



Dear Reader,

Leading a dedicated team of colleagues that has been tasked to develop the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network has been a true honour and a real pleasure. As an internal re-organisation of DG ECHO will take effect on 1 February, it is now time for me to close this professional chapter.

At the outset, back in 2019, most of us probably still had little understanding of what this “Knowledge Network” was supposed to be. But as we were starting our reflections, a number of key conditions for success became instantly clear: in order to be functional, a network must be owned and supported by its constituents. It must, therefore, be owned and supported by the EU Member States and participating states of the UCPM (MS/PS) and – beyond that – be used by the practitioners in the field and be useful to them. I liked to paraphrase President Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg: “A Network of the MS/PS, by the MS/PS, for the MS/PS.” Apart from hyperbole, this notion has been, and should also remain, a guiding principle in the future development of the Network. After all, it will only succeed if it enjoys the wide support of the UCPM community.

The beginning of the Knowledge Network, like many beginnings, was neither easy nor straightforward, especially at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, when essential, broad, and earnest consultations with relevant stakeholders suddenly proved very complicated, if not impossible. Making a virtue out of necessity, I reminded colleagues of a good practice in gardening: If you create a garden from scratch, during the first year, you do nothing but observing what grows naturally, to gain an understanding of prevailing growth conditions. And many things did “grow naturally”! We received strong input from MS/PS, and were able to build on the strong and passionate community of trained experts and teams that have taken part in MODEX. We could also link up with the European Commission’s Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre (DRMKC). These were already crucial “naturally grown” components of the Network.

Over time, we have developed many more activities, like the annual gathering of Young CP Professionals in Brussels, and the Evidence for Policy in Disaster Risk Management Summer School, generating connections and incremental networking across the EU Commission and beyond. Reaching out to the Horizon Community for European Research and Innovation for Security (CERIS) also proved essential.

The 2024 Civil Protection Forum in Brussels will undoubtedly be a highlight of the Network, for the Network, bringing hundreds of civil protection and disaster management experts together to discuss topical questions and share information. I hope you will join us, too!

So, four years on, is the Knowledge Network mission accomplished? Of course not! The Network’s development never stops. So much more needs to be done and explored, but I hope that the seeds that were planted will continue to grow and bear fruit. This 11th newsletter is a testament to those many activities. It is one of the more visible outputs of the UCPKN, and yet again its content demonstrates the breadth and relevance of the European dimension of civil protection.

Felix Bloch

Felix Bloch

Head of Unit, DG ECHO, European Commission

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2022-2023 UCPKN activities report presented to the UCPKN Board



The Knowledge Network stand at the exhibition accompanying the 2022 European Civil Protection Forum © EU

The first version of the Knowledge Network Activities Report was presented to the UCPKN Board on 4–5 December in Brussels.

The report sets out key achievements, results and lessons learnt since the Knowledge Network's inception in 2021, under each of the Network's three goals – Stronger Community, Shared Knowledge for Action, and Research that Matters.

The Knowledge Network's first two years took place in a unique context, where the sharing of information and collaboration between the community has never been more important. That is why its role as **Partnership Facilitator** has been key, with many activities under the first goal (**Stronger Community**) focused specifically on facilitating communication and partnership at different levels and across disciplines.

Highlights included the Knowledge Network's participation in the European Civil Protection Forum (it will also organise the next edition in June 2024), a study visit for young professionals in civil protection, a big expansion in the distribution of the Knowledge Network newsletter, and sharp increase in the publication of news and stories on its online platform.

Under the **second goal – Shared Knowledge for Action** – the Network has endeavoured to act as 'knowledge broker' by facilitating knowledge sharing among experts, offering them a space to learn and work together.

In 2022–2023, the UCPM Training Programme underwent substantial changes in terms of its content, format, modalities of delivery, and links with other capacity development activities (civil protection exercises and exchanges of experts). After a long period of reflection with the cooperation of stakeholders, the programme was ready to be relaunched with a new look in September 2023. The report looks back at the training and exercises run over the two years and sets out the various new pathways available under the revised offer. The document also features other activities with knowledge exchange and peer to peer support at the centre: exchanges of civil protection experts, peer reviews and lessons learnt programme.

It is incredible to look back at everything that has been achieved over the first two years of the Knowledge Network. None of this could have been done without the collaboration and support of our member and participating states, but also of our colleagues from across different teams and different Commission services. As this engagement continues to grow, we look forward to seeing what we can achieve together over the next few years – this is just the beginning!

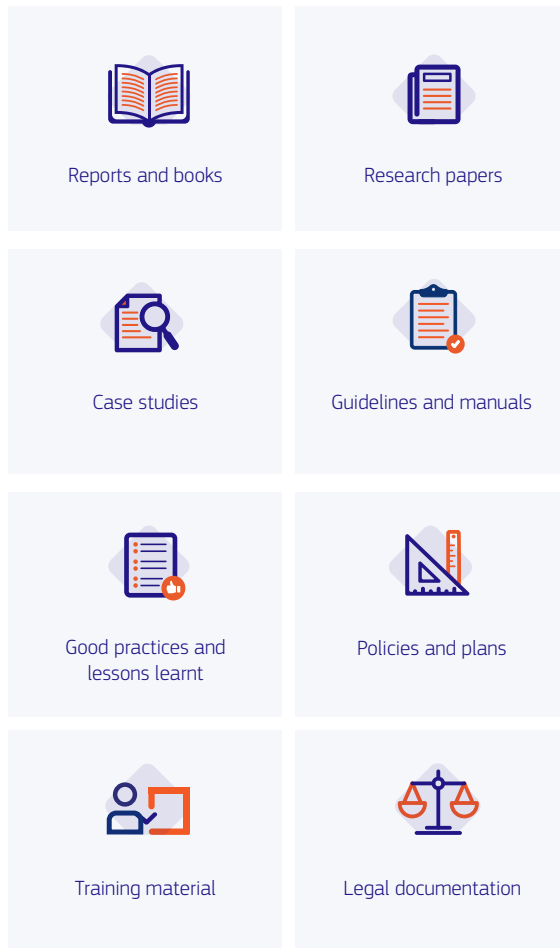
Artur Malantowicz, European Commission

The **third goal** looks closely at **Research that Matters**. The Knowledge Network's **Science Pillar** was set up to provide the UCPM community with access to high-quality data and analytical tools, and to support innovation and fill in any gaps that may exist in the area of civil protection and disaster risk management. It cooperates closely with the work of the European Commission's Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre (DRMKC), which serves as a hub for the science pillar and reinforces science-policy links between the Commission, EU Member States and DRM community.

Highlights of this pillar include improvements and a new interface for the Risk Data Hub, the enhancement of crisis-analytical tools for the community, and support to the Science-policy-practice interface (for example, through DRMKC annual seminars or the summer schools).

The working version of the Activities Report was shared with member and participating states for feedback following the meeting. Once comments have been collated, the print version of the report will be published online. Consult the [Knowledge Network Platform](#) for further details.

A one-stop shop for civil protection resources – the new Knowledge Library, coming soon



The Knowledge Library will be a repository for a range of different resources, such as reports, research papers, good practices or manuals © EU

One of the features of the Knowledge Network platform which has been most requested by community members has been the digital library. Civil protection stakeholders have long expressed the need for a collaborative space where they can share their reports, guidance, documentation, training materials and research with other members of the UCPM community. The library is now almost ready to be unveiled, with the public launch planned for the first quarter of 2024.

The library is designed to function as a central repository, where documents that are relevant and of added value to others in the field of civil protection can be uploaded and shared for stakeholders to download and access. This corresponds, among others, to the Science Pillar of the Knowledge Network, which was set up to bridge the gap between science and civil protection and aims to put high quality data and research at the disposal of UCPM member and participating states in order to support evidence-based decision making and operations. The library is intended to act as a 'one stop shop', putting material from a wide variety of resources together in one place.

