EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

GUIDE SUPPORTING MUNICIPALITIES' PREPARATION FOR NATURAL DISASTERS

Inclusive Approaches Regarding Roma Communities

Roma in Türkiye live in various parts of Türkiye, especially in urban settlements. Roma and groups living like the Roma (Roms, Doms, Loms and Abdals) are considered among the vulnerable groups. While they try to cope with prejudices, they face challenges in various aspects of life including education, employment, health, and housing. Numerous programs are being implemented both in Europe and Türkiye to empower the Roma and overcome these challenges. One of the most important among these is the ROMACTED Programme, a joint programme of the European Union and the Council of Europe. This Guide Supporting Municipalities' Preparation for Natural Disasters was elaborated to support the disaster preparedness efforts of the municipalities.

Along with internationally accepted approaches such as the SPHERE Handbook and Core Humanitarian Standards, experiences gained in the post-disaster period of the Türkiye Earthquakes of February 6th, 2023 were taken into account in preparing the guide. The municipalities in Türkiye are carrying out their preparations for disasters in line with the laws and regulations of the Republic of Türkiye and official plans and guides including Türkiye Disaster Intervention Plans. The purpose of this guide is to contribute to the preparation processes by considering the dynamics and characteristics of Roma communities at the local level.

The guide deals with the specific needs of Roma in disaster preparedness, intervention, and recovery processes. It was designed to get better acquainted with the social, economic, and cultural dynamics of Roma communities and to support the development of strategies addressing these dynamics. Supporting the integration of the participation of Roma in disaster management and recovery processes is one of the fundamental aims of the guide.

Disaster Preparedness

Disaster preparedness is critical for minimizing the adverse effects of disasters and ensuring the rapid recovery of communities in the post-disaster period. Roma, like many disadvantaged communities, is vulnerable to disasters because of their social, economic, and cultural dynamics. Accordingly, it is of utmost importance for municipalities to consider the needs of vulnerable groups, like the Roma, during their preparedness efforts and ensure their active participation in the process.

The participation of Roma in disaster preparedness processes ensures that the plans are more inclusive, effective, and in line with local needs. Enabling utilization of local knowledge and experiences, participation lays the ground for new ideas and innovative approaches. Inclusion of vulnerable groups including Roma in the preparedness process improves the resilience of the society in general, enables efficient sharing of information, and strengthens solidarity networks.

Participation of Roma in Disaster Planning

With the transition from traditional disaster management approaches to participatory approaches, the inclusion of the communities in disaster planning and the enhancement of cooperation have gained importance. The participatory approach aims to ensure the active participation of all segments of society, including Roma, in minimizing disaster risks, preparedness, intervention, and recovery processes.

Participation of Roma communities in the identification of their disaster related risks and needs ensures that disaster plans are designed based on actual needs. Furthermore, the cooperation with Roma opinion leaders, civil society organizations, and ROMACTED Community Action Groups during the process increases the community's trust in disaster plans and allows for broader inclusivity in their implementation. The inclusion of groups experiencing intersectional vulnerabilities (e.g. Roma women, Roma children, older Roma adults, Roma youth, Roma individuals with disabilities, and Roma with chronic illnesses) in disaster management ensures that the plans can better respond to different sensitivities.

Moreover, integrating neighbourhood-based solidarity processes of the Roma into disaster plans strengthens the feasibility of the preparations. Those municipality personnel tasked with disaster management should be aware of the living conditions, sensitivities, and dynamics of vulnerable groups including the Roma.

The establishment of mechanisms that lead to meaningful participation is strongly recommended. In this regard, participation in the decision-making process is crucial. Furthermore, establishing a balance of power between vulnerable groups and stronger stakeholders is essential. Facilitation should be provided to allow the discussion of different ideas and to enable the 'weaker' participants to express their opinions.

Surveys and quantitative research are instruments used for attaining a rich pool of information on needs and priorities. Nonetheless, meaningful participation in planning for disaster preparedness should go beyond surveys and quantitative research. In this regard, neighborhood meetings and workshops can be considered. These facilitate open dialogue and collaboration on local disaster plans, allowing participants to share experiences and concerns while fostering trust between the community and municipality personnel through inclusive discussion. Furthermore, participatory risk/hazard and vulnerability mapping in Roma neighbourhoods can be conducted. This mapping plays a key role in identifying hidden vulnerabilities. In collaboration with Roma representatives, hazard and risk-prone areas in neighbourhoods can be identified through participatory mapping, considering local knowledge about infrastructure, vulnerabilities, and community resources, which will help in addressing evacuation routes, access issues, and safe gathering places during disasters.

