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Implementation of Population Preparedness Guidelines on Reaching a Population Self Sufficiency of at least 72 Hours under the EU Preparedness Union Strategy

Accompanying the document

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Guidelines on Population Preparedness under the EU Preparedness Union Strategy

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Executive summary

This Staff Working Document (SWD) is designed to support European Union (EU) Member States and Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) Participating States in supporting citizens in reaching a population self-sufficiency of at least 72 hours (Action 28 of the EU Preparedness Union Strategy). It sets out **the concrete modalities through which to implement the guidelines in the Commission communication 'Guidelines on Population Preparedness under the EU Preparedness Union Strategy' (C(2026) 8250).** This guidance, while non-binding, is intended to encourage EU Member States and UCPM Participating States to develop their preparedness actions according to their own national organisation, enabling them to benefit from a collection of good practices that build on the EU's wider work on disaster prevention and preparedness.

This guidance provides a practical framework for designing, implementing and monitoring communication and measures that enhance societal resilience. When households can meet their essential needs during the initial phase of a crisis, pressure on emergency services is reduced, enabling resources to be prioritised for marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk. Preparedness also strengthens citizens' confidence and ability to act, and contributes to more resilient and empowered societies, where people help one another and collaborate before, during, and after a crisis.

Preparation focuses on establishing a common understanding of at least 72 hours of self-sufficiency, analysing national contexts, defining roles and responsibilities and identifying target groups and strategic objectives.

Implementation highlights how to translate strategy into practice through effective risk communication. Key principles include providing clear and actionable advice, linking preparedness to everyday life, lowering barriers to action and promoting both individual and collective preparedness. Household preparedness is framed as a combination of having access to essential supplies and resources, knowledge, skills, confidence and social collaboration.

Quality assurance and monitoring emphasise the importance of assessing whether people are better prepared, better informed, and better able to act, while enabling continuous improvement through data, indicators and learning.

1. Introduction

Why was this guidance developed?

The EU Preparedness Union Strategy was adopted by the European Commission in March 2025 in response to the evolving risk landscape and common challenges facing the EU, building also on the findings and recommendations of the Niinistö report on preparedness and readiness of the EU.[1]

Central to this approach is strengthening population preparedness, strengthening societal resilience by ensuring that citizens are prepared, which constitutes one of the seven building blocks of the Strategy (under Chapter 3, population preparedness).

This SWD is one of five Commission Staff Working Documents (SWD)[1] accompanying Commission Communication on Guidelines on Population Preparedness under the EU Preparedness Union Strategy (C(2026) 8250) which covers the following actions:

- Guidance under **Action 27** on risk communication (SWD(2026) 825);
- Guidance **under Action 28** on reaching a population self-sufficiency of a minimum of 72 hours (SWD(2026) 826);
- Guidance under **Action 29** on preparedness in school education curricula and training of educational staff (SWD(2026) 827); [2]
- Guidance under **Action 33** on disability inclusive emergency preparedness and first response training, a flagship initiative of the Enhanced Disability Strategy (SWD (2026) 828).[3]

It is also accompanied by the **Citizens' Report to the European Citizens' Panel** (SWD(2026)829). The recommendations from the European Citizen Panel on Preparedness, organised in Brussels by the European Commission in March-May 2026 with 150 randomly selected, citizens from all 27 Member States, have been taken into account in their drafting. [4]

In the Commission Communication on Guidelines on Population Preparedness under the EU Preparedness Union Strategy (C(2026) 8250) to which the present SWD is attached, the Commission proposes the following guidelines to the civil protection authorities and other

[1] Available at https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/preparedness_en.
[2] This guidance was informed by analytical work undertaken through the Technical Assistance Financing Facility for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness.
[3] Action 33 is accompanied by two TAFF Advisory Reports: Guidance for Persons with Disabilities and Guidance for First Responders.
[4] The panel discussed building a culture of preparedness through education and awareness initiatives, empowering citizens to be first responders and active participants in crisis management. The focus was on strategies that spanned aspects like health, civil society support, and media literacy, addressing the challenges of vulnerable groups and developing leaders across communities. The European Citizens' Panel on Preparedness formulated 20 recommendations, including calls for accessible risk communication, practical guidance on 72-hour self-sufficiency, preparedness education from preschool age, and support for persons with disabilities and other groups facing barriers to preparedness. These recommendations were considered in the development of this guidance.

agencies and stakeholders involved in disaster risk management in the area of reaching a minimum of 72 hours population self-sufficiency:

1. **Establish a coordinated, risk-informed approach to household preparedness.** Promote at least 72 hours of self-sufficiency as a minimum baseline, focusing on common consequences of crises, such as disruptions to essential services. Define clear objectives and responsibilities across authorities, civil society, businesses and communities, recognising household preparedness as complementary to public emergency response.

2. **Provide clear, practical and achievable preparedness guidance.** Help households meet essential needs for at least 72 hours. Encourage emergency plans, evacuation bags and practical skills, such as first aid. Promote affordable, gradual steps adapted to individual circumstances, rather than focusing solely on supplies.

3. **Make preparedness accessible, inclusive and a shared effort.** Tailor advice to different needs and capabilities, particularly those of persons with disabilities, low-income households and others facing barriers. Use accessible formats, trusted messengers and multiple channels, while encouraging cooperation and mutual support among households and communities.

4. **Monitor preparedness behaviours and continuously improve measures.** Regularly assess whether households understand risks, have taken practical action and can meet essential needs during disruptions. Use surveys, behavioural indicators and feedback to identify barriers, address inequalities and adapt communication and preparedness measures over time.

This SWD is intended to provide further, more detailed guidance based on the guidelines above. This guidance was co-created with experts from EU Member States and UCPM Participating States, civil protection authorities and other disaster risk management stakeholders, including through dedicated workshops, and written consultations to help ensure their practical relevance and applicability.

For whom is this guidance intended?

