

DATA ANALYSIS REPORT

PLUTUS project

**Funding resilient future: Exploring funding practices in the field of
disaster risk management**

Grant agreement – UCPM-2023-TRACK1 - Project 101142337 – D.16

Belgian Directorate-General for Civil Protection (IBZ)

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Introduction

The PLUTUS project, co-funded by the European Commission under UCPM Track-1, aims to improve the capacity of civil protection authorities in Belgium and other UCPM Member and Participating States to access, manage, and implement EU funding opportunities more effectively. Despite the wide range of EU funding opportunities supporting disaster risk management (DRM), these instruments remain fragmented and complex, making it difficult to access them for many civil protection actors.

This report presents an overview of the data collected during the research phase of the PLUTUS project and provides an analysis of the findings. It consolidates insights from a questionnaire addressed to UCPM Member and Participating States, in-depth national interviews conducted in Belgium, interviews with international partners, and discussions held during the PLUTUS webinar. Together, these sources provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, and good practices encountered across the different phases of the EU project cycle, from needs identification to long-term sustainability.

Background

The background of the PLUTUS project lies in the observation of the Belgian Directorate-General for Civil Protection that, while the European Union has developed numerous funding programmes to enhance resilience, these programmes are fragmented and vary in administrative complexity which makes them difficult to access. This fragmentation makes it difficult for civil protection authorities to identify appropriate funding opportunities and to successfully apply for and implement projects.

These observations are consistent with findings from the World Bank (2021), which highlighted persistent gaps in the capacity of civil protection authorities to make effective use of EU funding instruments, notably due to difficulties in navigating administrative procedures and aligning national needs with European priorities.

The relevance of these challenges was further confirmed during the 8th Civil Protection Forum, where participants were surveyed on their experience with disaster risk management funding. Nine out of ten respondents indicated that they encounter difficulties in attracting EU funding. This strong signal from the UCPM community underlines the need for a structured analysis of obstacles and good practices, which the PLUTUS project seeks to provide. It also underlines a need for a comprehensive understanding of the funding opportunities, that is why a mapping was developed during this project.

The PLUTUS project has attempted to better understand these issues by combining desk research, questionnaires, interviews, and a final webinar, thereby contributing to the collective knowledge base of the UCPM community. It furthermore focuses on the best practices that can be shared across Member and Participating States.

Objectives

This project aimed to analyse the obstacles faced by Belgian services and EU member states in obtaining and implementing funding for disaster risk management (DRM). On the one hand, we wanted to create an overview of available funds, and on the other hand, identify obstacles, collect examples of best practices, and develop recommendations to make investments in disaster risk management more accessible.

At the Civil Protection forum 2024, the top-voted need was the mapping of various funding sources available for Disaster Risk Management (DRM) projects closely followed by the sharing of best practices and case studies from other Member and Participating States as inspiration. This clearly demonstrates the interest of the UCPM community in these objectives. It furthermore showed that, even though the European Commission has conducted some mappings, there remains a gap in knowledge about the available funding opportunities in Member and Participating States, to which the project contributes.

Methodology and scope

1. General scope

The scope of this project encompasses an exploration of the funding project cycle and the potential difficulties that can be faced during a project. It covers both Belgian experiences and those of other UCPM Member and Participating States in all the phases of the project cycle.

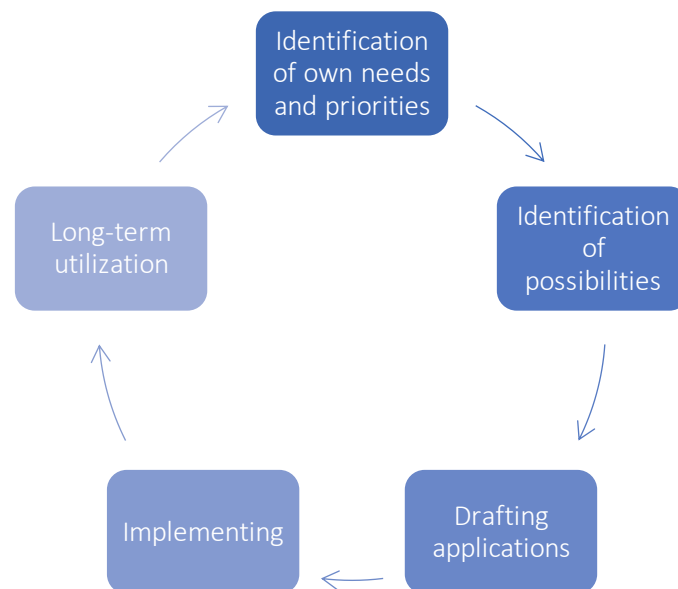


Figure 1 – EU project Cycle

The analysis is intentionally structured along this project cycle in order to capture not only isolated obstacles, but also how challenges encountered at one stage influence subsequent phases. This cycle approach makes it possible to identify systemic bottlenecks, recurring gaps, and enabling factors that affect the overall effectiveness of EU-funded disaster risk management (DRM) projects.

The scope of the analysis includes both Belgian experiences and those of other UCPM Member and Participating States. Belgium is also examined through national interviews in order to have a complete understanding for the ministerial report. At the same time, international data provide comparative insights that allow Belgian practices to be assessed in a broader European context and help distinguish country-specific issues from structural challenges shared across the UCPM.

In parallel to the analysis of practices and experiences identified through interviews, a comprehensive mapping was conducted. This mapping identifies, categorizes, and analyses EU funding opportunities relevant to disaster risk management across the domains of prevention, preparedness, and response. It covers funding instruments within the UCPM as well as selected non-UCPM programmes that are accessible to civil protection authorities or closely related. The mapping serves both as an analytical input highlighting fragmentation, overlaps, and complexity, and as a practical output intended to support authorities in navigating the EU funding landscape.

2. Limitations

This research primarily focuses on roadblocks and best practices in obtaining EU funds for disaster risk management, with an emphasis on Belgian services and UCPM Member and Participating States willing to partake in interviews and other data gathering opportunities. As a result, the findings may not fully capture the experiences of all UCPM Member and Participating States or organizations outside the UCPM framework.

Additionally, the scope of other EU funding sources (outside of the UCPM) will be primarily limited to those that are most relevant to civil protection authorities but, due to feasibility reasons the mapping may exclude some niche funding opportunities that could be accessed by civil protection authorities in specific cases. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of funding programs might mean that some opportunities identified change over time, affecting the relevance of the findings.

Finally, since the data collection relies on a questionnaire, interviews, and reports, which require the participation of different internal services of Civil Protection Authorities in UCPM Member and Participating States, it may introduce biases and limit the diversity of perspectives. Lastly, confidentiality and consent requirements may have limited information gathered on some sensitive issues.

3. Data Collection tools

The questionnaire

A questionnaire was distributed to 37 UCPM Member and Participating States, with 22 responses received. It explored strategic planning, identification of funding opportunities, preparation of applications, implementation challenges, and sustainability of results through a variety of questions, highlighting both quantitative trends (based on the responses to structured questions) and qualitative insights (based on open-questions inputs). A total of 22 out of 37 invited countries completed the questionnaire. In this report, the synthesis of responses has been integrated into the outcomes. The

analysis reveals key institutional practices, recurring challenges, and potential areas for improvement in how UCPM States engage with EU funding mechanisms.

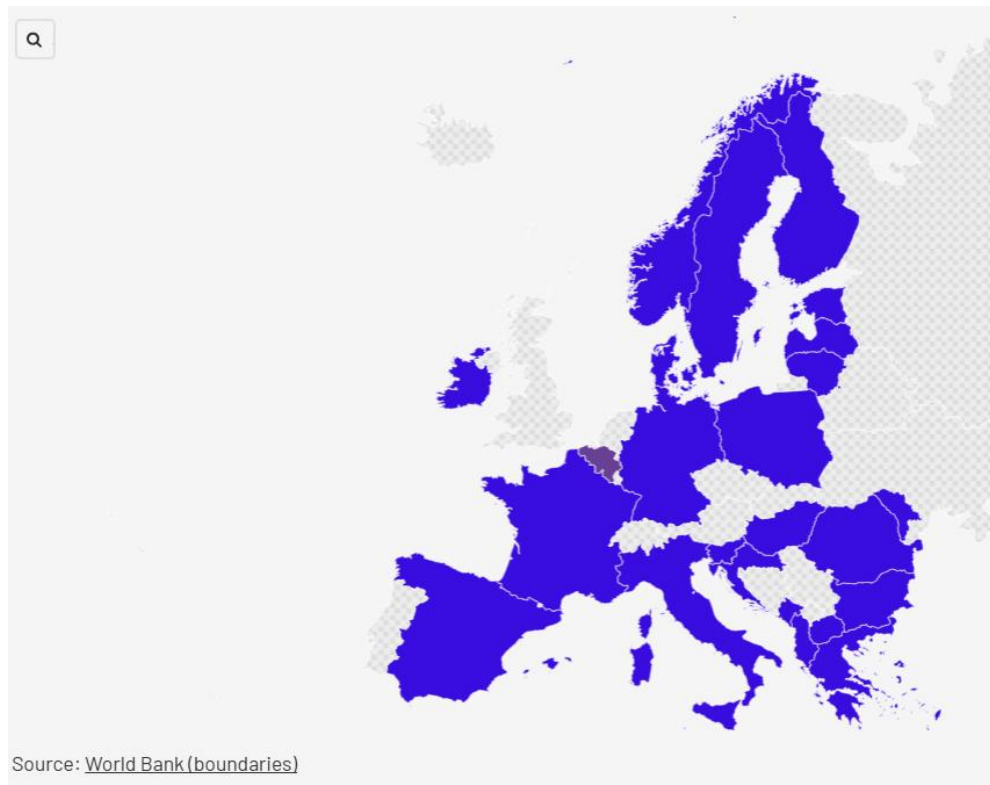


Figure 2 – Map of the countries who answered the questionnaire

National interview

Ten in-depth interviews were conducted in Belgium with for example the civil protection services, financial services, the Ministry of Health, the Federal Police, the National Crisis Centre, the National Contact Point for Horizon Europe, and regional actors such as Campus VESTA and the Province of Antwerp. These interviews offered detailed insights into Belgian-specific challenges, such as fragmentation across levels of government, administrative bottlenecks, and differences in institutional support structures.

Interview with Member and Participating States

Eleven interviews were carried out with UCPM partners either in-person or online. The interviews took place with a variety of actors from different Member States (France, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Luxembourg, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Romania, Poland, and Finland) including financial actors, project managers, national funding cells, managing authorities and policy makers. The interviews revealed how different national contexts influence access to and management of EU funds. While some countries have well-developed internal systems set up in relation to fundings, others rely heavily on individual initiatives or ad hoc networks. The interviews helped highlight comparative perspectives on both roadblocks and best practices.

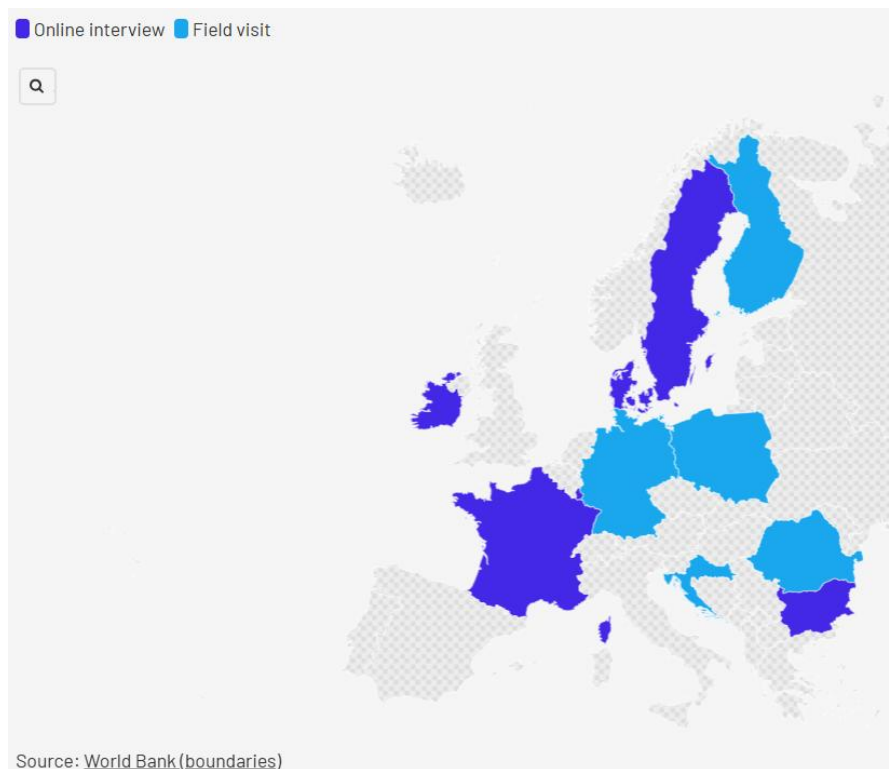


Figure 3 – Map of the countries interviewed

The PLUTUS webinar

The conclusion of the project was a webinar organized on the 6th of November 2015. The webinar aimed to validate previous findings, enrich them with further exchange of experiences among national authorities on both roadblocks and best practices, and co-development of recommendations for overcoming obstacles and improving national processes. Breakout sessions were structured around three themes: strategic planning and needs analysis, funding processes and applications, and implementation and sustainability with each a 10-minute introduction on the theme by someone from the PLUTUS team, followed by a 30-minute discussion on the topic. Bringing together representatives from civil protection authorities, EU institutions, and international financial organizations, the webinar served to test preliminary findings, gather additional practitioner insights, and collectively prioritize recommendations through structured voting. The webinar thus played a dual role as both a qualitative data source and a mechanism for collective endorsement of key conclusions.

Together, these tools form a mixed-methods approach that enables triangulation between quantitative data, qualitative evidence, and collective practitioner validation, thereby strengthening the robustness and credibility of the analysis.

Analysis

This section provides a strengthened and more detailed analytical assessment of the data collected through the PLUTUS questionnaire, national and international interviews, and the PLUTUS webinar. It is structured along the full EU project cycle in order to highlight not only phase-specific challenges, but also how weaknesses or strengths at one stage systematically influence subsequent phases.

References to the annexes are included where relevant to anchor the analysis in the empirical evidence.

1. Identification of own needs and priorities

This phase constitutes the one of the foundations of the EU project cycle. The analysis below draws on questionnaire results (Annex 1), Belgian national interviews (Annex 2), international interviews (Annex 3), and validation through the PLUTUS webinar (Annex 4). It demonstrates that the way needs and priorities are defined has a direct and systematic impact on all subsequent phases, notably the ability to identify suitable funding, draft competitive proposals, and ensure long-term sustainability.

1.1. Who is involved in identifying the needs

Questionnaire results indicate that the identification of needs is primarily driven by central authorities. National ministries or directorates are involved in almost all responding countries, followed by civil protection organizations and, to a lesser extent, regional or local authorities (Annex 1, Q4; see *Figure 4 below*). Operational responders, such as firefighters or medical teams, are involved in fewer than half of the cases, while private-sector actors are almost entirely absent from the process.

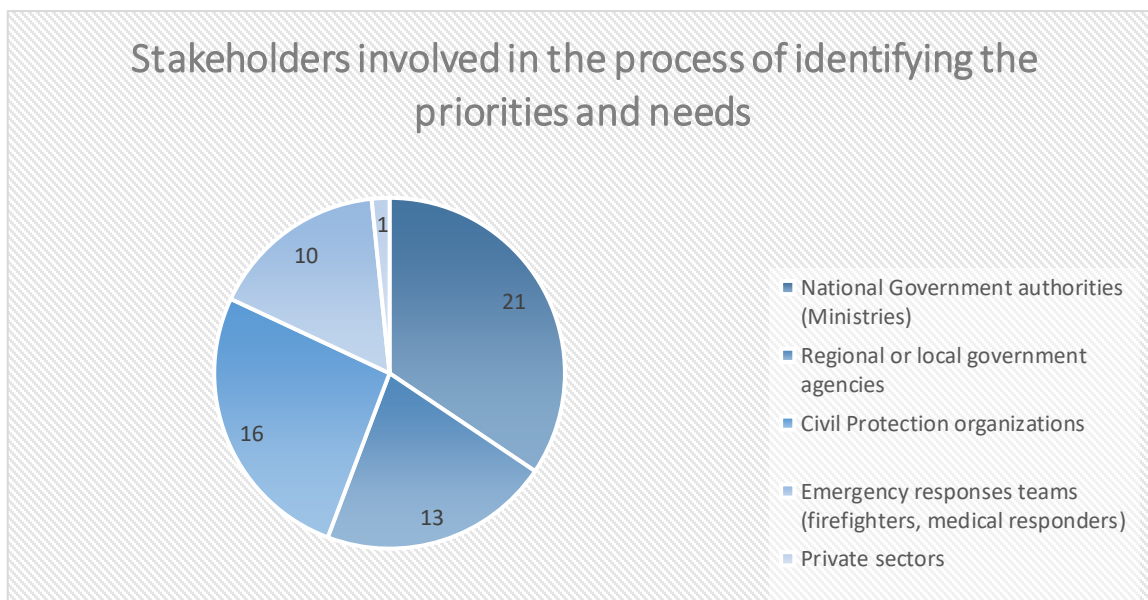


Figure 4 – Stakeholders involvement in need identification

This distribution reflects a predominantly top-down governance model. From an analytical perspective, such centralization ensures coherence with national policy frameworks and budgetary cycles, but it also limits the systematic integration of operational experience and technical stakeholders. Interviews confirm that where operational actors are only marginally involved, project ideas of risk being insufficiently grounded in day-to-day realities, which later manifests in implementation challenges or limited uptake of project outputs (Annex 3).

At the same time, qualitative data nuance the quantitative picture. Many authorities reported informal but regular consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including operational units, research

institutions, NGOs, and volunteers (Annex 1, Q5; Annex 2). These consultations are rarely formalized, which explains their limited visibility in questionnaire responses, but they nonetheless play an important role in enriching needs assessments. A recurring good practice identified across interviews is the early involvement of staff who will later be responsible for drafting and implementing projects. This continuity strengthens internal ownership and reduces knowledge loss between project phases.

Overall, the analysis suggests that the most robust needs-identification processes combine central strategic steering with structured input from operational and technical actors. Where this balance is absent, it can impact the other phases of the project cycle.

1.2. Long term strategies versus ad hoc decisions

The questionnaire reveals a clear split between authorities that operate with predefined long-term priorities for EU-funded projects and those that engage on an ad hoc basis. Exactly half of respondents reported working with multiannual priorities, while the remainder rely on opportunity-driven or informal planning approaches (Annex 1, Q2).

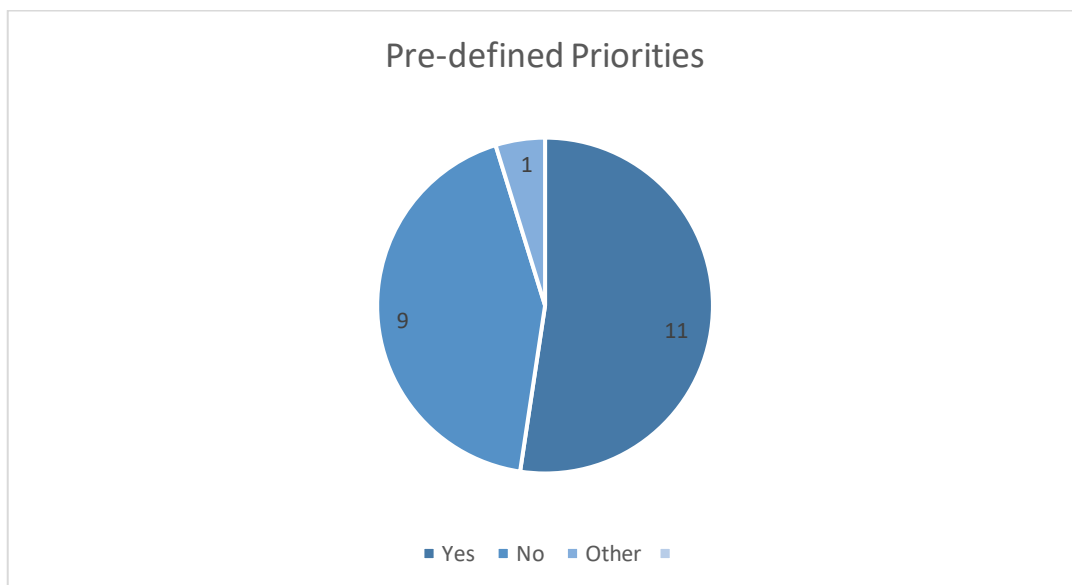


Figure 5 – Pre-defined priorities

Interviews show that this distinction is not merely procedural but has significant organizational consequences. Authorities with established strategies typically anchor EU-funded projects within broader national disaster risk management frameworks, risk assessments, or capability development plans. In several cases, these strategies are translated into concrete tools such as project identifications need, or multiannual funding calendars (Annex 3). This allows organizations to anticipate calls, allocate resources in advance, and maintain continuity across multiple projects.

By contrast, ad hoc engagement with EU funding is often driven by individual initiatives or external invitations to join consortia. While this can generate innovative ideas, it also creates fragility. Interviewees from such contexts frequently reported difficulties in securing internal approval, reallocating staff time, or sustaining engagement once a project ends. From an analytical standpoint,

the absence of long-term strategic anchoring increases dependency on individuals and heightens the risk of discontinuity due to staff turnover or shifting political priorities.

