


Measures to Improve Emergency Preparedness for Vulnerable Individuals in Norway

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This report emphasizes the importance of adopting an intersectional approach in assessing vulnerability within emergency planning. This involves focusing on the interplay between various crises and different personal characteristics, such as age, health, and socioeconomic status, and how this interaction can affect an individual's vulnerability in times of crisis. With such a perspective, we achieve a deeper understanding of how vulnerability is a dynamic state that changes over time and place and is highly context-dependent. To better protect the most vulnerable among us in times of crisis, the report proposes the following twelve measures:

- Measure 1: Consult "local intermediaries" (e.g., doctors, carers and voluntary organisations) about who will be particularly vulnerable in various crises
- Measure 2: Provide long-term financial funding to local voluntary organizations so that they are equipped to mobilize during crises
- Measure 3: Establish channels for cooperation and communication with voluntary organizations that can also be used in crisis situations
- Action 4: Provide extra funding to social services and voluntary organizations during a crisis, so that they can take their own initiatives to help those who are vulnerable during the crisis
- Measure 5: Map informal networks in the local environment, so that they can be utilized during crises
- Measure 6: Offer training to the civilian population (for example to people in housing associations, condominiums, and neighbourhood associations), so that they can offer those who are vulnerable help during a crisis
- Action 7: Tailor communication strategies together with representatives of the target groups to reach those who need customized information and alternative sources of information
- Action 8: Develop strategies to reduce the spread of false and harmful information
- Measure 9: Develop a strategy for social media, and use social media to build trust with, and have regular contact with, population groups that may be vulnerable in crises
- Measure 10: Use social media for two-way communication, i.e., followers can also ask questions and get answers

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- Measure 11: Develop guidelines for the use of social media when communicating during crises
 - Measure 12: Regularly evaluate and revise strategies for the use of social media in crises
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This report addresses the results and recommendations from the Horizon 2020 project BuildERS (2019-2022), focusing on strengthening societal resilience, especially among the most vulnerable groups, in the face of disasters. Viewing vulnerability as a dynamic and situation-dependent phenomenon, the project developed practical tools and solutions to support actors involved in emergency preparedness planning and improve society's ability to handle crises. The dissemination-oriented SPREAD project, funded by the Research Council of Norway, aims to bring BuildERS' findings and insights to a broader Norwegian audience through workshops and direct dialogue. These activities resulted in the development of measures adapted to the Norwegian context, focusing on improving preparedness for vulnerable groups and enhancing societal overall resilience. The report discusses the nature of vulnerability and resilience, based on existing research and BuildERS' definitions, highlighting the need for an intersectional approach to vulnerability assessment. Furthermore, the methods used in the study, selected recommendations from BuildERS, identified measures from workshops, and results from surveys are presented. Finally, the results are summarized, and recommendations for future work to strengthen preparedness for vulnerable individuals during crises are provided.

Method

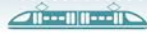
This study uses three methods to achieve its main objective: workshops with experts, analysis of recommendations from the BuildERS project, and a survey with participants at the SPREAD conference on vulnerability in times of crisis and municipal preparedness, aiming to present, discuss, and further develop recommendations adapted to Norwegian conditions to strengthen support for vulnerable groups during crises. Through workshops, participants' experiences were used to develop relevant measures, while an analysis of BuildERS' recommendations helped identify measures especially relevant for Norway. A survey was then conducted to assess the feasibility, effectiveness, and realism of these measures from the perspective of relevant Norwegian users, mainly from the municipal sector.

Results

Workshops and Conference

The workshops arranged under the SPREAD project focused on various key areas within risk awareness, communication, and emergency planning and response for vulnerable groups. The first workshop at the University of Stavanger highlighted the challenges of risk communication, focusing on the role of social media and the DSB's campaign You are part of Norway's emergency response to promote emergency awareness. Discussions pointed to the need for emergency preparedness campaigns that are adapted to local conditions and different societal groups, with an inclusive approach that also considers a global perspective and varying access to social media.

