



# FROM LOCAL ACTION

# TO LASTING IMPACT

Partnerships, innovation, and community resilience  
through the Urban Climate Resilience Program in  
Spain (2023-2026)



# THE CHALLENGE

Heatwaves create significant **health and social impacts**, particularly for older people, children, and vulnerable populations, while **affecting essential systems** including energy, water, transport, health, and education.

**Urban Heat Island effects** create localised hotspots, increasing both daytime and nighttime temperatures and exacerbating heat-related risks for urban communities.

Spain has experienced a 50% **increase in extreme heat days** over the past two decades, with heatwaves becoming longer, more frequent, and widespread.

Floods create **cascading impacts** across housing, transport, health, essential services, and local economies, disrupting communities well beyond the immediate event.

Climate change is increasing the intensity of extreme rainfall events, while **urbanisation and vulnerable infrastructure amplify impacts** on communities, particularly in high-risk areas.

The DANA event in Valencia on 28 October 2024 resulted in Spain's **deadliest flood disaster** in recent history, directly affecting more than 306,000 people and causing an estimated €20.3 billion in damage to physical assets.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Millor Vela, D., Szönyi, M., Otero Ketterer, J., Lisbona Lecina, F., Betancourt López, I., Bronchalo Antón, E., Vecino Puente, E., Informe PERC Inundaciones DANA de Valencia. Valencia, España. Zurich Insurance Europe AG, 2025.



Image: Spanish Red Cross

## Urban Climate Resilience Program

The Urban Climate Resilience Program (UCRP) is a global initiative operating in cities across Australia, Colombia, Ecuador, Italy, Malaysia, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States, bringing together the Z Zurich Foundation, Zurich Insurance teams, C40 Cities, ICLEI, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Plan International and Resilient Cities Network. The program aims to build sustainable, resilient communities that can withstand, recover from, and thrive in the face of climate-related disasters. UCRP combines locally led resilience-building with strategic partnerships, evidence-based advocacy, and systems change to address identified resilience gaps.

Between 2023 and 2026, UCRP in Spain was led by the Spanish Red Cross in partnership with Zurich Spain and IFRC. Working with vulnerable communities in Madrid and Valencia, the program strengthened individual, community, and institutional resilience to increasingly frequent heatwaves and floods. Through awareness-raising, risk-informed action, locally led initiatives, cross-sector partnerships, and knowledge generation, UCRP supported communities and institutions to better anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and adapt to climate-related emergencies.

UCRP Spain adopted a **systemic approach to strengthening climate resilience**, working simultaneously with communities, local government, and institutions to address the growing risks of floods and extreme heat. By connecting local action with cross-sector partnerships and collaboration, the program helped translate community priorities into broader resilience outcomes.

Through the UCRP, the Spanish Red Cross drew on its trusted humanitarian role, extensive community networks, and technical expertise to convene partners and strengthen collaboration across sectors. Zurich Spain played a strategic role by contributing private sector expertise, risk engineering, employee engagement, and evidence generation to support innovative approaches, community resilience, and institutional change.

Together, these partnerships drove impact across three pathways:

### Driving innovation for climate resilience



Cross-sector partnerships generated new approaches to measuring risk, activating anticipatory action, and integrating private sector expertise into community resilience.

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### Strengthening community resilience



Individuals and vulnerable households strengthened their knowledge, skills, and capacity to prepare for and respond to floods and extreme heat.

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### Scaling impact through partnerships and influence



Community evidence and local partnerships influenced planning, public services, and institutional practice, creating lasting improvements that extend beyond the life of the program.

UCRP Spain worked across two cities with distinct risk profiles, using complementary approaches to strengthen resilience.



- Reduced energy poverty through efficiency training, cooling solutions, and financial support
- Enabled rapid heatwave support through Crisis Modifier activation, including cooling units and heat stress bracelets
- Strengthened preparedness through risk awareness and preparedness kits

## MADRID



## VALENCIA

- Empowered youth through the My Pillowcase preparedness curriculum
- Established school climate brigades and heat-safe spaces
- Participatory climate mapping strengthened risk understanding and climate-informed planning
- Expanded climate refuge access through advocacy and partnerships

# OUR IMPACT

**39,000+**

## PEOPLE POSITIVELY IMPACTED THROUGH PREPAREDNESS AND RESILIENCE ACTIONS

Training, drills, emergency planning, and Early Warning Systems strengthened knowledge, confidence, and capacity to act during floods and extreme heat, while preparedness kits, energy efficiency support, and assistance for vulnerable households reduced climate-related risks and vulnerability.