This guidance is intended primarily to support national civil protection authorities within the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), as they have the primary responsibility for driving preparedness efforts for disaster risk management. It is also relevant for regional and local authorities and other stakeholders involved in preparedness efforts.

What is the scope of this guidance?

This guidance provides a practical framework to strengthen household preparedness by promoting at least 72 hours of self-sufficiency. It focuses on the development, implementation and evaluation of risk communication and preparedness measures that support behavioural change, increase societal resilience and help households to meet their essential needs during the initial phase of a crisis. The guidance is adaptable to different national and local contexts and applies to an all-hazards approach to preparedness.

How was this guidance developed?

This guidance draws on existing research and input from EU Member States and UCPM Participating States, including workshops and exchanges within the UCPM framework. Its development relied on a co-creation process involving civil protection authorities and other disaster risk management stakeholders through a dedicated co-creation workshop held in Brussels on 9-11 June 2026. The workshop brought together representatives from 22 different EU Member States and UCPM Participating States, as well as a range of institutional experts, including the European Commission, the Red Cross and the World Bank. Recommendations from the European Citizens' Panel on Preparedness organised in Brussels by the European Commission in March-May 2026 have also informed the drafting.

How is this guidance meant to be used?

The guidance builds on established principles of risk communication and disaster risk reduction (DRR), behavioural insights and practical examples from EU Member States and UCPM Participating States, to provide a practical and flexible framework that supports measures to strengthen household preparedness. National authorities could consider coordinating, at national level, with other government sectors and relevant government sectors, such as public health, energy and water supply, and agriculture, in developing or further adapting the guidance.

The step-by-step structure of the document covers preparation, implementation and monitoring, while linking to good practice and concrete examples from different countries.

This Staff Working Document addresses Action 28 of the EU Preparedness Union Strategy which aims to strengthen household preparedness and promote a minimum level of 72 hours of self-sufficiency across the EU. Household preparedness encompasses both the ability to meet basic needs, such as food, water, essential medicines and communication, and the practical skills required to manage disruptions and maintain essential everyday functions, including cooking without electricity, cooperating with others and making sound decisions under stress.

Prepared households enhance society's capacity to withstand, respond to and recover from crises, while supporting effective crisis management. The Six Basics of Self-Preparedness concept, developed by the preparEU pilot[5] project, identifies six essential elements (water, food, warmth, hygiene, medicine, information and communication) that every household should have in place to cope with the initial phase of a crisis. The concept aims to strengthen households' ability to cope with prolonged crises, including major disruptions to essential services such as water and electricity. Although crises may have different causes, their impacts on households are often similar, particularly through disruptions to essential services, communications and supply chains. Household preparedness and self-sufficiency are therefore promoted through an all-hazards approach.

[5] See preparEU pilot project, Final recommendations (2025), chapter 4, page 34.

2. Why at least 72-hour of self-sufficiency matters

2.1. 72 hours as recognised minimum standard

During the first 72 hours of a crisis, citizens may face considerable uncertainty and need to rely on their own preparedness. Response systems are typically under significant pressure, making this a critical period for both households and authorities.

The 72-hour benchmark has gradually emerged as an internationally recognised minimum standard for household emergency preparedness (self-sufficiency). This timeframe is used in many parts of the world and is based on lessons learned from past disasters, disruptions to critical infrastructure and other societal crises.

Strengthening household preparedness benefits citizens and is crucial to the overall functioning of crisis management systems (see Box 1). A central premise is that the more households are able to meet their basic needs during the initial phase of a crisis, the more emergency resources can be directed towards those most in need of support and assistance. Conversely, low levels of household preparedness can place additional strain on response systems and delay assistance to those who are least able to cope independently.

Key takeaways

- Promote at least 72 hours (three days) of self-sufficiency for households as a baseline, supported by practical examples of what that entails.
- Promote ownership: individuals are the expert in deeming what goods are relevant for their own household. Authorities support citizens in their assessment and action by providing information and guidance.
- Highlight how household preparedness can help to reduce pressure on emergency services.
- Emphasise the psychological and societal benefits of preparedness.

Box 1. The first 72 hours of a crisis

Operational perspective: The first 72 hours of a crisis place significant pressure on emergency services and crisis management systems, and it takes time to scale up logistics and assistance. The system may be unable to meet all demands simultaneously and may need to prioritise resources, resulting in delays to assistance. Stronger household preparedness during the initial phase of a crisis helps citizens to meet their basic needs themselves, freeing up emergency services and other resources across society for those most in need.

Individual perspective: The first 72 hours are critical for personal safety, as uncertainty, fear and confusion tend to peak at the onset of a crisis. Being prepared can contribute to a greater sense of control, reduce anxiety and support calmer, more resilient behaviour and decision-making. During this period, people may face challenges such as dehydration, untreated injuries or delayed assistance if emergency services are unable to reach affected areas immediately.

Societal perspective: Household preparedness can strengthen societal resilience overall. It emphasises the empowerment of citizens, households, and communities in preparedness efforts, as active participants and resources in times of crises. According to the 2024 Niinistö report, this approach recognises citizens as the backbone of societal resilience, reinforcing society's capacity to anticipate, withstand and recover from disruptions.

2.2. Shared challenges and how to address them

Key message

Countries face shared barriers, including communication sensitivity, coordination complexity and the challenge of making abstract risks relevant to everyday life.

Takeaways

- Communicate in a clear, non-alarmist and practical way.
- Make risks concrete and understandable by illustrating their potential consequences.
- Communicate preparedness as a shared responsibility of authorities and citizens.

Despite differences in national contexts, most countries face similar challenges when implementing self-sufficiency of at least 72 hours. These shared challenges create opportunities for cooperation, exchange of experience and continuous improvement across Europe (see Box 2).

Box 2. Key challenges and main takeaways

Several challenges have been identified across different national contexts. The suggested approaches are not universal solutions, but, rather, practical options to consider and adapt to national and local circumstances.

Challenge: Communication may be perceived as alarmist or causing unnecessary concern.