Following an extended internal consultation and external benchmarking work, library documents will be categorised using the taxonomy shown on the left. This is designed to be broad, and yet specific enough to accommodate the whole civil protection and disaster risk management community, with its diverse missions and fields of work.

Editorial guidance and requirements on the type of content and format to submit will be available on the library homepage. Users will initially be able to upload their documents and materials in an interactive group. From there, the documents will be assessed by the Knowledge Network Librarians to ensure that they meet editorial guidelines and are relevant and of added value to the community before they are published. This approach may be further developed once the library is in use.

I know from personal experience that there is a wealth of useful material on civil protection, but it can be difficult to find and published in many different locations. This library will bring all of those resources together in one place, providing stakeholders with faster and more efficient access to the information that they need, when they need it.

Felix Bloch, Head of Unit Knowledge Network & Evidence-Based Policy

For more information:
ECHO-CP-KNOWLEDGE-NETWORK-PLATFORM@ec.europa.eu

Have your say!

The library is designed to be a useful tool for our Knowledge Network community, so it is very important for us to hear from our stakeholders in the first few months on whether it meets their needs, or whether they think it could be improved.

Timeline

The library will be rolled out externally in the first quarter of 2024, following internal consultation within the European Commission. Member states, participating states and project leads will receive detailed communication and further information on when and how to upload their materials.

Moldova – A new member of the European civil protection family

The Republic of Moldova (hereafter 'Moldova') signed an agreement to join the UCPM on 29 September 2023. The membership fully entered into force on 1 January 2024, after its ratification by Moldova. Head of the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (GIES), Alexandru Oprea, shared his insights with ECHO on Moldova's accession to the Mechanism, and lessons learnt following the large inflow of people fleeing from Ukraine.

What does the UCPM membership mean for Moldova?

Our first contact with the UCPM occurred in 2008, during a major flood, when we requested and received assistance from abroad. Since then, we have had several opportunities to confirm our affiliation to EU values and principles.

Firstly, membership in the UCPM is an important step for Moldova towards EU integration, which has become our national objective.

Secondly, it means more security for my country and for the region. Any additional partner added to the European civil protection family brings additional value to the region. The interaction and mutual aid break barriers for the ultimate beneficiaries – people in the region.

In your opinion, how can Moldova contribute to the UCPM, now or in the future, in terms of capacities, knowledge, and expertise?



Alexandru Oprea, Head of the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations of the MIA of the Republic of Moldova © GIES

'A small country with a big heart!' This is how my country was described last year while trying to manage the inflow of people from Ukraine.

In the last two years, we have been part of missions abroad: wildfires in Greece (2021), COVID-19 response in Romania (2021), and the earthquake in Türkiye (2023). We have shown that we are compatible and interoperable with colleagues from other countries. Response is just one side of the coin, but it shows the progress we are trying to achieve.

We have taken advantage of every opportunity to increase our internal capacities: through the UCPM Training Programme, the PPRD East 3 programme, Technical Assistance projects, bilateral projects, and contacts with UCPM member and participating states. These actions enabled our personnel to apply EU procedures and knowledge.

We have recently benefitted from a peer review (see the following article). The peer review report highlighted the strengths of the Moldovan civil protection and disaster risk management system, and identified recommendations to further strengthen it.

What are the main lessons learnt for Moldova following the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and how can the UCPM membership help in the future?

A crisis may hit you any time. Thousands of women and children running away from war and seeking security and assistance in Moldova – we could not imagine such a scenario. It seemed so unreal and so demanding!

We wonder what could have happened if we had not have been prepared for such a situation. This is another important lesson – 'being prepared in advance to lessen the impact'.

'We are not alone!' This was another important lesson for us to learn. By requesting international assistance, we felt what the 'EU solidarity principle' really is. We are thankful to all UCPM member and participating states and other countries that shared their resources and enabled us to respond to all the challenges. By being part of the EU civil protection family, we will continue to contribute to increased safety and security.

Wearing the 'peer' hat - UCPM peer review in Moldova



In October 2022, the national civil protection authority of the Republic of Moldova, the GIES, requested a [UCPM peer review](#) on all main thematic areas of their disaster risk management system. The review mission took place in April 2023, and the report was published in October 2023.

The peer review team, made up of practitioners from six national authorities, accompanied by ECHO staff and supported by the Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Climate Change (CMCC), met a wide range of stakeholders from ministries and agencies in Chisinau. The team also went on field visits to Crocmaz town hall and fire station, a fire and rescue unit in Ștefan Vodă, and to Palanca, a temporary centre for receiving refugees from Ukraine.

Swedish peer Karl Tarring, who works for the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), describes his experience:

What made you apply to be part of the team?

I got attracted when I saw the call for peers. The peer review exercise sounded like the vulnerability and capacity assessment done at the beginning of humanitarian DRR (disaster risk reduction) projects, but at a national scale.

How was your overall experience as a peer?

I have not had as much fun at work for years! The peer review was, on the one hand, a great learning experience and, on the other, an opportunity to contribute to Moldova's change process for civil protection. ECHO facilitated a strong collaborative atmosphere among the peers, and the technical consultant CMCC did an amazing job at building common understanding and collecting input. For me, it was also a privilege to work with five experienced peers from other member states. Listening to their perspectives was a learning process within the learning process.

What is your main take away from the Moldova review?

It takes courage and preparation for all involved to benefit from the peer review format. Courage from the Moldovan civil protection authority and the ministries and agencies in opening up for an honest and transparent in-depth discussion. Preparation from CMCC, ECHO and the peers to put forward the pertinent questions, considering the short time available during a review mission. Essentially, what became clear to me is the importance of building mutual trust to be able to get a constructive dialogue going. Personally, I also found the [Peer Review Assessment Framework](#) (PRAF) very helpful. The PRAF provides a useful structure for drafting the report, preparing the right questions, and for the overall understanding of DRR.

What are your feelings about the approach of the reviewed country?

I was very impressed by the Moldovan openness towards change, and the honesty with which they assessed the recommendations and ideas throughout the process. I think that this is the best way to approach a peer review, with an open mind and, at the same time, constantly considering advice fitting the actual reality in the country.

Read the [Moldova Peer Review report](#).



Two back-to-back high-level events in Valencia



From 17–19 October, two important events co-hosted by the Spanish Presidency of the EU, and linked to each other by a joint session, took place in Valencia.

The **51st meeting of the Directors-General for Civil Protection of the UCPM** member and participating states, chaired by ECHO's Director-General Popowski and co-chaired by Spain's civil protection Director-General Ruiz Boada, was attended by all 27 EU Member States' DGs, as well as eight DGs from the UCPM participating states. Moldova participated for the first time, as the newest addition to the UCPM.

The agenda of the meeting highlighted the need to strengthen national civil protection systems, covering all phases of the disaster risk management cycle: from investing in prevention, to enhancing disaster preparedness and response within the UCPM. The outcome of the Spanish Presidency Workshop on Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Governance (focused on prevention) and the programme of the incoming Belgian Presidency were also presented.

For the first time, the morning of the second day was dedicated to a joint session of the UCPM DGs, together with the Directors-General responsible for civil protection from the Union for Mediterranean (UfM) countries. The joint meeting focused on the three key hazards identified for the Mediterranean basin: wildfires, storms and floods. The objective was to exchange on the operational side of cross-border cooperation and mutual assistance by showcasing recent experiences in Mediterranean countries.

The joint session was followed by the **fourth meeting of civil protection DGs of the Union for the Mediterranean** member countries. After discussing available UCPM cooperation instruments, such as the Union for the Mediterranean Regional Dialogue Platform (launched in 2022) and the proposed 2030 UfM Action Plan, the participants exchanged on the creation of a voluntary non-binding Mediterranean Framework on Civil Protection (MFCP). This framework would pave the way for increased operational interactions among UfM member states and the UCPM, leading to effective action on the ground.

