



Children and teenagers as volunteers during a disaster

A number of participants discussed the possibility of children and teenagers with first aid and disaster knowledge being able to provide support during emergencies and disasters, with practitioners expressing their opinion that this does not happen often in Italy, but that they should encourage this practice. Furthermore, practitioners identified the potential to use children as ‘Trojan horses’ (in the positive meaning), and that once they have knowledge, they are able to share this with their families, helping to educate them about what to do in emergency or disaster situations: “In prevention, meaning that in the schools this is already carried out, as there are activities such as communication of risk, of behavioural norms and so on. In fact children, going back home, asked their parents “Is our house at risk?”” (G4; R5 - see source document for full reference). “We already have an instrument that enters all homes: children in school. We started to go to schools with dogs and the police dogs. Children are very interested in dogs, and in the meantime, they gather the information given by authorities. Children are very alert; they absorb information and bring them back at home, where they tell what they do. They know what to do in case of a quake or a flood. ” (G3; R). “Children are much more responsive, while adults are more “rejective”, like if certain things were far away. Then they [adults] are the first ones to look for help when the event occurs, but they do not understand that they should be informed to inform their children. Often there are children who – thanks to school – inform their parents” (G5; R2). One participant further identified that “the acute disaster phase is not proper for elderly people and children... no, that is not right. [But] they might operate in the preparatory phase as a mean to convey messages and procedures in schools, churches and communities” (G1; R). In addition to children with first aid or disaster preparedness and response knowledge, which they may be able to share with others, practitioners also identified those children of immigrants who spoke both Italian and their parents’ language (e.g. Chinese), who could then inform their parents about emergency and disaster situations: “In Rome, there are a lot of Chinese warehouses and shops. A woman owner did not speak any Italian, while her 10-year-old daughter did and translated for us. It was amazing” (G3; R), “In Tuscany there is the Chinese community, and I noticed that a way to bring help to this community, which is pretty closed, are children. Many times the only way to talk to adults is through their children” (G6; R8). “In Tuscany, especially in Florence’s and Prato’s areas, we have a large presence of Chinese community. We noticed that in that community, the communication flow is going the other way around. Children know Italian, and children are those who explain to their parents – who often only know Chinese – what are the principles of civil protection. Children go to school and they are taught information on protection, on assembly centres, and they refer this back home. At least in our territory, this is a very important reality” (G4; R10). However, one practitioner outlined that in some communities (e.g. Chinese immigrants) children might not be listened to by their parents or families due to different forms of authority: “If we arrive and a child acts as translator, a senior comes and tells him to stop talking” (G6; R6), demonstrating that the role of children in disaster-related communication is also defined by the cultural factor of family hierarchies.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: [Social networks](#), [Educational system](#), [Age-related roles](#), [Communication](#), [Languages](#)



Disaster Phases: [Preparedness](#)

Types of Actors Concerned: [National civil protection body](#), [Local authorities](#), [Government](#)

Hazards: [Natural hazards](#), [Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations](#), [Man-made intentional hazards](#)

Recommendations:

- [Training programmes for citizens of all ages should be developed. These are necessary to increase citizens' knowledge of and preparedness in case of disasters. The training activities should be organized on the basis of a training strategy and should take various forms, ranging from emergency drill to workshops](#)
- [Foster the adoption of a culture of disaster prevention and resilience by informing and motivating citizens to take action](#)

Source

[Deliverable D5.11 "Report on Stakeholder Assembly 2 \(Italy\)" \(page 34\)](#)

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