



**European Committee
of the Regions**

NAT-VI/036

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OPINION

Cross-border dimension in disaster risk reduction (DRR)

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- emphasises that effective cross-border cooperation would bring significant advantages for the 37.5% of the EU population living in border areas;
- finds that risk prevention and management plans should include risk scenarios on a broad cross-regional level;
- notes that there is a need to set up a shared database in certain cross-border areas, identifying materials, resources, equipment, specialised volunteers and resource deployment and logistics;
- highlights the need to promote a shared and standardised cross-border alert system; calls for standardised communication on prevention and shared operational procedures in emergencies;
- recommends involving LRAs more closely in EU-funded projects related to disaster risks, to ensure that they have continuity over time and can be replicated in other areas facing similar risks;
- emphasises the importance of providing incentives for young people to undertake training as well as the need for specific training for local administrators to raise their awareness and provide them with better information tools;
- underlines the need to boost e-learning platforms along the lines of the UCPM training programme, and to increase the availability of open online courses in the field of civil protection;
- urges the Member States to recognise and certify professional posts ("disaster risk managers") with multidisciplinary and cross-cutting knowledge, skills and competencies, who would assist local and regional administrators particularly in emergency situations and in planning;
- hopes that scientific committees will be set up to define risk scenarios more accurately and promote knowledge and skills networking, bringing together specialist expertise based on similar risk factors for homogeneous areas (e.g. Mediterranean forest fires, sudden or gradual flooding in central Europe, etc.).

Rapporteur

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Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Cross-border dimension in disaster risk reduction (DRR)

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

1. emphasises that the growing intensity and frequency of damage caused by disasters is having an impact both on human lives and financially. Every year, around 90 000 people die in natural disasters and almost 160 million are affected worldwide. Between 1980 and 2016, natural disasters caused by weather and climate-related conditions account for about 83% of financial losses in the EU Member States;
2. stresses that disasters recognise no borders and that developing prevention, resilience and effective emergency responses therefore requires cross-border cooperation. Effective cross-border cooperation would bring significant advantages for the 37.5% of the EU population living in border areas;
3. stresses that the possibility of a large-scale cross-border power failure, a so-called "blackout", could also cause major emergencies, and specific disaster risk-reduction measures and stronger cross-border contacts should be urgently recommended for such a scenario;
4. reiterates the need to incorporate the capacity to significantly reduce the risk and consequences of disasters in all EU policy strategies in terms of investment, so that public funds help communities to become more resilient to the adverse effects of disasters and ensure that people's lives are not at risk. It regrets that under the Structural Funds and the European investment funds in general, and the Cohesion Fund in particular, a disaster risk assessment is not a prerequisite for carrying out infrastructure projects financed by the EU;
5. whilst noting that the EU currently has two instruments (the Civil Protection Mechanism and the EU Solidarity Fund) which it intends to use to contribute to response coordination and building resilience to natural disasters, a more robust multi-level governance approach is needed to achieve the objectives of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 (SFDRR), in close engagement with the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction. Moreover, the principle of investing in disaster risk reduction must be firmly embedded in the future of Europe, including in the European Semester and the EU funds;

General comments

6. observes that in previous opinions the CoR has drawn attention to cross-border threats and disasters affecting regions in two or more EU Member States, calling for closer cooperation between neighbouring regions to ensure that preventive efforts are shared and response activities coordinated¹;

¹ CoR opinion on *Post 2015 Hyogo Framework for Action: Managing risks to achieve resilience*, [OJ C 271, 19.8.2014, p. 61](#).

7. notes the need for planning that proactively takes account of the evolving needs of the various regions, including the outermost regions, linked to risks, vulnerability and exposure;
8. notes that Europe has a very diverse landscape in terms of risk management structures and methods at national or appropriate sub-national levels. The cross-border dimension of risks could therefore benefit from a more systematic approach to future risk assessments;
9. supports and encourages the establishment of national, regional and local risk management strategies and plans, including the development of joint cross-border strategies for border regions and effective coordination between such strategies; the CoR has also called for sufficient resources to be allocated to programmes supporting cross-border cooperation in the field of disaster risk reduction and crisis management²;
10. considers that risk prevention and management plans should include among other things risk scenarios on a broad cross-regional scale for the purposes of surveillance and monitoring of expected events, so that these scenarios can more effectively contribute to a regional understanding and assessment of risks. Studies on vulnerability and risk exposure and on hazard and environmental characterisation that result in risk mapping are the prerequisites for risk prevention and management plans. At cross-border level, these should be publicly available and adequately publicised on both sides of the border in order to prevent, mitigate and prepare a response to disasters;
11. highlights the need to strengthen risk management governance by promoting cross-border collaboration;
12. stresses the importance of improved understanding of the cross-border dimension of disaster risk reduction in Europe, not to mention the need for and added value of this understanding for more effective, long-term reduction of disaster risks;
13. reiterates that it has approved³ the Commission's proposal for a regulation establishing a European cross-border mechanism⁴ as part of efforts to remove obstacles to cross-border cooperation, including in the area of disaster risk reduction. In order to achieve a better cross-border cooperation and prevent disasters, new preparatory projects can be launched for the most vulnerable regions, such as the outermost regions, the islands and the coastal regions;
14. points out that when a disaster cannot be dealt with by one country alone, participating states step in and provide assistance via the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism. However, when cross-border threats and disasters affect regions in two or more EU Member States, more effective

² CoR opinion on *Action Plan on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030*, [OJ C 272, 17.8.2017, p. 32](#).

