

What is the Union Civil Protection Mechanism?

Civil protection assistance consists of governmental aid delivered in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. A well-coordinated European response is necessary to avoid duplication of relief efforts and ensure that any assistance provided meets the real needs of the affected country.

Whenever the scale of an emergency overwhelms the response capabilities of a country, the Union Mechanism may be activated upon official request of that country or the UN and its agencies, as well as the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) or the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). When this occurs, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC), operating from within the Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) in Brussels, acts as an operational hub, facilitating the coordination of the assistance made available by the Union Mechanism's Participating States¹ to the affected country.

Requests for assistance through the Union Mechanism can concern disasters and crisis of any type, both within and outside Europe. Recent examples include: the Ebola outbreak in West Africa (2014), the floods in the Western Balkans (2014), the conflict in Eastern Ukraine (2015), the voluntary evacuation of EU citizens from Yemen (2015), and the ongoing refugee crisis (2015-16). The Union Mechanism can also be activated in response to marine pollution emergencies, in which case it coordinates closely with the European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA).

Assistance made available via the Union Mechanism can consist of operational assets, relief items (in-kind assistance) and experts. The latter can be deployed for needs assessment and coordination missions as well as to provide advice to a requesting country on prevention and preparedness measures.

In addition to a coordination role during the response to disasters, the Union Mechanism also places substantial emphasis on disaster prevention and preparedness. The Decision provides a framework for sharing information on risks and risk management capabilities at European level, taking into account the likely impacts of climate change and the need for appropriate adaptation action, thus promoting an effective and coherent approach to prevention of and preparedness for disasters. The Decision makes financial support available for, inter alia, the organisation of trainings, exchange of experts, and other prevention and preparedness actions (including grants for cooperation projects, and the development of new tools, such as satellite images, improved weather forecast, early warning systems, etc.).

In order to further enhance preparedness of European countries to respond to disasters, a European Emergency Response Capacity (also called "Voluntary Pool") has been created to allow Participating States of the Union Mechanism to pre-commit different types of response capacities for use in Union Civil Protection missions. When a disaster strikes, the Union Mechanism can facilitate a coordinated deployment of such assets in close cooperation with the relevant Participating State(s). This enhances the immediate availability of response capacities, offers more predictability, and significantly reduces deployment times.

¹ All 28 EU Member States participate in the Mechanism, as well as Iceland, Norway, Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkey.