

NATIONAL PPN REPORT

BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE FOR TIMES OF EMERGENCY



Lónraí Rannpháirtíochta Pobail Éireann
Public Participation Networks Ireland

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
03	CONTEXT
04	ENGAGEMENT
06	CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY THE PPNS IN RESPONDING TO EMERGENCIES
08	THE POTENTIAL OF PPNS TO ENHANCE EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE
10	GENERAL RESPONSE TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES
11	COLLABORATION AND FUTURE PLANNING
14	COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION
16	MAPPING
17	LEADERSHIP
18	THE IMPORTANCE OF GROWING RESILIENCE AND INDEPENDENCE AT COMMUNITY LEVEL
19	PRACTICAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS
20	IMMEDIATE ACTION FOR PPNS
21	SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS
25	CONCLUSION
26	APPENDICES

Executive Summary

In this first joint initiative, the Public Participation Networks (PPNs) from across the country demonstrated the significant role they have played to date in responding to emergencies.

Their activities have focused particularly on vital communication with their uniquely extensive membership of community groups but have also encompassed provision of a wide range of other supports. Communities have faced difficult and often persistent challenges as a result of different emergencies. Shortcomings in responses to these prompted PPNs to identify community resilience and emergency response as a nationally critical issue to be addressed.

This report is based on a national online survey of all PPNs, and an in-person workshop to which representatives from all PPNs in July 2025 were invited. It is intended to form the basis for discussions with other stakeholders leading to agreement on a collaborative process to ensure communities are as resilient and prepared for emergencies as possible.

It considers the experience of diverse types of emergency across communities in Ireland in recent years and looks at the challenges experienced by PPNs in responding to these. It also considers the potential of the PPNs to contribute both to enhancing community resilience and playing a part in ensuring effective emergency response when needed. Fundamentally, it proposes that communities need to be consulted about their needs, facilitated to become increasingly resilient and supported appropriately to cope in times of crisis. All stakeholders; agencies and communities must be open to learning from their experience of emergencies, to improve future responses.

Specifically, the report seeks:

- A proactive and collaborative, interagency approach amongst all stakeholders, including the voice of the community (represented by the PPNs), and the development of a mandatory planning policy, setting out the requirements for ensuring communities readiness for a range of emergency scenarios.
- Clear communication protocols to ensure that a) all necessary information for emergency planning and response is up to date and accurate, and b) that communities receive timely, accurate, clear and regular information during emergency periods. Consideration must be given to reaching geographical communities and communities of interest and in making communications fully accessible.
- Support for comprehensive mapping, and updating, of emergency response community supports maps, to which can be added information from Central and Local Government, other stakeholders and agencies, to generate a 'Go To' resource of information for communities.
- Clear leadership from national and local government, to which is added more localised responses in order to maximise the supports available to communities in times of acute stress. In tandem with this there needs to be clarity about the roles of all stakeholders and a commitment to collaborative working.

- Support for measures to enhance resilience of local communities.
- Support for practical resources and responses as the need for these is identified, whether they relate to an individual service provider or all households.

Finally, it identifies a number of areas in which the PPNs themselves can begin to take action. Importantly, the report recognises that the PPNs' capacity is already exceeded and that additional resources will be needed to enable them to fulfil their potential of assisting communities to cope in times of emergency and to bounce back



1.0 Context

Communities across Ireland have experienced a range of different emergency situations in recent years.

These have included the COVID pandemic, weather-related emergencies, incidents of civil unrest, mass population movements, and cyber attacks.

Emergencies have impacted communities' access to basic needs including food supplies, infrastructure (such as power, water, transport/ travel, communications), services (such as healthcare and financial services) and employment, aside from wider non-essential services, activities and supports.

The response to these events has involved state agencies at national, regional and local level but has also seen the immediate mobilisation of local communities to provide practical support. In response to the needs in their local areas PPNs, as the recognised voice of community organisations engaging with Local Government, have found themselves called upon to assist and support both Local and Central government bodies and their member organisations, during these emergencies.

In the aftermath of many of these situations, communities have identified shortcomings in how the State and service providers responded and have pointed particularly to how poorly communities have been integrated into these responses. There is concern within communities across the country that lessons need to be learned from past experiences and that proactive action must be taken to ensure

- the resilience of communities facing future emergencies and
- the development of a partnership model involving all relevant agencies and **local communities** that can co-ordinate readiness for future emergencies.

Despite pitifully small staff and budget resources, and often with no notice, PPNs have provided important assistance, especially through communication of critical information, including the mapping of critical local infrastructure and resources.

PPNs' unique role in networking with existing community organisations has meant that they are aware of the challenges faced by local communities in times of emergency and of their concerns to ensure optimum preparedness for future such situations.