³ CoR opinion on the *Cross-border mechanism* (adopted on 5 December 2018, not yet published in the OJ).

⁴ *Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context*, COM(2018) 373 final.

cooperation is needed between neighbouring regions to ensure that the prevention efforts are shared and response activities coordinated;

15. notes that, in addition to specific coordination and communication strategies, knowing the language of neighbours along the border is very important in order to be properly prepared for any disaster and to ensure the best possible communication in the event of a crisis;
16. notes here that most countries have signed bilateral agreements with their neighbours (not necessarily restricted to only two countries) which also cover cross-border cooperation in the event of disasters. Greater attention should however be paid to prevention and risk mitigation, as well as the preparation of response strategies;
17. welcomes the fact that the European Parliament and the Council have reached a provisional agreement on strengthening the EU's current civil protection mechanism and the EU's response to disasters – rescEU – which, among other considerations, places greater emphasis on cross-border risks;

The role of local and regional authorities and cross-border projects

18. recommends involving local and regional authorities more closely in EU-funded projects related to disaster risks, to ensure that they have continuity over time and can be replicated in other areas facing similar risk situations;
19. calls on the Member States to also involve local and regional authorities in the screening of planned investments in all relevant programmes and in discussing possible changes;
20. calls for more active implementation of cross-border disaster risk reduction projects, the aim being to make more extensive use of the Structural Funds designated for this purpose;
21. would like to see more EU-level incentives directed towards local and regional levels to promote cross-border cooperation in disaster risk reduction, not least in the area of prevention, training and exercises;
22. emphasises the central role of local actors in reducing disaster risks and building resilience, and the value of existing initiatives at promoting local level disaster risk reduction such as the Making Cities Resilient Campaign of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction;
23. believes it particularly important to use the European Civil Protection Mechanism and the EU Solidarity Fund to invest, including financially, in planning in relation to risk reduction, especially with a view to climate change and the resulting extreme events;

Cross-border cooperation

Planning

24. points to the need for cross-border continuity planning that takes into account risk scenarios affecting several countries, jointly identifying and evaluating the risks and mapping them, both to develop cross-border areas and to protect more extensive areas, including for the purpose of surveillance and monitoring of expected events;
25. hopes that scientific committees will be set up to define risk scenarios more accurately and promote knowledge and skills networking, bringing together specialist expertise based on similar risk factors for homogeneous areas (for example Mediterranean forest fires, sudden or gradual flooding in central Europe, etc.) and affording the possibility of rapid intervention and dialogue with local authorities in order to access financial, human and material resources;
26. points out that with the decrease in funding in some local and regional authorities, it is becoming even more important for civil protection decision-makers to have a better assessment of communities, of individuals and of civil protection projects. Considers that the INDRIX social resilience index, one of the outcomes of the cross-border INDRIX project co-financed by the EU, is adequate for assessing a community's resilience based on statistical information and on data entered specifically for this purpose: the project has used selected social indicators (education level, state of health, unemployment rate, services offered, etc.) to estimate risk perception in various communities and, in particular, to pinpoint communities that are most exposed to risk and most vulnerable. Calls on the relevant institutions to consider developing compulsory insurance policies against natural disasters, to be standardised at European level, with insurance premiums linked to the level of risk. This would raise awareness and promote understanding of the importance of prevention on the part of individuals, reduce the moral hazard and guarantee fair and uniform compensation for all European citizens;
27. notes that there is a need to set up a shared database in certain cross-border areas, identifying materials, resources, equipment, specialised volunteers and resource deployment and logistics;
28. notes that this database should be established and managed not just to boost disaster preparedness, but also with a view to strengthening the socio-economic and cultural recovery of disaster-affected areas from a shared cross-border perspective;
29. considers it important to take into account and replicate existing positive examples of cross-border cooperation, such as:
 - the joint German-Danish civil protection exercises such as DANGEREX 07, DANGERFloodEx 2010 and emergency responses without borders;
 - flood preparedness and mitigation of transnational damage in the Sava basin (county of Brod Posavina in Croatia and the district of Mačva in Serbia);
 - RiKoSt: risk communication strategies (in Carinthia, Austria and Alto Adige, Italy, up until October 2020);
 - U-SCORE-II: city-to-city peer reviews (pilot projects in Portugal, Italy and the United Kingdom);

- The Mobile Inland Water Training Facility (MÜB) in the Upper Rhine and the congress of the French-German-Swiss Conference of the Upper Rhine on "Blackout – Large-scale cross-border power failure" (2016);

