



Information and education as a basis of risk mitigation for the citizens of Catalonia

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The General Directorate for Civil Protection of the Catalan Government is in charge of the drawing up and validation of plans that identify risk and establish a joint system of response actions to minimize the consequences of damages caused by emergencies. The risks covered are natural (fire, snow, flooding, heat,...) and human (chemical industry, transport of dangerous goods,...) ones. In the special case of flooding, an Emergency Flood Plan for Catalonia (INUNCAT) exists. Its aim is to minimize the effects and damages to people, property or the environment due to floods within the region of Catalonia.

In the following, the actions on active prevention currently realized by Civil Protection in this Mediterranean region regarding risk mitigation of flooding are described. Special emphasis is laid on the prevention of risk situations through advanced information and education which aim at diminishing the vulnerability of the population. The preparedness of the population to face a serious flooding depends highly on the level of the citizens' self-protection. Therefore the collection and dissemination of recommendations on adequate behaviour is crucial.

The Catalan Government realizes different activities to foster the understanding and the correct behaviour of the citizens in case of flooding. Informative sessions to target groups, opinion studies, mass media communication and itinerant exhibitions are some of the elements applied to increase social consciousness and mitigate the vulnerability of the population. Among these, sensitization campaigns play a crucial role. A coherent system of information and education is adhered to these campaigns.

Informative material (posters, leaflets, web sites) and sessions are part of the activities which are addressed to different social group and aim at rising the population's awareness on the risk of flooding. Multidisciplinary presentations and expert speeches on adequate behaviour are given to stakeholders in those areas which are potentially affected by flooding or which are situated downriver of big water reservoirs. These stakeholders act as multipliers to pass on the recommendations emitted by the Catalan Government.

Mass communication is a means of reaching a wide part of the population. TV spots, radio announcements and newspaper advertisements on correct behaviour in a certain emergency do already exist for certain risks, but are still missing in the case of flooding.

The realization of opinion studies contribute to a better understanding of the citizens' risk perception. The opinion study includes questions like: What do you know about recommendations on behaviour during flooding? or What would you do if you found yourselves in an emergency? When contrasting the results, the effectiveness of existing campaigns is put on proof and the content and canal of future campaigns can be determined.

The General Directorate for Civil Protection has created an itinerant exhibition as an additional activity to increase the populations' consciousness on the potential risks in the Mediterranean region of Catalonia. It includes the main preventive measures the citizens have to take in case of an emergency and depicts recommendations for self-protection. The exhibition is displayed at municipal level and is designated to approach the maximum number of citizens.

The participation in European projects, such as RINAMED, is a way to increase the interchange of know-

how and strengthen international communication. In the case of RINAMED the objective was to provide the citizens living in the Mediterranean areas with a better knowledge of the natural risks. The joint effort of the different member regions contributed to establish a common frame of prevention and information in order to increase risk preparedness in the Mediterranean area.

For future improvement and advances regarding educational and informative tasks, one of the aims is to obtain direct involvement of the population and to reach specific target groups through opinion leaders. Moreover the need to build partnership or strengthen existing cooperation, i.e. interdisciplinary participation of different institutions, such as for example the Red Cross, should help to rise social consciousness and reach the maximum number of citizens. A direct interaction with the citizens and an involvement of the population will be an effective way to educate vulnerable population and thereby mitigate negative social impacts.