As a result, they are aware that different emergency scenarios have varying impacts and require appropriate and tailored responses both between and within communities. It is essential to work with communities to enable them to react flexibly and successfully, so that immediate and enduring negative impacts are minimised

2.0 PPN Engagement

Working on behalf of all PPNs, an Organising Committee of Tipperary, Leitrim and Laois PPNs initiated a nationwide engagement to look at how PPNs can assist in ensuring best possible readiness within communities for future emergency situations.



An initial survey of all PPNs across the country was conducted in June/ July 2025. This was followed with a day-long national workshop event in Portlaoise, Co. Laois involving representatives and staff from across all PPNs on the 17th July 2025. PPNs nationally wish to acknowledge the work of Dr. Harriet Emerson as facilitator at the national workshop event in Portlaoise and for her support in compiling this report. The Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht (DRCDG) provided financial support for the national workshop event.

Both the survey and workshop used the following 6 themes to prompt discussion around the issue of emergency responses:

- Communications
- Mapping of Community Resource and Supports
- Best practices used by PPNs
- Challenges faced by PPNs
- Best practice collaborations
- Future planning suggestions

The survey submissions and workshop outputs were combined and analysed to generate a summary of experience of emergency responses to date and recommendations for improved future readiness.

This report is viewed by the PPNs as the start of a process. It is to be circulated initially to participating PPN representatives for comment and amendment.

PPN representatives will meet again to develop clear recommendations and a lobbying plan with time lines to communicate and promote these.

The report is to be submitted to the Minister and DRCDG and is intended to form the basis of further discussion with those agencies that need to collaborate to deliver future emergency responses. All PPNs will be prepared to meet with their Local Authority and Councillors, as well as their TDs to communicate these recommendations, and will ensure all members of the Seanad are also contacted. The goal is to secure political buy-in to effective PPN and community participation in emergency response planning and to the development of enhanced community resilience.

Nationally, PPNs have in excess of 20,000 member community groups, who in turn have approximately 2.4 million individual members, and a reach in terms of the people they deliver services to or support in the community of multiples of this.

Think for example of Meals on Wheels services, GAA clubs, Beach Clean groups, and the recognised, established and operational networks they have on the ground, as well as their ability to mobilise people locally.



Below is a brief summary of the challenges and shortcomings PPNs have experienced in past emergency responses and a note on their potential to enhance future responses. Then the areas for attention identified by the PPNs are set out. A small selection of examples of successful and best practice responses contributed to by PPNs are identified where relevant in text boxes. Lastly, a series of recommendations for delivering resilient communities that are best prepared for emergencies that may arise.

3.0 Challenges experienced by the PPNs in responding to emergencies

The PPNs identified challenges in a number of areas that negatively impacted local communities and significantly impaired their ability to support their member organisations.

A general **lack of preparedness** and the absence of developed strategies or plans was noted, compounded by a failure to learn from the actual experience of affected communities. There has been an absence of joined-up thinking by agencies and service suppliers; with every local authority area largely left to do their own thing. Evidence of problems caused by poor planning decisions, inadequate infrastructure, and lack of preparedness within agencies to operate their own services in emergencies indicates a wider lack of future planning.



The **different needs of communities have often not been fully appreciated**. These vary depending on circumstances (such as heating systems reliant on electricity, lack of funds/ space for additional provisions, electric/ fossil fuel vehicles, etc.) or the type of emergency.

Similarly, the **potential of communities to help themselves is often not recognised**, particularly where targeted supports from service providers and agencies to be made available. In many instances, community organisations have swung into action significantly before the local authority or other service providers have been able to provide support. Often these service providers do not inform themselves of how they can support and supplement community action for maximum efficiency and effectiveness, especially by prioritising the needs that the communities have not been able to address. This has led to examples of state agencies and service providers overlaying existing community efforts resulting in duplication of functions, inefficiencies, and reduced effectiveness.

Despite the above, there is lots of work left to the volunteers within communities during emergencies which has saved the government money. However, there is often **little or no recognition or respect for the work of community organisations** in emergency situations. As a result, volunteer fatigue is exacerbated. This is especially so for organisations that are so budget starved. Human and resource audits are needed to ensure all volunteers are appropriately and adequately trained.

Serious failures of communication during emergencies have been a recurring problem. Communications have often been absent, unclear or unreliable, with inconsistencies in format and delivery. These difficulties have been exacerbated by reliance on phone systems or text networks for communications which may be unavailable due to power outages. In addition, vulnerable individuals are not always identified or reached out to, for reasons of GDPR. Provision for people with disabilities is also not commonly made. These are examples of the many dimensions of communications during emergencies that need to be addressed.

