



**PrepAGE**  
**Enhancing disaster management preparedness**  
**for the older population in the EU**

**National Workshop - Report**

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## 1) Introduction

The probability of potentially damaging natural phenomena occurring such as earthquakes, floods, fires, or storms is called a natural hazard. When a hazard is combined with a group of particularly vulnerable people in a community, this can affect the scale and intensity of a disaster. While we cannot control the occurrence of natural hazards, we can certainly soften their impact on society. In recent decades we have seen a large number of natural disasters which have left devastating effects on communities. Responsibility for this belongs to all, including individuals, family, smaller communities, and the State Government. It is necessary to make plans to reduce the risk and mitigate the consequences of natural disasters. In the process of planning we should be aware that there are groups in society who are particularly vulnerable, such as people with disabilities, children or elderly people, and these groups should be approached differently with regard to disaster preparedness and response plans.

Within the implementation of the PrepAGE project needs, structures and measures will be identified which will improve preparedness and access to target groups of older people in case of emergencies and disasters. During the development of guidelines the resources and resilience of the older population will be taken into account. Experts from the Health and Social sector will connect with experts from the Protection and Rescue system with the aim of developing guidelines.

The National Workshop was held on March 12, 2015 in Zagreb as part of the “PrepAGE” project. It brought together experts from the field of protection and rescue and the health and social sector of the Republic of Croatia. The aim was to exchange experiences, develop guidelines, and provide recommendations to improve the situation of older population in disaster situations at local, regional and national levels.

The results of the National Workshop that was held in the Republic of Croatia will be compared with the results of National Workshops held in Austria, the United Kingdom, Latvia and Bulgaria (partners in the PrepAGE project), for the purpose of developing guidelines and recommendations that can be applied throughout the European Union.

## 2) Participants of National Workshop

Participants of the National Workshop were experts from organisations that deal with protection and rescue, as well as representatives of the health and social sector who provide care for the older population. Since the objectives of the workshop were focused on the development of guidelines and recommendations at the local, regional and national levels, representatives from local government and users themselves (the elderly) were also invited.





- 1) **The Ministry of Social Policy and Youth** is the ministry in the Government of Croatia which performs administrative and professional tasks related to the social welfare institutions, the care and protection of people and families, youth, persons with disabilities, victims of trafficking, refugees, asylum seekers and professional activities related to foster care and adoption.
- 2) **Protection and Rescue Directorate** is an independent, professional and administrative organisation in the Republic of Croatia tasked with preparing plans, managing operational forces and coordinating activities of all stakeholders active in protection and rescue activities.
- 3) **City Office of Emergency Management** is the office of the City of Zagreb that plans, organises, finances and implements activities related to protection and rescue and natural disasters in accordance with the obligations and responsibilities of the City Assembly and the Mayor in the fields of defense, civil protection, fire protection and firefighting.
- 4) **University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica** is the educational institution that conducts five professional and three specialist professional graduate studies including Crisis management, for people who make decisions or provide technical support to decision-makers in the corporate, local and regional government, state government, and in particular the protection and rescue system in the police and army.
- 5) **Croatian Mountain Rescue Service** is a national, voluntary, professional, humanitarian and non-partisan organisation of public interest whose main objectives are accident prevention, rescue and first aid in the mountains and other inaccessible areas.
- 6) **Croatian Caritas** is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation which is an official body of the Croatian Bishops' Conference whose aim is to spread solidarity and social justice. Croatian Caritas is part of a worldwide network of Caritas based in Rome.
- 7) **Association for Psychosocial Assistance** is a non-profit organisation that also carries out projects and programs of direct psychosocial assistance and support through various forms of psychosocial interventions such as counseling, psychotherapy, psychological crisis intervention, family mediation, psychosocial treatment of perpetrators of violence, etc. at local, county, national and international levels.
- 8) **City of Slunj - Department of Social Services** – carries out activities related to public needs of the City in the areas of education, sports, technical education, social welfare and health. The City of Slunj is a part of the Karlovac County and occupies area of 392,54 km<sup>2</sup>. It covers a total of 67 villages in the area with 6,096 inhabitants.
- 9) **Croatian Red Cross** - This organisation is one of 189 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world. It carries out its activities in the territory of the Republic of Croatia, with complete impartiality and no discrimination whatsoever, with the mission of promoting humanitarian aims and implementing programmes for the general benefit of Croatian society.
- 10) **Red Cross City Branch of Slunj**
- 11) **Red Cross City Branch of Krapina**
- 12) **Red Cross City Branch of Osijek**
- 13) **Red Cross City Branch of Zagreb**