The data therefore indicate that long-term strategies function as a key enabling condition for sustained and effective participation in EU funding, rather than as an administrative formality.

1.3. Influences on setting the priorities

When examining which factors influence priority setting, questionnaire responses show a strong dominance of national priorities, previous project experience, and risk assessments (Annex 1, Q3; see *Figure 5 below*). Almost all respondents cited alignment with national strategies, while a large majority also rely on lessons learned from earlier projects. This confirms that priority setting is primarily shaped by policy obligations and accumulated operational experience.

In contrast, research and academic recommendations, as well as structured stakeholder consultations, play a more limited role. Interviews suggest that scientific input is often incorporated indirectly, for example through national risk profiles or legislative requirements, rather than through systematic collaboration with research institutions. Similarly, stakeholder consultations tend to be more developed in countries with formal multi-stakeholder DRR governance structures (Annex 3).

Analytically, this pattern provides stability and legitimacy but may constrain innovation and forward-looking planning. Authorities that explicitly integrate scientific evidence and EU-level exchanges into their prioritisation processes report greater capacity to identify emerging risks and cross-border challenges, which in turn strengthens the EU added value of proposed projects. The relative absence of these inputs in many contexts helps explain later difficulties in aligning project ideas with EU priorities.

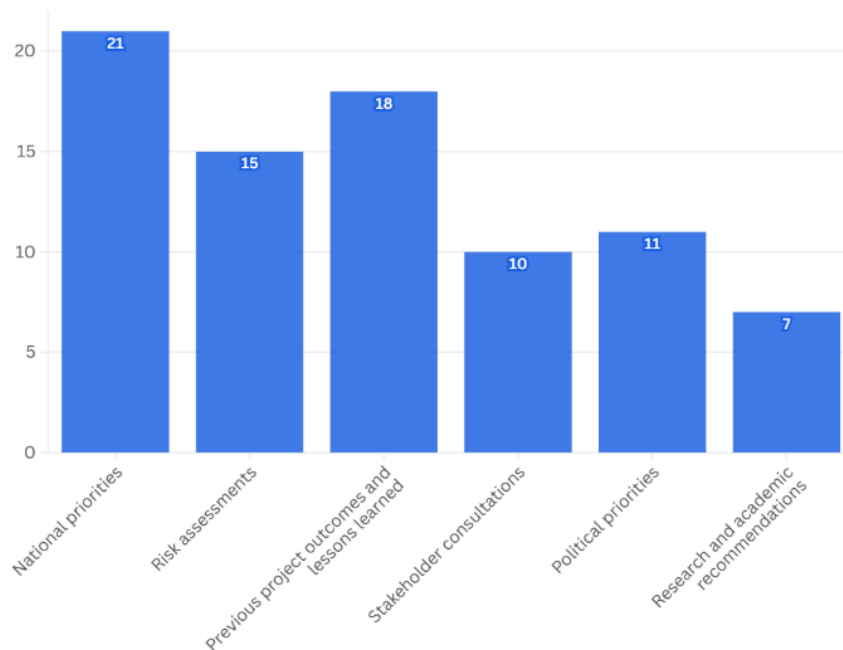


Figure 6 - What aspects influence the setting of priorities

1.4. Aligning national priorities with EU funding opportunities

Aligning nationally defined needs with EU funding priorities emerges as one of the most persistent challenges across the data collected. Interviews repeatedly highlight the difficulty of translating operational or locally specific needs into project concepts that clearly demonstrate European added value, cross-border relevance, or alignment with Commission work programmes (Annex 3).

Several good practices were identified. Some authorities maintain national or organizational “Wishlist” or project pipelines that are periodically screened against upcoming EU calls. Others systematically assess each project’s idea against both national priorities and EU work programmes before deciding whether to proceed (Annex 1, Q7). Dedicated funding units play a particularly important role in this process, as they possess the expertise needed to reframe national needs in EU-relevant terms and to identify suitable funding instruments beyond the UCPM.

Where such mechanisms are absent, authorities often develop project ideas independently of specific calls. The analysis shows that these ideas frequently require substantial reworking once a call is published, leading to time pressure, reduced proposal quality, or abandonment of the initiative altogether. This challenge is especially pronounced for regional and provincial authorities, which face additional eligibility constraints.

From a lifecycle perspective, weak alignment at this stage has cascading effects on the drafting and implementation phases, reinforcing the importance of early and systematic consideration of EU priorities.

1.5. The Belgian case

In Belgium, the Civil Protection service generally does not proactively search for EU funding opportunities. Instead, engagement often occurs when a specific need arises or when the service is invited to join an existing consortium. There is no overarching strategic plan that defines priority areas for EU-funded projects, and initiatives typically originate from individual staff members with an identification of a specific need in within the service. These initiatives then require hierarchical approval, which can be difficult in the absence of clear strategic guidance.

Several other Belgian services that are regularly invited to participate in consortia stressed the importance of assessing how proposed projects align with organisational strategies and long-term objectives. Interviewees noted that when projects are not embedded in a broader vision, there is a risk that results are not sustained or that the effort invested outweighs the benefits. To mitigate this, some organisations have introduced Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to assess project relevance and define conditions for participation in consortia. However, such practices remain limited and are not systematically applied across services.

Belgian respondents also highlighted the difficulty of aligning internally identified needs with EU funding priorities. Projects developed independently of specific calls often require significant reworking, and in some cases no suitable funding opportunity can be identified. For provincial and

regional authorities, identifying eligible funding sources remains a major challenge, further limiting their ability to engage strategically with EU programmes.

2. Identification of funding possibilities

This phase examines how civil protection authorities identify relevant EU funding opportunities once needs and priorities have been defined. The analysis draws on questionnaire data (Annex 1), Belgian interviews (Annex 2), international interviews (Annex 3), and insights from the PLUTUS webinar (Annex 4). It shows that the organisation of funding intelligence is a decisive factor shaping both access to EU programmes and equity between authorities.

2.1 Monitoring and awareness of funding opportunities

Questionnaire results reveal considerable variation in how authorities monitor EU funding opportunities. Some respondents report the existence of dedicated national or organisational units responsible for funding intelligence, while others rely on individual staff members to track calls in parallel with their operational duties (Annex 1, Q8; see Figure 6 below).

From an analytical perspective, this variation reflects deeper differences in institutional capacity. Authorities with centralised monitoring structures benefit from earlier awareness of calls, systematic screening of relevance, and more realistic planning timelines. Conversely, decentralised or ad hoc monitoring tends to result in late awareness, rushed decision-making, and selective participation limited to familiar programmes.

Across all contexts, the Funding & Tenders Portal is the primary source of information. However, it is widely perceived as complex and difficult to navigate, particularly by authorities without specialised administrative staff (Annex 3). This complexity reinforces structural inequalities between well-resourced national administrations and smaller authorities.

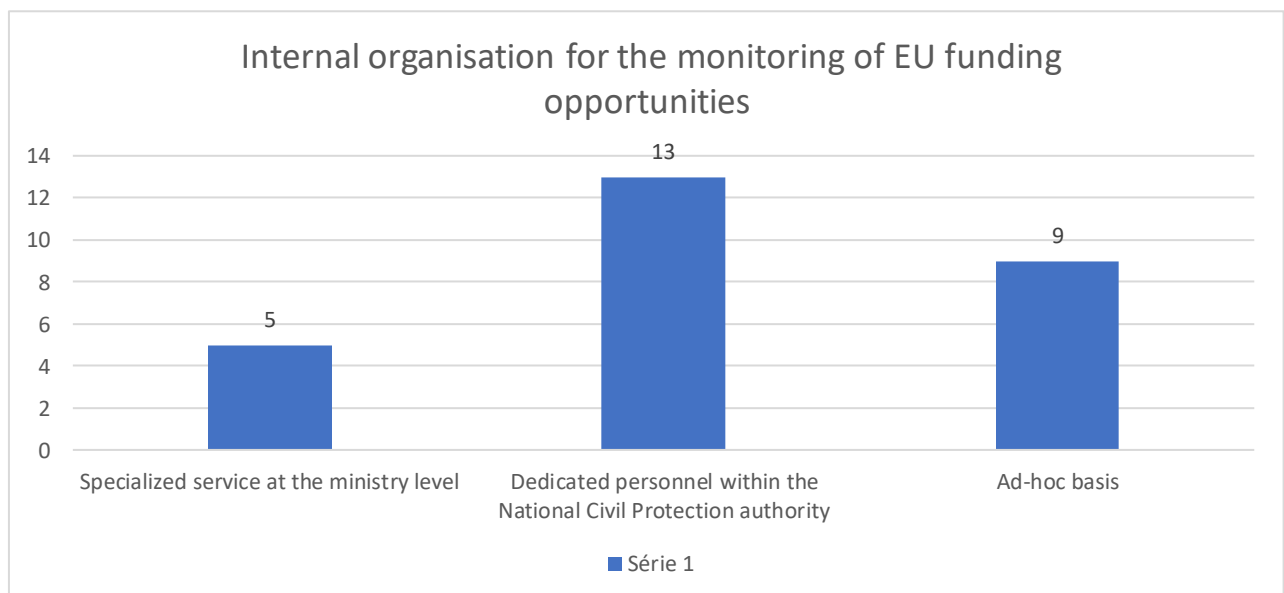


Figure 7 – Organisation of monitoring of EU funding opportunities (Annex 1, Q8)

2.2. Identifying funding sources beyond the UCPM

Although many disaster risk management needs could potentially be addressed through EU programmes beyond the UCPM, questionnaire responses show that such programmes remain underutilised by civil protection authorities (Annex 1, Q14).

Interviews suggest that this is not due to lack of interest, but rather to uncertainty regarding eligibility, administrative requirements, and thematic fit. Authorities frequently associate non-UCPM programmes with higher complexity and lower perceived relevance to operational civil protection tasks. As a result, opportunities for cross-sectoral or innovative funding are often missed.

Analytically, this pattern points to a fragmentation problem at EU level, where relevant funding opportunities are spread across multiple DGs and programmes without clear guidance for civil protection actors. Authorities that successfully navigate this landscape typically rely on strong national coordination mechanisms, inter-ministerial networks, or dedicated funding experts.

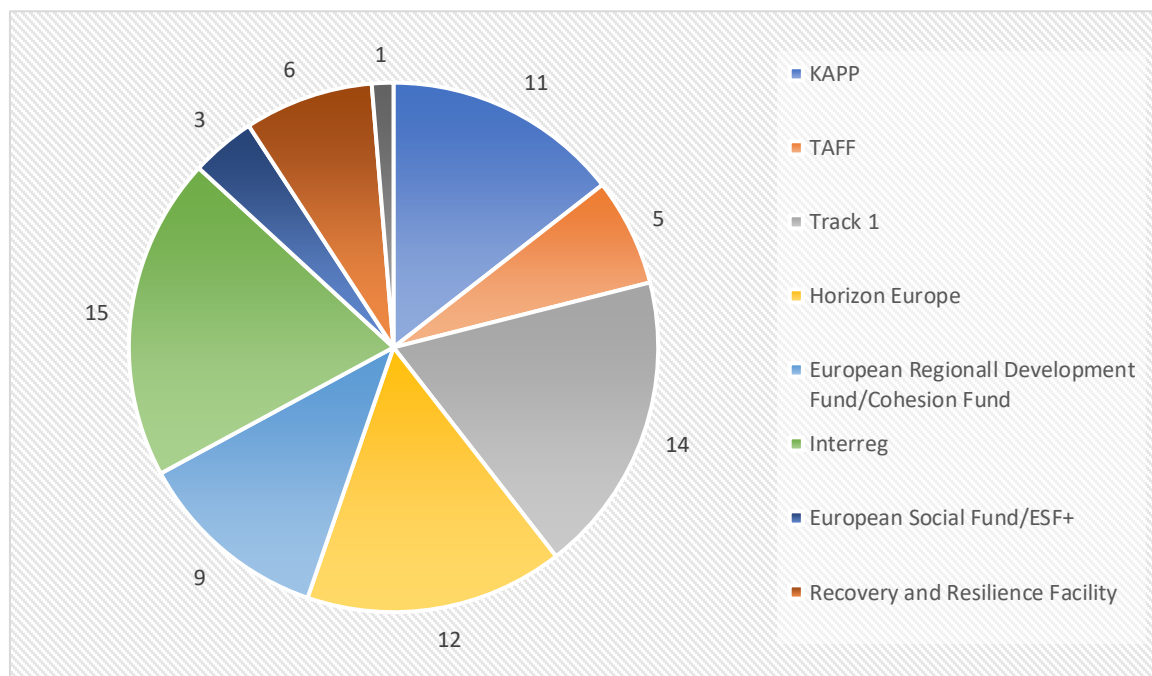


Figure 8 – Use EU funding instruments (Annex 1, Q14)

2.3. Consortia and informal networks

Informal networks play a central role in the identification of funding opportunities. Both Belgian and international interviewees highlighted that many project ideas originate from existing partnerships, previous consortia, or direct invitations from trusted partners (Annex 2 and Annex 3).

While such networks are efficient and reduce transaction costs, they also create risks of exclusion. Authorities with fewer international connections, may be less likely to become aware of relevant calls

or consortium opportunities. Over time, this can reinforce concentration of EU funding among a limited number of actors.

From an analytical standpoint, reliance on informal networks should be seen as a compensatory mechanism for gaps in funding identification. Strengthening transparent and inclusive information channels would reduce dependency on personal networks and improve equity of access.

2.4. Finding the right funding opportunities for national needs

Across all data sources, authorities reported using a combination of formal tools, such as the Funding & Tenders Portal, work programmes, and newsletters, alongside informal exchanges to identify funding opportunities. Persistent challenges include fragmented internal responsibilities, uncertainty around eligibility, and the complexity of EU funding platforms. Where dedicated funding units exist, they are generally more effective in screening opportunities and assessing their alignment with national priorities and long-term strategies.

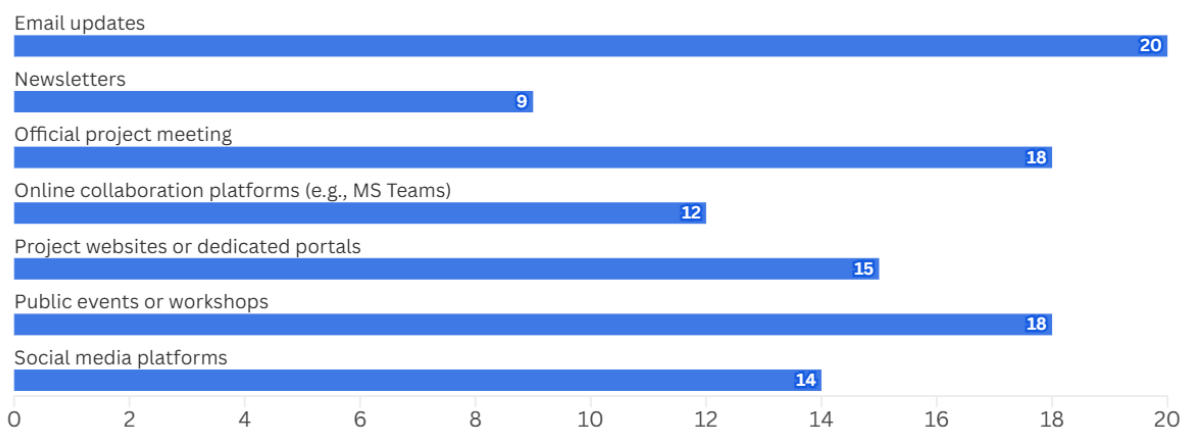


Figure 9 - What sources Civil Protection Authorities use to stay informed about funding opportunities (Annex 1)

2.5. The Belgian case

Belgium benefits from several support structures, including the Horizon Europe National Contact Point and EU funding services at provincial level, such as in the Province of Antwerp. These structures provide valuable expertise, but interview data indicates that fragmentation persists and that access to support is uneven across services. Within Belgian Civil Protection services, awareness of available support mechanisms and funding resources remains limited.

Internationally, good practices include the publication of national funding calendars, the use of keyword-based alerts, and strong inter-ministerial coordination mechanisms. Smaller Member States and regional actors were identified as facing the greatest challenges in identifying funding opportunities, largely due to the absence of specialised staff and limited access to coordinated support structures.

3. Drafting applications

This phase examines how identified needs and funding opportunities are translated into concrete project proposals. The analysis draws on questionnaire responses (Annex 1), Belgian interviews (Annex 2), international interviews (Annex 3), and validation through the PLUTUS webinar (Annex 4). It demonstrates that drafting capacity constitutes a critical bottleneck in the EU project cycle and strongly influences both implementation quality and long-term sustainability.

3.1. Who is drafting applications

Application drafting is resource-intensive for everyone everywhere. Nevertheless, the responsibility for drafting applications varies significantly between countries.

Questionnaire results show that the drafting of EU project applications is usually the primary task of project managers or coordinators (73% of responses). Civil protection experts are also often asked to be involved (45%), particularly to fill specific knowledge gaps within the writing team and contribute their expertise. Some respondents indicated that they have a dedicated grant team (32%), tasked with drafting the applications. In a minority of cases senior management holds the main responsibility for the writing (18%).

In some cases, there is no dedicated personnel for this task, and the responsibility falls on staff who are most of the time occupied with other duties. This limits the number of projects that can be developed, as drafting applications is time consuming. A main recurring obstacle is therefore the lack of staff available to develop project proposals (Annex 3). Furthermore, when drafting is not handled by a dedicated service, knowledge can be lost if staff members leave.

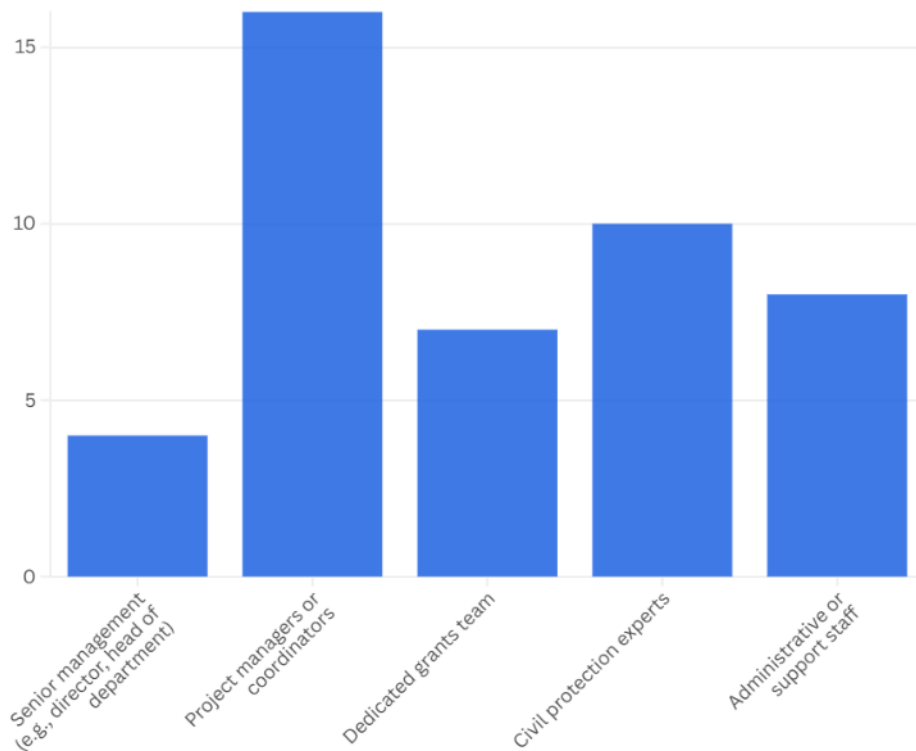


Figure 10 – Who is responsible for drafting EU project applications

In other cases, a dedicated team is responsible for preparing applications, either by writing the full proposal or by assisting other departments. These teams usually include staff with different areas of expertise such as budgetary, legal, logistical and project management, who contribute to specific sections and review each other's work. Some services also organise internal discussions to agree on the structure and content of work packages before or during the drafting process.

A good practice highlighted in several interviews is, as a centralised cell, to request an early draft version from the organisation writing the application and to establish a clear timeline, which helps to ensure coherence and coordination across the organisation.

3.2. Time constraints and internal validation

Short deadlines between call publication and submission were consistently identified as a structural challenge. Questionnaire respondents and interviewees alike reported that effective drafting time is often significantly reduced by internal approval procedures, including hierarchical, legal, and budgetary validation (Annex 2, 3 and 4).

Analytically, this creates a compression effect: proposal writing is concentrated in a narrow timeframe, reducing opportunities for strategic reflection, consortium coordination, or iterative quality improvement. Late-stage political or managerial validation further limits flexibility and often prevents substantive revisions.

To mitigate these challenges, some authorities have introduced anticipatory measures, such as maintaining draft project concepts in advance, internal timelines aligned with anticipated calls, or requiring early draft inputs from consortium leads. While outsourcing proposal writing to external consultants was mentioned as a coping strategy, interviewees cautioned that this may weaken institutional learning and long-term capacity building.

3.3. Consortia

Consortium-based drafting introduces additional complexity. Interviews highlight that differing national priorities, administrative cultures, and levels of experience often complicate agreement on objectives, work packages, and budget allocations (Annex 3).

Two dominant drafting models emerge: a centralised model, where the coordinating beneficiary drafts most of the proposal to ensure coherence, and a distributed model, where partners draft their respective work packages. While the latter fosters ownership, it also increases coordination costs and the risk of inconsistencies.