There seems to be **little evidence of timely reviews** (or audits) following emergencies, to help identify what worked well and what didn't, and why. This learning is important to inform actions that must be taken to improve the ability to respond to future emergencies. There is also a **lack of accountability amongst agencies and service providers** prior to or during emergencies, with apparent resistance from government agencies and stakeholders to working together for better preparedness.

Lack of clear guidance around “red tape”, such as GDPR issues, has been seen to impede emergency responses. Important information about risk / vulnerability factors needs to be kept up to date and accessible for responsible use to ensure that people are protected and supported. This is a difficult area, where individuals' privacy is concerned, but if agencies work together and with communities, it is possible to provide supports where they are needed while managing personal information.

Specific to PPNs, a persistent problem was identified across multiple PPNs where **state and semi-state agencies do not recognise the PPNs as the voice of the community**. The dismissal of local, lived experience as “anecdotal” results in emergency responses that can be ineffective and inefficient. This problem is exacerbated where institutions are resistant to working with communities and, in some cases, even reluctant to work collaboratively with other agencies.

There is a persistent challenge in **raising public awareness of the PPNs and their role**. The PPNs agree that the DRCDG's previous promotional campaign was not effective in raising the profile of the PPNs. However, it would be possible to explain the PPNs role and its importance through the lens of emergency planning.

PPNs are hampered by a lack of resources and are often overstretched by mission creep, that is unsupported by an increased budget. PPNs would prefer to work with other stakeholders to explore the most useful remit for the PPNs in times of emergency and then for additional funding to be allocated to support this.

4.0 The Potential of PPNs to enhance emergency response and community resilience

The PPNs have the largest data base of community groups and leaders in the Country. These groups represent established and active community networks, many equipped and experienced in providing services and supports to their local communities. Experience of emergencies in recent years has demonstrated how responsive these groups can be; often providing the first response on the ground and critical supports to individuals and families in a faster timeframe than large agencies can achieve.

These characteristics mean that PPNs and their member groups are ideally placed to support communications during times of emergency and to deliver real and vital action on the ground. There is a clear appetite amongst community organisations to work with state agencies and service providers to ensure that future responses are as effective as possible.

In addition, there is a strong desire amongst communities for support to enable them to become more resilient, and to achieve optimal readiness to cope under times of severe stress whatever the cause.

While it is acknowledged that PPNs don't deliver emergency response services directly, they are ideally positioned to play a crucial co-ordination, support and communication role that can significantly strengthen the effectiveness of those services. PPNs would not claim to be the source of all answers for communities, however they are ideally placed to support:

- awareness-raising on emergency preparedness through campaigns, workshops, development of emergency kits and neighbourhood watch systems

- mapping of community resources and supports available, especially those relevant in emergencies
- conduct of community audits to identify areas of vulnerability and best practice that can inform plans for improving readiness to cope successfully with emergencies



- input of vital community feedback on emergency response plan development
- clear, timely, accurate and trusted communications during times of emergency to community members, supplementing already established regular and consistent communications (newsletters, ezines, social media, emails, SMS messages, WhatsApp groups, linkage groups, etc.)
- co-ordination of on-the-ground activities by community organisations and volunteers during emergencies, and allocation of services to the most vulnerable residents

- co-ordination of logistics, such as supplies for community -based initiatives
- delivery of training to enhance community resilience through community groups including first aid, emergency response, crisis communication
- facilitate and support recovery after a crisis
- gathering of community feedback for evaluation of emergency responses to improve future preparedness and planning
- collaboration and facilitate partnerships between local authorities, emergency services and community organisations

amongst other potential actions. They are also powerful advocates for investment in resilient infrastructure and inclusive emergency planning that takes diverse community needs into account.

Example of PPN action:

****Roscommon PPN** co-ordinated the establishment of Community Hubs as part of the County's response efforts to Storm Eowyn. 41 hubs were supported by the PPN team on a daily basis over a period of 3 weeks, ensuring basic essentials were provided in focal locations across the County, particularly those areas worst affected.

**** A Tipperary PPN** social inclusion LCDC rep (a first responder in his own community) proposed to the LCDC that a Response to Extreme Events subgroup needed to be explored promptly, being open to having members with relevant expertise drawn from other agencies. At the following LCDC meeting (June 2025), it was announced that such a subgroup was to be formed.

Both the Tipperary PPN Co-Ordinator, a PPN LCDC rep, and the chair of the LECP advisory group, who is an Environment PPN rep, are members.

The sub-group has decided that they are going to create a community response plan that will link into the Major Emergency Plan. This overall emergency plan for the County has the emergency responses of the County Council sections, including housing, planning and infrastructure, with the Chief Fire Officer having oversight to coordinate the plan.

