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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Handbook and Main Objectives

This handbook, one of the primary outcomes of WP4.2, is designed to serve as a practical and accessible resource for young people, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary to prepare for and respond effectively to disaster situations. Its primary purpose is to enhance the resilience of young individuals by fostering awareness of safety measures and promoting proactive behaviours that mitigate risks. The handbook recognises that resilience is an individual attribute and a collective asset that strengthens community preparedness and response capabilities. By providing clear, actionable guidance, the handbook aims to empower young people to act confidently and responsibly before, during, and after disasters, thereby reducing potential harm and facilitating recovery.

The main objectives of this handbook include raising awareness about the importance of disaster preparedness, offering practical tools and strategies for risk reduction, and encouraging a culture of safety within both personal and communal contexts. It seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application by presenting information in a straightforward manner that is scientifically sound and relatable. Moreover, the handbook emphasises the role of young people as active participants in building resilient societies,



recognising their unique potential to influence peers and contribute to community safety initiatives. Through this approach, the handbook aspires to cultivate a generation better equipped to face the challenges posed by natural and human-made hazards, ultimately fostering a safer and more resilient future for all (Becque, 2017; Oxford University, 2020).

In drafting this Handbook, consideration was given to the **key recommendations outlined in Deliverable 4.1 of the AYDRESS project**. Particular attention was paid to ensuring flexibility, practicality, and cultural adaptability. The Handbook is designed to be adjustable to different educational contexts and local needs, emphasising clear guidance, valuable tools, and supportive resources for facilitators. The importance of emotional safety, relevance to local realities, and alignment with existing educational frameworks has also been considered to support meaningful and sustainable implementation of the AYDRESS approach. In addition to these principles, the Handbook draws on the experiences and insights shared by young participants across the piloting workshops. Their voices helped shape the themes and priorities addressed throughout the material.

1.2 How to Use This Handbook

This handbook is intended for young people and educators who wish to build their knowledge and strengthen their disaster preparedness and response skills. It provides clear instructions on integrating its contents into various educational and community settings. The handbook offers step-by-step guidance for young readers that can be followed independently or with support, facilitating self-directed learning and practical application. It encourages engagement through activities, reflection prompts, and scenario-based exercises, reinforcing understanding and building confidence in disaster preparedness and response.

Educators should incorporate the handbook's material into curricula, workshops, and informal learning environments. This includes suggestions for adapting content to suit different age groups, cultural contexts, and learning needs, ensuring inclusivity and relevance. The handbook also highlights the importance of creating supportive environments where young people feel empowered to discuss disaster-related topics and develop critical thinking skills openly. By following these guidelines, educators can effectively facilitate knowledge transfer and skill development, fostering resilience among their students and within their communities. The handbook's flexible design allows it to be used as a standalone resource or as part of broader disaster risk reduction programmes, making it a versatile tool for diverse educational contexts (Dixon, 2020; KTH, 2023).

1.3 Target Audience: Young People and Educators

The handbook specifically addresses the needs of two primary groups: young people and the educators who support them. Young people, often at the forefront of community dynamics, require tailored information that is both accessible and engaging. The handbook recognises the diversity within this group, including variations in age, cultural background, and prior knowledge, and seeks to accommodate these differences through clear language and inclusive examples. It aims to build their capacity to understand hazards, assess risks, and take appropriate actions that enhance their safety and that of others.

Educators play a crucial role in mediating this knowledge and fostering an environment conducive to learning and empowerment. The handbook provides the tools and frameworks to guide young people effectively, emphasising pedagogical approaches that encourage participation, critical reflection, and practical skill-building. By supporting educators, the handbook ensures that disaster resilience education is delivered consistently and effectively, maximising its impact. This dual focus on young people and educators reflects an



understanding that resilience is best achieved through collaborative efforts that combine knowledge dissemination with mentorship and community engagement (Becque, 2017; Oxford University, 2020).



Source: Workshop KCKompetenscenter Sweden– May 2025

1.4 Glossary of Key Terms

A glossary clarifies essential terms throughout the handbook, helping readers understand the technical language involved in disaster management and resilience building. This section defines critical concepts related to disaster management, risk reduction, and resilience, ensuring readers can confidently and clearly navigate the material. The glossary serves as a reference point, demystifying jargon and promoting accurate understanding, vital for effective communication and application of the handbook's guidance.

The glossary supports the handbook's educational objectives and reinforces scientific accuracy by providing precise definitions. It enables young people and educators to engage with the content critically and correctly use the terminology in discussions and practical scenarios. This clarity contributes to building a shared language around disaster resilience, which is fundamental for coordinated action and community preparedness. The inclusion of the glossary underscores the handbook's commitment to accessibility and educational quality, recognising that mastery of key terms is a cornerstone of effective learning in the field of disaster risk management (Becque, 2017; KTH, 2023).



2 Understanding Risks and Threats

2.1 What types of Disasters can happen in AYDRESS Countries?

The AYDRESS countries-Italy, France, Spain, Estonia, Sweden, and Norway are exposed to a broad spectrum of disasters related to natural phenomena and human-made hazards. These disasters arise from the interplay of geographical, climatic, and socio-economic factors unique to each country. Understanding these disasters' specific nature and impact is fundamental to developing effective preparedness and resilience strategies, particularly for young people who may face distinct vulnerabilities.

Disasters Related to Natural Phenomena in Southern Europe: Italy, France, and Spain

Italy, France, and Spain, situated in the Mediterranean basin, are particularly susceptible to disasters related to natural phenomena such as floods, wildfires, earthquakes, and volcanic activity. The region's Mediterranean climate, characterised by hot, dry summers, wet, mild winters, and complex geological structures, shapes these events.

Flooding is one of the most frequent and devastating disasters in these countries. In Spain, the recent Depresión Aislada en Niveles Altos (DANA) event that struck the Valencian Community in late October 2024 exemplifies the extreme nature of such disasters. This isolated high-altitude depression caused torrential rainfall, with some areas, such as the town of Chiva, receiving an extraordinary 491 millimetres of rain in just eight hours (PreventionWeb, 2024; SSPH Journal, 2025). The resulting flash floods overwhelmed river basins, including the Magro and Turia rivers, leading to catastrophic flooding that swept through urban and rural areas. The floods caused at least 224 deaths, displaced thousands, and severely damaged over 15,000 homes and thousands of businesses, decimating local economies and infrastructure (Cross Border Magazine, 2024; Time, 2024). Despite previous flood mitigation proposals, such as plans to channel water away or build reservoirs, financial and administrative delays meant the region was ill-prepared for the scale of the event (SSPH Journal, 2025). The DANA floods are a stark reminder of the increasing intensity and unpredictability of weather-related disasters in the Mediterranean, exacerbated by climate change.

In Italy, recent years have seen severe flooding in the Emilia-Romagna region and central Italy, highlighting the country's vulnerability to disasters related to natural phenomena. The Emilia-Romagna floods of 2023 and 2024 caused widespread damage to homes, businesses, and critical infrastructure, with rivers breaching their banks after prolonged heavy rainfall. These floods disrupted transportation networks and power supplies, forcing evacuations and emergency responses on a large scale (Clean Energy Wire, 2025). Similarly, central Italy has experienced recurrent flooding events that have tested local resilience and emergency preparedness. The complex topography, with mountainous areas prone to landslides and river valleys susceptible to overflow, compounds the risk.

Wildfires are another significant hazard in the Mediterranean countries, driven by hot, dry summers and increasingly frequent droughts. Spain and Italy have witnessed some of the worst wildfire seasons in recent decades, with fires destroying vast forested areas, threatening human settlements, and causing air quality crises. The combined effect of prolonged drought, heatwaves, and land-use changes has intensified wildfire risk, underscoring the need for integrated fire management and community preparedness (Clean Energy Wire, 2025).



Seismic activity remains a critical concern, especially in Italy, southern France, and Spain. Italy's location on the convergent boundary of the African and Eurasian tectonic plates makes it prone to earthquakes, which can cause severe damage in urban centres. The 2009 L'Aquila earthquake and other recent seismic events illustrate the ongoing threat. Volcanic hazards, such as eruptions and ashfall from active volcanoes like Mount Etna and Vesuvius, pose risks to populations and infrastructure (ITCOLD, 2021).

Disasters Related to Natural Phenomena in Northern Europe: Estonia, Sweden, and Norway

The northern AYDRESS countries-Estonia, Sweden, and Norway-face a different set of disasters related to natural phenomena, shaped by their colder climates, northern latitudes, and distinct geological features. These countries are vulnerable to severe winter storms, heavy snowfall, ice storms, and flooding caused by rapid snowmelt or intense rainfall.

Winter storms and heavy snowfalls can disrupt transportation, energy supplies, and public services, impacting daily life and economic activities. Coastal and inland flooding, often resulting from spring snowmelt or heavy rains, poses recurrent challenges. Norway's fjord regions and Sweden's coastal areas are particularly exposed to flooding and windstorms, which can damage infrastructure and ecosystems (Expertise France, 2023).

Climate change alters hazard patterns in these northern countries, leading to warmer winters, more variable precipitation, and increased risks of landslides due to thawing permafrost. Estonia, for example, faces rising flood risks in low-lying coastal zones, while Sweden and Norway are experiencing emerging wildfire and drought risks previously uncommon in these cooler climates. These evolving hazards require adaptive risk management strategies incorporating scientific monitoring and community engagement.

Human-Made Disasters Across AYDRESS Countries

In addition to natural phenomena, human-made disasters- including industrial accidents, chemical spills, transport incidents, technological failures, and cyber-attacks—pose significant risks across all AYDRESS countries. Urbanisation, industrial development, and critical infrastructure vulnerabilities increase exposure to such hazards. Effective regulation, safety standards, and emergency preparedness are essential to mitigate these risks and protect populations (Papaginiaki et al., 2022).

The AYDRESS countries face a complex and diverse disaster landscape. Southern European countries contend primarily with floods, wildfires, earthquakes, and volcanic activity, while northern countries deal with winter storms, flooding from snowmelt, and emerging climate-related risks. Human-made disasters add further complexity. Tailored, context-specific strategies that integrate scientific knowledge, community participation, and regional cooperation are vital to enhance disaster resilience, particularly among young people who are both vulnerable and key agents of change.

2.2 How do disasters affect Young People?

Disasters related to natural phenomena and human-made events profoundly and multifacetedly impact young people. While all population groups are vulnerable to the



immediate and long-term effects of disasters, young people face distinct challenges due to their developmental stage, dependence on adults, and social circumstances. Understanding these impacts is essential for developing effective support systems and resilience-building strategies.

Physical and Health Impacts

Young people, particularly children and adolescents, are often at greater risk of physical harm during disasters. Their smaller body size, developing immune systems, and limited ability to protect themselves can increase their susceptibility to injury, illness, and even death. For instance, in the recent DANA floods in Valencia, many of those affected were children and young people, some of whom were separated from their families during evacuations or suffered injuries from debris and contaminated floodwaters (SSPH Journal, 2025).

Disasters can disrupt access to essential healthcare services, leading to interruptions in treatment for chronic conditions, missed vaccinations, and a higher risk of infectious diseases. In flood situations, waterborne diseases such as gastroenteritis, hepatitis A, and leptospirosis can spread rapidly, disproportionately affecting young people whose immune systems may not be fully developed (PreventionWeb, 2024). Malnutrition is another concern, as disasters often disrupt food supplies and school meal programmes, a critical nutrition source for many children and adolescents (UNICEF, 2023).

Psychological and Emotional Impacts

The psychological effects of disasters on young people are well-documented and can be severe. Exposure to frightening events, loss of loved ones, displacement, and the destruction of homes and schools can lead to acute stress reactions, anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The emotional toll of disasters is often compounded by uncertainty about the future and the disruption of daily routines that provide stability and comfort (Oxford University, 2020).

Research shows that the mental health of young people can be significantly impacted even when they are not directly injured. Witnessing the distress of adults, experiencing separation from caregivers, or being exposed to media coverage of disasters can all contribute to psychological trauma. Adolescents may be particularly vulnerable due to their heightened sensitivity to social dynamics and developmental need for peer support. In the aftermath of the Emilia-Romagna floods, many young people reported sadness, anger, helplessness, and difficulties concentrating and sleeping (Clean Energy Wire, 2025).

