

# UK not equipped to protect citizens from crisis, charity warns

*New report from The Young Foundation sets out critical need for greater levels of preparedness for crisis and disaster*

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, April 2, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A new report, released today, argues that voluntary, community and faith networks and groups must be recognised as 'critical national infrastructure' in UK crisis preparedness planning.

Community, Not Catastrophe, from charity and social research organisation, [The Young Foundation](#), commissioned by [Local Trust](#), and supported by the [VCS Emergencies Partnership](#), explores the UK's ability to withstand and recover from crises. It finds that the UK depends on networks of trust, mutual aid, and voluntary infrastructure that mobilise during emergencies.

The report examines how people, communities and voluntary organisations consistently step up during crises – from the Covid-19 pandemic to floods, terrorist attacks, and civil unrest. It finds that these responses aren't 'nice to have' but essential for effective crisis management, particularly for protecting vulnerable and marginalised communities who face disproportionate impacts of disasters.

Among the report's key findings and recommendations:

Current levels of awareness and understanding of 'preparedness' across the UK are far too low. The UK needs to ensure that, regardless of circumstance or location, every member of society has the information and skills to keep safe in a crisis.

A dedicated initiative is needed to trial and test new community-led approaches to building preparedness for crisis, testing 'what works' for every UK citizen – regardless of their circumstances.

Consistent and sustained national messaging about preparedness should be channelled through local, trusted networks and accompanied by practical, local support to take action. Broadcasting information about risk is not enough.

'Exercises' to increase resilience should be designed and delivered with communities, building confidence and skills to respond in times of crisis.

Better evidence and data - including an annual National Preparedness Index to track progress and amplify the voices and experiences of those most impacted - should be central to the design of contingency plans and activities.

The UK needs local civil resilience infrastructure, with clearly identified spaces for public access

to information, training and safety.

The report calls for the extension of the UK Resilience Academy and Local Resilience Forums, and deeper investment in the growing number of Emergency Contact Hubs. These require outward-facing strategies to build leadership, training, and education to scale preparedness skills across our communities.

"The role of the public, communities, and the voluntary sector is downgraded in many national policy debates about crisis preparedness. That needs to change," says Helen Goulden OBE, CEO at The Young Foundation and author of the report. "The UK population is underprepared for the crises we face. Recent history shows us that - in the face of pandemics, fires and floods - civil society carries the heaviest burden in crisis response and recovery, yet receives the least recognition and investment. Indeed, it's proved time and again that community groups, informal networks, and neighbours are more trusted than government when crisis hits. Civil society should therefore be recognised as 'critical national infrastructure' in the UK. If we don't learn from these experiences and shift our approach now, we risk devastating consequences for our most vulnerable communities when – not if – the next crisis occurs."

The report comes at a critical time, through climate change, geopolitical instability, and technological vulnerabilities. The UK Government's 2023 Resilience Framework calls for 'a more diverse set of groups and partners [...] to prepare for and respond to emergencies on a 'whole of society' scale.' Similarly, the Government's Community Resilience Framework seeks to enable 'businesses, individuals, community networks and voluntary organisations [to be] empowered to prepare, respond and recover from emergencies and disasters.' If this rhetoric is to become a reality for people across the UK, Community, Not Catastrophe argues far deeper involvement and innovation with communities to build preparedness is essential.

The report challenges a 'command and control' approach to emergency planning, arguing that effective collaboration with voluntary capacity cannot be 'turned on' at will during a crisis. Instead, it calls for sustained investment in community resilience and meaningful relationships with diverse local voluntary actors.

Daniel Aldrich, an expert in the role of social capital in crisis and Professor of Political Science and Public Policy at Northeastern University, Massachusetts, comments, "Community, Not Catastrophe focuses on the importance of bottom-up, community-oriented preparation and response to shocks and disasters. I am honoured to be involved in such important work. Too often, we fail to recognise that our neighbours and nearby friends are most likely to be the first on scene after a fire, flood, or heart attack, and that strong connections to neighbours and friends can mitigate the impact of such an event and help accelerate recovery afterwards. We need to recognise that a strong, resilient society begins in the community."

Matt Leach, Chief Executive of Local Trust, says: "This report is timely and important. Climate change, economic challenges, political turmoil and geopolitical instability pose new and urgent threats to consider and plan for. In doing so, we need to recognise the importance of building

social capital and local civil society as a vital resource capable of supporting neighbourhoods and communities to cope with the uncertainties and challenges of the coming decade.”

Robyn Knox, Director at VCS Emergencies Partnership, says: “It is so important we move the conversation on from warm gratitude to practical action. We must recognise charities and community groups as we understand what it is that makes our households, neighbourhoods and communities resilient. They’re building resilience every day, and often for those most frequently forgotten or overlooked. This report is a timely reminder of the lead role the voluntary and community sector plays in resilience building. A role that should be recognised, invested in and learnt from”

Goulden concludes, “The causes of our crises are often varied and unpredictable. But the impacts of those crises are often common and predictable. We can – and must – do better to prepare for them.”

The report is available to download from The Young Foundation's website.

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