After the plan is designed, the participatory process should continue, incorporating feedback from neighbourhood meetings, assigning responsibilities, and providing relevant training to Roma representatives to ensure effective implementation during disaster preparedness and response.

Awareness Raising About Disasters

Awareness raising about disasters involves informing individuals on disaster risks and effects of disasters. This process may include a wide array of tools spanning from neighbourhood-based training programs to the release of audiovisual materials, from drills to workshops.

To facilitate participation in the awareness-raising activities, these can be conducted within the spaces of the Roma neighbourhoods and outside of working hours. Ensuring participation from different locations in the neighborhood and from different demographic groups would increase the impact.

The content of training should be shaped considering the disaster risks and needs that the specific Roma communities face. Subjects such as disaster preparedness, emergency planning, and first aid can be included in the training. Avoiding complex terminology, the content should be presented with simple and comprehensible language. The training is recommended to be supported with audio-visual materials (pictures and videos and interactive methods such as role play and dramatization). Repeating the same information using various tools, including social media ensures that the participants would gain a better understanding of the topics introduced.

Considering Roma's strong oral traditions, storytelling, and sharing of experiences of Roma regarding disasters, can be effective tools for awareness raising, ensuring participation, and establishing emotional ties. Abstract concepts become comprehensible with real-life events. With this approach, information sharing, solidarity, and sympathy can be strengthened.

Furthermore, drills and simulations improve Roma communities' skills related to disaster preparedness and help them to respond without panicking. For instance, drills for earthquake scenarios facilitate coordination among neighbors and teach them to act rapidly and correctly during disasters.

Volunteer teams that would act in the case of disasters can be also formed within Roma neighbourhoods. These volunteers can take on responsibilities during disaster preparedness and at the time of the disasters. These volunteers can be equipped with relevant skills through various training subjects spanning from first aid to fire security and evacuations. They can be integrated further into the Presidency's Disaster and Emergency Management volunteering system. Moreover, they can also take on roles in post-disaster response.

POST-DISASTER RESPONSE

Post-disaster response involves support and assistance to individuals and communities after a disaster. This process includes interventions such as meeting emergency needs, nutrition support, shelter, health services, and psycho-social support.

Rapid Needs Assessment for Post-Disaster Response

During the rapid needs assessment, specific dynamics of Roma neighbourhoods should be considered, and meaningful participation of Roma representatives should be guaranteed. Participation of representatives from different families and groups within Roma (e.g. women, young people, older adults, and people with disabilities), ensure that the needs are more accurately defined. The forming of trust-based relationships in advance facilitates needs to be openly uttered. Participatory methods such as focus group meetings and interviews in accompaniment with Roma facilitations are recommended along with surveys. Usually, water, food, and clothing are pressing needs. Nonetheless, the priorities of Roma should be considered and materials to be provided should confirm the habits and lifestyles of the Roma communities.

Distribution of Aid Items

Effective organization of the distribution of aid items is essential for ensuring that resources reach the populations promptly, preventing chaos, and maintaining fairness throughout the process. Considering the chaos and confusion that often follow disasters, it should be noted that the stigmatization of marginalized groups, such as the Roma, may complicate distribution efforts. This risk should be addressed by implementing measures that ensure fair and effective aid delivery while minimizing the potential for discrimination or exclusion.

A couple of strategies for increasing effectiveness in distribution can be implemented. Distributing aid directly in the neighbourhoods where Roma communities live, rather than in central locations, ensures that assistance reaches those in need more quickly and efficiently. The involvement of various community leaders who have ties with various segments in the neighbourhood for the organization and aid distribution process is strongly recommended. This ensures that aid reaches those in need more quickly and efficiently and contributes to orderly and fair distribution.

Shelter

Sub-standard housing and weak infrastructure in the Roma neighbourhoods yield serious challenges following the disasters. Even if the houses are not harmed directly, the furniture and appliances in the houses become unusable at times. Property issues, unwritten agreements on rents, and co-habitation of families sometimes make it difficult for Roma people to access post-disaster housing support mechanisms. Due to these challenges, sometimes Roma establish informal tent settlements after disasters. These informal tent settlements are sometimes overlooked in post-disaster aid efforts, and issues such as access to hygiene and energy (for lighting, etc.) can arise.

These challenges should be considered when providing support for shelter. Nonetheless, all types of temporary shelters need to meet minimum structural standards and to be accessible for elderly and people with disabilities. Hygiene and privacy should be ensured. Ventilation and lighting should be maintained. In the organization of shelter interventions, participation should be ensured, and cultural sensitivities of Roma should be considered. Furthermore, interventions for home improvements, and furniture and appliance support would help disaster victims without assets and savings to recover.

