



Citizens' expectations during a disaster is often related to their trust in authorities

Generally, practitioners felt that citizens' trust in authorities, and their ability to effectively communicate information related to risk and disaster, was connected to citizens' expectations of authorities in performing their job well in providing support and correct information in emergency and disaster situations. Further, they perceived citizens' trust in authorities as being further developed through speed of response, taking up a personal responsibility for actions – even if one is not formally in charge – being flexible and showing situational awareness of citizens' needs: “You earn the trust by being [responsive] in the emergency or by solving a particular problem in a short time” (G2; R1 - see source document for full reference), “it would be better to say that he must wait, rather than saying that we are going to intervene immediately or that that issue does not fall within our competence. We should accompany the citizen towards who is in charge of that issue” (G3; R1), “On one hand, we tried to not to be intrusive, on the other we had to listen to their requests. We must be helpful and flexible. In fact, sometimes we are required to do something different from what we were supposed to do” (G6; R2). The practitioners described a number of experiences where citizens' trust in authorities was undermined due to misleading information, or a feeling that authorities do not, or are not able to take care of their needs: “First of all there is a political aspect: it is very hard to make promises regarding the timing of interventions. They say 118 (i.e. health emergency) teams get anywhere within 20 minutes, and they do, more or less. A politician would say that they get there within 3 minutes, so when the rescue team actually gets there after 20 minutes, the expectation has not been met... We relate with the citizens regarding reimbursements in the post-event and what the municipality tells them and what the regional authority tells them is what the state wants them to say so it is never very clear and the citizens are basically distrustful from the beginning” (G2; R5). “The most important thing is listening to people. I had an experience in which people showed distrust towards institutions, when the Sarno mudslide occurred. After the COC (Town Operations Centre) was set up, rescue operations started. Few days later, Carabinieri had to protect the structure, because citizens assaulted us. That was the only distrust experience I have had in 10 years of work. In that case, citizens thought we were not able to take care of their needs” (G6; R4). Generally, meeting citizens' expectations was seen as an important factor: “Everything depends on the work that was done beforehand. If we spend time for a correct prevention campaign, created groups of aware citizens, always replied, created a working institution, the citizen will trust us when needed and will not go looking for other pieces of information” (G2; R). Practitioners, here, suggested that communication needs to be reassuring and simple to be effective in building credibility and communicating with citizens: “Honesty is highly relevant, because you always need to give exact information, or your credibility collapses, even under small details. The voice tone needs not to be reassuring and downgrading, because the person you are rescuing won't believe you, and you lose your authority. We need to be honest in describing all you can do and not do” (G2; R2). “However, this is very complicated, as we need to guarantee also the accuracy of what we say and this takes a lot of time. We deal with communication, however, to transmit correctly a message we would constantly need the presence of experts that help us to explain



it in the more understandable – and at the same time correct – way” (G4; R7).

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: [Attitudes toward authorities](#)

Disaster Phases: [Response](#)

Types of Actors Concerned: [National civil protection body](#), [Local authorities](#), [Government](#), [Red Cross](#), [NGOs](#), [Military](#), [Law enforcement agencies](#), [Healthcare and emergency services](#)

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

Recommendations:

- [Engage in activities and develop strategies aiming to improve trust between citizens and authorities](#)
- [Inform citizens about the risk they may face and about possible actions and measures, they can take to reduce vulnerability and better prepare themselves](#)
- [Use cultural factors to improve the effectiveness of disaster communication](#)

Source

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