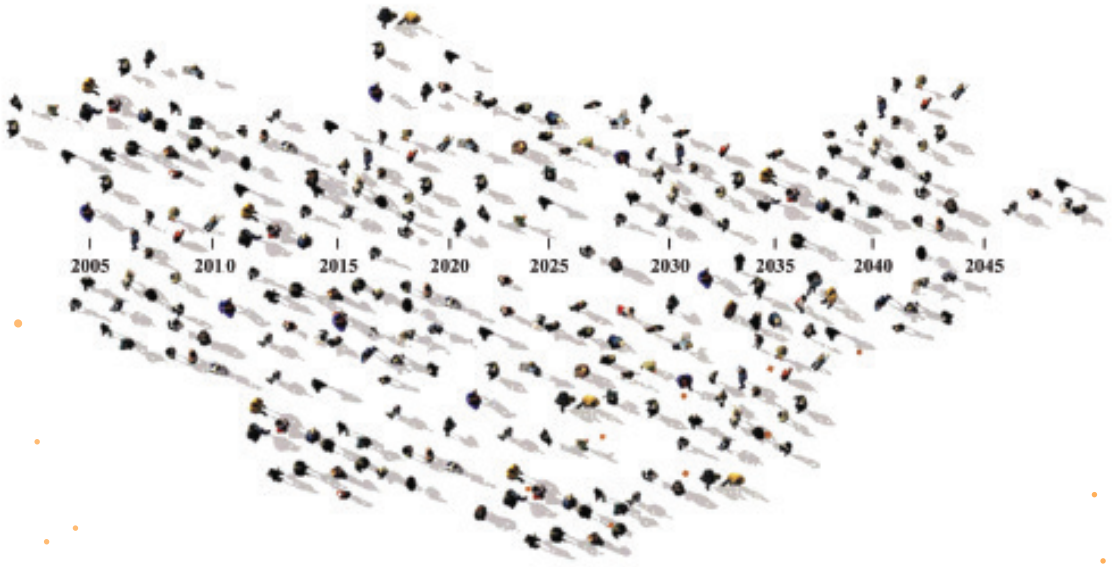
15TH ANNIVERSARY

IRIM
INDEPENDENT RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF MONGOLIA

THE SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF MONGOLIA AND CLIMATE CHANGE:

THE SOCIAL WELL-BEING SURVEY OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY NATURAL DISASTER



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ABOUT THE SURVEY

IRIM recently completed the Social Well-being Survey of Mongolia for the sixth year in a row. The main objective of the Survey was to improve understanding of the factors influencing social development and to provide valuable evidence to support decision-making based on data.

Previously, the survey team selected different social groups each year to analyze well-being and provide explanations; based on scientific approaches, and survey methodologies using collected evidence. Previously, the survey was conducted as follows:

- Data collection for *the Social Well-being Survey of Mongolia* conducted during 2016 to 2019, was undertaken in different seasons (with consideration of the time and cycle of each season) and the results were used as key comparison indicators.
- In 2020, IRIM conducted a series of surveys under the title of *The Social Well-being Survey of Elderly People*.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, a survey titled *The social well-being of Doctors and hospital workers was carried out.*

Most recently, 2022-2023, the survey team focused on the impact of climate change, which was an emerging global concern, and aimed to clarify how Mongolians' knowledge, attitudes, habits, and resilience to disasters and risks, affected the overall well-being of the population. The Survey included approximately 2,800 respondents from all districts of Ulaanbaatar, and 26 soums of 13 provinces. The results of the Survey provide for comparisons of groups affected by climate-related natural disasters, and their general well-being.

The Survey findings can be reflected in national and local policies, as climate change issues, and can be used for the development of national action plans aimed at enhancing public understanding, knowledge, and skills related to climate change. Therefore, this report (initially) addresses general issues of understanding, knowledge, and attitudes. This includes observations related to weather, environment, and climate change, the understanding of the causes and consequences of climate change, and the concerns expressed by the respondents.

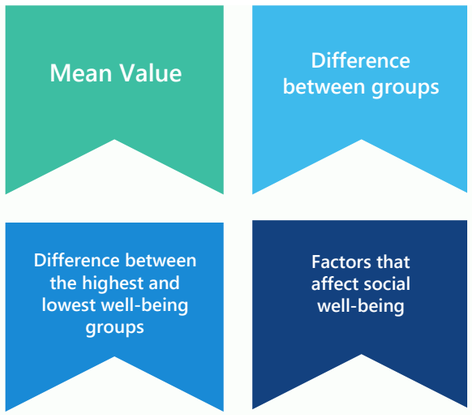
Additionally, in this year's report, the survey team has compared the results of the Social Well-being Survey of Mongolia 2022 with those of 2017; and sought to explain the changes that have occurred over the previous five years. This information will be crucial for researchers, experts, project-implementing organizations, and decision-makers, as it offers valuable insights into the dynamics of social development and the changes in the well-being of Mongolians.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE SURVEY

The purpose of this survey was to clarify the impact of natural disasters caused by climate change, upon the social well-being of Mongolians. The results of the Social Well-being Survey of Mongolia were compared over a five-year interval (2017 to 2022) to show how they have changed.

Measurement and analysis

Well-being is a compound index measured using the Cantril Ladder (self-rating scale). It asks how people rate their well-being on a scale from the best possible (10 or 7) to the worst possible (0). In order to keep the report simple and clear, the well-being levels were aggregated and mean valued when categorizing the summative measures. Also, when analyzing the level of well-being, the differences between the groups, the differences between the groups that rated their well-being as the high and low, and the factors influencing the domain evaluation of well-being, were studied.



Survey sampling

The Survey was conducted in 26 soums of 13 provinces and all districts of Ulaanbaatar, and data were collected from a total of 2,800 citizens-aged 18 years and older-through random sampling. The results can be considered nationally representative with a confidence level of 95%.

Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire had the following structure, and this report presents only the analysis of the overview questions, and compares the results.

- Demographic information
- Social trust
- Cooperation
- Life satisfaction
- Domain evaluation
- Climate change and disaster situations

SCOPE AND KEY TERMS OF THE SURVEY

Over the previous 20 years, 'well-being' has been an interesting issue of research (OECD, 2017). The term 'well-being' encompasses all ways of positively experiencing and assessing people's lives. This concept should be understood as a subjective assessment, that affects society and individuals, as well as the relationships between members of society. Studying well-being in this sense, provides for:

- Discovering how different life experiences affect people's happiness and quality of life.
- Understanding the issues that people face in their lives, and what they consider most important.
- Identifying opportunities to guide policymaking.

