Supplementary Material

This Supplementary Material consists of two sections. The first one analyses the results of the two surveys in terms of gender, age and political orientation, while the second section compares the results of our survey across lay people in Italy and Sweden with similar surveys about the perceptions of scientists and decision makers.

1. Gender, age and political orientation

In addition to national averages, we also considered demographic information provided by the participants (i.e. gender, age, and political orientation) and explored their role in the explaining public perceptions of multiple hazards.

Figures S1-S3 shows that women, youngsters and people with a left political orientation are generally more concerned about multiple hazards than men, elderly and people with a right political orientation. Yet, despite these differences in the absolute values of perceived likelihood and impact, the way in which multiple hazards are ranked remain similar across socio-demographic factors. Rankings are primarily driven by experience. We interpret this outcome by the major role played by the availability heuristic in explaining cross-country differences in terms of public risk perception.

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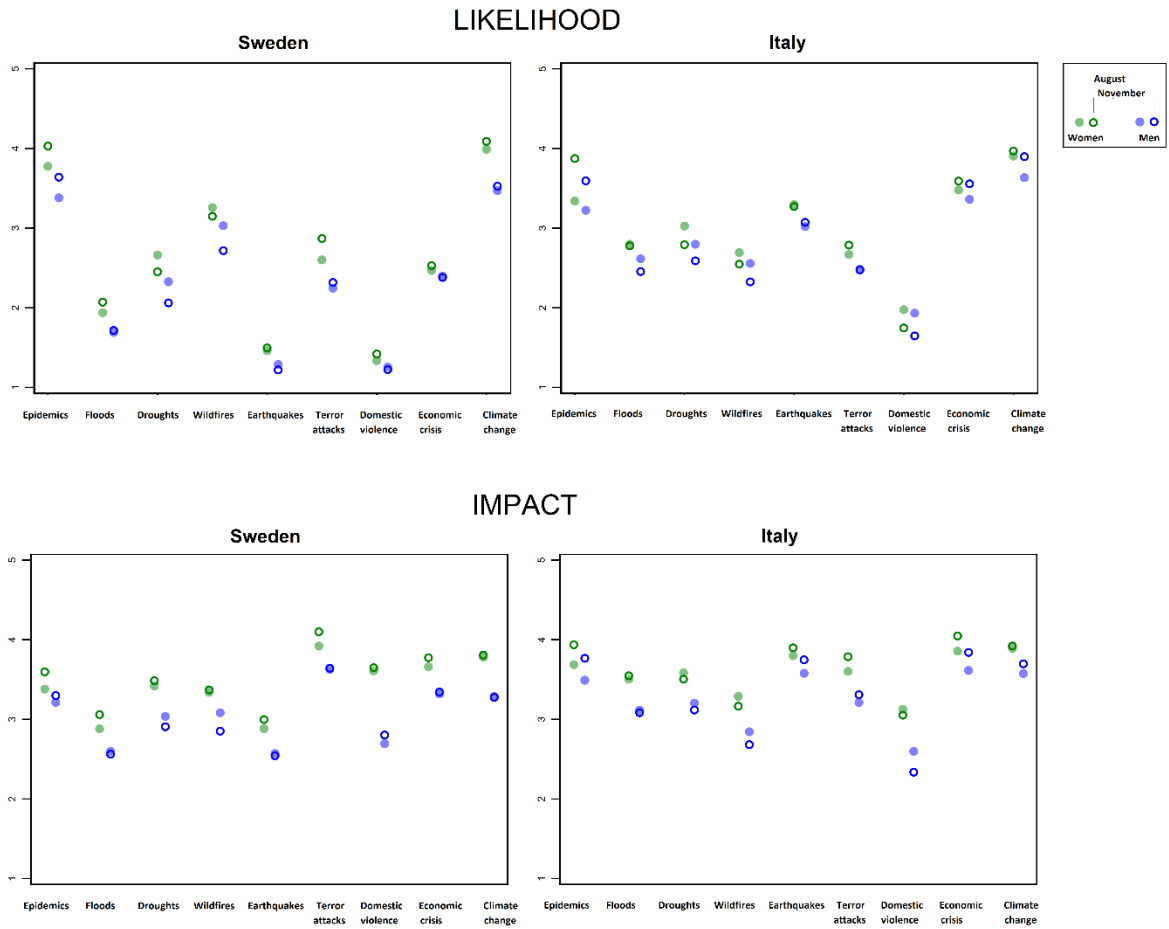
Figure S1. Perceived likelihood and impact in Italy and Sweden in August and November 2020 by gender.

