

2014 International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction
Survey for Older Persons in Potential Disaster Areas
Draft Report 20 September 2014

I. Background

Today, people aged over 60 constitute 11 per cent of the global population. By 2050, this proportion will have doubled, to 22 per cent – that is, 2 billion older people. Populations are ageing most rapidly in developing countries, which are currently home to 60 per cent of the world's older people, projected to rise to 80 per cent by 2050.¹

Globally, life expectancy at 60 (both sexes) has increased from 17.6 years in 1980-1985 to 20 years in 2010-2015. It is projected to be 22.3 by 2045-2050.² Women at age 60 are expected to live 2.9 years longer than men. Female life expectancy at 60 in 2010-2015 is 21.4 years whereas male life expectancy at 60 is 18.5. By 2045-2050 the gap is expected to remain the same with 23.7 years life expectancy at 60 for women and 20.8 years for men.³

All over the world, there is general agreement on older person's contributions in building resilience in society. For example, Bolivian migrants who move to Spain found that 69 per cent left their children at home, usually with grandparents.⁴ In rural China, grand parents care for 38 per cent of children under five whose parents have gone to work in cities.⁵ In one town in Colombia, around a third of internally displaced older persons are responsible for caring for grandchildren.⁶

In other examples, in the Netherlands, one in three people between 55 and 75 years are involved in volunteering.⁷ In the United Kingdom, 30 per cent of people aged between 65 and 74 are engaged in voluntary work.⁸ Finally in the Philippines, 30 per cent of 60 to 69 year-olds and 23 per cent of 70 to 79 year-olds participate in voluntary activities.⁹

Older persons are also generally actively contributing to society through their labor. For example, according to the ILO, globally 47 and 23.8 per cent,

¹ HelpAge International and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2012), *Ageing in the Twenty-First Century: A Celebration and a Challenge*, New York and London, UNFPA and HelpAge International.

² United Nations DESA Population division, *Profiles of Ageing 2013*.

<http://esa.un.org/unpd/popdev/AgingProfiles2013/default.aspx> Accessed June 25 2014

³ United Nations DESA Population division, *Profiles of Ageing 2013*.

<http://esa.un.org/unpd/popdev/AgingProfiles2013/default.aspx> Accessed June 25 2014

⁴ Asociación de Cooperación Bolivia España, *Situación de Familias de Migrantes a España en Bolivia* (Madrid, Asociación de Cooperación Bolivia España; La Paz, Asociación de Migrantes Bolivia-España, 2008).

⁵ China Development Gateway, "Left-behind' rural children numbered at 58 million" (February 28, 2008). Available from www.chinagate.cn/news/2008-02/28/content_10958410.htm

⁶ HelpAge International, *Obligados a Cambiar de Horizontes: Desplazamiento Forzado, un Enfoque Diferencial para las Personas Adultas Mayores en Cali, Colombia* (Colombia, 2010).

⁷ Anja Ehlers, Gerhard Naegele and Monika Reichert, *Volunteering by Older People in the EU* (Dublin, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011).

⁸ Anja Ehlers, Gerhard Naegele and Monika Reichert, *Volunteering by Older People in the EU* (Dublin, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2011).

⁹ George W. Leeson and Sarah Harper, "Ageing and later life, Hong Kong and Asia", *The Global Ageing Survey*, Oxford Institute of Ageing, Research Report 307 (Oxford, University of Oxford, 2007).

respectively, of older men and women are participating in the labor force.¹⁰ In the poorest parts of Africa, participation in labor is extremely high for both older men and women. For example, in Malawi, the rate is above 95 per cent for men and women aged 60-64 and above 90 per cent for men and women aged 65 years and above.¹¹

Despite this accepted contributions, older persons are also regularly excluded in many aspects of the workings of society. For example, out of the four age groups surveyed in six countries (Kazakhstan, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia, Tajikistan and Ukraine), those aged 65 and older experience the highest levels of social exclusion at 45 per cent, compared with the 31 per cent average for all age groups. The highest levels are found in Moldova and Tajikistan.¹²

One example that shows the level of social inclusion is participation in social protection programmes. Older persons generally show low participation in specific examples of social protection in many countries. For example, fewer than 25 per cent of older people in low- and middle-income countries receive a pension.¹³ Globally 52% of older persons above statutory pensionable age have a pension – breaks down in 17% in the least developed countries and 25% in low and medium countries. In countries such as Burkina Faso, Malawi, Pakistan and Haiti less than 5% of older people receive a pension. In around 40 countries less than 10% of older people receive a pension.¹⁴

Older persons are also disproportionately affected by disasters. For example, when Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, 75 per cent of those who died were aged over 60, even though this age group comprised only 16 per cent of the local population.¹⁵ In the Japanese tsunami of 2011, 56 per cent of those who died were 65 and over, despite this age group comprising just 23 per cent of the population.¹⁶ In an informal survey conducted in Haiyan-affected communities in the Philippines by HelpAge International and the Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE), 67 per cent of older women and 69 per cent of older men said their health deteriorated following the disaster.¹⁷

¹⁰ International Labour Organization, Economically Active Population, Estimates and Projections, database, October 2011. Available from http://laborsta.ilo.org/applv8/data/EAPEP/eapep_E.html

¹¹ International Labour Organization, Economically Active Population, Estimates and Projections, database, October 2012. Available from http://laborsta.ilo.org/applv8/data/EAPEP/eapep_E.html

¹² UNDP, Regional Human Development Report on Social Inclusion: Beyond Transition: Towards Inclusive Societies (Bratislava, 2011).

¹³ ILO Social Protection Department database, www.social-protection.org/gimi/gess/RessourceDownload.action?ressource.ressourceId=37897 (accessed 6 June 2014).

¹⁴ ILO, Old-age effective coverage: Old age pension beneficiaries, <http://www.ilo.org/gimi/gess/ShowTheme.do?tid=10>, 2014

¹⁵ Wilson, N. (2006), 'Hurricane Katrina: unequal opportunity disaster', *Public Policy and Ageing Report* 16(2), pp 8-13.

¹⁶ HelpAge International (2013), *Displacement and older people: the case of the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami of 2011*, London, HelpAge International.

¹⁷ HelpAge International and COSE (2014), *Older people's inclusion in the Typhoon Haiyan response*, Cebu City, HelpAge-COSE.

2014 will be the final year in the four-year “Step-Up” Campaign on the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction (IDDR), which raises awareness and advocates for inclusive disaster risk reduction, each year focusing on the role of important actors such as – Children and Young People (2011), Women and Girls (2012), People living with Disability (2013) and Older Persons (2014). The vital need to acknowledge them as a resource for resilience and ensure their equal participation in resilience building needs to be recognized. As part of the activities leading to the IDDR celebrations in October, a survey was conducted of both older persons and governments on issues related to ageing and DRR. The result of the survey is intended to better understand older people’s knowledge and experiences with disasters, and to inform the messaging for the International Day for Disaster Risk on 13 October 2014.

II. Survey for Older Persons in Potential Disaster Areas

The survey was administered 15 August and in 2 weeks gathered 226 responses from older persons and 141 responses from policy maker and government officials. The responses were mostly in English, and a number of responses were also received in French, Spanish and other languages such as Nepali.

Voices from older persons

“This is making me think about getting in touch with the local government unit in my community and finding out more about their work in preparing for disasters”

“There are no opportunities provided by the local Government. The only source of learning and preparing is attending workshops of Non-Government Organizations.”

“Sometimes the drills done by the responsible agencies do not always suit everybody.”

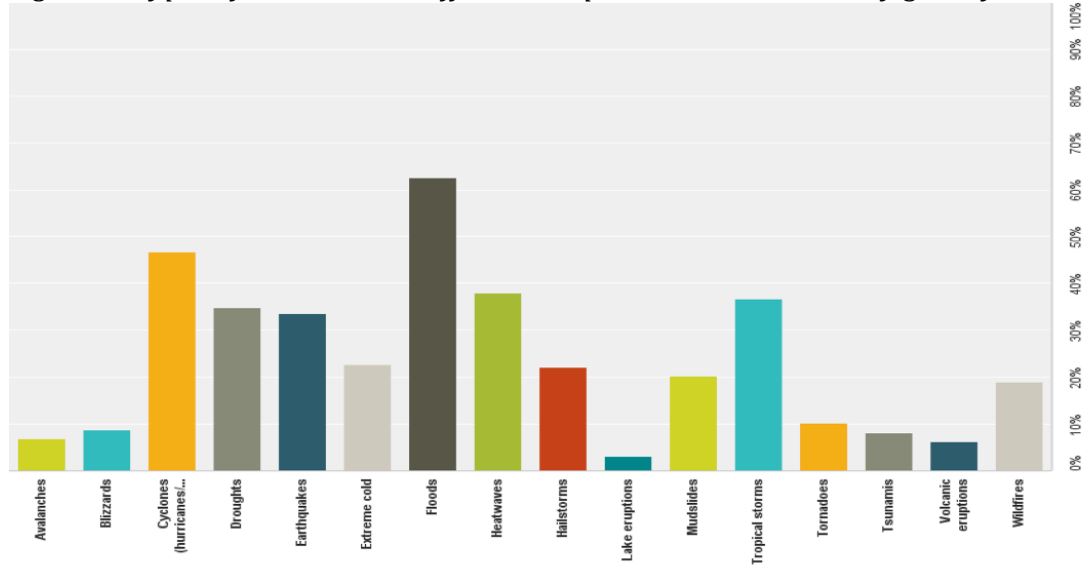
Views from older persons

The first part of the survey was for older persons, to gather their views on how various aspects of disasters affect them, and how they wish to engage in the process or reducing these potential impacts in the future.

