ENGAGE

Engage Society for Risk Awareness and Resilience

ENGAGE Recommendations for Enhancing Societal Resilience

Public Warning

With the frequency and intensity of natural disasters and hazardous events increasing, the ability of individuals- and society at large- to acquire the ability to rapidly respond to the risks that these events pose is vital. Although past events have demonstrated the invaluable contributions of citizens, public authorities, and first responders in disaster response, there remains a gap between the formal effort of public authorities to protect citizens from harm and the voluntary support provided by citizens during emergencies.

It is from this perspective that the ENGAGE project seeks to address society as a whole- bridging different ways of intervention to make communities more skilled in responding to disasters jointly and therefore more resilient.

In this regard, enhancing the availability of and access to public warning systems can ensure that citizens are provided with accurate risk information that allows them to take timely action when an emergency occurs. In this way, not only can effective communication be fostered between public authorities and citizens, but overall risk awareness and preparedness can be enhanced which, as a result, strengthens the capacity to rapidly recover from a natural disaster or a hazardous event.

This document outlines a few recommendations which can be utilized by public authorities when implementing or further developing existing public warning systems in order to contribute to building resilience.

ENGAGE is an EU-funded project whose mission is to provide novel knowledge and identify impactful solutions for exploiting Europe´s societal resilience.

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1

Disasters are complex in nature- warning messages do not have to be

The ability of citizens and businesses to take informed action depends on balancing details on impending disasters and updated risk information with the simplicity of the message. Information coming from a multiplicity of sources and is potentially contradictory can impact the effectiveness of the message in an emergency. Warning messages need to be from an identified and authoritative source.

Take a multi-channel approach

2

Ensuring that every potentially affected person and business is informed requires multiple channels – from traditional systems like SMS, radio messages, and public board messages on roads and in public transport stations, to modern systems like coordinated and targeted cell broadcasts and location-based SMS. For example, warning systems need to adjust to the geographic nature of the area affected by its population density and the features of the locations (I.e. a remote island versus an overpopulated urban area).

3

Inclusivity is key

Leaving nobody behind in emergencies requires adjusting messages to diverse audiences through different languages, accessibility for persons with disabilities, and various channels for those who do not frequently use or have access to mobile phones. A key lesson of the floods caused by Hurricane Ida in New York in 2021 was the need to break language barriers in warning systems to immigrant communities. Tourist destinations need warning systems in multiple languages to alert visiting tourists, like Peru's early warning emergency messaging system (Sismate) designed to reach the 33 million residents and the four million tourists that usually visit the country.