Educational Disruption

Disasters frequently interrupt education, sometimes for extended periods. School closures due to damage, displacement, or using school buildings as emergency shelters can deprive young people of learning opportunities and critical social interactions. Losing routine and structure can further exacerbate stress and hinder academic progress. Children may sometimes be forced to relocate to areas where educational resources are limited or unavailable, leading to long-term setbacks (Becque, 2017).

For marginalised groups, such as children with disabilities, migrants, or those from low-income backgrounds, the barriers to education may be even greater. Disasters can deepen existing inequalities, making it harder for these young people to catch up academically and socially once normalcy is restored (UNICEF, 2023).

Social and Community Impacts



Disasters can disrupt the social fabric of communities, altering relationships and support networks that are vital for young people's development. Family separations, loss of friends, and the breakdown of community structures can lead to feelings of isolation and abandonment. In some cases, economic hardship caused by disasters may force young people into early employment or expose them to exploitation and abuse (Papaginiaki et al., 2022).

However, it is essential to recognise that young people also possess remarkable resilience and adaptability. They can play active roles in recovery and rebuilding efforts with appropriate support, contributing ideas, energy, and creativity to their communities. Programmes that engage young people in disaster preparedness and response help them cope with trauma and foster a sense of agency and belonging (KTH, 2023).

The Importance of Tailored Support

The impacts of disasters on young people are complex and interrelated, requiring a holistic approach to support. This includes ensuring access to healthcare, psychosocial support, education, and community participation opportunities. Recognising the unique needs and strengths of young people is essential for building resilience and promoting recovery in the aftermath of disasters.

Disasters related to natural phenomena and human-made events affect young people in complex and varied ways. Their needs are not uniform; they are shaped by age, developmental stage, cultural background, prior experiences, and the specific context of the disaster. Tailored support means recognising these differences and responding with flexibility, empathy, and precision, rather than offering a one-size-fits-all approach. This is crucial because young people's resilience and recovery are strongly influenced by how well the support they receive matches their unique circumstances and voices (AIDR 2021; UNDRR; Becque, 2017; UNICEF, 2023).

Central to adequate support is empowering young people to participate meaningfully in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. When young people are given opportunities to express their views, make decisions, and take action, they gain a sense of agency and control. This reduces anxiety and nurtures a sense of belonging and connectedness, key protective factors for mental health and wellbeing (Be you, 2022). Research and practical experience show that when young people's voices are heard and respected, they are more likely to feel supported and to recover from trauma. Involving young people in community activities-such as peer support groups, memorials, or recovery projects-enables them to process their experiences, help others, and contribute positively to their environment (Felix et al, 2020) (INEE,2012).

Tailored support must also take into account the diversity among young people. For example, children with disabilities, those from minority backgrounds, or those who have experienced previous trauma may require different forms of assistance. Child-responsive disaster risk reduction recognises that boys and girls, children with disabilities, and those on the move face unique risks and coping challenges. Solutions must therefore be holistic and inclusive, addressing not only immediate needs but also underlying drivers of vulnerability such as poverty, stigma, or gender discrimination (UNDRR). Culturally sensitive mental health screenings and support are essential, as distress may be expressed differently depending on cultural background (Felix et al, 2020).

One of the most effective forms of support is re-establishing routines and safe spaces as soon as possible after a disaster. Reopening schools-even in temporary locations-restores normalcy, reconnects young people with peers, and provides access to social support and



physical activity. These factors are proven to influence mental health and overall recovery positively. Safe spaces, whether in schools, community centres, or youth-led organisations, allow young people to interact with peers, access information, and receive guidance from trusted adults (INEE, 2012). These environments foster a sense of security and stability, essential for healing.

Communities play a vital role in supporting young people post-disaster. Survivor- and community-initiated activities, such as memorials, art projects, or volunteer efforts, help young people process their emotions and feel connected to recovery (Felix et al, 2020). Simple activities like writing thank-you notes to first responders or drawing pictures can be therapeutic for younger children. For adolescents, participating in tangible recovery efforts, such as clean-up operations or distributing aid, provides a sense of purpose and helps them regain confidence (Felix et al, 2020) (INEE,2012).

Disaster resilience education (DRE) is a key component of tailored support. By equipping young people with knowledge, practical skills, and opportunities to share what they have learned, DRE empowers them to protect themselves and others before, during, and after disasters (AIDR 2021). Training in first aid, health promotion, and survival strategies builds individual capacity and strengthens community resilience. Partnerships between schools, emergency services, and youth organisations are essential for delivering effective, context-sensitive education and support (AIDR 2021).

Support must also be sustained over time. While immediate needs are urgent, the risk of anxiety, depression, and other internalising disorders can persist or even increase in the months and years following a disaster. Long-term support should include ongoing mental health services, opportunities for youth leadership, and continued community engagement. Planning for at least two years of support is recommended, as families and young people may not be able to focus on mental health until basic needs and routines are re-established[4]. (Felix et al 2020)

Tailored support for young people in disaster contexts is not simply about meeting basic needs; it is about recognising and nurturing their strengths, addressing their vulnerabilities, and involving them as partners in their recovery. By listening to young people, respecting their diversity, restoring routines, building skills, and sustaining support over time, communities can foster resilience and help young people emerge from disasters not only healed but empowered to become leaders in building safer, more inclusive societies.

2.3 How may I feel in case a disaster occurs?

Experiencing a disaster can trigger a wide range of emotional, psychological, and even physical reactions in young people. These feelings are natural responses to extraordinary and often frightening circumstances. Understanding what you might feel and why can help you recognise your reactions, seek support when needed, and begin the recovery process.

Immediate Emotional Responses

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, it is common to feel fear, shock, and anxiety. The suddenness and unpredictability of such events can make you feel unsafe, confused, or overwhelmed. You may worry about your own safety, the safety of your loved ones, or the possibility of another disaster occurring. These fears and anxiety are usual and are shared by many people who experience disasters (AboutKidsHealth, 2010; Headspace, n.d.).



Sadness and grief are also familiar, especially if you have lost your home, your community, or someone you care about. Even if you have not suffered a direct loss, witnessing destruction or hearing about others' suffering can bring about feelings of sorrow and helplessness. Sometimes, there is a sense of relief if your family and friends are safe, but this can be mixed with guilt-sometimes called "survivor's guilt"-if others were not as fortunate. (Calm, 2025).

Changes in Behaviour and Thinking

After a disaster, you may notice changes in your behaviour or thinking. Some young people become more clingy, irritable, or withdrawn. Others may lose interest in activities they once enjoyed or have trouble sleeping and concentrating. It is also common to experience nightmares or intrusive thoughts about the disaster (CDC, n.d.; Gale Academic OneFile, n.d.).

You might replay the event, feel jumpy at loud noises, or be easily startled. Some may act out their feelings through play or by re-enacting the disaster. These reactions are all normal ways your mind and body process what has happened (AboutKidsHealth, 2010).

Physical Reactions

Emotional stress often affects the body. You might have headaches, stomach aches, changes in appetite, or trouble sleeping. These physical symptoms are another way your body responds to stress and uncertainty. Many symptoms fade, but some may last longer and require extra support (iResearchNet, 2016).

Longer-Term Feelings

As time passes, your emotions may change. Some young people recover quickly, while others find that their feelings come and go in waves. You might feel frustrated if life does not return to normal as fast as you hope, or if reminders of the disaster keep appearing. Anxiety about another disaster can persist, especially during certain seasons or weather events (Headspace, n.d.).

For some, these feelings can develop into more serious mental health concerns, such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Signs of these conditions include ongoing sadness, a sense of hopelessness, nightmares, flashbacks, or feeling emotionally numb. If these feelings last more than a few weeks or interfere with your daily life, it is essential to seek help from a trusted adult or mental health professional (CDC, n.d.; Calm, 2025).

Differences Among Individuals

Not everyone reacts to disasters in the same way. Your age, personality, previous experiences, and the support you receive all influence how you feel and how quickly you recover. Girls and boys may express their feelings differently: girls may talk more about their distress, while boys may show anger or act out. Recovery can also take longer for some than others (Gale Academic OneFile, n.d.).

Moreover, pre-existing inequalities play a significant role in shaping emotional responses. Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds may experience compounded stress due to inadequate shelter, food insecurity, or limited access to healthcare during disasters. Social isolation or stigma can deepen feelings of helplessness and exclusion. Conversely, those with strong family and community support often demonstrate greater resilience, as emotional bonds and collective coping mechanisms provide a buffer against trauma (Oxford University, 2020).



Acknowledging that emotional responses can vary widely among young people is essential. Some may exhibit resilience and adaptability, while others may struggle with prolonged psychological effects. Providing spaces for open communication, emotional expression, and psychosocial support is essential to help young people process their experiences and rebuild a sense of safety and normality. Educational programmes that prepare young people for potential disasters can reduce fear by increasing their understanding and confidence in their ability to respond effectively (Becque, 2017; KTH, 2023).

Coping and Recovery

It is important to remember that your reactions are normal responses to an abnormal situation. Seeking comfort from family, friends, or community members can help. Returning to routines, engaging in activities you enjoy, and discussing your feelings are all positive steps. Limiting exposure to distressing news and focusing on things you can control can also reduce anxiety (AboutKidsHealth, 2010).

Participating in recovery efforts—such as helping your family or community—can foster a sense of hope and purpose, which are essential for healing. If you find your feelings too much to handle alone, do not hesitate to ask for help. Support from adults, peers, or professionals can significantly improve recovery (Headspace, n.d.; Calm, 2025).

2.4 Warning Signals and Risk Awareness

Recognising early warning signals of impending disasters is critical to risk awareness and preparedness, particularly for young people who may be among the first to observe environmental changes. Developing this awareness empowers them to take timely and appropriate actions to protect themselves and others.

Warning signals vary depending on the type of disaster. For floods, indicators include heavy or prolonged rainfall, rising river levels, and official alerts issued by meteorological agencies. In the case of wildfires, signs such as smoke, unusual heat, and dry vegetation are crucial. Earthquake warnings may come from seismic monitoring systems, though often the event occurs without prior notice. Understanding these signals requires access to reliable information sources and education on interpreting environmental cues.

Risk awareness also involves understanding the vulnerabilities specific to one's community and environment. Young people benefit from learning about the hazards common in their region, safe evacuation routes, and the location of emergency shelters. Schools and community organisations are vital in disseminating this knowledge through drills, workshops, and accessible materials. Encouraging young people to participate actively in risk assessment and preparedness activities fosters a culture of safety and collective responsibility (Expertise France, 2023).

Moreover, technological advancements, such as mobile alert systems and social media, offer new avenues for improving early warning dissemination and risk communication. Teaching young people how to access and respond to these alerts enhances their readiness. Ultimately, increasing risk awareness protects young people and strengthens community resilience by promoting informed and proactive behaviours before, during, and after disasters (Becque, 2017; KTH, 2023).



3 Dynamics Before the Disaster

3.1 What can I do to be prepared for a disaster before it occurs?

Preparation before a disaster is crucial to reduce risks and enhance safety for young people and their communities. Practical measures can be taken to anticipate potential hazards and establish clear plans, which increase confidence and reduce panic if a disaster occurs. The first step involves understanding the types of disasters affecting one's area and the risks involved. This knowledge enables targeted preparation.

Forming an emergency plan is essential. Young people should work with their families or caregivers to decide on safe meeting points, evacuation routes, and methods of communication in case of separation. Remembering significant phone numbers and ensuring all family members know how to contact emergency services is advisable. Plans should consider the needs of all household members, including those with disabilities or special requirements.

Gathering essential supplies is another critical action. An emergency kit should include bottled water, non-perishable food, a torch with spare batteries, a first aid kit, necessary medications, copies of essential documents, and basic hygiene products. It is vital to keep the kit accessible and to check it regularly to replace expired items. Young people should also be aware of how to use these supplies effectively.

Additionally, staying informed about local warning systems and alerts is vital. Signing up for official notifications and understanding the meaning of different warning levels helps young people act promptly. Practising drills at home or school reinforces preparedness and familiarises young people with the steps to take during an emergency. By taking these proactive steps, young people contribute significantly to their safety and community (Becque, 2017; KTH, 2023).