One of the main projects presented at the meeting was the recently launched PPRD-Med, aimed at developing a culture of preparedness and proactive risk reduction in the region, which has a strong focus on the actual needs of the Southern Mediterranean partners in this field. Both meetings highlighted the significant contribution that the UCPM can make to strengthening the resilience of our societies in the face of growing challenges.



The UCPM can provide a blueprint model for regional cooperation.

Maciej Popowski (DG ECHO)

LEARNING



FORMATEX23: 'Lessons learnt and way forward' workshop wraps-up highly successful project

After two years of successful activities, the FORMATEX23 UCPM Full-Scale Exercise (FSX) project marked its final step with a 'Lessons learnt and way forward' workshop in Brussels on 22–23 November 2023.

The FORMATEX23 FSX took place in Linz, Austria, from 14–16 of September, and involved ten project partners and over 600 participants from eight EU countries. The full-scale multinational and multi-agency exercise involved national and regional emergency response organisations and structures, as well as specific emergency response elements. It aimed to improve and strengthen cooperation among European members in the context of major accidents triggered by natural hazards. The exercise scenario focused on multiple industrial accidents in and around the city of Linz, triggered by an intensive flooding event along the river Danube.

In addition to the FSX, the project featured a variety of side activities, planning meetings, workshops and seminars aimed at contributing to a deeper awareness of the UCPM missions and their activation. The final activity related to the project was represented by the FORMATEX23 'Lessons learnt and way forward' workshop in Brussels on 22–23 November 2023. The workshop was hosted at ECHO headquarters.



Scenario during the FORMATEX23 Full-Scale Exercise in Linz © FORMATEX23

During the workshop, consortium members had the opportunity to look back at the FSX and at the two years of related activities, with the aim of highlighting the main achievements of the project and identifying areas of improvement for future exercises. Partners have identified the main take aways from the project below:

- Exercise evaluation as an essential pillar in full-scale exercise projects;
- The need for revision of the European Union Civil Protection Team (EUCPT) selection process, as well as the re-assessment of its role within the EU;
- Enhanced use of technical experts within the EUCPT;
- Strengthened interoperability of chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear (CBRN) capabilities and ability to manage environmental implications;
- Official EU observers programme to be kept at a manageable size of approximately ten members;
- Active involvement of observers within exercises through the assignment of observation tasks;
- The importance of involvement of all national authorities at an early stage of a project to foster stakeholder involvement during the planning phase;
- Enhancing the exchange of lessons learnt within the community and amongst different projects through the organisation of dedicated after-project workshops.

FORMATEX23 was essential in addressing the need for improved preparedness in handling NaTech events and enhancing CBRN capabilities. The exercise highlighted the importance of solidarity among European countries and underscored the ongoing commitment to better prepare for and respond to similar events in the future.

Hanna Jahns, Director for Disaster Preparedness and Prevention, DG ECHO

FORMATEX23 is a great example of how to be better prepared in a real emergency. It makes the difference in delivering an efficient and effective response and saving lives.

Mariangela Pelliccia, FORMATEX23 Project Officer, DG ECHO

To conclude the workshop, participants visited the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) to learn more about how it supports countries hit by disasters through expertise, human resources, and specialised relief equipment.

National Training Coordinators take stock of new UCPM Training Programme

National Training Coordinators (NTCs) met face-to-face for their annual meeting in beautiful Alcalá de Henares, Spain, on 13–15 November 2023. The meeting was organised by the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the EU, in collaboration with the European Commission.

NTCs are the point of contact in UCPM member and participating states for civil protection and disaster management personnel to identify their training needs and access the right training opportunities. As part of this, they select and nominate the participants to be trained through the UCPM Training Programme.

While the 2023 meeting focused on the recently launched UCPM Training Programme, NTCs also discussed their now strengthened role, and were informed by the European Commission about changes in relation to the UCPM, as well as various tools and platforms to support knowledge and information sharing. Participants also had an opportunity to exchange and network on the premises of the University of Alcalá, one of Europe's oldest universities, where the meeting took place.

In his welcoming speech, Angel Goya, Head of the Sub-directorate for Training and institutional Affairs of the Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Emergencies, Spain, presented the Spanish civil protection structure and its respective training system, addressing the multiple planning levels operating in the country and similarities with the UCPM Training Programme.

Since this was the first NTC meeting in person after the start of the new programme, the contractors responsible for the implementation of the UCPM Training Programme presented the courses and activities, and identified some lessons already learnt since the launch of the new courses in September 2023. European Commission staff joined from Brussels to provide operational updates on UCPM activations coordinated by the ERCC and general policy updates, and to share the latest developments on rescEU.

The meeting also saw the inauguration of the new online module for National Training Coordinators, an eLearning module to address key areas that NTCs should know about and understand on the Training Programme, as well as skills that would help them manage their tasks and role as the main UCPM Training ambassadors in their countries and constituencies.

The next NTC annual meeting will take place in 2024 in Hungary.



Over three days, the NTCs discussed the new Training Programme and other new developments within the UCPM © EU

This third event hosted by the Spanish Presidency has been a particularly important one: for the first time, NTCs have been able to exchange experiences and discuss the challenges met in the implementation of the new Training Programme. The Commission team has succeeded at engaging all participants in this process, which is very much in line with the Spanish Presidency's goal to promote stronger involvement of Member States in the work of the UCPM.

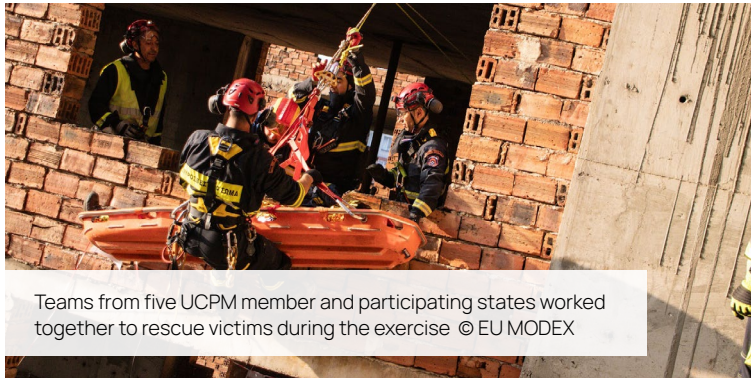
Cristina Marugán Güemez, Head of International Relations, Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Emergencies, Spain

The NTC has an important role in facilitating the knowledge transfer process from UCPM to the national level. Participating in such meetings is a very good opportunity to break the barriers of virtual communication, to get to know colleagues and to share with them good practices and build synergies for facing challenges. Also, holding meetings like this is a good way to improve the work process and support the NTC's role.

Jonian Harka, National Training Coordinator, Albania

MODEX earthquake simulation takes place in Bulgaria

An international exercise for search and rescue modules of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism was held in early October in the city of Montana, Bulgaria. The organiser was the Bulgarian Fire Safety and Civil Protection Directorate-General.



Teams from five UCPM member and participating states worked together to rescue victims during the exercise © EU MODEX

The simulated scenario of the exercise was related to a severe earthquake that occurred in a country outside the European Union named 'Modulistan' and the situation that followed. Since the country could not cope with the consequences of the natural disaster on its own, it turned to the Union Civil Protection Mechanism for help. To support the country, offers for assistance were sent from Austria, Greece, Türkiye and Hungary, which were subsequently accepted. These four countries sent their medium-sized search and rescue teams, which exceeded 200 people.

During the exercise, the teams had to rescue people, both from narrow and confined spaces, and from heights. The rescue operations lasted for 48 hours without interruption, and were held in daylight and in the dark. During the operations, many victims were rescued, and some of them were treated and handed over to the local medical teams.

