

Recommendations

The approach to communicating disaster risk in recent years has been shifted from a top-down, ‘one size fits all’ approach to a more democratic, engaged and inclusive one. It implies partnership between policymakers, practitioners and citizens of all backgrounds. In a society in which people have the opportunity to inform themselves about a wide variety of risks through various media channels, one-way media campaigns that tell people how to prepare, respond and recover from a disaster are not effective. Instead, engaging in a dialogue with local communities to understand the historical and local context is an important fundament for future risk communication that focuses on stimulating resilient behaviour:

- words used for risk communication should be inclusive and emphatic in order to contribute to effective communication and support and eventually to more resilient coping strategies of those affected by a disaster;
- since the people’s response to disasters is influenced by past experiences and local cultures, risk communication should be based on the understanding of local risk perceptions and capacities.

Likewise, the practices of disaster and risk management should rely on a comprehensive approach to decision-making. Participatory models emphasising engagement with and empowering of local communities through joint preparation, planning and information crowdsourcing have emerged, enabled by increasing digitalisation. Those involved in risk communication should:

- realise that collecting, sharing and disseminating disaster information is not neutral, as it has an impact on how people perceive risks and deal with the consequences;
- bottom-up, people-centred and participatory processes need to be established to ensure collaborative and inclusive decision-making;
- make sure that the collection, analysing and modelling of crisis data is done in a transparent and ethical way to avoid privacy infringements, unauthorised dissemination of personal information, inequality and irresponsible behaviour.

ICTs play a vital role in risk communication. New communication tools and innovations, including social media, Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA) and the use of mobile and online communication tools, might help people to find more relevant information on disaster risks. At the same time, innovation in risk communication should never be a goal in itself:

- it is critically important to invest in the implementation of mechanisms by which innovations can improve communication practices, including interorganisational collaboration;
- the communicator and/or the channel’s social position should be as close as possible to the recipients’ everyday lives as this will positively affect the

outcome of risk communication;

- using personalisation of risk communication that is related to cultural and contextual diversity is a key ingredient of a successful communication strategy;
- since critical information infrastructures can be affected by disasters (e.g. resulting in large-scale power blackouts), governments should invest in reliable, redundant and sustainable infrastructures, but at the same time take measurements to go beyond the infrastructure by investing in risk knowledge, monitoring and risk capacity and early warning systems.

The above efforts together will support a more balanced, inclusive and systematic approach to risk communication and will eventually lead to a more resilient European society that has to deal with increasing risks.