3.2 Psychological Preparation: How to Manage Emotions and Stress Before the Event

Psychological preparation is as necessary as physical readiness. Anticipating a disaster can cause anxiety and stress, but developing mental resilience helps young people cope more effectively. One key strategy is to gain knowledge about the disaster risks and the planned responses. Understanding what might happen reduces uncertainty and fear.

Practising relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, mindfulness, or guided imagery, can alleviate stress. Young people are encouraged to maintain regular routines, including sleep, nutrition, and exercise, which support emotional stability. Talking openly about fears and concerns with trusted adults or peers fosters emotional expression and reduces feelings of isolation.

Building a support network is crucial. Knowing who to turn to for help and sharing preparedness plans with friends and family creates a sense of connectedness and reassurance. It is also important to recognise signs of overwhelming stress, such as persistent worry, irritability, or difficulty concentrating, and to seek professional support if needed.

Educational programmes that include psychological preparedness empower young people by normalising emotional responses and teaching coping skills. This proactive approach mitigates anxiety before a disaster and strengthens recovery after an event, promoting long-term mental health and resilience (Oxford University, 2020; Becque, 2017).



3.3 Physical Preparedness Actions: Personal and Community Safety

Physical preparedness involves concrete actions to protect oneself and others. Young people should familiarise themselves with their environment, identifying safe places at home, school, and the community. This includes knowing the location of emergency exits, shelters, and assembly points.

Creating safety protocols is essential. For example, establishing a “drop, cover and hold” procedure for earthquakes or a fire evacuation plan ensures swift and coordinated responses. Emergency contact lists should be compiled and kept accessible, including numbers for family members, neighbours, emergency services, and local authorities.

Participation in community preparedness initiatives, such as first aid training or volunteer groups, enhances practical skills and fosters a safety culture. Young people can assist in hazard mapping, identifying neighbourhood risks, and advocating for safer infrastructure.

Maintaining personal health and fitness also contributes to preparedness. Physical strength and agility can be critical during evacuations or rescue efforts. Furthermore, young people should be encouraged to support vulnerable community members, such as the elderly or disabled, by sharing information and assisting with preparedness measures.

By taking responsibility for personal and community safety, young people become active agents in disaster risk reduction, improving outcomes for all (Expertise France, 2023; KTH, 2023).

3.4 How can I contribute to forming and raising awareness about risks and threats in my community?

Young people are vital in raising awareness about disaster risks and promoting community preparedness. Effective communication starts with accurate knowledge and sharing information clearly and respectfully.

Social media platforms, youth groups, and school activities can help young people disseminate messages about potential hazards, safety tips, and emergency procedures. Creating posters, videos, or presentations tailored to peers and family members makes the information relatable and engaging.

Organising or participating in community workshops, drills, and campaigns increases visibility and reinforces the importance of preparedness. Collaborating with local authorities and organisations ensures that messages are consistent and supported by expert advice.

Listening to community concerns and encouraging dialogue fosters trust and responsiveness. Young people can act as bridges between experts and the wider community, translating technical information into practical actions.

By taking the initiative to inform and educate, young people strengthen community resilience and empower others to take proactive steps before disasters occur.



4 Dynamics During the Disaster

4.1 Am I ready to manage uncertainty: Emotions and Reactions During a Disaster?

When a disaster happens, feeling scared, anxious, or confused is entirely normal. You might find yourself asking, “Can I really stay calm? What if I don’t know what to do?” These feelings come from the fact that disasters are sudden and unpredictable. They disrupt everything around us, making the world feel unsafe and uncertain. But the good news is that you can learn how to manage these emotions and reactions, so you don’t feel overwhelmed when facing uncertainty. The first step is understanding that fear or worry is a natural response. Everyone experiences these emotions during emergencies; they are your body’s way of preparing you to respond. Instead of trying to ignore or push away these feelings, it helps to acknowledge them. Recognising your fear and anxiety allows you to take control over them rather than letting them control you. Simple techniques like taking slow, deep breaths or focusing on something steady around you, like the sound of your breathing or a familiar object, can help calm your mind and body. These small actions tell your brain you are safe, even if the situation around you feels scary (Oxford University, 2020).

Another essential way to manage uncertainty is to prepare ahead of time. You build confidence when you know what to do and have practised emergency plans. This confidence reduces fear because you know you have a plan and can act. Talking about your feelings with family, friends, or teachers can also help. Sharing your worries makes them feel less heavy and reminds you that you are not alone. Having people you trust nearby gives you strength and support. Remember, managing uncertainty doesn’t mean you won’t feel scared—it means you learn how to act even when you are afraid. Focusing on what you can control, like following safety steps or helping others, gives you a sense of purpose and helps keep your mind clear. Building this mental strength before a disaster happens is one of the best ways to stay calm and make good decisions when it really matters (Becque, 2017; KTH, 2023).

4.2 How can I Protect Myself and Others During a Disaster?

You might wonder, “What can I do to keep myself and the people around me safe if a disaster happens?” The answer is that there are clear and practical actions you can take, and knowing these can make a huge difference. First, learn about the types of disasters that might happen where you live. Different disasters require different responses. For example, if there is an earthquake, the safest thing to do is to “drop, cover, and hold on” to protect yourself from falling objects. If there is a flood, you should move to higher ground and avoid walking or driving through floodwaters, which can be deeper and faster-moving than they look. In the case of a fire, leaving the building quickly and staying low to avoid smoke is vital. Knowing these specific actions helps you respond rapidly and safely when a disaster strikes (Expertise France, 2023).

It is also essential to have emergency contact numbers memorised or written down in a safe place. You should know how to call family members, friends, or emergency services. If you see someone needing help, like an elderly neighbour or a person with a disability, assist them calmly and safely. Remember, staying calm yourself helps others stay calm too, which makes the whole situation safer. Having an emergency kit ready is another key step. This kit should include water, snacks, a torch, spare batteries, a first aid kit, and any necessary medicines. Knowing your evacuation routes and safe places, such as community shelters or meeting points. Practising these plans regularly at home or school means you will be ready to act quickly and confidently when needed. By learning and practising these safety steps, you not



only protect yourself but also become a strong support for your family and community during emergencies.

4.3 How to Stay Calm and Safe in a Scary Situation?

When a disaster happens, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and panicked. You might ask yourself, “How do I stop myself from getting too scared or making mistakes?” Staying calm is one of the most important things you can do to keep yourself and others safe. One of the simplest ways to calm your mind and body is to focus on your breathing. Taking slow, deep breaths lowers your heart rate and helps your brain think more clearly. You can also try grounding techniques, which means paying attention to your surroundings to return to the present moment. For example, look around and name five things you can see, four things you can touch, three sounds you hear, two smells, and one taste. This exercise helps distract your mind from fear and brings a sense of control (Oxford University, 2020).

Another key to staying calm is to follow the safety plan you have practised. Knowing exactly what to do and where to go gives you a clear path to follow, which reduces confusion and fear. Avoid listening to rumours or unverified information, as these can cause panic. Instead, rely on trusted adults or official emergency services for instructions. If you get separated from your family or friends, go to the agreed meeting point or contact them as soon as it is safe. Helping others calmly, if you can, also enables you to feel more in control and less scared. Practising these behaviours regularly through drills and discussions means they become automatic when needed. Remember, staying calm is a skill you can learn and improve with practice (Becque, 2017; KTH, 2023).

4.4 Why Following Safety Protocols is so Important?

You might wonder, “Why must I follow all these rules during a disaster? Can’t I just do what feels right?” Following safety protocols is one of the most important things you can do to protect yourself and others. Safety protocols are carefully designed based on expert knowledge and lessons from past disasters. They tell you the safest way to act in different situations and help everyone work together smoothly. When people follow the same rules, emergency responders can do their jobs better, and fewer people get hurt (Expertise France, 2023).

Following protocols also helps reduce panic. When you know exactly what to do, you feel less scared and more in control. This is especially important for young people, who can set a good example by staying calm and following instructions. Safety protocols often include special measures to protect vulnerable people, such as older people, children, or those with disabilities. Following these rules, you help ensure everyone stays safe and gets the help. Remember, safety is a team effort, and your actions matter greatly. When everyone follows the protocols, communities recover faster and become stronger together.

5 Dynamics After the Disaster

5.1 What shall I do to Protect Myself and Others?

In the first moments after a disaster, your actions can make a crucial difference for your safety and those around you. It is normal to feel shocked or frightened, but staying calm and focused



will help you respond effectively. The first step is to quickly assess your immediate surroundings for dangers such as falling objects, fires, unstable structures, or flooded areas. If you are indoors during an earthquake, remember to “drop, cover, and hold on” to protect yourself from injury. If you are outside, move away from buildings, trees, or power lines that may fall or collapse (Expertise France, 2023).

Once you are in a safe spot, check yourself and others for injuries. If someone is hurt, provide basic first aid if you are able, or call for emergency medical help. It is important to reassure those around you, especially children or older adults, who may feel scared or confused. Your calmness can help them feel safer. Avoid unnecessary movement if there is a risk of aftershocks or further hazards, but be prepared to evacuate if authorities instruct you to do so.

Communication is key. Use your phone or other means to contact family members and emergency services, but keep calls brief to avoid overloading networks. If you are with a group, organise yourselves to stay together and support one another. Look out for vulnerable individuals needing extra help, such as people with disabilities or young children. Sharing information and resources, such as water, blankets, or first aid supplies, can save lives.

Remember, your safety is the priority. Don't take unnecessary risks trying to help if it puts you in danger. Instead, seek help from trained responders as soon as possible. By acting quickly, calmly, and responsibly, you contribute to a safer environment for yourself and your community during those critical moments after a disaster (Becque, 2017; Papaginiaki et al., 2022).

5.2 How can I receive help to cope with the psychological impact of a disaster?

Disasters can leave deep emotional scars, and it is essential to recognise that feeling upset, anxious, or overwhelmed after such events is normal. However, sometimes these feelings can persist and develop into more serious conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Knowing when and how to seek help is essential for your recovery.

PTSD symptoms may include flashbacks or nightmares about the disaster, difficulty sleeping, feeling constantly on edge, or avoiding places and people that remind you of the event. You might also experience mood swings, irritability, or trouble concentrating. If these symptoms last for weeks or interfere with your daily life, it is crucial to reach out for professional support (Oxford University, 2020).

Mental health professionals, such as psychologists or counsellors, are trained to help people cope with trauma. They can provide therapies that teach you coping strategies, help you process difficult emotions, and rebuild your sense of safety. Many communities have support centres or helplines specifically for disaster survivors. Schools and youth organisations often offer counselling services as well.

In addition to professional help, talking openly with trusted adults, friends, or family members about your feelings can be healing. Peer support groups where young people share experiences and coping strategies are also valuable. Remember, seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness. Taking care of your mental health is as important as your physical health after a disaster (Becque, 2017; UNICEF, 2023).



5.3 How can I support and assist my friends and Community After a Disaster?

After a disaster, your support can be a powerful force for healing and recovery in your community. You might wonder, “How can I help others when shaken?” The answer is that even small acts of kindness and solidarity make a big difference.

Start by simply being there for your friends and neighbours. Listen to their stories and feelings without judgment. Sometimes, just knowing someone cares can provide comfort and hope. Encourage others to talk about their experiences and reassure them that their feelings are normal.

You can also participate in organised community recovery efforts. This might include helping distribute food and water, cleaning debris, or setting up shelters. Volunteering helps the community and gives you a sense of purpose and control during uncertain times.

Informal support is equally important. Check in regularly with those who may be isolated or vulnerable, such as elderly neighbours or people with disabilities. Share information about available resources, such as food banks, medical clinics, or counselling services.

If you are part of a youth group or school club, consider organising awareness campaigns or fundraising events to support disaster relief. Working together strengthens community bonds and shows that young people are active and responsible contributors to recovery (Papaginiaki et al., 2022; KTH, 2023).

Effective ways for young people to support their peers and community after a disaster encompass a wide range of actions, from emotional support to practical assistance and active participation in recovery efforts. Young people play a vital role in helping their communities heal and rebuild, and their contributions can be both meaningful and empowering.

