



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

**National Workshop - Report**

Facilitator: Latvian Red Cross

Venue and date: Riga, 16 April 2015



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## 1. Introduction

The global growth of an ageing population in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a challenge for European society. In order to ensure a good quality of life for the older generation (65 years and over), Europe must develop a comprehensive plan of action. As there are more scientific and technological developments, there is more of a focus on the safety and protection of individuals. Unfortunately the risk of disasters has remained and with this questions relating to personal safety and security have reached new levels of complexity.

While there are some existing guidelines relating to the requirements of older people in disaster situations, the integration of these guidelines into emergency and disaster preparedness programs remains insufficient in many countries. Older people often face additional risks, including isolation, lack of support, impaired mobility and frailty resulting in greater levels of vulnerability in the event of a disaster. Therefore it is essential to identify the needs, structures and measures to prepare and reach older people in emergencies and disasters. It is also important to take into account the resources and resilience of older people and bring together experts from the health and social sector and the field of disaster management.

As the aim of the PrepAGE project - Enhancing disaster management preparedness for the older population in the EU- is to introduce the special requirements of older people into emergency and disaster preparedness and prevention programmes, it is essential to be clear about the existing procedures in the participating organisations and countries. The project focuses on helping older people, health and social care personnel, and volunteers to raise awareness and improve readiness to assist others in case of an emergency or disaster. There is a specific focus on the resources of older people in disaster preparedness and response and how they can support other people through their knowledge and previous experience.

All project partners hosted National Workshops in order to identify the needs, structures and measures to prepare and reach older people in emergency situations and disasters. The aim was to bring together experts from the health and social sector and the field of disaster management in order to evaluate the existing situation and to come up with recommendations that will improve the situation for older people in case of a disaster at local, regional or national levels. The participants of the National Workshops were emergency and disaster management stakeholders from governmental institutions, representatives of the health and care sector for older people, NGO's and the civil society.

The National Workshop in Latvia was held on 16 April, 2015 in Riga, and was organised by the Latvian Red Cross. The results of this National Workshop will be compared with the results of national workshops that were held in Austria, the United Kingdom, The Republic of Croatia and Bulgaria, and the result will be newly developed recommendations and guidelines that can be applied throughout the European Union.



## 2. Participants

The national workshop in Riga was attended by 21 participants. The participants included representatives from state institutions, the social and healthcare system, NGO's and LTD's, as well as the users themselves (older people).

### State Institutions:

- **State Emergency Medical Service** - whose purpose it is to implement a unified national policy of providing medical service in emergency and disaster situations. Its functions are to organise and provide pre-hospital emergency medical care 24/7, to ensure preparedness for emergency situations and disasters, to ensure the storage of state medical stockpiles and to provide training in emergency medicine, first aid and medical care.
- **State Police** - This body is in charge of protecting the lives, health, rights, freedom and property of people, public, and national interests from criminal and other illegal threats.

### Were invited but did not participate:

- **State Fire and Rescue Service**
- **Ministry of Health of Republic of Latvia**
- **Riga municipality Welfare Department and Social Department**

### LTD participants:

- **Riga Hospital No 1** - the oldest hospital of Riga, which also has a short-term social care service that provides social care and health care daily to adult persons who are in particular need.
- **Ltd. Zerorisk** - civil protection specialists

### NGO participants:

- **Alliance of Riga Active Seniors** - whose aim is to promote the socialisation and integration processes of seniors, aged 50 years and up in Riga and Riga Region. At present, the society has more than 700 members.
- **Representatives from the Latvian Red Cross secretariat** (the management, the Head of Health promotion program and others) – A non-governmental non-profit volunteer-led humanitarian organization whose operations cover the whole territory of Latvia as well as cross-border projects that aim to raise awareness among citizens of the value and benefits of disaster preparedness. The Latvian Red Cross is active in providing home care service for seniors in Latvia and social care services in several social centres across the country.
- **Representatives from Latvian Red Cross social centre "Sturisi"** - Provide social care and social rehabilitation services for persons of retirement age and adults who have mental disabilities and dementia.
- **Representatives from Latvian Red Cross day care centre** - Provide social rehabilitation and support services for persons who have dementia by involving them in different workshops - memory training, art, music, handicrafts, physical activities, health and thematic sessions.
- **Representatives from Latvian Red Cross home care service** - Provide home care services for the elderly and unwell who are not able to take care of themselves, as well as a companionship service and a specialised transportation service;

- **Representatives from Latvian Red Cross health centre in Riga** - Provide consultations given by nurses, paramedics or medical assistants on a variety of medical and health issues

Were invited but did not participate:

- **Latvian Umbrella Body for Disability organisations SUSTENTO** – whose aim is to facilitate rights of people with disabilities and chronic illnesses throughout the national and local decision-making processes, and to influence the legislative development, adoption and implementation for its target group.
- **NGO “Apeirons” for people with disabilities and their friends** - whose aim is the integration of people with disabilities into the society.

PRIVATE PERSONS` participants:

- **Professor Mr. Janis Zalkalns** - Latvian State Professor of Gerontology, Habilitated Doctor of Medicine, and Professor at Riga Stradins University.

