

## FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT DISASTER RISK PREVENTION IN THE COHESION POLICY 2014-2020 PERIOD

### *Why does the EU invest in risk prevention?*

Although a safe place in global terms, the European Union still faces multiple risks. These include floods and extreme weather events, pandemics and man-made disasters resulting in injury and loss of life. There is also the significant cost of damage, affecting stability and growth. Since 2005, natural disasters have cost the EU close to €100 billion.

The frequency and severity of natural disasters are increasing in Europe, partly due to climate change. Southern and central Europe experiences more heat waves, forest fires and droughts; northern and north-eastern Europe faces heavier precipitation and flooding. Disasters often have cross-border effects, and can threaten entire areas in neighbouring countries. Quite separately, other emergencies, such as the refugee crisis, add to pressure on public services.

The EU coordinates its risk management through the Civil Protection Mechanism, which targets disaster prevention and response. The EU also plays a leading role in supporting implementation of the 2015-2030 UN Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, which addresses these issues at global level.

Investing in risk prevention is vital to preserving the capacity for further socio-economic development. It is also more effective than bearing the cost of inaction: for every €1 spent on prevention, €4 or more will be saved on response.

In this respect, EU cohesion policy is key to disaster prevention and management. Local and regional authorities are the first to be confronted with the impacts of disasters. Disaster prevention is also a central plank of regional development. It often requires cross-border action. Furthermore, risk prevention safeguards prior investments and is important in maintaining local growth and jobs. It can also develop new professional fields, encourage innovation, involve small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and accelerate the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy.

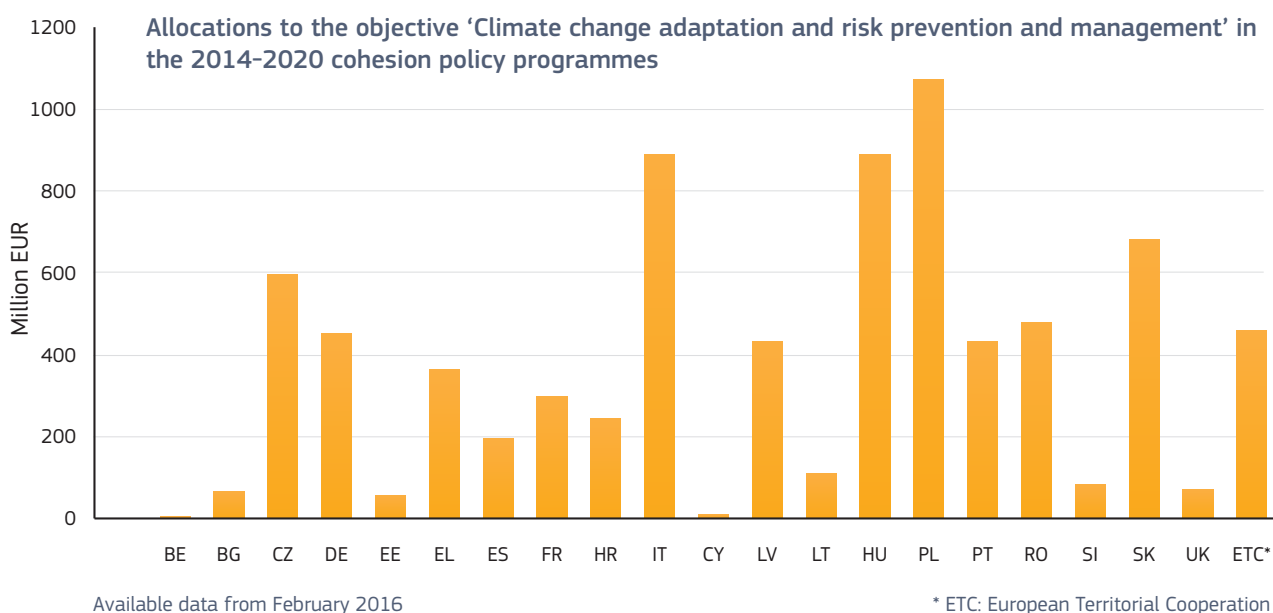
### **What is the EU cohesion policy?**

Cohesion policy provides more than €350 billion over the 2014-2020 period to support job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth and sustainable development, and improve people's overall quality of life. It comprises the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the European Social Fund (ESF). All EU Member States and regions profit from the investments, with the bulk concentrated on less developed ones.

It supports Europe's objectives for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, through investments in eleven priority areas, including one on climate change adaptation and risk prevention and management. This brochure is focused on risk prevention (both climate and non-climate-related risks).

## Cohesion policy support for 2014-2020

With €8 billion for climate change adaptation and risk prevention and management, cohesion policy is one of the most important sources for funding in this area. Twenty Member States have selected risk prevention as a priority for the 2014-2020 funding period, depending on their specific needs - see the table below. In addition, risk prevention, disaster resilience and climate change adaptation are integrated into other cohesion policy funding priorities, such as innovation, energy efficiency and water management.



Cohesion policy support is complemented by other EU instruments, such as the Civil Protection Mechanism, the EU Solidarity Fund, Horizon 2020, and the LIFE programme.

### Where do the investments go?

Many activities to support risk prevention and management can be funded, including:

- ▶ development of strategies,
- ▶ reinforcement of monitoring and early warning systems,
- ▶ awareness-raising and education,
- ▶ flood and coastal defence,
- ▶ logistical support for civil protection units,
- ▶ ecosystem-based solutions, and
- ▶ disaster-resilience and climate-proofing of public infrastructure.