Several interviewees noted that Commission feedback or evolving policy priorities may require late-stage adjustments, which can be particularly challenging for consortia due to the need for renewed internal alignment and formal agreement. These dynamics underline the importance of strong coordination and clear role allocation during drafting.

3.4. Technical difficulties and budget

Majority of interviewees indicated that the Funding and Tenders Portal is not intuitive to use when preparing an application. Many expressed confusions about the one size fits all application forms, as it is often unclear which sections need to be completed for different type of projects. The budget table was also a source of difficulty for many, especially when it needs to be filled by multiple partners in a consortium. Some standard elements expected in applications, such as milestones or deliverables, as well as budget related concepts such as unit costs, were also described as difficult to understand at first. Lastly, a recurring frustration is the need to enter the same information multiple times in the system both during the application and the implementation phases. Questionnaire respondents consistently rated EU funding application procedures as complex across multiple funding instruments, with particularly high complexity scores reported for Horizon Europe, Recovery and Resilience Facility, and INTERREG, 1 not complex – 5 very complex (Annex 1, Q15).

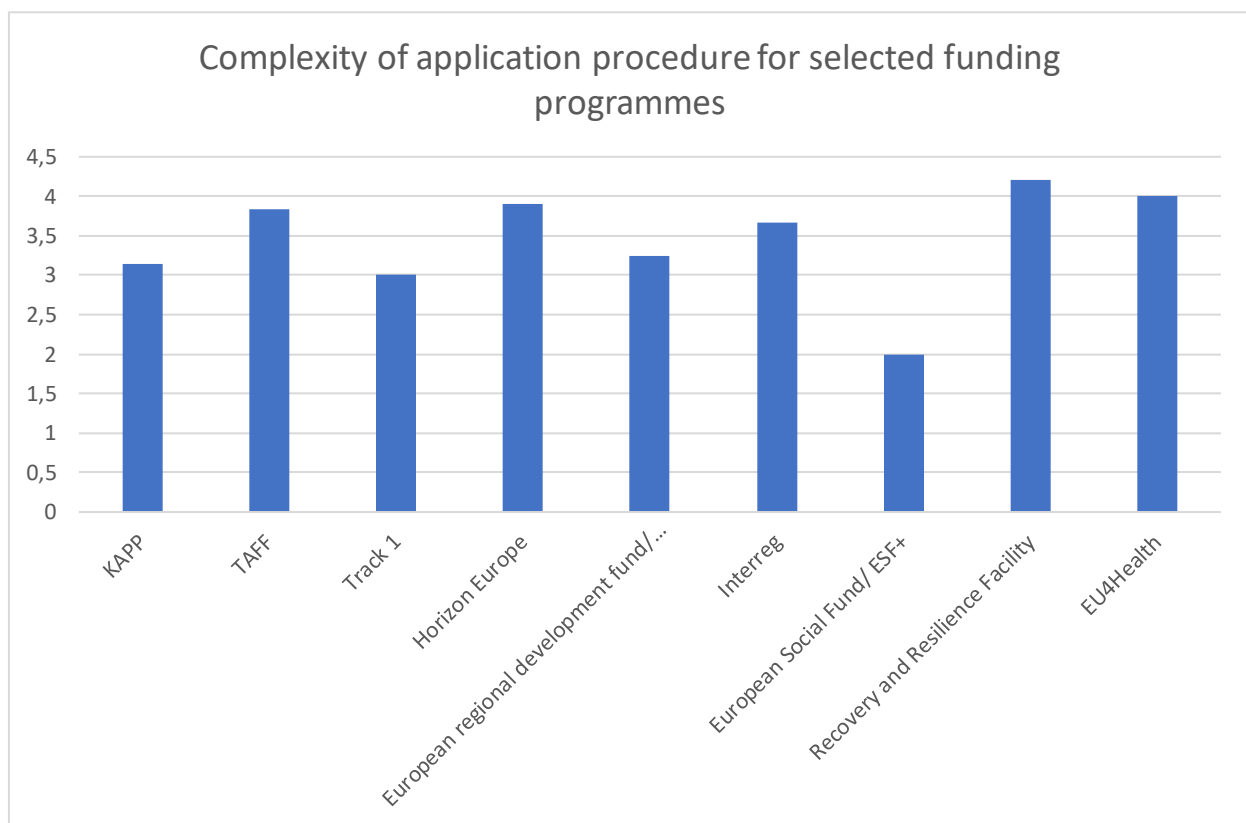


Figure 11 – Perceived complexity of EU funding applications by programme (Annex 1)

To address these challenges some countries have developed internal documentation to assist colleagues. These range from simple guidance documents explaining the procedures to more elaborate e-learning environments that cover basic concepts such as budget limits on procurement, timelines, how to use a Gantt chart, and lump sums. While the Funding and Tenders Portal already contains a large amount of information, interviewees noted that this can be overwhelming and/or too generic. A suggestion was made that the Commission could provide dedicated training on how to use the portal effectively.

In many cases, drafting the budget for a new project is done by specialised staff. The system of unit costs was frequently described as difficult to use, with the amounts considered very low, particularly in countries where flight prices fluctuate significantly. Overhead costs were also mentioned by some as insufficient. Procurement, which often involves the purchase of necessary equipment, was identified as an area where national rules differ, complicating joint purchases across countries.

Several interviewees recommended increasing the requested budget with 10 to 20 percent compared to the market analysis carried out before, in order to cover costs in case of delayed implementation or inflation rises during that period. VAT was frequently cited as a significant obstacle to applying for projects. In many countries VAT costs are foreseen in the national budget, and in some cases administrations have successfully requested a humanitarian exemption from national VAT services (Annex 3). However, this exemption does not apply to expenses incurred abroad. Removing ineligible VAT costs from invoices was described as very time consuming for project staff.

These technical and budgetary challenges identified at the drafting stage are not limited to proposal preparation, but have direct consequences for project execution and reporting, as further analysed in Phase 4.

3.5. The Belgian case

Belgium often struggles with aligning EU budget structures with national templates, and interviewees reported the need for repeated clarifications. On the other hand, some Belgian actors have developed internal learning networks, and SOPs (Annex 2). Internationally, good practices include dedicated multi-disciplinary teams, early preparation for recurring calls, and even outsourcing complex applications to consultants.

Belgium vs international: Both face complexity and resource constraints, but some Member States show stronger centralised grant-writing support units.

4. Implementing

This phase analyses the transition from approved proposals to project execution. Drawing on questionnaire data (Annex 1), interviews (Annexes 2 and 3), and webinar discussions (Annex 4), it shows that implementation challenges are widespread and often rooted in decisions taken during earlier phases of the project cycle.

4.1. Moving from drafting a proposal to implementing a project

The handover from drafting to implementation is a critical risk point in the project cycle. Interviewees consistently reported knowledge loss when implementation is managed by staff not involved in proposal preparation, leading to misinterpretation of objectives, underestimation of reporting obligations, and delayed start-up of activities (Annex 3).

Staff shortages, procurement delays, and complex reporting requirements were consistently identified as implementation bottlenecks. These challenges are particularly acute for newcomers and authorities without EU financial expertise.

4.2. Reporting on projects and administrative burden

Questionnaire results show that implementation is widely perceived as demanding, with respondents rating several programmes as difficult to manage in practice (Annex 1, Q16). The most frequently cited challenges relate to staff allocation (86%), procurement and financial management (77%), and internal coordination (50%). (Annex 1 – Q18)

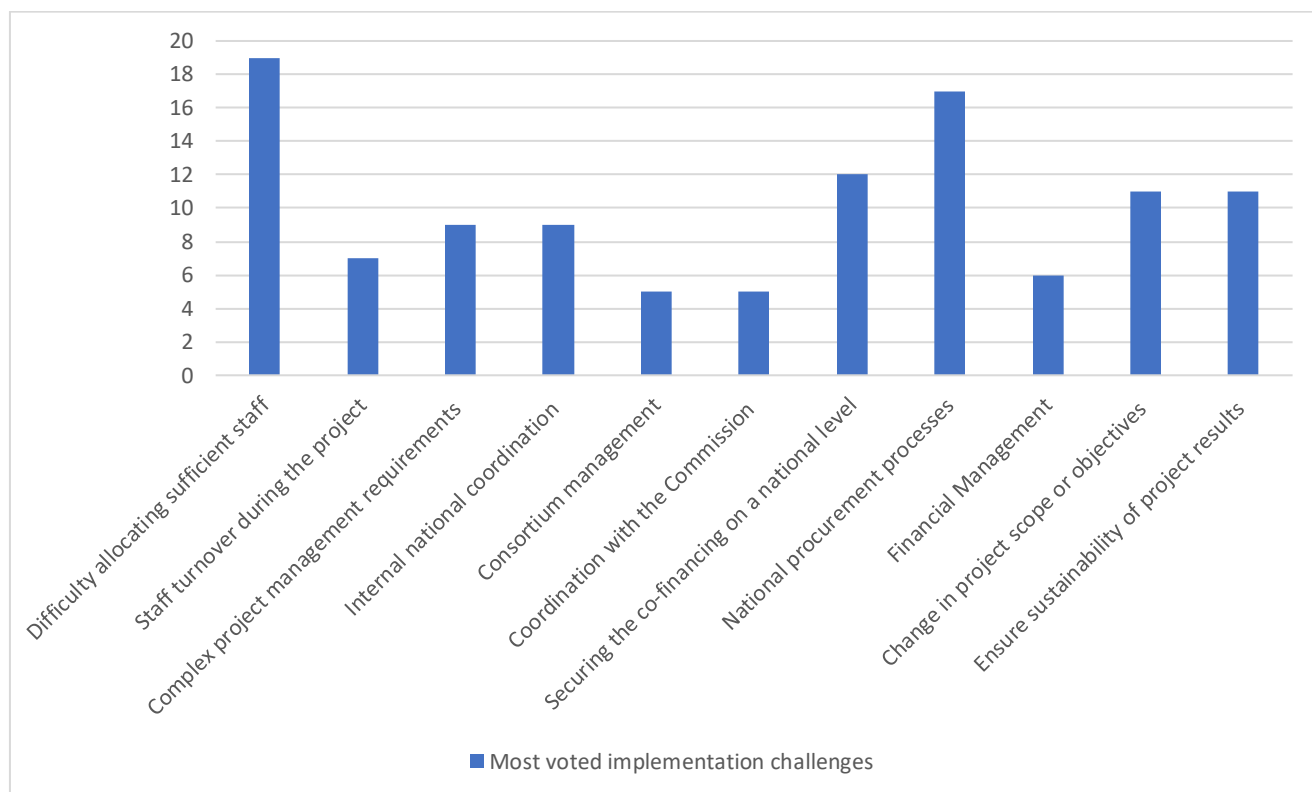


Figure 12 – Most voted implementation challenges

Reporting requirements, particularly financial reporting, were described as resource-intensive and difficult to reconcile with national accounting systems. As already highlighted during the drafting phase (Section 3.4), administrative complexity and budgetary rules, particularly regarding cost eligibility, overheads and VAT, continue to generate a significant workload during implementation. Differences in procurement rules across countries further complicate joint implementation in multinational consortia.

4.3. Financial requirements

Implementation challenges are consistent across contexts: staff shortages, administrative burden, procurement delays, and misalignment between EU and national financial rules. VAT costs and strict reporting requirements were repeatedly flagged as obstacles.

Belgian services noted unique issues, such as delayed payments during political stalemates and rigid hiring procedures preventing timely recruitment of project staff. International interviewees mentioned difficulties linked to differences in procurement rules, reporting cycles, and currencies when projects

involve multiple partners. A common challenge across the UCPM is ensuring continuity between the team drafting the application and those implementing it, as expertise often gets lost between phases.

Overall, the analysis confirms that technical and financial choices made during the drafting phase (Section 3.4) strongly condition the administrative burden and financial feasibility observed during implementation.

4.4. The Belgian case

Belgium shares most implementation challenges identified at EU level but faces additional constraints related to administrative rigidity and fragmented governance structures (Annex 2). While experienced staff develop informal coping mechanisms, these remain highly person-dependent and insufficiently institutionalized.

5. Long-term utilisation

Long-term utilization and sustainability emerge as the weakest phase of the EU project cycle. This section draws on questionnaire results (Annex 1), interviews (Annexes 2 and 3), and webinar voting outcomes (Annex 4).

Questionnaire data reveal that only a limited proportion of authorities systematically integrate project results into daily operations, maintain structured documentation systems, or use lessons learned to shape future initiatives. This confirms interview findings that EU projects are often treated as time-bound activities rather than strategic investments.

A key barrier to sustainability is the lack of formal mechanisms linking project outputs to national disaster risk management frameworks, such as risk assessments, preparedness plans, or capability development strategies. Without such anchoring, results remain isolated and underutilized once EU funding ends.

Staff turnover further undermines long-term utilization. In the absence of structured knowledge management systems, institutional memory is frequently lost, leading to duplication of efforts and reduced cumulative impact of EU funding.

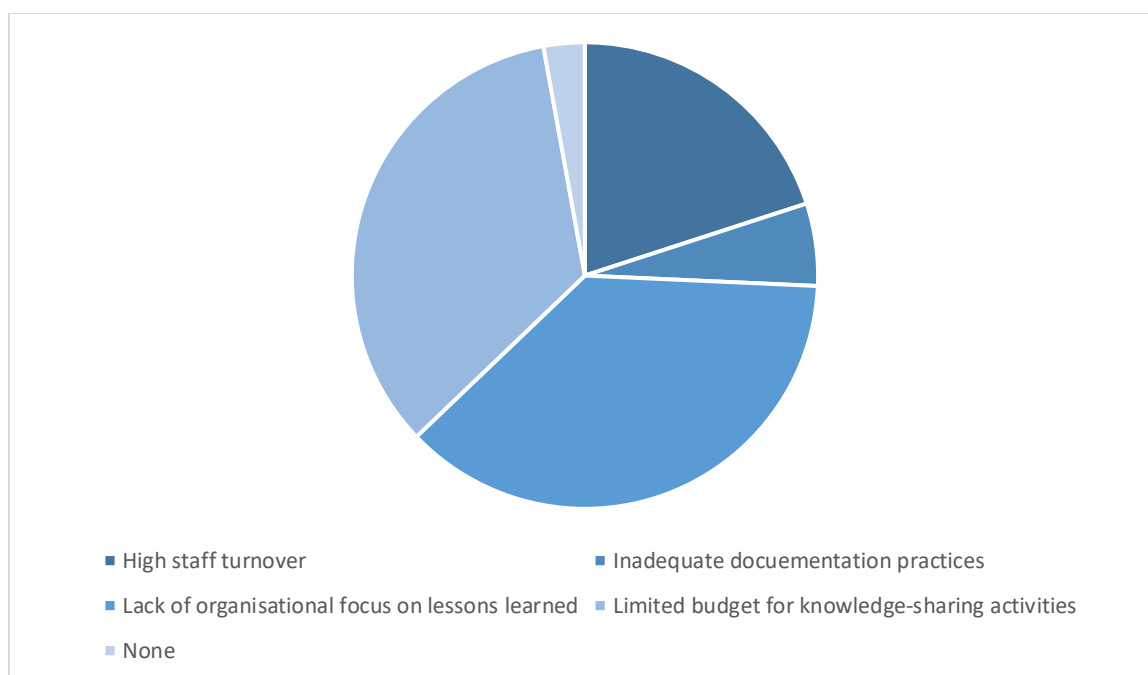


Figure 13 - Main barrier in retaining and utilising knowledge gained from projects

Good practices identified include early planning for post-project continuation, aligning EU projects with ongoing national initiatives, publishing outputs on shared platforms such as the UCPM Knowledge Network, and creating internal repositories or project databases. Webinar voting results strongly support these findings: ensuring staff continuity and preserving institutional memory received the highest level of support (76%), followed by linking project outcomes to policy processes (47%) (Annex 4).

From a lifecycle perspective, the analysis confirms that sustainability must be actively designed from the earliest phases of the project cycle. Weak strategic anchoring (Phase 1), ad hoc drafting (Phase 3), and discontinuous implementation (Phase 4) directly translate into poor long-term utilization.

Conclusion

This analysis of the full EU project cycle demonstrates that the challenges encountered by civil protection authorities in accessing, managing, and capitalising on EU funding are systemic and cumulative rather than isolated to individual projects or phases. Across all data sources, the questionnaire results, national and international interviews, and the PLUTUS webinar, a consistent picture emerges: authorities are highly motivated to engage in EU cooperation, but their capacity to do so effectively and sustainably is constrained by structural governance, resource, and administrative factors.

The first phase of the project cycle, identification of needs and priorities, plays a decisive role in shaping outcomes throughout the lifecycle. Where needs are defined primarily through centralised, policy-driven processes without systematic operational or scientific input, project ideas risk limited alignment with on-the-ground realities and emerging risks. Authorities that embed EU engagement within long-term strategic frameworks and combine top-down guidance with bottom-up consultation

demonstrate greater coherence, ownership, and continuity. Conversely, ad hoc engagement increases dependency on individual initiative and weakens institutional resilience.

These early choices directly influence the second phase, identification of funding opportunities. Fragmented responsibility for funding intelligence and heavy reliance on informal networks create unequal access to information and reinforce disparities between well-resourced and smaller or regional authorities. Difficulties in navigating the broader EU funding landscape beyond the UCPM further limit strategic options. Authorities with centralised monitoring structures and cross-programme expertise are consistently better positioned to match identified needs with suitable EU instruments.

The drafting phase constitutes a critical bottleneck where structural capacity gaps become particularly visible. Short deadlines, internal validation procedures, consortium coordination challenges, and high technical and financial complexity disproportionately affect authorities without dedicated EU funding expertise. These constraints not only reduce proposal quality and success rates, but also discourage future participation, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of under-engagement. Where drafting capacity is institutionalised and supported by clear processes, learning effects and staff sustainability are significantly stronger.

During implementation, many of the weaknesses originating in earlier phases materialise and intensify. Discontinuities between drafting and implementation teams, limited human-resource capacity, and rigid administrative frameworks contribute to delays, compliance risks, and conservative delivery choices. While experienced authorities develop coping mechanisms and adaptive practices, these often rely on individual expertise rather than formalised systems, increasing vulnerability to staff turnover.

The final phase, the long-term utilisation and sustainability, emerges as the weakest link in the project cycle. Although projects generally deliver their planned outputs, systematic integration of results into operational practice, training, and strategic planning remains limited. Sustainability is frequently undermined by staff turnover, weak knowledge management, and the absence of structured follow-up mechanisms once EU funding ends. The analysis clearly indicates that sustainability must be designed from the outset through strategic anchoring, continuity planning, and institutional learning, rather than assumed as an automatic outcome of project participation.

The Belgian case illustrates these dynamics particularly clearly. Belgium combines strong bottom-up initiative and flexibility with fragmented strategic coordination and uneven access to EU funding expertise. While this enables innovation, it also limits coherence and long-term impact. Institutionalising existing good practices, strengthening coordination mechanisms, and clarifying strategic priorities would significantly enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of Belgian participation in EU-funded disaster risk management projects.

Overall, the findings underline the necessity of a lifecycle approach to EU funding engagement. Improving performance in later phases of the project cycle depends fundamentally on investments made earlier, particularly in strategic planning, capacity building, and governance structures. Addressing these systemic issues would not only increase participation and success rates, but also

maximise the long-term value and EU added value of funded projects. This conclusion provides a robust analytical foundation for the recommendations set out in the following section.

Recommendations

Based on the combined findings of the questionnaire, national and international interviews, and the outcomes of the PLUTUS webinar, a clear set of recurring challenges and enabling factors emerges. While EU funding opportunities for disaster risk management are substantial, their effective use is constrained by structural, administrative, and capacity-related barriers. The recommendations below are designed to address these barriers in a pragmatic and feasible manner, building directly on the evidence collected throughout the project.

1. Establish Dedicated Personnel for EU-Funded Projects

The analysis clearly shows that authorities with dedicated personnel or units for EU-funded projects are significantly more effective at tracking opportunities, preparing applications, and managing ongoing projects. Such personnel accumulate expertise that would otherwise be lost when a project ends, ensuring continuity and reducing dependency on external actors. They are also better equipped to identify suitable partners, understand procedural nuances, and maintain regular communication with Commission services and national contact points of other Member States. Because many EU programmes allow staff costs to be covered through the project budget, investing in this capacity represents a cost-effective and sustainable solution.

2. Integrate EU Projects Into Strategic Planning and National DRM Initiatives

Rather than treating EU projects as stand-alone actions, they should be embedded within the broader strategic planning of the organisation. This could take several forms:

- Creating synergies between national and EU-funded initiatives. Projects developed in tandem with national programmes benefit from shared objectives, resources and continuity, increasing their long-term sustainability.
- Designing projects with a built-in follow-up component. Some projects can be deliberately structured to generate new projects.

3. Create an Internal Co-Financing Mechanism or Common Fund

A recurring challenge is the lack of available co-financing, particularly to cover VAT or own-contribution requirements. Creating an internal fund or common budget line, jointly managed by relevant directorates or services, could address this issue. A similar system already exists in some countries, where such a shared fund supports international projects. This approach not only facilitates financial management but also promotes awareness of existing projects and cross-service support for selected initiatives.

4. Address the VAT Challenge

VAT obligations often make projects financially difficult to manage. Some Member states have national VAT exemption mechanisms for EU-funded projects. Exploring similar measures nationally would ease administrative burdens and make EU funding more attractive and accessible.

5. Foster Interservice Cooperation and Knowledge Sharing

Disaster risk management is cross-sectoral by nature. The PLUTUS findings underline the need for improved communication between national actors on funding opportunities and project experiences. Creating incentives, such as co-financing fundings, will encourage services to collaborate more systematically. Regular coordination, shared platforms, and joint monitoring tools can reduce duplication and improve project proposal development.