Takeaway: Clearly explain that preparedness is a precautionary measure and not linked to an immediate threat. Combine information about common consequences from different risks with practical, achievable actions, and frame preparedness as a normal and responsible part of everyday life. Emphasise that preparedness is a shared effort. Households are not alone in this.

Challenge: Lack of trust in public authorities.

Takeaway: Link national communication (e.g. through social media, mass media, influencers) with local, face-to-face engagement and involve trusted intermediaries and community actors who already have established relationships with different population groups. Support and integrate with existing local (even informal) preparedness initiatives.

Challenge: Few households report taking preparedness steps, despite available and accessible guidance.

Takeaway: Promote simple, concrete actions, strengthen self-efficacy and encourage conversations about preparedness within families, neighbourhoods and local communities.

Visible community engagement can help to establish preparedness as a shared and accepted social norm.

Challenge: Preparedness messaging may become politically sensitive.

Takeaway: Position 72 hours of self-sufficiency as neutral public safety guidance. Anchor messages in widely recognised risks (e.g. extreme weather and common consequences such as power outages) and consider using trusted cross-sector voices to reinforce credibility.

Challenge: Coordination across national, regional and local actors.

Takeaway: Engage stakeholders early across all levels of society, including civil society, the private sector and media, from the preparation and planning stage onwards. This can include consultation workshops, joint planning meetings, co-creation of communication materials and testing messages with target groups. Clear roles and early coordination strengthen consistency and trust.

Challenge: Reaching marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk.

Takeaway: Involve target groups in the design of communication from the beginning. Ensure that messages are accessible, actionable, tailored and available in relevant languages and formats. Work with trusted intermediaries to improve reach and impact (***see (SWD(2026) 825 on risk communication***).

Challenge: Risk of preparedness being commercialised.

Takeaway: Emphasise simple, affordable measures and encourage households to build on existing resources. Highlight skills, planning and community rather than consumption, and discourage misleading or fear-based commercial approaches. Collaboration with commercial organisations should be transparent and should not imply endorsement of specific products or brands.

Challenge: Public expectations that authorities will manage all aspects of a crisis.

Takeaway: Communicate preparedness as a shared responsibility. Clarify the role of authorities before, during and after a crisis, while explaining how household preparedness supports the overall system and helps to prioritise those most in need.

Challenge: Many citizens struggle to relate abstract risks to daily life, reducing the perceived relevance of preparedness measures.

Takeaway: Make risks concrete and relatable by using scenarios, examples and timelines that illustrate how disruptions may affect everyday life over time, helping to demonstrate the value of preparedness.

Example	Main takeaways
Planning ahead for crisis and disasters	By illustrating how disruptions may affect critical services and functions that people rely on in their daily lives and highlighting dependencies between

Germany, Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance (BBK), brochure	infrastructure, services and everyday activities, communicators can help to make potential consequences more understandable and relatable
Prepare for an emergency situation The Netherlands, National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV), brochure	Describe a timeline covering how a major disruption may develop over time and the consequences citizens may experience during the first hours, days and beyond. This can help people to understand why preparedness measures are recommended and how they may support themselves and others during a crisis.

3. Promoting at least 72 hours of self-sufficiency

3.1. Preparation

3.1.1. Establish the national context

Key message

Preparedness levels, risks and approaches vary across UCPM countries, but the consequences of different crises are often similar, such as severe disruptions to critical societal services and impact on individuals and communities.

Main takeaways

- Focus public communication on how to prepare for common consequences identified through risk assessment across different risks and crises.
- Preparedness at home and preparedness for evacuation should be seen as complementary.
- Explore opportunities to integrate household preparedness into existing policy areas.

By focusing the messages to the public on how to manage the consequences of crises and an all-hazards approach, variations in the risk landscape become less significant in relation to basic household preparedness. The consequences of a crisis may include severe disruptions to critical societal services, such as electricity supply, food supply, water services, and communications, whether arising from human-induced incidents or natural hazards.

Some countries are focusing their efforts on strengthening population preparedness, including the ability to receive and act on early warnings and population alerts, to enable rapid evacuation from homes, for example in the event of wildfires, floods and earthquakes. Others have prioritised a minimum of 72 hours (or even a week or longer) of self-sufficiency at home. When considering a timeframe beyond the 72-hour minimum, countries could involve relevant providers of critical services, such as water, food and electricity providers, to take into account the resilience of these services and the potential duration of disruptions.

Preparedness to evacuate and preparedness to meet basic needs at home should be seen as complementary, rather than two distinct alternatives. Maintaining an emergency bag with essential items for immediate evacuation forms part of overall household preparedness.

Household preparedness is stronger where it is integrated into existing policy areas and programmes, such as civil protection, climate adaptation, building regulations, public health, social policy and other areas. Where appropriate, this can increase efficiency, help to ensure policy coherence and support long-term implementation.

3.1.2. Defining objectives in a strategy

Key message

Effective risk communication requires specific and measurable objectives, defined target groups and consistent messaging. A structured risk communication strategy supports coordination across stakeholders and sets out a clear, step-by-step pathway towards achieving the stated objectives.

Main Takeaways

- Define clear and measurable objectives.
- Align communication across stakeholders to ensure consistency and coherence.
- Distinguish between awareness and action goals and plan for long-term behavioural change.

Developing a risk communication strategy is a valuable foundation for strengthening household preparedness over time (see also SWD on risk communication). Collaboration with relevant stakeholders is a key part of this process, contributing diverse perspectives, expertise and legitimacy.

A well-designed strategy provides a structured framework for how, why and to whom communication is carried out, while defining the pathway from awareness to preparedness action. Grounded in audience research and evidence-based insights, it should reflect an understanding of target groups' needs, behaviours, motivations and communication preferences.

