European Union

Union Civil Protection Mechanism -
Peer Review Programme
for disaster risk management

# Peer Review Programme Guidelines

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Version/release date: Ver. 05; 10-04-2025
Dissemination level: Public

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**Suggested citation**
Casartelli V., Marengo A., Mohammadi S., Salpina D., Brăilescu, C., Sørensen, J. (2025). Peer Review Programme Guidelines. https://doi.org/10.25424/cmcc-wvhm-hj40

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One

# What are the Peer Review Programme Guidelines?

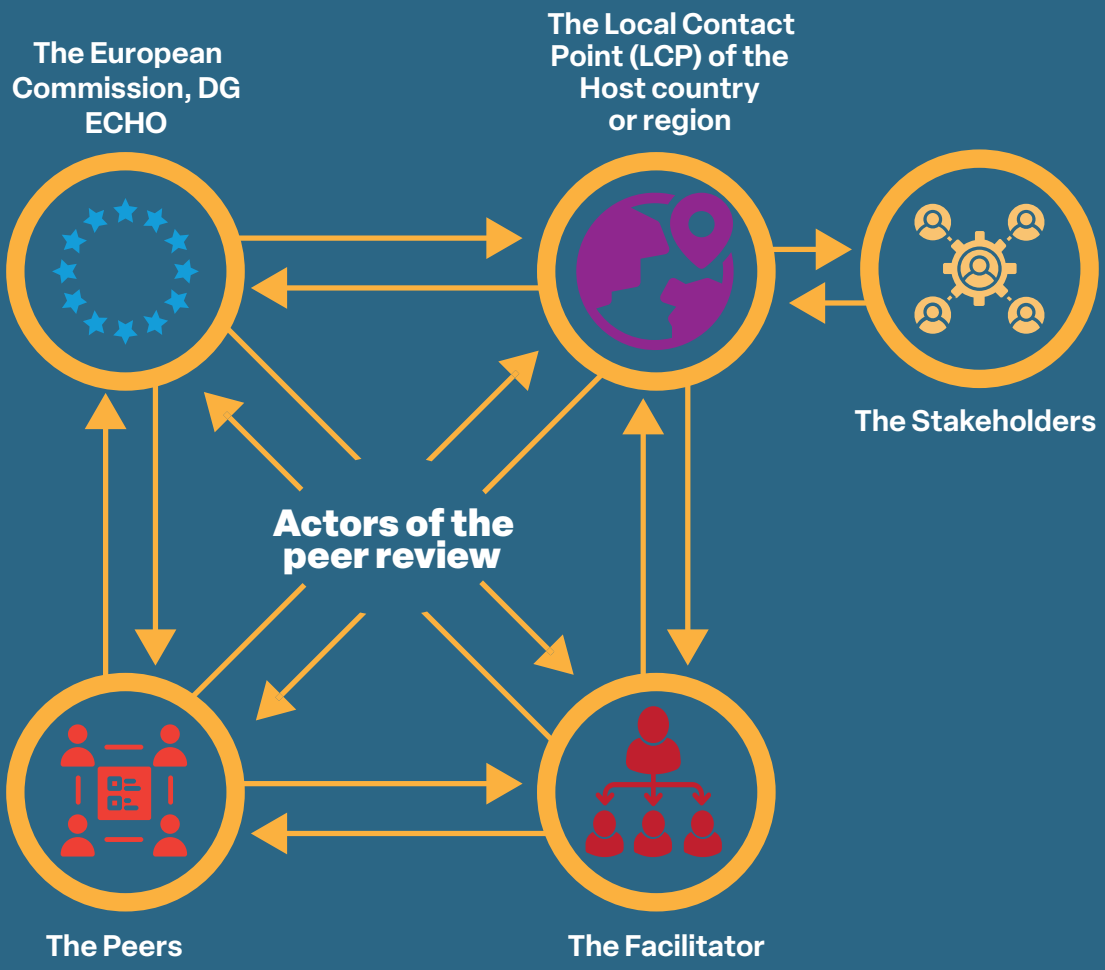
These Guidelines clarify the purpose and organisation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) Peer Review Programme for Disaster Risk Management (DRM) for the 2025-2027 cycle, funded by the European Commission - Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO). They outline key benefits, principles, roles of involved actors, and provide a step-by-step overview of the peer review process to support peer experts and the countries/regions under review in the implementation of the programme.