Participating teams had previously presented the tasks they would like to complete during the exercise. The tasks were developed by the Exercise Control in advance and linked with essential learning objectives for the participating teams. The workplaces were designed and arranged in such a way that the teams were placed in conditions close to real life. Locations allowed teams to deploy their capabilities to orientate themselves in an unfamiliar environment.

One of the tasks in the scenario was related to the arrest of a wanted person. A team from the Gendarmerie, Special operations Operations and Counter-Terrorism Directorate-General was involved in the preparation and implementation of this task. In another situation, distressed people were sent to the basecamp of the international teams for food and water.

The organisers from Bulgaria provided conditions for simulating amputation of a victim's limb, in which the Hungarian team proved that it had the capacity to cope with the task. The search and rescue team from Hungary underwent a reclassification process during the exercise, assessed by a team from the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG). During this process, the team showed that it met the requirements for INSARAG reclassification, and received its certificate at the ceremony which was organised for all participants in the exercise.

A large number of institutions were involved in the exercise, including: the Montana District Administration, Municipality of Montana, Municipality of Medkovets, Bulgarian Red Cross, National Customs Agency, Bulgarian Food Safety Agency, Border Police Directorate-General, Gendarmerie, Special Operations and Counter-Terrorism Directorate-General and the Regional Directorate of the Ministry of Interior – Montana. The European Commission representative who was present during the exercise expressed satisfaction with the organisation before and during the process.



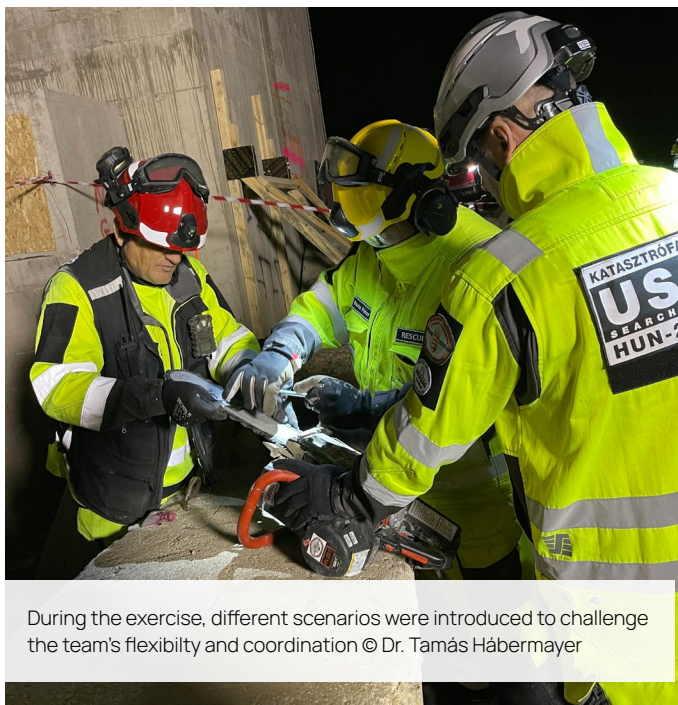
The teams exercised their rescue operations in narrow and confined spaces, as well as from heights © EU MODEX

More information about the MODEX exercises, photos and video can be found at the following link:
<https://www.eu-modex.eu>.

HUSZÁR Volunteer Rescue Team successfully achieve INSARAG reclassification

Hungary's HUSZÁR Volunteer Rescue Team underwent its second UN INSARAG reclassification on 2–6 October 2023, during the EU MODEX field exercise in Bulgaria. This achievement strengthens their status as an INSARAG medium urban search and rescue (USAR) team, marked HUN-02, allowing them to actively engage in international deployments under UN accreditation.

The EU MODEX Lot 3 exercise brought together USAR teams from Austria, Greece, Türkiye and Hungary, fostering collaboration and enhancing preparedness through realistic simulations in Bulgaria. This joint effort showcased the strength of international cooperation in disaster response.



During the exercise, different scenarios were introduced to challenge the team's flexibility and coordination © Dr. Tamás Hábermayer

Day 1 – Mobilisation and briefing

The HUSZÁR team received a simulated alert from Hungary's National Directorate-General for Disaster Management (NDGDM) to respond to a massive earthquake in Bulgaria. This was part of the INSARAG reclassification within the EU MODEX framework. After a swift response, the team underwent medical examinations, loaded equipment onto transport vehicles, and received a send-off from Dr. Ferenc Tóth, Brigadier General of the NDGDM.

Day 2 – Setting up operations

The HUSZÁR team, designated HUN-02, initiated the exercise by establishing the Reception/Departure Centre (RDC) for international teams. Simultaneously, they assessed the sites offered by the local authority for the Base of Operations (BoO). The team then created its BoO and set up the USAR Coordination Cell (UCC) following INSARAG rules. Rapid reconnaissance identified areas with potential survivors, setting the stage for coordinated rescue operations.

Day 3 – Dynamic rescue operations

Technical rescues continued, with teams adapting tactics to situations inserted by the Exercise Control (EXCON) team in the background. Various scenarios were inserted into the exercise, including a train accident and responding to a team leader's illness, testing the team's flexibility and coordination. By the end of the day, all INSARAG qualification criteria were met, leading to the successful closure of the dynamic part of the exercise.

Day 4 – Successful intervention and demobilisation

The combined efforts of the HUSZÁR team culminated in a successful intervention at the complex damage scene. Meeting all INSARAG criteria, the EXCON acknowledged their work, leading to the demobilisation process. The team's achievements were celebrated during a community dinner, emphasising the collaborative efforts of volunteers and support units.

Five year mandate and collaborative success

The HUSZÁR Volunteer Rescue Team's reclassification is the result of over 12 years of collaborative work involving six Hungarian NGOs in the field of USAR, including the Hungarian Red Cross. Their commitment and preparation, coupled with the support of contributors, mentors, liaisons and observers from NDGDM, secured the team's 'medium' USAR international classification for another five years.

The recognition of the Hungarian team was attributed to the preparedness of the international teams, the professionalism of the experts within those teams, as well as the effective venue management from Bulgaria, the EXCON from the EU MODEX Consortium, and the international classifiers from the INSARAG Family. HUN-02 is ready to work again with them in the next exercise, or during an international deployment anywhere in the world.

Márton Ábrahám, LTC, Module focal point, Hungary



After successful reclassification, the module retains its UN accreditation for another five years © Dr. Tamás Hábermayer

- <https://www.katasztrofavedelem.hu/29/hirek/278787/bulgariaba-indult-a-huszar>
- <https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/news/eu-modex-lot-3-field-exercises-concluded-montana-bulgaria>
- <https://www.katasztrofavedelem.hu/29/hirek/278842/foldrenges-osszedolt-hazak-rengeteg-aldozat>
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- <https://www.katasztrofavedelem.hu/29/hirek/278899/ujabb-ot-evre-megkapta-a-minositest-a-magyar-csapat>

Full-scale simulation exercise on flood scenario organised in Bosnia and Herzegovina

DPPI FLEX 2023, the first ever full-scale simulation exercise within a Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for Southeastern Europe (DPPI SEE), was held between 23–27 October 2023 in Brčko District, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

DPPI FLEX 2023 was designed around a flood scenario, replicating the situation in 2014 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with specific objectives on activating the UCPM and the deployment of the EU Civil Protection Team, testing of Host Nation Support (HNS) processes and international drone deployment, and solving logistics tasks and camp management through the application of the Sphere Handbook (minimum humanitarian standards for emergency response).



Participants setting up camp © DPPI SEE

Combining three topics into a single scenario is what made DPPI FLEX 2023 unique in both design and learning outcomes. The core planning team was determined to design something that had not been tested before and that was, at the same time, very close to reality.

