European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Disaster preparedness

What is it?

Disaster preparedness consists of a set of measures undertaken by governments, organisations, communities or individuals to better respond and cope with the immediate aftermath of a disaster, whether it be man-made or caused by natural hazards. The objective is to reduce loss of life and livelihoods. Simple initiatives can go a long way, for instance training for search and rescue, establishing early warning systems, developing contingency plans, or stockpiling equipment and supplies. Disaster risk reduction and preparedness plays an important role in building the resilience of communities.

Why is this important?

With increasing population growth, rapid and unplanned urbanisation, climate change, environmental degradation and widespread poverty, a growing number of people and assets are exposed to disasters. Moreover, many of these events occur in fragile and conflict-affected states, thus increasing the complexity of crises and overburdening countries experiencing violent conflict or fragile governance.

However, improved practice and response mechanisms saves lives and strengthens the countries and communities’ ability to reduce the impact of disasters. Understanding the occurrence and frequency of natural hazards as well as the risks, vulnerabilities and potential impact on people and assets helps to improve preparedness. Instead of providing emergency response only, international efforts should help governments and communities invest in understanding risks and building preparedness capacities for pre-emptive and early action. Disaster preparedness is cost-effective and saves aid money.

These concepts are agreed and firmly embedded into international commitments, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, climate negotiations, Agenda 2030, the New Urban Agenda, and the Grand Bargain commitments.
How are we helping?

The European Commission is at the forefront in promoting risk reduction and anticipatory actions. Signatory to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030), the European Commission supports the adoption of a risk-informed approach into all EU policies and programmes.

The European Commission contributes to Sendai Priority 4 by ensuring that disaster preparedness is systematically embedded across all sectors into humanitarian aid programmes and projects. Over the past 5 years, 65% of all the EU-funded humanitarian projects included a disaster preparedness component.

In order to support this work, the EU allocates on average €50 million of its annual humanitarian funding to targeted preparedness actions. This funding strengthens the ability of national and local preparedness systems to respond earlier and better, so emergency response is ‘as local as possible, as international as necessary.’

The EU invests in early warning systems, in monitoring and building national and local capacities for response – as exemplified by the EU response to El Niño in the years 2015 and 2016. The EU supports partners in developing cost-effective methods to mitigate risk and in collecting the evidence to justify preparedness for early action.

Some examples of disaster preparedness in EU-funded humanitarian aid interventions include:

- strengthening the response capacities of first responders at the regional, national, and local levels after hurricanes swept through the Caribbean in 2017, and developing resilience-building strategies;
- developing mechanisms and targeting for shock-responsive social safety nets able to deliver an early response to needs in a number of countries (for instance, Niger, Somalia, Burkina Faso, and Malawi), jointly with development partners;
- cholera preparedness in Yemen;
- developing systems for an early response based on weather and risk forecasts in Vietnam.

Each disaster preparedness strategy and funding allocation include a defined exit strategy, where local capacities are deemed adequate or where local governments or development partners are able to take over.

Additionally, the EU engages and supports local and national government structures in all countries worldwide through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, notably within the areas of prevention and preparedness.

Finally, the EU Aid Volunteers initiative, which provides opportunities for European citizens to get involved in humanitarian aid projects, aims to strengthen the capacity and resilience of vulnerable communities in non-EU countries, through the implementation of joint actions between experienced humanitarian operators and local organisations.