

When the System Reaches the Area But Not the People

Barriers to Early Warning Access, Comprehension & Action
in Rural Lezha, Albania

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270

residents surveyed
across 3 rural
administrative
units



The Central Question



What does meaningful “coverage” actually require — when a system reaches a geographic area but overlooks the people, places, or identities within it?

ACCESS

Can people receive warnings in the first place?

COMPREHENSION

Can they understand what the warning means?

ACTION

Do they know — and feel able — to respond?

Albania - A Compound Risk Environment



High

World Risk Index (2023)

Top 20

countries in Europe & Central Asia for disaster displacement
(2008–2021)

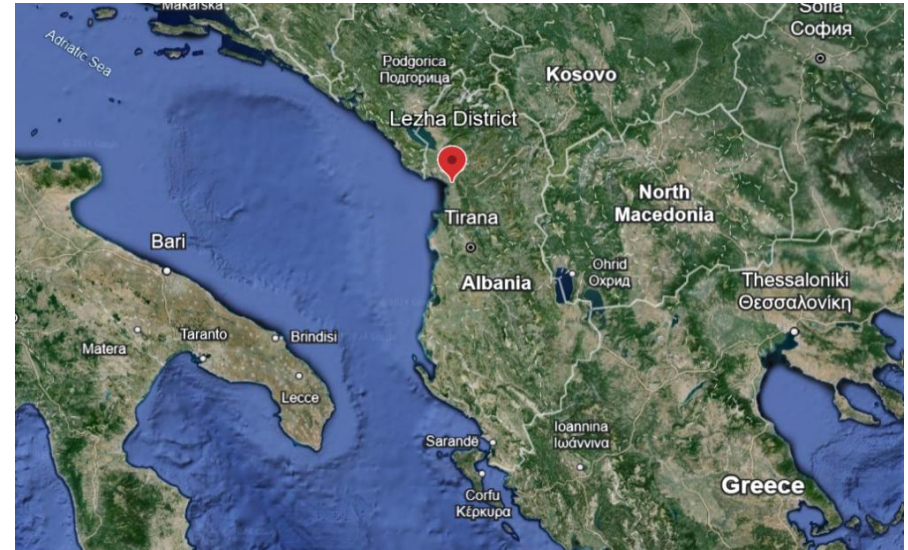
3

administrative units studied:
Balldren · Shëngjin · Shënkoll

Why Lezha? A Compound Risk Environment

Lezha County, northern Albania:

- Historically a wetland — reclaimed during communist era, leaving the area structurally flood-prone
- Two of Albania's strongest earthquakes in 40 years occurred here
- 20% of deaths (2022–24) from flash floods; 16% from snowstorms
- 86% of homes damaged or destroyed by flash floods
- Military intervention repeatedly required during disasters
- Albania Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (MHEWS) exists — but its reach to last-mile communities was unknown



Most people are not receiving early warnings

46%

do NOT receive early warning info
without actively seeking it

89%

rate access as only 'somewhat accessible'
to 'not accessible at all'

Only 11%

find early warning information easy to
access

How people DO receive warnings:

- Television: 89% use it — primary channel
- Social media (e.g. Facebook): 58%
- Phone calls from friends/family: 40%
- SMS/text messages: only 5%

Main barriers reported:

- No internet or weak/unreliable connection
- Poor mobile phone signal
- Power outages cutting off all channels
- No reliable official information source
- Information arrives late — after the event

Even when warnings arrive, most people can't understand them

69%

say early warning info is Not communicated clearly or Don't Know
(answered No or Don't Know)

Only 6%

report excellent understanding of early warning information
received

Who understands best?

- Ages 28–37: 44% report excellent comprehension
- Ages 18–27: 38% excellent
- Ages 48–57: only 13% excellent

- University-educated: 38% excellent
- Post-graduates: 50% excellent
- Primary school: 0% excellent

Top comprehension barriers:

- 50%: limited access to internet or media
- 32%: difficulty finding reliable sources
- 17%: too much information, hard to filter

- 91% do NOT use additional resources to improve understanding

Communities are not prepared to act — regardless of gender, age, or location

94%

have NOT taken any preparedness measures

Only 8%

feel adequately prepared to respond to emergencies

70%

have NEVER participated in an emergency training exercise

” *Lack of financial means, shelter for the family and livestock* ”

— Community member, Balldren

Key insight: The lack of preparedness is NOT linked to gender, age, or location — it is systemic across all communities studied.

Resilience & Humanitarian Support

Only 15%

can access timely humanitarian aid during/after disasters

84%

feel between neutral and not resilient in coping with extreme events

Only 3%

have received training from humanitarian organizations

Only 4%

of women confirm they can access humanitarian assistance (vs 11% men)

Aid is concentrated in urban centres — rural communities face barriers to reaching it, and often don't know it exists.

In Their Own Words

What communities in rural Lezha told us they need

"We do not receive information from anyone."

— ES, Balldren

"Organizing awareness campaigns at the community level to promote awareness and preparedness."

— AV, Shëngjin

"Closer communication with local residents. Strengthening cooperation between institutions, emergency agencies, and the local community."

— DK & SL, Shëngjin / Shënkoll

Communities already know what they need. They are asking us to listen.

4 Practical Recommendations

For practitioners, policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and community leaders



Diversify Channels & Simplify Language

Combine TV, social media pages, Albanian-language mobile apps, and printed materials. Use plain, non-technical language. Help communities identify which sources are trustworthy.



Regular, Targeted Training Exercises

Humanitarian and local organizations: run community training at least once a year. Connect training to specific local hazards. Build in coordination across institutions.



Community Engagement

Face-to-face meetings remain essential. Involve local leaders ('village elders'), schools, and businesses. Train volunteer groups who can support warning dissemination and emergency response.



Improve Humanitarian Aid Access

Establish known gathering/evacuation points in rural areas. Coordinate aid distribution beyond urban centres. Ensure women and lower-income households are not excluded from support.

Coverage is not enough.

What meaningful coverage requires:

- Warnings that reach people through the channels they actually use
- Messages in language ordinary people can understand
- Communities trained and resourced to act
- Aid and support that goes beyond urban centres
- Genuine participation of last-mile communities in system design

Thank you for your attention!