



## **Study on Tourism Industry Response to Earthquake Affected People in Albania**



Department of  
Public Services

## SUMMARY

On 26 November 2019, Albania was hit by a magnitude **6.3 earthquake**. As a result, fifty-one people lost their lives and **913 were injured**. Thousands of residential buildings were destroyed or severely damaged and **13,000 citizens** had to move out of their homes. The majority of the displaced inhabitants were sheltered in temporary tents and about a third of the total were moved into hotels. The destructive effects of the earthquake were felt more severely in three regions of the country, namely in Durrës, Lezha and Tirana.

At the request of the **Ministry of Tourism and Environment, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)** carried out this research study focusing on hotel accommodation as a temporary solution for the citizens affected by the earthquake and the effect of this solution on the behaviors and attitudes of the citizens affected by the earthquake.

The study consisted of **400 questionnaires, 25 focus groups** discussions and **60 semi-structured** interviews with citizens affected by the earthquake. In addition, **30 semi-structured** interviews were conducted with hotel managers/owners and representatives of organizations and institutions engaged in providing services within these hotels.

### Citizens Affected by the Earthquake

Eighty per cent of the citizens affected by the earthquake who were accommodated in hotels originate from urban areas. Of the total number of respondents, **35% are employed, 18% are retired, 6% differently abled, 22% under 18 years of age, 40% have completed secondary and 10% tertiary education.**

**84.5%** of the respondents report that they are very satisfied with the services provided within the hotels, including accommodation, food quality, sanitary and maintenance services. **81%** report that they are very satisfied with the hospitality given and communication with hotel managers and staff.

Of the total number of respondents, **63%** rate positively the relations with each other during their stay at the hotel. **42.68%** report that they have built new relationships and rate the social environment in the hotels as very positive. In addition, **20.4%** state that as a result of these interactions with each other they have now become one community and feel like part of one extended family.

**57.01%** of the respondents stated that they felt much better at the time of the survey compared to the first days after moving to the hotels. Regarding to positive changes experienced, it is the people at both ends of the age range, namely the **18-31** and the over **71** cohorts, who report the most positive changes.

*“I shall never forget the welcome we were given at this hotel. The communication with the hotel owners and staff and the everyday conversations with other guests have helped alleviate the pain. The overall positive atmosphere has made us stronger and more able to face the future.”*

*A 65-year old woman from Durrës.*

The development of the community spirit, a sense of belonging due to sharing the same fate, and the positive communication, have had a significant effect on the sense of agency and have raised the level of protagonism and usefulness of the inhabitants staying in the hotels. In some of the hotels, especially those where a more emphasized sense of community spirit has developed, inhabitants have repeatedly offered themselves for volunteer work, including by helping in the provision of services or by getting involved in proposing and carrying out joint activities. **86.31%** of the respondents expressed their willingness to volunteer if asked to do so.

## Hotel Managers/Owners

The main motive behind the involvement of these hotels in the present initiative was to show solidarity with the citizens affected by the earthquake. The majority of the hotels opened their doors to the citizens affected by the earthquake even before the government authorities launched an appeal in this regard.

This was the first time that hotels, which are private businesses, were made part of an intensive collaboration scheme with institutions and organizations providing services within their premises. The presence of various services provided by a number of different actors within the same space seems to have been successful.

## INTEGRATED SERVICES SCHEME



Services provided by the hotels themselves: **accommodation/ meals/ sanitary services/ activities and events.**



Services provided by institutions: **health/ education/ tourism.**



Services provided by organisations: **activities and events with children/women/ counselling services.**