The risk communication strategy should clarify:

- Objectives: what changes in awareness, attitudes or behaviours are expected.
- Target groups: who needs to be reached, through which channels, and with what approach.
- Key messages: what people need to understand and act on.
- Roles and responsibilities: who communicates to whom.
- Monitoring and evaluation: who evaluates whether the strategy´s objectives have been achieved.

Objectives should be adapted to national contexts, reviewed regularly and be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART). Objectives may address different stages of preparedness, including awareness, motivation and preparedness actions.

Examples of objectives:

- Short-term: Increase public awareness and understanding of at least 72 hours of self-sufficiency guidance by X% within 12 months, measured through national surveys (establish the status quo or baseline before work commences, and measure what changes).
- Medium-term: Increase the share of the population that has taken at least one preparedness action (e.g. storing water, preparing a crisis plan) by X% within two years.
- Long-term: Increase the proportion of households able to meet their basic needs for at least 72 hours to a defined national target level within three-to-five years.

3.1.3. Defining roles and coordination mechanisms

Key message

Preparedness requires coordinated actions by multiple actors, with households playing a central role.

Main Takeaways

- Clearly define roles and responsibilities at all levels of e.g. public authorities, civil society, businesses and households in strengthening individual preparedness.
- Promote coordination and cooperation between sectors and actors through established structures, networks and communication channels.
- Empower households as active contributors, rather than solely recipients of information or support.

Effective guidance on self-sufficiency and specific preparedness advice should be developed collaboratively between relevant authorities and other stakeholders in line with the 'whole-of-society' approach, ensuring that recommendations are evidence-based, context specific, practical and coherent. While roles and responsibilities may vary between countries, key stakeholders are generally:

- National civil protection authorities provide overall strategic direction and coordination.
- Other relevant national authorities (e.g. health, finance, security, communications authorities) provide sector-specific expertise.
- Regional and local authorities adapt and implement measures in local contexts, ensuring reach to all residents of a given territory.

- Schools and educational institutions contribute to preparedness by building knowledge, skills and attitudes among children, young people and their families, and by promoting a culture of preparedness from an early age.

- Civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, other organisations and volunteers provide expertise, support outreach and engagement, represent the needs of marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk and promote community-level preparedness.

- Media contribute to public awareness and understanding of preparedness across society.

- Academia and research institutions provide evidence, analysis and insights to support effective preparedness measures.

- Businesses and the private sector ensure access to essential goods, own and operate critical infrastructure and services such as water and electricity supply and play a key role in building resilient supply chains and systems.

- Employers can strengthen preparedness among their employees by promoting awareness, knowledge and practical preparedness, supporting both household preparedness and business continuity management.

- Armed forces support civilian authorities as appropriate, including in ensuring continuity and civil protection operations.

Within this structure, individuals, households and communities contribute by strengthening their own preparedness and by engaging in preparedness activities that support their local communities and society as a whole. This complements public efforts and supports the overall functioning and resilience of society.

Examples of practical collaboration mechanisms under a whole-of-society approach

- Establishing national and/or regional preparedness networks, bringing together authorities, civil society, academia and the private sector.

- Organising multistakeholder workshops to jointly develop and adapt preparedness guidance and strategies.

- Conducting consultations and focus groups with different population groups to identify barriers and enablers to household preparedness.

- Running joint preparedness exercises and awareness campaigns involving multiple sectors.

- Supporting local preparedness initiatives and community events to encourage engagement and ownership.

- Using pilot projects and evaluations to test and refine approaches before wider implementation of household preparedness activities.

3.1.4. Assess target groups and starting points

Key message

Risk perception and preparedness vary across socioeconomic and demographic groups, influenced by differences in resources, skills, education, access to information and previous experiences with crisis.

Main Takeaways

- Gather and use data and insights to understand variations in awareness, risk perception and behaviour.
- Tailor communication to different target groups and levels of preparedness.
- Ensure that preparedness measures are accessible, affordable and adaptable to different needs.

Motivation and capacity to prepare vary across the population and are influenced by knowledge, risk perception, available resources, social norms and lived experiences. Surveys from several countries (see examples below) indicate that citizens with higher levels of income and education tend to report better household preparedness. Practical skills, previous experience, strong social networks and community support can significantly enhance preparedness. For example, people living in rural areas often demonstrate high levels of self-reliance and community-based resilience, reflecting everyday experience of managing service interruptions and longer distances to support systems. At the same time, rural communities may face specific vulnerabilities, including longer distances to essential services and greater challenges in maintaining supply and service continuity during prolonged disruptions.

Trust in authorities, perceptions of individual versus collective responsibility, gender roles, community norms and expectations about preparedness can affect both willingness and ability to act.

Effective and inclusive risk communication should reflect the diversity of people's circumstances and motivations. In addition to demographic characteristics, target groups should be defined by differences in values, life stages, experiences, levels of trust, available resources, perceived barriers and motivations for taking action.

Box 3. Identify target groups in advance

A baseline assessment or pre-study establishes an initial understanding of the population's awareness, attitudes and behaviours. It serves as a reference point for subsequent measurements, enabling comparison over time and supporting the evaluation of the effectiveness of specific communication strategies.

Collaboration with civil society organisations and other actors representing specific groups, such as older adults, people with disabilities or young people, can facilitate a more nuanced

understanding of target audiences and improve the relevance and effectiveness of communication efforts.

Methods for gaining a better understanding of target audiences may include:

- Baseline surveys and questionnaires to assess awareness, attitudes, behaviours and preparedness levels.
- Focus groups to explore perceptions, motivations, barriers and communication preferences in greater depth.
- Interviews with representatives of specific population groups, community leaders or civil society organisations.
- Analysis of demographic and socioeconomic data to identify different audience segments and their specific needs.
- Pilot testing of messages and communication materials with members of the target audience before wider dissemination.

Example	Takeaways
Report Rasch Resilience Re-analysis 2026 The Netherlands, National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV)	National survey on resilience-building behaviour.
National Household Survey on Disaster Preparedness United States (US), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)	National survey on public risk perception, preparedness actions and factors that influence preparedness actions.