This document replaces the *Union Civil Protection Mechanism - Peer Review Programme for Disaster Risk Management: Guidelines* (Mysiak et al., 2021). It builds on insights from the 2020-2024 UCPM Peer Review Programme, including key findings from the Lessons learnt meeting held in Brussels in December 2024, feedback from a survey conducted in fall 2024 aimed at gathering suggestions to enhance the peer review process, and results from desk research. Further information on the UCPM peer review process and tools, beyond what is covered in the current guidelines, can be found on the programme's page on the UCPM Knowledge Network portal.

Two

# Who are the key actors in the peer review process?

The UCPM peer review of DRM systems involves five key actors, with specific roles and responsibilities throughout the overall review process. These are the host country/region, the Peers, the Facilitator, the European Commission, and stakeholders from the host country/region.



- The Local Contact Point (LCP) of the host country/region is assigned by the civil protection authority (or other organisation involved in DRM) that requested the peer review. The LCP identifies and engages the stakeholders, plans on-site mission agenda and has the role of host during the peer review mission. It also shares relevant material for the desk-research with the Facilitator. Before its publication, the LCP assists with comments and revisions of the peer review final report. Finally, supported by the Facilitator and in close cooperation with DG ECHO, the LCP is expected to organise a formal handover event, where the final report is handed over to relevant authorities.
- The stakeholders are representatives from entities in the host country/region playing a key role in the DRM system and key focus areas covered in the peer review. They are identified and engaged by the LCP considering the scope of the peer review. Stakeholders may belong to public and private entities, research and academia, civil society organisations, and the general public.
- The Peers are experts selected by DG ECHO, after an open call for experts shared with authorities and organisations involved in DRM in UCPM countries. The Peers are selected on the basis of having expertise matching the scope of the particular peer review. Experts from research and academia, international organisations and other key institutions might also be engaged. Peers participate in the on-site mission in the host country/region and, based on insights gathered during the meetings with stakeholders, identify strengths and recommendations for improving the country's or region's risk management system. The Peers actively contribute to the drafting of the peer review final report.
- The European Commission, DG ECHO, funds, coordinates and oversees the implementation of UCPM Peer Review Programme. It invites countries and regions to volunteer for a peer review and agrees with the LCP on the objectives, expected outcomes, and areas of analysis of the review. Additionally, it selects the Peers, chairs preparatory meetings and takes active part in the on-site mission, reviews the peer review report, and delivers the final report to the host country/region.
- The Facilitator manages and supports the peer review process by developing relevant working and training tools. It conducts preliminary desk research and fact-finding exercises to assist the Peers and manage the peer review on-site mission and preparatory meetings, which also include logistical arrangements. Additionally, the Facilitator supports the Peers in drafting the findings from the review mission, writes the peer review report, and contributes to its further revisions. Finally, it assists DG ECHO in conducting the ex-post evaluation of the experiences gained and the impact of the peer review exercise.

Three

# Why should I apply?

**As a host country or region**: A peer review provides you with a structured description and assessment of your DRM system, highlighting strengths and identifying areas for improvement. It results in practical recommendations to tackle challenges in your DRM policies and practices, providing good practice examples from other countries and regions. Beyond that, the process increases risk awareness and strengthens teamwork among national and local DRM stakeholders. It also enhances international collaboration by connecting you with civil protection and DRM experts from around Europe.

**As a peer expert**: Joining a peer review is a great way to expand your expertise while actively contributing to strengthening DRM systems in other countries or regions. You will gain firsthand insights into innovative solutions and strategies that have proven effective in different contexts - a knowledge that can be valuable for tackling similar challenges in your own country. Additionally, the experience can help you to expand your professional network and collaborate with a diverse range of DRM stakeholders, fostering strong teamwork and knowledge exchange.

Benefits of the peer reviews:

**Comprehensive assessment**

Peer reviews provide a structured assessment of the DRM systems, highlighting strengths, identifying areas for improvement.

**Catalyst for change**

Peer reviews help to identify alternative approaches to policy and operations and explore actionable solutions to similar challenges successfully implemented elsewhere.

**Collaboration and mutual learning**

Peer reviews promote mutual learning and exchange of good practices. Trusted relationships can stimulate transferability of innovative practices.

**Risk awareness**

Peer reviews encourage awareness-raising through broad involvement of stakeholders in the process and wide dissemination of results.