The challenge behind the exercise and the learning opportunity was also recognised by the European Commission. Using the ongoing project for external technical on-site assistance in the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) beneficiaries and the Southern Neighbourhood countries, DPPI FLEX 2023 was supported by two experts who remained a key part of the core planning team. Additional DPPI SEE partners also recognised the opportunity presented by the exercise: Sphere Association from Geneva, Global Logistics Cluster and DHL were also included in the planning process, training activities and execution. Furthermore, DPPI FLEX 2023 proved the added value of cooperation between the national civil protection authorities in the SEE region and the Red Cross/Red Crescent, as they were also part of the journey.



Drone operations as part of the exercise © DPPI SEE

The exercise provided a close-to-reality environment for the international teams to test and train their capabilities. It involved 200 participants including EXCON, a HNS team from Bosnia and Herzegovina, international teams and one national team from the host country, EUCPT, evaluators and observers. DPPI SEE proved that it could organise simulation exercises with its own resources. As all ten member countries of DPPI SEE shared the burden of preparation and execution, the exercise contributed to exchange and strengthening of the network and personal relationships.

This exercise provided a learning opportunity for participating teams to enhance their coordination and technical skills for working together in a complex flood emergency in the framework of the UCPM.

Vlatko Jovanovski, DPPI SEE Head of Secretariat

During the evaluation workshop and the wash up, three thematic areas of learnings were identified: **Standardisation** – in terms of drone teams' composition, protocols for deployment and equipment, and establishing a functional drone cell within the On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC); **Communication** – in terms of preparation for the exercise, particularly when new topics are introduced; and **Flexibility** – in terms of openness to new challenges among all participants.

UCPM introductory course for Ukrainian colleagues



During the five-day seminar, the participants received detailed information about the UCPM © BBK

Since 2016, the German Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance (BBK) has been implementing a bilateral project in the field of CBRN protection on behalf of the Federal Foreign Office of Germany, in cooperation with the State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SES) and the State Border Guard Service (SBGS).

Due to Ukraine joining the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) as the ninth Participating State on 20 April 2023 and the great interest shown by the SES in UCPM related topics, BBK, together with the Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW), conducted a UCPM introductory seminar in Bonn, Germany from 6 to 10 November 2023, in which 15 colleagues from the SES took part.

The seminar participants were very diverse, from an employee of the Office for Cooperation with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, to another staff member from the main humanitarian aid hub in Ukraine, and a member of the INSARAG classified heavy USAR team. The seminar therefore covered a wide range of different aspects within the UCPM so that all participants could benefit from it. Accordingly, the sessions and lectures focused thematically on the three pillars of the UCPM: prevention, preparedness and response.

For me personally the seminar was also a good opportunity for networking and partnership-building between the Ukrainian and German colleagues, which is as important as the promotion of knowledge and the exchange of experience.

Susanne Wacht, German National Training Coordinator

On the third day, the Ukrainian participants had the opportunity to visit the German Joint Information and Situation Centre (GMLZ) as part of the seminar. The centre is the national focal point for Germany within the UCPM. It coordinates the deployment of experts, modules and in-kind assistance from Germany. GMLZ also plays an important role in organising medical evacuation operations (MEDEVAC) from Ukraine to Germany. Overall, GMLZ has facilitated the delivery of around EUR 217 million worth of in-kind assistance to Ukraine. It has successfully arranged over 900 MEDEVAC (flight) operations since the beginning of the war. Colleagues from GMLZ appreciated the close exchange with their colleagues from SES.



Ukrainian delegation at the BBK in Bonn, Germany © BBK

During the second half of the seminar, the participants were able to benefit from the long lasting UCPM experiences of their THW colleagues, who reported on their activities in various missions within the UCPM. In addition, the Ukrainian delegation was able to visit the THW local organisation in Neuwied to exchange knowledge with THW colleagues and view the equipment on site.

The seminar was positively received by the Ukrainian participants. BBK and THW are planning to offer the UCPM seminar again in the future, and perhaps focus it on one specific subject area in greater depth with a respective target group.

Contact details: internationales@bbk.bund.de, Division II.6 – International Affairs, Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance

The Competence Center European Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance: Enhancing disaster relief and cooperation in Europe



Emergency Medical Team at the EU Modex in Romania, 2022 © EU MODEX

The Competence Center European Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance (EUCC) Germany is an important department within the Johanniter-Unfall-Hilfe e.V., which is one of the largest non-profit organisations in Germany. The Johanniter are committed to providing excellent medical care, ambulance service, civil protection and disaster relief. In the context of civil protection, the EUCC is, on behalf of Johanniter's Federal Board of Management, responsible for projects related to European civil protection and disaster management.

The Johanniter International Assistance Team EMT Type 1, as part of the EUCC, operates internationally, providing assistance with various aspects of disaster relief and humanitarian aid. Its focus is on primary health care. In June 2017, it was the first mobile team to be globally classified under the Emergency Medical Team initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Due to its expertise and experience in disaster preparedness, the Johanniter have actively participated in the UCPM since 2006, and since 2021 through the Competence Center European Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance (EUCC). The EUCC provides response assets and disaster response experts for UCPM missions, conducts training courses and exercises, and contributes trainers and lecturers. In various projects, the EUCC takes on the role of project coordinator, work package leader and end-user. This allows them to validate new technologies and methods developed in these projects. Furthermore, the Johanniter contribute expertise and competence to the UCPM and assist in the development and provision of response capacities and modules for the European Civil Protection Pool.

As the EUCC, we can make an active contribution to international disaster relief. However, we not only provide assistance in the event of disasters, but also contribute to the development of new strategies and technologies to improve disaster management. This not only benefits national civil protection, but also strengthens the response capacity in Europe as a whole. The EUCC has become a hub where many different activities within the UCPM converge. EU MODEX USAR and Medical full-scale exercises, rescEU Medical Stockpile DE or rescEU EMT, to name just a few examples which are coordinated by us.

Mario Di Gennaro, Head of the EUCC in Frankfurt/Germany



Rescue experts at the Modex USAR in Portugal, 2022 © Lukas Hanning

Contact details: Mario Di Gennaro: Mario.DiGennaro@johanniter.de



SCIENCE

Highlights from the Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre Annual Seminar

On 21 November, the Royal Library of Belgium hosted the 7th Annual Seminar of the [Disaster Risk Management Knowledge Centre \(DRMKC\)](#), an important event uniting perspectives for a more resilient Europe.

Organised by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) and ECHO, the seminar gathered 120 participants (and 186 web viewers). Speakers and attendees emphasised the challenges the EU faces and the importance of implementing proactive strategies amidst increasing climate-related disasters and global uncertainties.

Agenda highlights and key discussions

The day-long event covered [sessions and workshops](#) on disaster resilience hosted by different voices from the Commission's policy and research directorates and agencies (ECHO, JRC, CLIMA, HOME, EEA, ENISA), international organisations (OECD, UNDRR, WMO), national authorities, projects, and other stakeholders.

The morning started with remarks by JRC and ECHO Directors, and a representative from the Spanish EU Presidency. A scene-setting discussion followed, highlighting the escalating disasters of the past summer and underscoring the need for collaborative action across multiple fronts. Key questions addressed the role of the EU in advancing disaster resilience and the vital contributions of scientific research in shaping Europe's pathways to resilience.

Subsequent panel discussions focused on robust risk assessment processes, innovative methodologies, and interdisciplinary collaborations to anticipate and mitigate diverse hazards, emphasising regional and local perspectives in DRM and policymaking.

The afternoon sessions included three workshops. Themes discussed ranged from effective risk communication strategies, to a unified approach to early warning systems in Europe, and how to set governance structures in disaster risk management that lead to better resilience.



The seminar finished with a panel session synthesising workshop insights and highlighting the importance of incorporating foresight principles and tools into disaster resilience.