The Survey sought to improve understanding of the factors affecting social development and support evidence-based decision-making. For this purpose, researchers used the following two concepts as the basis for measuring social well-being in Mongolia.

1. ***Social cohesion:*** Social cohesion is based on the willingness, motivation, and cooperation of individuals-at any level of society-to achieve a common goal. It also encompasses trust. The level of social cohesion among survey respondents was determined by examining whether social members trusted each other or institutions (such as National Agency for Meteorology and Environmental Monitoring, Emergency Management Agency, Local Government, and research institutions) and whether they engaged in helping and collaborating. To ensure comparability with other international surveys, questions measuring social trust and cooperation from the World Values Survey and the European Social Survey, were used in the Survey.
2. ***Subjective well-being:*** Subjective well-being refers to the assessment of relationships between members of society. It involves how individuals perceive the purpose of their lives, whether they have achieved their purpose over a specific period, and what factors may hinder realization (leading to dissatisfaction).

From these concepts, the concept of life satisfaction is considered in this survey. In doing so, life satisfaction in general, five years assessed how satisfied they are with their life before, after, and now. In addition, the overall happiness and quality of life (including satisfaction with safety and the quality of the environment) were also compared and assessed.

Figure 1. Social well-being factors: Social cohesion

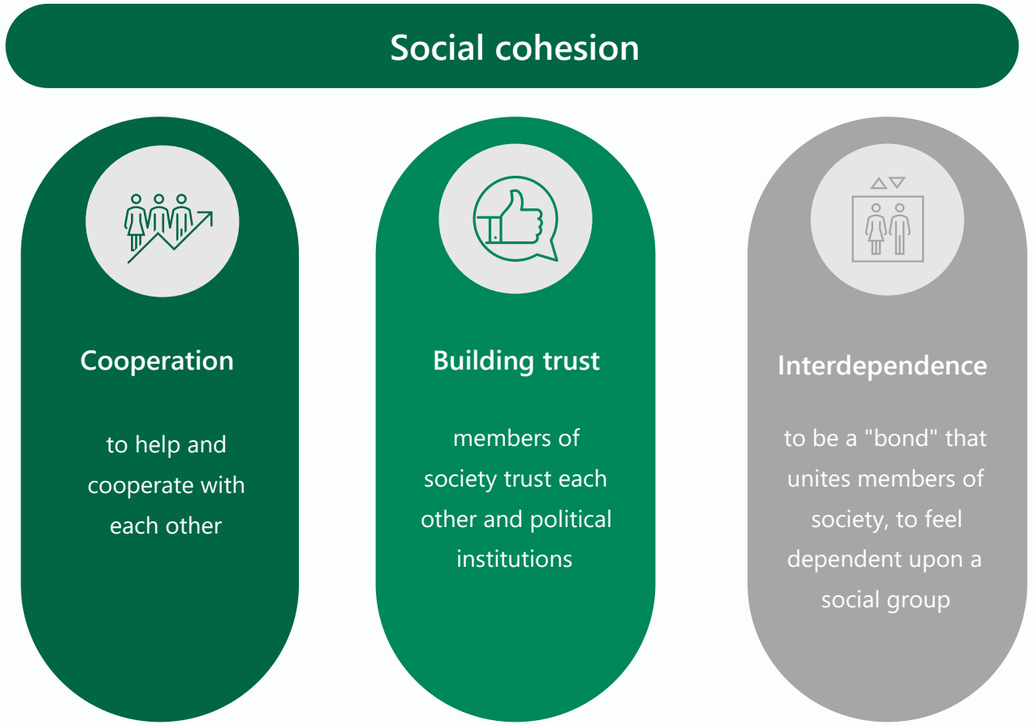
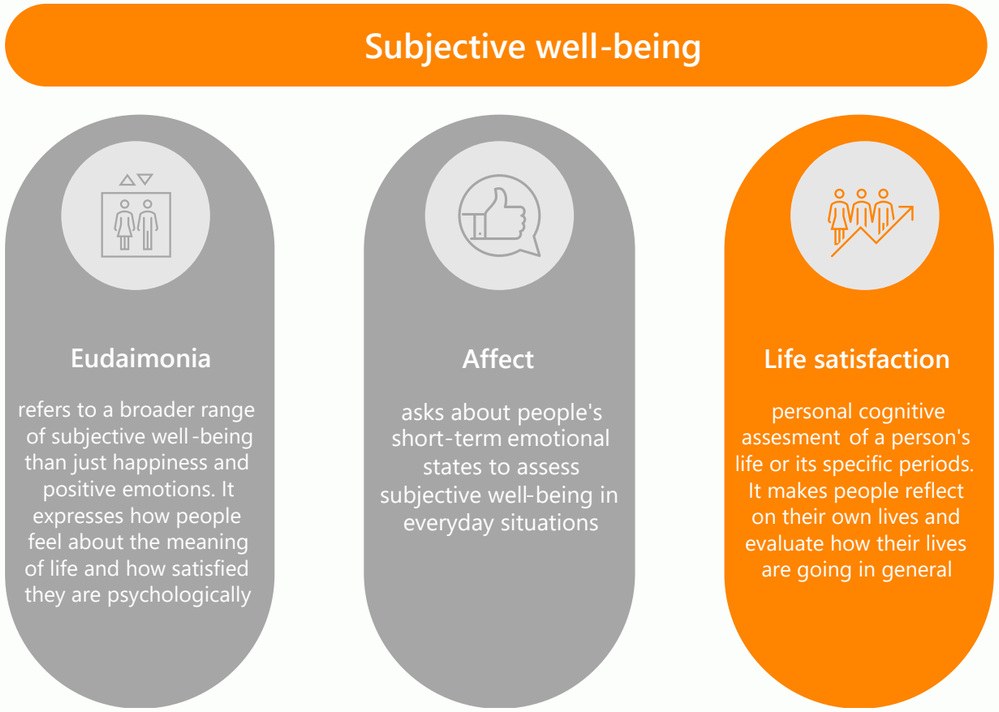


Figure 2. Social well-being factors: Subjective well-being



THE SOCIAL WELL-BEING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is becoming a major challenge facing the world. The climate crisis is having a significant negative impact on the world, particularly among developing countries, due to rising average air temperatures and increases in the frequency and intensity of natural phenomena and climate disasters.