Education

Similarly to the general society, the continuation of education plays a central role in matters such as cognitive and emotional development, socialization, career opportunities, and civil participation for Roma children and youth. Education also supports the returning to normal during the post-disaster period.

However, extraordinary circumstances such as Covid pandemic and the Türkiye earthquakes have once again highlighted the weakness of the connection between Roma children and education. This underlines the need for special efforts to support the continuation of education for Roma children and youth in the post-disaster period.

Various measures can be undertaken to prevent weakening of these ties during this period. Provision of school supplies and nutrition support, support for transportation to school, guidance to students, establishment of safe spaces to study, and interventions for encouraging parents to continue sending their children to school with the participation of community leaders are some of these measures. Safe spaces for children can also be used as a tool.

Health

Due to factors such as inadequate nutrition starting from the womb, substandard housing conditions, and the challenges encountered in life, the health status of Roma communities is generally weaker compared to the general population. Access to healthcare services becomes even more critical for the Roma during disasters, as disasters exacerbate existing health inequalities and introduce additional barriers to access. The high prevalence of chronic diseases among Roma as well as the increased risk of illness for pregnant women, infants, children, and older adults in disaster conditions, the heightened risk of rapid spread of infectious diseases as well as deep traumas experienced underline the critical importance of health interventions following a disaster.

Aside from the treatment of injuries, the provision of medicines for people with chronic diseases, as well as cold (during winter), and support for accessing health services for cancer and bedridden patients, are among the priority interventions in many circumstances. Initiatives to support substance abusers in coping with withdrawal symptoms should be also considered. Mobile health services, periodical health screening, support for water, sanitation, and hygiene infrastructure as well as programs facilitating access to health services are among the interventions that can be implemented during the post-disaster period. Reproductive health care also becomes crucial, especially with the increase in early marriages.

Special support mechanisms for pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and infants should also be considered. Furthermore, to support the mental health and emotional well-being of disaster victims and help them cope with stress and the trauma they have experienced, psychosocial support programs are among vital interventions.

Cash Assistance and Livelihoods

Many of the Roma lose their livelihoods following the disasters. With limited or no savings and assets, they try to manage financial hardships with negative coping mechanisms such as receiving debt from informal sources, child labour, and early marriages in the absence of effective interventions for livelihoods.

At the initial stages in the post-disaster period, cash assistance accompanying support to basic needs interventions preserves dignity and provides flexibility and access to those items that are not delivered with food and non-food item parcels. During the rehabilitation and reconstruction process, livelihood interventions for Roma strengthen their access to decent work not only during the post-disaster period but also afterward. Vocational training aimed at building professional capacity in areas with employment potential in the region, entrepreneurship training and support, microfinance initiatives, labour market entry, and job placement support are among the interventions that can be implemented. All these interventions are recommended to consider the educational levels, and preferences of the Roma, and address discrimination and exclusion in the labour market. Additionally, providing per diems for participation in the training not only ensures continuity in education but also supports their livelihoods.

Empowerment

Post-disaster empowerment helps individuals and communities affected by disasters to regain control of their lives, rebuild their communities, and actively participate in the recovery process. Empowerment initiatives enhance the well-being and resilience of individuals and communities.

Vulnerabilities of the Roma increase in post-disaster processes. Social exclusion and inequalities they experience, the limitations in their access to resources and support networks, the potential damage to social cohesion within their communities, and the psychological effects of disasters are among the factors that increase vulnerability. Empowerment interventions include training and skills development programs, initiatives improving access to services and infrastructure as well as initiatives regarding advocacy and rights awareness, leadership, social entrepreneurship, and networking. Capacity-building initiatives for Roma civil society organizations are central to empowerment. Design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of these initiatives with Roma communities themselves and Roma civil society organizations also serve empowerment purposes.

Intersectional Vulnerabilities

Roma women, children, older adults, and youth are particularly vulnerable during disasters. Women, due to their gender roles, often take on caregiving responsibilities within the family, which can become a heavier burden during disasters. Children, when left unsupervised in disaster environments, face the risk of dropping out of school and becoming more vulnerable to exploitation. Older adults, who often suffer from serious health issues, may experience worsening health conditions due to reduced access to healthcare and the lack of familiar housing environments, even if substandard. Youth, too, face increased challenges in areas like education, employment, and social integration, with the added risk of early marriage in post-disaster situations.

The intersectional vulnerabilities faced by these groups make disaster response efforts more complex, requiring the development of more careful and comprehensive strategies. Establishing support mechanisms that address the specific needs of different groups, while integrating lessons learned from past disasters, will contribute to making post-disaster interventions more inclusive and effective.