3.2. Implementation

3.2.1. Develop clear and actionable guidance

Key message

Risk communication is generally most effective when it is simple, practical and relevant to people's everyday life (See also Staff Working Document on risk communication).

Main Takeaways

- Focus on basic needs.
- Encourage adaptation to personal needs and circumstances
- Encourage simple steps and gradual preparedness over time.

Focus communication on basic needs: Risk communication on 72 hours of self-sufficiency should focus on essential needs such as food, drinking water, heating or cooling, lighting, medicines, hygiene and access to information and communication. Framing preparedness around basic human needs provides a common and transferable foundation across countries and contexts.

Promote a minimum baseline of preparedness: The 72-hour concept should be communicated as a minimum level of self-sufficiency. The aim is to help people understand why preparedness matters, what they are expected to do, and how to get started. The emphasis should be on encouraging action rather than on the specific timeframe itself.

Provide clear and practical guidance: Guidance should be practical and actionable, helping people manage their daily needs during disruptions such as power outages. This includes advice on food and water storage, essential medicines, assistive devices and technologies, including medical devices, personal hygiene, sanitation, in particular toilet use, access to information and communication when normal services are unavailable (on inclusion, see also the SWD on disability inclusive emergency preparedness). This should also include advice to keep a reserve of cash and an offline digital payment method (where available) for essential household purchases.

Encourage gradual and personalised preparedness: Households should be encouraged to assess existing resources, take simple first steps, and improve preparedness over time. Recommendations should be affordable, accessible, realistic for people with limited income and limited storage space or additional support needs. In this context, the contribution of non-governmental organisations such as food banks should be taken into account. They should be adapted to individual needs, circumstances, and capabilities, and integrated into everyday life as a normal habit rather than a one-time effort.

Frame preparedness as relevant and shared: Preparedness should be presented as useful for both major crises and more common disruptions, whether they occur suddenly or develop and worsen over time. Communication should encourage cooperation between neighbours and communities and emphasise that preparedness is a shared responsibility that strengthens both individual and societal resilience.

Essential items to meet basic needs during severe disruptions or prolonged interruptions to critical societal functions:

- Food (that can be stored at room temperature, requires no heating, no or little water to prepare, and can be readily eaten without any or only simple preparation).
- Stored water for essential use (drinking, basic cooking, hygiene).
- Alternative heating/cooling and lighting.
- Medicines and first aid equipment.
- Personal hygiene and sanitation supplies, including arrangements for toilet use and waste management.

- Equipment to receive emergency information and maintain communication (e.g. radio powered by batteries, fully charged power banks).

Payments for essential items

- A reserve of cash, including small notes and coins, for essential household purchases in case digital payment systems fail.
- An offline digital payment method (such as the offline digital euro in the future) where available.

Examples of additional considerations

- Preparedness for pets.
- Household emergency plan (including nearest shelter and how to get in touch with family and friends if mobile networks are unavailable). Emergency evacuation bag/grab-and-go bag (with essential items to support rapid evacuation).
- Basic knowledge and skills, such as first aid, psychological first aid, and appropriate behaviour during different types of emergencies.

Example	Main takeaways
Preparedness brochure: ***72 hours - how to prepare for crisis situations and overcome them together*** Czechia: Ministry of the Interior, Fire Rescue Service	Concrete advice on 72 hours of emergency supplies and preparedness guidance.
Build an emergency kit and grab-and-go bag: website with films Canada: Government of British Columbia (PreparedBC)	Example of a practical and scalable risk communication approach with clearly structured information and simple preparedness guidance for households.

Tailored advice for persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities face increased risks in crises, making their level of preparedness especially important. Tailored guidance on household preparedness and crisis planning should be prioritised and developed in collaboration with the target groups concerned.

In addition to basic supplies such as food and drinking water, preparedness should include disability-specific needs, for example extra medication, back-up power for assistive devices, communication aids, and clear plans for how to replace essential services or support that may be disrupted (see also Staff Working Document on disability inclusive preparedness).

Example	Main Takeaways

Tips for Getting by at Home During a Crisis Easy-to-read edition and guide Norway, Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection (DSB)	An easy-to-read edition of the regular advice on preparedness, with shorter text and more descriptive illustrations. A guide for anyone helping others with emergency preparedness, whether as a family member or professionally.
Advice for disabled persons and their carers UK, UK government, Cabinet Office	Preparedness advice for people with different disabilities and their carers.
Thinking about how to reduce disaster risks at the national and community level Japan, Government of Japan, Cabinet Secretariat (National Resilience Office)	Adapted advice for children

Preparedness for individuals facing financial or health-related challenges

The European Citizens' Panel on Preparedness in 2026 recommended exploring ways to make 72-hour preparedness measures more accessible to people facing financial or health-related difficulties. Among the ideas put forward was the provision of emergency kits or other targeted forms of support for households that may have difficulty preparing independently.

In line with the participants' recommendation that the EU should ensure that assistance is offered for citizens who may struggle to access resources for self-sufficiency, the Commission will carry out a study to look at preparedness amongst low-income groups. The results will be available in 2027.

Preparedness advice for people travelling away from home

Temporary visitors in a country, such as tourists or people on business trips, face specific preparedness challenges. They might have limited knowledge of local risks, difficulties to access resources normally kept at home, challenges in understanding advice or warnings in a different language. This may include practical advice for travellers on how to prepare before and during their trip, including what essential items to carry and how to access local risk information, warnings and emergency services.

Preparedness messages should therefore also aim to reach temporary visitors, with practical advice on how to be prepared for short-term disruptions while visiting a country. This could include information on how to stay informed about local risks and emergencies, receive public alerts, accessing emergency services, and follow evacuation or other official instructions.

