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MAGAZINE

The first European app to empower citizens against floods, fires and extreme weather

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Thanks to the I-REACT app, citizens can warn other citizens of natural risks by sharing geolocalised photos and information on floods, fires and extreme weather; the app also notifies users of their risk to suffer natural hazards based on their location and provides information to improve their safety; its launch coincides with the International Day for Disaster Reduction

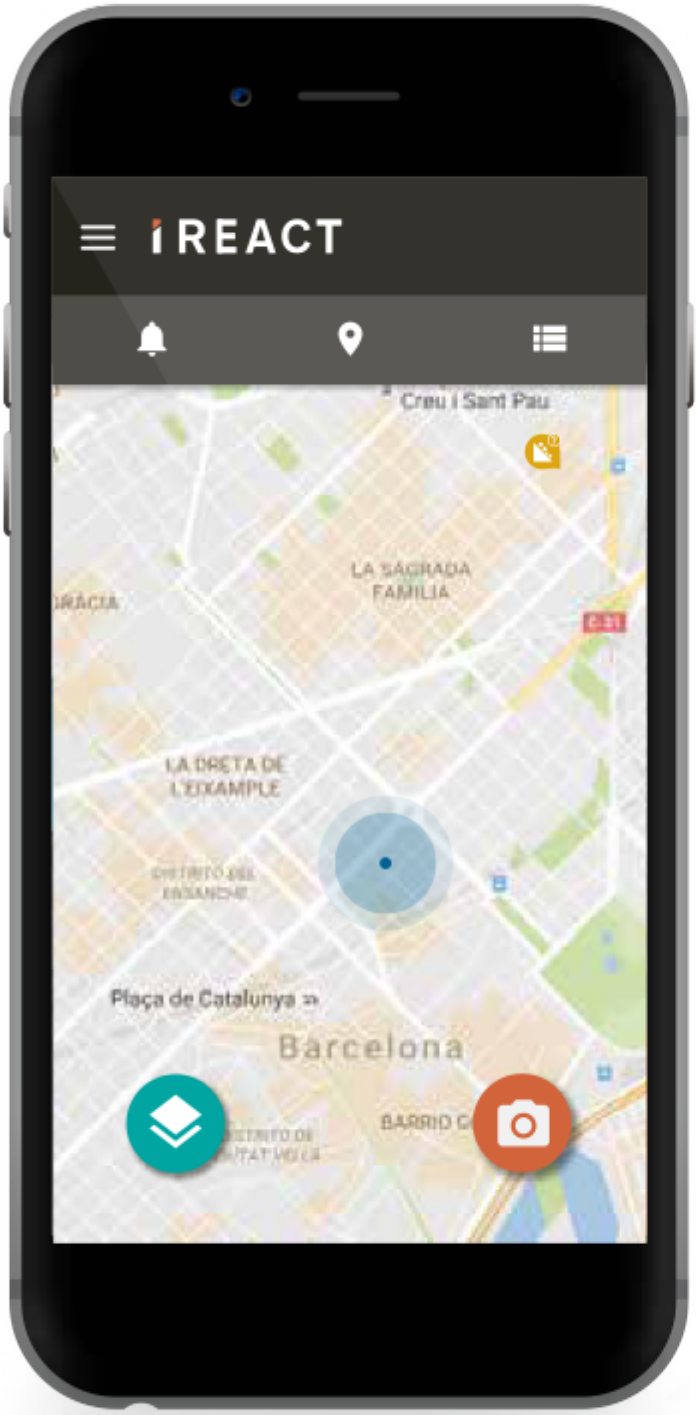
[PRESS RELEASE] 13th October 2018, Torino (Italy). The research project I-REACT, funded by the European Commission, launches today a free app to keep citizens safe from floods, fires and extreme weather. The app enables its users to share pictures and other information on natural hazards and in turn provides essential information about the risks of suffering from these threats. The free app, available through Google Play, aims to provide citizens with tools to build a society more resilient to disasters and is launched with the occasion of the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction.

Just in 2017, disasters like floods, wildfires and earthquakes killed more than 9000 people worldwide, affected 96 million, and caused €270 billion in losses —it is the second costliest year in disasters on record. For this reason, the International Day for Disaster Reduction focuses on diminishing the economic impact of disasters worldwide. “Our approach aims to empower all European citizens, enabling them to take a more active role in preventing disasters.”, says Dr Fabrizio Dominici, head of the Mobile Solution research area at the Istituto Superiore Mario Boella (ISMB), Italy, and coordinator of the I-REACT project. “The users of the app can monitor environmental conditions and share useful information such as photos and other data that will help other citizens be prepared.” These reports can be verified and rated by the rest of the users, so citizens can filter the relevant information and avoid the propagation of fake news. The same approach is applied to tweets: the app filter relevant tweets in real time, to offer the users only informative content related to emergency events happening in their surroundings. Also, the app also includes a set of tips and quizzes on what to do in case of a flood, a wildfire or other extreme weather event.

This kind of information becomes especially useful during floods, fires and other natural hazards. “The photos and comments uploaded by the users are useful not only to monitor the environment.”, remarks Dr Dominici, “they also allow citizens to report the damage caused to infrastructures, and help fellow users locate safe havens during an emergency.”

The app also features risk maps, that let people know at every moment the likelihood of being affected by extreme weather events, flood and fires. “We want to make disaster information as accessible as possible,” adds Dr Dominici,” and in the current world, this means that we all should be able to access it on our smartphones. This will contribute to keeping people safe, saving lives and reducing the damages caused by natural hazards”.

For the last two years, the European project I-REACT has been developing technological tools to prevent and respond better against natural hazards. Among the technologies developed by the project are a Big Data platform to predict better the occurrence of this type of events, wearables and smart glasses for first responders, so they can receive and send information without using their hands, and a decision support system for emergency coordinators, that enables them to take the best decision possible considering all the information available. I-REACT is complementary to existing solutions and its implementation is highly modular so as to be easily integrated with current operational platforms. “One of the key players during emergency situations are citizens themselves”, says Dr Dominici, ”so we wanted to provide them with the tools they need to stay safe. The app is the easiest way to do so: its free, and it can be used on your phone. Hopefully, it will contribute to create safer communities and save lives in the process.”



TAKE A PICTURE

The app is freely available on Google Play

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