

**Proposed discussion document for the preparatory Working group  
meeting:  
“Engaging citizens in disaster risk management”  
20 October 2020 – VTC**

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**Subject:** Engaging citizens in disaster risk management. Follow up of the third meeting of Civil Protection Directors-General (12 February 2019) of the Partner Countries of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and Working Group on international assistance (26 November 2019).

**Objective:** To discuss and identify common challenges, best practices, lessons learned and propose a set of priority actions at national, sub-regional and regional levels, addressing both policy and capacity building.

This document serves as basis for discussion at the meeting and will be further developed reflecting participants’ inputs during the meeting and comments received afterwards. The document should be finalised prior to the final Working group meeting, taking place in 2021.

The actions proposed under this working group will be complementary to the work carried out under all three other working groups (*i. Preparing for efficient mutual assistance in the Euro Mediterranean area; ii. Engaging citizens in disaster risk management; iii. Volunteers in civil protection*) identified in the recommendations of the UfM Director Generals meeting<sup>1</sup> (February 2019) and in the Action plan of the Preparing for efficient mutual assistance in the Euro Mediterranean area<sup>2</sup>.

## **1. - Introduction**

Population plays an important role in prevention, preparedness and response to disasters. Citizens can be the first responders when a disaster happens, therefore it is essential to involve citizens in disaster and risk management. Authorities need to have procedures in place to inform citizens on the risks in their region and how to behave in case of disasters, including most vulnerable people.

Discussion in the working group will take into account marine pollution as integral part of the Union Civil protection mechanism<sup>3</sup> and recent experience on COVID-19 pandemics.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ufmsecretariat.org/directors-general-of-civil-protection-meeting/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ufmsecretariat.org/mutual-assistance/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2013:347:0924:0947:EN:PDF>

## 2. Engaging citizens in disaster risk management

Engaging citizens in disaster risk management can be tackled from different points of view: risk communication, education, social media and volunteers.

Risk communication is a set of communication techniques addressed to the citizens whose ultimate purpose is to enable people at risk to take their own decisions to protect themselves and the others. Thus, risk communication to citizens becomes an effective tool to raise their awareness on prevention, preparedness and response measures in case of disasters, including, public health emergency during pandemics<sup>4</sup>.

It is important to know citizens perception for main risks in their region, taking into account vulnerable groups, before developing citizens' awareness communication strategies (e.g. risk awareness campaign in Italy<sup>5</sup>).

Risk events can come to our attention in many ways, through authorities, news and social media. Social media and news play a very important role in this respect; therefore, it is important that responsible authorities cooperate with the media to make sure that the information shared with the citizens is accurate. These new channels are an effective tool for sharing information in real-time and maintaining a dialogue with the citizens. By using social media, institutions may position themselves as a trusted source of information and lead communication during the whole cycle of an emergency. The social media allows of a quick transmission of initial instructions to the citizens.

Communicators (including authorities) need to understand how people perceive the situation (risk perception). Social media are also a good resource to involve young people and volunteers during the emergencies.

The authority's commitment to engage citizens should include organisation, planning and available means for a successful campaign. Those in charge of civil protection have to be aware of the importance of communication plans as an effective tool to help decision-makers in the risk communication and to lay down some conditions for generating public trust.

Another important goal of risk communication is to become an educational tool. UfM partners agreed that awareness raising should start in schools, at an early age. One of the proposed priority actions of the Working Group on Preparing for efficient mutual assistance in the Euro Mediterranean area is to promote training facilities and educational programmes for possible linkages with the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network.

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<sup>4</sup> Risk Communication <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/health-communication/risk-communication>

<sup>5</sup> Italian civil protection campaign "Io non rischio": <http://iononrischio.protezionecivile.it/en/homepage/>

Joint exercises with emergency services and population promote community engagement. Some studies<sup>6</sup> show that exercises are an effective way to raise people's risk awareness. Likewise, internal exercises in the workplaces are very useful to prepare employees.

### 3. Volunteers, youth and citizen's awareness

This Working Group will be carried out in close collaboration with the "Volunteers in Civil Protection Working Group" since they share some common points. Trained volunteers may play a key role when liaising with civil protection authorities towards population in risk awareness. In Spain, for example, one of the most shared videos<sup>7</sup> about how to wash hands properly to prevent SARS-Cov-2 infections was precisely posted by a civil protection volunteer.

Likewise, UfM partner countries acknowledge the essential role of young people as part of disaster risk management and the importance of engaging young people. Investing in youths and volunteers as a driving force for community resilience is a key element to a more inclusive citizen's awareness that also addresses the needs of vulnerable people.

It makes sense to link volunteers, youth and engaging citizens through social media as they can help us reach young people easily and we can capitalise on volunteers in social media (digital volunteers).