### **3) Experience of the various organisations and decision makers in Republic of Croatia with older population in disaster situations**

As part of the PrepAGE project, the University of Innsbruck conducted two types of research, (desk research and empirical research), in order to define the specific needs and identify the challenges of the older population in disaster situations.

For the purpose of the research 616 different manuals were used, including scientific articles and guidelines, of which 76 were explored in detail and included in the analysis. The research results were then presented to participants during the National Workshop.

At the National Workshop in the Republic of Croatia the current situation was analysed, the challenges were identified and recommendations were made that should be applicable at the national level.

Experience of the National Workshop participants in regards to the special needs of the elderly population in disasters or emergency situations:

- Unwilling acceptance of the new situation and refusal of older people to leave their place of residence (evacuation).
- Health and dependence on other people requires additional engagement of all in disaster situations.
- Beneficiaries experience emotional crises, and it is often necessary to provide additional psychological help.
- Due to various possible risks it is necessary to apply an individual approach (which focuses on the characteristics of each beneficiary).
- Many participants organised exercises and trainings for intervention teams, in order to provide assistance to vulnerable groups in different scenarios.
- Exercises were conducted with the aim of training staff in the evacuation of people with special needs (exercises are generally conducted within a single organisation and not in coordination with other services).
- The inclusion of the elderly population in these activities and respect for their opinions proved to be a good method for implementing change.
- Organisations dealing with search and rescue said that despite public opinion their activities are mostly related to the tourist season and the pursuit of irresponsible adventurers, statistical data and experience show that most of the action is related to the rescue of elderly people throughout the calendar year.



Groups within the older population that participants considered to be particularly vulnerable:

- Older people with limited mobility
- People with poor health
- People who are dependent on others
- People with physical and intellectual impairments
- People with a lower level of education
- People in difficult financial situations
- Single-person households

The presence of the older population as a vulnerable group in protection and rescue plans:

- According to Protection and Rescue Law, executive authorities at local, county and national level are obliged to make protection and rescue plans. Although in most cases the plans have been made and certain vulnerable groups have been mentioned, the general opinion is that this issue is not developed enough and that older people are not identified as a separate group
- In the Republic of Croatia a risk assessment was made and released nationally. Within this assessment, vulnerable groups were mentioned generally.

Existing databases for the older population and a list of the most vulnerable people:

- In the Republic of Croatia a database of the elderly population and the most vulnerable people does not exist on a national level.
- There are databases in certain institutions and care homes for older people which are used only for their own needs.
- The Central Bureau of Statistics completes the census of the population every 10 years which can be used to gain information. However, since the needs of the protection and rescue system are very specific, very little information from the census is actually relevant.

Recognised advantage of the older population in crises situations and disasters:

- Workshop participants thought that older people significantly contribute to the protection and rescue system due to their life experience and professional knowledge.
- Older people are thought to have understanding and empathy for all vulnerable groups.
- If they are not in a situation where they need help, older people are less demanding than the general population.