Firstly, providing emotional support to peers is fundamental. Disasters often cause fear, anxiety, and confusion, especially among young people who may struggle to process what has happened. Encouraging open conversations where young people can express their feelings helps reduce isolation and fosters resilience. Maintaining regular routines, such as attending school or participating in familiar activities, can also provide a sense of normality and security (Headspace, n.d.; Psychology Today, 2025). Additionally, creating safe spaces where young people feel comfortable sharing their experiences and emotions is essential for psychological recovery.

Beyond emotional support, young people can engage in practical relief efforts. Historical examples, such as youth responses to the 2004 tsunami, demonstrate that young volunteers have assisted in diverse ways: setting up shelters, distributing supplies, helping relocate families, educating communities on health and hygiene, and organising recreational activities for camp children (INEE, 2012). These activities aid immediate recovery and empower young people by giving them active community roles. Many youth-led and youth-serving organisations, including Scouts, Red Cross youth sections, and YMCA groups, provide structured opportunities for young people to contribute meaningfully during emergencies.

Moreover, young people’s familiarity with technology and social media enables them to mobilise peers, disseminate vital information, and assist in locating missing persons. This digital engagement complements physical relief efforts and enhances communication within affected communities (INEE, 2012). Young people can also support community awareness by sharing accurate information about risks and recovery resources, helping to counter misinformation and panic.



Fundraising and resource mobilisation are additional ways young people can help. Organising donation drives, awareness campaigns, or community clean-up events fosters solidarity and provides tangible support to those affected. Significantly, these activities contribute to the broader recovery process and help rebuild social cohesion.

Communities can further support young people's involvement by providing life-saving skills, first aid, health promotion, and disaster preparedness training. Equipping young people with these skills enhances their capacity to assist effectively and safely. Recognising and respecting young people's contributions is crucial, as is ensuring they are included in decision-making and recovery planning (INEE, 2012).

In summary, young people support their peers and communities after disasters through emotional care, practical assistance, digital engagement, fundraising, and active participation in recovery efforts. Their involvement not only aids immediate relief but also fosters personal growth, empowerment, and stronger, more resilient communities.

5.4 I want to be a Role Model for Other Young People.

Being a role model means leading by example and inspiring others through your actions and attitude. After a disaster, young people who stay calm, follow safety protocols, and support their communities can influence their peers in powerful ways.

You might think, "How can I make a difference?" Start with small steps: practise preparedness at home, share accurate information with friends, and encourage others to take safety seriously. Your behaviour can motivate others to do the same, creating a ripple effect of positive change.

Role models also show empathy and patience. They listen to others, offer help without judgment, and promote inclusion. Demonstrating resilience and kindness, you help build a supportive environment where everyone feels valued and safe.

Leadership doesn't require notable titles or positions. It begins with everyday choices and consistent actions. When young people take responsibility and act with integrity, they become trusted voices in their communities. This inspires confidence and encourages collective efforts to prepare for and recover from disasters (Becque, 2017).

Being a positive role model for other young people in your community means leading by example, inspiring others through your actions, and encouraging positive behaviours that contribute to a safer, stronger, and more supportive environment. Here are some practical ways you can become a role model and make a meaningful difference:

1. Demonstrate Responsibility and Preparedness

Show others the importance of responsibility by preparing yourself for emergencies and disasters. This includes knowing safety protocols, having an emergency plan, and practising it regularly. When your peers see you taking preparedness seriously, they are more likely to follow your example. Share your knowledge and encourage friends and family to prepare, too. Proactively promoting safety demonstrates leadership and care for the community (Becque, 2017; KTH, 2023).

2. Stay Calm and Positive in Challenging Situations



Your attitude during difficult times can inspire others. When you remain calm, focused, and positive during emergencies or stressful situations, you help reduce fear and panic around you. Practice managing your emotions and encourage others to do the same. Showing resilience and optimism motivates your peers to face challenges with confidence and hope (Oxford University, 2020).

3. Support and Include Others

Be kind, empathetic, and inclusive. Listen to others' concerns without judgment and offer help when you can. Stand against bullying, discrimination, or exclusion in your community. Creating a welcoming and supportive atmosphere encourages others to do the same. Your actions can foster a sense of belonging and safety for everyone.

4. Get Involved and Take Initiative

Participate in community activities, volunteer for disaster preparedness or recovery efforts, and organise awareness campaigns. Taking initiative shows leadership and com

mitment. Encourage your peers to join you and work together to make your community safer and stronger. Collective action amplifies impact and builds solidarity (Papaginiaki et al., 2022).

5. Communicate Effectively and Respectfully

Use your voice to share accurate information, raise risk awareness, and promote safety practices. Through social media, school clubs, or informal conversations, transparent and respectful communication helps spread essential messages. Being a reliable source of information earns trust and influence among your peers (Becque, 2017).

6. Lead by Example Every Day

Remember that being a role model is about significant actions and everyday behaviours. Show respect to others, take care of your environment, and act with integrity. Small, consistent actions build your reputation as someone others can admire and emulate.

By embodying these qualities and behaviours, you become a positive role model who inspires other young people to contribute to a safer, more caring community.

Your leadership helps create a ripple effect of positive change that benefits everyone.

Source: Workshop Yyouth Norway – February 2025

5.5 How can I create a Safe and Supportive Environment

Creating a safe and supportive environment means working with peers to look out for one another and respond effectively during and after disasters. Cooperation and mutual support are key to collective safety.

Start by building trust and open communication within your peer group. Encourage everyone to share their concerns and ideas about safety. When young people feel heard and respected, they are more likely to participate actively in preparedness and response activities.



Develop simple group agreements about how to act in emergencies, such as checking in with each other, sharing resources, or helping those who need extra support. Practise these agreements through drills or role-playing exercises to make them second nature.

Remember that safety is not just physical but also emotional. Creating an environment where everyone feels accepted reduces stress and promotes well-being. Support peers struggling emotionally and encourage them to seek help when needed.

By working together, young people create a network of care that strengthens resilience. Collective action ensures that no one faces disasters alone and that communities recover faster and stronger (KTH, 2023; Papaginiaki et al., 2022).

6 Support from Formal and Informal Institutions

In the past, civil protection was often understood as the immediate response to emergencies, such as firefighting or rescue operations. However, the concept has become a broader **Disaster Risk Management (DRM) system**. This system includes emergency response, *risk prevention*, *preparedness*, *early warning*, *education*, and *long-term recovery*. Modern civil protection focuses on building safer and more resilient communities through cooperation among governments, communities, and individuals.

One key element of this modern approach is the European Union's disaster preparedness and response strategy. The **EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)** was created to strengthen cooperation among member states during disasters, both within and beyond Europe. In 2023, the European Commission introduced the **Union Disaster Resilience Goals 2030**, which aim to improve the ability of countries and communities to prepare for, withstand, and recover from disasters. These goals focus on inclusive risk governance, better local coordination, climate adaptation, and digital tools for early warning systems (European Commission, 2023).

Civil protection today is seen as a *shared responsibility*. It includes formal actors such as national governments, regional authorities, emergency services, and armed forces. However, it also involves informal networks, such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), schools, youth groups, and volunteers. Together, these actors form a collaborative system that protects people, especially vulnerable groups like children and young people. Youth are no longer just seen as passive victims—they are now recognised as active contributors to resilience and recovery (IFRC, 2022; UNDRR, 2022).

6.1 How youth and local communities can receive Support from Institutions

Local authorities have a leading role in managing disasters at the community level. They are responsible for creating risk maps, running public awareness campaigns, ensuring that schools and hospitals are safe, and organising emergency training. Many towns and cities in Europe now have *municipal civil protection plans*, which include measures to support children and adolescents, such as safe school evacuations, emergency counselling services, and family reunification systems after a disaster.

Before a crisis, local authorities can reduce risks by educating young people through school programmes, using social media for awareness campaigns, and creating youth-friendly disaster simulations. For instance, school-based drills help students know how to react calmly and safely during events like earthquakes or fires. During a disaster, local emergency services—such as firefighters, police, and medical teams—act quickly to protect lives, coordinate evacuations, and deliver first aid.

After a crisis, recovery is just as important. Authorities provide affected families with mental health services, temporary housing, and social care. For teenagers and children, these



services are essential in restoring a sense of normality and security. Local youth services, school counsellors, and health centres can work together to offer tailored support, helping young people process trauma and return to everyday activities (Peek, 2008). Involving youth in post-disaster decision-making—such as through school councils or youth parliaments—also helps empower them, giving them a voice in shaping a safer future (UNDRR, 2022).

6.2 How can youth and local communities receive support from Volunteer and informal groups?

While official institutions provide structured and often large-scale support, NGOs and community-based organisations are vital in delivering fast, flexible, and personal emergency assistance—especially in areas where government support is limited or delayed. These groups often include local charities, religious organisations, sports clubs, and informal neighbourhood networks. Because they are deeply connected to the community, they can identify specific needs and reach people who might otherwise be overlooked.



In times of crisis, these organisations coordinate volunteers to deliver food, provide shelter, support families with children, and offer culturally sensitive care for diverse populations. For young people, such groups often organise child-friendly spaces, educational workshops, and peer support groups where they can talk, play, and begin to recover emotionally. For example, after the 2016 earthquake in central Italy, local associations worked alongside civil protection services to provide creative therapy and play-based activities for children in tent camps.

Source: Workshop Instituto IKIGAI Spain – March 2025

Volunteering can also be a powerful tool for young people themselves. When teenagers take part in helping others—by distributing aid, translating for refugees, or raising awareness on social media—they gain a sense of agency and purpose. This active participation strengthens both their own resilience and the social fabric of the community (Fernandez et al., 2006; Twigg, 2009). Encouraging youth leadership in informal support networks helps build a culture of preparedness that goes beyond emergencies, creating stronger bonds and greater mutual trust within society.

6.3 How can I create a Peer Support?

Now, let's talk directly to you. If you're a young person or an educator reading this, you might wonder: "How can I make a real difference? How can I be there for my friends, classmates, or community when things get tough?" The answer lies in building peer support networks—groups of young people who come together to help each other through challenges, disasters, mental health struggles, or everyday stresses.



Creating a peer support network might sound daunting, but it's one of the most powerful ways to foster resilience and solidarity. It starts with training and preparation. You don't need to be an expert, but learning basic skills like active listening, recognising signs of distress, and knowing when to seek professional help can make a huge difference. Many organisations offer free or low-cost mental health first aid or crisis intervention training, which equips you with the tools to support your peers safely and effectively (Moser, 2023).

Next, think about creating a safe and welcoming space—a physical meeting place, like a community centre or school club, or a virtual space like a private social media group or chat app. The key is to foster an environment where everyone feels respected, heard, and free from judgment. Remember, peer support is about empathy and connection, not fixing problems or giving advice unless you're trained. Sometimes, just being there to listen can be the most significant help.

It's also essential to build an inclusive and diverse network. Reach out to young people from different backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. Diversity enriches the group and ensures that everyone's unique challenges and strengths are recognised. Shared interests—like music, sports, or art—can be great ways to connect and build peer trust.

Finally, empower each other. Encourage members to take on leadership roles, organise activities, and share what they learn with others. Peer support networks thrive when everyone feels ownership and pride in their community. And remember, by supporting others, you're also supporting your wellbeing. Helping friends through tough times builds resilience, confidence, and a sense of belonging that can carry you through life's challenges (Mental Health America, 2025).

So, if you're thinking about starting a peer support group, know that you're stepping into a significant and incredibly impactful role. You're not alone—resources, organisations, and people are ready to help you. Together, young people can create a web of support that strengthens communities and transforms lives.



7 enhances community resilience andThe Active Role of Young People

Source: Workshop Kk Academy Estonia – March 2025

Young people are not merely passive victims in the face of disasters; they are vital actors who can significantly contribute to every stage of disaster management—preparedness, response, and recovery. Their energy, creativity, and unique perspectives make them powerful agents of change within their communities and societies. This section explores how youth can actively engage in disaster risk reduction, why advocating for safety for all is crucial, and how to sensitise peers and vulnerable groups effectively.

7.1 How Can Young People Contribute to Preparedness, Response, and Recovery at the Societal Level?

Young people possess immense potential to influence disaster management at the societal level, contributing meaningfully across all phases: preparedness, response, and recovery. Their involvement not only enhances community resilience but also fosters leadership skills and civic engagement that benefit society long-term.