Overall, the UCPM peer reviews are based on fundamental principles that ensure a fair, transparent, and effective process. These principles encourage collaboration, trust, and accountability among all actors involved, while maintaining the integrity and reliability of the review. They help keep the review process structured and objective, which enhances its credibility and overall impact.

Peer reviews observe the following principles:

The information, knowledge, and evidence collected throughout the review process are available to the involved parties, except for information provided under confidentiality agreements. The final reports of the peer reviews are going to be publicly available.

Peers, the LCP, and stakeholders are engaged on a voluntary basis.

The host country/ region provides and explains the facts and evidence requested by the Peers and the Facilitator in a timely and exhaustive way.

Where the insights gained are based on confidential or personal information, the sources are not disclosed and, whenever necessary, part of the outcomes of the review process can be anonymised.

The process and outputs of the peer review are based on a triangulation of information collected, increasing confidence in the feedback.

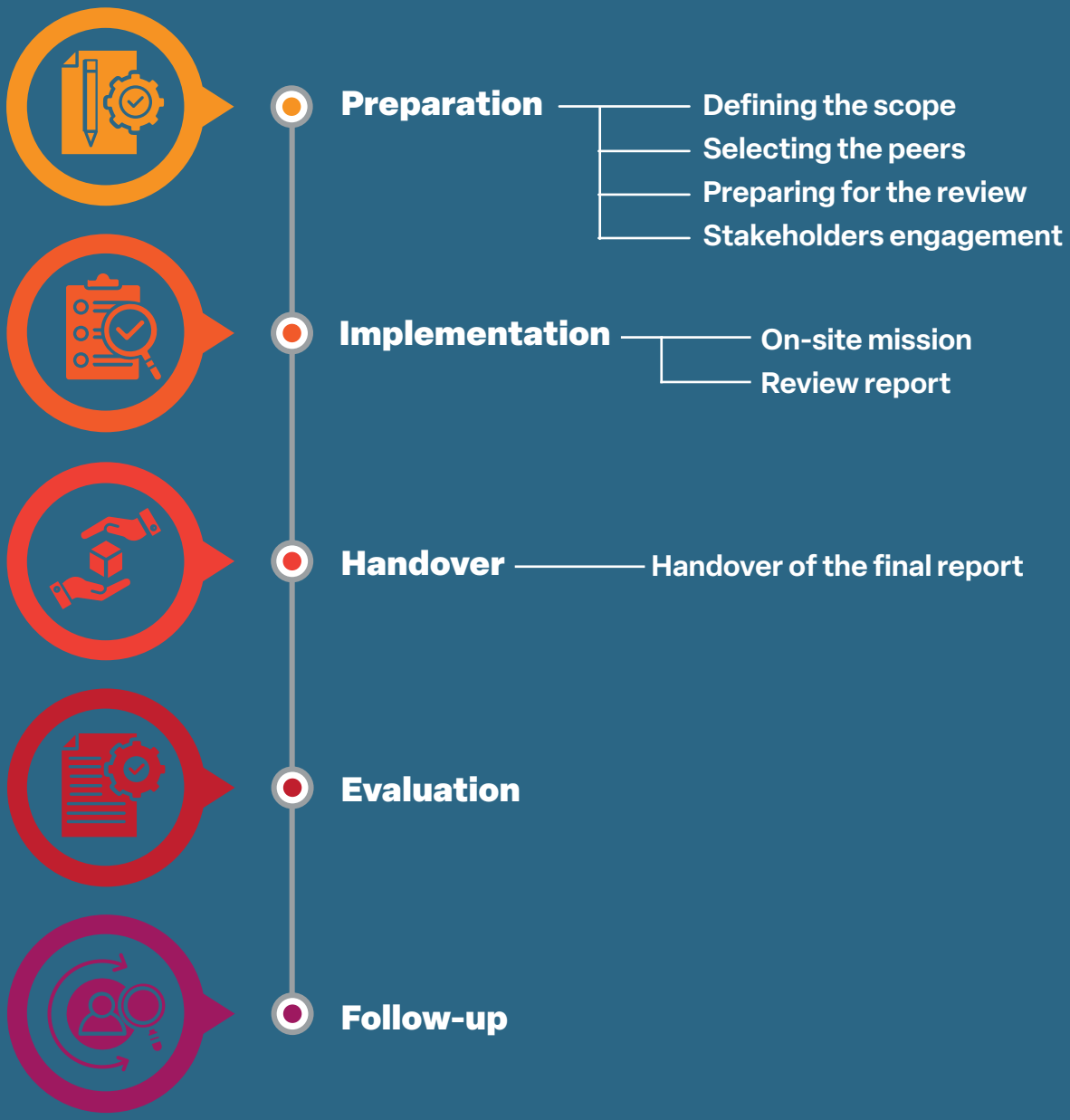
All findings, analyses and recommendations are based on verifiable sources and knowledge available to the Peers.

