

STORIES FROM CUIDAR



CUIDAR

Cultures of Disaster Resilience
among children and young people

In Athens and Thessaloniki, Greece, children taking part in the CUIDAR project met with representatives of the General Secretariat for Civil Protection . In one school the children with severe vision impairments and multiple disabilities aged 10 -12 had the chance to talk about their rights, to express their views and feelings about risks and hazards. They made suggestions for risk reduction and tried to sensitise policy-makers about disability issues and more specifically vision impairment issues. At the end of this visit, children and the representatives from Civil Protection signed a Collaboration Contract.

The children agreed that they would try to find ways to become more active and get involved in disaster risk reduction actions, also involving their family members. The stakeholders agreed that they would try to design and implement participative workshops in schools and develop accessible material. By signing this contract, children felt that more chances for collaboration and being included in state emergency planning had been created. As one child said:
'At last someone has heard what we want to say'.

In Loures, Portugal, children aged 9 -10 felt that the best way to communicate what to do in case of a flood would be to create a leaflet. Working with their teacher, 'A Social Emergency Plan for Active Children' briefly explained about flooding, the measures the children proposed to mitigate risk and effects before, during and after a flood, and a reminder about the importance of allowing children to participate in planning and responding. When this was shown to local authorities and civil protection representatives attending the CUIDAR Mutual Learning Exercise, council leaders realised this was an important step in raising flood awareness. So they decided to reproduce it for distribution to all elementary schools in the municipality. This had the effect of drawing attention to the role of children as active contributors in disaster risk reduction.

In Ancona, Italy, a crucial agreement was signed between young people, officials from the Marche Region, the Ombudsman for Children and Youth, the Marche Association of Italian Municipalities and Save the Children Italy, to collaborate in involving and protecting children in emergencies. The Ombudsman's support for this initiative was strengthened by his involvement in CUIDAR events. The agreement followed work started in 2015 with the Marche Civil Protection Agency as part of the trialing of 'Child-centered guidelines for emergency planning'. Then during a CUIDAR event the Ombudsman met a delegation of young people and learned how their involvement in the project led them to design a child-friendly version of the local emergency plan for use on mobile phones. Consequently, the Marche Civil Protection Agency decided to publish this child-friendly emergency plan on its institutional web page, demonstrating a new willingness on the part of institutions and policy makers to recognise the role children can have in strengthening community resilience to disasters.

In Glasgow, Scotland, children aged 9-11 taking part in the CUIDAR project decided to work towards reducing the risk of fires in blocks of flats. After exploring the concepts of risk and hazards, they focused on fire safety which they felt was the biggest risk in their community. They found that information on fire safety in densely populated rented housing was not accessible to people with little knowledge of English or low levels of literacy. Old and poorly maintained privately rented housing stock in their own and similar Glasgow communities may not meet fire safety standards and with the density of housing, the children felt this was a serious and real risk. They developed a booklet that explains in pictures how to reduce the risk of fire in privately rented flats (see one of their pictures below).

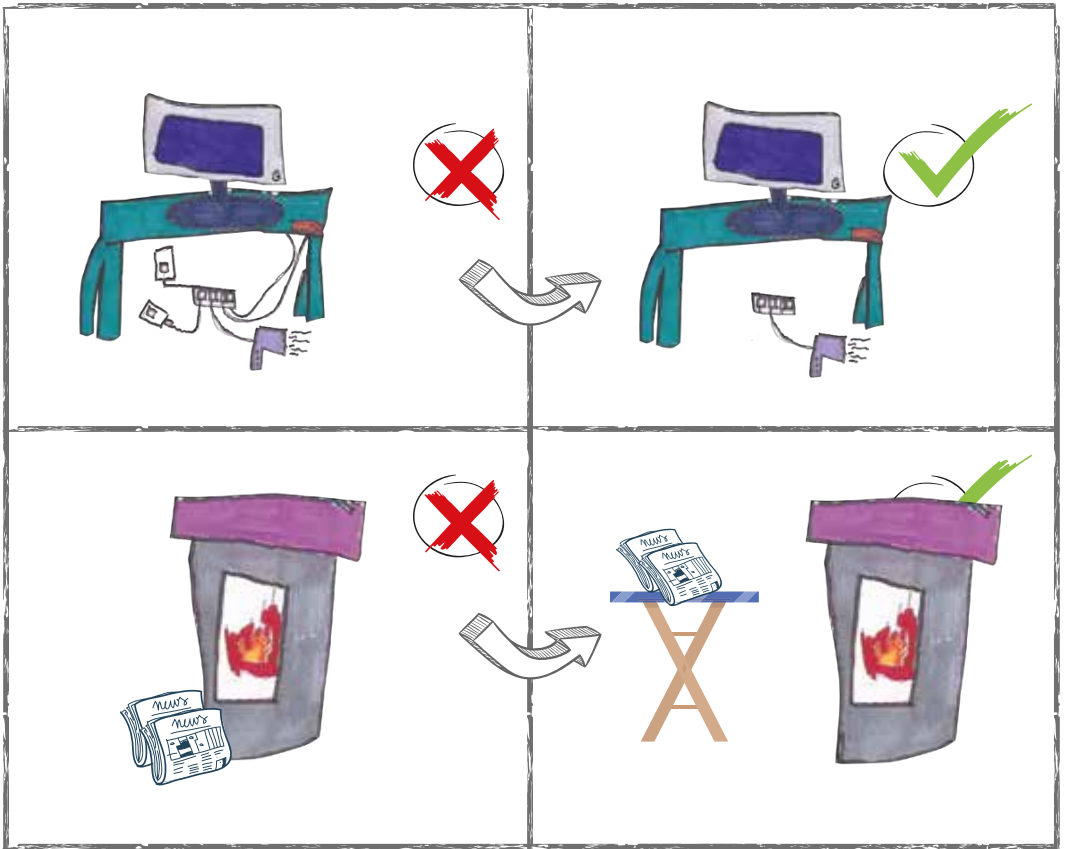
The children also met with their local MP and fire services to present their concerns and ideas. Through these conversations, they worked towards establishing better ways of communicating fire safety messages to families of all backgrounds and how to ensure that smoke and fire alarms were installed, and electrical and gas appliances meet safety standards everywhere. They sensitised decision makers and first responders to the different needs of different groups of people and as a result, they changed their approach in how to communicate with people in the community. The children also educated their peers and families in basic risk reduction measures and made sure their own homes were fitted with smoke alarms.

In Lorca, Spain, young people aged 15-18 who had experienced the 2011 earthquake, wanted to learn more about how to deal with fear, self-control and care-taking. During their Mutual Learning Exercise, they shared their concerns, questions and ideas with a psychologist specialising in emergencies, civil protection officials, practitioners and officials from the City Council. They insisted on the importance of learning how to deal with anxiety in case of an earthquake, especially if you are unaccompanied by an adult, either at home or in the street.

Young people also pointed out the need for better training in self-protection measures, using drills, talks, games and more engaging formats to learn about these emotions. They asked officials to improve their forms and networks of communication to better manage rumours and uncertainty.

They called for the formation of peer-support groups, both in schools and neighbourhoods. The policy-makers and stakeholders reacted positively, as one said, quoting The Little Prince story; ***'what is essential is invisible to the eye'***.

Officials found it interesting and innovative that young people wanted better psychological preparation before, during and after an earthquake. Some of these proposals are now being incorporated into the National Formation Plan in Psychology for Disasters and Emergencies and into the training and protocols of civil protection practitioners of Andalusia, and the Spanish network of digital volunteers in emergencies (VOST).



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