6. Build a National Repository of EU-Funded DRM Projects

A centralised database documenting national participation in EU-funded projects would help avoid duplication, identify gaps, and highlight successful initiatives. It would also allow services to build on past experiences and develop projects in a more strategic and evidence-based manner as this is currently lacking. This repository would serve as a strategic tool for planning, stakeholder matching, and project proposal development.

7. Provide Training and Practical Guidance on EU Funding Procedures

Targeted training on project design, financial management, and administrative rules would significantly improve the quality of applications. Guidance tools, templates, checklists, FAQs, would reduce errors and lower the barrier to apply for services less familiar with EU funding. An e-learning platform could ensure broad, sustainable access.

8. Strengthen Cooperation with Academic and Research Institutions

Academic institutions bring methodological rigor, experience in EU projects, and access to research networks. Formalized cooperation can increase proposal competitiveness, support evidence-based design, and open opportunities in programmes such as Horizon Europe.

Concluding Remarks

The PLUTUS project offers clear evidence that EU funding is a strategic instrument for strengthening resilience which yet remains underutilized due to structural and administrative challenges shared across Member and Participating States.

The recommendations presented here are practical, feasible, and designed to strengthen national capacity while contributing to the broader objectives of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism. Implementing them will help ensure that civil protection authorities can fully benefit from the funding tools available, ultimately reinforcing prevention, preparedness, and response capabilities

Annexes:

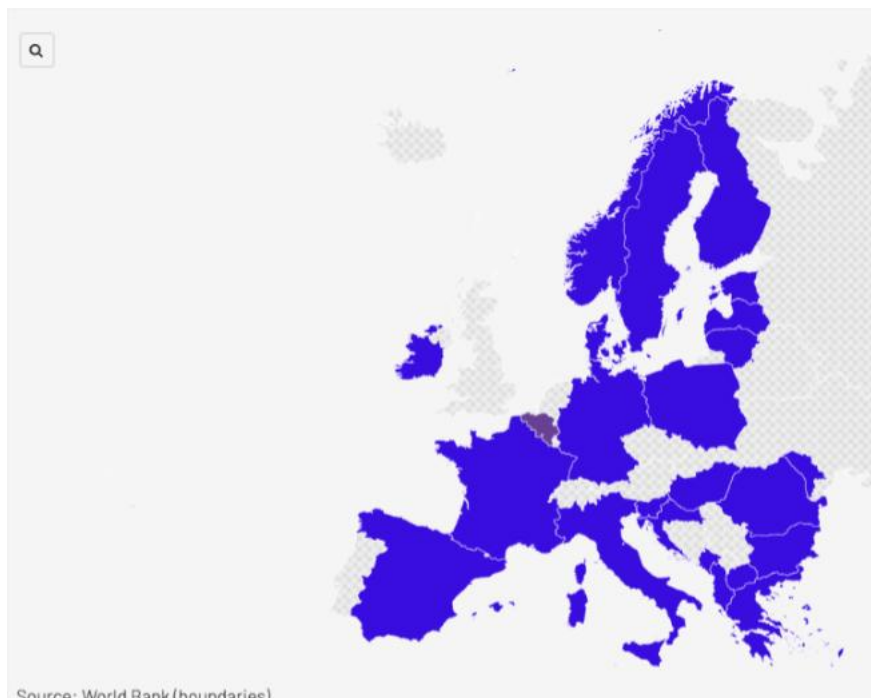
Annex 1. Questionnaire Analysis:

1. Introduction

PLUTUS is a project implemented by the Directorate-General for Civil Protection and co-funded by the European Commission under Track 1 of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM). The project aims to strengthen the capacity of UCPM Member and Participating States to access, manage, and implement EU-funded initiatives that support civil protection, disaster risk reduction (DRR), emergency preparedness, and resilience-building.

In support of this objective, PLUTUS developed and distributed a questionnaire to civil protection authorities across the UCPM network. The purpose of this questionnaire was to gather data on how national stakeholders define priorities, identify funding opportunities, coordinate internally and externally, and manage the challenges associated with EU project development and implementation.

A total of 22 out of 37 invited countries completed the questionnaire. This report presents a synthesis of the responses, highlighting both quantitative trends (based on the responses to structured questions) and qualitative insights (based on open-text inputs). The analysis reveals key institutional practices, recurring challenges, and potential areas for improvement in how UCPM States engage with EU funding mechanisms.



1. Map of countries that filled out the questionnaire

2. Analysis of the responses to the questionnaire

In this section, the main trends that emerged from the questionnaire are described, with both the questions and our analysis following roughly the project cycle. A consolidated summary of all questionnaire responses can be found in the annex to this document.

A. Identification of own needs and priorities

Strategic Planning and identification of needs

When asked whether they operate with predefined long-term priorities for EU projects, only 11 out of 22 organisations (50%) answered yes. Nine stated they do not work with fixed priorities, and one selected “Other,” pointing to ad hoc or informal planning methods. This result reveals a divide: half of the responding authorities approach EU funding strategically, while the other half act when an opportunity arises, rather than as part of a long-term roadmap.

Nevertheless, almost all respondents (21 out of 22 respondents) cited national priorities as a key influence. This was followed by previous project outcomes and lessons learned (selected by 18 authorities), and risk assessments (15). In contrast, only 7 organisations considered academic or research inputs, and just 10 consulted external stakeholders in a structured way.

These figures suggest that while civil protection authorities largely align with their national strategies, many do not yet integrate scientific data or internal and comprehensive consultation into their planning.

Some respondents also mentioned that dialogue with their counterparts across the EU had an influence on their priorities, since it helped to identify the most relevant challenges affecting multiple Member States, making it worth it to pursue funding to address those challenges. Additional factors that were named as influencing the priorities, were legislative changes that need implementation and wear and tear of equipment.

Personnel Involvement

On the question of who is involved in identifying project needs, almost all respondents (95%) reported the involvement of national ministries or directorates. About 73% also cited civil protection agencies, and 59% included regional or local authorities. However, only 10 respondents said that emergency responders play a role, and just one respondent involved the private sector.

This data indicates a generally centralised, top-down approach to project definition. The low inclusion of operational actors and non-government stakeholders could mean a missed opportunity to integrate diverse perspectives, especially given the complex, cross-sectoral nature of disaster resilience. Despite these results, frequent consultations with stakeholders was also frequently mentioned in the comments as a good practice. A wide variety of actors was specifically mentioned including state institutions, state administration bodies, scientific institutions, citizen associations, variety of

operational units, NGOs, voluntary organisations, research/academic institutions and the private sector. For some these consultations may also take the form of special surveys, structured consultations, joint assessment or thematic workshops to facilitate this process. The importance of including the staff that will be responsible for drafting and implementing the projects in these discussions was also mentioned as a good practice. This enables them to have an overview of both the needs and the related project ideas that are developed within the organisation, which helps them to identify possible links and synergies with other projects.

B. Identification of funding opportunities

Among the 22 respondents, 13 indicated that their national civil protection authority has staff specifically dedicated to monitoring the different funding opportunities. Another nine reported that this task is handled on an ad-hoc basis, not by dedicated personnel. A smaller group of five stated that their ministry has a separate unit tasked with this responsibility. Several responses included a combination of these options. This is most likely due to the input from different departments contributing to the questionnaire or the fragmented nature of how funding is tracked across different levels and types of financing.

For instance, some authorities explained that the unit responsible for disaster risk management funding focuses exclusively on certain sources, such as structural funds like the Cohesion Fund, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or larger funds such as the Just Transition Fund. Meanwhile, funding opportunities related to the Union Civil Protection Mechanism are often monitored directly by experts on an ad-hoc basis. A number of respondents added that they are actively working towards establishing a more centralised and specialised structure, recognising that the current ad hoc approach is neither sustainable in the long term nor effective in leveraging available resources.

Civil Protection Authorities described several methods for staying informed about funding opportunities. Most rely on official sources, such as email, notifications while others use proactive online research or informal networks. Although the latter two were cited slightly less frequently, many emphasised that they use all available options and ways in parallel to ensure complete coverage.

C. Preparation of applications

The writing of applications is usually the primary task of project managers or coordinators (73% of responses). Civil protection experts are also often asked to be involved (45%), particularly to fill specific knowledge gaps within the writing team and contribute their expertise. Some respondents indicated that they have a dedicated grant team (32%), tasked with drafting the applications. In a minority of cases senior management holds the main responsibility for the writing (18%).

Several tools can facilitate the application-writing process, e.g. internal workshops, training sessions, and dedicated internal webpages providing guidance regarding the procedures. Some civil protection

authorities outsource the writing of applications, relying on external expertise to create new project proposals.

D. Implementation of projects

Use of EU Funding Instruments

One of the most critical sections of the questionnaire examined which EU funding programmes have been used by national authorities. The responses reveal both a concentration of usage around the most used programmes and a marked underutilisation of others.

The INTERREG programme was the most widely used, with 15 out of 22 respondents (68%) reporting participation. UCPM Track 1 followed closely, used by 14 respondents (64%), and UCPM KAPP by 11 respondents (50%). Horizon Europe was used by 12 respondents (55%), and the European Regional Development Fund/Cohesion Fund by 9 respondents (41%).

In contrast, UCPM TAFF had been accessed by only 5 respondents (23%), and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) by 6 respondents (27%). The European Social Fund (+) was used by just 3 respondents (14%), EU4Health by only 1 respondent (5%), and Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds by none.

This skewed usage pattern suggests that most authorities rely on a small cluster of well-known programmes while leaving a significant number of potentially relevant instruments largely unused. The implications are twofold: many potential projects may go unfunded due to low awareness or limited institutional readiness, and broader funding sources relevant to health, agriculture, or climate adaptation remain functionally inaccessible to civil protection actors.

Complexity and Administrative Burden

Respondents were asked to rate both the application complexity and implementation difficulty of various programmes on a scale of 1 (not complex/demanding) to 5 (very complex/demanding).

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) was ranked the highest in both categories, with an average complexity score of 4.20 and implementation difficulty of 4.25, despite being used by only 5 countries. Similarly, Horizon Europe was considered complex (3.9) and moderately demanding to implement (3.3). Even INTERREG, a widely used instrument, scored 3.67 on both dimensions.

By contrast, UCPM KAPP, which saw high uptake, was rated more accessible (3.15 for complexity, 3.00 for difficulty). This correlation between perceived simplicity and actual use suggests that complexity is a direct barrier to entry, especially for smaller agencies with limited administrative or technical support.

In the case of TAFF, used by only 6 organisations, the average application complexity score was 3.83, despite its relatively low implementation burden (2.60). This may reflect a perception problem: even programmes with modest demands post-award are discouraging applicants up front.

The survey results also show that the number of respondents who evaluated the complexity or implementation requirements of the different funding programmes does not always match the number who reported having used them. In some cases, such as for KAPP and TAFF, there are respondents who provided an evaluation despite not having indicated that they had made use of these funds. This may be due to a broad interpretation of the question, prior experience outside the specific context referred to in question 14, or an assessment based on general perception rather than actual use. Conversely, some funds have fewer evaluations than declared users, as is the case for INTERREG, Horizon Europe, or the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which could indicate that some respondents skipped the questions or did not recall the procedures well enough to rate them. Finally, for funds with no reported use, such as the Common Agricultural Policy Funds, it is unsurprising that no evaluations were provided. These discrepancies make interpretation more difficult, as the averages or trends observed in complexity or requirements do not necessarily reflect the actual experience of the declared users only.

Implementation Challenges

The challenges during implementation reflect a near-universal strain on institutional capacity. When asked about the most frequent problems:

- 86% (19 respondents) cited difficulties allocating staff.
- 77% (17) highlighted burdens from procurement and financial management.
- 55% (12) reported challenges with national co-financing.
- 50% (11) noted poor internal coordination.
- 10 organisations (45%) lacked trained or experienced project staff.

While political support was less frequently cited (only 5 mentions), these figures clearly show that the primary implementation issues are administrative and human-resource related, not political. Many organisations simply lack the systems, staff, or skills to manage multi-year EU projects within existing institutional constraints.

Stakeholder communication

External stakeholder communication is done through multiple channels and combinations of different tools. E-mail updates remain the most widely used method, used by 90% of respondents. Official project meetings, as well as public events and workshops, are equally popular, each used by 81% of respondents. Only slightly less common are project websites or dedicated portals, social media platforms, and online collaboration platforms. Newsletters are the least frequently used tool (40% of respondents reported to have used them).

The main challenges related to stakeholder communication are primarily linked to a lack of staff and insufficient stakeholder engagement. Other issues, such as language or cultural barriers, technical difficulties, and conflicting stakeholder priorities, were considered far less significant.

To address some of these challenges, some respondents emphasised that stakeholder communication can be included as a dedicated work package within a project, ensuring thorough reflection on

communication strategies. It was also suggested that using plain language and using already established fora in different sectors can serve as effective entry points for facilitating stakeholder communication.

E. Sustainable use of funding

Project Sustainability and Learning

The final section of the questionnaire focused on what happens after a project ends. The responses reveal a concerning picture:

- Only 12 respondents (55%) said project results are systematically integrated into their daily operations.
- Just 7 (32%) had a structured system for documentation or knowledge sharing.
- Only 4 organisations (18%) reported using lessons learned to shape future projects.

In other words, despite significant investment in project-based action, most civil protection authorities have no structured approach to ensure continuity or institutional learning. Projects risk becoming isolated experiences rather than stepping stones for system-wide improvement.

3. Final Observations

The data from the PLUTUS questionnaire reveal a consistent pattern: while there is clear commitment and effort to engage with EU funding, capacity and coordination vary significantly between organisations. Authorities tend to focus on simpler and better-known funding programmes, often leaving broader or more complex EU instruments underutilised.

Staffing constraints, procedural burdens, and the lack of institutionalised structures for funding coordination limit deeper engagement with available funds. The mismatch between declared fund usage and the number of evaluations for complexity and implementation further highlights challenges in experience sharing and institutional memory.

Moreover, the predominance of centralised, top-down planning approaches and limited inclusion of operational or external stakeholders may hinder the development of fully informed and resilient project strategies.

Overall, the analysis underscores that while many organisations are actively seeking funding opportunities, systemic barriers related to administrative complexity, capacity, and knowledge management remain significant obstacles to fully leveraging the EU funding landscape for civil protection

4. Conclusion and follow up

This analysis, together with the responses collected from the questionnaires, will be used alongside the interviews in the final project report. Both sources of information will contribute to shaping the overall findings, supporting the conclusions, and providing a comprehensive understanding of the project outcomes.

5. Annex

Consolidated answer to the questionnaire:

This section contains a summary overview of all the responses we received to the questionnaire shared with UCPM member and Participating States. To preserve the anonymity of the services and authorities that replied, certain parts of their answers have been redacted (blacked out). For greater readability, the numbers indicating the response count for each item have been highlighted in yellow.

1. Which UCPM Member States or Participating States do you represent? N/A

2. Does your organisation work with pre-defined annual or multi-annual priorities for new EU projects?

- Yes **11**
- No **9**
- Other (Please specify) **1**

1. The priorities are generally defined and aligned with the priorities in the strategic document Resolution on the national programme of protection against natural and other disasters, adopted by the national government and the national assembly (currently for the period 2024-20230). The thematic and partly also geographical priorities for the implementation of EU funded projects were also defined in a separate document and signed by the respective minister. To the extent possible, we also follow the foreign policy priorities and strategic documents of the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs.
2. A structural approach to external funding sources is under development in the Ministry of the Interior. As a result, is expected to build a national strategy for relevant projects based on the expected outcomes and impacts which support for example national and regional implementation of the governmental and ministerial strategies.
3. Both options

4. [redacted] advised “yes” to this question. [redacted]
[redacted] indicated “no” to this question while [redacted]
[redacted] indicated “Other”.

[redacted] works with other national competent authorities in Europe to identified shared priorities for EU projects which they then address by forming multi-MS consortia.

3. What elements are considered when setting priorities and needs for new EU projects in your organisation? Please select all that apply.

- National priorities 21
- Risk assessments 15
- Previous project outcomes and lessons learned 18
- Stakeholder consultations 10
- Political priorities 11
- Research and academic recommendations 7
- None
- Other (Please specify): 3
 - 1. Financial and HR resources
 - 2. Scientific organisations
 - 3. Wear and tear of the equipment
 - 4. Priorities in strategies of organisation, sector, ministry
 - 5. [redacted] also advised that the priorities are also informed by significant legislative changes which require implementation and challenges that have been identified from a regulatory perspective (e.g. addressing medicines shortages).

4. Which actors or stakeholders are involved in the process of identifying these needs?

- National government authorities (ministries, DG) 21
- Regional or local government agencies 13
- Civil Protection organizations 16
- Emergency response teams (e.g., firefighters, medical responders) 10
- Private sector 1



Others (Please Specify)

1. Based on the Comprehensive Security model approach also (applied) research is strongly engaged with the authorities, NGOs and voluntary organisations and private sector.
2. NGO (██████████ Red Cross)
3. National Health and Public Health Services/Competent Authorities and ██████████
4. We involve also universities, research centres, civil protection competence centres and others

5. What would you consider being good practices your organisation has regarding the identification of needs and priorities? (Please explain)

1. The priorities are set up in National Plans for a period of 5 years
2. Identification of country needs and priorities in the field of civil protection is ultimately supported and approved by the Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction of ██████████, as the national priority for the current year. The ██████████, a forum and coordination mechanism for various stakeholders who implement disaster risk reduction and management into sectoral policies, composed of all relevant state institutions, state administration bodies, scientific institutions, citizen associations and other institutions, discuss prevention and preparedness actions in ██████████ in order to strengthen resilience.
3. A good practice within the organization involves regular meetings with stakeholders interested in potential investments in emergency management capabilities. These meetings include participants from intervention and management teams, medical personnel, ██████████ volunteers, and auxiliary staff or other actors involved in the management of emergency situations. Additionally, experts in management of projects with external funding participate in these discussions, extracting the priorities and needs that may be eligible for funding. These experts are part of a dedicated service (*Project Management Unit*), established at the level of our organization, to manage all externally funded projects in the field of emergency situations. Most important and as a best practice, they are also the ones responsible for drafting project proposals aimed at securing funding. Therefore, the person responsible for completing the funding application is highly familiar with the discussions surrounding identified needs, their overall context, and the circumstances that led to them, which significantly increases the chances of success in the application process.

Moreover, the project management experts have an overall view of other projects carried out at the organization level and within the coordinating institutions, which provides a broader perspective on funding tools and helps link identified needs with those addressed in other projects. This approach contributes to the development of a comprehensive and sustainable system of fundable projects.

4. Documented needs (RVA analysis) – early involvement – stakeholder involvement. Follow guidelines for Instructions for Official Studies and Reports.

5. The basis for need prioritization of our institution is the Action Plan 2023-2027 of the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (NDRRS) 2023-2030. This Action Plan is split annually into matrix of objectives linked with budgetary flow of financing.

The Matrix of objectives is also integrated into the macro directive of Nation Civil Protection System (along with other institutions and structures).

6. Internal and inter-institutional cooperation and coordination
7. Consultation with relevant stakeholders (for specific call for tenders), identification of needs, project development and consortium building prior the actual tender publication. Projects support/complement each other in enhancing national capacities from different aspects and thematic priorities (research, training, equipment, procedures), also with a view that these capacities would be deployed within UCPM.
8. Good practices for a Fire and Rescue Department (FRD) in identifying needs and priorities are centered around safety, efficiency, community impact, and alignment with organizational goals. FRD involves key personnel: Firefighters, rescue teams, administrative staff, and leadership who contribute to the needs assessment. FRD Prioritizes needs that address high-risk scenarios or life-critical situations, such as improving response times, enhancing firefighter safety, or upgrading outdated equipment.
9. Engaging all relevant stakeholders give the best overview and ensures the impact later, when the project produced outcomes. Stakeholders in the [REDACTED] context are: authorities, NGOs and voluntary organisations, research academic and applying, private sector. If needed also educational actors are engaged.
10. Consultations on the demand for equipment and training devices are conducted by substantive offices with the [REDACTED] Headquarters of the State Fire Service (stakeholders) based on legal acts, i.e. the regulation of the Ministry of Interior and Administration of 20 June 2007 „on the list of products used to ensure public safety or protect health, life and property, as well as the principles of issuing approvals for use of these products”, as well as internal regulations in the organizational units of the State Fire Service, aimed at unifying primarily the types of fire trucks and their minimum required equipment. The basis of the standardization system was defined in the document „Guidelines for the standardization of fire trucks and other means of transport of the State Fire Service”, approved on April 14, 2011 by the Chief Commander of the State Fire Service.
11. As well as collecting and using statistics, we also carry out special surveys (research work) to measure the situation and these could be an identification for the project applications.
12. Stakeholders Engagement, Cross-Sector Collaboration, Risk Assessment, EU and National Policy Alignment, Long-Term Planning, Decision Making Channels, Participation Platforms for feedbacks - initiatives, Ongoing Evaluation, Lessons Learned, Capacity Building, Cooperation and Collaboration with neighboring and EU countries
13. Staff/ structural units of organisation are involved in the process of identification of needs and priorities
14. Adopting the future project priorities to the current civil protection landscape including a forecast on the future developments.
15. [REDACTED] Unit identified obvious synergies between new project and previous/existing projects. Identification of the correct unit/area/personnel to participate in the project.