So, County Tipperary will have a community response plan within the Major Emergency Plan, with the PPN as one of the main community communicators along with other relevant agencies, in times of emergency.

PPNs are eager to work with all the relevant stakeholders to improve community resilience and ensure the most effective emergency response possible. They are keen to discuss and identify the most effective and practical way that they can participate. However, as noted above, PPNs have very limited staff and are already severely under-funded, so that adequate resources will need to be allocated for an expanded workload.

5.0 General response to address these challenges

The PPNs agree that there is a need for an integrated and proactive response by State and semi state agencies to handling emergency situations, which is informed by communities' input. This requires a culture change towards collaboration as a default mode of operation within and between such bodies, and with local communities. This approach is crucial for the development of a co-ordinated response system for emergency situations.

There is a strong sense that agencies risk being inefficient and duplication efforts if they fail to consult and understand communities and work with them in response to crisis situations. It was agreed that communities need to be

- consulted about their needs, experiences of emergency situations, and the ways in which they can be assisted to cope most successfully under stress,
- facilitated to become increasingly resilient and able to manage serious challenges and bounce back, and
- appropriately supported through plans and resources, and provision of community supports so that they can navigate sudden periods of acute pressure satisfactorily.

5.1 Prepared to learn

An essential part of building communities that are best positioned to cope with emergency situations, and building effective emergency response plans is a determination to learn from previous experience, both in Ireland and elsewhere.

This learning needs to be gathered from all 10 stakeholders, including the local communities affected, and conscientiously and efficiently used to revise plans and upgrade resources and skills for emergency response and general resilience.

In addition, discovering and learning about best practice that can be adapted from elsewhere is an important part of efficient and informed emergency planning.



Greater detail is given below on a number of issues of concern and proposed responses to these.

6.0 Collaboration and future planning

There was universal support amongst PPNs for a move to a more proactive approach to managing emergency situations. Collaborative planning is needed so that agencies and communities can work in harmony in times of emergency. There should be a clear system for collaborative emergency planning at a local level (Local Authority and smaller areas) and PPNs request membership of multi-agency emergency response co-ordination teams at all levels. It is vital that those agencies and service providers involved work together to address potential challenges and break down existing silo mentalities.



PPNs are essential partners in providing effective emergency response. Interagency collaboration alone is not sufficient; there needs to be a co-ordinated response at grass-roots level. Since communities themselves respond generally fastest in emergencies, it is vital that community actions are integrated with those from agencies involved. PPNs report that commonly local government-led 'agency' responses superseded community initiatives some weeks or even months later.

The needs of the community in an emergency arise immediately and it is clear that there is room for both local and agency-led responses but an integrated approach or smooth handover where appropriate is preferable to past experiences of disconnect, or a lack of local understanding and knowledge by agencies when they become involved. Resourcing and co-ordination are often the biggest challenge for emergency responses despite having the structures in place for collaboration. It is important to build relationships that support joined up thinking and address the risk of a disjointed approach, gaps or duplication.

Consistent with EU policy, PPNs need to be recognised as the channel for government to communicate with community organisations and as the vehicle to bring their local knowledge into discussions for example identifying potential issues to be addressed before emergencies arise and so minimise impacts.

Examples of PPN actions:

**** Westmeath PPN** (like a range of other PPNs) worked closely with the County Council and active membership of the local co-ordination group responding to recent weather emergencies. In many instances, the PPNs co-ordinated and actively supported community groups who were active before the Local Authorities and other agencies were able to reach areas

In this context, it is the responsibility of the PPNs to become trusted intermediaries; facilitating participative democracy to ensure all voices in the community are heard. It is necessary to clarify a meaningful role and contribution, with reasonable expectations of PPNs in emergency response and, equally, to resource the PPNs to carry out this additional role.

Other partner agencies critical for cohesive emergency response were identified as central and local government, HSE, Gardaí, Fire and Ambulance Services, ESB, Uisce Eireann, Army, Civil Defense, the Coastguard, Coillte and Irish Farmers Association.

A wider circle of collaboration to other societal support and voluntary organisations like the Irish Red Cross, Lifeboat (RNLI), St Vincent de Paul (SVP), food cloud charities, meals on wheels, family support centres, GAA, befriending call services, development companies, 1st responders and Alone is also desirable. It is suggested that the person leading collaboration at Local Authority level needs to be appointed at least at Director of Services level.



It is noted that most community groups are not used to being consulted and actually listened to. It may take time to encourage them to engage, and then for all stakeholders to learn how to successfully engage respectfully and constructively, that that no-one is attacked but all work together to ensure the best preparedness possible. Raising issues should be done appropriately and seen as an opportunity to mitigate negative impacts in an emergency, rather than create an adversarial situation. If bringing things to the attention of responsible agencies is a negative experience, people will become disenfranchised and not engage when their input and collaboration is vital.