In the preparedness phase, youth can be critical in raising awareness about risks and



promoting safety behaviours within their families, schools, and communities. They often bring fresh ideas and technological savvy, using social media and digital platforms to disseminate vital information quickly and widely (UNDRR, 2023). For example, youth-led initiatives have successfully mapped community hazards, developed disaster preparedness kits, and organised drills engaging peers and adults (Youth.gov, 2023). By participating in local disaster planning committees or youth councils, young people can ensure that their unique perspectives and needs are included in community strategies, making plans more inclusive and effective.



During disaster response, young people frequently step forward as volunteers, helping with search and rescue, first aid, distribution of relief materials, and communication efforts. Their familiarity with technology enables them to mobilise peers rapidly and trace missing persons through social networks, thus enhancing the efficiency of emergency operations (NIDM, 2021). Furthermore, youth often serve as trusted messengers within their communities, helping counter misinformation and providing emotional support to affected individuals.

In the recovery phase, young people contribute to rebuilding efforts, psychosocial support, and advocacy for sustainable development practices that reduce future risks. Their involvement in recovery accelerates community healing and empowers them with skills and confidence that promote lifelong resilience (ScienceDirect, 2017). Youth-focused government programmes, such as AmeriCorps NCCC in the United States, provide structured opportunities for young people to engage in disaster recovery projects, combining service with skill-building (Youth.gov, 2023).

To access institutional support, young people should familiarise themselves with local emergency contact numbers and services, such as civil protection agencies, health departments, and youth-serving organisations. Many governments and NGOs offer youth-specific training and resources that prepare young people to act effectively before, during, and after disasters. Engaging with these institutions enhances individual preparedness and strengthens community-wide resilience (UNDRR, 2023).

7.2 Why should I Promote Safety for all?

Promoting safety for all young people is a fundamental advocacy issue because disasters disproportionately affect youth, especially those from marginalised or vulnerable groups. Ensuring that every young person's right to safety and protection is recognised and upheld is essential to building equitable, resilient societies.

Advocacy for safety means amplifying the voices of young people in decision-making processes related to disaster risk management. Despite their critical role and unique vulnerabilities, youth are often excluded from policy discussions and planning forums. This exclusion denies them the opportunity to influence decisions directly impacting their lives and futures (WCDRR, 2014). By promoting inclusive participation, we acknowledge young people as rights holders and capable contributors who deserve to be heard.

Moreover, advocating for safety for all involves addressing systemic inequalities that increase disaster risk among specific youth populations, such as those living in poverty, with disabilities, or from minority communities. These groups often face barriers to accessing information, resources, and support during emergencies (PrepareCenter, 2023). Promoting safety for all means working to remove these barriers and ensuring that disaster preparedness and response efforts are culturally sensitive, accessible, and inclusive.

When you promote safety for all, you contribute to a culture of care and solidarity that recognises the dignity and worth of every young person. This approach saves lives and fosters social cohesion and justice, essential for sustainable resilience.

7.3 How can I Sensitise Peers and Other Vulnerable Groups?

If you are a young person or an educator, sensitising peers and vulnerable groups about disaster risks and safety may feel challenging. Still, it is one of the most impactful ways to strengthen community resilience. Here are some strategies to help you lead this vital work with empathy and effectiveness.



First, start by listening and understanding. Every community and peer group has experiences, fears, and knowledge about disasters. Take time to listen to your peers, especially those vulnerable or marginalised. Understanding their perspectives will help you tailor your messages in ways that resonate and feel relevant.

Next, use engaging and accessible communication methods. Young people respond well to dynamic approaches such as storytelling, interactive workshops, social media campaigns, and creative arts like music or drama. For example, creating short videos or infographics that explain how to prepare for floods or heatwaves can capture attention and be easily shared (UNDRR, 2023). Remember, your creativity is a powerful tool to make complex information understandable and memorable.

Building trust and safe spaces where peers feel comfortable discussing their concerns and asking questions is also crucial. Encourage open dialogue without judgment, and be patient if some hesitate to engage first. Peer support groups or school clubs can serve as excellent platforms for these conversations.

When working with vulnerable groups, such as youth with disabilities or those from minority backgrounds, ensure your approach is inclusive and respectful. This might mean adapting materials to different languages, using accessible formats, or collaborating with community leaders who have established trust. Inclusion not only improves the effectiveness of your message but also empowers those who are often overlooked.

Finally, lead by example. Show your commitment to safety by practising preparedness behaviours and encouraging others to do the same. Sharing your experiences and challenges creates a sense of solidarity that motivates others to participate.

Sensitising your peers and vulnerable groups is about sharing information and inspiring confidence, empathy, and collective action. Your efforts can create ripple effects that strengthen your community's ability to face disasters together.

8 Vulnerable Categories in Disaster Scenarios

8.1 Identifying Vulnerable Groups: Who Is at Higher Risk?

This section provides an overview of the different categories of vulnerable individuals, such as children, individuals with disabilities, people with chronic illnesses, socio-economically disadvantaged groups, and those experiencing social exclusion.

Vulnerable groups are those individuals or populations who face greater risks and challenges in emergencies or crises, due to specific characteristics or circumstances. These groups are frequently and disproportionately affected by natural hazards, artificial or climate-induced disasters, and global health emergencies. Several factors may intensify disaster vulnerability, such as a lack of training and awareness, existing social or financial inequalities, an inaccessible building environment, etc. The key categories of vulnerable individuals are listed below.

Categories of Vulnerable Groups

1. Children

This category usually includes newborns to five and six to eighteen (school-aged children ages 6-13 years and adolescents of 14-18 years). Children, especially infants and young children, are particularly at risk due because they are depended on caregivers or



personal assistants, they have limited ability to understand the emergency messages or to respond to crises, and because their physiological susceptibility, such as dehydration, exposure to heat or cold; they are more likely to get sick or severely injured, either to lose too much body heat.

In emergencies, children may face increased risks of physical injury, psychological trauma, separation from family members, and neglect. Their needs for nutrition, health care, and protection from exploitation (e.g., trafficking, abuse) are critical. Children with disabilities may have special healthcare needs or difficulties in communicating. Emergency shelters need to be safe spaces for children, in terms of being equipped with child-friendly facilities, providing special health services, including vaccinations and access to pediatric care. They must also protect themselves from exploitation and trafficking.

2. Elderly

This category usually includes people over 65, which can be divided into youngest-old (ages 65-74), middle-old (ages 75-84), and oldest-old (ages more than 85). This group often encounters mobility limitations or has multiple health problems, so they may struggle to evacuate quickly or care for themselves in emergencies. They may struggle in perceiving the early warning messages due to their hard-of-hearing or mental problems, which may reduce their risk perception, putting them at higher risk.

They may also be more likely to suffer from heat or cold stress, dehydration, or chronic health conditions exacerbated by stress. Additionally, isolation can be an issue, particularly if they live alone or depend on caregivers or personal assistants. They usually need assistance with evacuation or sheltering in place; at shelters, they need access to essential health services, including care for chronic conditions and mobility aids. Also, social support networks are necessary to combat isolation and loneliness during crises.

3. Individuals with Disabilities or Chronic Diseases

Persons with disabilities face intensified risks in emergencies due to physical, communication, or social barriers that may obstruct them from accessing essential services, evacuating safely, or receiving timely assistance. It is important to mention that there are disabilities which may be invisible, such as the Chronic Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs), called “hidden disabilities”. These conditions may include cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes or chronic lung illnesses, and usually they are the result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behavioural factors. Individuals with chronic diseases are at increased risk because their health status may require continuous care, medication, or medical interventions, which may be disrupted during emergencies.

According to the above, the disability sub-groups are sorted into the following:

Disability Sub-groups:

3.1 People with movement disability, e.g. lower or upper limb impairment and/or body disability; Wheelchair users; Users of walkers or canes.

3.2 People with sensorial disability; Deaf, Blind; Deafblind.

3.3 People with cognitive disabilities/Neurodevelopmental Disorders; Intellectual Disabilities; Communication Disorders; Autism spectrum disorder; Learning disorder; Down syndrome (Neurogenetic disorder) etc.

3.4 People with Schizophrenia and Other Psychotic Disorders; Depressive disorder; Bipolar disorder; Anxiety disorder; Epilepsy, etc.

3.5 People with Neurodegenerative disorders or neurological problems; Alzheimer disease (dementia); Parkinson's disease; Multiple sclerosis; Fibromialgia etc.

3.6 Substance-Related and Addictive Disorders; Alcohol use disorder; Drug addiction, etc.

3.7 People with other diseases; COVID-19; Hidden disabilities (i.e. early-stage illness such as dementia, SLA, or chemotherapy patients); Chronic disease, e.g., respiratory problems (asthma), high blood pressure disorders, diabetes, allergies, etc.

3.8 People after surgery or accidents; Temporary disability (movement, sensorial, etc.); Permanent disability (movement, sensorial, etc.)



Individuals with disabilities may be dependent on specific assistance, medical equipment or medication, which is vital for them. Also, their ability to receive emergency warnings and respond to evacuations can be hampered by the lack of accessible infrastructure or communication systems and alarm messages (e.g., sign language, braille, or easy-to-read formats). These aspects must be considered when designing emergency shelters with inclusive criteria.

4. Pregnant Women and New Mothers

Pregnant women and new mothers are particularly at high risk during an emergency, since they have specific health and medical needs that should be addressed. This includes access to prenatal care, delivery services, and postpartum support. They and their babies can be exposed to serious consequences after a catastrophic event, e.g. children born to mothers who experienced such an event may have a different cognitive, neurobehavioral, psychosocial, and physiological profile; they can be more reactive, anxious, fearful, or likely to be aggressive.

Moreover, pregnant women usually have a more sensitive immune system, making them more vulnerable to diseases, and they have demanding nutritional needs. New mothers may also struggle with infant care needs in stressful or unsafe environments. It is essential to consider safe sheltering regarding access to maternal and child health services, including prenatal care, secure delivery, and postnatal care, as well as access to hygiene supplies and safe spaces for breastfeeding or support for emotional and mental well-being.

5. Caregivers and Personal Assistants

Caregivers support people in need, such as people with disabilities of all ages (children, adults, older people, or individuals with chronic diseases). They can be family members, relatives, friends, or people from the person in need's close network. Also, personal assistants can aid those usually employed for this task. They can be trained to handle medical responsibilities and the specific needs of the person they assist.

Generally, caregivers and personal assistants carry the load of supporting the people in need that they take care of. In an emergency, they must decide effectively and act promptly, not only for themselves but also for their assistants, which puts them at higher risk.

6. Tourists, foreign workers/exchange students

Tourists and foreign workers are generally at greater risk during a disaster, primarily due to language barriers. Their limited understanding of the local language can hinder their ability to comprehend emergency messages, signs, labels, and evacuation plans if they are not translated. As a result, they may struggle to reach a safe refuge area in time.

The same limitations exist for students who have visited a foreign country through educational international exchange programs, such as ERASMUS+ (European Union). For Youth Exchanges, the age range can be from 13 to 30; hence, children are included in this category, which is considered a vulnerable group, as mentioned above.

7. Homeless

People who are homeless or living in informal settlements are often the first and most severely affected group during disasters because they are directly exposed to hazards, such as hurricanes, heavy rain, wildfire, etc. They lack stable and safe housing, and usually they have no access to basic services, such as sanitation, healthcare, or food, besides their social isolation and exclusion.

Their lack of identification or documentation may also hinder their access to aid. It is essential to consider their access to emergency shelters and safe spaces and provide healthcare, mental health, and social services to help with reintegration and recovery after the crisis.

8. Discriminated people



People who face discrimination in disasters, due to factors such as gender, sexual identity, or nationality, may be at significant risk. This is particularly critical when multiple forms of vulnerability intersect, such as gender combined with disability, e.g. women with disabilities may encounter several barriers based on their disability and their gender, including problems in evacuation, accessing health care facilities, etc. It is worth mentioning that the majority of caregivers for persons with disabilities are women, who may also face obstacles to quick evacuation and accessing disaster relief services.

These groups may face violence, discrimination, or neglect during emergencies, particularly if social services or shelters are not inclusive. Their needs may be overlooked or disregarded during preparedness efforts. They may also fear being targeted or rejected by responders.