Example	**Main Takeaways**

<u>THEMIS project</u> Greece, General Secretariat for Civil Protection	Tailored preparedness information for tourists, including awareness of local hazards and how to prepare for and respond to emergencies while travelling

Strengthening preparedness through household crisis planning

A household emergency plan takes household preparedness and self-sufficiency a step further. Useful information to include in an emergency plan includes written contact details for key persons, arrangements for a meeting point if communication is not possible and information on the location of the nearest shelter or other safe place nearby.

One way to encourage households to develop such a plan is to provide ready-made templates that can be downloaded or printed from an official website or included in a preparedness brochure. Households should be encouraged to involve all family members in developing the crisis plan, while the plans should also be adapted the requirements and needs of all members, including children and persons with disabilities (see also the SWD on disability inclusive preparedness). This serves as a practical exercise, helping people to work through scenarios and identify key actions and information in advance.

Example	Main Takeaways
<u>My emergency plan</u> Belgium: National Crisis Centre	Template for household emergency plans that can be printed from an official website and filled out

Preparing an emergency bag for evacuation

Household preparedness may include an emergency bag (emergency backpack or grab-and-go bag) for situations where citizens need to leave their home quickly.

An emergency bag is a portable, easy-to-carry bag with essential items for evacuation. Its contents should be adapted to individual needs, local risks and the expected duration of evacuation. Typical items include identification documents, cash and basic supplies.

It is important to distinguish between:

- Household preparedness supplies, for staying at home.
- Emergency bag/emergency backpack or grab-and-go bag, for evacuation.

To avoid confusion, communication should clearly separate these two concepts and avoid using terms like ´emergency kit´ for household preparedness.

Example	Main Takeaways

***Emergency Kit vs Grab-and-Go-Bag What's the difference?* film and guidance** Canada, Government of British Columbia (PreparedBC)	A simple and clear explanation of the differences between a grab-and-go bag and an emergency kit

Communicating shared responsibility and building trust

Emphasising individual responsibility alone may reduce trust and willingness to act. People are more likely to take preparedness measures when they understand that civil protection authorities and other actors are also taking responsibility and fulfilling their roles. Communication should clearly demonstrate how household preparedness forms part of a broader societal effort.

This includes explaining how authorities:

- invest in emergency preparedness and response capabilities,
- protect critical infrastructure,
- strengthen warning systems and civil protection arrangements.

Household preparedness should be framed as a way to complement, rather than replace, these efforts.

Clearly explain:

- what authorities will do,
- what citizens can do and how their actions benefit the individual and contribute to a stronger collective effort,
- how authorities can support citizens in fulfilling their responsibilities and contributing to societal preparedness and resilience (e.g. by providing practical, actionable and accessible guidance).

Example	Main Takeaways
Preparedness brochure Safety Handbook (brochure) Poland, Government Centre for Security	Communication that places individual preparedness within a broader context and demonstrates that preparedness is a shared effort rather than a transfer of responsibility

3.2.2. Beyond supplies: Knowledge, skills and self-efficacy

Key message

In addition to supplies, preparedness includes knowledge, skills, confidence and social cooperation.

Takeaways

- Promote a holistic approach to preparedness.
- Strengthen knowledge and practical skills.
- Build confidence and self-efficacy.

Household preparedness depends on supplies and also on individuals' knowledge, skills, confidence and ability to cooperate with others at a local and community level. Following elements are essential for effective preparedness and for encouraging and enabling behavioural change and active engagement:

1. Knowledge and understanding

- Understand basic needs in a crisis (e.g. food, water, heat, communication).
- Enhance information literacy, including know where to find reliable, up-to-date information, to build resilience to risk related to disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) (see also SWD on risk communication, Tool n. 5).
- Learn about local risks and their consequences and discuss preparedness measures within the household.

2. Practical skills

- Practise key skills, such as lighting candles, cooking without electricity, storing water and using alternative heating.
- Rehearse a household emergency plan so everyone knows what to do and how to communicate. Learn how to use preparedness supplies and equipment before they are needed.
- Encourage participation in local drills and exercises when possible, for example with schools or communities, to practise evacuation, first aid and other emergency response skills.

3. Self-efficacy and confidence

- Build confidence through regular preparedness actions and simple exercises.
- Discuss roles and responsibilities within the household and prepare for different scenarios.
- Use checklists and routines to support calm decision-making under pressure.

4. Community and collective capability

- Identify people, groups and local resources that could provide support during disruptions. Try to find a preparedness buddy.
- Establish ways to communicate and share information with family, neighbours and the community.
- Be prepared to both give and receive help and participate in local preparedness activities where possible.

3.2.3. Inclusive risk communication design and channels

Key message

Inclusive risk communication requires a combination of accessible channels, formats, languages and sustained engagement, tailored to different target groups.

Takeaways

- Align channels, messengers, formats and language with target groups.
- Ensure consistency across actors and platforms.
- Maintain communication over time to reinforce preparedness behaviours.

Inclusive risk communication is essential to ensure that preparedness information reaches and can be understood by everyone, regardless of age, language, disability, literacy level, digital access or socioeconomic background. Clear, accessible and culturally sensitive communication helps individuals and communities to take appropriate action to strengthen resilience and support effective 72-hour self-sufficiency across the whole population.

Communication should be designed based on where people already seek information and whom they trust. Different groups are reached through various channels and may require different communication approaches:

- Younger audiences may be reached through schools, social media and digital formats.
- Older populations may rely more on traditional media, face-to-face contact or printed materials, such as a preparedness brochure.
- Marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk are often best reached through trusted intermediaries.
- Linguistically diverse populations may be best reached through translated materials and tailored communication channels.

While household preparedness measures primarily target residents and households, EU Member States and UCPM Participating States should also consider how essential preparedness and

emergency information can be communicated to temporary visitors, tourists, seasonal workers and other non-resident populations who may be present in the affected area during a crisis (see also SWD on risk communication).

Use a multichannel approach

No single channel is likely sufficient to reach the entire population. Effective communication combines a diversity of formats:

- Digital channels (websites, games, films, social media);
- Traditional media (TV, radio, print);
- Direct engagement (municipal level, community activities, schools, workplaces, supermarkets, charities including food distribution banks or points).