Importantly, legally established emergency planning policy and not simply a toolkit or PR stunts ⁽¹⁾ are needed. Such a planning policy would require:

- commitment to constructive involvement of all the relevant partners identified
- conduct of local community housing and infrastructure audits, to guide allocation of supports, retrofitting works, etc. and to allow community and stakeholder agencies to “control the controllable” prior to emergencies and build resilience
- conduct of timely and efficient audits into resources and actions following each emergency, to establish what worked well and what didn’t, what more is needed or needs to be done differently etc. with recommended changes implemented promptly
- independent research on emergency responses
- research and sharing of best practice in Ireland and elsewhere
- specific deliverables against a prescribed timeline including:
 - multi-agency planning structure including all stakeholders
 - regularly updated emergency plans,
 - scheduled emergency plan reviews (including following emergencies)
 - provision of training,
 - holding drills, etc.
- stress-testing of forward planning, planning proposals emergency response plans to be undertaken.
- need for cumulative emergency scenario planning
- community-based drills at scale for emergencies
- community resilience training – with research to develop a strategic plan for “Building Resilience for Times of Emergency” (involve universities in data gathering and research etc.)
- dissemination and awareness raising so that communities are familiar with and confident of plans in place and their role in these.

The more communities are involved in planning for emergencies and building greater resilience, the more confidence they will have in the plans developed. There will also be a greater level of awareness within communities by default and so a greater likelihood that plans can be delivered successfully



⁽¹⁾ Previous supply of iodine tablets to individual households was viewed as a stunt.

7.0 Communication & Information

It is critical that information needed for emergency planning and response is maintained up to date and that resources are allocated to do this.

Communication to communities in times of emergency needs to be kept streamlined, factual, clear and concise. Information must be provided in a timely manner and updated regularly. There is a need for communication guidelines and protocols.

PPNs request clarity on emergency response plans and proactive measures to improve community resilience.

The PPNs ability to communicate with community groups about emergency situations is part of the “wraparound” service they provide. They are in effect ‘One-Stop-Shop’s for community groups, that represent powerfully effective means of communication when other stakeholders collaborate effectively with them and they can reach out to their unique network of community organisations. PPNs need to be ‘in the loop’ and supplied with correct information to assist with disseminating this, and also to combat the spread of misinformation.

PPNs have an important role in communicating with community leaders to get information widely circulated using the most appropriate of multiple methods of communication. This is especially the case where there are challenges of literacy or language. An example is the diverse Dublin communities at the time of the riots, where people did not know who to contact for information. These community leaders need to be brought together to ensure consistent communication, share issues that arise, and identify how these can be addressed.

Similarly, PPNs can facilitate the sharing of skills by community groups and learning about aspects of the circular economy that have been used by previous generations, as well as those that are newly being developed. PPNs can help foster a meitheal approach to addressing challenges faced by communities through building capacity within community organisations, providing training, and supporting collaborations.

It was noted that when all power supplies were down during and following Storm Eowyn, the only source of communication available was radio. This was only accessible to those with battery life in their phone or battery-operated radios. Inexpensive access to wind-up radios, some of which come with additional functionalities, such as torches, was considered an important practical consideration for future emergency planning.

Examples of PPN action

**** Kildare PPN** has published a 'Be Winter Ready' booklet giving practical tips for people to prepare (for storms, power outages, ice or snow, etc.), useful contact numbers, and information such as the County Council's road salting routes and winter maintenance plan. This is recirculated across social media ahead of any extreme weather event.

**** In January 2025, Leitrim PPN** coordinated a community response to the severe impacts of recent storms and the ongoing challenges posed by recurrent water and electricity outages in the county. A public meeting attended by 140 people highlighted the scale of disruption to services and the need for improved preparedness. The issue subsequently received widespread local and national media attention and was acknowledged by the Minister of State for Community Development, Charities and Rural Transport, Mr. Jerry Buttimer T.D., local TDs and was discussed in the Oireachtas. Leitrim PPN issued a "Be Prepared & Stay Safe During Outages" guidance flyer to community groups. Additionally, Leitrim PPN continues to provide information through its online Supports and Services Map, available on the Leitrim PPN website, which helps residents easily access local resources.

**** Clare PPN** runs information sessions on local communities where these are targeted by online misinformation being promoted regarding international protection applicants and other migrants. This often happens in an information vacuum, where ordinary people are not given correct information from trusted sources. Training and information sources have been run on and offline using in-house expertise and collaboration with Clare PPN member group 'Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland'. While these initiatives may most often reach those that are already disposed towards welcoming new people to the community, experience has shown that supplying accurate information in an area helps these people to counteract the overload of misinformation.