Positive outcomes and future prospects

The seminar raised awareness about pathways to disaster resilience and strengthened collaborations, offering guidance for actions to advance the implementation of the Union Disaster Resilience Goals.

It addressed current challenges and identified knowledge gaps, laying the basis for shaping future research agendas. The discussions initiated are expected to influence the [science pillar](#) roadmap for 2024, guiding future initiatives towards reinforcing Europe's resilience against disasters.

Europe faced the second-worst year for wildfires in 2022, new JRC report points out

For the third consecutive year, wildfires have caused substantial environmental and economic damage. The [JRC Forest Fires in Europe, Middle East and North Africa 2022](#) report indicates that new prevention efforts, preparedness and firefighting operations curbed casualties in 2022.



Challenging wildfires in Europe: From 2017 to 2023

The JRC report reveals that in 2022, wildfires scorched an area in the European Union equivalent to the size of Corsica. Nearly 900 000 hectares of land were consumed, with Natura 2000 sites, vital for biodiversity, accounting for 43% of the total burnt area.

These data shows that 2022 was the second-worst year since the [European Forest Fire Information System](#) (EFFIS) monitoring began in 2000. The worst year was 2017, with 1.3 million hectares of burnt land and over 130 lives lost.

A [JRC news announcement](#) also looks at preliminary data from 2023. At the time of publishing, the data showed around 500 000 hectares of natural land lost to wildfires in the EU, which includes the largest single wildfire in the EU. It took place in Alexandroupolis, Greece, and surpassed 96 000 hectares. In 2023, unprecedented wildfire conditions in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece proved challenging to control due to extreme conditions.

EU response and international cooperation in 2023

Human activities contribute to 96% of these climate change-exacerbated wildfires. Urgent prevention measures are required across all sectors of the population, from rural actors in direct contact with natural areas, to an enlarged population segment that lives in the so-called wildland urban interface (WUI), where most fires occur.

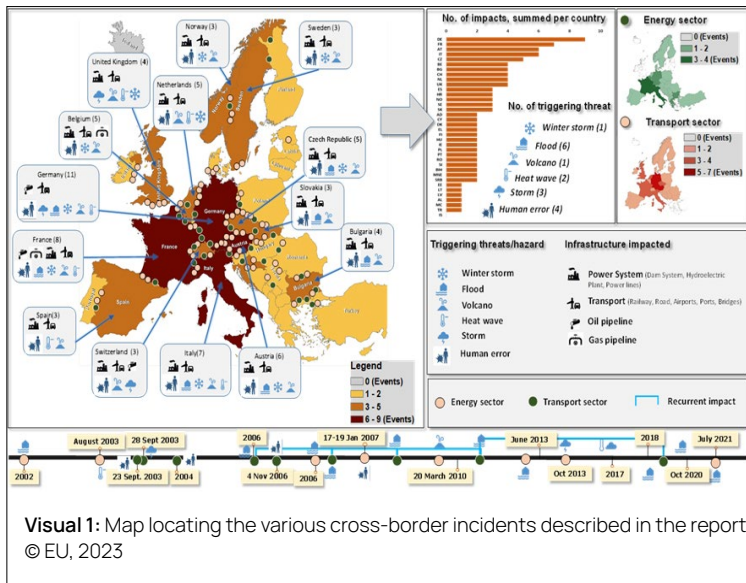
As climate change intensifies, the EU remains committed to enhancing firefighting capacity through the UCPM. The ERCC coordinates these efforts, with the JRC providing crucial early warning and monitoring systems to inform decision making and deploy resources effectively.

The European Union's response includes the EU Nature Restoration Law and the newly proposed Forest Monitoring Law, which aim to enhance ecosystem resilience and provide timely, accurate forest data for effective wildfire prevention.



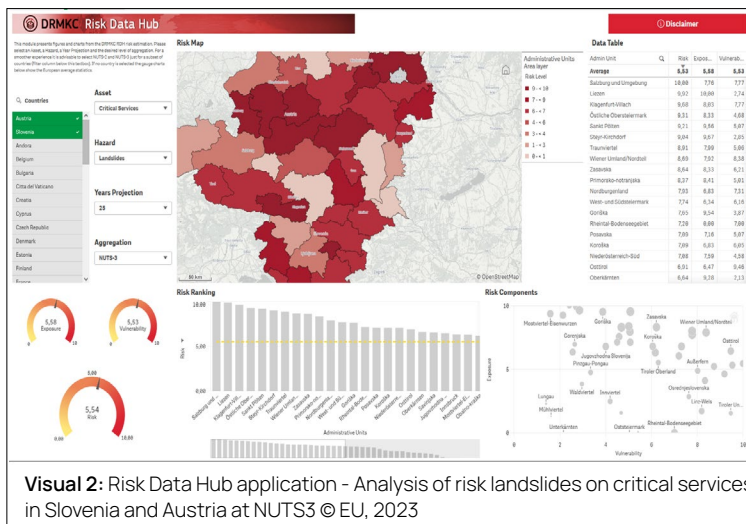
Cross-border impact of natural hazards on networks

A [new report](#) by the JRC builds on a 2019 study exploring cross-border implications of network failures during natural disasters and discusses them next to recent events and EU policies. While the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the extreme dependence on information and communication systems, the systemic vulnerabilities of networks in the face of a variety of compound stresses, including the impact of climate change, require action. To reduce the consequences of disruptions also in the longer term, resilience and risk management must be combined, blending anticipation and prevention capacity with preparedness, governance arrangements and instruments, both technical and financial, to recover in a resilient manner. This is one of the report's main conclusions.



Cross-border incidents often take place during extreme events – such as floods or wildfires – near or across borders. However, cascading and compound failures across networks at different spatial and temporal scales provoke transboundary impacts that are difficult to predict. The report proposes a framework to define cross-border failures. This builds on a set of criteria that go beyond the geographic dimension to embed cross-sectors, scales dependency and interconnectedness. Those criteria derive from classical widely known models, integrating less quoted research results to operationalise networks' resilience.

Following this understanding of cross-border incidents, several incidents that occurred in Europe because of natural hazards have been compiled (see visual 1) and analysed in detail in a comprehensive table. Finding cross-border governance examples that address the challenges of cross-border incidents can be difficult. Many initiatives are not the object of studies and are part of the rather wide tacit knowledge of practitioners and civil servants.



Reassessing governance recommendations from an [OECD report](#), the authors call to better address multi-hazard and multi-risk conditions deriving from both combined phenomena and/or failures that may occur cross-border, or imply more countries at the same time due to systemic complex interconnections. In this regard, the DRMKC [Risk Data Hub](#) is a rather useful tool that allows to explore risk conditions across borders (see visual 2).

This report aligns with recent EU policies such as the Directive on Critical Entities Resilience (CER) and the Directive on High Cybersecurity (NIS2). Drawing on recent recommendations for National Risk Assessments, it also highlights the need to embed essential networks as well as the development of governance tools for their resilience in the recent recommendations for National Risk Assessments, both national and cross-border according to the Union Disaster Resilience Goals.

Advancing disaster risk assessments with the Risk Data Hub Vulnerability Dashboard

Addressing the complexity of multifaceted disaster vulnerability

The [newly-launched Risk Data Hub Vulnerability Dashboard](#) simplifies the complex nature of vulnerability and its interactions across dimensions and administrative levels.

It aims to make the vulnerability framework developed by the [Risk Data Hub](#) team more easily accessible, providing insights into measuring and monitoring disaster vulnerability in Europe.

A multi-dimensional indicator for comprehensive assessment

There are three elements which are central to disaster risk assessment: vulnerability, hazard, and exposure. With natural hazards being inevitable, the key to disaster risk mitigation lies in reducing vulnerability.

The dashboard's vulnerability framework, which is specifically designed for Europe, encompasses a multi-dimensional indicator. This indicator spans five aspects: social, economic, political, environmental, and the newly-added physical dimension. It provides a systemic vulnerability assessment across various administrative levels (Country, NUTS2, and NUTS3), using a 0 to 10 scoring system.



