

Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network

Our stories

Haiti: UCPM supports recovery efforts following earthquake and tropical depression

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The Union Civil Protection Mechanism was called into action when a 7.2 magnitude earthquake hit south-western Haiti in August 2021. Two days later, a tropical depression heightened the emergency.

On 14 August 2021, a devastating 7.2 magnitude earthquake hit south-western Haiti. On 16 August, Haiti requested assistance through the [Union Civil Protection Mechanism](#) (UCPM) for emergency medical teams, water and sanitation (WASH) support, and shelter items. The following day, tropical depression Grace struck.

An EU Civil Protection Team (EUCPT), composed of 12 experts and 2 [Emergency Response Coordination Centre](#) (ERCC) liaison officers, was immediately deployed to Port-au-Prince, arriving on 18 August. On the ground the EUCPT was able to support the authorities and facilitate the coordination of [EU assistance](#).

Gerard Guerin (ERCC Liaison Officer) was part of this team, working in close cooperation with the [United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination team](#) (UNDAC) on humanitarian efforts, which were expected to continue into October.

"The effects of the earthquake and tropical depression Grace exacerbated an already very difficult situation, combining a complex emergency with a natural disaster," explains Gerard. "This created a very challenging operational environment. The current political situation and the safety and security situation in Haiti – particularly in Port au Prince – remains tense and unpredictable."

Above: Gerard Guerin is part of the EU Civil Protection Team supporting the authorities in Haiti and facilitating the coordination of EU assistance. He has over 30 years' experience working in the fire, rescue and emergency management sector.



To manage potential security threats, the EUCPT worked in cooperation with five key partners.

Five key security partners

The EUCPT met regularly and worked closely with the EU Delegation for Haiti, ECHO Field Office Haiti, ECHO Security Cell, and ERCC to ensure the safe conduct and delivery of the mission.

"I always get concerned when I hear gunfire," shares Gerard, "however, I trust in my colleagues, and I trust in my training and what I have learned over the years in exercises, and on previous missions."

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, workable, practical protocols have been developed by the EUCPT health experts and Technical Assistance Support Team (TAST) nurse to manage risks associated with the virus.

Reflecting on the nature of humanitarian work, Gerard highlights the importance of collective risk assessment.

"If we are determined to help people in real need, we must face up to the risks and difficulties of working in such challenging environments, and collectively decide what level of risk we are willing to accept and where we draw the line."



Left: UN OCHA/UNDAC AND EUCPT welcome the visit of the U.N Deputy Director General Amina J. Mohammed to the OSOCC in Port au Prince, Haiti.

The EUCPT's role in Haiti includes identifying and confirming the most urgent critical needs on the ground, and informing Member States and participating states through the ERCC. This is achieved through direct engagement with national, regional, and local authorities, operational partners and stakeholders, and other international responders (such as the UNDAC), as well as participation in the established coordination structure.

In Haiti, emergency medical interventions are a priority, followed by WASH needs – particularly water purification to provide clean drinking water, as the public piped water system in the worst affected areas has suffered severe damage.

Gerard praises the support provided by EU Member and participating states, which has included:

- **France:** A water purification team of 40 firefighters led by Lieutenant Colonel R. Avenel.
- **Norway:** An Emergency Medical Team type 1 (EMT1) of 36 personnel, 90,000kg and 700m³ of equipment (including a heavy base camp), and five 4x4 vehicles (including three ambulances).
- **Luxembourg:** Deployment of emergency response module 'emergency.lu', which has enhanced the French and Norwegian deployments, in addition to supporting the EUCPT and many other responders, including national civil protection authorities such as the Direction Générale de la Protection Civile (DGPC).
- **Sweden:** A TAST, which has worked in full coordination with the EUCPT.
- **The Netherlands:** The naval ship 'HOLLAND' (based in CURACAO) with rotary wing support (NH90) and 99 crew members, which has provided intelligence gathering and analysis, and safety and security, as well as an armed LNO team on the ground working closely with EUCPT to facilitate safe fly assessment missions, allowing them to understand the environment's particular risks.
- **Spain:** Water purification plants, many of which have been installed, and local staff trained in their usage, providing a long-lasting solution.

Gerard also emphasises the contribution of national authorities and other operational partners (such as the Pan American Health Organisation, which strongly supported the Ministry of Health, and the ERCC coordinators/duty officer team), as well as the assistance provided by Member States and participating states, which continued to arrive on a regular basis.



Left: EUCPT experts facilitate the arrival in Haiti the first shipment of the Norwegian EMT 1 cargo.

"The 'one Europe, one team' approach was really critical given the enormity of the challenges we faced, especially at the beginning of the mission," notes Gerard. "I am pleased that the UCPM was activated for this emergency, and that there was willingness on behalf of Member States and participating states to deploy capacities."

Looking to the future, Gerard hopes that experiences from the UCPM's work in Haiti will inform and strengthen future missions, particularly those related to complex emergencies.

"I think that the valuable lessons which we will learn from this deployment will help develop and improve the ability of the UCPM to respond more effectively and efficiently to future difficult missions around the world."

Topics: Haiti, earthquake, tropical depression Grace, [UCPM](#), [EUCPT](#), [ERCC](#)