

Press release

Forschungsinstitut für Nachhaltigkeit Helmholtz-Zentrum Potsdam

Sabine Letz

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Building a Disaster-Resilient Europe: A Research Agenda

A team of researchers led by Nathan Clark of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, in partnership with the Research Institute for Sustainability (RIFS), has unveiled a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at strengthening Europe's resilience to disasters. Their published findings emphasize the importance of grounding disaster preparedness in both scientific research and practical application.

The authors warn in their article "Strengthening all-of-society approaches for disaster resilient societies through competency building: A European research agenda" that societies face an increasingly complex and unpredictable risk landscape, shaped by global crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, accelerating climate change, and emerging geopolitical conflicts. These risks often have cascading effects that disproportionately impact vulnerable communities, underscoring the need for integrated, systemic responses.

Rather than relying on isolated or top-down strategies, the team advocates for a whole-of-society approach that embraces cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary, and inclusive efforts. Researcher Pia-Johanna Schweizer from the RIFS says: "We must support complex system-thinking for addressing dynamic interplays among cultures, contexts, and risk characteristics. And we need more practical guidance on how to build local disaster resilience capabilities that are cognisant of an all-of-society approach."

More than 100 participating European research and practice organizations

The publication is based on the research results and experiences of more than eight European-funded research projects involving over a hundred research and practice organisations. These initiatives have demonstrated the benefits of involving citizens and stakeholders in disaster risk management and climate adaptation efforts. By fostering better communication between authorities and the public, the projects showed that inclusive participation can significantly improve both preparedness and response.

The key recommendations are four dimensions for building disaster-resistant societies:

1. Enhancing participation – Ensuring that communities, local authorities, volunteers, NGOs, and other stakeholders are engaged in the process.
2. Reducing vulnerability – Targeting communication, leveraging diversity and local expertise for enhancing agency.
3. Capacity building – Building trust, fostering opportunities for co-creation and learning, and equipping communities and institutions with knowledge to prepare for and respond to crises.
4. Driving organizational change – Increasing the adaptive capacity of disaster management agencies and supporting transformational change towards more proactive disaster risk management.

The researchers also highlight various methodological approaches used across the projects, emphasizing participatory action as a means of generating actionable knowledge and trust within communities.

Ultimately, the publication aims to inform a European research agenda focused on enhancing societal resilience and institutionalization of participation mechanisms for sustaining urgency and inclusivity in disaster risk management activities even in non-crisis times. The authors call for further investment in research and policy that bridges gaps between scientific knowledge, practical implementation, and citizen engagement.

contact for scientific information:

Dr. Pia-Johanna Schweizer
Research Group Leader
pia-johanna.schweizer@rifs-potsdam.de
+49 331 6264-22457

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Clark, N., Boersma, K., Raju, E., Opromolla, A., Orru, K., Hansson, S., Russo, R., Gargiulo, M. V., Duca, G., Capuano, P., Schweizer, P.-J., Cumiskey, L., Steinhausen, M., Branlat, M., Olson, A., Andersen, N. B., Larruina, R., Atun, F., Van Westen, C., ... Vollmer, M. (2025). Strengthening all-of-society approaches for disaster resilient societies through competency building: A European research agenda. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 121, 105345. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2025.105345>

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