Mongolia has already begun experiencing the impacts of climate change. The frequency of dangerous and catastrophic weather events-such as floods, droughts, dzuds, strong winds, snowstorms, and dust storms-has doubled in each category over the previous 20 years.

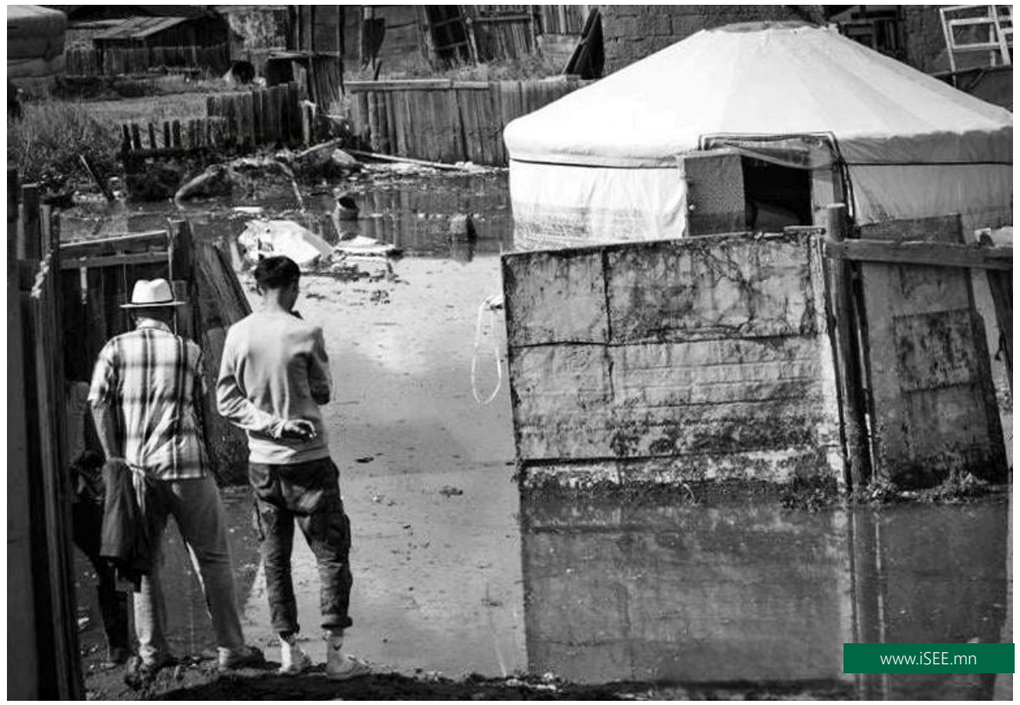
Over the last 80 years, Mongolia's average annual temperature has increased significantly (by 2.2°C since 1940). Since the crisis caused by climate change will continue and increase; the ability to overcome related problems and crises facing countries is very important. Many studies show that a nation's capacity to cope with natural disasters and crises profoundly affects the well-being and overall quality of its society. This underscores the importance of mitigating the effects of climate change, and building the resilience of communities. From a social structure approach, components of social capital -such as trust and social networks-are crucial in any crisis, including natural disasters. In particular, the relationship between these social capitals and natural disasters is reciprocal.

As explained in the conceptual framework for measuring social capital, social networks play an important role in disaster risk reduction, rescue, and search operations (during and after a disaster). They are also very helpful in coping with situations by:

- supporting the flow of information,
- forming and distributing various types of aid, and
- provide psychological support to survivors and victims.

Social trust plays a crucial role in joint efforts and responses, during post-disaster situations and recovery. However, its impact-high or low, and whether positive or negative-depends on the type and severity of the disaster, as well as the speed and scale of the response measures implemented by government organizations of the country. Additionally, civil society participation, membership, and political engagement, are all essential for effectively overcoming and addressing disaster situations. By planning active and preventive measures before a disaster occurs-creating resources, and strengthening social networks-communities can better prepare for and mitigate the impacts of disasters.

The results of the above studies show that people can overcome and adapt to climate change (with less risk and impact) with the help of many factors that make up social well-being; such as trust, cooperation, participation, and social networks. However, there is a lack of survey information in Mongolia regarding how social well-being changes before, during, and after a disasters caused by climate change, and the interconnected effects. It is clear that there is a need to continue this kind of social survey, in order to support community resilience related to climate change.



ONE. THE SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF PEOPLE AFFECTED BY NATURAL DISASTERS

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1.1 Characteristics of respondents

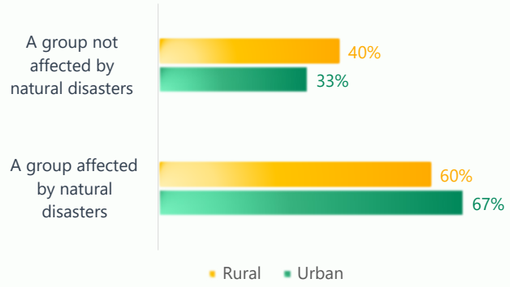
In this section, the general characteristics of respondents affected by natural disasters in the previous 12 months were compared, with other respondents who were not affected by natural disasters. The aim was to determine any distinctive differences between the two groups.

The percentage of respondents in urban areas who experienced serious incidents or disasters (67.0%) was 7.0% points higher than that of respondents in rural areas (60.0%). The percentage of respondents who experienced serious incidents and disasters was higher among those living in forest areas (49.5%), than those is steppe areas (25.5%), and Gobi areas (15.8%). Specifically, it was observed that people living in Ulaanbaatar City faced more natural disasters than those living in rural areas. Respondents in urban areas were more likely to encounter natural disasters caused by floods, winds, and storms. In rural areas, there was a higher probability of being affected by natural disasters related to drought and dzud.