Figure 1: Evaluation of services Accommodation / food quality and hygiene

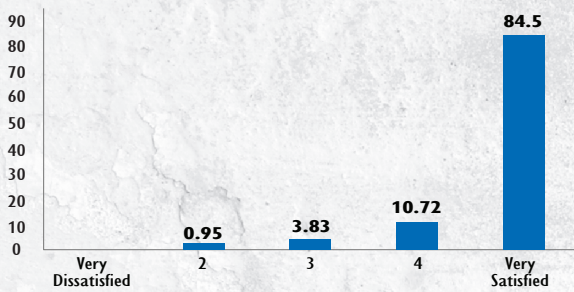


Figure 2: Hospitality-communication evaluation Owners/staff

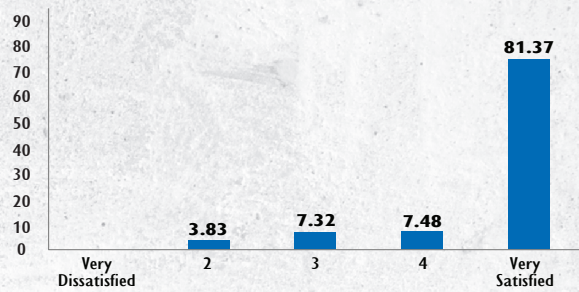


Figure 3: Relations between citizens affected by the earthquake

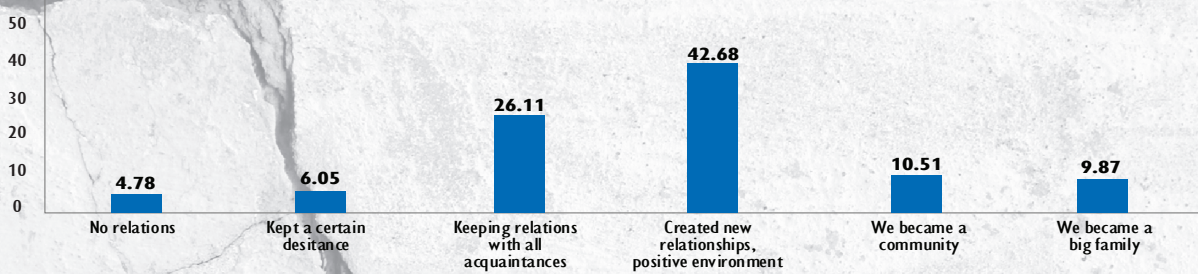


Figure 4: Changes identified during the stay

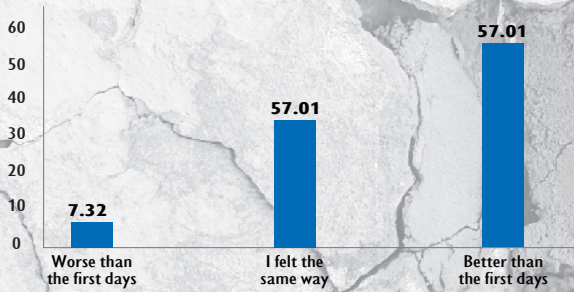


Figure 5: Willingness to volunteer

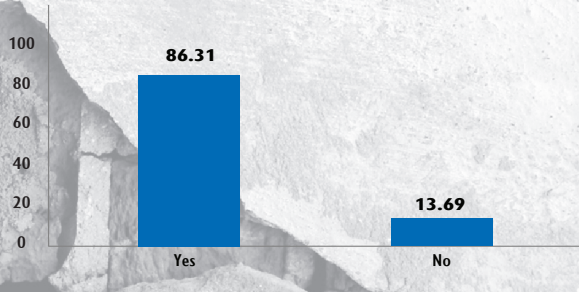
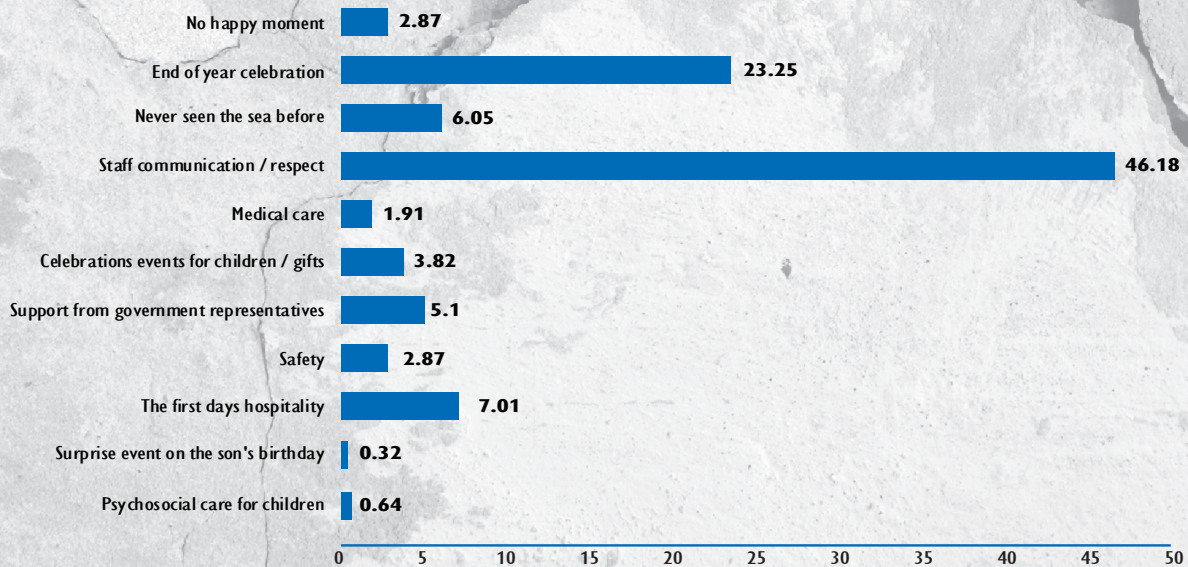


Figure 6: Happy moments to remember



Asked whether they would be willing to be part of a similar initiative in the future, all participating hotel managers/owners, with one exception only, expressed their willingness to participate. According to them, the experience gained on this occasion will lay the groundwork for further improvements in all aspects of the services provided and interactions among the various actors and will ensure an even better management of the situation.

They report that the greatest challenge they faced in relation to this category of guests was communication. A different kind of communication — one that is more empathetic and accepting and showing respect for human dignity, suffering, pain, and diversity — was the necessary mechanism for the successful management of this experience.