Training

- underscores the importance of providing incentives for young people to undertake training and urges the Member States and local and regional authorities to promote specific university courses and projects on risk mitigation activities. Emphasises, moreover, that young people can take part in solidarity work in the disaster risk prevention sector through the European Solidarity Corps⁵. This work can take the form of volunteering, apprenticeships, traineeships and work experience;
- notes the need for specific training for local administrators (also in line with the Making Cities Resilient campaign) to raise their awareness and provide them with better information tools given that they are directly responsible for the local inhabitants and the protection and development of the area;
- recommends paying greater attention to training volunteers and technicians, making them more specialised by providing incentives and introducing training courses based on the risks facing the different countries, particularly in cross-border areas, with the aim of improving local geographical knowledge and undertaking joint, coordinated action for monitoring, surveillance and emergency intervention;
- reiterates the need for information campaigns run by the local authorities or volunteers to inform people of the risks and of how to protect themselves, and for mutual learning initiatives at local and regional level through peer reviews between cities and regions;
- stresses that transnational training should be in accordance with the risk scenarios set out in the cross-border risk prevention and management plans. All those directly involved in the risk – including technical experts and volunteer organisations – should take part in these training courses on both sides of the border, if possible jointly;
- underlines the need to boost e-learning platforms along the lines of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism training programme, for example, and to increase the availability of open online courses in the field of civil protection;
- considers that the EU Solidarity Fund provides enhanced information campaigns for the regions through support measures that are already functioning well for EU Member States and candidate countries. The EU Solidarity Fund is an essential support instrument for the regions concerned when exceptional efforts are needed to rebuild areas affected by natural and weather-related disasters, since natural disasters do not stop at borders;

⁵ CoR opinion 2018/03892, *European Solidarity Corps and the New EU Youth Strategy* (rapporteur: Matteo Bianchi).

Emergency responses

37. highlights the need to promote a shared and standardised cross-border alert system, including real-time notification of any disruption or disaster that could have an impact on a region in another Member State;
38. notes that cross-border agreements are needed to standardise and speed up rescue system and volunteer activation times, identifying legal obstacles and calling for cooperation in order to optimise the logistics of material and personnel. It also calls for agreements to be reached in the area of water systems to develop better knowledge of the organisational and operational management of dams and thus ensure prompt action to reduce water-related risks downstream in the territory of another Member State;
39. requests that acronyms be introduced to refer to aid coordination centres at various territorial levels in order to standardise the terms used;
40. calls for standardised communication on prevention and for shared operational procedures in emergencies;
41. recommends using IT applications that can be used to alert citizens in real time;
42. urges the Member States to recognise and certify professional posts (best defined as "disaster risk managers") with multidisciplinary and cross-cutting knowledge, skills and competencies, who would assist local and regional administrators particularly in emergency situations and in planning;

The subsidiarity principle

43. agrees that the European Union shall have competence to carry out actions to support, coordinate or supplement the actions of the Member States in the area of civil protection;

Best practice

44. stresses that there are a number of examples of best practice in cross-border cooperation in disaster risk reduction that could be followed and developed in an ideal way, such as:
 - joint practical exercises to ensure a common approach, mutual understanding and the same level of preparedness in the event of an actual disaster;
 - sharing of standardised information, exchange of best practice and learning from the initiatives, methods, tools, etc. of neighbouring regions;
 - joint awareness and education campaigns for people living in high-risk cross-border areas, with the participation of different stakeholders (e.g. disaster risk reduction days in different cities/municipalities);
45. strongly supports the "b-solutions" project of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), which aims to identify legal and administrative obstacles to cross-border cooperation in disaster prevention and reduction. Points out that in the first call for proposals in 2018, the AEBR

identified ten such instances which were turned into pilot projects, but that many other obstacles have yet to be resolved (ambulances, fire engines or helicopters that can enter some border regions but not others, administrative formalities for transferring remains, asymmetrical cross-border service provision, problems relating to insurance, recognition of diplomas, etc.). Encourages all regions facing similar obstacles to participate in future calls for proposals;

46. stresses that regions affected by disaster must put forward joint solutions to their respective national governments. One example of this is the cooperation between northern Portugal and the Spanish region of Galicia, which submit their priorities to their central governments regarding issues that can be resolved in connection with the "Iberian summits", or the close cooperation between the outermost regions of the Canary Islands, the Azores and Madeira through the MAC INTERREG programme, which has also been joined by neighbouring third countries such as Cape Verde, Mauritania and Senegal.

Brussels, 27 June 2019

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Karl-Heinz Lambertz

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

Jiří Buriánek

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Cross-border dimension in disaster risk reduction (DRR)
Reference(s)	
Legal basis	Article 307(4) TFEU
Procedural basis	Own-initiative opinions (Rule 41(b)(ii) of the RoP)
Date of Council/EP referral/ Date of Commission letter	
Date of Bureau/President's decision	4.12.2018
Commission responsible	Commission for Natural Resources
Rapporteur	Roberto CIAMBETTI (ECR/IT)
Analysis	10.12.2018
Discussed in commission	28 March 2019
Date adopted by commission	28 March 2019
Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	Majority
Date adopted in plenary	27 June 2019
Previous Committee opinions	CdR 617/2018 – CoR Opinion on the <i>Review of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism</i> CdR 5035/2016 – CoR Opinion on the <i>Action Plan on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030</i>
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	