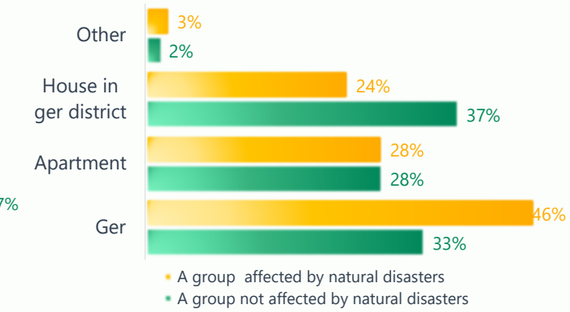
Seven percent (7.0%; n=196) of all respondents had experienced serious incidents and disasters (caused by climate change) in their place of residence. More than one-third of them were affected by storms (35.0%) and floods (32.0%), while one-tenth were affected by dzuds.

Figure 3. Characteristics of respondents

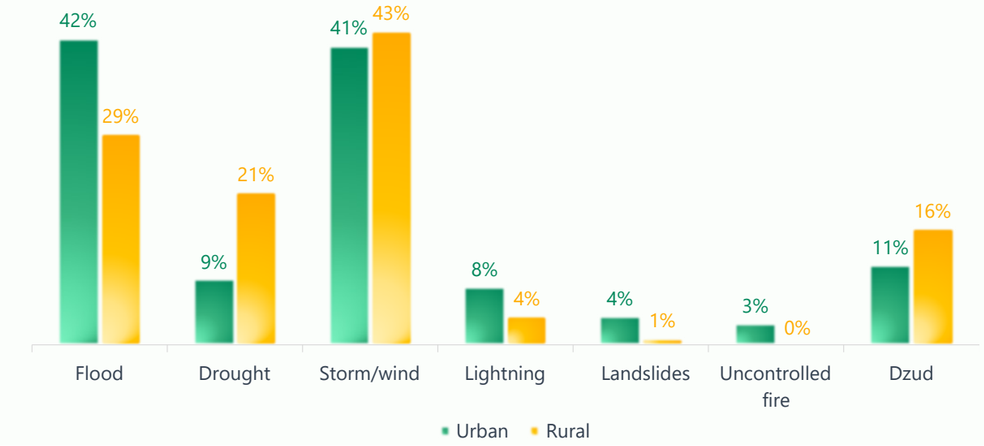
Sample size, by location, n=2800



Respondents housing, by type of group n=2800



Type and location of natural disasters affecting respondents, n=196



Approximately, half of the group affected by natural disasters caused by climate change lived in 'ger' dwellings: resulting in increased exposure to risks related to floods and storms.

According to the vulnerability assessment in the Third Assessment Report-Speech of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change of the United Nations (UN), the risk of natural hazards and disasters caused by climate change impacts (as well as the total rate of their occurrence) is expected to increase in the entire area (and most of the provinces) during 2046 to 2065. Furthermore, factors such as rising air temperatures, increased frequency of extreme heat and drought, and more frequent occurrences of 'dzud' (a natural phenomenon characterized by exceptionally cold and harsh winters in Mongolia) are expected to intensify. With increased heavy rains, the risk of landslides, erosion, and flooding is high. The frequency of droughts is also increasing, intensifying dryness and drought, reducing pasture fertility, and accelerating desertification. In urban areas, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases are common among the population, and their prevalence is expected to rise due to the effects of climate change. Additionally, a study by the International Society of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC)-on climate change and public health-reported that the impact of climate change may lead to an increased risk of zoonotic and tick-borne diseases, indirectly affecting public health.

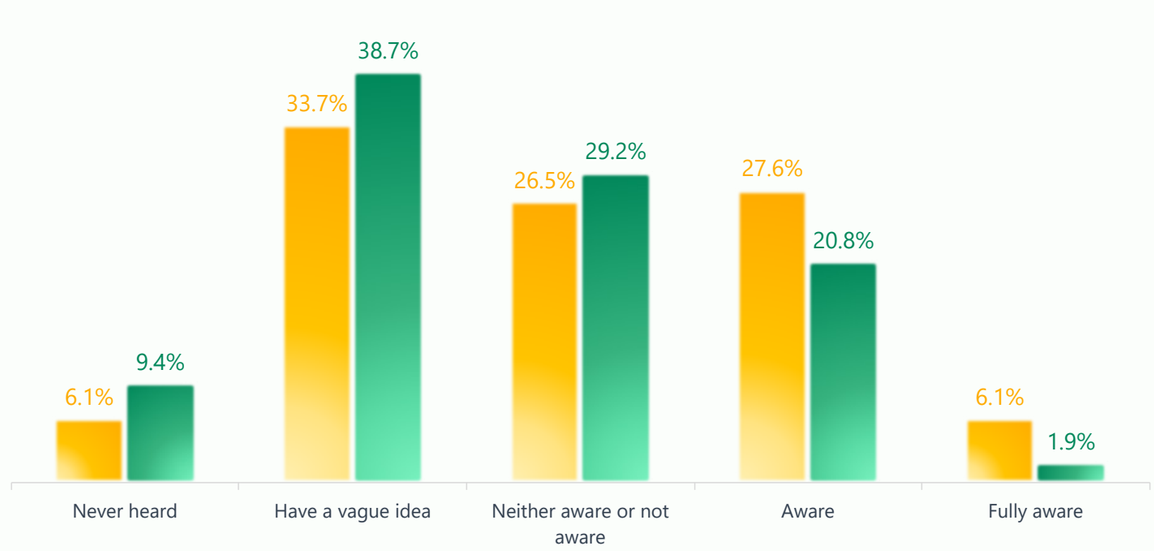
1.2 Knowledge of Climate Change among respondents

This section presents results that clarify whether there were differences in perceptions and knowledge about climate change; between those groups that were affected by natural disasters - and groups that were not - in the previous 12 months.

When assessing the level of understanding of climate change among all participants, the majority (76.5%) rated their understanding as insufficient. When compared by group, the percentage of climate change awareness was relatively higher within the group affected by natural disasters in the previous 12 months.

When comparing the percentage of people who knew the concepts and terms related to climate change, the percentage of people who had heard about global warming, the greenhouse effect, and greenhouse gas emissions, were not significantly different beween those groups affected by disasters and those not affected. However, the group affected by natural disasters was better informed about the concepts of climate change (and ozone layer depletion) than the group not affected.