The planned investments increase Europe's resilience to disasters and climate change. **This includes protecting 13.3 million people from floods and 11.8 million from forest fires.**

Investments in **flood protection** receive major attention. There are many examples (see 'Stopping floods in Athens'). Another project provided increased flood protection to 1 million people along the Sarno River in Campania (Italy), by combining monitoring, civil protection interventions and environmental protection measures.



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### Stopping floods in Athens

Western Attica (Greece) has serious flood problems. The Cohesion Fund financed an €80 million flood protection project along the Eschatia river. This protects 134000 local residents and their property from floods in the suburbs of Ath-

ens. It also created over 700 jobs and promoted urban regeneration in a low-income area. The construction of new flood defence structures stops floods now, and it will also allow for future development of areas upstream.

Preventing **forest fires or wildfires** is another priority. Again, there are many examples, such as in Spain (see 'Forest defence centres in Andalusia'). Countries work together more, for better results: eight Member States across Europe can now detect and handle forest fires more quickly, assess damage and regeneration needs, and make the best use of information systems together, through the 'European Forest Fire Monitoring using Information Systems' (EFFMIS) project.

There is still a need for **more equipment and better contingency plans**. The Czech Republic has purchased 80 emergency response vehicles. In the border area between Romania and Bulgaria, there are now better joint emergency preparedness measures, with cross-border risk monitoring of hail, air pollution and floods (see 'Joint risk monitoring during emergencies in the Danube border area').

### Forest defence centres in Andalusia

The ERDF invested €2 million to improve the defence centre against forest fires in Vélez-Blanco, Andalusia (Spain). The centre now covers 11 municipalities and 150000 residents in a region at high risk of fire. A new heliport means bet-

ter collaboration with other rescue services in the area. The project also links closely to parallel efforts in forest management, and training and awareness-raising.



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**Raising awareness** is also important. In the border area between Bulgaria and Serbia, students were trained as 'green ambassadors' to disseminate knowledge on a local and regional level.

**Ecosystem-based solutions**, such as floodplains or wetlands, are supported as a priority. These help to protect the environment, and are generally cheaper in the long term. In order to adapt to climate change, the EU encourages the development of **green infrastructure**, to protect biodiversity and preserve ecosystem services. For example, the project 'Green Infrastructure for Tomorrow' (GIF-T!) explains to people living in coastal areas how to adapt to extreme weather and rising sea levels in England, Belgium and the Netherlands.

Cohesion policy also supports **research and innovation** activities, for new approaches to risk prevention and management. A number of regions have selected risk-related areas in their smart specialisation strategies which steer their research and innovation investments. For instance, regions in southern Europe, such as Andalusia, prioritise the fight against droughts and desertification. Other regions see opportunities for innovation related to fire safety.

Finally, cohesion policy supports investments to improve institutional capacities. Better coordination of police and fire services, or language learning for staff, increases the capacity to prevent and react to disasters. Joint responses by fire brigades in the border region between Austria, Slovakia and the Czech Republic mean rescues can be carried out faster, not stopping at national borders.

### **Strategic context and supporting policy framework**

So that resources are used in the best way, there has to be a strategic, long-term approach. That is why cohesion policy investments must be based on national or regional risk assessments, also required under EU civil protection legislation. They must also take climate change adaptation strategies into account. Since these require expertise, the Commission supports Member States, regions and cities with technical assistance and capacity-building.

Risks do not respect borders. Cross-border and transnational cooperation programmes work across national borders to provide, for example, downstream alerts for floods or water pollution, or faster joint emergency response services. In addition, the EU's Adriatic-Ionian, Alpine, Baltic Sea and Danube Macro-Regional Strategies make joint risk management a reality.

Cities are especially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and disasters. In this respect, urban development projects now pay better attention to risk prevention and management and to climate change adaptation.

### **How to get support?**

The various cohesion policy programmes adopted in 2014 and 2015 specify the funding opportunities for all Member States and regions until 2020. Member States run the programmes, via Managing Authorities. These give excellent information on the programmes, select projects and assist with implementation. Visit the Inforegio website to read about the programmes and find useful contact points.

### **Joint risk monitoring during emergencies in the Danube border area**

Floods, air pollution and severe weather cause much damage on both the Bulgarian and Romanian side of the Danube. Improved collaboration and the development of a joint monitoring and reaction system have been supported by a cross-border cooperation project. There is now better emergency preparedness and risk management.

### **EU Solidarity Fund**

Independent of the cohesion policy framework, the EU Solidarity Fund can offer assistance to Member States and countries in the process of negotiating their accession to the EU in the event of a severe natural disaster. It helps finance public emergency and recovery operations in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Since its creation in 2002, the Solidarity Fund has assisted 24 Member States and candidate countries following 70 natural disasters, for a total of €3.8 billion.

#### **Further reading**

ESIF Open Data Platform: [cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu](https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu)

Project examples: [ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/projects](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/projects)

EU Civil Protection Mechanism: [ec.europa.eu/echo/what/civil-protection/mechanism\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/what/civil-protection/mechanism_en)

EU Strategy on the adaptation to climate change: [ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/adaptation/what/documentation\\_en.htm](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/adaptation/what/documentation_en.htm)

Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction: [www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework](https://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework)

EU Solidarity Fund: [ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/solidarity-fund](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/solidarity-fund)