Strengthening the framework for robust assessment

The dashboard has recently been upgraded with new features to strengthen its framework for more robust assessment. These enhancements include improved methodologies, disaggregation of regional-level indicators for statistical coherence, a comprehensive literature review, and the introduction of new indicators. Notable additions include indicators for healthcare facility accessibility, remoteness, and hazard-dependent loss data.

The dashboard was presented at the Commission for Natural Resources (NAT Commission) in the Committee of the Regions plenary on 23 November, with a [recording available on the dedicated website](#).

Demonstrating impact and relevance

Since its publication in June 2023, the dashboard has collected significant interest. An article published in the [Italian newspaper Il Sole 24 Ore](#) on 19 July demonstrates the score's applicability in assessing vulnerability across Europe and within regions, using baseline data from the dashboard.

This new dashboard is not just a tool, but a stride forward in enhancing our understanding and management of disaster risks in Europe.

Calls to boost region's climate protection and resilience

CLIMAAX Open Call

The CLIMAAX consortium launched the first Open Call for Regions and Communities to select those that will carry out their regional and local multi-risk assessment by implementing the CLIMAAX methodological framework and the supporting Climate Risk Assessment (CRA) toolbox.

Individual applications from public bodies and non-profit legal entities to design and implement a comprehensive climate multi-risk assessment are welcome. The selected applicants will receive:

- Up to EUR 300 000 lump sum funding per project;
- Access and bespoke support to the CRA toolbox;
- Methodological guidance and support through the CLIMAAX helpdesk;
- Technical advice and counselling to implement the locally tailored methodologies using local data and approaches;
- Access to the outreach and engagement events organised by CLIMAAX.



The call closes on **8 March 2024 at 17:00** Brussels time. You can find the application form and further information at this link: <https://bit.ly/3FcmpnP>.

About the CLIMAAX project

'CLIMAtE risk and vulnerability Assessment framework and toolboX' (CLIMAAX) is a four-year Horizon Europe project (January 2023–December 2026) that will provide financial and practical support to improve regional climate and emergency risk management plans.

Pathways2Resilience (P2R) Open Call

P2R aims to increase the resilience of European regions and communities in the face of climate change. While climate risks are growing and many regions/communities are struggling to cope, they are also key actors for mitigation and adaptation to its impacts. P2R's approach of transformative climate adaptation seeks to empower regions and communities through systems innovation and capacity building towards climate resilience.

Since particular attention is needed for less developed regions/communities that are vulnerable to climate impacts and have low adaptive capacity, this first call will prioritise regions/communities with heightened vulnerability.

This first call aims to provide 40 regions/communities with financial support through subgrant agreements (up to a maximum amount of EUR 210 000), along with supporting services and capacity building activities for subgrants lasting up to 18 months. Application deadline: **22 February 2024 at 17:00** Brussels time.

You can find more information about the First Call for Applications at:

<https://www.pathways2resilience.eu/first-open-call/>.

If you have questions, send them to Pathways2Resilience@climate-kic.org.

About the Pathways2Resilience project

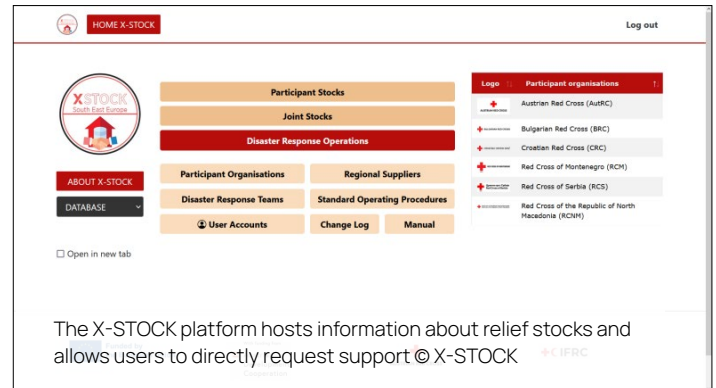
P2R is a project implemented by 14 organisations and coordinated by EIT Climate-KIC. P2R will support at least 100 regions/communities (within EU Member States or Associated Countries that are within Europe's biogeographical regions) with EUR 21 million over the course of two calls. The goal is to co-design visions of a climate resilient future and corresponding transformative adaptation pathways.



FROM THE COMMUNITY

X-STOCK: A joint virtual warehouse of relief items

The main output of the [X-STOCK project](#), which finished in June 2023, is a web-based software application that links the Red Cross emergency stocks of five neighbouring countries in Southeast Europe. Emergency relief items, such as tents, blankets, heaters or kitchen sets, are shared in a 'joint virtual warehouse'. This virtual warehouse allows users to access information about shared relief stocks in other countries and to request support directly through the system, in case of need. Through the system, it is also possible to carry out most of the administrative steps needed for the shipment of relief items between the countries.



This software has been fully operational since May 2023. The database allows the emergency stocks of the Red Cross societies in Bulgaria, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Austria to be virtually connected. The first five countries are fully participating in X-STOCK to receive and send relief items, whereas Austria is additionally sharing some stocks in support.

X-STOCK allows disaster managers to see the immediate availability of pre-stocked relief items in higher numbers. Relief items are available and can be distributed within days of a request, with the often time-consuming procurement processes postponed to a later phase of the emergency operation. Thanks to this network of Red Cross warehouses from Vienna to Skopje and from Zagreb to Burgas, safety for citizens living in these countries has improved considerably. The time span from a disaster happening to relief reaching the affected population is now reduced by several days.

The tool is not only valuable for the Red Cross societies operating in the region, but also for the national civil protection authorities, as they will have access to the stock information in the database too. This way, they will be able to see how the Red Cross can complement national civil protection efforts when a disaster happens.

A long cherished dream came true, to have this virtual warehouse between six Red Cross partners developed and operational! Besides that, the most positive outcome of the project was the development of a professional and excellent relationship with our national civil protection authorities. We will definitely maintain the habit developed during the X-STOCK simulation exercises of sending liaison officers to each other's emergency operation centres for improved coordination.

Jassen Slivensky, Director Disaster Management, Bulgarian Red Cross

In the last months of the project, X-STOCK carried out a series of tabletop exercises to test the software. The national civil protection authorities and Red Cross societies of all six countries and ECHO took part in the last exercise, a cross-border flood scenario in Serbia and Croatia, coordinated by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) country cluster office in Sarajevo.

Currently, five countries are fully participating in X-STOCK, and a sixth is sharing its stocks under the coordination of the IFRC. Within the next two years, the goal is to expand the regional network to ten additional countries.



The project links ten different warehouses in six countries © AutRC

GoHelp: Global impact in disaster response and climate resilience

In the unpredictable aftermath of disasters, collaboration between governments, NGOs, and the private sector is vital for effective disaster management. DHL's 'GoHelp' programme is an example of this collaboration. It connects people, improves lives, and creates lasting impacts through global teamwork and sustainability.



Kim Melville, Lead GARD Trainer, VP Humanitarian Affairs, DHL, during GARD assessment in Sarajevo
© Deutsche Post AG, 2023

GoHelp exemplifies the power of public-private partnerships in addressing humanitarian needs. With over 800 trained volunteers, the programme has established itself as a reliable force in disaster response. GoHelp allows us to utilise our expertise and global network to support and improve relief efforts worldwide.

Christoph Selig, VP sustainability communications and programs, DHL Group

Establishing GoHelp in Europe underscores DHL's commitment to collaborate with public and private sectors and humanitarian organisations. This expansion reflects our dedication to enhancing climate adaptability, mitigation, and rapid response mechanisms, leveraging our global expertise for a more efficient disaster response and positive impact on affected communities.

