

Union Civil Protection Mechanism: prevention; European Civil Protection Pool; rescEU

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The European Commission has presented a communication announcing ambitious new plans to **strengthen Europe's capacity to deal with natural disasters**.

2017 has seen a wide range of disasters. In total, over 200 people were killed by natural disasters in Europe in 2017. Over one million hectares of forest have been destroyed, almost three times the five-year EU average, half of which was in Portugal alone. The last two years have also seen serious damage from earthquakes.

As well as these environmental disasters, Europe has been hit by terrorist incidents with multiple casualties, including large numbers of complex burn cases needing immediate attention. The Ebola and Zika viruses also served as reminders of the risk from epidemics and health emergencies.

These natural disasters have a **significant economic impact**.

Since 1980, as well as the human cost, EU Member States have lost over EUR 360 billion in weather and climate extreme events. Since its establishment in 2001, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism has monitored more than 400 disasters and received more than 250 requests for assistance.

EU response to date: the [European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism](#) (UCPM) is at the disposal of Member States and third countries who can activate it when a disaster strikes and their national capacities are insufficient. It works on a voluntary basis whereby a Member State or third country issues a request for assistance via the European Commission's Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) and other Member States decide to make an offer of assistance or not.

In recent years, climate and other phenomena have exacerbated the ability of Member States to help each other as each Member State's own capacities have often reached their limits. In parallel, the incentives for Member States to offer assistance via the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism are very low since the EU budget only finances a share of transport costs.

As a consequence, **the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism often does not deliver the expected results**. For example, in only 10 cases out of the 17 requests for forest fires this year, was assistance actually delivered. At times, the response was too slow.

The Commission considered that a **fully integrated approach** to prevention, preparedness and response to disasters in the Union and its Member States is urgently needed.

A Europe that protects (rescEU): the Commission proposed to **amend the existing legislation in force** as regards civil protection which would allow Europe to take a leap forward in its aim to better prevent, prepare for and respond to natural and man-made disasters both within and outside the Union.

The changes have the following objectives:

- **reinforce the EU's and Member States' collective ability** to respond to disasters, and address recurrent and emerging capacity gaps, by putting in place a dual system of response capacity: a dedicated reserve of response capacities with command at control at Union level, to be known as

rescEU; and a more effective and dynamic contribution from Member States through a European Civil Protection Pool;

- **strengthen the focus on prevention** action as part of the disaster risk management cycle, as well as reinforce coherence with other key EU policies acting, *inter alia*, in the field of climate change adaptation, disaster prevention and disaster response;
- ensure the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism is **agile and effective in its administrative procedures** in support of emergency operations.

Complementarity with other EU policies: the Commission stresses that a higher level of **solidarity and responsibility** in response and preparedness must be accompanied by the necessary prevention measures to reduce long-term risks. This implies greater coordination of EU policies.

These include the EU strategy on adaptation to climate change, European Structural and Investment Funds, environmental legislation (e.g. flood management plans and eco-system based solutions), research and innovation, and policies to address serious cross-border threats to health.

For post-2020, the Commission is considering, *inter alia*:

- using risk assessments and risk management planning provisions as an **ex-ante conditionality**, both under cohesion policy and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development;
- studying how the rules could **facilitate co-financed disaster response capacities** developed through cohesion policy funds used in the context of the European Civil Protection pool of response assets;
- consider ways to **speed up the procedures** to amend the relevant European Structural and Investment Funds' programmes, in particular following a disaster.

The Commission intends to launch a **Communication and Advocacy Campaign** on disaster prevention with a particular focus on forest fires, heat waves and other climate-induced extreme weather events, to improve awareness of preventive action.

Member States and Commission should promote more **systematic collection and dissemination of loss data**, to enhance the collection of loss data and make use of loss data for optimised prevention and climate adaptation planning.