Assessments and evaluations are performed without prejudice and in a way that fosters consensus among the Peers, and trust building between Peers and host country/region experts and stakeholders.

Four

# What are the main steps of the peer review?

The peer review process is divided into five key phases: preparation, implementation, handover of the final report, evaluation, and follow-up (voluntary).



## Preparation

**Defining the scope**: Countries/regions for a peer review discuss the objectives and expected outcomes with DG ECHO.

**Selecting the peers**: DG ECHO selects the Peers that will participate in the review. The experts are often proposed by civil protection authorities of other UCPM countries (experts from the country/region under review cannot be selected).

**Preparing for the review**: The Facilitator organises online and in-person preparatory meetings and prepares an initial desk research report, summarising the DRM system under review and, if available, insights from a voluntary self-assessment survey completed by relevant stakeholders.

**Stakeholders engagement**: The LCP identifies relevant stakeholders and communicates on the peer review process, engaging them in identifying pertinent material for the desk-research, sharing the self-assessment survey, and inviting them to attend the peer review mission.

## Implementation

**On-site mission**: The peer review team (Peers, DG ECHO, the Facilitator) travels to the country/region under review to gain on-the-ground insights and identify strengths and areas for improvement. Relevant stakeholders are invited to participate in meetings by the LCP. The mission lasts approximately one week. The on-site mission can also include relevant field visits.

**Review report**: Based on the knowledge acquired during the mission, the peer review team drafts the report, which will include strengths and recommendations. The LCP has the opportunity to review and comment on the report during the drafting process.

To complete the process, from the peer review kick-off to the final report, it usually takes 8 to 10 months.

## Handover

**Handover of the final report**: The peer review team formally hands over the final report to the national or regional authorities. This event is attended by one or two selected Peers who will present the final report results, usually accompanied by DG ECHO.

## Evaluation

Immediately following the peer review, the LCP and Peers complete an online survey designed to collect feedback on good practices and areas for improvement in the peer review process. The results of this survey are then analysed by the Facilitator to further improve future peer reviews.