██████████ advised that there can be short deadlines for expressing interest and submitting applications. They also noted the following:

Multiple competing priorities. No dedicated resources to participate in EU project.

██████████ believe that entering into dialogue with their counterparts across Europe is very beneficial in terms of identifying the most significant challenges affecting multiple MSs and securing funding to address those challenges.

16. Stakeholder cooperation: Our organization fosters collaboration among relevant stakeholders to gain a comprehensive understanding of priorities. This approach ensures that project proposals are financially sound, informed by different perspectives, and aligned with realistic objectives as well as an ongoing focus on the dissemination of results among stakeholders and end-users. Contextual analysis: We conduct an in-depth analysis of the context and needs before submitting proposals for funding. This ensures that proposed projects address gaps and are tailored to the specific circumstances.
17. One of our key good practices in identifying needs and priorities is the consistent use of a multi-stakeholder, evidence-based approach. We engage relevant actors at national and local levels - such as civil protection authorities, the National Fire Brigade, Ministries (Health, Culture, Cohesion, etc.) and technical experts - through structured consultations, joint assessments, and thematic workshops. This allows us to capture diverse perspectives and ensure that priorities reflect both operational realities and strategic goals.

Another important aspect is our emphasis on aligning needs assessments with existing national and international frameworks and capacities, which helps ensure coherence and facilitates integration into broader risk management and policy processes. We also regularly review lessons learned from past emergencies and training activities to adjust our priorities and better anticipate emerging challenges.

18. The government has a key role in addressing challenges raised across all stages of the disaster risk management cycle, including prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. In the beginning of 2023 a National Disaster Risk Profile (NDRP) has been adopted by the Council of Ministers. According the NDRP 14 risks were identified as significant through examination of previous disasters and soliciting of expert opinion.

To raise the public awareness of the main risks of the NDRP, a Public Awareness Plan (PAP) has been developed under the Reimbursable Advisory Services Agreement on Accelerating Resilience to Disaster Risks between the Ministry of Interior of t ██████████ and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. One of the specific objectives of PAP is to contribute for the increasing of readiness for action of the citizens. According to PAP a specific target groups and sub-groups has been identified with a respective horizontal investments priorities for three periods – 2025, 2030, 2040.

6. What would you consider being a challenge your organization has regarding the identification of needs and priorities? (Please explain)

1. Sometimes the organization's priorities change, according to the political priorities
2. It is complicated to find other calls of proposals outside the UCPM
3. None so far

4. Most of the staff is very busy with the daily tasks and this requires extra time for reflection and discussion.
5. The constraints of limited time for long, productive periodic meetings, the absence of key stakeholders in these discussions (such as field personnel for whom solutions are being sought to enhance operational efficiency), the presence of multiple competing needs, all prioritized, coupled with restricted funding sources and budget, and the lack of a clear definition of the needs or appropriate solutions to address them.
6. Due to the size of the State authority it can be difficult to identify priorities in framework of the call and rapidly changing priorities.
7. Prioritization btw sectors – potential for outcome/impact and prioritization btw prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.
8. The main challenge is data standardization and the lack of reporting from central structures such as line ministries or other agencies that exercise functions related to disaster risk management and civil protection.
9. Budget
10. Lack of human resources, lack of taking into account scientific recommendations. More frequent disaster, demanding different prioritisation
11. There is a lack of project based thinking in our organisation. The ideal path would be/ needs, project identification, proposal, product
12. Fire and Rescue Departments (FRDs) face several challenges in identifying needs and priorities for projects. These challenges often stem from the complex and dynamic nature of their responsibilities, limited resources, and the diversity of stakeholders they serve. Budget limitations: Insufficient funding often forces FRDs to make difficult choices between competing priorities, such as equipment upgrades, staffing, or training. Limited personnel: Staffing shortages can affect the ability to conduct thorough needs assessments or dedicate time to project planning. Aging infrastructure: Maintaining and upgrading old equipment and facilities competes for resources with new initiatives.
13. Challenge is to build a reliable overview, where the national priorities have been taken in consideration.
14. Determining the state of wear and tear of fire trucks / vehicles and setting priorities for the need to replace them with new ones (due to insufficient funding in terms of reported needs).
15. Environmental risks are increasing in both time and space due to global climate change, which is why it is necessary to increase the Rescue Board's ability to respond to forest and landscape fires and to replenish the stock of rescue equipment scattered in the deteriorating security environment in order to adapt to climate change. Needs and priorities sometimes change too often (political situation, international situation, security situation, etc.) and it is not easy to reconcile them with the application and strategic documents.
16. Climate Crisis, Unpredictable Events, Geopolitical Dynamics, Effective Resource Management, Maximizing Collaboration and exploitation of opportunities with/by Other Stakeholders, Countries, Organizations (included EU)
17. Needs / priorities identified by organisation should be approved by the ministry/ government
18. In the [REDACTED] sometimes local or regional priorities couldn't be taken up, as they were not considered to create an EU added value.

19. ██████ advised challenges include siloed comms between units and view that EU work is someone else responsibility. ██████ advised that the main challenge is not necessarily identifying the needs and priorities but being able to dedicate resources to address these separately from their normal day-to-day work.
20. A challenge lies in effectively connecting identified needs to specific funding opportunities. Additionally, allocating the necessary resources including human resources to develop well-informed and competitive funding applications can be challenging, particularly when balancing existing workloads.
21. Working with a long-term perspective shared with a wide number of stakeholders

One of the main challenges our organization faces in identifying needs and priorities is ensuring consistency and coordination across different levels of governance and sectors, particularly in alignment with EU policies. While we actively promote a multi-stakeholder approach, the diversity of mandates, capacities, and agendas among institutions can sometimes make it difficult to establish a shared understanding of priorities. At the same time, combining ordinary institutional activities with project-based initiatives can be particularly complex - especially when emergencies arise or when other national priorities need to be addressed.

Additionally, balancing the urgency of action with the need for accuracy and inclusiveness remains an ongoing challenge. Strengthening mechanisms for early engagement and data-sharing continues to be a key priority for us in addressing this issue.

22. N/A

7. Once your priorities are identified, do you follow a specific process before searching for appropriate funding opportunities? (Budget identification, hierarchical approval, etc)

1. Budget identification, and then looking for the best offers on equipment and vehicles
2. Long hierarchical approval, budget estimation with several services
3. Support and approval by the Rescue and Protection Directorate and Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction ██████
4. We estimate the costs for each identified priority, ensuring that we have a clear understanding of the financial requirements. If multiple priorities are identified, we carry out a detailed analysis to ensure that the identified priorities align with the organization's overall objectives and can be effectively addressed with available resources. Once the process is complete, the priorities and associated budgets are submitted for hierarchical approval.
5. Yes
6. Must be approved at Director level and include budget and funding (opportunities).
7. Yes, this process is mostly linked with Midterm Budget Planning, which is an internal cycle developed through a hierarchical approval based on the Guidelines of Ministry of Finance. Then other funding opportunities are identified through stakeholders and donor negotiations.
8. Yes

9. Sector specific proposal/support for needs/priority identification is needed first then hierarchical approval comes.
10. Once priorities are identified, Fire and Rescue Departments (FRDs) typically follow a structured process before searching for appropriate funding opportunities. This process ensures alignment with organizational goals, resource availability, and regulatory requirements.
11. Not yet, but the structure is under development in the Department for Rescue Services in the Ministry of the Interior.
12. We take part in projects implemented in a non-competitive manner, thus reporting the need for the allocation amount, submitting a fiche and then an application for funding. Throughout this time we cooperate with the institution responsible for managing a given priority.
13. Complex project management requirements, decision by the responsible authority. Difficulties in securing co-funding at national level and in scheduling time for procurement processes and contract management, as well as financial management and audit.
14. Climate Crisis, Unpredictable Events, Geopolitical Dynamics, Effective Resource Management, Maximizing Collaboration and exploitation of opportunities with/by Other Stakeholders, Countries, Organizations (included EU)
15. Definition of main activities, stakeholders to be involved, budget identification, hierarchical approval
16. No
17. In the past, [REDACTED] have identified the funding opportunities first and assigned priorities when it is agreed that this Unit should sign up. Participation is undertaken only if the project aligns with national priorities.
18. Our organization employs two main approaches:

Funding-driven approach: This approach starts with the identification of a relevant funding opportunity. From this a project proposal is developed to correlate with the funding opportunity. This includes creating a business case which will be submitted to the agency's management for approval.

Need-driven approach: When a specific need is identified, potential funding opportunities are explored to address it. The project description and budget (including the organization's own financial contribution) also need approval from executive board.
19. In general terms, the procedure foresees the following steps: identification of priorities > identification of possible financial sources > identification of possible partners > partnership building > initial draft and budget > hierarchical approval > final drafting and submission

Once priorities are identified, we follow a structured process that includes a review of both national and international funding opportunities. We assess available national funding mechanisms to support the implementation of activities that align with our strategic goals. At the same time, depending on the focus of the initiative - especially when it has implications or potential impact at the European level - we actively explore opportunities under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM).

Using UCPM funding not only allows us to secure financial resources but also provides a stronger reference framework for the initiative, enhancing its visibility, alignment with EU priorities, and potential for multi-country cooperation. This dual approach helps ensure that the activities we design are both relevant and sustainable and allow for a consistent share of experiences and knowledge.

20. In [REDACTED] has been established a committee that plays key role to search an opportunities for financing ideas and further elaboration and participation in project proposals.

8. Who is responsible within your organisation for tracking and identifying EU funding possibilities?

- A specialized service on the ministry level 5
- Dedicated personnel within the National Civil Protection Authority 13
- No one specifically; it is done on an ad-hoc basis 9
- Other (Please specify):

1. A specialized service within the National Civil Protection Authority
2. In our case it is hard to give a clear answer. On the one hand in the National DG for Disaster Management there is a dedicated department, a department for project coordination, which deals with EU funded projects: mainly funded from the Cohesion Fund, ERDF, Just Transition Fund. Disaster management is concerned in the Environment and Energy Efficiency Operational Programme. The staff involved in the tracking, coordination, implementation of these projects are not really involved in UCPM funding projects.

On the other hand projects in the UCPM domain are tracked, identified by colleagues of the Department for International Relations mostly on an ad hoc basis. In the application, implementation and financial reporting phase the dedicated project department may contribute.

3. The system is being build, it will consist of the Ministry, national level authorities. Now there still is too much of ad hoc -action.
4. A specialized service dealing with fundraising
5. For structural funds, there is a specialised service at the level of the ministry (different ministry, depending on the foundation) that is responsible for mapping opportunities and involving authorities and others for mapping needs. Support funded under DGs (e.g. DG ECHO) could mostly be tracked at expert level and there is no specific authority for tracking support at national level. The information of application is known, if needed the support letter from civil protection agency (in [REDACTED])
6. Development and International Affairs Department of [REDACTED]
7. [REDACTED] advised that a specialised unit in the Department of Health inform them of upcoming projects that may align with their mandate. [REDACTED] review relevant funding calls (e.g.

Horizon, EU4Health, IHI) as they are published and they also receive queries re possible funding opportunities from the relevant National Contact Points for each funding programme.

9. How are EU funding opportunities identified?

- Official information 21
- Research on EU platforms 17
- Informal networking 12
- Other (Please specify): 4

1. Proposal received by e-mail from other entities
2. Macro-region cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region is a good source, where information is shared but also common projects are prepared actively.
3. Searching Polish websites about funds
4. By other organizations for supporting them in new projects (as partners, with advisory role, end user role etc)
5. █████ advised that a specialised unit in the Department of Health inform them of upcoming projects that may align with their mandate. They may also become aware through other networks such as ECDC surveillance networks. █████ advised that these are also highlighted and discussed within the European regulatory networks in which they operate.

10. What challenges do you face in staying informed about relevant EU funding opportunities?

1. Outside the scope of the UCPM, it is complicated to find other calls of proposals.
2. None so far
3. The amount of information regarding funding opportunities / calls for proposals can be overwhelming. Identifying the relevant ones that aligns with specific needs requires significant time and effort.
4. The calls are not aligned with the descriptions in the work program which limit a longer planning.
5. We are well informed
6. Limited human resources and lack of specialised staff
7. /
8. EU funding opportunities are spread across different DGs, and funds and are therefore hard to track. A joint regularly updated overview of funding opportunities for civil protection (also including for example Cohesion funds) would be beneficial.
9. None – we consider the EU Tender Portal, and ECHO distribution of funding possibilities efficient.
10. -
11. Since the national structure to for working in projects is only under construction, the challenge is to have an overview to the projects as well as to see their possible linkages between them. That might lead to overlapping projects or even gaps between the contents.

12. Obtaining assurance of the amount of allocation of funds, determining the level of co-financing from EU funds in order to determine the budget and feasibility of purchasing equipment.
13. N/A
14. Increased workload of involved staff, divers funding programs (e.g., Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, UCPM grants), unclear prioritization
15. No Specific challenges to be mentioned
16. Too many opportunities with too many possibilities
17. ██████ advised that challenge as lack of a centralised EU service to identify calls – each DG/programme area has their own calls. There have been times where calls are not where you would think they should be. Titles of calls are not clear/too long winded which risks non participation. ██████ advised that the challenge is the volume of different opportunities.
18. Without personnel dedicated to tracking and identifying EU funding possibilities, awareness of specific calls can reach relevant entities too late.
19. We do not experience specific challenges
20. No challenges have been identified at this time regarding staying informed about relevant EU funding opportunities

11. Do you have any good practices or tools in place to stay informed in a timely manner about relevant funding opportunities that align with your needs?

1. We have good cooperation with our partners who informs us on the relevant opportunities
2. Continuous presence at all meetings, committees as well as exchange of information with colleagues from the region.
3. We have a dedicated team responsible for monitoring the funding opportunities and we are also subscribed to various alerts and newsletters such as the EU Funding & Tender Portal, national platforms / websites that aggregate the EU funding opportunities.

On the other hand, for some funding opportunities we receive guidance through the collaboration with national agencies / national contact points, which also keep us informed about calls that are specifically targeted to our sector/domain.

4. Yes
5. Yes
6. No, we don't have a specific tool or instrument, rather than a standard database recording the initiatives on process and search within the focus of topics identified as institutional priorities i.e capacity building, operational support etc.
7. Direct communication with the EU institutions, but also shared information by different stakeholders that have experience with EU funding.
8. As regards the UCPM – KAPP, the best way is to be informed through written announcements from the Commission to the CPC members; information days are also useful. On national level, through permanent contacts with the Managing Authorities (i.e. for Interreg programmes).
9. -

10. -
11. Not a good one yet. therefore we share information in our national RDI network as well as in the national Sendai Network and the Baltic Sea Region cooperation network.
12. Sign up for the Newsletter to receive information about training, programs and information about changes in regulations, as well as a daily review of fund websites.
13. NO
14. Funding calendar, frequent visits to EU portals and Newsletters, Strategic Partnerships, Workshops and Seminars, Periodicity of new proposals
15. Internal planning, tasks and document management system, cooperation with ministry/ other organisations, networking
16. No
17. ██████ advised that good networking contacts means that when a relevant project is known then it is shared. ██████ advised that there is no specific processes. ██████ advised that they subscribe to updates from websites and participating in relevant discussions with the European regulatory networks in which we operate.
18. Information about funding opportunities is shared on ad hoc basis e.g. by circulating the quarterly UCPKN newsletters as well as direct letters from the Commission, participating and reporting back from meetings and presentations organised by the EU-commission (as the two previous DRM funding workshops) as well as project leads. We also relay on information provided by our collaborators in our networks.
19. We currently perform this activity based on internal expertise and networking
20. At this stage, there is no specific mechanism regulated

12. Has your organisation recently implemented any changes to facilitate the writing of project proposals? (if yes, please elaborate)

1. Not yet
2. No
3. We have unlocked documents –sharing tools (such as Google Drive), which allow us to work together in real time and track progress (the use of online tools was restricted as a result of the institution's specific nature). This year, we plan to organize internal workshops and training sessions on proposal writing and funding regulations, focusing on practices and lessons learned.
4. Yes, we have established detailed information on how to apply for funding on our internal web, we have dedicated staff assisting with the writing of proposals, workshops on how to write proposals.
5. No
6. Actually we haven't yet. It is extremely necessary for us, as we still rely on external expertise and outsource this service.
7. No
8. We try to apply the approach, that subject -matter experts develop the core of project content, and the project office personnel in cooperation with financial unit then prepare a project proposal according to the project management, admin and financial requirements.
9. -
10. No

11. Yes, in the [REDACTED] we have started to build a structure for project elaboration. In this structure are engaged the stakeholders of the Comprehensive Security Model approach. The writing work has been addressed to the RDI-members, since they have the best experience in project applications, experts give their expertise, expert-networks and the mandate of the national administration.
12. No.
13. NO
14. NO
15. No specific changes to be mentioned
16. No
17. [REDACTED] that they have considered AI tool to assist in the preparation of proposals. [REDACTED] have advised “no”. [REDACTED] generally write project proposals in association with similar competent authorities in other EU MSs. Between them, they have staff who have experience in writing such proposals and involve such staff in reviewing submissions. For larger projects, they may also seek to involve an agency with experience in project management who provide experience.
18. Based on recent experiences with preparing project proposals, a greater understanding of the process requirements have been gained internally in the organization. This allows for a better foundation for writing new proposals, although this is still partly hampered by the fact that the “lessons learnt” are not centralized.

[REDACTED] have gained good experience in applying for EU funds, as well as understanding the requirements of the EU civil protection projects. This we have shared with other national sister-organisations, and other EU Member States, in their application process for EU-funds.
19. No
20. In [REDACTED] has been established a committee that plays key role to search an opportunities for financing ideas and further elaboration and participation in project proposals. Elaboration of project proposal is performed by a working group which includes experts from the relevant competent areas of activity. The working group, based on the provided basic structure of the project idea and the necessary initial data, prepares the required documents and information within the announced application deadline.

13. Who is primarily responsible for drafting EU-funding applications within your organisation?

- Senior management (e.g., director, head of department) 4
- Project managers or coordinators 16
- Dedicated grants team 7
- Civil protection experts 10
- Administrative or support staff 8
- Others (Please specify)



1. With the involvement of the civil protection experts, including head of specialized services / departments. The dedicated grant teams do not have expertise in civil protection or emergency situations. For this specific concepts they need the expert's knowledge.
2. Members from the consortium
3. This depends on the Foundation.
4. Within [REDACTED] there is a team member with significant EU funding application experience. Generally, the [REDACTED] staff that are assigned to work on a project are the ones who contribute to the preparation of the funding application.
5. The responsibility of drafting EU-funding applications varies between [REDACTED] [REDACTED] working with civil protection. For instance, [REDACTED] has a dedicated grant team, while the [REDACTED] prepares grant applications in the relevant teams.

14. Have your Civil Protection authorities previously utilised one or more of the following funding sources:

- UCPM - KAPP - Knowledge for Action in Prevention & Preparedness 11
- UCPM - TAFF - Technical Assistance Financing Facility for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness 5
- UCPM - Technical Assistance for Disaster Risk Management (Track 1) 14
- Horizon Europe 12
- Common Agricultural Policy Funds
- European Regional Development Fund and/or Cohesion Fund 9
- INTERREG (which is funded by the European Regional Development Fund) 15
- European Social Fund / European Social Fund + 3
- Recovery and Resilience Facility 6
- EU4Health 1
- None
- Other (Please specify):
 1. UCPM – 2021 – KN; UCPM – 2021 – ExT; UXPM – 2021 – INT
 2. DG REFORM/TSI, ISF Fund, Asylum-and integration fund, Digital Europe, CEF
 3. IPA programmes
 4. National [REDACTED], which is managed and financed by the [REDACTED]. National PSR (Fire Protection Fund)funding for national RDI, building and purchasing projects.
 5. UCPM (rescue)
 6. Other:



- Rescue Board have foundation from: UCPM-2023-ECPP-URC European Civil Protection Pool Upgrade or repair of ECPP response capacities programmis EE-EOD.
- UCPM-2021-EX – Formatex23
- Some examples of projects where our civil protection authorities are not beneficiaries are:
- University of Tartu: Horizon Europe (e.g. SYNERGIES; ROADMAP2, BUILDERS).
- ██████████ KAPP
- Voluntary organisations and NGOs: Common Agricultural Policy funds is used for Resilience Centres, Voluntary Rescue Stations.
- EEA ██████████
- LIFE+ (Forest fiers)
- 7. Internal Security Fund
- 8. ██████████ advised that they have utilised previous versions of Horizon and Innovative Health Initiative (IHI) projects.
- 9. During the COVID19-pandemic we ██████████ applied and was awarded EU funding within UCPM MGA — MULTI & MONO for a civil protection rescEU-stockpiling project (2020-2027). Some of the co-financing comes from the NGEU funds.

Additionally, we ██████████ have applied and been partly awarded a UCPM Mono grant in November 2021 for stockpiling medical equipment, but we kindly rejected the project and funding.

10. European Emergency support instrument (ESI)
11. Horizon 2020, Erasmus+

15. Please rate how complex the application procedure was for the following funding programmes. (E.g. clarity of the funding objectives, clarity of the application process, consortium prerequisites, use of the web platform, financial estimation, ...)