Mayyada Ansari, Group Head of GoHelp, DHL Group

In 2003, DHL faced a critical situation during the Bam earthquake in Iran. The small provincial airport, ill-equipped to handle the sudden influx of relief supplies, became a bottleneck, hindering the swift distribution of aid. This experience prompted DHL to bridge the gap between logistics and humanitarian communities, giving birth to the ['GoHelp' programme](#).

GoHelp, in Strategic Partnership with the United Nations (UNOCHA), rapidly deploys Disaster Response Teams (DRTs) globally. With a proven track record of 55 incidents, it ensures airports continue to function and effectively handle aid and relief goods. Deployed strategically under regional heads in Singapore, Panama and Dubai, DRTs cover 80% of global disaster hotspots, ensuring rapid deployment within a 72-hour timeframe. Comprised of trained employee volunteers with diverse logistics expertise, including airside, warehouse and supply chain specialists, DRTs ensure swift and efficient aid distribution.

GoHelp's impactful relief efforts are evident in recent operations following the flood in Germany in 2021 and in Türkiye, Syria, and Morocco after earthquakes in 2023, demonstrating collaboration with local organisations and NGOs to benefit thousands in need

In order to support climate adaptability and mitigation mechanisms, GoHelp addresses the crucial role played by the Get Airports Ready for Disaster (GARD) program. Celebrating its 15th year in collaboration with the United Nations (UNDP), GARD program has conducted over 60 workshops in 29 countries, spanning from Peru to the Philippines. DHL veteran experts lead workshops, empowering airport personnel and disaster organisations. GARD ensures efficient logistics, reducing bottlenecks for timely aid delivery and enhancing climate resilience.

As the landscape of crisis response evolves, so must the efforts to address the challenges posed by climate change. Europe too, has been facing an increasing number of climate-related crises. Recognising this, GoHelp is set to launch in Europe in 2024, extending its reach and impact to this region.

For more information visit <https://group.dhl.com/en/sustainability/social-impact-programs/disaster-management.html>



The disaster response team managed relief aid at Nassau Lynden Pindling International Airport, Bahamas in response to Hurricane Dorian's impact in 2019
© Deutsche Post AG, 2023

Safe Village, Safe People: Working with the local community to boost preparedness

Portugal is particularly prone to wildfires over the summer season. In fact, one third of the country is classed as a 'high' or 'very high' risk area. This can pose real threats to the safety of inhabitants: in 2017 (the deadliest fire season on record), the fires resulted in more than 100 casualties. Future climate scenarios are not favourable: there is a high potential for extreme 'mega fires', which will threaten the area between wild and urban land.



Community volunteers raised awareness for forest fire risk in rural areas © ANEPC

Given this risk, the Portuguese Government decided that a stronger call for action on awareness and preparedness was needed, particularly targeting local citizens in those areas which are at risk.

The 'Safe Village, Safe People' programme was set up in 2018, under the coordination of the Portuguese Civil Protection Authority, to increase awareness and preparedness within the communities in rural areas which were most threatened by forest fires. Experience suggested that citizens were more likely to respond to awareness campaigns if they heard the messages from members of their community, whom they tend to trust more. The campaign therefore worked at a local level, bringing in volunteers from within the communities to act as liaisons with local civil protection authorities, and even to take part in awareness-raising videos. Local people quickly came on board, and more than 2 200 villages have joined the programme. Almost 2 100 Local Safety Officers have been nominated to take part.



The accompanying media campaign, which focused on awareness raising, was supported by the distribution of leaflets in different languages (this was particularly vital, given the large numbers of tourists in the country each year). Practical tools, like evacuation kits containing first aid kits, lanterns, whistles, and radios, were given out, while local safety officers received supporting materials such as vests, backpacks and megaphones.

The 'Safe Village, Safe People' campaign also involved the implementation of preparedness measures on a large scale. More than 2 800 shelters or places of refuge were set up. Local warning mechanisms were established, and 12 000 citizens took part in over 400 drills. More than 900 evacuation plans were implemented.

Based on the feedback received, the campaign was judged as being very successful, both in terms of raising awareness and boosting preparedness. An independent evaluation carried out in 2022 in the report of the Expert Group on Rural Fires stated: "According to the testimonies heard from several civil protection agents, in general, people were more prepared to collaborate in evacuation and confinement actions. This greater preparation is felt above all in the agglomerations in which the 'Safe Village, Safe People' programme is implemented, especially in those villages with an evacuation plan and a drill carried out".

Feedback from on-site commanders supported this: they found that in villages where the programme was implemented, citizens were calmer and more confident, aware of the risk but willing to cooperate with authorities. This facilitated the evacuation and shelter-in-place procedures.

Overall, more than 35 000 citizens have been involved in more than 900 awareness actions over the duration of the campaign so far. The programme is ongoing and planned to last until at least 2030. Forthcoming priorities include the distribution of evacuation kits to citizens, as well as support materials for shelters (emergency lighting and first aid kits). A media campaign on fuel management in buffer areas around villages is expected to start in March 2024.

'Safe Villages, Safe People' is a pertinent example of good practice in running a campaign at local level in order to achieve stronger results in awareness raising and preparedness.

COMING UP

2024 Knowledge for Action in Prevention and Preparedness call for proposals

The 2024 Knowledge for Action in Prevention and Preparedness (KAPP) call for proposals was published on the Commission's [Funding & Tender portal](#). It will open for submissions on February 1, with the application deadline set for 25 April. With a total budget of EUR 14 million, the call invites proposals from eligible countries, including EU Member States and UCPM Participating States. The call has three main topics: (1) Prevention, (2) Preparedness and (3) Full-scale exercises, each defining different specific priorities, e.g., risk awareness, early warning, or institutional preparedness. All topics and priorities are aligned with the Union Disaster Resilience Goals: the project activities support the implementation of the goals and contribute to a more effective and coherent EU prevention, preparedness, and response to disasters.

A [dedicated webpage](#) was prepared with an overview of the call and supporting documents. Additionally, DG ECHO will host an **online information session on February 15** to guide potential applicants through the objectives, administrative, legal, and financial aspects of the KAPP call, providing valuable insights into preparing effective proposals.

2024 Technical Assistance for Disaster Risk Management call for proposals

The 2024 Technical Assistance for Disaster Risk Management (Track 1) call for proposals will be published on 23 January on the Commission's Funding & Tender opportunities portal. It will open for submissions on 1 February, with the application deadline set for 9 April. With a total budget of EUR 6 million, the call invites proposals from eligible countries, including EU Member States and UCPM Participating States. The Technical Assistance for Disaster Risk Management funding instrument provides financial support (with a rate of EU co-financing of 95%) to the national disaster risk management authorities for the development of strategic activities (including feasibility studies, proposals, policies and plans), which can leverage investments for greater disaster risk management impact.

A dedicated webpage will soon be available on the Knowledge Network platform with an overview of the call and supporting documents. An **online information session will be organised on 13 February** to guide potential applicants through the objectives, administrative, legal, and financial aspects of the call.

MODEX Cycle 12 launch

The 12th cycle of the EU MODEX began on 13 December 2023, marked by an initial meeting in Brussels between the Commission and contractors. This cycle will feature 24 exercises, split into 10 tabletop and 14 field exercises. These exercises focus on various scenarios, and will include three on floods, two on forest fires, one on CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear) threats, and six on Urban Search and Rescue (USAR), of which three will be combined with medical capacities. Two exercises are specifically tailored for the European Union Civil Protection Team (EUCPT) and Technical Assistance and Support Team (TAST). The process for nominating and registering participants for these exercises will start shortly.



Want to keep up to date about events
in civil protection and disaster risk management?
Then check out the [events section](#) on the Knowledge Network online platform.

European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations - Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network
E-mail: ECHO-CP-Knowledge-Network@ec.europa.eu - Website: <https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu>