

# Emergency Resilience in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities.



## BACKGROUND

With approximately a third of Australian residents born overseas, cultural and linguistic diversity is one of Australia's defining features and most valuable assets. However, when disasters strike, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities often face additional challenges, including:

- Poor knowledge of local hazards
- Low English proficiency hindering access to emergency information
- Undeveloped support networks
- Low awareness of recovery services
- Lack of trust in authorities
- Past traumatic experience

To support CALD communities to enhance disaster resilience, Australian Red Cross implemented a two-year project entailing volunteer mobilisation, community engagement, capacity building, development of multilingual disaster preparedness resources and research. The research's objectives were to:

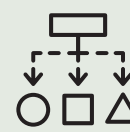
- Refine our understanding of CALD communities' experience with disasters
- Highlight findings of global research and practices
- Outline concrete and achievable actions that various stakeholders can take to increase disaster resilience in CALD communities

### Examined topics

- The migration journey and settlement challenges
- Perceptions, knowledge and attitudes towards hazards
- The influence of past experience
- The role of social capital
- The challenges of culturally appropriate emergency communication

### Methodology

- Literature review
- Semi-structured interviews with migrants, refugees, community leaders, and key informants in the disaster management and settlement sectors (n = 29)
- Practical experience and lessons learned from Red Cross engagement



## FINDINGS

### Past experience and hazards perceptions

- Past experience – including the migration journey – has a major impact on both resilience and vulnerability, as it influences our perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and coping capacity.
- The meanings of “emergency” or “disaster” varied widely across respondents, with past experience being a strong determinant.

*For [our] people, emergency situations are war, when they were sleeping and hearing gun shots. This is a disaster. For [our] people who live here, their idea of disaster is war and political confusion.*

- Overall, hazards awareness among recently-arrived migrants and refugees is low.

*Before migrating here, how much did people from your community know about natural disasters in Australia?”*

*Nothing. To be honest, we knew about kangaroos, we didn't know about cyclones.*

- For many migrants, disasters are not a salient problem because of the numerous competing priorities in their lives.

*Do you know if people in your community have taken some action to prepare for natural disasters? I don't think so, because you know when they first came here, there are many things we must do for settlement, we must care about health, Centrelink, how to send kids to school, to uni... And you prepare yourself [to find employment], you improve*

*your [English] language, and then, maybe, when we're finished with all this [laughs], we can prepare to face disasters.*

### Social capital

- Social capital is a key ingredient of emergency resilience. Generally, members of CALD communities benefit from strong “intra-group” bonding social capital (connecting them with people sharing similar backgrounds), but weaker bridging and linking social capital (connecting them with mainstream culture and institutions).

### Emergency communication

- The ability to access, understand and act upon emergency information is a key determinant of resilience. No single communication strategy is alone sufficient to ensure that CALD communities possess the required information to prepare for, cope with and recover from emergencies. A combination of different approaches that consider the specificities and needs of each community seems to be most effective.
- Building trust-based relationships with CALD communities and their leaders might be the most powerful way to ensure communities' access to emergency information. To be effective, these relationships must be developed well before disasters strike.



## GOING FORWARD

Despite “vulnerability factors” resulting from specific life circumstances, many migrants and refugees display high levels of resilience, knowledge and coping capacities – often as a result of having overcome the challenges of migration and settlement. However, these strengths are often overlooked due to a lack of interaction between CALD communities and disaster management agencies. This research therefore outlines concrete actions to enable their tremendous resilience capacities to inform our sector's efforts.