1 not complex – 5 very complex

UCPM - KAPP - Knowledge for Action in Prevention & Preparedness	4 – 2 – 2 – 3 – 2 – 4 – 4 – 5 – 4 – 2 – 4 – 4 – 3	3,15
UCPM - TAFF - Technical Assistance Financing Facility for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness	4 – 3- 4 – 4- 5 - 3	3,83
UCPM - Technical Assistance for Disaster Risk Management (Track 1)	5 – 2 – 3 – 3 – 3 – 4- 5 – 3 – 2- 2 – 1 – 4 - 2	3
Horizon Europe	3 – 4 - 5 – 5 – 4 – 3 – 3 – 4 – 4 - 5	3,9
Common Agricultural Policy Funds	...	
European Regional Development Fund and/or Cohesion Fund	2- 4 – 3 – 2 – 4 – 4 – 4 - 3	3,25
INTERREG (which is funded by the European Regional Development Fund)	3 – 5 – 5 – 3 – 5 - 4 – 3 – 3- 3 – 3 – 4 - 3	3,67
European Social Fund / European Social Fund +	2- 4	3
Recovery and Resilience Facility	5 – 4 – 4 – 4 - 4	4,20
EU4Health	4	4

Table 1 : combined answers to question 15 of the Plutus questionnaire

(Optional further explanation)

1. INTERREG Program, changed its procedures/rules many times, before we could apply to the project (It changed the rules on the way)
2. Recently we had experience with direct grants like rescEU, Presidency workshop and ECPP grant is running. Considering these projects we think that the EUTender Portal was

transparent and consistent in the application procedure (process, objectives, prerequisites etc.)

3. The system is not very user-friendly, at least for beginners. Financial Excel's uses macros and for us this means extra work for our IT team (for security reasons), also some guidance's are not very clear. The transition to the e-environment required readjustment. Not sure, there to categorize rescEU -2
4. Internal Security Fund = 1
5. Complexity (especially within the KAPP Calls) has significantly increased during the last years. (budget estimations in too complex excel spread sheets)
6. ██████ advise that the project title not always intuitive. Application process is very time consuming and in the case of restricted calls, very labour intensive for all involved, it's a very complex procedure. Web platform is not very user friendly or intuitive. Also, there is no compromise on approved budget despite EU request for changes to application or identification of errors during preparation phase. ██████ have advised that they rated the ██████ as "2" noting that the EU-WISH is quite straightforward. ██████ rates EU4Health as "4". ██████ experience is that the application process for both Horizon Europe and EU4Health was equally complex at first but becomes easier as you gain experience of the processes and the required content.
7. The score of 4 for the UCPM Track 1 application process reflects the extensive supporting documents and manuals provided, which thoroughly explain the various application requirements. While these resources are valuable for ensuring compliance, they also make the application process time-consuming and complex. Furthermore, in some cases the proces of clarifying content in a Call for Proposal can be quite comprehensive. The templates have been sufficient for the application process on non-complex projects such as the rescEU-stockpiling projects, and therefore a low score being not complex. However, the obligatory risk assessments to the main project implementation has been challenging to assess sufficiently correct, especially as they are regarded as long term commitments.

16. Please rate how demanding the requirements were during the implementation phase of the following funding programmes. (e.g. own financial contribution, reporting, number of required meetings, communications demands, ...)

1 not demanding – 5 very demanding

UCPM - KAPP - Knowledge for Action in Prevention & Preparedness	2 – 2 – 3 – 3 – 4 – 4 - 3 – 3 - 2 – 3 - 3	3
UCPM - TAFF - Technical Assistance Financing Facility for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness	1 - 3 – 4 – 3 - 2	2,6

UCPM - Technical Assistance for Disaster Risk Management (Track 1)	1 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 3 – 3 – 3 – 3 – 3 – 2 – 3 – 3 – 3,5 – 3	2,96
Horizon Europe	3 – 3 – 4 – 4 – 3 – 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 – 3	3,3
Common Agricultural Policy Funds	...	
European Regional Development Fund and/or Cohesion Fund	3- 5 – 4 – 3 – 5 – 3 – 4 - 4	3,86
INTERREG (which is funded by the European Regional Development Fund)	5 – 5 – 4 – 4 – 3 – 3 - 3 – 3 – 3 – 3 – 3 – 4	3,67
European Social Fund / European Social Fund +	3 - 4	3,5
Recovery and Resilience Facility	4 – 5 – 4 - 4	4,25
EU4Health	3	3

Table 2: combined answers to question 16 of the Plutus questionnaire

(Optional further explanation)

1. INTERREG Program requests a lot too many reporting to different levels of stakeholders
2. In the case of Kapp projects, it very much depends on the role of the consortium leader.
3. Cohesion funds are considered the most demanding, since procedures for accounting, reporting and communication are very complex.
4. Own financial contribution.
5. Very good communication and contact person on the Commission side. Tender portal requires some experience (e.g. special click after upload for submission and several special save buttons). When there are multiple parties involved, addressing various clarifying questions can be time-consuming, and the time allocated for this is often limited. vNot sure, there to categorize rescEU -2
6. Internal Security Fund = 3
7. ██████████ have rated EU4Health as “4” while ██████████ have rated it as “3”. ██████████ have rated horizon Europe as “4” while ██████████ have rated it as “3”. ██████████ have advised that Own Financial Contribution can be off putting to some consortium members (e.g. 50%), numerous reporting dates, mandatory KPIs, comms requirements and visibility (dedicated team/member needed). ██████████ experience is that the demands are dependent of the extent of their role in the project. The demands on the overall project

leads are greater than those on work-package leads which in turn are significantly greater than those placed on participants who do not take a lead role. Once you become familiar with the reporting requirements the implementation phase becomes a little easier although still demanding.

8. The precise requirements to the annual reporting and accounting in the grant agreement together with easy templates for the rescEU-project, have made reporting easy, and not demanding. However, the reporting templates are generic and should be adjusted to the specific project.

17. Did your organisation encounter any other specific administrative or bureaucratic hurdles during the implementation of one of the following programmes, please give some explanation:

<p>UCPM - KAPP - Knowledge for Action in Prevention & Preparedness</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Large number of entities needed for establishing a consortium. Overlapping between continuous reporting and ad hoc reporting on the F&T portal. Portal guide is not comprehensive and is not sufficient for understanding how to proceed in different stages of the application and implementation process. It would be useful with for example audio visual guides. The templates in the portal have changed without prior notifications. There is very limited support on how to use the system as well as problem shooting from the Commission. The communication tools on the platform are not user friendly. 2. Budget estimation is broken into too many details. Excel Spread sheet to complicated. Incoherent usage of the Funding and Tender Portal.
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UCPM - TAFF - Technical Assistance Financing Facility for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applications didn't respect the authority line within national civil protection system.
UCPM - Technical Assistance for Disaster Risk Management (Track 1)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It wasn't possible to form a consortium, so a lot of work had to be done on the procurement process. 2. The tools e.g. budget table and Gantt diagram is to some extent simple, however is makes it difficult to explain, what is included in the work package.
Horizon Europe	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Resource constraints: limited administrative capacity and a lack of specialized personnel dedicated to managing research and innovation programs has occasionally slowed down implementation. 2. The new role that D [redacted] as POM is also funding receiver for other [redacted] [redacted] is quite demanding, as new procedures has to been created to allow flow of finances.
Common Agricultural Policy Funds	...
European Regional Development Fund and/or Cohesion Fund	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complex accounting procedures and unintuitive reporting platform. 2. Inconsistency between the information on the funds' official websites and the information provided orally, by e-mail, and the version in the recruitment program documents.
INTERREG (which is funded by the European Regional Development Fund)	...

European Social Fund / European Social Fund +	...
Recovery and Resilience Facility	1. Complexity of reporting.
EU4Health	1. ██████████ have advised of the “time taken to approve submission and change requests, level of co-funding can be an issue, final reporting requirements, comms requirements”. ██████████ advised of the “Difficulty obtaining decision on co-funding in a timely manner for the ██████████ t and financial commitment was then withdrawn”. ██████████ have indicated that there are “No specific hurdles”

Table 3: combined answers to question 17 of the Plutus questionnaire

Other comments:

It is important to note that application periods and decision-making times are not always well-timed and can be difficult to predict. In terms of reporting, deadlines for activities are often scheduled concurrently, which can result in a more demanding workload during certain periods. This is due to the need to submit information for multiple projects simultaneously.

18. What are the most common implementation challenges your organisation faces? (Select all that apply)

- Difficulty allocating sufficient staff resources to the project 19
- High staff turnover during the project 7
- Complex project management requirements 9
- Internal national coordination 9
- Consortium management 5
- Coordination with the Commission 5
- Difficulties to secure the co-financing on a national level 12
- National procurement processes and contract management 17



- Financial management 6
- Changes in project scope or objectives during implementation 11
- Challenges to ensure the sustainability of project results after the project end 11
- Other (Please specify):

1. Staff resources are complicated because of national threshold within our services

19. Has your organisation recently made any changes to support the implementation of projects? (If yes, please elaborate)

1. We had more trainings of our staff on Project management rules
2. Creation of a European project position to monitor the projects since 2023, September
3. No
4. We are trying to organise a little better our participation in projects by having a unit act as hub for all administrative requirements for all projects, no matter which department oversees the project activities.
5. Training and capacity building (in plan for 2025) – personnel receiving targeted training on project management tools and techniques to ensure better execution and alignment with organizational and Commission`s goals.
6. No, not recently
7. Not yet
8. No
9. -
10. No
11. This procedure has been there almost from the beginning: the █████ engages end-users to the project consortium to ensure that the outcomes will be implemented to reach impact and added value. There is a project team in the Department for Rescue Services (DRS), another one where are DRS and the Emergency Services █████. A third one is a regional one on the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), where █████ has taken the lead to establish a RDI network for all 10 member states. Idea is to connect RDI-community, connect them with administration and possible end-users.
12. A "Procedures Manual" has been introduced for internal use in order to standardize procedures related to project implementation.
13. NO
14. No
15. No specific changes to be mentioned
16. █████ have noted the request made for additional Technical staff to support EU implementations, especially following █████ Regulation coming into force from 2025.

█████ advised that they had to withdraw from some projects due to difficulty securing financial co-funding and staff capacities. █████ advised that in their latest project, they have assigned a dedicated resource who almost exclusively works on the project – this is a larger project in which they are a workpackage lead so that level of involvement can be justified.

17. Due to underspending of the awarded funding, the Commission has made a request to continue the project beyond the initially agreed project termination. There is pending political decision at national level to meet the request.

18. No

19. During the 2021-2027 programming period, the teams for management and implementation of approved projects were expanded, including more employees with different expertise - disaster risk reduction experts, public procurement and legal case experts, public awareness experts, fire and rescue equipment experts, etc., in order to ensure better quality in project implementation.

20. What communication channels do you use to keep external stakeholders informed during project implementation? (Select all that apply)

- Email updates 20
- Official project meeting 18
- Online collaboration platforms (e.g., MS Teams) 12
- Project websites or dedicated portals 15
- Newsletters 9
- Social media platforms 14
- Public events or workshops 18
- Other (Please specify):

1. We also have a national mechanism approved with a DCM No 1020/2020, under which a National Technical Advisory Committee for DRR is established. It is compounded by national and regional institutions, meets at least twice a year and different issues are discussed, presented and challenges faced for different projects.
2. Even national broadcasting company [REDACTED] (Radio and TV 1 and 2)
3. Press release etc.
4. [REDACTED] advised that they are currently looking at a collaboration between [REDACTED] [REDACTED] on social media channels

21. What are the main challenges you encounter with communication between project partners during project implementation? (Select all that apply)

- Lack of stakeholder engagement or responsiveness 14
- Limited resources (e.g., time, budget, personnel) 16
- Language or cultural barriers 4
- Technical issues with communication tools 5
- Conflicting priorities among stakeholders 5
- Others (Please specify):

22. Does your organization have specific good practices for stakeholder communication?

- Yes (please describe): 7

1. Continuous cooperation and communication during project implementation through organization of at least monthly meetings
2. We use established fora in different sectors
3. Different kind of working moral and culture
4. Developed "Procedures Manual", telephone and e-mail contact, through an adapted program for transmitting data and/or information requiring a qualified electronic signature, monitoring visits.
5. █████ advised that they have good practices in relation to presentation and language that are not specific to EU projects and which we also apply for other activities (e.g. when preparing updates for our website)
6. In the █████ project that we are currently engaged in one of the WP is fully dedicated stakeholders involvement, which speeds up and ensures smooth communication with them.
7. Our organization has developed several good practices for stakeholder communication, with the goal of fostering structured dialogue, mutual learning, and long-term collaboration.

One example is the use of country-based working groups, which have proven effective in bringing together national stakeholders from different sectors - such as civil protection, cultural heritage, and technical agencies - to discuss priorities and share experiences in a structured setting. This approach not only strengthens national coordination but also facilitates the exchange of practices at the European level.

We also rely on periodic bulletins, which serve as a communication tool to keep stakeholders informed about project developments, emerging challenges, and innovative practices. These publications often include articles and contributions from partners and experts, further enhancing peer-to-peer learning and visibility of national experiences. Workshops and training sessions play a key role as well. They provide valuable opportunities for stakeholders to interact directly, exchange insights, and test tools and methodologies. These moments of exchange contribute significantly to shaping a common European approach to the protection of cultural heritage at risk and to disaster risk management more broadly.

No 15

23. What is the main barrier to retaining and utilising knowledge gained from completed projects?

- High staff turnover 7
- Inadequate documentation practices 2
- Lack of organisational focus on lessons learned 13
- Limited budget for knowledge-sharing activities 12
- None 1
- Other (Please specify):

1. After the project has ended the members change to other tasks and projects, the distribution and using the project outcomes is easily forgotten or they are not exploited.
2. █████ advised that projects bring a specific focus in an area. Once the project finishes other priorities can take precedent meaning that it can be difficult to find the time to utilise knowledge gained or more significantly implement recommendations from previous projects. Follow-up projects can assist in this regard.
3. Due to staff turnover and limited resources as well as gaps in procedures for implementing of lessons learned there is a risk of projects and outcomes being forgotten in the continued daily workload.

24. Does your organisation use any tools to ensure the sustainability of project benefits over the long term? (if yes, please specify)

1. Stakeholder engagement and presentation of results through lessons learned and exchange of experience
2. Yes, and these includes continued access to resources obtain after the project implementation, securing long-term funding by identifying areas for improvement and upgrades, and building partnerships with key stakeholders, including local authorities, NGOs, and other organizations, to integrate project benefits into larger, sustainable systems.
3. Yes, we utilize internal project management systems and diffuse knowledge gained from projects.
4. No
5. Including the project results and the gained knowledge into regular working process
6. -
7. -
8. There are no structures, yet
9. Our projects are non-infrastructureal and involve the purchase of equipment.
10. No
11. There are no specific tools. This achieved by Monitoring and Evaluation Systems, Sustainability Planning, Capacity Building, Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement and Knowledge Sharing and Dissemination
12. No specific tools to be mentioned
13. █████ advised that projects that are relevant to ongoing day-to-day activities are more likely to be sustained. Follow-up projects are also considered where feasible and appropriate
14. At █████ there has been a focus on securing specific deliverables of projects. Ensuring the sustainability of projects will likely become a larger area of focus as █████ undertakes more EU funded projects and gains more experience with the post-implementation phase.

█████ has in many practical areas used various approaches to ensure the sustainability of project benefits. The rescEU-project is based on ensuring sustainability, which means that

there is a continuous development of methods, principles and national guidelines to ensure this.

15. No

16. Yes. [REDACTED] is constantly looking for EU-funded opportunities to maintain and upgrade of project benefits. During the 2014-2020 Programme period, six training centers for flood response preparation of population were built within the Operational Programme Environment. In the present Programme period, the same centers will be upgraded for preparation of population in case of forest fires.

25. Please provide any additional insights or suggestions on improving the Plutus project.

1. The idea to organise a workshop on this particular issue may be useful
2. We have not been provided with detailed information regarding the PLUTUS project, and this questionnaire is the only communication we have received thus far. After reviewing the information available on the UCP Knowledge Network website, we find that the objectives of the PLUTUS project align closely with our needs in this area. We fully support the project and are willing to offer any assistance necessary to contribute to achieving practical outcomes that will help all EU member states in identifying and securing funding for investment needs.
3. -
4. We suggest taking part in the Erasmus+ program, Key Action 2. Partnerships for cooperation in the Vocational Education and Training sector, within the project Small-scale Partnerships. You invite us, we will come and discuss the subject of the procedure of funds in our institution and then, as part of the return visit, we will invite you to us and show the results of our projects.
5. N/A
6. No specific suggestions to be mentioned
7. [REDACTED] advised that the short time frame for applications is difficult in the context of multiple competing priorities for an operational service. Permitting staff time to be used as the financial contribution would enable them to participate more. Securing co-funding is a major barrier.
8. It could be useful to have more information on the opportunities for strengthening DRM of CP that exists across the different DGs of the commission. This exists to some extent through the knowledge network platform, but could be further expanded with updated information on timelines for new calls, guidance on what kind of initiatives they can support (focusing on CP and DRM) and some examples/best practices. Also a suggestion to consider earmarked financing in support of sharing best practise and lessons learned among clusters of similar EU awarded projects. When the Commission awards the project with EU-funds, there should be a trade-off to participate in such network ensuring the dissemination of relevant information and the best use of EU financing.

26. Which services were involved in answering this questionnaire?

27. Would you, or others from your organisation, be willing to participate in interviews or provide more information for the Plutus project to help identify roadblocks and share best practices?

Yes Please provide your contact details (Name, surname, and e-mail address)

No

Data Protection Statement

The information you provide in this questionnaire will be processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Your data will be treated confidentially and used solely for the purposes of this project. By submitting this questionnaire, you consent to the processing of your data as described.

Annex 2: Executive Summary of BE interviews

1. Introduction

The aim of the PLUTUS project (co-funded by the European Commission) is to gain an overview of the main challenges faced by civil protection authorities in attracting and implementing funding, as well as to identify good practices in this area. To gather the necessary information, amongst other sources, a total of 24 interviews were conducted throughout the PLUTUS project with relevant stakeholders. This document is an executive summary focusing only on the ten interviews conducted at national level.

Those ten national interviews were conducted with different services, including civil protection authorities (including the internal financial service), the Firebrigade Directorate the Ministry of Health, the Federal Police, the National Crisis Centre, and the National Contact Point for Horizon Europe. Regional actors were also included, such as the Campus VESTA school and the funding service of the Province of Antwerp.

In the final report, these findings will be analysed together with the results of the questionnaire, the international interviews, the interviews with the European Commission, and the work that will be carried out during the PLUTUS workshop.

2. Results and analysis of the interviews

This executive summary highlights some of the key elements that emerged in these interviews. To structure the discussions, interviewees were asked to reflect on different phases of the project management cycle: identification of own needs and priorities, identification of funding opportunities, drafting of applications, implementation, and long-term utilisation.

2.1 Identification of own needs and priorities

In different ministries, projects are often initiated either when a new opportunity arises or when a specific need is identified. Some services benefit from strong networks and are frequently invited to join consortia, while others face greater challenges in finding suitable funding opportunities.

When projects are written based on internal priorities rather than being specifically tailored to a funding call, significant adjustments are often required once a funding opportunity is identified. Matching the previously identified needs with the priorities of the European Union also remains a frequent challenge, sometimes resulting in no adequate funding source being found.

Several services regularly invited to join consortia, pointed out the importance of reflecting on how the proposed projects fit within the overall strategy and priorities of the organisation. If they are not part of a long-term vision, results risk being lost or the effort invested may outweigh the project's benefits. To address this, some organisations have established Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to evaluate whether a project idea is worthwhile and to define the conditions under which they will participate in a consortium.

For provincial and regional organisations, it is often difficult to find suitable funding opportunities for which they are eligible.

2.2 Identification of funding possibilities

Some Belgian services have a dedicated unit, with limited capacity, that proactively searches for funding opportunities. Others rely mostly on invitations from other UCPM Member and Participating States to join consortia. In some cases, these dedicated cells share opportunities with other departments and showcase results of other projects more widely, for example through lunchtime presentations to interested services.

The Funding and Tenders Portal is generally seen as a useful tool for identifying funding opportunities, but there remains no straightforward way to receive information on a specific type of tender. Some services also consult the work programme, although some interviewees mentioned that it can be difficult to interpret.

Finding relevant funding information remains challenging for some services, as management responsibilities can differ. Some funds are managed directly by the European Commission, while others are managed at national or regional level depending on the regulations. Although the EU is working to harmonise many opportunities through the portal, funds managed indirectly are not listed there. This absence makes it difficult for some interviewees to know where to search for funding opportunities .

External supporting services

Support for the identification of relevant funding opportunities is available at various levels. For example, the funding service of the Province of Antwerp and the National Contact Point (NCP) for Horizon Europe proactively screen calls and matches them with the long-term priorities of their organisation or partner organisations. They also respond to requests from project leads from other consortia looking for suitable opportunities. However, interviewees from these services noted that

there is still a lot of fragmentation in the National Contact Point for Horizon Europe Structure structure related to funding, leading to overlapping or duplicated services.

To identify opportunities, these services primarily use the Funding and Tenders Portal and newsletters, but also less traditional channels such as LinkedIn. In addition, there is a Flemish subsidy guide for EU funds, and some private consultancies offer similar guides as a paid service. The Horizon Europe NCP is currently working to expand its network and better inform stakeholders about the different security-related funding possibilities. A recurring challenge for them is, however, that the tasks related to Cluster 3 (security) are divided among many different actors.

2.3 Drafting applications

Some federal services have a dedicated team responsible for both identifying funding opportunities and drafting proposals, others rely on their own personnel to take on these tasks.