**171,000+**

## PEOPLE POSITIVELY IMPACTED THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS AND ADVOCACY

Participatory climate mapping informed local planning, while advocacy supported systems change through the expansion of Emergency Social Care Centres as climate shelters and the promotion of the replication of school-based resilience initiatives.





# DRIVING INNOVATION FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE

UCRP drove innovation through partnerships that brought together humanitarian, private sector, and technical expertise to address complex climate risks. By testing new approaches to resilience measurement, programme financing, and cross-sector collaboration, the program generated practical solutions that strengthened community resilience while creating scalable models for future climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

A **pioneering partnership with Zurich Spain** demonstrated how the private sector can strengthen community resilience. This included Zurich's risk engineering and technical expertise informing resilience measurement and the design of targeted interventions, as well as trained Zurich employees supporting awareness-raising and community-based activities in high-risk areas. The partnership provides a scalable model for private sector engagement in disaster risk reduction.

An **integrated resilience measurement ecosystem** combined complementary tools from the Spanish Red Cross, the Z Zurich Foundation, and Zurich Spain to generate a comprehensive understanding of climate risks, vulnerabilities, and capacities. By bringing together the Climate Resilience Measurement for Communities framework, disease risk analysis, and technical climate risk assessments, the approach provided evidence to prioritise locally relevant actions and offered a replicable model for resilience-informed decision-making.

An innovative Crisis Modifier integrated **anticipatory action within community resilience programming** through a flexible funding mechanism that enabled rapid support before extreme heat events. Linked directly to preparedness activities, the approach strengthened continuity between anticipation, response, and recovery while providing timely assistance to vulnerable households. The model demonstrated how preparedness and emergency response can be integrated within a single resilience programme, offering a practical approach for future climate adaptation initiatives.

*"Initiatives such as the Urban Climate Resilience Program demonstrate that collaboration among businesses, social organizations, and communities is indispensable for effective climate adaptation. At Zurich, we are committed to contributing our expertise and voice, working in partnership with others to foster safer and more sustainable cities with special focus on protecting vulnerable communities."*

Cristina Gomis R  th, Head of Corporate Social Responsibility, Zurich Spain



# STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

UCRP strengthened community resilience by building the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to prepare for and respond to climate-related emergencies. Through practical learning, locally relevant solutions, and partnerships with schools, communities, and local organisations, the program fostered a stronger culture of prevention, empowered people to take action before disasters occur, and improved preparedness for increasingly frequent heatwaves and floods.

## Key partners

- Community members
- Local government
- Community centres
- Schools
- Elderly care centres
- Pools and sports facilities
- Neighbourhood associations

Community awareness and preparedness were strengthened through a comprehensive programme of training, outreach, and practical learning, **increasing understanding of climate risks and building the confidence to act before, during, and after emergencies.** Workshops on climate change adaptation, first aid, emergency planning, and heatwave and flood preparedness were complemented by local events, participatory activities, drills, climate mapping, and targeted awareness campaigns that reached diverse audiences, including children, young people, and vulnerable groups.

Preparedness kits and practical demonstrations helped **translate knowledge into action**, ensuring community members had both the skills and resources to protect themselves and others. By combining accessible communication with hands-on learning, the program fostered a stronger culture of prevention and resilience across participating communities.

Image: Spanish Red Cross





Image: Spanish Red Cross

*"Emergencies can be complicated, but preparing and rehearsing these situations helps children respond with confidence and reduces the fear and urgency they may feel when they occur."*

José, Primary school teacher

Hundreds of **primary school students were empowered as climate resilience champions** through an adapted Disney My Pillowcase methodology, using a "learn, practice, and share" approach to build practical skills in disaster preparedness, personal and family safety, and emotional coping. Delivered over two years in partnership with schools, the program combined classroom learning with peer mentoring, **student-led climate brigades**, first aid training, creative activities, and the **creation of cool spaces within school grounds**. By encouraging children to apply and share their knowledge at home and in their communities, the program extended its impact beyond the classroom and helped strengthen a culture of preparedness. The sustained engagement created lasting capacity within participating schools, while strong interest from other schools and local authorities has positioned the approach as a practical and replicable model for strengthening climate resilience among young people.