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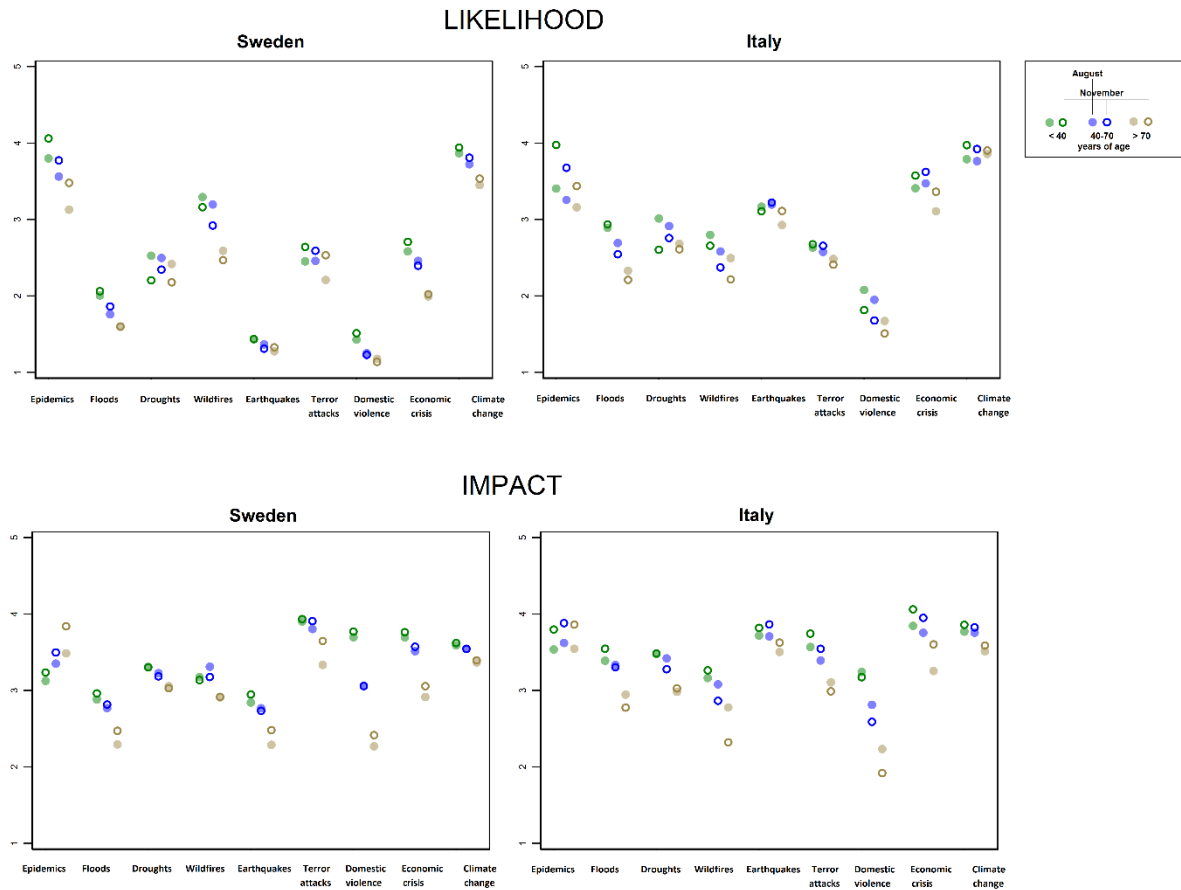
Figure S2. Perceived likelihood and impact in Italy and Sweden in August and November 2020 by age groups.