Another workshop focused on the role of local authorities in emergency preparedness and response planning for vulnerable groups, where the essence was to find solutions that ensure all municipalities can proactively care for all residents' needs during crises. Participants



proposed measures including detailed mapping of capacities and needs, development of action cards and checklists, and promoting neighbourhood preparedness through increased knowledge of self-preparedness and strengthening the principle of community spirit. It was also noted that a comprehensive and coordinated effort is necessary, and communication to vulnerable groups must be adapted and easily accessible.

In the workshop on the framework conditions for voluntary organizations, it was discussed how local and central authorities can improve support for these organizations, so they better can meet the needs of vulnerable groups during major crises. Suggestions included establishing mutual trust and clear role understanding, adjustments in legislation to support the efforts of voluntary organizations during crises and strengthening communication and resource access. A "blank cheque" approach during crises, allowing flexibility and immediate action, was also suggested to strengthen the ability of voluntary organizations to contribute effectively.

Misinformation was the theme of another workshop, where participants discussed strategies to combat the spread of misinformation among vulnerable groups during crises. Suggestions included developing communication strategies tailored to the needs of vulnerable groups, using mother tongue and effective information channels, and establishing a common preparedness plan that includes early intervention and collaboration between authorities and organizations.

The closing conference of the SPREAD project, held in Oslo, gathered insights and experiences from both researchers and practitioners on handling vulnerability in crises. Insights from various crises, including the quick clay landslide in Gjerdrum and the extreme weather event Hans, as well as the challenges of the pandemic, were presented to illustrate the importance of well-anchored emergency preparedness plans and communication strategies adapted to vulnerable groups. The conference also highlighted how experiences from the pandemic could be applied in handling other crises, such as the refugee flow from Ukraine, and emphasized the importance of recognizing intersectionality in the concept of vulnerability to better care for the most vulnerable in society during crises.

Recommendations from BuildERS

The recommendations of the BuildERS project focus on improving disaster management and support for vulnerable groups through the collection of precise vulnerability data, including disaster planning, effective risk and crisis communication, and strengthening of social capital. The recommendations encourage a broader view of vulnerability in emergency preparedness planning, engagement of relevant actors, including voluntary organizations and social services, and the development of guidelines for tailored communication. They emphasize the importance of the role of national and local authorities in strengthening dialogue and cooperation across sectors, improving psychological support, and handling communication-related vulnerabilities. Furthermore, the need to counter misinformation and disinformation, as well as measures to reduce inequality and discrimination, and strengthen informal support networks to increase society's resilience to crises, are highlighted.

Final List of Recommendations for the Survey

We came up with a list of 12 recommendations that we wanted to take forward in a survey. The summary at the beginning describes the twelve measures.



Survey

The results also showed that many organizations have partially mapped the vulnerability among the population but see room for improvements. Respondents identified specific vulnerable groups and emphasized that vulnerability can vary after type of crisis and situation. Several measures, especially those related to collaboration with voluntary organizations and the use of social media for communication during crises, are reported to be partially or fully implemented in some organizations. The respondents believed that it is realistic to introduce several of the measures and that they can have a significant effect on the preparedness for vulnerable people. Comments from respondents pointed to the need for coordinated efforts, financial and operational challenges, and the importance of tailored communication and training to strengthen the general preparedness of society and support for vulnerable groups during crises.

Conclusion

The study focused on presenting key findings and recommendations from the BuildERS project which resulted useful in a Norwegian context to strengthen support for vulnerable groups during crises. Through workshops, measures were identified to improve preparedness, including thorough mapping, promoting neighbourhood preparedness, and coordinated effort. The importance of improved framework conditions for voluntary organizations, mutual trust, adapted legislation, and strengthened communication was emphasized. Measures to combat misinformation included developing tailored communication guidelines and collaboration with culturally competent professionals. Twelve specific measures were highlighted as relevant for the Norwegian context, including consulting local intermediaries, financial support for voluntary organizations, using social media for trust-building and two-way communication, and training the civilian population. A survey of relevant users' perceptions showed that many measures are already partially implemented and are considered realistic to implement, with a common recognition of the measures' potential to strengthen preparedness for vulnerable individuals during times of crisis.