**Public Participation
Network Kildare**



**Public Participation
Network Leitrim**



8.0 Mapping

As a part of the need for information, it is agreed that comprehensive mapping of County services provided by agencies AND by community groups is vital.

For example, the location of defibrillators and salting routes. Mapping can also set out clearly what organisations are in charge of what services or aspects of emergency response.

Mapping of services and assets is also essential to identify gaps which collaborative future planning structures should then seek to fill.

It is vitally important that maintenance of data included on the maps is up-to-date and resources need to be dedicated to this.

The exercise of mapping resources is itself a valuable exercise for building collaborative community engagement and community relationships, create a useful asset and raise awareness of it. It is also a means for capturing maximum inputs on community assets. PPNs have skills, professionalism in staff and member groups to help in the mapping process and have experience that has been of direct use during emergencies.

It is noted that digital and hard copy formats for maps are needed if these are to reach all audiences, particularly the vulnerable.

Examples of PPN action:

**** Laois PPN** (like a range of other PPNs) created a Covid-19 response map for the County during the pandemic, detailing the supports available in towns and villages across Laois to elderly and vulnerable people. Over 100 community groups registered the services and supports they were actively providing. A similar map was created for supports available to displaced Ukrainians, and these can be viewed as a template for creation of a Community Supports Emergency Response map.

**** Meath PPN** was able to repurpose the COVID support maps they had generated and easily update them with where outages occurred, where support hubs were available and any water stations being provided. This was published on websites and social media as well as made available to local news outlets.



9.0 Leadership

PPNs see it as critical that there is leadership from Central Government when emergencies arise. This includes clear core messaging, which is then added to in a tiered approach so that regional and more local information can be included before information is disseminated locally. This ensures it contains essential nationally messaging but also that it is relevant to the area where the information is received. While ways to improve communications should always be explored, shared and incorporated where proven, it is important that a basic standard of communication is consistently delivered. This also saves re-invention of the wheel by different Local Authorities and agencies.

There is a need for clarity on agencies responsibilities and an end to “pass the parcel” system toxicity, where problems are passed from agency to agency, which is frustrating, inefficient, and unhelpful. Communities need to know who they should contact in the event of an emergency and how. If a multi-agency response is needed, there should be clear collaborative mechanisms to deliver this promptly and efficiently. All staff need to be familiar with and experience in these practices and be clear what their responsibilities are.

Each stakeholder organisation needs to demonstrate leadership in its own area, and to account for their performance in planning for and responding to emergencies.

An all of society approach is essential to securing resilience and readiness to deal with emergency situations. Planning for all possible eventualities is very challenging and it is important to realise that people who may not ordinarily fit into a “vulnerable” category might do under different circumstances. For this reason, an inclusive community-wide approach is useful and involvement in emergency planning should be recognised as work.



10.0 The importance of growing resilience and independence at community level

As referred to above, investment in community resilience and development of local emergency response groups, supported and trained in best practices, will enable communities to act to support themselves in handling crisis situations. It should seek to address common and shared challenges, such as insurance.

Audits and scenario planning exercises will give communities the opportunity to see what could be done to improve their ability to handle different types of emergency. Actions identified as useful can then be carried out, potentially in partnership with relevant agencies, and with funding sought from the appropriate source(s).

Community resilience can include developing plans for emergency situations, training for emergency scenarios, and ensuring everyone locally knows and understands these. Taking action to reduce vulnerability locally through practical measures is essential and might involve actions such as improving insulation in housing stock, providing hubs with facilities for emergency situations, and setting up systems for checking on neighbours for example.

There are a wide range of actions that can empower communities to be increasingly strong and resilient into the future.

Example of PPN action:

**** Cavan PPN** delivered an online Zoom Programme including training throughout Covid- covering topics such as Mindfulness/Mental Health, Food & Nutrition, Social Media, Chair Yoga

**** Carlow PPN** is working on a PPN Strategic Framework for Community Resilience

Step 1 - form a Vision

Step 2 - develop Strategic Pillars such as:

- Pillar 1. Community Engagement & Education with Objectives and Key Actions under each of the pillars
- Pillar 2. Community Mapping & Resource Identification
- Pillar 3. Partnership & Policy Integration
- Pillar 4. Volunteer Mobilisation & Coordination
- Pillar 5. Communication & Information Flow
- Pillar 6. Recovery & Community Wellbeing
- Pillar 7. Governance & Accountability
- Pillar 8. Resource Needs



11.0 Practical resources and supports

A wide range of possible practice resources and supports have been identified by PPNs, some of these have been developed and sourced by the PPNs themselves or their member groups. A list of these is found in Appendix B. Some general observations about effective emergency response are presented here.

