



The Monitoring and Information Centre

A European crisis response centre



European Civil Protection

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Together in the face of disaster

The European Commission is an active partner for EU Member States in the field of civil protection. Through the European Civil Protection Mechanism, it can facilitate the coordination of assistance during a major emergency.

The Mechanism can respond to man-made and natural disasters, acts of terrorism and technological, radiological or environmental accidents, including accidental marine pollution. Natural disasters can be anything from flooding, storms, forest fires or landslides to earthquakes and tsunamis.



Set up in 2001, the Community Civil Protection Mechanism allows countries to pool their emergency response capacities in times of disaster. The Mechanism currently has 31 members, known as participating states. These are the 27 EU Member States as well as the countries of the European Economic Area, Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland, and EU candidate country Croatia.

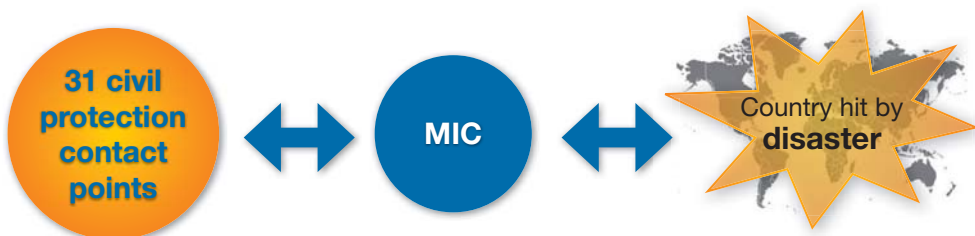
All participating states have their own man power and equipment, but a major emergency, whether natural or man-made, can overwhelm these capacities. In such a situation, the Mechanism facilitates cooperation and increases efficiency in responding to the disaster. Cooperation at European level provides an added value in disaster management.

European Civil Protection – Key Dates

1991	First Council resolution on improving mutual aid between Member States in the event of natural or technological disasters
1999	Community Action Programme for civil protection starts
2001	A Council Decision establishes the Community mechanism "to facilitate reinforced cooperation in civil protection assistance interventions"
2007	The Community Civil Protection Mechanism is strengthened and a dedicated Civil Protection Financial Instrument is set up

A crisis centre in Brussels

The operational heart of the Mechanism is the **Monitoring and Information Centre (the MIC)**. Based at the European Commission in Brussels, the MIC is accessible 24/7. Staffed by two duty officers at all times, the MIC can spring into action immediately when it receives a call for assistance.



The MIC works in cooperation with national crisis centres throughout the European Union and is a central contact point for these crisis centres.

The MIC can respond to disasters anywhere in the world. When a country, whether a member of the Mechanism or not, makes a request for assistance, the MIC can facilitate the coordination and mobilisation of offers of assistance, find the best transport solution, deploy experts on site, provide technical support and much more.



Interview with the head of the MIC

Interview with **Mr. Peter Billing**, Head of MIC, Disaster Response Unit, European Commission

Q: What is it like to work in the MIC?

PB: *In many ways, the MIC is like any crisis centre. We are contactable by phone, email or fax around the clock. Duty officers take care of monitoring the situation worldwide, deal with requests for assistance and pass on the information we receive to our contact points. But, in some ways, we are quite unique. For example, our network covers 31 participating states. We act as a hub between all these countries so that information can travel faster and the best solution for providing assistance can be found in case of need.*

Q: Who works in the MIC?

PB: *The MIC is staffed by duty officers around the clock. Our team is from all over Europe. Commission employees and national experts from Member States, who work with us for a number of years and share their expertise, work side by side during emergencies.*

How the MIC handles emergencies

The MIC now handles over 20 emergencies per year, up from single digit figures in the first years of its existence. In addition, it monitors many more potential emergencies.

Emergencies can be anything from natural disasters like forest fires, floods, earthquake and typhoons to man-made disasters such as chemical leakage, marine pollution or terrorist acts.

If a country requests assistance following a major emergency, the MIC helps to coordinate the assistance offered by participating states.

Mechanism activation

The Civil Protection Mechanism can be activated in two ways: either by a participating state directly or by the MIC following a request for assistance from a third country. Participating states all have access to a Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS) run by the European Commission, where they can follow requests and offers of assistance in real time.

Specialised emergency response units known as «modules» have been set up to respond more quickly to emergencies. Modules are prepared by one or more countries. They have to be available at short notice and be able to work independently. Using modules ensures that the European response is quick and that European teams are experienced in working together



Modules cover high-capacity pumping, water purification, search and rescue, advanced medical posts and many more capabilities that are needed in an emergency.

However, not in all emergencies technical modules are required. Very often, the Mechanism delivers in-kind assistance offered by Member States, such as tents, blankets, medicine, or water purification tablets.

Experts also play a large role in the assistance delivered by the Mechanism. Where an emergency occurs outside Europe, an assessment and coordination team is often despatched to assist the government of the affected country in the assessment of needs and help identify how the Mechanism can best contribute to the international or national emergency response.



Transport

The transport of in-kind assistance and technical equipment to the site of a disaster is often a large cost factor for the country providing the assistance. Transport can also be difficult to organise. Since 2007, the EU can support Member States in finding transport solutions by co-financing up to 50% of transport costs and organising joint flights where possible, thereby reducing the burden on individual countries.

Preparing for disaster: Training, simulation exercises and exchange of experts

When international assistance is required in a disaster situation, the cooperation between national and international teams on the ground is vital for successful disaster management. But the effectiveness of international assistance can be reduced by coordination and communication problems.

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism foresees a variety of tools to improve the preparedness of European teams to work together during a disaster: exercises, training and exchange of experts.



The variety of training courses offered under the Mechanism increases knowledge of the Mechanism in participating states and allows disaster management actors from different countries to train together in courses addressed at their specific expertise. In large scale pan-European simulation exercises, teams from many European countries can test their compatibility and cooperation during interventions. Finally, the exchange of experts programme aims at improving awareness of different disaster response systems.

By strengthening interpersonal links, sharing information and highlighting best practice, the Mechanism training, simulation exercises and exchange of experts contribute to the effectiveness of European assistance interventions.



Further information on the Civil Protection Mechanism:

<http://ec.europa.eu>