Figure 4. Self-reported awareness on climate change, by group



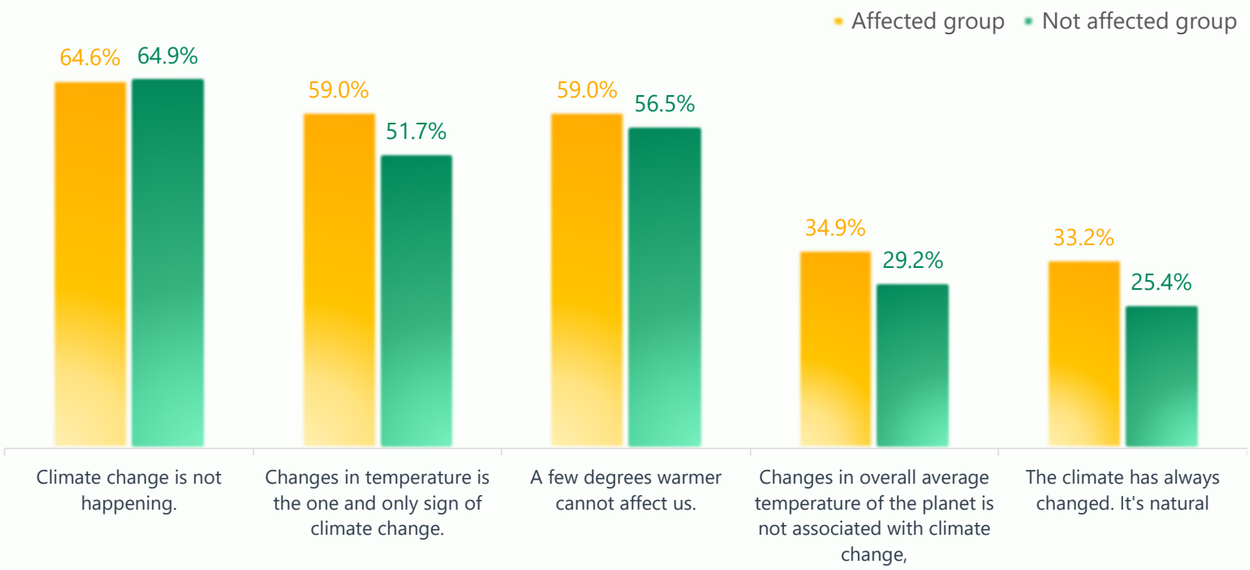
To clarify common misconceptions about climate change, five types of perceptions were examined and compared by group. When asked about each of five common misconceptions, a maximum of 64.0% of all respondents correctly identified the misconception. However, in general, the percentage of people who could identify the misconceptions was low.

When compared by group, there were no significant differences-between the group affected by natural disasters and the group not affected – for four of the misconceptions. However, the percentage of those who denied the misconception *(that 'change in the average temperature of our planet was not related to climate change')* was significantly higher (59.0%) among respondents who were affected by natural disasters.

When all the respondents were asked whether they needed additional knowledge and skills related to climate change, 54.8% said it was very much needed, 31.5% said that it was somewhat needed, and 13.8% said that it was slightly (or not at all) needed. Respondents were seeking additional knowledge and skills, regardless of whether they were in the group affected by a natural disasters or not.

The causes of climate change were considered to be caused by both industrial faults and human faults-for both affected and not affected group-by the natural disaster.

Figure 5. Statements about climate change, by group



1.3 The Social well-being of groups affected by climate change

1.3.1 Social trust

This section examines how people cooperate with each other, and the levels of trust they have in society, other organizations, and individuals. People were asked *'In general, do you think you can trust other people? or feel the need to communicate very carefully? (0=very cautious; 10=most people can be trusted)*

Trust in others was statistically significantly higher in the disaster-affected group than in the non-disaster-affected group. Additionally, while respondents displayed trust in their family and close acquaintances, they exhibited a greater degree of caution towards individuals from different regions and ethnicities. These findings highlight the importance of fostering behavioral changes and organizing public relations activities through face-to-face interactions and collaboration, rather than by distant approaches.

Most people had low trust in institutions, especially the government, and decision-makers. According to the results, trust in politicians and legislators received a rating of 2.8 points, while government decision-makers were rated relatively highly at 4.6 points. Despite Mongolians' belief in the necessity of government action (in crucial areas like energy, agricultural waste management, infrastructure, and the environment) the lack of trust in these institutions may hinder climate change adaptation measures.

Trust in the National Agency for Meteorology and Environmental Monitoring and the Emergency Management Agency was higher compared to other organizations. This presents an opportunity to utilize trusted scientific organizations as reliable sources of information for organizing public initiatives through the media. Conversely, trust in the media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, local governments, and research institutions was rated as average.

No differences were observed in the results from the Survey regarding respondents' trust in others, based on their work conditions or demographic information. For instance, statistical tests conducted on variables such as the respondents' organizational status, position, salary, working hours, age, gender, and education level showed no significant differences.

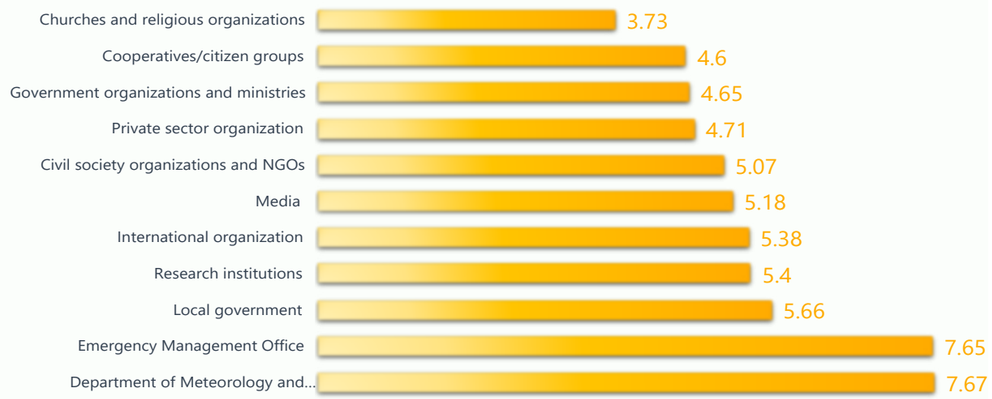
Figure 6. Mean value of social trust

'In general, do you think you can trust other people? or feel the need to communicate very carefully? (0=should be very careful cautious; 10=can trust most people)

Figure 7. Mean value of trust

The social trust of respondents in social groups (Mean value).

The social trust of respondents in social institutions (Mean value).