- A national strategy or template for emergency planning is needed across the Country, adaptable to individual circumstances.
- Recognition of the varying needs of communities in planning for emergency response. For example, rural and urban communities or mains/ group water scheme/ domestic well water supplies, people with little or no English, those with disabilities, etc.



- A library of best practice resources should be built.
- During an emergency, critical service providers should ensure that they provide a response and service outside of office hours.
 - General basic advice on “What every household should have” for emergency situations (such as candles & matches, battery or wind up radio, additional warm bedding, etc.), possibly in the form of a single page advice sheet or “tool kit”, accessible in different formats and media.

If a standard template and guidance is provided, then tailored plans can be developed that are relevant, responsive and owned by all the stakeholders involved, including local communities.



12.0 Immediate action for PPNs

While this report is promoted to the Minister, DRCDG, and government, there are opportunities for PPNs to begin work.

Given that weather emergencies can be anticipated in the coming months, PPNs should be raising the issue of emergency planning and community resilience at their plenaries. It was suggested that working groups could be set up within PPNs involving interested community representatives. A particular priority should be to identify mechanisms for reaching out to people who fall outside PPN groups.

The PPNs should look collectively at what they are good at and what they can bring to the table of emergency planning and building community resilience. PPNs need to raise their profile and to own their role in emergency planning. Importantly, PPNs need to ensure that their values are maintained by ensuring feedback and discussion at Plenaries.

PPNs should also identify training to support improved community resilience.

As with all emergency response communications, PPNs need to ensure their re-registration processes are robust and fully up-to-date. The importance of contacts to receive information in times of emergency could be stressed



13.0 Summary of Recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations generated by PPNs to secure good planning and community preparedness for future emergencies and to maximise community resilience in coping with these events.

1. Government to direct the development of national policy governing the collaborative production of multi-stakeholder emergency response plans that incorporate community representation by the PPNs. Such plans to include the following:

Commitment to constructive involvement of all the relevant stakeholders identified in a collaborative structure tasked with emergency planning and ‘joined up thinking and operation’, including the PPNs as the mechanism for engaging with local communities

Conduct of local community housing and infrastructure audits, to guide allocation of supports, retrofitting works, etc. and to allow community and stakeholder agencies to “control the controllable” prior to emergencies and build resilience

Conduct of timely and efficient audits into resources and actions following each emergency, to establish what worked well and what didn’t, what more is needed or needs to be done differently etc. with recommended changes implemented promptly

Independent research on emergency responses

Research and sharing of best practice in Ireland and from elsewhere

Specific deliverables against a prescribed timeline including:

- Ø multi-agency planning structure including all stakeholders
- Ø regularly updated emergency plans
- Ø scheduled emergency plan reviews (and following all emergencies)
- Ø provision of training
- Ø holding drills, etc.

Stress-testing of forward planning, planning proposals emergency response plans to be undertaken

1. Government to direct the development of national policy governing the collaborative production of multi-stakeholder emergency response plans that incorporate community representation by the PPNs. Such plans to include the following (Continued):

Cumulative emergency scenario planning

Community-based drills at scale for emergencies

Community resilience training – with research to develop a strategic plan for “Building Resilience for Times of Emergency” (involve universities in data gathering and research etc. and PPNs in co-ordination, outreach and delivery, etc.)

Clear communication protocols (to fit within national framework) for keeping communities informed prior to, during and following emergencies

Dissemination and awareness raising so that communities are familiar with and confident of plans in place and their role in these

Requirement for all stakeholders to maintain accurate data/ databases and additional actions as needed



Lónraí Rannpháirtíochta Pobail Éireann
Public Participation Networks Ireland

2. Government to provide resources and support for PPNs to engage fully in community-related elements of:

Emergency planning

Dissemination of accessible, timely, and accurate information to all members of communities during emergencies, giving particular consideration to those hardly-reached communities, those with disabilities, those in different situations, those experiencing different vulnerabilities, and so on

Co-ordination of community activities as needed

Mapping and other resource/ support tasks

Undertake evidence-based resilience-building activities

Provide support for community recovery initiatives

Assist in audits and evaluations (as set out in policy)

Other related tasks



Lónraí Rannpháirtíochta Pobail Éireann
Public Participation Networks Ireland

3. Government to provide resources for an awareness-raising campaign for PPNs, highlighting their role in emergency planning and community support.