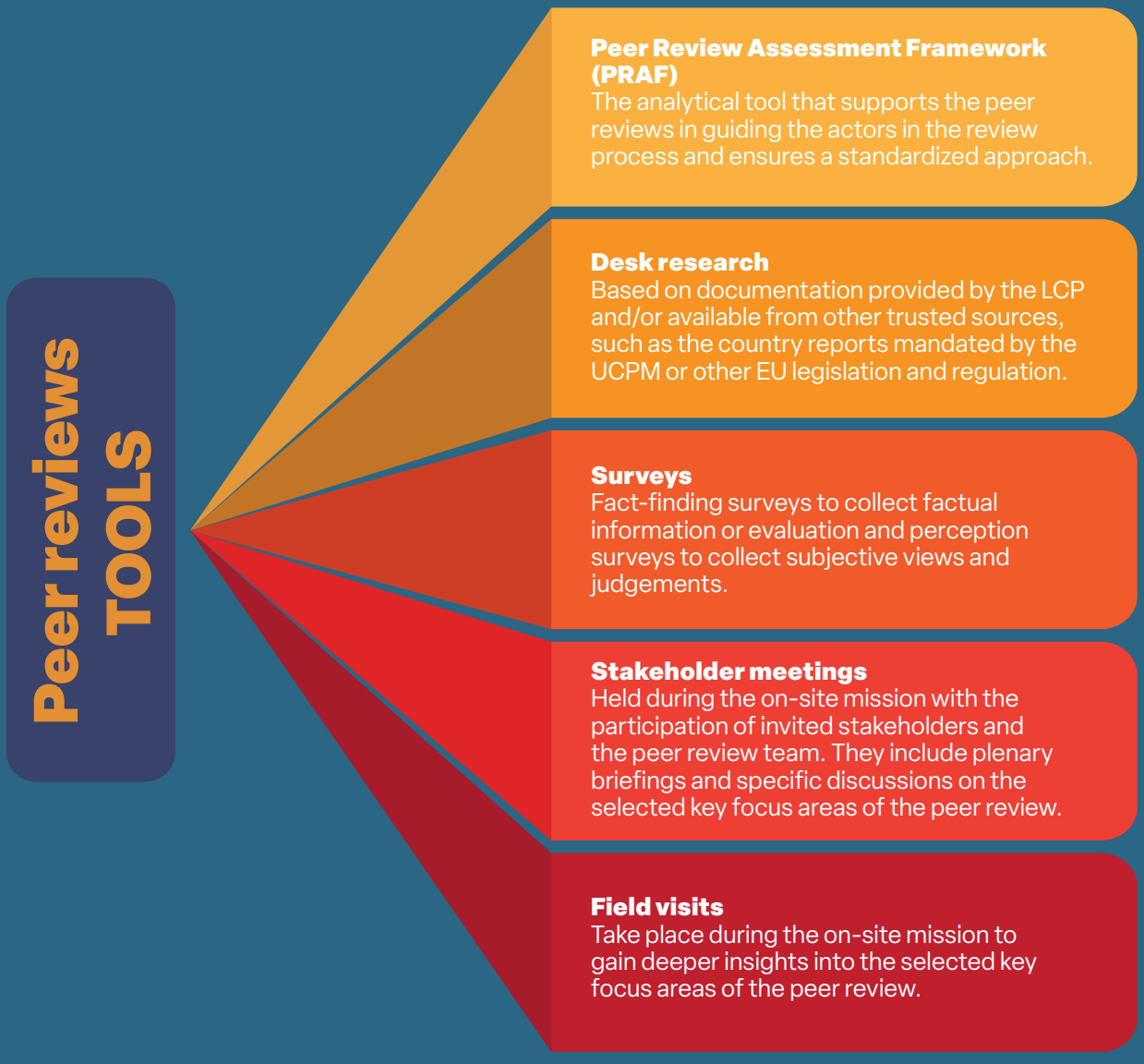
## Follow-up

Not a mandatory step of the peer review process, but the LCP is encouraged to draft an action plan for implementing recommendations outlined in the final peer review report. DG ECHO can support this process by assisting in identifying potential funding opportunities.

Five

# What methods and tools are used in the UCPM peer review process?

The UCPM Peer Review Programme employs a variety of fact-finding and verification methods to ensure a comprehensive and evidence-informed assessment. These methods enable a thorough analysis of DRM practices by gathering qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources. By combining different tools, the peer review process ensures accuracy, reliability, and a well-rounded understanding of the host country or region's policies and operations.



Six

# What are my responsibilities?

## As an LCP

As the representative of the authorities of the host country or region, the LCP plays a crucial role in the peer review process, with key responsibilities throughout all steps. The LCP's coordination and execution of its tasks significantly contribute to a smooth and effective implementation of the review, ensuring an environment where all actors can collaborate successfully.

The follow points outlines the responsibilities and taks of the LCP and can serve as a practical to-do list.

### Preparation

- Define the objectives and expected outcomes of the peer review in collaboration with DG ECHO and with the support of the Facilitator.
- Define the thematic scope and key areas of analysis of the peer review based on the Peer Review Assessment Framework (PRAF).
- Attend online and in-person preparatory meetings. One or two meetings take place in Brussels at DG ECHO premises.
- Prepare and deliver a presentation on the DRM system of the country/region, to be presented during the online and in-person meetings.
- Provide the Facilitator with necessary information for preparing the peer review fact-sheet, a two-page summary of the peer review process in the host country/region and check its translation into the local language.
- Identify and involve relevant stakeholders early in the process, informing them about the scope and objectives of the peer review and determine the level of their engagement in the overall review exercise. Invite them to attend the peer review mission.
- Familiarise with the online repository, where all documentation and reports related to the peer review process are stored and shared.
- Submit documentation relevant to the thematic scope of the peer review, engaging stakeholders, when possible in the identification of useful material. This will support the Facilitator in drafting the desk research report.
- (Optional) Complete and share the self-assessment survey with stakeholders. Responses will contribute to the desk research report drafted by the Facilitator and help Peers formulate key hypotheses.
- Review and provide feedback on the desk research report, adding comments or clarifications if necessary.
- Prepare the on-site mission agenda in coordination with DG ECHO and the Facilitator.

