

Regional Conference: “From Lessons Identified to Lessons Learnt using HNS Experience and Examples”

19-22 May 2026 - Bodrum, Türkiye



Final Conclusion & Recommendation Report

1. Background and Context

The Regional Conference “From Lessons Identified to Lessons Learnt using HNS Experience and Examples” was organised under the PPRD OSA Programme, financed by DG ECHO. The PPRD OSA Programme provides external technical on-site assistance to IPA III beneficiaries, Southern, and Eastern Neighbourhood countries, supporting DG ECHO, partners, and regional organisations in strengthening civil protection cooperation and disaster risk management. The Conference convened senior representatives from civil protection and disaster risk management (CP/DRM) authorities across the regions, with the aim to catalyse the systematic transformation of Host Nation Support (HNS) lessons identified from recent emergencies and international deployments into institutionalised lessons learnt, embedded in national CP/DRM systems and regional good practice.

The event featured expert technical sessions, peer workshops, and case study presentations, with a focus on operationalising the updated EU Host Nation Support Guidelines (HNSG) and advancing regional preparedness. Through this collaborative platform, the conference contributed to the PPRD OSA Programme’s objectives of enhancing technical cooperation, capacity-building, and alignment with EU standards, supporting the evolution of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and regional frameworks.

The Conference was moderated by senior experts who were each representing a key institutional perspective within the civil protection and disaster risk management community:

Conference moderators:

Mr Paul Rock, Senior Civil Protection Advisor, National Directorate for Fire & Emergency Management, Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government Republic of Ireland and session's moderators

Ms Biljana Zuber, Team leader for Türkiye, Western Balkans, Central Asia and South Caucasus, DG ECHO

Ms Mirnesa Softic, Head of the Operational and Communication Center of BiH – 112, Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ms Valentina Atanasovska, Head of the International Cooperation Department, Protection and Rescue Directorate, Republic of North Macedonia

Dr Dejan Radinovic, Head of Department of International Humanitarian Assistance Coordination, Sector for Emergency Management, Ministry of the Interior Republic of Serbia

Dr Alessandro Carrotta, Policy Officer, DG ECHO and

Mr Sergiu Gradinaru, DRM/CP Expert, PPRD OSA Programme, GOPA PACE.

2. Main Findings from Expert Technical Sessions

ETS 1: Deployment: Preparation, Coordination, and Institutional Ownership

Conference discussions, including **Dr Raed Arafat's**, State Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Romania, keynote and expert panel interventions, underscored that effective deployment begins well before teams arrive. Early information exchange, clear definition of needs, and pre-deployment meetings are critical for aligning expectations and avoiding operational missteps. Dr Arafat highlighted the necessity of institutional learning and change management, emphasising that lessons must be systematically integrated into national legislation, SOPs, and training, supported by political will and thus responding to societal pressure.

Persistent gaps were noted in assigning responsibility for implementing lessons; without clear accountability, recommendations remain in reports rather than being operationalised. Cross-country exchanges and regular exercises proved invaluable in improving deployment efficiency and fostering institutional memory. Despite recurring challenges, the consistent theme was the need to move from identifying lessons to embedding them in procedures, training, and operational practice.

ETS 2: Operational Support: Integration, Liaison, and Real-Time Effectiveness

Session findings reinforced that HNS must be considered not only when receiving but also when sending assistance. Operational effectiveness hinges on timely information, clear points of contact, and rapid integration of incoming teams. The role of HNS liaison officers was repeatedly highlighted as a critical enabler for bridging communication gaps and facilitating coordination between national and international actors, echoing conference-wide consensus.

Transportation, accommodation, access to resources, and operational briefings are fundamental to successful support. Experiences from Montenegro, Greece, and Türkiye confirmed that operational challenges, especially those related to coordination and information flow, are shared across the region. Lessons identified during emergencies must be systematically reflected in national HNS planning and training cycles to drive continuous improvement. Integration of HNS mechanisms and effective communication are essential for operational resilience.