Using multiple channels increases both reach and repetition, which are crucial for behavioural change.

Ensure consistency and trust

- Messages should be as consistent as possible across channels and actors. Differences in tone or content can create confusion and reduce trust.
- Coordination between national, regional and local actors is essential to ensure that communication is coherent, while allowing for local adaptation.
- Refine messaging and content over time as data and evidence develop.

Risk communication should be continuous rather than relying on one-off campaigns. Repeated exposure helps to normalise preparedness and supports long-term behavioural change.

Communication can be reinforced through:

- Recurring campaigns and reminders throughout the year, also using influencers and well-known public figures
- Integration into schools, workplaces, supermarkets, charities and food distribution banks or points, municipalities and community activities.
- Key moments (e.g. preparedness days, seasonal risks).

According to the EU Preparedness Union Strategy, the European Commission will propose an annual EU Preparedness Day to recognise the efforts of national, regional and local authorities and communities to enhance preparedness. This could provide an excellent opportunity to reinforce the importance of household preparedness for at least 72 hours.

3.2.4. Communicating the timeframe

A specific timeframe such as 72 hours provides a measurable target and is already a widely recognised concept in many countries, as well as a strong campaign message. Referring to 'three days' may communicate the same objective in a way that is more understandable and intuitive for some audiences.

Building communication too strongly around a fixed timeframe may reduce flexibility if recommendations change over time, for example from 72 hours to one week. Once a specific timeframe is well established, extending it may require authorities to explain why the recommendation has changed. A more flexible approach, such as encouraging households to be prepared for 'at least three days' or 'a few days' may be easier to adapt over time but provides a less precise target. It is worth considering the balance between clarity, recognisability and long-term flexibility when deciding how prominently the timeframe should feature in risk communication.

Example	Main Takeaways
Io non rischio/I don't take risks Italy, Italian Civil Protection Department Presidency of the Council of Ministers	How to work with preparedness activities all year round
Lucca Comics & Games Festival Italy, Italian Civil Protection Department Presidency of the Council of Ministers	Using creative formats and public engagement through existing public events
Think Ahead The Netherlands, National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV)	Illustrating how daily life is affected by a sudden and widespread power outage
Preparedness Buddy Norway, Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning (DSB)	A softer and more community-oriented tone; takes an all-hazards approach
In Case of Crisis or War (brochure) Sweden, Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency (MCF)	A more serious and direct tone focusing on preparedness for war
In a disaster, will you be ready? Have a prep talk film New Zealand, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)	Humour and accessibility in risk communication

3.3. Quality assurance and monitoring

3.3.1. Monitoring and evaluation

Key message

Systematic monitoring and evaluation are essential for measuring impact and improving preparedness efforts.

Main Takeaways

- Use regular surveys to track changes in awareness, attitudes and behaviour for preparedness.
- Combine key indicators into a composite index to enable comparison over time and across groups.
- Identify barriers and motivators and use the findings to tailor communication and support action.

Monitoring, analysing and evaluating communication activities is essential to understanding their impact. Repeating the same survey regularly can track changes in attitudes, approaches and actual behaviour over time, including how households assess their preparedness, actions they have taken and reasons for not taking action. To ensure meaningful measurements and comparability over time, attention should be paid to using well-designed and validated survey questions. Findings should also be used to identify, analyse and address underlying (social) vulnerabilities within communities which are contributing to lower levels of resilience.

Examples of monitoring tools include:

- Annual nationally representative preparedness surveys, tracking preparedness levels across the population.
- Preparedness barometers, measuring awareness, attitudes, and behaviours over time.
- Recurring omnibus surveys (a shared survey from different actors), adding preparedness questions to existing population surveys.
- Public perception surveys, assessing risk awareness, trust and willingness to prepare.
- Focus groups and qualitative interviews, exploring barriers, motivations, and public perceptions in greater depth.
- Dashboard-based monitoring systems, combining survey results and other indicators to track progress over time.

As with most forms of measurement, the assessment of risk behaviour presents a number of challenges. Data often rely on self-reports, which may be affected by biases such as social desirability (tendency of respondents to present themselves in more positive and socially acceptable terms[6]) and underreporting of sensitive behaviours. Individuals' perceptions of risk can influence how they report behaviour and outcomes, and awareness does not always translate directly into actual behaviour. In addition, different methods may produce divergent results, and

[6] Zaal, E. *et al.* 'Unravelling honest responding: a systematic review on the effectiveness of social desirability bias reduction methods in survey research', *Qual Quant,* Vol. 60, 2026, pp. 10359–10391, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-026-02664-7.

behaviour itself is shaped by psychological, social and situational factors, making it difficult to capture through simple metrics.

A composite index methodology (combining multiple indicators into a single measure) can be used to assess crisis preparedness and self-sufficiency. This approach uses a set of indicators capturing different dimensions of preparedness, including risk awareness, behavioural intentions (people's stated willingness or plans to take preparedness actions), actual preparedness measures and cooperation readiness. These indicators can be combined into a single preparedness index, enabling systematic monitoring, benchmarking (comparing results over time, across regions, or between population groups) and evaluation of changes over time.

Example	Main takeaways
Estonian Residents' Crisis Preparedness Awareness Index Survey, 2025 Estonian Rescue Board	Combines knowledge, attitudes and practical preparedness into a single indicator, enabling comparison of overall preparedness, as well as differences across population. It also assesses compliance, with nine baseline criteria for minimum individual preparedness in a crisis

4. Checklist: Step-by-step implementation and coordination of at least 72 hours of self-sufficiency

Implementation should follow a structured pathway from strategy development to sustained behavioural change.