Writing applications can be challenging due to the specific language and requirements of the European Commission. Drafting the budget is particularly seen as difficult for many interviewees, especially when it is not done by specialised staff. Making accurate cost estimates is a complex task and the standardised Excel template provided to create the budgets does not align with the way national annual public administration budgets are structured.

For some projects, securing the right expertise before the project is approved can be difficult, as it is not always available internally. Especially, finding suitable academic partners can be difficult.

Interviewees also underlined that preparing an application is very time-consuming, and the effort is not always rewarded, particularly for highly competitive funds such as Horizon Europe. Short deadlines add further pressure, especially since the internal approval period can be lengthy and demanding. This can act as a barrier to develop new projects. Within consortia, the short deadlines for grant applications often make it impossible to organise proper face-to-face meetings.

Some services, which are aware of the learning curve, have started to keep records of best practices from previous projects. Suggestions include training staff to become familiar with the different European programmes and financial regulations, which would help speed up the application process and make reporting afterwards easier. Interviewees also said it would be valuable to have more concrete information sessions at the European Commission focused on writing proposals and having a dedicated national contact person to advise project managers on specific questions during a project. Another good practice mentioned is to prepare a comprehensive table listing all the information required from partners in a consortium with clear deadlines.

To further increase the chances of success in an application, it is important to meet all the call criteria and include an additional element of added value as well, for example putting the focus on the type and weight of partners, geographic distribution, gender balance, academic and public representation, diversity, price, or other features.

Other entities can also play an important supporting role, such as the Horizon Europe NCP or the funding cell of the Province of Antwerp. They can assist with partner identification, provide general and specific information on calls, and share guidelines outlining the tasks required at each stage of the application process. The Province of Antwerp's funding cell, for example, supports services with project

proposals, offers training on the drafting of applications, provides an e-learning module on EU funds (in Dutch), and organises an annual writing session in January where applicants review proposals from the perspective of an evaluator. Their approach is usually to first develop the general idea and budget, before dividing tasks into work packages and setting impact indicators and KPIs, which are not always well understood. They also maintain a learning network with a FAQ and experience-sharing platform to capture lessons learned.

2.4 Implementing the project

Implementation is generally considered easiest when the people involved in the drafting are also involved in the implementation phase. The services that can offer support usually have smaller role to play than during the identification of opportunities or the writing of applications. However, it is not uncommon that they are still asked for their expertise regarding the reporting.

Financial management is often a major source of problems. Financial services are rarely familiar with European requirements and procedures. The Commission's deadlines and payments are not aligned with the Belgian financial cycle, and payment notices often contain too little information to be easily linked to the relevant budget lines of a project internally.

VAT, as a non-eligible cost, is another recurring challenge. Some services have addressed this by creating a shared national budget to cover costs such as VAT, shared between several Directorates-General. This shared financing also broadens support for the project as it needs to be discussed with different DGs.

Budget management within consortia can be equally challenging. The division of funds between partners is often a point of discussion, and national procedures can delay payments. Concretely, during the period when Belgium had no government, funds could not be transferred to consortium partners, causing frustration.

Language barriers can also complicate cooperation in a consortium, as some staff members do not have the necessary command of English.

Hiring new staff is another lengthy process for many Belgian services, since several different services need to be involved, and complex procedures respected, often causing delays in the implementation.

Sometimes, Commission desk officers also lack expertise in the subject matter, complicating the implementation process. Another added difficulty is the fact that the reality of a call does not always align with the reality of implementation. For instance, some calls emphasise the importance of cooperation with non-EU countries, but in practice the exchange of information with those countries can be nearly impossible if it concerns restricted/sensitive information.

To implement projects more smoothly, different services have set up specific requirements. Examples include appointing one staff member dedicated to financial management or organising a state of play at least every six months within a consortium and more frequently if needed.

Reporting

Reporting can be quite demanding. Financial reporting, however, is generally considered straightforward, nevertheless it requires careful record-keeping and timely processing of all relevant

documents. To support this, several interviewees suggested developing project management tools such as checklists and templates to help streamline these tasks.

The use of unit costs is often a difficulty, as this system is not commonly known by Belgian services. In addition, the administrative burden associated to Commission requirements is seen as substantial. Authorities are expected to provide audit certificates, personnel timesheets and salary slips, travel invoices, signed attendance lists, and other supporting documents, which creates an extra workload for national services.

2.5 Long-term utilisation

Depending on the type of project, it can be more or less challenging to assess the long-term impact and ensure proper follow-up. Outcomes are often straightforward for projects involving for example capacity building, while for trainings the long-term benefits are often less tangible but still valuable, such as the creation of strong professional networks.

According to the interviewees similar projects are still sometimes developed without full awareness of each other. To avoid duplication, they suggested establishing a central library of all previous projects would be beneficial. Luckily, in practice, many departments already develop follow-up projects to ensure that outcomes are continuously being used. Often, these follow-up projects are even already considered when the first project is designed and submitted. At the same time, this continuity also depends on retaining staff, which itself relies on the availability of ongoing projects.

A good practice mentioned is to engage with relevant EU actors to ensure that project outcomes are embedded into existing structures on the EU level as well.

Annex 3: Executive Summary of the International Interviews

1. Introduction

The following information was collected through interviews as part of the PLUTUS project (co-funded by the European Commission), which aims at gaining an overview of the main challenges faced by civil protection authorities in attracting and implementing funding, as well as to identify good practices in this area.

A total of 24 interviews were carried out with a variety of stakeholders. Purpose was to gain an overview of the main challenges faced by civil protection authorities in attracting and implementing funding, as well as to identify good practices in this regard.

Of the interviews, 11 were conducted with authorities from UCPM Member and Participating States, either online (France, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, Luxembourg and Bulgaria) or in person (Croatia, Germany, Romania, Poland and Finland).

In the final report, this information will be analysed together with findings from the questionnaire, the national interviews, interviews with the European Commission, and the work carried out during the PLUTUS workshop.

2. Results and analysis

This executive summary of the international interviews presents some of the key elements that emerged. To structure the discussions, interviewees were asked about different phases of the project cycle: identification of needs and priorities, identification of funding opportunities, drafting applications, implementation, and long-term utilisation.

2.1 Identification of own needs and priorities

Setting priorities

For civil protection authorities, the identification of priorities for new EU projects can take many forms. In many cases, overarching strategic documents covering several years are drafted and complemented by ministerial or service-level strategies, potentially involving different Directorates-General, operational units, and/or other stakeholders. Meanwhile, other authorities do not work with a predefined set of priorities at all, instead relying on discussions about how to improve or streamline operations.

Other important factors mentioned that influence the process include risk analyses, internal security reports, and lessons identified from previous experiences. In practice, both top-down and bottom-up approaches can play a role in shaping priorities, and several interviewees underlined that this is not a one-directional process.

In some cases, a dedicated unit responsible for funding opportunities proactively reaches out to departments to identify needs, for example through questionnaires or meetings, while also taking operational requirements into account. Close, often informal, cooperation between services and stakeholders, combined with meaningful engagement across different levels, was considered essential for developing a comprehensive overview of needs, while it also enables ideas to circulate more freely and fosters creative thinking for future projects. Some interviewees also pointed to good cooperation with national representatives at the institutional level, who can feed national priorities into the EU work programme. Providing colleagues with a clear explanation of the work programme was also considered useful to stimulate input and encourage innovative, cross-cutting use of available funds.

Connecting national needs to European funding opportunities

A recurring challenge in setting priorities is the difficulty of balancing national priorities with those voiced by the European Commission. Some countries approach this process by compiling a national “wishlist” of potential projects, which is then reviewed to identify suitable funding opportunities. A good practice in this regard is to always reflect on the added value of project ideas for the UCPM as a whole as well as considering the Commissions’ priorities alongside national needs, as this significantly increases the chances of securing EU funding.

Several Member States indicated that they find it challenging to link local or operational needs to the Commission’s broader priorities, particularly when these needs have limited cross-border relevance or offer fewer opportunities for visibility. In such cases, dedicated funding units can play a valuable role, since they have more experience with projects and often have a greater sensitivity to Commission requirements as well as an overview of how national priorities could potentially align with wider EU

objectives. This knowledge can help maximise the success rate of applications and avoid siloed approaches.

2.2 Identification of funding possibilities

The identification of funding opportunities is handled differently across countries. In some cases, it is the responsibility of a specialised unit (with varying levels of resources), while in others it is managed on an ad hoc basis. Many interviewees indicated that they begin their search on the Funding & Tenders Portal, where information is centralised. However, they highlighted several challenges in relation to the portal: the search function does not work optimally, the titles of funding opportunities can be unclear, and the process is labour-intensive and time-consuming. This puts countries without dedicated personnel at a disadvantage, as they are less able to search proactively.

Some authorities do not proactively seek for funding opportunities, as the perceived benefits of EU projects are considered limited compared to the effort required to apply. Especially when a national budget for these projects is foreseen. In this context, several interviewees said it would be preferable to have larger funding pools. To convince higher-level decision-makers of the added value of EU funding, it was considered effective to emphasise not only financial gains but also the benefits in terms of strategic development and strengthened cooperation that project can bring. In some countries, individual staff members are incentivised to initiate new projects by providing financial compensation for their involvement in European initiatives next to their other tasks.

Some services do not proactively look for new funding opportunities. Instead, they rely on invitations to join consortia through their networks and rely on these partners to keep them informed. Trust between partners is considered crucial, both to ensure smooth cooperation and to avoid hidden agendas, which is why consortia members often keep working together on different projects. However, this reliance on existing networks can disadvantage organisations with limited connections, as they are less likely to be invited to join consortia and therefore struggle to develop projects. Regional organisations or frameworks, which facilitate frequent contact and highlight shared issues, were mentioned as useful starting points for identifying potential partners.

For those who proactively look for funding opportunities, finding suitable funding sources outside of the UCPM was also described as sometimes challenging. While civil protection offers many synergies with areas such as agriculture, health, and safety, it is not always straightforward to determine whether they are accessible for civil protection authorities.

Several good practices were highlighted: maintaining a strong national network to exchange information on potential opportunities, setting up funding alerts using relevant keywords, and anticipating recurring calls by preparing a calendar of opportunities. Dedicated funding staff were seen as particularly effective when they bring together staff with different specialisations (e.g. drafting applications, national policy, budget analysis), allowing funding opportunities to be assessed from multiple angles. It was also suggested that a regular newsletter providing updates on available funding would be a useful tool to improve awareness and understanding.

2.3 Drafting applications

The responsibility for drafting applications varies significantly between countries. In some cases, there is no dedicated personnel for this task, and the responsibility falls on staff who are most of the time occupied with other duties. This limits the number of projects that can be developed, as drafting applications is time consuming. A main recurring obstacle is therefore the lack of staff available to develop project proposals. Furthermore, when drafting is not handled by a dedicated service, knowledge can be lost if staff members leave.

In other cases, a dedicated team is responsible for preparing applications, either by writing the full proposal or by assisting other departments. These teams usually include staff with different areas of expertise such as budgetary, legal, logistical and project management, who contribute to specific sections and review each other's work. Some services also organise internal discussions to agree on the structure and content of work packages before or during the drafting process.

A good practice highlighted in several interviews is, as a centralised cell, to request an early draft version from the organisation writing the application and to establish a clear timeline, which helps to ensure coherence and coordination across the organisation.

Another recurring challenge is the short period between the opening of a call and the submission deadline, which is particularly demanding when hierarchical approval is required.

For consortia, drafting a proposal can be challenging since needs and priorities can diverge across countries, which may lead to misunderstandings within a consortium or tension if certain partners' priorities dominate. Approaches to proposal writing vary. In some cases, the main beneficiary prepares most of the application to ensure coherence. In other cases, all partners contribute directly to the drafting of the different work packages, fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership.

After an application is approved, some changes or adjustments may still be requested. Several interviewees noted that Commission priorities can shift during the application process itself, which is especially challenging for consortia since substantial changes may require new internal agreements between partners.

Technical difficulties and budget

Majority of interviewees indicated that the Funding and Tenders Portal is not intuitive to use when preparing an application. Many expressed confusion about the one size fits all application forms, as it is often unclear which sections need to be completed for different type of projects. The budget table was also a source of difficulty for many, especially when it needs to be filled by multiple partners in a consortium. Some standard elements expected in applications, such as milestones or deliverables, as well as budget related concepts such as unit costs, were also described as difficult to understand at first. Lastly, a recurring frustration is the need to enter the same information multiple times in the system both during the application and the implementation phases.

To address these challenges some countries have developed internal documentation to assist colleagues. These range from simple guidance documents explaining the procedures to more elaborate e-learning environments that cover basic concepts such as budget limits on procurement, timelines, how to use a Gantt chart, and lump sums. While the Funding and Tenders Portal already contains a

large amount of information, interviewees noted that this can be overwhelming and/or too generic. A suggestion was made that the Commission could provide dedicated training on how to use the portal effectively.

In many cases, drafting the budget for a new project is done by specialised staff. The system of unit costs was frequently described as difficult to use, with the amounts considered very low, particularly in countries where flight prices fluctuate significantly. Overhead costs were also mentioned by some as insufficient. Lump sums were recommended as a useful approach because they emphasise on outcomes rather than on detailed financial reporting. Procurement, which often involves the purchase of necessary equipment, was identified as an area where national rules differ, complicating joint purchases across countries.

Several interviewees recommended increasing the requested budget with 10 to 20 percent compared to the market analysis carried out before, in order to cover costs even if implementation can sometimes be delayed and inflation rises during that period. VAT was frequently cited as a significant obstacle to applying for projects. In many countries VAT costs are foreseen in the national budget, and in some cases administrations have successfully requested a humanitarian exemption from national VAT services. However this exemption does not apply to expenses incurred abroad. Removing ineligible VAT costs from invoices was described as very time consuming for project staff.

Additional tips:

- Include concrete numbers and figures in the application so that results can be clearly demonstrated
- Keep the contact details of the IT service responsible for the project readily available
- Submit the proposal well before the deadline to avoid last minute technical issues
- Take advantage of the fact that many calls are repeated each year by starting to prepare proposals proactively
- Make use of technical assistance grants to support the proposal drafting process
- Even when a proposal is unsuccessful, it is valuable to retain the materials, since parts of them can be reused for future applications when priorities change

2.4 Implementing

Most interviewees agreed that ensuring continuity between the staff who draft the proposal and the staff responsible for implementation is crucial. This continuity helps maintain a clear understanding of the grant agreement, ensures that the vision of the proposal can be executed more effectively, and reduces the risk of unrealistic deadlines or objectives.

The use of external consultancy companies during implementation had mixed views. Some interviewees reported difficulties, noting that consultancies are organised differently than public entities and often face fewer financial constraints, which in some cases created challenges in the working relationship. Others, however, gave positive feedback, highlighting that external companies can provide valuable expertise, particularly in project management. Outsourcing certain tasks to specialists was seen as a practical solution, since building the same structures internally would require considerable time and resources.

Reporting

Many of the good practices mentioned relate to establishing a clear filing system early in each project phase, which allows progress to be monitored easily. Some interviewees reported using a document that records all key project events, including issued documents, meetings, and other relevant milestones or deliverables to maintain an overview. Some others highlighted the value of additional internal evaluations functioning as regular check-ups that allow projects to be monitored closely and potential issues to be identified early.

A well-organised filing system was also considered useful for other tasks, such as reporting on the working hours of a project. This task is tedious (or even nearly impossible) if completed only at the end of a project. Several interviewees noted that the Commission in some cases accepts internal timesheets, which significantly reduces the reporting burden.

Travel expenses were another area where clear record keeping was essential. While keeping all invoices, reporting costs, and accounting for VAT was described as time consuming, the process becomes much more manageable when done concurrently with the expenses rather than after the project.

Contact with the Commission was described as depending heavily on the assigned desk officer. Some interviewees suggested having two project officers per project to ensure smoother communication and reduce the risk of delays or misunderstandings.

Consortia

Within consortia, many countries reported challenges arising from differences in financial structures, currencies, and payment processes, as well as from different ways of working. Several interviewees suggested that frequent meetings with partners, including in-person meetings where possible, help strengthen cooperation. Full budget transparency was highlighted as essential, as fund allocation is often a delicate issue and payment timelines differ between countries. Furthermore, the lead country is responsible for financial oversight, which in practice can mean being accountable for mistakes made by other beneficiaries.

Language and working culture were also identified as potential challenges. Interviewees emphasised the importance of knowing the people you will be working with and, if necessary, having informal contact points within partner organisations.

Information sharing during a project was also mentioned as a challenge due to varying security restrictions across countries. Finding a suitable platform for internal communication among beneficiaries is often challenging and frequently becomes a topic of discussion.

Additional tips:

- Keep all invoices and process them in a timely manner
- Select the project coordinator carefully, as this role has a major impact on project success
- Involve end users throughout the implementation process
- Allocate sufficient time for procurement, which is often a source of delays
- Ensure enough staff are involved in implementation so that tasks can be covered if someone is unavailable

- A dedicated unit that gathers information on all ongoing projects and centralises it
- Use a mailing list to keep all partners informed of important developments in a consortia

2.5 Long-term utilisation

Follow-up

Most interviewees acknowledged that follow-up after projects is often limited. While some types of grants, such as service contracts, naturally include follow-up, this is often problematic for other grants. Letters of support are often requested, but project outcomes are not consistently shared, and projects carried out by civil protection authorities often lack a clear follow-up structure, leading to their outcomes being lost over time. Research projects, which may only have tangible results years later, are particularly difficult in this regard.

Although the long-term vision of a project is usually addressed as a separate section in the application, concrete follow-up procedures are often lacking. Many interviewees noted that project outcomes are not always utilised to their full potential because departments work in silos and information is not consistently shared. When funding ends, there is often little incentive to follow up on completed projects, and follow-up frequently depends entirely on the staff involved. For large-budget projects such as RescEU, some interviewees raised concerns about unclear provisions for maintenance funding.

In some cases, European-funded projects are implemented in parallel with national projects. While differences in timelines can cause delays, this approach can also help ensure consistent follow-up and integration of projects into a broader framework nationally.

Ensuring a clear link between projects and the organisation's needs and priorities can increase the likelihood that outcomes are retained and facilitates future priority setting.

Overview of completed project

Many interviewees noted the difficulty of maintaining a complete overview of existing projects both nationally and internationally. While some suggested improvements at the national level, others proposed the establishment of a centralised European service gathering projects' outcomes across all Directorates-General to avoid overlaps and identify more potential synergies. While some outcomes are already shared through Commission platforms such as the Knowledge Network (DG ECHO) and CERIS (DG HOME), this remains fragmented due to the absence of a centralised space for all projects. Several interviewees indicated an interest in developing a national lessons learned platform to consolidate information on previous projects.

Some interviewees also suggested a handbook outlining the different types of EU projects and related processes nationally could be beneficial, along with record-keeping of all completed projects and sharing information on similar procurement initiatives between different countries.

Good practices include producing tangible outcomes where possible, strengthening networks to retain institutional knowledge, and making outcomes publicly available whenever feasible.

Annex 4: Conference Proceeding – PLUTUS Webinar

1. Introduction

The PLUTUS Webinar, held on 6 November 2025 and organised by the Directorate-General for Civil Protection, brought together representatives of national civil protection authorities, EU-level experts, and stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of EU-funded projects. The objective of the event was to identify structural, technical, and operational challenges along the entire project cycle, from strategic planning to proposal drafting and project implementation, and to jointly formulate recommendations.

The webinar was structured with an introduction by representatives of the Belgian Directorate-General for Civil Protection and DG ECHO, followed by a scene-setting by the project team, three breakout sessions to discuss each phase of the project management process, and a concluding plenary consultation on the priority recommendations. Participants attended from Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova, the Republic of Serbia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Türkiye. The European Commission, the European Investment Bank, and the World Bank were also represented.

These proceedings consolidate the content of the conference presentations, including the material provided in Annex 1, together with discussion summaries, the icebreaker reflections, and the voted recommendations. A quantitative analysis of the priorities selected by participants during the voting rounds is also included, based on the data collected. Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lux, EIB, Malta, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Republic of Serbia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, the Netherlands, Türkiye.

2. Background and Preparatory Work

The PLUTUS Team conducted preparatory research prior to the webinar. This included a questionnaire targeting Civil Protection Authorities, in-depth interviews with Belgian stakeholders, and additional interviews with Civil Protection Authorities from the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) Member and Participating States. Together, these steps helped build a consolidated understanding of recurring challenges in accessing and implementing EU funding opportunities. Additionally, a mapping of funding opportunities was conducted and presented during the introductory session of the webinar.

3. Opening Session and Icebreaker Reflections

The opening session, led by senior representatives of the Belgian Directorate-General for Civil Protection, DG ECHO and the World Bank, introduced the webinar objectives. Participants then took part in an icebreaker activity designed to stimulate reflection on their previous experiences with EU-funded projects, perceived barriers, and expectations for the webinar. The insights shared during this exercise highlighted a need for clearer guidance on available funding, improved coordination within national systems, and simplified processes for developing future applications.

4. Breakout sessions

Phase 1 – Strategic Planning and Needs Analysis

The first phase of EU project management focused on how Civil Protection Authorities identify needs and plan strategically in relation to EU funding opportunities. The introductory presentation based on the preparatory analysis highlighted several recurrent issues.

Some authorities operate reactively, responding only to open calls, while others adopt longer-term structured strategies. Identifying appropriate calls remains challenging for many Civil Protection Authorities due to the fragmentation of funding instruments and the complexity of navigating them. Smaller organizations face more difficulties due to a lack of dedicated staff.

