



Red Alert.

National Red Cross
Societies managing
disaster risks
in Europe



RED CROSS
EU OFFICE



**Red
Alert.**

National Red Cross Societies managing disaster risks in Europe

Our sincere appreciation goes to everyone who contributed to the development of this publication.

To order copies, please contact international@redcross.eu

The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the official policy of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), or of individual National Societies.

© November 2020, Red Cross EU Office

All rights reserved

Cover photo:

Hellenic Red Cross Samaritans looking for survivors in the town of Mati, after the devastating wildfires of July 2018.

© Evi Christopoulou / Hellenic Red Cross

Contents

EDITORIAL	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
INTRODUCTION	10
Chapter 1: UNDERSTANDING RISKS – INCREASING LOCAL RESILIENCE	12
1.1 Preparing for expected and unexpected crises	13
1.2 Volunteer network increases local resilience	14
1.3 Increasing communities' flood resilience	15
1.4 Creating preparedness capacity in island communities	16
BOX Closer to people: enhanced accountability through innovation	17
Chapter 2: ANTICIPATING AND ACTING EARLY	18
2.1 Using alerts to anticipate disasters and take early action in winter	19
2.2 Mobilising people to act early	20
2.3 Early warnings complemented with more attention to prevention	21
BOX Managing data to improve the speed, quality and cost-effectiveness of operations	22
Chapter 3: SAVING LIVES – RAISING AWARENESS	23
3.1 High skills, capacities and dedication – mountain search and rescue saves lives	24
3.2 Water life-saving and awareness raising	25
3.3 Heatwave preparedness protects people and increases resilience	26
BOX Adapting to extreme heat	27
Chapter 4: PREPARING FOR CHANGING RISKS	28
4.1 Investing in response capacities to changing risks	29
4.2 Responding to emerging challenges in the heart of Europe	29
4.3 Collaborating at all levels to face climate change	31
4.4 Towards smart preparedness planning in the Baltic Sea region	31
BOX Strengthening preparedness for multi-site and multi-risk response	33
Chapter 5: STRENGTHENING EFFECTIVE RESPONSE	34
5.1 Reinforcing institutional capacities for effective response – PER approach	35
5.2 Expanding impact through government–civil society collaboration	36
5.3 Exercises pay off in more effective response	37
5.4 Supporting authorities in Europe to strengthen disaster laws	38
5.5 Strong subregional collaboration strengthens preparedness in the neighbourhood	39
5.6 Digitalising preparedness for effective response	40
BOX The key role of emergency operations centres in coordination	41
CONCLUSIONS	42
SOURCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION	44

Editorial

Maarten van Aalst

Director of
the Red Cross
Red Crescent
Climate Centre

Europe is facing a changing climate, and rising risks. Some trends are clear: heat, extreme rainfall, droughts and wildfires are on the rise. Recent events often provide a good lens to understand how risks are evolving. The record heatwaves for instance, which featured among the world's most deadly disasters, show us not just how the climate is changing, but also how our societies are still unprepared to cope with increasing extreme weather events.

And we are also facing more surprises. Who had expected a drought to cause floods – exactly what happens when peat dykes dry out and then fail to protect adjacent communities from the river? And how do we address systemic and compound risks, such as power plants shutting down during a heatwave for lack of cooling water, putting electricity supply and thus air conditioning at risk at a time when vulnerable populations need it most?

Europe is starting to adapt, based on centuries of experience coping with disasters. We need to build on that experience, but also better anticipate emerging risks – and prepare for the unexpected.

A few ingredients are essential to manage disaster risks.

The first is analysis. In Europe, civil protection can build on some of the best weather observations and computer models that predict immediate and longer-term hazards. It is critical that these models connect to societal impacts and adaptation options. Rather than just predicting extreme rainfall, we need to know about floods, the risk to people and assets, and the effect of early action and long-term risk mitigation.

But such analysis takes us nowhere if it does not inform decisions. So, secondly, we need to invest in European risk awareness, taking account of differences in risk perception across countries and contexts. And we should enhance transparency on disaster impact data to increase accountability and investment in risk management – for instance on heatwave mortality, which is not consistently recorded in many countries in Europe.

Thirdly, and most critically, we need to turn that awareness into action – systemic solutions to systematically reduce risks.

Recognising this need for urgent action, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) has made climate change one of its top five priorities for the coming decade. Red Cross branches with local volunteers are in many ways at the front line in dealing with rising climate risks, whether these are weather extremes, health impacts or other environmental and social consequences. Although much attention is now focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, our concern about the increasing risk of natural hazards has not disappeared. And let's be clear: there will be no vaccine against climate change.