### **3. National experience of different organisations and stakeholders with older people in disasters**

The audience of the National workshop agreed that in order to develop an effective strategy for helping elderly people, the main age-related problems that determine how the elderly can respond to a disaster must be taken into account, especially as some elderly people can become confused, limiting their understanding of the situation and which may mean that they do not act appropriately in the situation.

The representatives from the State Emergency Medical Service stated that there is legislation for emergency response at a national level, however older people have never been specifically targeted. The only part of the legislation where the elderly were mentioned was in cases of extremely high temperatures – e.g., the heat wave in Europe a few years ago and this was treated as an exceptional case.

The State Police sees its role as providing support to the services which provide first aid and respond to emergency situations. The police do however have experience in dealing with elderly people who have found themselves in problematic situations, for example when they are lost and confused about their identities or addresses. Therefore, they do have knowledge of how to respond to older people with memory loss or confusion, a common problem affecting the elderly.

The representatives of the Latvian Red Cross, home care service providers, social centres and the Riga Hospital No 1 also noted that often the elderly can be quite isolated, with their only point of contact being the member of staff or volunteer of the organisation which has provided them with assistance. Therefore, in emergencies that member of staff is the one who, depending on the situation, calls for an ambulance or other service, and who would inform relatives, if there are any. Sometimes there is also a need from these services to provide specialised transport for the elderly in an emergency situation.

The group agreed that in order to effectively communicate with older people their specific needs must be taken into account to earn their trust, so that they will be more likely to follow the advice given in an emergency. For example, they are not always able to respond quickly to an evacuation order, even in the case of a fire, especially in complex situations that include physical or mental disabilities, so alternative arrangements need to be discussed and the appropriate advice needs to be given.

It is also vital to promote the inclusion of the elderly in communities, as this is an effective way to establish connections with which to communicate the appropriate response to emergencies. This should also include socialising with a range of age groups, especially as the experience of the elderly can then be passed down to younger generations for the most effective responses to emergencies.



## Comparing the National experience with the Desk and Empirical research

The Desk Research and the Empirical research that was done within the PrepAGE project, was distributed to the participants of the National Workshop together with the invitation to the workshop, and it was examined during the workshop discussions.

The research reflected many aspects of the situation in Latvia and the experience of the participants confirmed the main conclusions and findings of the research. It was agreed that the highest risk of accidents is for seniors with physical and mental health problems.

It was mentioned that the real life day to day experience was hard to compare to the research facts and for an accurate comparison further research would be needed, especially in order to compare the situation in Latvia with the situation throughout Europe.

## 4. Recommendations

The participants of the National Workshop in Latvia came up with recommendations in specific action points.

### TARGET GROUP:

1. Seniors;
2. Professionals and assistants.

### OBJECTIVES:

1. To make a clear chart of emergency responder roles and outline how they would cooperate (including state institutions and NGOs) and share information regarding each party's capacity to help in case of an emergency or a disaster;
2. To encourage social services to create a database of seniors (and their emergency contacts), listing all of their special requirements, which can be shared with responders in the event of an emergency.

### INFORMING:

1. To make informative materials - leaflets with top 5 things to do in an emergency situation for the elderly. It should be A5 format with illustrations and easy to read text:
  - a. Top 5 things to do at the emergency situation; Additional:
  - b. Life-saving tips for preparing a disaster kit;
  - c. Audio material and written material to share through national radio, local TV channels, local newspapers.
2. To provide training for information providers and volunteers who communicate with the elderly on topics such as: how to deliver information to elderly people; practical training advice.



3. To check that information has been retained correctly, for example through:
  - c) Games;
  - d) Checking regularly at home while providing the regular home services (asking questions, reminding);
4. Promote the use of special technology to make getting in touch with the emergency services easier (this is not very popular in Latvia at the moment).

#### **DISTRIBUTION of the leaflets:**

1. To be distributed by Latvian Red Cross social workers and homecare workers who visit the elderly on a daily basis;
2. Latvian Red Cross to encourage all the municipalities to use these leaflets in order to share the information with as many elderly people across the country as possible (using the register of elderly on the municipality's social service);
3. Latvian Red Cross Youth – organizing intergenerational groups;
4. To involve other NGOs.

#### **COOPERATION:**

1. To improve the cooperation with governmental institutions and municipalities;
2. To improve the cooperation with NGOs;
3. To encourage the cooperation between generations – elderly people and youth (with the help of the Latvian Red Cross Youth);
4. To improve the cooperation with private sector – entrepreneurs.

#### **Evaluation**

There was a lot of positive feedback from the participants both during and after the National Workshop, particularly from the Governmental institutions. The participants were glad that an NGO was promoting the topic of increasing disaster management preparedness for the older population, as there is a definite need to improve this situation in Latvia. All of the participants expressed interest and willingness to work on this issue in the long term, outlining the current capabilities of existing resources, naming the preconditions for further development of these activities and also readiness to present proposals for complex solutions at a national level in the future.

The Latvian Red Cross will continue to advocate the need to distinguish elderly people as a separate group in disaster management and preparedness processes by emphasising their specific needs, and will promote the cooperation between the State institutions, municipalities, social services and NGOs in order to improve the existing emergency response system. The Latvian Red Cross has been working with the elderly for a long time and has a long-term strategy for the future. In 2012 the Latvian Red Cross promoted the cooperation between the different generations within making the concept of active aging principles for municipal work, which could start to include making the elderly more aware of their need to be prepared for emergency situations.