Structural challenges include limited coordination between ministries and sectors, weak connections between strategic and operational levels, and inconsistencies between local priorities and the objectives of EU work programmes. From a technical standpoint, participants were informed that low visibility of EU opportunities, shortages of experienced staff, and information gaps remain significant barriers. Despite these obstacles, the findings also emphasized positive practices such as maintaining internal mapping tools, monitoring annual EU work programmes, and establishing dedicated internal funding units.

Summary of the Group Discussion:

Across the three groups, participants reported that they usually learn about funding opportunities through Council working groups (PROCIV) and Civil Protection Committee (CPC) meetings, direct communications from DG ECHO, and EU info days. The EU Funding & Tenders Portal is primarily used for project management rather than tracking new calls. Informal networking also plays an important role.

Key obstacles included the absence of a dedicated unit or focal point, limited staff to monitor opportunities or prepare proposals, and insufficient technical expertise in EU funding processes. Several participants noted that beginners would benefit from targeted EU-level training and clearer guidance.

Quantitative Analysis of Recommendations – Phase 1

Following the group discussions on strategic planning and needs analysis, participants voted on the suggestions for improvement they considered most relevant. The results reveal a clear hierarchy of priorities. The most supported recommendation was the organization of regular internal briefings or newsletters to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are aware of upcoming EU funding opportunities. This option received 13 votes, corresponding to 76% of respondents, demonstrating a strong consensus that improved internal communication and awareness-raising are essential foundations for strategic engagement with EU funding.

The second most supported recommendation was the proposal to create permanent EU project coordination units with 11 votes (65%). This strong level of support reflects a shared recognition that stable, dedicated structures are necessary to overcome fragmentation and to maintain institutional capacity over time. Close behind is the proactive mapping of existing and future funding opportunities, which gathered 10 votes, or 59%. This result confirms that participants see systematic, forward-looking knowledge of EU funding instruments as a crucial enabler of strategic planning. Together, these three recommendations form a coherent cluster centered on strengthening internal structures and processes to support funding identification and strategic alignment.

Other recommendations received more moderate support. The suggestion to introduce regular cross-sectoral reviews to identify needs early and align them with national and EU priorities obtained 6 votes (35%), indicating sustained interest in improving cross-ministerial coordination. Meanwhile, connecting strategic planners with operational services and local actors received 4 votes, or 24%, highlighting the importance, but also the existing difficulty, of ensuring vertical coherence across levels of governance.

Phase 2 – Drafting Applications

The second phase addressed the preparation of EU project proposals. The presentation underscored that preparing high-quality applications requires familiarity with templates, budget rules, and procedural steps. Many authorities reported gaps in internal expertise, leading in some cases to outsourcing, which can weaken ownership and institutional learning.

It was identified that long internal validation processes often compress the time available to prepare proposals, reducing overall quality. The Funding & Tenders Portal was frequently cited as difficult to use for newcomers. Building strong consortia was also

presented as a challenge, particularly for organizations with limited previous experience in EU projects. Divergent partner objectives, communication barriers, and complex budget allocation arrangements were highlighted as recurrent problems.

The presentation concluded with several good practices identified during the preparatory work: forming mixed drafting teams, establishing internal learning networks, organizing writing sessions that simulate evaluator reviews, drafting concept notes before full proposals, and incorporating quantitative indicators early in the application process.

Summary of the Group discussion:

Discussions on proposal development highlighted difficulties accessing technical expertise, including specialized areas like AI, and challenges in obtaining EU administrative and financial support. Participants called for broader eligibility criteria and better alignment of funding calls with national authorities' specific needs. Good practices identified included combining technical expertise, project management skills, stakeholder engagement, and political commitment. Many participants emphasized that designating a single coordinator for the entire application process enhances efficiency and coherence.

Quantitative Analysis of Recommendations – Phase 2

Following the group discussions on drafting applications, participants voted on the suggestions for improvement they found most relevant. The quantitative results clearly show that the most strongly supported recommendation was the organization of internal workshops on EU financial rules, proposal writing, and partner management, which received 14 votes, corresponding to 78% of participating respondents. This indicates a strong collective recognition that strengthening internal knowledge and technical understanding is essential to improving the quality and consistency of EU project applications.

The second most supported recommendation was the encouragement to draft short concept notes as soon as funding priorities are published, which received 11 votes or 61%. Participants saw this as a practical way to test feasibility early, align with partners, and prepare more competitive proposals.

Other recommendations received more moderate support. The proposal to offer technical sessions to help newcomers navigate the Funding & Tenders Portal gathered 7 votes (39%), while involving relevant stakeholders from the earliest stages of drafting received 6 votes (33%). These results reflect participants' recognition of both the technical and organisational aspects of drafting applications.

Finally, streamlining administrative workflows to better manage short deadlines received 3 votes, representing 17% of participants.

Taken together, these voting patterns show a consistent message: capacity-building measures and structured internal processes are perceived as the most impactful improvements for strengthening application drafting within Civil Protection Authorities.

Phase 3 – Implementation and Sustainability

Before the group discussion, the PLUTUS Team presented the preliminary findings linked to implementation, including recurring administrative, financial, and sustainability challenges, as well as good practices that support smoother execution and long-term impact.

The third session examined challenges arising during project implementation. The analysis highlighted that administrative requirements frequently outweigh the substantive aspects of projects, leading to a perceived insufficient benefit for the effort provided. Financial management remains complex, especially for authorities without staff experienced in EU budgetary procedures.

One of the most pressing concerns raised was the impact of staff turnover, which can significantly disrupt project continuity and erode institutional memory. It was also noted that additional challenges in embedding project results within long-term national strategies, often lead to outcomes that remain isolated rather than contributing to systemic improvement. Inadequate dissemination and knowledge-sharing across organizations can lead to duplication of efforts and missed opportunities for mutual learning.

Good practices were also discussed, including retaining the same team throughout both the drafting and implementation phases, aligning EU projects with national initiatives, publishing results on shared platforms such as the Knowledge Network, and maintaining internal project webpages to preserve traceability and visibility.

Summary of the Group discussions:

Participants agreed that financial statements and reporting requirements are particularly complex for newcomers and often excessively time-consuming, suggesting simplifications to reduce the administrative burden.

To strengthen sustainability, they recommended aligning project outcomes with national risk assessments and maintaining momentum through EU-funded national activities post-project. Improving knowledge sharing was also emphasized, with suggestions including workshops on best practices and lessons learned, as well as info days and events highlighting successful projects.

Quantitative Analysis of Recommendations – Phase 3

Following the group discussions on project implementation and sustainability, participants were invited to vote on the recommendations they considered most relevant. The results show a clear and dominant priority: ensuring staff continuity and preserving institutional memory, which received 13 votes, representing 76% of all respondents. This confirms that stability in staffing and knowledge retention is perceived as the most critical factor for the successful implementation and long-term impact of EU-funded projects. Participants clearly viewed the lack of continuity as one of the most disruptive challenges encountered across the project cycle.

Other recommendations also received substantial interest. The suggestion to link project outcomes to policy processes gathered 8 votes, corresponding to 47%, indicating strong support for better integrating project results into national strategies and decision-making structures. This reflects a shared awareness that sustainability requires more than successful implementation; it also depends on the institutional uptake of outcomes.

Two recommendations received the same level of support, each with 7 votes, or 41%: the creation of an internal “project management checklist” and the simplification of administrative and reporting requirements. Together, these results highlight the need for more structured tools that can guide implementation teams, and the need to reduce the administrative burden (at national and European level).

Finally, the creation of internal knowledge repositories collected 5 votes, representing 29%. This reflects the interest in mechanisms that facilitate knowledge transfer and mitigate the consequences of staff turnover.

Taken together, these results indicate a strong consensus: the sustainability of EU-funded projects depends foremost on stable staffing and the protection of institutional knowledge, supported by structured internal processes and improved integration of project results into policy frameworks.

5. Next Steps

The PLUTUS Team outlined several follow-up actions that will build on the findings of the webinar. These include the publication of a detailed final report, the dissemination of an updated mapping of EU funding opportunities for Civil Protection Authorities, the compilation of good practices and improvement proposals, and the drafting of a ministerial report with recommendations tailored to the Belgian context.

6. Conclusion

The PLUTUS Webinar offered a clear overview of the challenges faced by Civil Protection Authorities across the EU project cycle and highlighted areas where improvements are most needed. Despite the distinct focus of each phase, the voting results point to a coherent overarching priority: strengthening internal capacity. Across all phases, participants consistently favoured measures that enhance staff skills, improve internal communication, and ensure institutional continuity. These priorities were reflected in the highest-ranked recommendations, including increased awareness of funding opportunities, targeted training on EU procedures, and mechanisms to preserve institutional memory.

Participants also emphasized the importance of better internal information management and more streamlined administrative processes, as well as the need to embed project results into long-term strategies. While these areas received varied levels of support, they collectively underline the value of more coordinated and efficient internal systems.

Overall, the webinar demonstrated a shared commitment to improving organizational readiness and long-term project sustainability. The insights gathered here will inform the forthcoming detailed report, the mapping of funding opportunities, and recommendations for national decision-makers.

Annex

Presentation given during the Webinar including the voted recommendations

Webinar PLUTUS

6 November 2025
13:00



The webinar

Welcoming words:

- Anne Baetens, Advisor, Directorate-General for Civil Protection
- Gaetano Vivo, Deputy Head of the Prevention and Preparedness Capacity Building Unit, DG ECHO B3
- Zuzana Stanton-Geddes, Senior Disaster Risk Specialist, World Bank



The Webinar

1. Three rounds of discussion on each of the following phase:

Phase 1 - Strategic planning and needs analysis

Phase 2 - Drafting applications

Phase 3 - Implementing and sustaining projects

Structure of each round:

- Introduction by the PLUTUS Team
- Group discussions
- Report in plenary

2. Final choice on priority recommendations

3. Conclusions and next steps

Previous steps

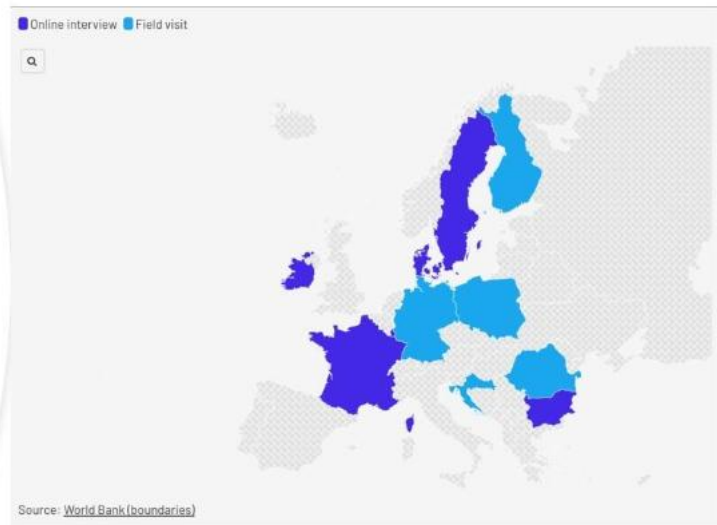
1. Questionnaire





Previous steps

- 2. Interviews with Belgian stakeholders
- 3. Interviews with other UCPM Member and Participating States



Mapping of funding opportunities

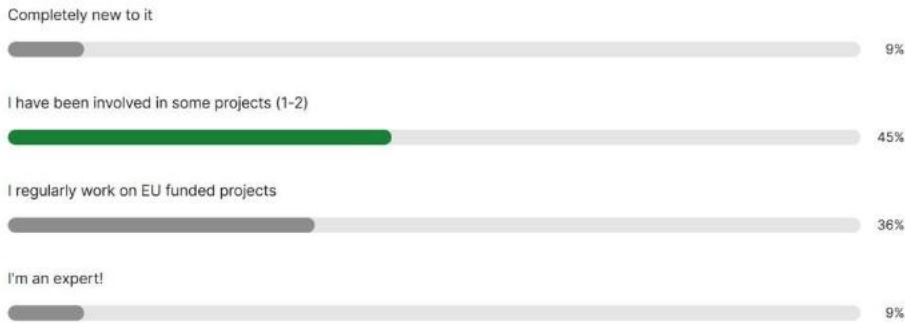
Legend for funding sources:

- UCPM
- DG RTD
- DG-ENV/DG CLIMA
- DG EAC
- DG REGIO
- DG HOME
- DG CONNECT
- DG AGR
- DG EMPL
- DG MOVE/DG ENER/DG CONNECT
- DG SANTE
- SG REFORM



Ice breaker


How experienced are you with EU funding?




Ice breaker

- Insights on funding possibilities
- Better understanding of the bottlenecks at country level
- Interesting insights to simplify future submissions
- Knowledge resources, inspirations
- Exchange of views, Insight on good practices





Phase 1: Strategic planning and needs analysis



Preliminary observations

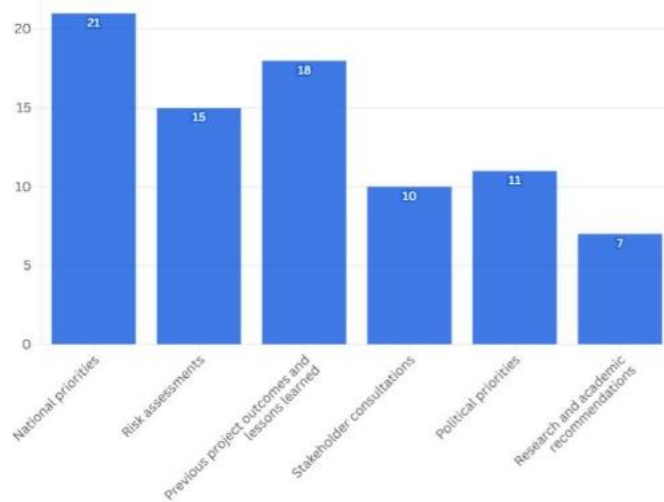


50% of National Civil Protection Authorities operate reactively when there is a call for proposals, 50% work with long term strategies



Identifying the right funding opportunities remains challenging due to complexity and fragmentation of the different funding instruments, particularly for smaller services lacking dedicated staff

Preliminary observations



Motivation to partake
in an EU funded
project can differ

Preliminary findings – Structural Challenges

- Fragmented coordination:
 - Limited cooperation across ministries and sectors (civil protection, health, environment)
 - Weak link between strategic and operational levels in identifying funding needs
- Misalignment of priorities:
 - Difficulty aligning local need and initiatives with EU and national priorities
 - Challenge in connecting Commission objectives with operational realities
- Regulations and annual work programmes can lack clarity or specificity
- Needs identified too late or informally, reducing alignment with funding priorities



Preliminary findings – Technical Challenges

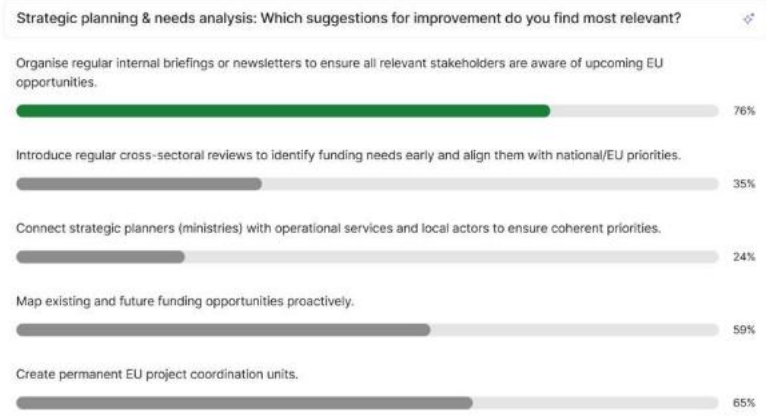
- Limited awareness, low visibility of available EU funding opportunities and ongoing projects among national and local actors
- Staff shortages and limited expertise complicate funding identification and proposal preparation
- Information gaps: it can be difficult to find the right information as some funds are managed by the European Commission, while others are handled at national or regional levels

Preliminary findings – Good practices

- Call for proposal at the same time each year
- Have a specialised cell for identifying calls for proposals
- Strong network for identifying funding opportunities
- Regular info-sharing between departments and partners
- Internal mappings
- Monitor annual work programmes to predict priorities



Vote the best recommendation

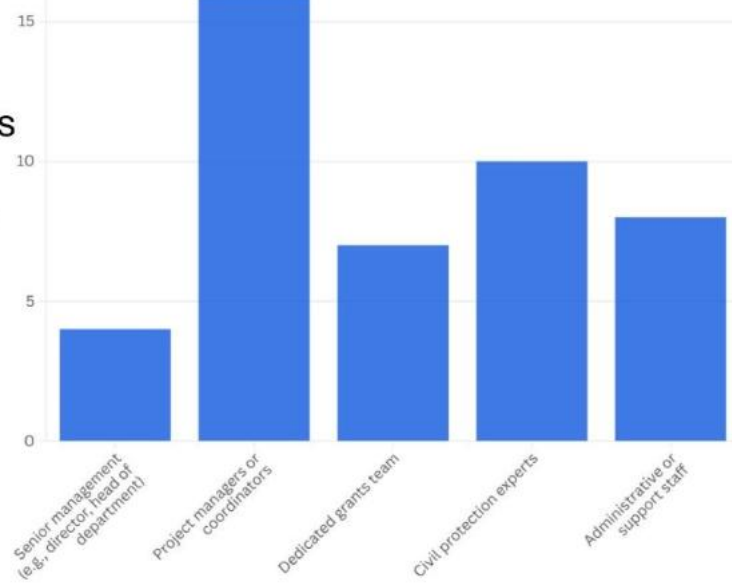


Phase 2: Drafting applications



Preliminary observations

- Limited internal expertise or resources for proposal writing
- Outsourcing of drafting applications



Preliminary observations

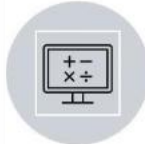


Drafting applications requires pre-existing knowledge on templates, processes and budget requirements



Internal validation processes can be very long adding time pressure which reduces proposal quality

Preliminary observations



The Funding & Tenders portal is not considered user friendly



For some the benefits of an EU project are outweighed by the effort it takes to fulfil all the requirements of an application

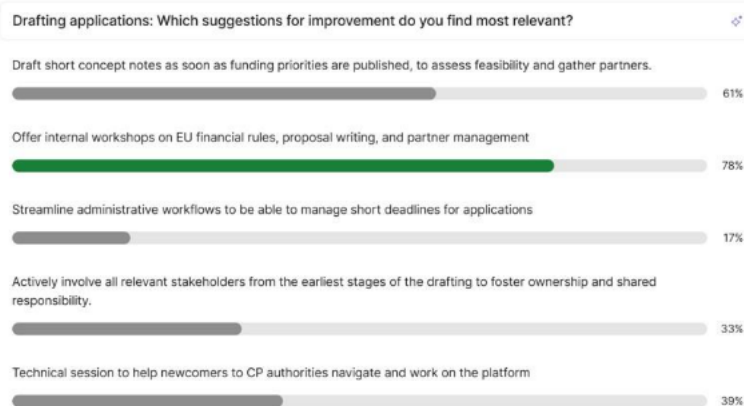
Preliminary findings – Good practices

- Always involve several (at least two) people in the drafting process for a project to exchange ideas and share the responsibility
- Mix the drafting teams, combining staff with specific knowledge of EU wording and budget guidelines with those who bring innovative ideas
- Internal learning network with FAQ and experiences with applications, to support other colleagues for the application

Preliminary findings – Good practices

- One-pager outlining the proposal
- Proactive writing of the proposals before the call
- Include concrete numbers and figures in the application so that results can be clearly demonstrated

Vote the best recommendation





Phase 3: Implementation and sustainability



Preliminary observations



Administrative burdens during reporting and audits can take focus away from substance.



Financial management of the project



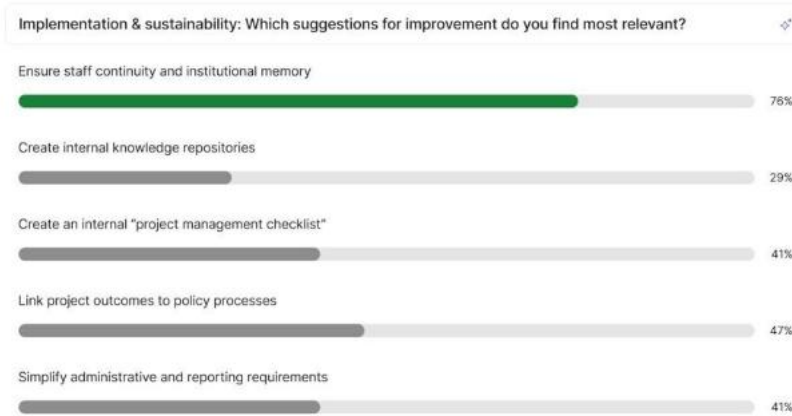
Preliminary Findings - Challenges

- Staff turnover leads to loss of institutional memory and project continuity
- Difficulties embedding results into long-term structures or national strategies
- Duplication of efforts: similar projects restart without building on past work
- Insufficient dissemination and knowledge-sharing mechanisms

Preliminary Findings – Good practices

- Same team is drafting and implementing the project
- Working on EU projects in tandem with national projects
- Publication of the outcomes on a platform (e.g. Knowledge Network)
- Internal web page with project initiatives

Vote the best recommendation



Next steps

Dissemination of the [project analyses](#) through:

- Final [detailed report](#)
- Mapping of [funding opportunities for Civil Protection Authorities](#)
- List of good practices and suggestions for [improvement](#)
- Ministerial report: [list of recommendations that could be implemented in Belgium](#)



Thank you for your participation !

The Plutus Team