Foreigners as a vulnerable group in a disaster

The majority of practitioners perceived that foreigners as a vulnerable group, identified by the Citizen Summits, were vulnerable due to language differences and lack of familiarity with an area: "They are, of course. They have no knowledge of the territory; they know nothing about emergency plans" (G1; R - see source document for full reference), "The tourists here are amongst the people at risk only because they do not know the territory, they are disorientated, perhaps they do not speak the local language, and so on" (G4; R3). However, the practitioners also differentiated between different nationalities and their level of vulnerability through stereotypes regarding national identities: "It depends on how foreigners are used in their own countries. Italians, Spanish go and don't get any information. Nordic people plan their trip in terms of security too" (G3; R). A small number of practitioners felt that not all tourists would be vulnerable during a disaster, as they would still be able to understand warning signs: "Talking about the tourists, it seems to me that the language exchange – at least in Italy… travelling a lot, I always received information. It seems unlikely to me that people coming from other countries are not able to understand the signs and the indications" (G5; R3), or in touristic areas there would be people who can communicate with foreigners. However, there was a doubt as to whom this information should be provided, particularly whether this should be provided by authorities more linked to tourism: "English is more or less spoken around, especially in the structures where tourists go. But only those who work in the touristic structures should give information on where to go in case of earthquakes or floods?" (G5; R8). In this context, practitioners referred to mobile-phone based technologies that provide foreigners with multi-lingual messages containing emergency information. Additionally, they felt that in multi-cultural areas like Munich it is important to provide multi-lingual information to the general population: "in Munich, the German Police after the attack, they gave information to all citizens in many different languages using twitter. And this was very effective. Therefore, even people who don't speak German could understand what was going on" (G1; R). "In terms of groups at risk, I think that tourists effectively are at risk. Usually [emergency] plans are studied for… for example Americans, they know that if something happens they have to call immediately their consulate and they are immediately informed. In Israel, the hotels managers are those who – in case of emergency – have to act as a liaison and give information to tourists. This is a very simple solution – and inexpensive - because it would be enough to teach some basic notions to the hotel's staff" (G6; R8).

Note: See source document for full reference.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: Local knowledge, Languages, Communication
Disaster Phases: Response, Preparedness
Types of Actors Concerned: Healthcare and emergency services, National civil protection body, Local authorities
Hazards: Natural hazards, Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations, Man-made intentional hazards

Recommendations:

- Use local knowledge, collective memory and shared cultural values to improve disaster preparedness, response and

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recovery
- Foster the adoption of a culture of disaster prevention and resilience by informing and motivating citizens to take action

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