Climate induced disasters the greatest threat

Older persons who completed the survey noted that floods (62%), cyclones (46%)/typhoons (36%) and heat waves (37%) were the hazards they most likely expect will affect them in any given year. This highlights the increasing perceived effect of climate related hazards from an older persons point of view. One possible reason for this response is the fact that weather related disasters are more frequent compared to geological hazards such as earthquakes, and thus considered more relevant.

Figure 1. Types of hazards that affect older persons the most in any given year



Capable but need social support system

The survey showed that older persons have capabilities to prepare themselves for disasters, but require some form of assistance to effectively carry out these preparations. For example, asked what older persons do to protect themselves from disasters, 60% of the respondents noted that they prepare or stock food and water, 42% noted that they prepare a bag with medicine and important documents and 36% noted that they prepare a list of contact numbers of family and friends.

Asked where they will go in case of a disaster, 60% of the respondents noted that they will try to go to a community evacuation center, 42% noted that they will try to go to a nearby family or friends home, and 35% noted that they will try and go to a family or friends home located in another town or area. Asked if they can evacuate themselves in times of disasters, 79% of the respondents said that they could do so.

Asked to identify multiple people who can help them the most to evacuate before a disaster strikes, 71% of the respondents identified their relatives, 49% identified government officials, and 40% identified their neighbors or friends.

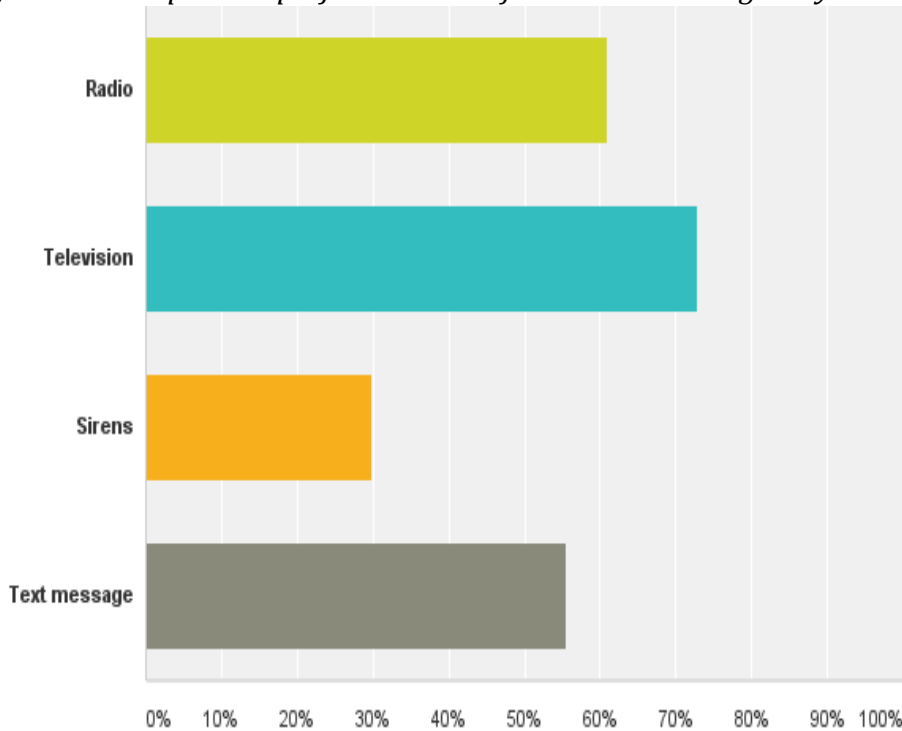
Finally, in order to explore the issue of social cohesion, respondents were asked if they have regular contacts with other members of their communities, including other social groups such as youth, and people with disabilities, and 69% noted that they do have such contacts and interactions with other social groups.

Different needs

The survey showed that older persons have different preferences in various aspects of disaster risk management, based on what they are comfortable with. For example, asked what are the best multiple means to inform them of early warning signals, 73% said they prefer through television, 61% identified through

radio, and another 55% said through text messages. Surprisingly, only 29% preferred sirens as an effective means for them to receive early warning signals.