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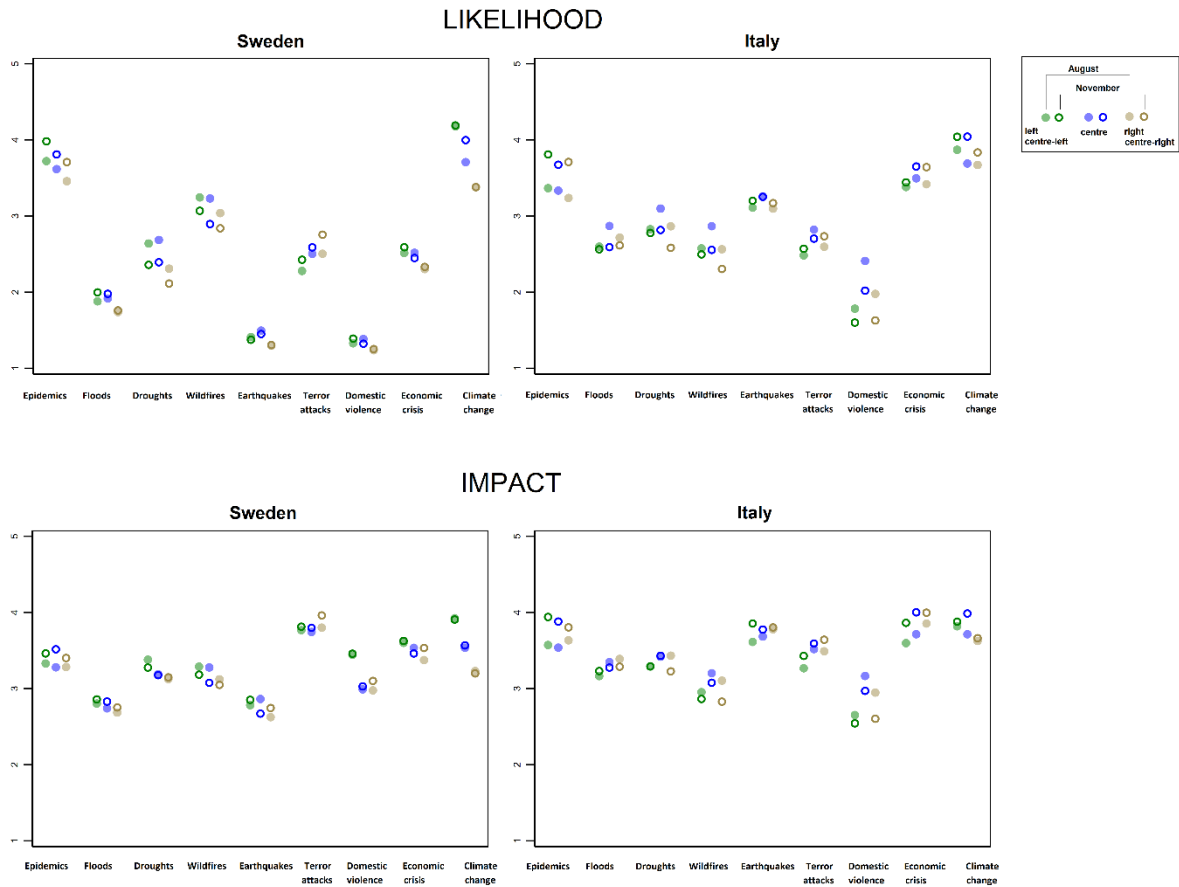
Figure S3. Perceived likelihood and impact in Italy and Sweden in August and November 2020 by political orientation.

2. People, scientists and decision makers

Public risk perceptions in Italy and Sweden (derived from our survey in August 2020) were compared with two recent surveys about perceptions of: i) scientists from the global change research community, collected in the 2020 Future Earth's Survey, and ii) decision makers around the world, described in the 2020 Global Risks Report by the World Economic Forum. The comparison between perceptions of lay people, scientists and decision makers showed an interesting alignment. The relative ranking of perceived likelihood is the same for people in Italy and Sweden, decision makers, and scientists: climate change (1st), epidemics (2nd) and terrorist attacks (3rd).
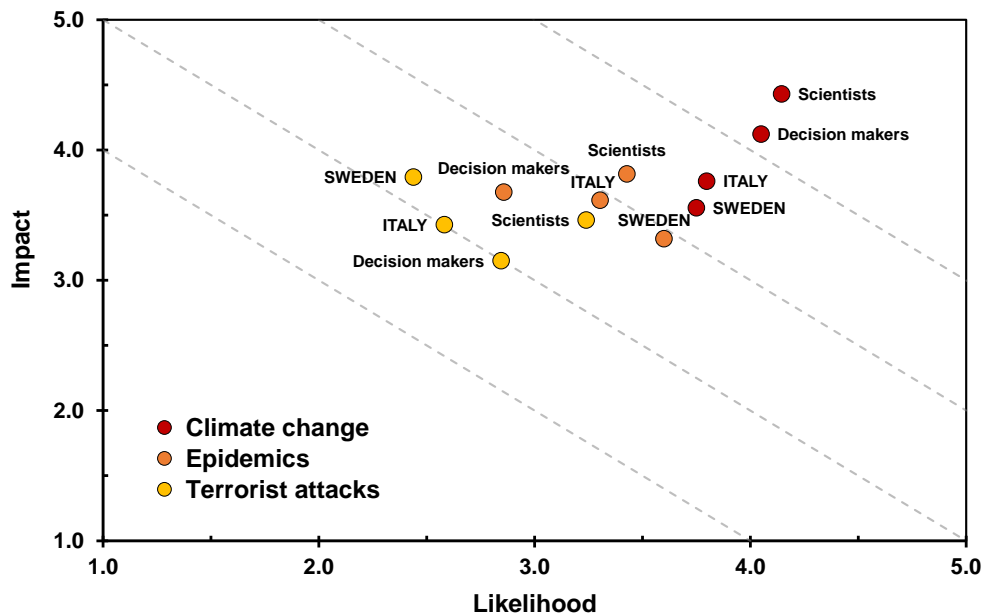
Figure S4. Public risk perceptions in Italy and Sweden associated with climate change, epidemics and terrorist attacks compared with perceptions of scientists from the global change research community, i.e. 2020 Future Earth's Survey, and decision makers around the world, i.e. the 2020 Global Risks Report by the World Economic Forum.