9. People without a social safety network/Internally displaced people

People without a social safety network are considered socio-economically disadvantaged, usually living in poverty and lacking the resources to prepare for, or respond effectively to emergencies. They may have limited access to healthcare, safe housing, or transportation, making it harder for them to evacuate or recover, putting them at higher risk.

“Internally Displaced Persons” (IDPs) are people who were forced or obliged to leave their homes because of particular circumstances like war, violence, human rights violations, or disasters. Still, they have not crossed the border into another country. These individuals are likelier to live in hazardous areas (e.g., flood zones, informal settlements) with inadequate infrastructure. They may also lack financial resources to access basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and medical care during a crisis; children and youth of these groups are at even higher risk in disasters.

10. Refugees, Migrants, Asylum seekers and Undocumented Persons

Refugees are persons who have been forced to flee their home country because they were at risk of serious harm—such as persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group; though, there are some eligibility criteria to be accepted as a refugee in another country. Migrants are people who have left their countries purely for economic reasons. Asylum seekers are the ones whose claims for residency have not yet been finally decided on by the country in which the claims were submitted. Some undocumented persons may live in another country without official permission.

These groups often face compounded vulnerabilities, as they may already live in precarious conditions due to displacement or status. They may lack legal rights, documentation, and access to social services. Language barriers, lack of familiarity with the local legal or healthcare systems, and discrimination can prevent them from accessing the resources they need during an emergency, putting them at higher risk. Also, undocumented people are challenging to identify during the search and rescue process because they don't belong to any official databases.

11. Indigenous People

Indigenous people are the original inhabitants of a region, living there long before modern states or outside populations arrived. They have distinct cultural traditions, languages, and ways of life closely tied to their land and environment. Indigenous communities are often marginalised, face discrimination, and may be displaced from their lands, making them especially vulnerable to disasters or climate change impacts.

Their cultural practices and traditional knowledge may also be overlooked in mainstream disaster preparedness strategies. They may lack access to modern infrastructure (such as roads, healthcare, or communication systems) and may experience loss of land, cultural identity, and social cohesion.



8.2 What are the challenges for Vulnerable Groups in Disaster Situations?

A discussion on the unique challenges these groups face before, during, and after a disaster, including mobility constraints, communication barriers, and heightened emotional distress.

Vulnerable groups face unique and often compounded challenges before, during, and after disasters. These challenges can make it harder for them to respond effectively to emergencies and recover afterwards. These challenges often arise from physical, social, economic, and systemic vulnerabilities. Based on the key categories of vulnerable individuals identified in the previous paragraph, the respective challenges are indicated before, during, and after a disaster.

1. Children

- **Before a Disaster:**
 - **Lack of Preparedness:** Children may not be included in family preparedness plans, and their specific needs (such as food, medicine, and emotional support) may not be considered.
 - **Limited Risk Awareness:** Children are unaware of risks and have limited interaction with the environment in terms of understanding when they are in danger; this is especially true for children between the ages of 2 and 3.
 - **Dependence on Caregivers (parents, relatives, babysitters or other helpers):** Children rely entirely on adults for care and protection, making them dependent on others to ensure their safety and survival. Usually, their supportive members are not adequately trained in emergency preparedness or response, which is a vulnerability driver.
- **During a Disaster:**
 - **Constraints in Perceiving Warning Messages:** Children may have no or limited understanding of emergency alarms and early warning messages. Also, it may be difficult to follow guidelines and cooperate with rescuers.
 - **Mobility Constraints:** Infants and toddlers are especially affected, as they cannot evacuate and reach safe places alone.
 - **Separation from Family:** In disasters, children can become separated from their families, especially if evacuation plans do not consider child safety or if there is insufficient identification and tracking.
 - **Psychological Impact:** The trauma of experiencing disasters, such as witnessing violence or losing family members, can have acute emotional effects on children.
- **After a Disaster:**
 - **Increased Vulnerability to Exploitation:** Children may be at greater risk of abuse, trafficking, or exploitation, especially if they are orphaned or separated from their families.
 - **Emotional and Psychological Distress:** Children may experience Post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, or depression, but psychological services may be inadequate or inaccessible for them. Regular and ongoing support by child psychologists should be considered.
 - **Safe and child-friendly Emergency Shelters:** Emergency shelters must be safe and supportive environments for children, offering child-friendly facilities, providing food suitable for consumption by kids 0-5 years/clean water, specialised health services, such as vaccinations and pediatric care, and protection from exploitation and trafficking.
 - **Financial support needs:** After a disaster, children have specific financial support needs to ensure their health, safety, education, and emotional well-being.



2. Elderly

- **Before a Disaster:**
 - **Physical and Cognitive Limitations:** Older people may face health problems, such as arthritis and heart disease, that limit their ability to prepare for or respond to disasters. Also, cognitive or sensory impairments can reduce their risk perception capability.
 - **Poverty:** Usually, older people live on fixed or low incomes (e.g., pensions or none at all), making it hard to afford emergency supplies, insurance, or home repairs. They may live in older or unsafe buildings that are more likely to be damaged during disasters and may not have the money to reinforce or *evacuate*.
- **During a Disaster:**
 - **Isolation:** Elderly individuals may live alone or have limited social support, which makes it harder for them to receive help during an emergency, to evacuate or reach safe shelters.
 - **Mobility and Evacuation Challenges:** Older adults may have difficulty evacuating or reaching shelters alone due to mobility issues, frailty, or reliance on medical equipment. They may also lack knowledge of how to react in emergencies, make wrong decisions, and encounter difficulty following the authorities' guidelines or cooperating with rescuers.
 - **Health Complications:** The stress of a disaster can exacerbate age-related health issues, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease.
- **After a Disaster:**
 - **Mental Health Problems:** Older adults may experience increased isolation, depression, or anxiety after a disaster, especially if they lose loved ones or their homes. Ongoing support from psychologists/psychiatrists should be considered.
 - **Safe Shelters:** Shelters need access to essential health services and medicine, including care for chronic conditions and mobility aids. Social support networks are also crucial to combat isolation and loneliness.
 - **Difficulty Accessing Services:** Elderly individuals may find it challenging to access recovery services, particularly if they are not mobile or do not have family or caregivers to assist them.
 - **Financial needs:** Older adults need financial help not just to survive, but to recover their independence, manage their health, and restore a safe, stable living environment.

3. Individuals with Disabilities or Chronic Diseases

- **Before a Disaster:**
 - **Inaccessible Disaster Preparedness Plans and Discrimination:** Persons with disabilities are rarely included in disaster planning processes, leading to systems that don't meet their needs. Hence, most of the disaster preparedness plans are not designed to be accessible (e.g., not available in braille or sign language)
 - **Inadequate Housing or Infrastructure:** Persons with disabilities may live in housing that is not accessible in emergencies (e.g., no ramps, narrow doorways, or inadequate bathroom facilities). In many countries, disability allowances cannot cover their daily needs.
 - **Limited Access to Healthcare:** People with chronic diseases may struggle to access healthcare services during regular times, and during a disaster, access to medical care and medications may be even more limited.
- **During a Disaster:**



- **Mobility Challenges:** Persons with physical disabilities may have difficulty evacuating promptly, particularly with no accessible transportation or evacuation routes. They can be left behind.
- **Communication Barriers:** People with hearing, visual, or speech impairments may not be able to receive emergency alerts or warnings if they are not available in accessible formats (e.g., sign language, visual notifications, or braille). Also, they may have problems communicating with the rescuers.
- **Dependence on Caregivers:** Individuals with disabilities or persons with chronic diseases may depend on caregivers or assistants, who may be unavailable, injured, or overwhelmed during a disaster; usually, they lack training on how to react in emergencies.
- **Medication and Treatment Disruptions:** People with chronic illnesses may need daily medications or ongoing treatments. A disaster could disrupt supply chains or prevent them from accessing vital medicines or health services.
- **Exacerbation of Health Conditions:** The stress, exposure, or physical conditions of the disaster could worsen existing health conditions, making them more susceptible to complications.
- **After a Disaster:**
 - **Difficulty Accessing Shelters and Services:** Many emergency shelters may not be accessible to individuals with disabilities, and services such as medical care or recovery programs may not be equipped to address their specific needs.
 - **Ongoing Care Needs:** Persons with disabilities or chronic diseases may require specialised medical equipment, therapies, or medications that are difficult to access during and after a disaster.
 - **Financial needs:** After a disaster, persons with disabilities or chronic diseases often face greater challenges and have specific financial support needs to ensure their safety, health, and recovery. For example, they should promptly regain their personal assistive equipment, such as their wheelchair or cane, if damaged. Recovery efforts may focus on immediate survival and infrastructure rebuilding, while long-term medical care and chronic illness management might be overlooked.

4. Pregnant Women and New Mothers

- **Before a Disaster**
 - **Limited Mobility:** In later stages of pregnancy or after childbirth, movement may be complex, making evacuation slower or impossible without help.
 - **Sensitivity:** Pregnant Women and New Mothers usually have a sensitive immune system and significant nutritional needs.
 - **Lack of Emergency Planning:** Many disaster plans don't specifically include the needs of pregnant women or mothers with infants (e.g., prenatal care access, infant supplies)
- **During a Disaster**
 - **Physical and Medical Risk:** Higher risk of injury or pregnancy complications due to stress, unsafe conditions, or lack of medical attention. Interruptions in access to prenatal or postnatal care, including emergency obstetric services.
 - **Lack of Access to essential material:** May struggle to find diapers, clean water, sanitary products, or medications.
 - **Difficulty to Evacuate:** Wheelchair or car might be needed to evacuate and reach shelter, usually with assistance.
 - **Separation from Family:** During evacuation or sheltering, people may be separated from partners, caregivers, or children, increasing their vulnerability and emotional stress.



- **After a Disaster**
 - **Difficult Access to Health Services:** Clinics and hospitals may be damaged or overwhelmed, reducing access to vital maternal care, vaccinations, and postpartum services.
 - **Mental Stress:** The trauma of the disaster, combined with the stress of caring for a newborn or facing an uncertain future, can lead to **postpartum** depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Ongoing support by psychologists/sociologists should be considered.
 - **Unsafe or Unsuitable Shelters:** Emergency shelters may lack privacy, clean conditions, food, water, and safe spaces for breastfeeding or infant care. Also, they may face a higher risk of abuse or exploitation.

5. Caregivers and Personal Assistants

- **Before a Disaster**
 - **Lack of Inclusion in Disaster Planning:** Caregivers are rarely included in official preparedness efforts, leaving them without guidance or resources.
 - **Responsibility for caring for other people:** They depend on the people they support and are responsible for taking care of them.
 - **Lack of Emergency Guidelines:** Emergency instructions often lack clear guidance for caregivers on what actions to take or what assistance is available.
- **During a Disaster**
 - **Lack of Training for Emergencies:** They don't know how to react in emergencies and how to support the people they assist, leading to wrong decision-making and an inability to help the rescuers.
 - **Physical and Emotional Overload:** May have to manage their own safety and the safety of those they care for, often without help or backup.
 - **Health and Safety Risks:** Disasters increase exposure to illness, injury, and exhaustion, especially for caregivers. They may be left behind as the persons they support.
- **After a Disaster**
 - **Mental Health and Medical Support:** Constant stress or trauma from the disaster can lead to burnout, anxiety, or depression in caregivers. Ongoing support by psychologists or sociologists should be considered. Medical support in case of injury should be provided at shelters.
 - **Financial Stress:** Caregivers may lose their income during a disaster and face extra costs and responsibilities, putting them at risk of severe economic stress. For example, after a disaster, the person they care for may need more help (because of stress, loss of services, or injuries), and their workplace can be damaged or closed.
 - **Disrupted Access to Support Services:** Day programs, therapy services, and community supports may be shut down or inaccessible, increasing caregivers' strain.

6. Tourists, foreign workers/exchange students

- **Before a Disaster**
 - **Communication Barriers:** May not understand local emergency instructions or safety guidelines for disaster preparedness due to language differences
 - **Lack of Local Knowledge:** Unfamiliar with local geography, shelters, or emergency protocols.
 - **Limited Social Networks:** Often isolated from local support systems (friends, family, institutions).



