

ENGAGE Recommendations for Enhancing Societal Resilience

Takeaways for First Responders



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, ENGAGE has carried out an in-depth case study analysis in order to better understand the ways that citizens contribute overall to crisis management without viewing them as merely "spontaneous volunteers".

Ordinary people (or informal actors as they are referred to in this document) often are, as the case studies exemplify, not only first on site during a crisis and complement professional tasks during the unfolding event, but they also take decisions that affect the overall disaster management when they, for example, choose a site to care for the wounded or decide to engage a perpetrator.

It is for this reason that ENGAGE employs the concept of "coping actions"- or all actions intended to mitigate or adapt to an adverse event actively in order to understand the impact that these actions have on formal and informal ways of dealing with a disaster.

This document outlines a few recommendations which can be utilised by first responders and disaster management professionals who are interested in incorporating the work of informal actors on the scene of a crisis in their own strategies for emergency response.

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



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Recognise the presence and agency of informal actors

Informal actors always actively cope with a crisis. They are the first ones on site, and they are not passive victims. The situational awareness of professionals should not only focus on victims or "bystanders" but also the coping actions of informal actors. Enhancing perception in order to recognise these actions could be done in a systematic way by adapting manuals, protocols, and trainings. First responders could also integrate and formally recognise an ongoing rescue operation by informal actors to avoid "taking over".

Informal actors on-site should always be recognised and, if necessary, given a role

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Recognising the agency of informal actors entails interacting with them. People on-site should always be recognised and, if necessary, given a role in the transition from informal to formal crisis management and while formal crisis management is ongoing. Our case studies show that a societal resilience perspective highlights how formal and informal coping actions often coexist without interacting. However, these actions are often complementary and formal crisis management should ensure that informal actors could continue their initiatives.

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Ensure effective resource distribution and utilisation

Resource distribution in an emergency should not only focus on formal actors or victims, but collective and individual coping actions should, once recognised, receive **resources and knowledge to continue their complementary coping actions**. Understanding societal resilience as a potential for action offers space for unintended creative actions to emerge, however, disaster managers should not necessarily expect a direct output after allocating such resources. Collective and individual coping actions themselves also provide formal disaster managers with information and resources. Therefore, disaster management should assess the **societal resources that are already on site**. Protocols, training, and manuals should systematically invite disaster managers to verify if there are unplanned resources on site that could be utilised. This entails tapping into local knowledge and the situation assessment of the ones that were on site before you.