1.3.2 Cooperation

One important indicator of interpersonal cooperation is membership of various voluntary, political, and/or professional organizations and associations. These include a variety of organizations and groups that provide opportunities for individuals to connect with their communities at large, support them in making changes, and address the problems they encountered.

The survey findings indicate that individuals belonging to groups affected by disasters were more likely to be members of organizations or groups, in contrast to those not impacted by disasters. The most frequently mentioned organizations include sports, physical activity, arts, and cultural groups. This suggests an opportunity to enhance knowledge and capacity building through environmental organizations, movements, local councils, partnerships, and political parties, focusing on climate policies, priorities, and related issues. Strengthening these organizations or groups will empower respondents to voice their concerns more effectively.

Additionally, the Survey revealed a strong interest in, and demand among people to participate and contribute to, climate change mitigation, disaster preparedness improvement, and adaptability to changing environments. These aspirations can be addressed through the implementation of sustainable and effective strategic activities.

A relatively high percentage of people believed that various groups were ready to support them when natural disasters such as earthquakes, forest fires, floods, and droughts occured. Nearly all respondents expressed willingness to help relatives, close friends, emergency responders, and first responders, during a natural disaster; indicating high levels of trust in frontline organizations and emergency responders. Interestingly, the percentage of respondents who were willing to help or provide support to voluntary aid organizations and NGOs during disasters (73.6% and 70.1%, respectively) was higher than the percentage of respondents those who were expecting to receive support from these organizations (56.1% and 53.6%, respectively).

Figure 8. Mean value of cooperation

Respondents' membership of organizations

Community support during natural disasters

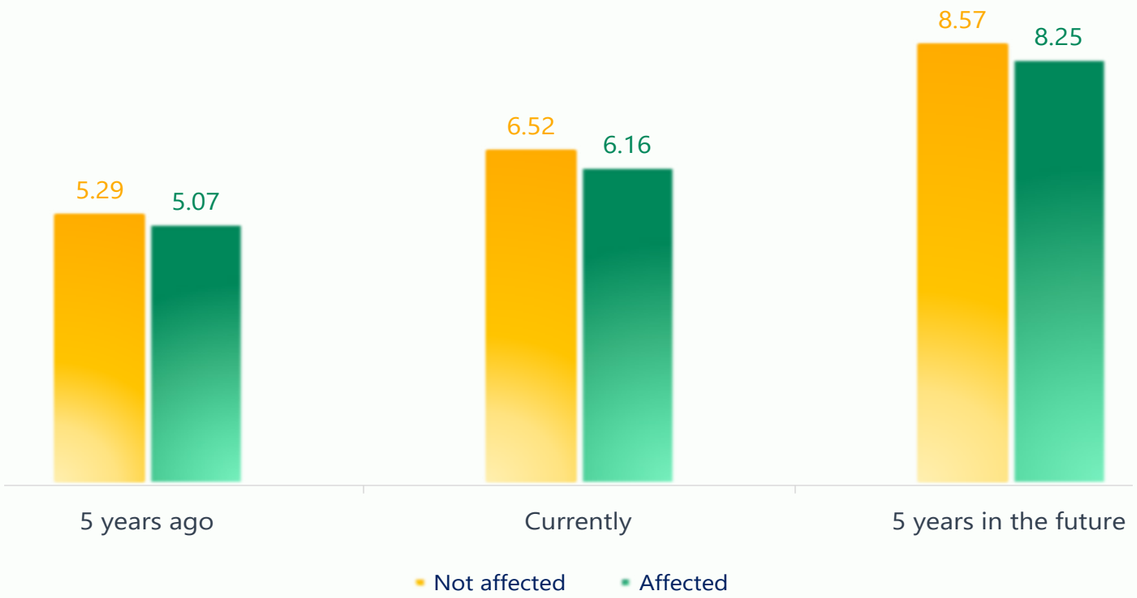
1.3.3 Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a measure of how people value their lives. It is a cognitive evaluation rather than a statement of a person's current emotional state.

This indicator was determined using the 'Cantril Ladder' scale, where respondents were asked to imagine a ladder with steps numbered from 0 to 10, and then assess which step best represents their current life situation. A score of 10 signifies the highest level of life satisfaction, representing the best possible life, while the lowest rung, 0, signifies the lowest level of life satisfaction, representing the worst possible life.

People affected by natural disasters tended to report lower life satisfaction compared to those who had not been affected. Moreover, respondents' perceptions of their life situations had evolved. Participants rated their current life situation higher than five years previously, and their future five-year situation higher than their current situation. Furthermore, higher life satisfaction was strongly correlated with higher income levels; making income the most influential factor in determining life satisfaction. Additionally, factors such as age, gender, level of education, and type of settlement also played a role in shaping people's domain evaluation of life satisfaction.

Figure 9. Life satisfaction rating; by type of group (Mean value).



TWO: THE SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF MONGOLIA: FIVE-YEAR CHANGES (2017-2022)

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2.1 The Social well-being of Mongolia: five-year changes (2017-2022)

In this section, the latest survey findings are compared with the results of 2017, and changes explained. This analysis aims to provide insights into the evolving dynamics of social development and the shifting well-being of Mongolians. The section is structured into three parts–social trust, cooperation, and life satisfaction-with each reflecting different aspects of Mongolians' well-being.

2.1.1 Social trust

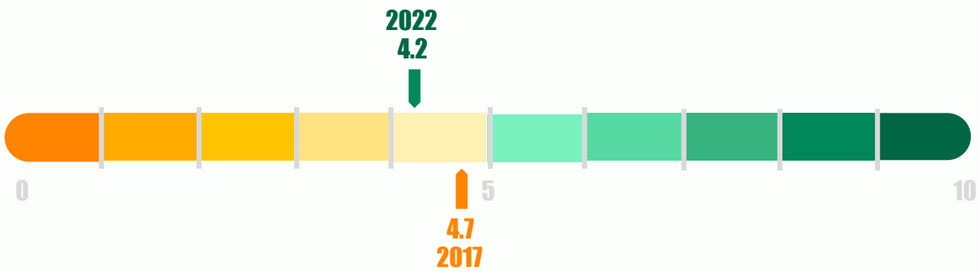
In general, do you think you can trust other people, or do you feel the need to communicate very carefully? (0=Very cautious; 10=Most people can be trusted)

In 2017, respondents were asked to rate how much they trusted others on a scale of 0-10, and the mean value score was 4.7, indicating a relatively low level of trust among people. However, in 2022, the trust level dropped even further to 4.2. Internationally, according to Larsen's analysis of the results from the World Values Survey (2010) , only five out of the 52 countries surveyed, reported a higher inclination to '*trust others*' than '*do not trust others*' (Larsen, 2014). Furthermore, Larsen pointed out that '*high levels of social trust are rare*'.