- **During a Disaster**
 - **Transportation Constraints:** Difficulty in finding transport or safe evacuation routes. Lack of personal transportation means.
 - **Communication barriers:** Limited interaction with the rescuers due to language or cultural specificities.
 - **Fear of Deportation for workers:** Foreign workers may avoid seeking help due to fear of losing jobs or visa status.
- **After a Disaster**
 - **Emotional Distress & Isolation:** Fear, confusion, and anxiety from being in a foreign place without help. May not know how to access relief services or communicate their needs. Need to contact relatives abroad through the embassies of their home countries.
 - **Financial support:** May need financial support in cooperation with their Country.
 - **Safe and Accessible Sheltering:** Students should be able to reach shelters and have free access to food, water, and medicine. Special care should be taken for students under 18 years old.

7. Homeless

- **Before a Disaster**
 - **No sheltering:** Directly exposed to environmental hazards, with no permanent, safe place to stay or store emergency supplies. Disabilities, chronic physical conditions, and behavioural health needs may overlap.
 - **Exclusion from Planning:** They are not considered in official disaster preparedness programs.
 - **Poverty and Social isolation:** Poor lifestyle, limited access to information and lack of social networks. Lack of safety culture.
- **During a Disaster**
 - **Severe Mobility Constraints:** Difficulty or inability to evacuate by themselves and reach safe places; no transport or shelter access.
 - **Communication Barriers:** Some may not have phones, radios, or the internet to receive alerts or updates; information and early warning are not easily accessible. Communication and interaction with rescuers may be difficult.
- **After a Disaster**
 - **Increased Vulnerability to Exploitation:** May face violence or exploitation in overcrowded shelters.
 - **Mental Health Strain:** May face high levels of trauma, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder; ongoing support by psychologists/sociologists should be considered.
 - **Financial and Medical support:** Homeless people often lack the documentation needed to apply for aid, and they are overlooked in recovery planning. They may need healthcare and medical support in case of injury. Reintegration programs should be considered to recover with dignity and avoid being left further behind.

8. Discriminated people

- **Before a Disaster**
 - **Excluded from Planning Processes:** Emergency plans often don't reflect the needs of people who are discriminated against due to their gender, sexual identity, nationality, religion, e.g. women, or ethnic minorities are often excluded from education or training.
- **During a Disaster**



- **Mobility and Communication Barriers:** During evacuation, people may feel unsafe moving or travelling alone in mixed groups, and it may be challenging to interact with the rescuers.
- **After a Disaster**
 - **Unsafe or Hostile Shelters:** Risk of harassment or violence in shelters that lack inclusive or protective environments.
 - **Unequal Access to Aid:** May face discrimination in aid distribution, documentation requirements, or housing access.
 - **Emotional Distress:** Trauma from disaster is amplified by social exclusion, stigma, or violence; ongoing support by psychologists or sociologists should be considered.

9. People without a social safety network/Internally displaced people

- **Before a Disaster:**
 - **Lack of Resources:** May often lack the financial means to prepare for a disaster, such as purchasing emergency supplies, securing insurance, or evacuating in advance.
 - **Living in Hazardous Areas:** They are more likely to live in areas prone to disasters (e.g., river basins, informal settlements, or unsafe constructions) that are difficult to approach.
- **During a Disaster:**
 - **Limited Evacuation Capability:** They may not have access to transportation means to evacuate or reach safe shelters alone—no support from relatives, friends or other people.
 - **Communication barriers:** Difficulty perceiving or comprehending the emergency messages/alarms due to a lack of prior training. Difficulty communicating and interacting with the rescuers
- **After a Disaster:**
 - **Barriers to Recovery:** They may lack resources, social support, financial aid, or insurance access. They may also face barriers to accessing food, clean water, or medical care.
 - **Long-Term Economic Impact:** The financial losses from a disaster can further entrench poverty, making it even harder to recover in the long term.

10. Refugees, Migrants, Asylum seekers and Undocumented Persons

- **Before a Disaster:**
 - **Legal and Documentation Barriers:** They may lack legal documentation, preventing them from accessing emergency services or being included in evacuation plans. They may also have a limited understanding of disaster risks.
- **During a Disaster:**
 - **Language Barriers:** Difficulty in perceiving the emergency messages/alarms because they don't understand the language. May struggle to follow the authorities' guidelines and communicate/ interact with the rescuers.
 - **Limited Evacuation Capability:** Difficulty or inability to evacuate themselves and reach accessible shelters.
 - **Limitations in Search operation:** Difficult to identify during the search and rescue process because they are undocumented (do not exist in databases)
- **After a Disaster:**
 - **Limited access to aid:** Due to their status and lack of recognition, they may struggle to access long-term recovery support, such as housing, healthcare, or



legal assistance; legal support to get valid documents for social integration should be considered.

- **Continued Marginalisation:** These groups may be at risk of being further marginalised, facing challenges in rebuilding their lives due to their displaced status. Social welfare is required.

11. Indigenous People

- **Before a Disaster:**
 - **Neglect of Traditional Knowledge:** Indigenous peoples' unique knowledge and practices regarding environmental hazards may not be integrated into local disaster preparedness plans.
 - **Displacement or Land Loss:** Indigenous communities may already be displaced or have lost land and resources, rendering them more vulnerable to disasters.
- **During a Disaster:**
 - **Exclusion from Disaster Response:** They may be overlooked in the disaster response process, and their needs might not be understood or addressed. There are restrictions on reaching shelter.
 - **Cultural and Linguistic Barriers:** Language differences and cultural misunderstandings may prevent effective communication and assistance.
- **After a Disaster:**
 - **Loss of Cultural Heritage:** Disasters can damage or destroy culturally significant land and property, leading to loss of identity and heritage.
 - **Delayed Recovery:** Indigenous communities may face delays in recovery, as their unique needs may be overlooked in national recovery plans.

8.3 How can I contribute to Ensure Support for All?

Practical guidance on how young people and communities can ensure that preparedness strategies are inclusive and account for the specific needs of vulnerable individuals.

Youth play a critical role in disaster preparedness and response, and their involvement is not just helpful but necessary because they are both the present and the future of our communities. They are powerful communicators, using social media, etc., and have many peer networks, bringing innovation and technical skills compared to prior generations.

They generally have the intuition and perception to understand the challenges of the climate crisis and the associated risks, which threaten both the planet and their present and future lives.

Source: Workshop PUI France – February 2025

As the generation most affected by long-term environmental consequences, they could be motivated to act and drive innovative solutions in disaster preparedness and climate resilience. Societies can build disaster resilience by actively engaging youth in planning, decision-making, and response efforts.

Here are some practical steps for youth to take to be part of the disaster resilience cycle:

1. Educate Yourself and Raise Self-Awareness

- **Understand vulnerabilities:** Learn how disasters disproportionately affect certain groups, e.g., children, those with limited mobility, those with language barriers, and those with financial constraints. Relevant projects can be helpful, such as CUIDAR



(Cultures of Disaster Resilience among children and young people), CORE (sScience & human factOr for Resilient society), YAPS—Raising Young People’s Awareness on Preparedness and Self-Protection, and LEAP 2—Life on Earth and Risk Prevention.

- **Learn about Emergency Preparedness and Response:** Join youth forums or attend meetings of community preparedness programs. Be informed about disaster preparedness and response-related workshops, webinars, or campaigns of the [Council of Europe](#) and the [UNDRR](#) to build your risk knowledge.
- **Act now to help protect your family:** Prepare your emergency evacuation plan and kit based on civil protection guidelines and interact with your family members.

2. Engage through Volunteerism

- **Contribute to emergency shelters and food aid programs:** Volunteer with groups that assist vulnerable individuals during crises and promote solidarity. Contact relevant organisations like the Red Cross, UNICEF, Save the Children, Doctors Without Borders, etc.
- **Join advocacy groups:** Team up with groups that advocate for human rights in disasters, such as disability rights organisations or children and refugee support groups, to co-develop action plans. Advocate for preparedness plans that explicitly address accessibility, such as evacuation routes suitable for wheelchairs, accessible and safe shelters, etc.
- **Assist in drills and training:** Participate in or help run inclusive disaster drills with the involved stakeholders and parties in your schools or community. Involve students or individuals with disabilities.

3. Level Up Disaster Response with Gamification for All

- **Create or Play Disaster Simulation Games:** You can design or participate in creating mobile apps or online games that simulate disaster scenarios (e.g., earthquakes, floods, and wildfires). Provide subtitles, visual cues, or vibration feedback for players who are deaf or hard of hearing, or include features such as screen readers, high-contrast modes, or audio descriptions for players with visual impairment.
- **Organise Virtual Disaster Response Challenges:** You can organise virtual competitions or hackathons where teams should develop solutions for real-world disaster preparedness needs, like developing evacuation plans or designing accessible early warning systems.
- **Design and Share Educational Disaster Quiz Apps:** You can develop quiz apps or interactive educational tools on disaster preparedness. These apps can include questions about emergency protocols, first aid, and risk awareness.

4. Inclusion Starts with You! Spread the Word

- **Be a role model:** In your daily life, give a good example by understanding how others feel, especially those facing difficulties. Pay attention when someone speaks, especially those whose voices are often ignored. Encourage and support peers who cope with disabilities, language barriers, or other challenges.
- **Disseminate via High-Visibility Channels:** Use social media, school forums, or community groups to exchange ideas, share inclusive preparedness messages, and stay updated. Share stories from vulnerable individuals to highlight their needs, challenges, and possible solutions.
- **Educate others:** Teach classmates and community members why inclusion matters in emergencies. Motivate them to form groups focusing on fairness and inclusion during emergency response efforts.



9 Practical Resources and Preparedness Tools

Effective disaster preparedness relies on accessible, practical tools that empower individuals and groups to take proactive steps before, during, and after emergencies. This section provides comprehensive guidance on personal and group preparedness checklists, developing emergency plans, accessing critical resources, and monitoring preparedness efforts. These tools are designed to be inclusive and user-friendly, supporting young people and their educators in building resilience and fostering a safety culture.

9.1 Personal and Group Preparedness Checklists

Preparedness checklists are essential instruments that help ensure no critical step is overlooked when preparing for emergencies. The European Commission, as part of its Preparedness Union Strategy, has emphasised the importance of such tools to boost citizens' readiness for crises ranging from natural disasters to industrial accidents and hybrid threats (European Commission, 2025).

A personal preparedness checklist typically includes items and actions to help individuals sustain themselves and their families for at least 72 hours during a crisis. The EU recommends assembling an emergency kit containing essentials such as non-perishable food, clean water, copies of important identity documents, basic first aid supplies, flashlights, batteries, and necessary medications (Euronews, 2025). Additionally, individuals should keep a list of emergency contacts and have a plan for communication and meeting points in case of separation.

For group or community preparedness, checklists expand to include coordination tasks such as identifying vulnerable members, establishing communication chains, assigning roles, and conducting regular drills. Schools, youth organisations, and local community groups are encouraged to adopt these checklists to ensure collective readiness. The EU's approach promotes integrating preparedness into youth programmes like Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps, fostering civic engagement and resilience among young people (European Commission, 2025).

These checklists serve as reminders and educational tools that build awareness and confidence, enabling young people to take ownership of their safety and contribute actively to their communities' resilience.

9.2 Developing my personal Emergency Plan

A personal emergency plan is vital for young people to ensure they can respond effectively during a disaster. This plan should be comprehensive, adaptable, and regularly updated to reflect changing circumstances.

To start, young people should identify the types of risks most likely to affect their area—such as floods, wildfires, earthquakes, or industrial accidents—using resources like the EU's European Risk Atlas, which provides scientifically grounded information on regional hazards (EUMonitor, 2023). Understanding these risks informs the specific actions and preparations needed.

Next, the plan should outline clear steps for different scenarios, including how to evacuate safely, where to seek shelter, and how to communicate with family, friends, and emergency services. Establishing meeting points near home and outside the immediate area is essential



in case evacuation is necessary. Young people should also consider special needs, such as medications, mobility challenges, or pet care, ensuring these are addressed in the plan.

Collectively, youth can collaborate to develop group emergency plans within schools, clubs, or neighbourhoods. This includes assigning roles like communication coordinators or first aid helpers, sharing resources, and practising drills to build familiarity and confidence (EU go Association, 2025).

