

From Risk to Resilience: Strengthening Disaster Risk Reduction for All People



By Jonathan Alexander, Research Assistant, Directorate for Disaster Risk Reduction, Sustainable Tourism, Caribbean Sea and Environment within the region.

The Caribbean and Latin American region continues to be one of the most vulnerable to disasters globally, with nearly 190 million people affected by 1,534 disasters between 2000 and 2022. ¹ Climate change is driving more frequent and severe weather-related events, making it harder for countries to recover before the next disaster strikes.² This situation is compounded by challenges like food security, which worsens when disasters disrupt agricultural production and supply chains, further affecting vulnerable populations.

COVID-19 exposed the region's fragility, crippling economies, halting development, and causing widespread displacement. The increasing frequency of these events means we must not only manage existing risks but also prepare for new ones. Without preparedness, even less severe disasters can have catastrophic impacts. The key to building resilience lies in early warning systems, which can greatly mitigate disaster impacts by facilitating rapid response and providing crucial information to vulnerable communities.

However, for these early warning systems to be effective, they must be inclusive. Disasters do not discriminate, but their impacts are disproportionately felt by vulnerable groups—especially those already struggling with issues like food insecurity. Disaster risk reduction strategies must be tailored to reflect the diverse needs of the Caribbean's pluralistic society, ensuring that no one is left behind.

At the heart of early warning systems is communication, and in our diverse region, this means addressing linguistic barriers. For instance, in Trinidad and Tobago, there are over 44,000 Venezuelan refugees and migrants, many of whom may not have a strong command of English.³ In times of disaster, this language gap could prevent them from accessing life-saving information such as evacuation routes, emergency services, and safety protocols. While some may have learned English, it's crucial to recognize that language barriers still exist and can increase vulnerability. To create a truly resilient region, disaster communication must be multilingual, not just in Trinidad and Tobago but across countries with significant migrant populations. Only then can we ensure that

disaster preparedness and response efforts reach everyone.

Inclusion also means ensuring that people with disabilities are not left behind during disaster preparedness and response efforts. Globally, we've seen how disasters disproportionately affect people with disabilities—the death rate among them during the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 was twice as high as the general population.⁴ In the [Caribbean](#), accessibility challenges can leave people with mobility impairments particularly vulnerable, whether it's the lack of ramps and accessible shelters or uneven surfaces that hinder evacuation. Similarly, those with sensory impairments may miss critical warnings. Disaster risk reduction strategies that include provisions for these groups are not just ethical, they're necessary. By addressing these gaps, we can create more resilient communities and save lives.

Food security, defined as the state when all people have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food at all times, is a critical yet often neglected aspect of disaster risk reduction. When disasters strike, they wreak havoc on agriculture, disrupting food supply chains and leaving vulnerable populations at risk of hunger—both immediately and in the long term. This is especially alarming in rural areas, where many rely on farming for their livelihoods. If we don't prioritize food security in our disaster strategies, we risk escalating the situation into widespread hunger and social instability. Protecting agriculture and ensuring rapid recovery after disasters isn't just an option—it's essential for securing the region's food supply and preventing further chaos.

Children and youth are particularly vulnerable during and after disasters, with around one billion children globally at risk due to climate impacts. However, they are not just passive victims.⁵ Young people are key to building future resilience. Engaging youth in disaster risk reduction allows us to tap into their fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, making preparedness and response strategies more effective. Involving young people strengthens their own protection and fosters a culture of resilience that will benefit future generations.

In the face of growing disaster risks, it is imperative that the region adopts inclusive, comprehensive disaster risk reduction strategies that protect all people—regardless of language, ability, or age. Addressing food security as part of disaster resilience is critical for reducing the long-term impacts on vulnerable communities. Ensuring that disaster communication reaches everyone, that people with disabilities are supported, and that youth are actively involved will enhance our collective resilience and lead to more effective disaster responses. This is not just a strategy for today, but for the future of the Greater Caribbean.

1 Overview of disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean 2000-2022 | UNDRR

2 Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems' capacities in the Caribbean Region | UNDRR

3 Trinidad and Tobago | ACAPS

4 Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems' capacities in the Caribbean Region | UNDRR

5 Disaster risk reduction and recovery | UNICEF