#### 4) Recommendations

In order to improve the situation of the older population in crises and disasters, National Workshop participants cited the following recommendations: (Recommendations applicable on local, regional or national level)

Levels:

1. The Policy level
  2. The level of delivery design
  3. The level of practice
- **Development of a database of vulnerable older people at the local level.** Databases should be regularly updated, and it was decided that the implementation would be most effective if responsibility and management were left to local governments (municipalities, cities). It is necessary to define a methodology to create the database so that all interested parties can contribute to adding and using the data. The database should be standardised for the whole territory of the Republic of Croatia. It is also important to define who has access to database.  
**Applicable on: local level**  
**Level: 2 and 3**
  - **Capacity building of the various organisations, institutions and NGOs.** Many participants in the protection and rescue system have professional experience and trained staff but lack some technical and material resources, and this can stop them from providing appropriate assistance.  
**Applicable on: local, regional and national level**  
**Level: 1, 2 and 3**
  - **It is necessary to make special plans that will define different access in urban and rural areas.**  
**Applicable on: local level**  
**Level: 2**
  - **Connection and coordination of all stakeholders in the protection and rescue system.** For the purpose of a more efficient provision of assistance to the vulnerable older population, it is necessary to encourage a combined approach. The requirements in emergencies and disasters on a large scale are too high for individual organisations or institutions and they cannot adequately respond to all requests.  
**Applicable on: local, regional and national level**  
**Level: 1**



- **Education of volunteers (especially youth).** In case of a major crisis, professional organisations in the protection and rescue system are not sufficient to cover all needs of the victims, and it is of great importance to encourage the involvement of volunteers in education and preparation.

**Applicable on: local and regional level**

**Level: 3**

- **Encourage the creation of databases on micro levels** (inclusion of neighbours - residential building - representatives of tenants)

**Applicable on: local level**

**Level: 2 and 3**

- **Accurate definition of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.** The review of laws, regulations, strategic documents and plans proved that there are no clear definitions of vulnerable or disadvantaged groups.

**Applicable on: national level**

**Level: 1**

- **During a crisis there is a need to define who is responsible for the older population.** Identify at least one person who will take care of the problems of vulnerable older people.

**Applicable on: local and regional level**

**Level: 1**

- **Education of vulnerable groups and their caregivers.** Raising awareness amongst vulnerable people and those who care for them about the importance of their active involvement in emergencies (preparedness and response).

**Applicable on: local level**

**Level: 3**

- **Include a monitoring mechanism in the legal provisions.** While many things are defined by laws, problems arise when legal opportunities are not used or are not used properly.

**Applicable on: national level**

**Level: 1**

- **Introduce mandatory cooperation between all stakeholders in the protection and rescue system in the legislation.** It was noted that cooperation between stakeholders depends on the awareness and goodwill of the stakeholders themselves, and some institutions and organisations do not recognise cooperation as an important factor.

**Applicable on: national level**

**Level: 1**





- **Development of evacuation plans at the local level.** This should involve all stakeholders and the creation of promotional materials for the population.  
**Applicable on: local level**  
**Level: 2 and 3**
  
- **Continuous evaluation of the existing system.** There are continuous changing factors within society and with the daily impacts of climate change it is necessary to regularly analyse and update existing plans.  
**Applicable on: local, regional and national level**  
**Level: 2 and 3**
  
- **Encourage the involvement of non-governmental organisations.** Non-governmental organisations have a lot of expertise, large numbers of volunteers and a wide network within the Republic of Croatia. They have not been sufficiently recognised as a force that can contribute to protection and rescue.  
**Applicable on: local, regional and national level**  
**Level: 2**
  
- **Raising awareness.** The protection and rescue system covers the whole society, from the individual to the state institutions.  
**Applicable on: local, regional and national level**  
**Level: 3**
  
- **Implementation of education for all** (citizens, organisations, institutions, NGOs and other)  
**Applicable on: local, regional and national level**  
**Level: 3**
  
- **Regular training and exercises in protection and rescue** (At least annually)  
**Applicable on: local, regional and national level**  
**Level: 3**