*“I experienced the earthquake myself. I know exactly how the citizens who were directly affected by it feel. I can put myself in their shoes. It is important that they should not be treated like victims, nor like clients. They are simply temporary guests in our home.”*

*Hotel owner, Durrës.*

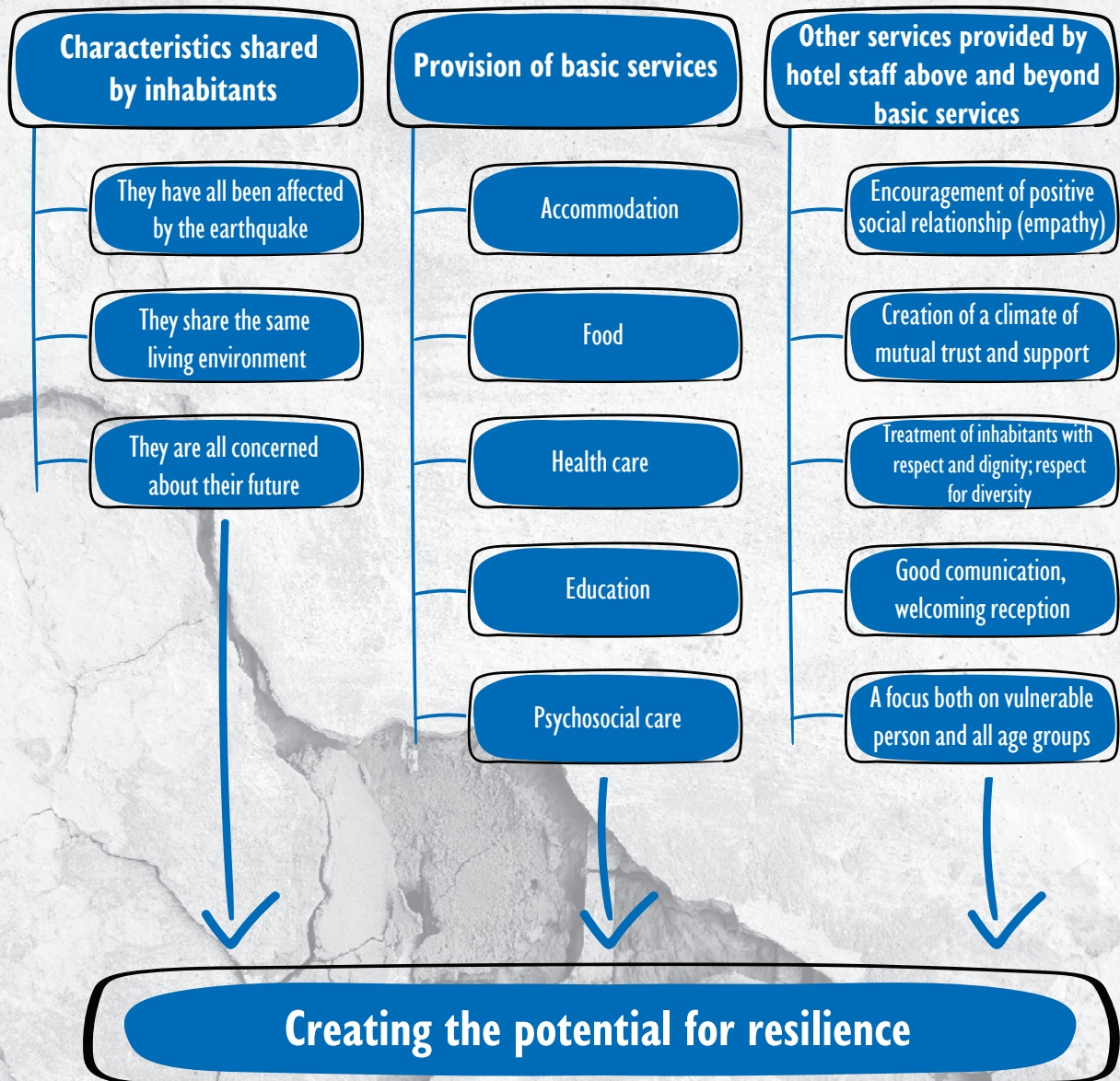
## Increasing the Potential for Resilience

The unique experience of accommodating citizens affected by the earthquake in hotels in the regions of Durrës and Lezha can be considered as a positive model of intervention for the development of the potential for resilience.

The entirety of this unique experience shows that three factors have been instrumental in creating the potential for resilience among the citizens affected by the earthquake.

- 1. Integrated basic services;**
- 2. Creation of a positive social atmosphere by hotel staffs;**
- 3. An inherent tendency displayed by the citizens themselves to engage and interact with others, as a result of being faced with the same adversity.**

# The Process of Building the Potential for Resilience



All three factors taken together have had a positive effect in increasing the affected inhabitants' potential for resilience:

- **Active citizens, willing to engage in volunteerism;**
- **A transformation in status - from passive receivers of services to active contributors to the provision thereof;**
- **Involved in conceiving and designing activities;**
- **Concerned, but optimistic about the resolution of their mid-term accommodation situation.**