There are several social media initiatives where volunteers, such as, Virtual Operation Support Teams (VOST)<sup>8</sup>, help officials to prevent and identify fake news in emergencies. The Standby Task Force<sup>9</sup> gathers, verifies and filters information on-line during disasters in order to share it through interactive mapping. This information could be useful during the whole cycle of an emergency and also for citizen's awareness.

### 4. Marine Pollution

Marine pollution also concerns UfM partners as many countries share the Mediterranean basin. Therefore it is important to raise citizens' awareness in this area as well. REMPEC<sup>10</sup> is launching the future Mediterranean Strategy for the Prevention of and Response to Marine Pollution from Ships (2022-2031) which calls for cooperation with key players in the region. It will be useful to involve citizens also to assist to its goals.

Ultimately, it is important to promote a campaign to encourage individuals to act spontaneously, as responsible citizens, against marine litter.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Marginales/2620\\_2639/2635/e263500.html](http://www.cis.es/cis/export/sites/default/-Archivos/Marginales/2620_2639/2635/e263500.html)  
<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/etools/evacuation/implementation.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://youtu.be/WocWKg03pD0>

<sup>8</sup> VOST TEAM: <https://www.vosteuropa.eu/>

<sup>9</sup> Standby Task Force: <https://www.standbytaskforce.org/about-us/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.rempec.org/en>

Suggestions for axes of reflection	
Major themes	Topics
1. Risk communication – involving citizens in prevention and preparedness	Identifying communication strategies to position institution as a reliable information source to engage and prepare the citizens to respond to emergencies.
	Key factors to take into account: risk perception, factors that influence communication (emotional, social, cultural, fake news...), identifying necessary and available assets, organisation, planning and dedicated resources to public awareness/engaging citizens.
	Three pillars of any communication campaign: organisation, planning and means. Involving civil protection specialist in communication planning at the early stage.
	<b>Prevention and preparedness:</b> risk awareness campaigns include awareness raising in schools' curricula, target audience, develop messages and features (accessibility, integration, responsibility, accuracy and relevance), means of communication. How can we measure the results?
	<b>Response:</b> public communication as an operative means in emergencies. Communication plans as a way of means to help decision-makers in prevention, preparedness and response phases.
	<b>Tools:</b> mass media as an asset, journalism's social responsibility, collaboration with the journalist to ease their work, sharing of useful/correct/reliable information in due time, (text, videos, photos,...etc.).
	Direct cooperation of civil protection actors and journalists to exchange reliable information (what happened, consequences and response of the population...etc.).
	The organisation of 'resilience campaigns' ahead of a disaster (e.g. campaign "Get ready for heat wave").

Major themes	Topics
<p><b>2. Promoting social and educational programmes to engage citizens in disaster risk management</b></p>	<p>Promoting social and educational programmes at early stage. (e.g. European 112 telephone number campaign).</p>
	<p>Importance to involve population in awareness raising campaigns and exercises to familiarise citizens with risks, increase knowledge and confidence in emergency services. Encouraging population resilience.</p>
	<p>Internal workplaces exercises to prepare employees to prevent and face emergencies.</p>
	<p>Education campaigns organised in schools to teach children and young people in life-saving techniques, disasters prevention and to face emergencies.</p>
<p><b>3. Using Social Media to make people better prepared in case of disasters</b></p>	<p><b>Preparedness and Prevention:</b> Social media can support positioning institutions as information source before emergencies arises. Increasing people knowledge, confidence and reducing the risk of misleading information. Identify most useful social media network in emergencies for your region (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.)</p>
	<p><b>Response:</b> Using social media to keep a direct and quick communication with citizens during emergencies. Social media Apps make information sharing more efficient such as links to web sites, maps, videos, infographics, tracking information (use of #Hashtags), Safety Check (Facebook).</p>
	<p>Gather and verify on-line information, data, images through social media may be useful to the emergency services. Social media will also help to know citizen´s perception and major concerns.</p>
	<p>The involvement of influencers and celebrities in emergencies can boost citizen´s awareness.</p> <p>Engaging young people and volunteers through social media to take advantage of their abilities and skillsets in these communication channels.</p>

<b>4. The role of volunteers in communication awareness.</b>	<p>Volunteers are key actors to link emergency services and population, including the most vulnerable people.</p>
	<p>Involve volunteers in training communication activities to create a closer link with local emergency services.</p>
	<p>Digital Volunteers: e.g. Virtual Operation Support Teams (VOST) help to prevent and face fake news in emergencies; Standby Task Force volunteers gather, verify and filter on-line information during disasters to share it through interactive mapping.</p>
	<p>How to coordinate and align activities and messages with authorities?</p>
<b>5. Marine Pollution</b>	<p>Raising citizens' marine pollution awareness in the Mediterranean area</p>
	<p>Use of public communication to support marine pollution campaigns goals.</p>
	<p>Planning communication campaigns to encourage individuals to act spontaneously, as responsible citizens, against marine litter.</p>