Figure 2. Older persons preferred modes for communicating early warning



Participation and contribution

The survey also tried to understand the level of participation and the contributions that older persons do for various aspects of disaster risk management.

When asked if they knew who was responsible for disaster preparedness in their respective communities, 58% of the respondents said no. Asked if they participate in disaster preparedness planning in their communities, 68% said they do not participate at all, 28% said they sometimes participate, and 9% said they participate frequently.

Asked how they would like to be better included in decision-making on disaster planning, 70% of the respondents noted their wish to explain to disaster planners about the special needs and vulnerabilities of older persons, while 43% said they wish to be given training so that they can help the community in disaster preparedness and response, using their own abilities, and 32% noted their wish to share their experiences on how to cope with disaster situations.

On the issue of what are the barriers to encourage participation of older persons in disaster preparedness activities, most respondents noted that mobility and capacity as the biggest challenge, including issues related to transportation and resources for preparedness. Following this, respondents identified the lack of awareness and information, including the importance of disaster

communications. A third issue identified was the availability of institutions for coordinating action. These were then followed by lack of community unity and varying gender roles, which prevent women from participating in disaster preparedness actions.

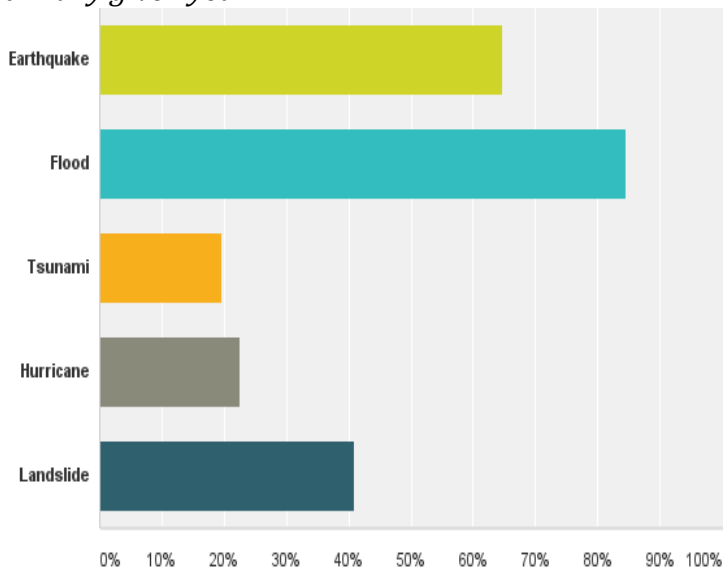
Perspectives from decision makers and government officials

Awareness and action to ensure the inclusion of older persons in disaster risk management planning and action fall into the hands of decision makers and government officials. A special component of the survey was also conducted in order to get the views of these officials.

Different views of the threats

Decision makers when asked what are their perceived multiple hazards posed the greatest threat to older persons, listed floods (84%), earthquakes (65%), and landslides (45%). This varies from the perception of older persons, who selected mostly climate related hazards.

Figure 3. Decision makers perceived types of hazards that affect older persons the most in any given year



Asked if they believe that older persons are affected more by hazards as compared to younger persons, 93% said they believe strongly that this is the case, and further noted that the reasons for this in order of priority, includes poor mobility, poor eyesight and hearing, lack of access to information, and low income.

In addition, close to half (49%) of the policy makers who responded to the survey noted that older persons are assets to society because they have more experience in dealing with disasters as compared to other age groups.

Special considerations

Due to the above, 85% of these policy makers said that they believe that older persons should be given special considerations compared to other members of the population, both to include their special vulnerabilities to disasters, and also to capitalize on their special knowledge and experience.

Finally, policy makers also identified the need to improve their understanding of older persons in their communities, through improved and disaggregated data collection, and mapping, and the use of this information in disaster risk assessment and planning. In addition, the documentation and use of their experiences and wisdom including traditional knowledge was identified.

Asked to list their priorities to improve the inclusion of older people in DRR programmes and services, decision makers and government officials noted that the provision of more support for older persons in the context of disaster issues should be one top priority. They explained that this includes ensuring that DRR policies and programmes reflect and respond to the interests and needs of older persons; providing more targeted support such as training, education and awareness raising, their engagement in targeted mitigation activities, and supporting the formation of older persons associations. Policy makers also identified the need to make policy development processes more inclusive and accessible as another priority. This includes actively seeking community feedback on risk analysis, assessment and design of DRR plans and activities.