1.	**Establish the national framework.** Explore a national approach to 72 hours of self-sufficiency, aligned with existing policies (e.g. civil protection, security, public health, climate adaptation). Clarify objectives, scope, and target outcomes
2	**Define roles and coordination mechanisms.** Assign clear roles across national, regional and local levels. Establish coordination structures to ensure cooperation between authorities, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders
3.	**Assess target groups and starting points.** Use available data and insights to understand levels of preparedness, barriers to action and differences between population groups. If such data are not available, consider conducting a national survey or other audience research
4.	**Develop clear, actionable guidance.** Translate the 72-hour concept into practical advice focused on basic needs. Ensure that guidance is clear, actionable and adaptable to different needs and circumstances
5.	**Design communication and outreach.** Select appropriate channels and formats based on target groups. Combine national campaigns with local engagement and use trusted intermediaries to increase reach and credibility

6.	**Support households to take action.** Encourage simple first steps and gradual improvement. Provide tools such as checklists, templates and examples to help households to assess their preparedness and take action
7.	**Engage communities and partners.** Promote cooperation at community level, including sharing resources and supporting marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk. Work with civil society, schools, workplaces, supermarkets and local networks to embed preparedness in everyday contexts
8.	**Implement and scale up activities.** Roll out coordinated communication and preparedness activities across levels. Ensure consistency in messaging while allowing adaptation to local contexts
9.	**Reinforce and normalise preparedness.** Maintain continuous communication through repeated messaging, campaigns and integration into everyday settings. Position preparedness as a part of a normal routine and shared responsibility
10.	**Monitor, evaluate and adjust.** Track awareness, behaviour and preparedness levels over time. Use follow-up data and feedback to refine communication, improve measures and strengthen long-term impact

5. Conclusion

Influencing people's behaviour to take concrete action, such as achieving at least 72 hours of self-sufficiency, is a long-term effort that requires clear communication and measures to support awareness raising and long-term behavioural and cultural change.

Population preparedness extends far beyond maintaining supplies that cover basic needs such as food and water, having an emergency plan, and preparing an evacuation bag. At its core, it is about a broader approach: the EU Preparedness Union Strategy explains that 'a paradigm shift is needed to create a mindset that fosters a culture of preparedness and resilience'.

Building a culture of preparedness requires:

- Active participation by individuals and communities.
- Sustained behavioural change over time.
- Long-term societal integration of preparedness into everyday societal activities, education and community life.

The most important success factors are:

- Making preparedness relevant to everyone's everyday life.
- Promoting practical action alongside awareness.
- Engaging the whole of society and strengthening community involvement.

- Addressing specific needs of marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk.
- Promoting solidarity with those most at risk and encouraging mutual support across all levels of society, starting at local and community level.
- Strengthening self-efficacy and leveraging social norms to support action.

Solutions work better when they embed preparedness in local social networks, use trusted community intermediaries, turn citizens from recipients into active participants and connect formal civil protection with everyday community life.

Annexes

Common questions and reactions to self-sufficiency advice

The public should be clear on which authority to contact with questions, concerns and reactions on the implementation of at least 72 hours of self-sufficiency. Authorities should ensure internal preparedness and organisational capacity to manage public reactions, with accessible channels such as a helpline, email address or dedicated contact function. Publishing frequently asked questions (FAQs) is an effective complementary approach.

Over time, knowledge will be built up within the population and individuals will begin to share their own tips and advice on household preparedness, for example via social media, where dedicated preparedness groups may emerge as grassroots initiatives.

In the context of a changing risk landscape, including the increasing impacts of climate change, citizens may also increasingly adopt self-sufficiency practices, such as local growing initiatives and courses in household preparedness and survival skills.

Box 4. Sample questions that may arise and suggested responses

Question: Why is this necessary now - is there an immediate threat?
Response: Emphasise that preparedness is a precautionary measure based on a changing risk environment, not a response to a specific or immediate threat.

Question: Isn't it the responsibility of the authorities to take care of this?
Response: Explain that preparedness is a shared responsibility. Household preparedness complements public response efforts and helps to ensure that support can prioritise those most in need.

Question: What exactly should I prepare and how much do I need?

Response: Provide clear, practical and detailed guidance focused on basic needs (water, food, medicines, information) and simple starting points.

Question: I cannot afford to buy extra supplies - what should I prioritise?

Response: Highlight low-cost and gradual approaches, focusing on using what people already have and building preparedness step by step. Recommend sharing more expensive items with others.

Questions: Where do I store everything in a small home or apartment?

Answer: Emphasise flexible storage solutions and integrating preparedness items with everyday household supplies rather than requiring dedicated space. Cooperating on preparedness might be a solution for some.

Question: How do I prepare if I have specific needs (e.g. disability, illness, children, pets)?

Response: Acknowledge different needs and direct citizens to tailored, accessible guidance, including on continuity of support services, assistive devices, medicines, communication

support and evacuation arrangements based on personal circumstances, encouraging planning and preparedness based on personal circumstances.

Question: What happens after 72 hours - will help arrive?

Response: Clarify that 72 hours is a minimum preparedness baseline during the most critical period. As crises vary in nature and scale, it is not possible for the responsible authorities to predict exactly how long a particular crisis will last.

Some crises may last longer and preparing for extended periods strengthens resilience. A crisis is characterised by insufficient resources to meet all needs simultaneously and it may take time before broader societal support measures become operational at scale. Emphasise that everyone needs to contribute and support each other in a crisis.

Glossary

Risk communication

The interactive process of exchange of information and opinions between individuals, groups and institutions about a risk or potential risk to human health or the environment. Any risk communication effort must have an interactive component, if only soliciting information about the audience in the beginning or evaluating success in the end.
(Lundgren and McMakin, 2018)

Risk perception

The way individuals understand and evaluate risks that may affect them. Risk perception is influenced by factors such as personal experience, emotions, trust, cultural context and perceived control, and can affect preparedness behaviour and willingness to take protective actions.
(Source: Slovic, P., 2000)

Additional resources

The UCPM Knowledge Network has a repository of brochures on emergency preparedness from Member States and Partner States, available at Knowledge Network Library: Risk awareness & communication.