ETS 3: Demobilisation and Post-Response Evaluations: Knowledge Transfer and Institutional Learning

Demobilisation is a critical phase requiring robust HNS efforts. Minimising disruptions in logistics, coordination, and communication is essential for safe and efficient return of deployed teams. evaluations reviews, including immediate debriefs and comprehensive after-action evaluations, are

vital for capturing lessons and identifying HNS gaps. Incorporating perspectives from host, sending, and transit countries enriches the assessment.

Challenges in knowledge transfer arise from personnel turnover and limited accessibility of past mission reports. Without robust structures for collecting, storing, and disseminating lessons, opportunities for organisational learning are lost. Transforming lessons identified into policy or operational change demands clear institutional structures, dedicated resources, and ongoing monitoring.

3. Main Findings from Peer Workshops

Workshop 1: From Lessons Identified to Implementation

Participants confirmed that most national systems are effective in capturing observations and lessons from operations and exercises. However, the main challenge lies in moving beyond documentation to implementation. Key issues discussed included:

- The need for clear assignment of responsibility and accountability, ensuring that recommendations are owned and acted upon by specific institutions.
- HNS as a comprehensive stress test, exposing vulnerabilities across planning, transit, legal arrangements, logistics, deployment, and demobilization.
- The importance of leadership commitment, dedicated resources, and structured follow-up to ensure lessons are integrated into procedures and operational practice.

The value of reconstructing events from multiple stakeholder perspectives to identify root causes and systemic gaps.

- Weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation, with lessons often failing to be embedded in standard operating procedures, training, or planning cycles.

Workshop 2: Innovations in Lessons Learning

This session focused on emerging approaches and tools for institutionalizing lessons, including performance indicators, peer-review mechanisms, and regional benchmarking. Highlights included:

- Broad support for developing Host Nation Support readiness indicators and peer reviews to enable mutual learning and benchmarking, without imposing formal reporting

requirements.

- Recognition that institutional silos are a major barrier, and that tools and frameworks must promote inter-institutional coordination.
- The need for systematic integration of HNS experience into national learning systems and harmonization with EU civil protection standards.
- The importance of expanding inter-institutional tabletop exercises, including scenarios addressing hybrid threats and disinformation.

Workshops' Outcomes

Both workshops generated practical recommendations, such as:

- Strengthening the full lesson learned management cycle, from identification and analysis to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Mainstreaming HNS into national preparedness, ensuring lessons are integrated into standard procedures, training, and exercises.
- Institutionalizing a culture of continuous learning, supported by structured peer exchange and regional cooperation.

These peer workshops contributed directly to the Conference's actionable recommendations and reinforced the shared commitment to operationalizing lessons learnt across all levels of civil protection.

4. Case Studies

Selected case studies, including the Kochani nightclub fire, demonstrated how HNS and lessons learned processes influenced legislation, SOPs, and training across the region. Common themes included mass casualty management, interagency coordination, and the critical need for prevention, enforcement, and structured follow-up.

A remarkable example of Host Nation Support in complex conditions is illustrated by Croatia's experience responding to major earthquakes during the COVID-19 pandemic—a true “disaster within a disaster” scenario that tested the robustness and adaptability of national civil protection systems.

While details varied, all cases illustrated the challenge of translating operational lessons into institutional change.

5. Recommendations & Action Points

Conference deliberations yielded the following actionable recommendations:

A. Strengthen Lesson Learned Management Cycle

- Upgrade national systems for end-to-end processing: identification, analysis, validation, responsibility assignment, funding, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and training/exercise.

B. Mainstream HNS into National Preparedness

- Integrate HNS fully into SOPs, training, and exercises; avoid treating it as a separate domain.

C. Enhance Accountability and Ownership

- Assign clear responsibility for implementation of recommendations, supported by leadership commitment and dedicated resources.