4. PPNs should consider taking the following actions ahead of commitment from Government to points 1 & 2 above.

Raise emergency planning and building community resilience for discussion at forthcoming plenaries, to include identifying what they can contribute to emergency planning and developing community resilience

Look for ways to reach out and establish communications with people who fall outside PPN groups, and to encourage all community groups to join the PPN

Identify and develop training to enhance and support community resilience

Ensure robustness of re-registration processes and that all data is fully up-to-date



Lónraí Rannpháirtíochta Pobail Éireann
Public Participation Networks Ireland

14.0 Conclusion

This national initiative of the PPNs is clear that a ‘whole of society’ approach is needed to secure optimal readiness for communities to cope successfully with emergencies. They are seeking a culture change towards a collaborative way of working that is efficient for both individuals, communities and service providers; seeing everyone as partners with a role to play in improving our resilience to handling times of stress.

The PPNs themselves have significant assets, skills, relationships and experience to contribute to making future emergency planning a success. Given adequate supports, they hope to be able to make full use of these to the benefit of communities in the future.



Appendix A Considerations for effective communication

Language

- Use of simple, clear language is critical. (Materials should qualify for the National Adult Literacy Agency's Plain English Mark.)
- Use pictures to assist those with poor literacy or English
- Materials need to be available in multiple languages
- Use Rich Text Format (RTF) for those with disabilities
- PPNs are experienced in "translating" Council and other official communications – ensuring these are free of technical jargon, are accurate, clear and concise. This is important to make official communications accessible.
- Know about and use other means of local communications and use these – community online websites/ FB pages, Church newsletters, etc.
- Understand different cultures and communication needs.
- Do not use Acronyms
- Do not scare monger
- Produce paper as well as digital versions need to be available

Delivery

- Consider cultural appropriateness in how communications are delivered e.g. for some mixed gender gatherings may not be appropriate and alternative forms of accessing information are needed.
- Vulnerability is not constant and can be true for everyone – for example some older, rural residents may be prepared to cope, at least initially, without heat and light, having been familiar with the need for this in the past, while those reliant on regularly renewed medical equipment or treatment, those whose first language is not English, etc. DO NOT make assumptions that may either give offence, or exclude those who may be/ become vulnerable and need support
- Sustainability – look for simple, renewable equipment options to reduce obsolescence and idle/ unused materials leading to cost and waste.

Appendix B : Suggestions for community supports (actions & resources)

Actions –

- Annual community gatherings, street feasts (or equivalent) that help build relationships within communities.
- (Bi-) annual community preparedness review event (involve community in identifying what happens “if”, points of contact, resources, etc.)
 - Contact directories
 - Phone trees
 - Audit
 - of resources, reviewed in timely & efficient manner following each emergency, to establish what worked well and what didn’t, what more is needed or needs to be done differently, etc. and changes implemented promptly.
 - of communities – local housing and infrastructure, to guide allocation of supports, retrofitting works, etc. to support community resilience.
- Community support initiatives such as community gardens, orchards, produce sharing, etc.
- Liaise with An Post for distribution

Resources

- Emergency protocols (by type of emergency/ need)
- Best practice reference sheets for emergencies (Dos & Don’ts in event of ...)
- Designated “emergency hubs” – that include the physical space for location of generators, provide access to gas hobs, data, food, water, windup chargers, basic first aid/ iodine tablets, solar panels, fire points, etc., as well as the groups that meet & organise for emergency responses. (Use of “hub” may be confusing given work-related hubs)
- Safe places (in times of riot, evacuation, etc.)
- Regular training and upskilling in emergency response
- List of local service providers e.g. tree surgeons, plumbers, etc.
 - Preparedness advice, resource packs, postcard/ fridge magnet (with folded sheet inside) – key information (actions & contacts)
- “Readiness pack” for community groups
 - Toolkits – in digital and physical form
- Central telephone number to report community concerns regarding safety/ resilience, e.g. rotting tree that is potential risk to safety/ transport, etc.
- Community gardens, orchards, allotments, for community food production, etc.
- PPN as “go to” for questions about emergencies, as Citizen’s Information is.
- PPN – alarm/bleep warning system through all phones, TVs, web servers
- Basic plan for all emergencies, refined at Local Authority level, that can be adapted.
- Adaptation built into future planning, for example the use of underground rather than overhead power cables
- Community centres as food hubs

- Appropriate generators at water plants and community hubs
- Community leaders as main point of contact within locality at times of emergency
 - train these (like train the trainer)
- Regional roadshow – stands at events
- Conduct of questionnaire/ survey to ID needs
- Community WhatsApp – can't reply to
- Generic PPN leaflet “Be _____ Ready” – tweaked for each location/ type of emergency
- Consider use of personalised communication – “Dear Mary”...
- Every person in every community should have someone that they can contact and have that person named somewhere
- PPNs include “Emergency Contacts” for all community groups