Reducing vulnerability to extreme heat combined energy efficiency training, preparedness kits, cooling devices, and financial support for utilities, helping vulnerable households to afford the electricity needed to use cooling devices during periods of extreme heat. By **addressing energy poverty alongside practical preparedness**, these direct interventions improved living conditions, increased access to effective cooling, and reduced exposure to extreme heat among those most at risk.



# SCALING IMPACT THROUGH **PARTNERSHIPS** AND INFLUENCE

Through strategic partnerships and sustained engagement with public institutions, UCRP translated community evidence into collective action beyond the project itself. By integrating local knowledge into planning and decision-making, the program strengthened local governance, influenced policies and public services, and contributed to a growing recognition of climate resilience as a priority for local authorities.

**Participatory climate mapping** generated detailed, location-specific information on microclimates, flood-prone areas, urban heat hotspots, and community resources such as drinking water, shaded areas, and air-conditioned facilities. The resulting digital and printed maps improved public access to risk information while enabling local authorities to complement their existing technical data with community knowledge to better inform risk planning and target resilience actions.

Partnerships with the Madrid and Valencia City Councils strengthened coordination around community priorities and translated evidence into action. In Valencia, this supported the integration of **Emergency Social Care Centres** (CAES) into the city's extreme heat response, expanding activation criteria to provide vulnerable people with cooling, rest, food, hygiene facilities and basic health support during heatwaves.

**National capacity building on community-based Early Warning Systems** strengthened climate resilience leadership across the Spanish Red Cross by equipping staff and volunteers with shared tools and approaches. Drawing on expertise from the IFRC, the Red Cross Movement, Zurich Spain, and meteorological services, the initiative created a scalable model for replicating good practice in communities nationwide.

*"We are living through a profound shift, and communities need to understand how climate change is affecting them. Building awareness and preparedness to face these risks will be fundamental—and that's where the greatest change will happen."*

Ángel García,  
Spanish Red Cross

*“Disaster preparedness requires consolidating habits that transform risk perception into action and strengthen a shared culture of prevention. This year, the Urban Climate Resilience Program has taken a decisive step forward by promoting shared commitment among institutions, the private sector, and citizens, demonstrating that a community-based, data-driven strategy can be scaled up and sustained to improve urban resilience in the face of emergencies.”*

Iñigo Vila Guerra, Director of  
Emergencies, Spanish Red Cross



Image: Spanish Red Cross

UCRP demonstrated that climate resilience is built through **sustained partnerships that connect communities, institutions, and decision-makers around shared solutions**. By combining innovation, community action, and cross-sector collaboration, the program strengthened preparedness for floods and extreme heat while creating approaches that can be adapted and replicated in other contexts.

Beyond the communities directly involved, UCRP contributed to lasting change by strengthening local governance, informing public services, embedding community perspectives into planning, and demonstrating new models for collaboration between humanitarian, public, and private sector partners. These achievements illustrate how locally grounded action, supported by evidence and strong partnerships, can influence systems and extend impact well beyond the lifetime of a project.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

The foundations established through UCRP will continue to support climate resilience efforts beyond the life of this phase. Building on the partnerships, knowledge, and approaches developed, future climate resilience programming in Spain will continue advancing shared resilience objectives through a collaboration between Zurich Spain and Resilience Cities Network. The Spanish Red Cross will continue applying and refining approaches strengthened through UCRP—including community awareness and training, participatory climate mapping, Early Warning Systems, and resilience measurement—through other programmes and interventions, extending the programme's legacy and impact.

### Learn more



The knowledge, tools, and resources developed through UCRP remain available to support practitioners, policymakers, and communities working to strengthen climate resilience. To explore the programme's methodologies, learning, and publications, visit the [UCRP resource hub](#).



Image: Spanish Red Cross