The personal emergency plan should be shared and discussed with family members and peers to ensure everyone understands their roles and responsibilities. Regular review and practice of the plan help embed preparedness behaviours into daily life, making responses more instinctive during emergencies.

9.3 Valuable Resources: Emergency Numbers, Crisis Management Apps, Links to Support Resources

Access to reliable and timely information during emergencies is essential for young people to protect themselves and support others. Familiarising yourself with emergency contact numbers, using crisis management apps, and connecting with support services can make a life-saving difference.

Emergency Numbers

In the European Union and many other countries, the universal emergency number 112 connects callers to police, fire, and medical services. Many regions have enhanced this service with apps like “112 Where Are U” (Regione Lombardia), which allows users to call emergency services while simultaneously sending their precise GPS location to the dispatch centre. This is particularly useful if you are unable to speak or unsure of your exact location. Knowing such numbers and apps is critical for immediate help.

Crisis Management Apps

Several smartphone applications have been developed to assist individuals in emergencies, offering features like GPS tracking, SOS alerts, and communication with trusted contacts. For example:

- **bSafe** is a popular app designed especially for young people. It allows users to create a trusted network of friends or family who can be alerted with a single tap if the user feels unsafe. It sends live GPS tracking, records audio and video, and can trigger loud alarms to deter threats. Although only available in English, it is free and user-friendly for those comfortable with social media-style interfaces (Safety Security Magazine, 2024).
- **ImNotScared** is an Italian app developed by young innovators that sends an SOS alert to pre-selected contacts with a single button press. It calls all contacts simultaneously, connecting the first responder directly and sending the user’s location via SMS. This app complements other emergency apps and is free to use (Corriere del Veneto, 2024).
- **SoSScuole** is an app designed specifically for schools to manage medical emergencies and first aid. It accelerates response times by alerting internal first aid teams and automatically contacting emergency services (112) if necessary. It also includes specific functions for suspected COVID-19 cases, enabling rapid communication with school authorities and health officials (Invisiblefarm, 2022).

Supporting Vulnerable Peers



Young people can play a vital role in helping peers who might be more vulnerable—such as those with disabilities, mental health challenges, or limited access to technology—by sharing information about these apps and emergency numbers, helping them install and use the apps, and encouraging them to save emergency contacts. This solidarity ensures no one is left isolated during crises and strengthens community resilience.

Institutions, NGOs, and local support networks often provide additional resources, including helplines, counselling services, and community outreach programmes. Young people can act as connectors, facilitating access to these services and advocating for inclusive preparedness measures that consider the needs of all community members.

9.4 Feedback and Evaluation Forms: How to Monitor Preparedness

Monitoring and evaluating preparedness efforts is crucial to ensure that emergency plans and resources are adequate and current. Feedback tools help individuals and groups identify strengths and gaps, enabling continuous improvement.

Practical Examples of Feedback Tools

- Preparedness Surveys: Schools and youth organisations can distribute questionnaires asking participants about their knowledge of emergency procedures, confidence in using emergency kits, and clarity of communication channels. For example, a survey might ask, “Do you know how to contact emergency services?” or “Have you practised evacuation drills in the past six months?”
- Drill Evaluations: After conducting emergency drills, feedback forms can collect participants’ experiences, noting what went well and what was confusing or complicated. This might include questions like, “Was the evacuation route clearly marked?” or “Did you feel prepared to respond?”
- Resource Checklists: Groups can use checklists to verify that emergency supplies are complete and accessible. For instance, a checklist might confirm the presence of water, first aid kits, flashlights, and communication devices.

Case Study: EU Erasmus+ Disaster Tool Guideline

The Erasmus+ programme has developed the Disaster Tool Guideline, which includes templates for feedback and evaluation tailored to youth workers and educators. It guides users through assessing preparedness activities, identifying training needs, and planning improvements. For example, after a community preparedness event, organisers can use the guidelines’ forms to gather participant feedback on the clarity of information and usefulness of activities, then adjust future events accordingly.

Why Monitoring Matters

Regular feedback ensures that preparedness is not a one-time effort but a dynamic process. It helps detect emerging risks, adapt to changes in community composition, and improve communication strategies. Moreover, involving young people in monitoring activities empowers them to take ownership of their safety and contribute to building resilient communities.



Practical Tip

Encourage peer-led evaluations where young people design and conduct group feedback sessions. This peer approach can increase honesty and engagement, making the assessment more effective and inclusive.

10 Conclusions

This handbook emphasises young people's vital role in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Core principles include:

- **Empowerment through Knowledge:** Understanding risks and preparedness strategies equips youth to protect themselves and their communities.
- **Collaboration with Institutions and Informal Groups:** Engaging with formal bodies (government agencies, emergency services) and informal networks (NGOs, volunteers) enhances collective resilience.
- **Active Participation:** Young people are not passive victims but active agents who can contribute meaningfully at every stage of disaster management.
- **Inclusivity and Solidarity:** Ensuring safety and support for all young people, especially vulnerable groups, fosters equitable and cohesive communities.
- **Practical Preparedness:** Developing personal and group emergency plans, maintaining preparedness kits, and utilising available resources and technology.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Monitoring, feedback, and evaluation help refine preparedness efforts and adapt to evolving risks.

Recommended actions for youth include educating themselves and their peers, building peer support networks, volunteering with local organisations, advocating for inclusive safety policies, and regularly practising preparedness.

You have the power to make a difference. This handbook invites you to step forward as an agent of change—someone who prepares personally and inspires and supports others to do the same. By actively engaging in disaster preparedness and response, you help build safer, stronger, and more resilient communities.

- **Learn and Share:** Equip yourself with knowledge about risks and preparedness, and share this knowledge with your peers, family, and community.
- **Get Involved:** Join youth councils, volunteer groups, or local initiatives focused on disaster risk reduction and emergency response.
- **Lead with Empathy:** Support vulnerable peers by fostering inclusive networks where everyone's voice is heard and needs are met.
- **Use Technology Wisely:** Leverage crisis management apps and communication tools to stay informed and connected during emergencies.
- **Advocate for Safety:** Raise awareness and encourage decision-makers to prioritise youth-inclusive disaster policies.

Your energy, creativity, and commitment are essential to transforming how communities face crises. Together, you can turn challenges into opportunities for growth, solidarity, and lasting resilience. **Step up, take action, and be the change your community needs.**



11 Appendices

11.1 Detailed Glossary of Technical Terms

A comprehensive glossary to clarify complex terminology and concepts throughout the handbook.

1. Disaster

A disaster is a severe disruption that causes significant damage to people, property, the economy, or the environment. It goes beyond the capacity of the affected community to cope using its own resources. Disasters can be natural (like earthquakes) or human-made (like industrial accidents).

2. Hazard

A hazard is a potentially damaging event or physical condition. It can be natural (such as floods or hurricanes), technological (like a chemical spill), or social (such as conflict). A hazard only becomes a disaster if it affects people or systems that are vulnerable.

3. Risk

Risk refers to the potential loss or damage resulting from a hazard. It is the combination of the likelihood of a hazardous event occurring and the severity of its possible consequences. Understanding risk helps in planning how to reduce or manage it.

4. Vulnerability

Vulnerability is the extent to which people, communities, or systems are likely to suffer harm from hazards. This can be due to physical conditions, social inequalities, lack of resources, poor infrastructure, or limited access to information and services.

5. Exposure

Exposure describes the situation of people, property, or ecosystems in areas that could be affected by a hazard. High exposure means more things are at risk if the hazard occurs.

6. Resilience

Resilience is the ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from adverse events. A resilient community can cope with a disaster and return to everyday life more quickly, often becoming stronger.

7. Preparedness

Preparedness involves all the actions taken before a disaster to ensure a timely and effective response. This includes creating emergency plans, training volunteers, practising drills, raising public awareness, and stockpiling necessary supplies.

8. Mitigation



Mitigation refers to efforts to reduce the severity or impact of a disaster. This includes structural measures (like building dams or stronger buildings) and non-structural ones (like laws or public education).

9. Prevention

Prevention means avoiding the creation of new disaster risks. While some hazards cannot be prevented (like an earthquake), many of their effects can be avoided through good planning and policies, such as not building in high-risk zones.

10. Early Warning System

An early warning system is a coordinated set of tools and actions to detect potential hazards and inform people before the danger arrives. It includes monitoring, risk analysis, communication, and community response plans.

11. Emergency Response

Emergency response is the immediate help provided after a disaster. It focuses on saving lives, protecting property, and meeting basic needs like food, water, shelter, and medical care.

12. Recovery

Recovery is the long-term process of restoring everyday life after a disaster. This includes repairing buildings, restoring public services, helping people regain jobs, and supporting emotional and social well-being.

13. Reconstruction

Reconstruction is the physical rebuilding of infrastructure and services after a disaster. It often includes improvements to reduce future risks and make systems more resilient.

14. Community-Based DRR

Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction involves local communities identifying risks and deciding how to reduce them. It values local knowledge and encourages people to take part in protecting their own safety.

15. Climate Change Adaptation

This refers to actions taken to reduce the adverse effects of climate change on people and the environment. This might include adjusting farming practices, improving drainage systems, or developing city heatwave plans.

16. Risk Assessment

Risk assessment identifies hazards, analyses their potential impacts, and evaluates how vulnerable people and systems are. It is the first step in managing and reducing risk.

17. Capacity Building



Capacity building means strengthening the skills, resources, and institutions people and communities need to manage disaster risks effectively. This includes education, training, and the development of tools or partnerships.

18. Contingency Plan

A contingency plan is prepared in advance to respond effectively to emergencies. It outlines specific actions, roles, and resources needed if something goes wrong.

19. Sustainability

In DRR, sustainability means creating solutions that protect people and the environment over the long term, without using up resources that future generations will also need.

20. Stakeholders

Stakeholders are all individuals or organisations involved in or affected by disaster risk management. This includes youth, communities, local authorities, emergency services, NGOs, and policy-makers.

21. Natural Hazard

A natural hazard is a natural event such as an earthquake, storm, drought, or volcanic eruption. These events can lead to disasters if people or places are vulnerable and exposed.

22. Technological Hazard

These hazards arise from human activities, such as industrial accidents, nuclear leaks, or transportation crashes. They are sometimes called artificial hazards.

23. Complex Emergency

A complex emergency involves a combination of factors—such as conflict, displacement, and natural hazards—that require a multi-dimensional response, often involving humanitarian and development support.

24. Disaster Risk Management (DRM)

DRM refers to the complete policies, strategies, and activities to understand, reduce, and manage disaster risk. It includes prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery.

25. Risk Reduction Strategy

A risk reduction strategy is a plan that outlines how to reduce the impact of potential disasters. It may include improving building standards, strengthening health systems, or investing in early warning.

26. Evacuation Plan

An evacuation plan provides clear instructions on how people should leave a dangerous area quickly and safely in case of a disaster. It includes routes, assembly points, and communication strategies.



27. Livelihood

A livelihood is how someone earns a living and supports their household. Protecting livelihoods in emergencies is key to reducing long-term vulnerability and supporting recovery.

28. Ecosystem-Based DRR

This approach uses natural systems—like forests, wetlands, or coral reefs—to reduce disaster risks. For example, mangroves can protect coastal areas from storm surges.

29. Urban Risk

Urban risk refers to the specific vulnerabilities in cities, such as overcrowded housing, poor infrastructure, and limited emergency services. Cities often face multiple, overlapping risks.

30. Critical Infrastructure

These are essential facilities and systems, such as hospitals, power grids, water supplies, and roads. Maintaining them during and after disasters is crucial for public safety and recovery.

31. Social Inclusion

Social inclusion ensures that everyone, regardless of age, gender, ability, or background, has a voice and role in DRR. Inclusive DRR plans are more effective and fair.

32. Risk Communication

Risk communication is sharing information about hazards and risks clearly, honestly, and helpfully. It helps people make informed decisions before and during emergencies.

33. Simulation Exercise

Also known as a "drill," this practice activity simulates a disaster scenario so that people and organisations can test and improve their emergency plans.

34. Psychological First Aid

This is emotional and mental health support provided after a disaster to help people deal with fear, stress, or trauma. It is a first step toward healing and recovery.

35. Humanitarian Aid

This refers to immediate assistance provided to people affected by disasters, including food, shelter, clean water, medical care, and protection. It helps people survive and recover in the short term.

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