In 2017, more than half of Mongolia's population (61%) reported that they did not trust others. By 2022, the percentage of the population rating low trust on a scale of 0-5 had increased to 69.9%.

Furthermore, both 2017 and 2022 findings on interpersonal trust show no statistically significant differences depending on gender, location (urban/rural), employment, and as well as marital status.

Figure 10. Mean value of the general social trust

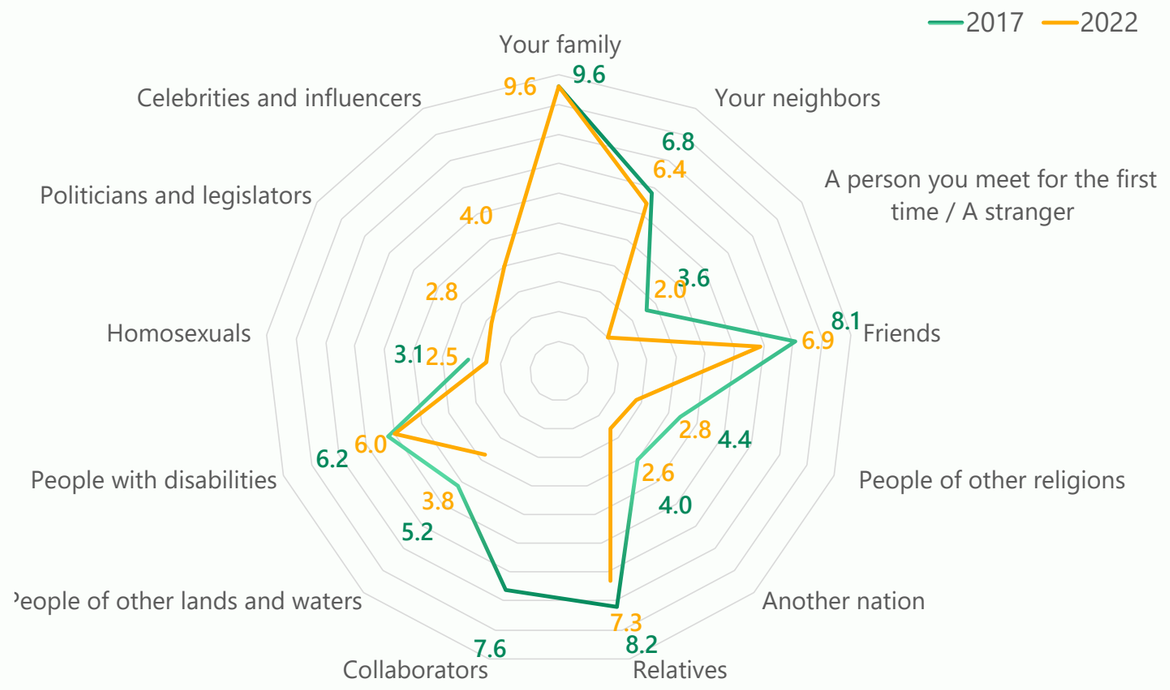


In order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of trust, researchers attempted to study both general social trust and specific trust levels in Mongolian society, as well as the basis of mutual understanding that underlies trust. In doing so, interpersonal trust and trust in institutions were examined.

A survey conducted in 2017 revealed that respondents had the least trust in strangers (3.6) and the highest trust in their family members (9.8); concerning 'interpersonal trust. However, when re-examined five years later, in 2022, the mean value of trust in strangers exhibited a significant decline, dropping to 2.0 on a scale of 0-10.

These results reinforce the findings from five years ago, indicating that trust between individuals ***in Mongolia is predominantly concentrated within family relationships, rather than extending to other social groups.***

Figure 11. Mean value of interpersonal trust, by year



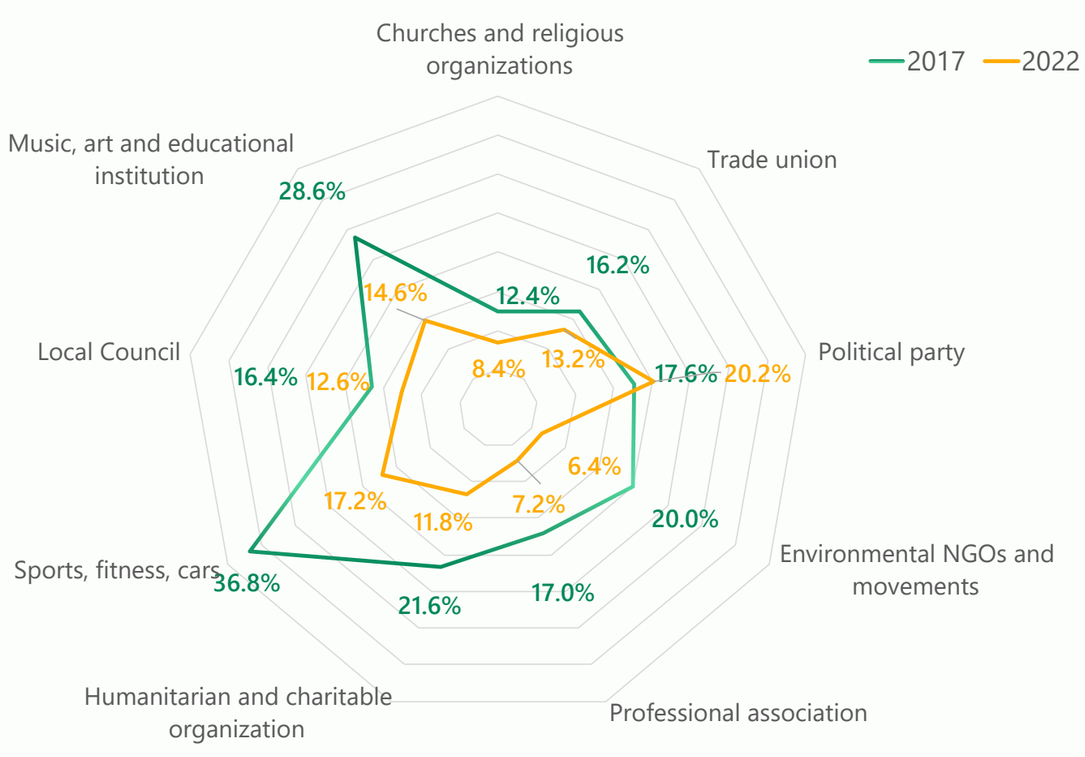
2.1.2 Cooperation

Respondents were asked about their experiences with collaboration, specifically focusing on their membership in various organizations between 2017 and 2022. The ratings for membership varied significantly over time, with 2017 showing a distinct difference compared to 2022; indicating a statistically significant change in membership over the years.