- Assist the Facilitator in arranging the logistics of the on-site mission. Identify suitable meeting venue(s) for daily meetings; possibly arrange local transportation for the peer review team (and any interpreters) to and from the meeting venue(s) and/or to and from scheduled field visits; possibly organise catering for coffee breaks and identify options for lunch breaks; notify the Facilitator regarding the need for interpretation services, specifying when they are required – the Facilitator will organise interpretation when necessary (see also Section 9).
- Schedule stakeholder meetings and presentations and send invitations well in advance.

### Implementation

- Actively support the on-site mission by chairing meetings and sharing necessary information to assist the peer review team in the assessment.
- After the on-site mission, review and provide feedback on the draft final report prepared by the Facilitator and Peers.
- Review the translated version of the executive summary (of the entire report, in case it is translated into the local language).
- In cooperation with DG ECHO and with the support of the Facilitator, organise a formal handover event to officially present the final report to relevant authorities.

### Evaluation

- Complete an online survey to provide feedback on good practices and areas for improvement in the peer review process.
- Participate in the Lessons learnt meeting of the 2025-2027 Peer Review Programme, to be held in Brussels at the end of the programme cycle.

### Follow-up

- (Optional) Draft an action plan to implement the recommendations outlined in the final peer review report.

## As a Peer

Peers are a core component of the peer review process, responsible for identifying strengths and providing recommendations that can significantly enhance the DRM system of the country or region under review. Once selected, the Peers are expected to actively engage in the review process, which includes attending meetings, reading relevant documentation, and supporting the drafting of the review report.

The following list outlines the essential tasks for Peers during the three steps for their involvement, also serving as a practical to-do list to facilitate their work.

### Preparation

- Attend online and in-person preparatory meetings (one meeting will be held in Brussels at DG ECHO premises).
- Familiarise with the online repository, including key documents such as the Peer Review Assessment Framework (PRAF) and Guidelines.
- Analyse the PRAF's structure and its thematic areas in detail. This is essential for understanding the core documents of the peer review process (e.g., the desk research and the final report) and ensuring a smooth unfolding of the peer review process.
- Carefully read the desk research report and (if available) the results from the self-assessment survey completed by the LCP and stakeholders.
- Use these materials to develop initial hypotheses and questions for stakeholders.
- Contribute to stakeholder mapping by suggesting additional relevant stakeholders for the on-site mission.
- Prepare for the on-site mission.

### Implementation

- Actively participate in the on-site mission, gathering insights on the host country's/region's strengths and areas for improvement.
- During the mission, start drafting the report, identifying strengths and areas of improvement.
- Before the end of the mission, present preliminary insights and recommendations to the LCP.
- After the on-site mission, participate in on-line meetings, continue refining the draft report and support the Facilitator in any necessary revisions. Include relevant good practices from your own country that may benefit the host country/region.
- Participate in a dedicated online meeting to present the strengths and recommendations of the host country/region to the LCP.
- One or two Peers return to the host country/region for the official handover event to formally present the final report (usually accompanied by DG ECHO representatives).

### Evaluation

- Complete an online survey to provide feedback on good practices and areas for improvement in the peer review process.
- Participate in the Lessons learnt meeting of the 2025-2027 Peer Review Programme, to be held in Brussels at the end of the programme cycle.

Seven

# What support will I get from the Facilitator?

## As an LCP

The Facilitator will support you from the outset, providing all necessary information on the peer review process and helping to tailor the peer review to the specific needs of your country/region. It will organise regular online preparatory meetings before and after the on-site mission, providing continuous support throughout the process. In this regard, it will keep you informed of next steps and tasks, and manage logistical and administrative matters, including transportation and accommodation for in-person meetings in Brussels (see also Section 9). All key information on the peer review process and relevant documentation will be made available by the Facilitator in an online repository.

During the preparatory phase, the Facilitator will assist in planning the on-site mission by proposing a sample agenda and maintaining continuous communication to help coordinate logistical arrangements. It will also provide guidance on stakeholder engagement and offer practical recommendations for an effective mission, drawing on previous experience. Additionally, the Facilitator will arrange interpretation services (if required), as well as catering for coffee breaks and lunches, should the latter not be arranged by the LCP.