D. Develop HNS Readiness Indicators and Peer Review Mechanisms

- Pilot a framework for HNS performance indicators and light-touch HNS peer reviews to foster mutual learning and benchmarking.

E. Institutionalise Inter-Institutional Coordination

- Establish or strengthen HNS Cells¹ with pre-assigned roles and protocols, engaging all relevant authorities (civil protection, customs, health, transport, etc.).

F. Build a Culture of Continuous Learning

- Institutionalise learning as a core function, ensuring lessons are embedded in operational practice and not just documented.

G. Expand Training and Knowledge Sharing

- Leverage EU-funded and UCPM projects for HNS training, exercises, and knowledge exchange; maintain a database of trained personnel.

H. Integrate Lessons from International Assistance into National Frameworks

¹ The inter-institutional HNS Cell was characterized as one of the most operationally concrete expressions of what whole-of-government preparedness means in practice.

- Systematically feed lessons from international operations into national learning systems and planning cycles.

6. Assumptions & Risks

- **Assumptions:** Political commitment, institutional readiness, and regional cooperation will continue to underpin HNS and LL system evolution.
- **Risks:** Fragmented ownership, insufficient funding, and barriers in the collection, storage, dissemination, and application of knowledge, including limited accessibility and usability of past mission reports, may hinder the effective implementation of lessons learnt. Personnel turnover and competing priorities remain persistent challenges.

6. Key Success Factors

- Leadership commitment and dedicated resources
- Robust institutional structures for lesson management
- Effective inter-institutional coordination
- Continuous training and practical experience sharing
- Integration of lessons into SOPs, trainings, and national legislation

7. Way Forward

The Regional Conference outcomes should inform national strategic and operational frameworks, regional peer mechanisms, and present inputs to the future EU HNSG revisions. Participants committed to ongoing dialogue, peer reviews, and operationalisation of recommendations. The Conference has set a clear path for moving from lessons identified to lessons learnt, strengthening regional preparedness and interoperability in line with EU strategic policy and frameworks.

The closing session reinforced that the core challenge in Host Nation Support is not analytical capacity, countries understand what effective HNS looks like, but institutional architecture and mindset. Evidence from the 2025 wildfire season and recent UCPM activations highlighted persistent operational friction, including customs delays, medical provision gaps, and unclear coordination interfaces. These issues are rooted in structural and inter-institutional gaps rather than a lack of knowledge.

Keynote contributions and peer workshops emphasised that resilience is not synonymous with cost efficiency; real change is driven by operational pressure and trust. Exercises serve as resilience laboratories, and pre-agreed inter-institutional structures and agreements are essential for building shared institutional memory and operational confidence.

The Conference generated actionable evidence for EU policy evolution, suggesting that the EU toolbox, guidelines, training, exercises, peer reviews, and funding, should be further aligned to incentivise inter-institutional coordination and named accountability. Nordic models (Finland, Sweden, Denmark) offer concrete blueprints for whole-of-government preparedness, demonstrating that statutory mandates, inter-ministerial coordination and cooperation, and dedicated focus on resilience can embed shared responsibility and tested protocols.

Participants agreed on practical orientations for the weeks ahead:

- Immediate: partner beneficiaries and countries developing inter-institutional HNS arrangements or expanding tabletop exercises are encouraged to signal their progress to the Commission, shaping future support and knowledge exchange.
- Near-term: an interest has been voiced out in developing a common HNS readiness indicator framework, not as a reporting obligation but as a peer benchmarking tool for national and regional review and mutual learning.
- Self-directed: before the next activation season, each partner beneficiary is invited to identify one inter-institutional HNS coordination gap requiring a formal agreement, and to note where Commission facilitation could support resolution.

The full set of recommendations, workshop outputs, and expressions of interest is recorded during the Conference and will inform the Commission's internal workstreams and future iterations of EU guidance and support tools. Ultimately, lessons learnt are decisions taken, they materialise in transformed institutional architecture, operationalised through pressure, trust, ownership and accountability.