

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PLUTUS project

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

Grant agreement – UCPM-2023-TRACK1 - Project 101142337 – D.17

Belgian Directorate-General for Civil Protection (IBZ)

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About PLUTUS

PLUTUS, “*Funding Resilient Futures: Exploring EU Funding Practices in the Field of Disaster Risk Management*,” is a Belgian Civil Protection–led project under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) Track 1 grants. It examines the roadblocks and best practices encountered by civil protection authorities in UCPM Member and Participating States when identifying, accessing, and utilising European financing, mainly through calls for proposals published by the European Commission.

The project maps existing EU financing opportunities and the legal and administrative barriers that limit their access, collects good practices from other Member States, and develops practical recommendations to improve the ability of Belgian and other authorities to apply for and implement EU-funded projects.

The project was conducted with a budget of 300.774,07 over 22 months, during which extensive research and analysis were carried out. Information was gathered through a questionnaire sent to all Member and Participating States of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM). Ten interviews with relevant Belgian stakeholders (including police, health authorities, the international cell, financial services, and others) were conducted to identify shared challenges and learn about potential good practices. An additional ten interviews were conducted with civil protection authorities in UCPM countries, five in person and five online. A webinar was also organised in November this year to present the preliminary findings of the project and to vote on the most relevant recommendations for improvement. All Member and Participating States, as well as the European Commission, the World Bank, and the European Investment Bank, were invited.

Why PLUTUS Matters

Investing in disaster risk reduction and resilient infrastructure is not only vital for safety and security but also brings clear economic benefits. Analyses by the World Bank show that every euro invested in resilience can generate multiple euros in return. Roughly €4 in benefits for every €1 invested, while broader global studies indicate benefit-cost ratios ranging between two and ten ¹, demonstrating that strategic use of EU financing through projects can deliver both economic and operational advantages for countries. EU funding mechanisms, including the UCPM, Horizon Europe, LIFE, INTERREG, the Digital Europe Programme, and others provide powerful opportunities to reinforce preparedness, build essential networks, and strengthen national and local capacity.

Yet these opportunities are not used efficiently as reported by many countries who share the same challenges. The PLUTUS project has identified several barriers, and good practices and opportunities, that have led to the formulation of recommendations that could be implemented to help strengthen the ability of national authorities to attract more funding and implement it more effectively to ultimately improve its overall resilience.

Key Findings

PLUTUS reveals a complex reality: while substantial EU funding is available for disaster risk management, civil protection authorities face systemic obstacles that prevent them from fully taking advantage of it. Authorities report that EU funding opportunities are dispersed across multiple programmes managed by different European Commission services, each with its own timelines, administrative need etc. Even with tools like the Funding & Tenders Portal, navigating this landscape remains challenging. Without staff specialized in EU funding, many authorities struggle to maintain a clear overview of relevant calls.

Many civil protection authorities also face limited administrative capacity and organizational fragmentation. Personnel dedicated exclusively to EU-funded projects are often lacking, and responsibilities are dispersed among staff with competing operational duties. Without institutional memory or permanent expertise, authorities frequently have to “start from scratch” when new calls are published. This lack of continuity reduces the quality of applications and leads to missed deadlines or opportunities.

Administrative and financial burdens further complicate the use of EU fundings. Authorities repeatedly highlight the heavy reporting requirements, complex procurement rules, and uncertainty regarding staff cost eligibility, subcontracting rules, and documentation requirements. Difficulties understanding and applying evolving templates and regulations add to the strain, making project management more cumbersome and time-consuming. Structural financial barriers, such as co-financing requirements and VAT obligations, also limit participation. Even modest co-financing requirements can impact a project feasibility for countries.

The loss of institutional knowledge and limited national coordination exacerbate these challenges. Without a national structured mechanism to track EU-funded projects results, authorities often lack visibility on past activities. Knowledge is frequently lost as staff change positions, leading to repeated efforts, fragmented strategic planning, and missed opportunities.

Recommendations

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. Formalised cooperation can increase proposal competitiveness, support evidence-based design, and open opportunities in programmes such as Horizon Europe.

Conclusion

The PLUTUS project offers clear evidence that EU funding is a strategic instrument for strengthening resilience which yet remains underutilised 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.

The full analytical report is available to all interested authorities upon request.