During the on-site mission, the Facilitator will be available to support you for any logistical arrangement. Following the on-site mission, the Facilitator will support you in organising the hand-over event in your country/region.

## As a Peer

The Facilitator will guide you throughout the peer review process. It will organise online preparatory meetings before and after the on-site mission, keep you informed of next steps and tasks, and manage logistical and administrative matters, including transportation and accommodation for the in-person meeting in Brussels and in the host country/region (see Section 9).

During the preparation phase, the Facilitator will compile a desk research report summarising key information on the country/region's DRM system, based on documentation provided by the LCP. This report will be shared with you well in advance before the on-site mission and will serve as a crucial resource for your preparation. The desk research report, along with key documentation from the LCP and other relevant materials collected by the Facilitator, will be accessible through an online repository.

Throughout the on-site mission, the Facilitator will provide daily support, helping to prepare for the following day, facilitating internal meetings among the peer review team for debriefing and discussion, and structuring the initial drafting of the peer review report. Both during and after the mission, it will assist in identifying strengths and areas for improvement for the final report. The Facilitator is responsible for drafting the report.

Eight

# What support will I get from the European Commission, DG ECHO?

## As an LCP

DG ECHO, alongside the Facilitator, will support you from the outset to ensure the seamless planning and execution of the peer review. After you have been notified of your country/region's selection, DG ECHO will organise a kick-off meeting to provide further information on the Peer Review Programme and explain what is expected from you as the host country/region. It will then assist in defining objectives, setting expectations, and tailoring the review to your country/region's needs by identifying key focus areas for analysis. Based on this, DG ECHO will lead the selection process of the peer experts. During this phase, DG ECHO will also host one or two in-person meetings at its headquarters in Brussels, and will chair all other preparatory meetings.

During the on-site mission, DG ECHO will be available to support you, alongside the Facilitator.

After the mission, DG ECHO will assist, together with the Facilitator, in organising the handover event, where it will be present alongside one or two Peers.

Finally, DG ECHO can support the voluntary follow-up process by providing relevant contact details and assisting in identifying funding opportunities to facilitate implementation.

## As a Peer

DG ECHO, together with the Facilitator, will support you throughout the overall implementation of the peer review process.

Nine

# Who manages logistical arrangements and which costs are covered?

## For the LCP

For the in-person preparatory meetings in Brussels, the Facilitator will cover transport, accommodation, and other relevant travel expenses incurred during the trip.

- Tickets and accommodation: In this case, air tickets (economy class) and/or train tickets (first class) and accommodation are pre-booked and paid by the Facilitator. The LCP will be asked to promptly provide necessary information to the Facilitator for making the bookings.
- Daily allowance and other reimbursements: the LCP will receive a daily allowance, based on EU official mission scales. Funds might be deducted if a meal is already paid and offered to the participants.
- Transfer of the allowance and other reimbursements: The Facilitator will pay the allowance/other reimbursements to the bank account indicated by the LCP. Specifically, it will transfer the per diem allowance via instant bank transfer (applicable only to Single Euro Payments Area - SEPA), taking weekends into account to avoid delays, after the completion of specific forms. The Facilitator will provide further instructions and support for submitting reimbursement requests.

For the on-site mission, the Facilitator will cover interpretation services (if needed), as well as catering for coffee breaks and lunches, should the latter not be arranged by the LCP.

## For Peers

For the in-person preparatory meetings in Brussels and the on-site mission, the Facilitator will cover accommodation, transport, and other relevant travel expenses. The Facilitator will also handle logistics and cover the travel expenses for the Peer(s) attending the report handover event.

- Tickets and accommodation: Air tickets (economy class) and/or train tickets (first class) and accommodation will be pre-booked and paid by the Facilitator. Peers will be asked to promptly provide necessary information to the Facilitator for making the bookings.
- Daily allowance and other reimbursements: Peers will receive a daily allowance as outlined in the invitation letters sent by the Facilitator, based on EU official mission scales. Funds might be deducted if a meal is already paid and offered to the participants.
- Transfer of the allowance and other reimbursements: The Facilitator will pay the allowance/other reimbursements to the bank account indicated by Peers. Specifically, it will transfer the per diem allowance via instant bank transfer (applicable only to Single Euro Payments Area - SEPA), taking weekends into account to avoid delays, after the completion of specific forms. The Facilitator will provide further instructions and support for submitting reimbursement requests.