage certain cultural practices while culture can be influenced by legal principles
- Cultural heritage protection in disaster contexts
- Legal frameworks for children, pregnant women, elderly, disabled and sick people vulnerabilities in a disaster situation
- Minorities in disaster contexts
- Inequalities caused by disasters
- Woman are disproportionately affected by disasters
- Gender roles prevail in disaster situations
- Differences in risk exposure due to gender roles
- Gender disadvantages in disaster recovery
- Tackling vulnerabilities concerning the prevention and preparedness stage
- Specific vulnerabilities of children
- Children and young peoples views concerning a flooding context
- Social and economic isolation of senior citizens as a disaster issue
- Dependency of senior citizens on others who may need support themselves in disasters
- Disaster management policies should target the empowerment of senior citizens
- Support by cultural leaders specifically for senior citizens
- Basic rules for respecting local cultural contexts and needs
- Developing a caring network for helping elderly people in Sri Lanka

General association with cultural factors: Gender roles, Age-related roles, Ethnicity, Socio-economic status, Social exclusion

Implementation steps:

A. Identify groups of people presenting specific characteristics that can make them or vulnerable in the context of natural and man-made disasters, therefore requiring special protection and consideration due to their particularities. Related cultural factos: Social exclusion

B. Provide special assistance, through the help of specialized professionals (e.g. therapists, psychologists) to vulnerable people, such as children during the response and recovery phases. Related cultural factos: Social exclusion

C. Set-up databases containing data referring to all people with limited mobility or requiring home care nodes, electro-medical equipment or oxygen, which disaster managers and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. NGOs) can use to assist these individuals in the event of a disaster. Related cultural factos: Social exclusion

Sources:

Deliverable 2.1: Report on actors in disaster management - CARISMAND
(pdf, 3.9 MB)

Deliverable 2.2: Report on systems and processes in disaster management - CARISMAND
(pdf, 9.2 MB)

Further reading:

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This file was generated automatically on: 18.02.2019.

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https://toolkit.carismand.eu/a/recommendation-consider-vulnerable-groups