Notably, political party membership accounted for 17.6% in 2017, and it increased slightly to 20.2% in 2022. However, membership in all other organizations had decreased.

Furthermore, when respondents were asked to rate 'how satisfied they are with their social activities and participation' on a scale of 0-10, the mean value score was 7.2 in 2017 but decreased to 6.7 in 2022. This decline indicates that between 2017 and 2022, reduced levels of social trust and cooperation among respondents played a role in diminishing their satisfaction with social activities and participation; one aspect of their overall life satisfaction.

Figure 12. Respondents' membership of organizations



2.1.3 Life satisfaction

In 2017, respondents expressed higher satisfaction with their lives in general, and the results remained consistent in 2022. Furthermore, when the respondents were asked about their level of satisfaction five years previously, their current life satisfaction, and their projected satisfaction five years into the future, they provided optimistic assessments; stating that their life satisfaction had increased in the past, continued to be high, and was expected to remain high in the future.

This was relatively high compared to other countries. For instance, Scandinavian countries had a mean value of life satisfaction indices of 7.5, whereas Syria, Burundi, and Central African countries have the lowest life satisfaction indices of 3.0 (Gallup Global Survey 2017).

Researchers asked respondents to imagine a ladder with steps numbered 0 to 10, and then rate which step best represented their current life situation. In 2017, respondents estimated their life 'after five years' (i.e. in 2022) would be (on mean value) 7.9 on a scale of 0-10. However, in five years (in 2022) they rated 'their current life' between steps 6 and 7.

Mongolia has made significant progress in reducing poverty over the past 10 years, but growth has been unstable and slow recently. Creating jobs remains a challenge for Mongolia, especially for youths.

Figure 13. Life satisfaction rate (Mean value)

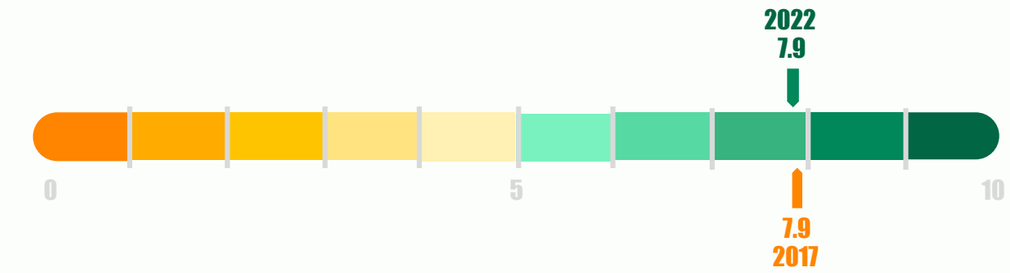


Figure 14. Mean value of life satisfaction, by time intervals

Creating jobs remains a challenge for Mongolia, especially for youths. Despite the government's substantial support in addressing these challenges, they have been exacerbated by the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on respondents and the economy. This facto may have contributed to respondents' more optimistic assessment of their lives five years hence.

In this survey, levels of respondents' satisfaction with the quality of their environment, and general living environment, were also examined. This approach sought to understand the factors influencing people's perceptions of their overall well-being, encompassing both their living environment and safety. ***The findings revealed that respondents' satisfaction with their external environment (or safety) was higher in 2022 compared to 2017. However, when it came to rating the quality of their living environment, their satisfaction had decreased by 0.7 points since 2017.***

Figure 15. Factors affecting life satisfaction (Mean value)

CONCLUSION

Mongolians are family-oriented, and interpersonal trust tends to focus on family relationships rather than trust in other social groups. In the results of research conducted in the last five years, the common characteristics of Mongolians are observed, such as life satisfaction is relatively high compared to other countries, and they tend to imagine the future more positively. The main feature of this year's report was to shed light on how climate change, which has become a pressing social issue in recent years, affects people's social well-being.

If we examine the overall situation and the changes in the social well-being of Mongolians over the last five years, we can observe that indicators such as people's trust in each other, particularly trust in strangers, and active participation in public cooperation, have declined at the national level. However, in recent years, the experiences of increasingly frequent disasters have revealed numerous exceptional outcomes. For instance, people affected by natural disasters exhibit higher levels of trust, willingness to assist others, and cooperative behavior compared to citizens who were not affected by such events. This demonstrates that when confronted with natural risks or disasters, the indicators of social capital guiding citizens to support one another and collectively overcome adversity are stronger than during normal times.

While there is a strong desire among people to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives, collaborate with others, and assist fellow people, the understanding and knowledge regarding adaptation, prevention, and coping remain insufficient. The constraints of limited financial, human, and technical resources during natural disasters increase the risk of not reaching remote and vulnerable communities. Nevertheless, public knowledge, understanding, and resources play a pivotal role in overcoming these challenges effectively and swiftly.

Therefore, in a country such as Mongolia, characterized by dispersed and remote regions with constrained resources, fostering a greater inclination for mutual assistance and collaboration while enhancing community capacity becomes paramount. This approach will aid in mitigating disaster risks and minimizing damages. Specifically, it becomes crucial to acknowledge the associated risks in raising awareness and implementing behavior-influencing actions. Moreover, informing and educating groups facing similar risks about these hazards and imparting preventive and coping strategies collectively are of utmost importance.

Despite the low level of trust among citizens in government institutions, particularly in decision-makers, trust in professional and scientific organizations, such as the National Agency for Meteorology and Environmental Monitoring, and Emergency Management Agency, and other similar entities, is relatively high compared to other organizations. Additionally, people place greater trust in the information provided by these organizations in the realm of climate and environment. Consequently, involving professional and scientific organizations in the coordination of such endeavors proves to be impactful and worthwhile.

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