We do know what works to combine analysis, awareness and action. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies across Europe stand ready to work with communities and authorities to plan for a more resilient future and build local capacity to respond to the rising risks.

“
Europe is starting to adapt, based on centuries of experience coping with disasters. We need to build on that experience, but also better anticipate emerging risks – and prepare for the unexpected.”

Executive summary

Climate change will increasingly lead to extreme weather events and natural hazards – from heavy floods to deadly heatwaves and forest fires – that affect everyone, everywhere. Disasters already impact many millions of people worldwide every year, killing tens of thousands. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the consequences of not being adequately prepared, and has provided lessons for future preparedness, even beyond the known and expected risks.

European countries are already recurrently hit by different types of disasters. National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societiesⁱ are at the forefront of helping people and supporting the authorities, as part of their auxiliary role – and within the framework of the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism.

Divided in five chapters, this booklet showcases good practices, challenges and lessons learned on reducing and managing disaster risks across the region, including from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The examples cover the importance of understanding risks and taking action at local level, early warning mechanisms and capacities for anticipatory and early action, the combination of life-saving and awareness-raising actions to increase people's resilience, continuous efforts to adapt, innovate and test capacities for changing hazards, and how to step up collaboration and partnerships to optimise operational reach, scale and impacts on preparedness and emergency response.



Search and rescue teams and sniffer dogs on the ground in Amatrice, central Italy, following the 6.2 magnitude earthquake of August 2016.

© Marco Di Francesco / Italian Red Cross

ⁱ All the examples showcased in this booklet come from National Red Cross Societies, while the Europe region for IFRC also includes National Red Crescent Societies. Therefore, when making general reference to the National Societies, they are referred to as 'Red Cross'.

Understanding risks – Increasing local resilience

Collaboration among research institutions, public authorities and National Red Cross Societies is crucial, as it allows for better understanding of risks, their local effects and the most effective measures to reduce them, based on data and analyses. Capacity and vulnerability assessments enable communities and local actors to make risk-informed decisions, which increase their resilience to disasters such as floods.

Public awareness on existing hazards, their impacts and how to adequately prepare for them strengthens local communities and helps minimise the negative consequences of disasters.

Investing in building local capacities and empowering people to prepare and respond to disasters are also important, especially in isolated or remote locations. Training a high number of volunteers to be mobilised before and during emergencies can reduce risks and damages and help affected people. New technologies help make information about the response widely accessible and improve the efficiency of alerts.

Anticipating and acting early

Speed is critical to reduce the impact of hazards on people. Having relevant data at hand helps to identify priorities, as well as the location and availability of resources and capacities. This is why systems such as the Disaster Management Information System developed by the 510 team are of invaluable support for decision-making.

When a National Red Cross Society receives information and warnings in advance through emergency systems such as the 112 portal or Red Alert, it spreads them and gets ready for action. Suitable databases and communication tools enable early warnings to be easily scaled up to reach more people. These can lead to all key services – fire, rescue and medical – being on standby and ready for joint action based on the Red Cross' knowledge of vulnerable people's individual situations and needs. National Societies have gained this knowledge through their ongoing assistance, as they work with local authorities to ensure people are more able to cope in their daily life.

Efficient and timely interactions between weather forecast services and the Red Cross, through alerts and early warnings, can prompt early action. However, the positive effects could be even greater with more attention put on prevention, notably by adapting response strategies and working on solutions to increase awareness.

Saving lives – Raising awareness

National Red Cross Societies' volunteers help people in life-threatening situations in the mountains, in water, in severe weather conditions like heatwaves – which are increasingly prevalent and deadly, and in other emergencies. They are available to respond to unexpected situations at a moment's notice, and able to adapt to new situations swiftly and efficiently. Requests for assistance in emergencies can be received through national emergency call systems, and the speed of response relies on warning and response mechanisms.

Cooperation with authorities and institutions to monitor weather forecasts, prepare the population and respond quickly is essential. COVID-19, for example, has brought the need to adjust actions and guidelines to include pandemic prevention across Red Cross services.

At community level, one effective measure to increase local populations' adaptation capacities to disasters is to increase the awareness of the general public about the different risks in their areas. To help keep communities safe, National Societies share information and materials on preventive actions and, ahead of extreme weather events, reach people in vulnerable situations, such as homeless people and people living in hard-to-reach locations.

Preparing for changing risks

Forest fires, exacerbated by extreme weather, have had severe effects on different European countries in recent years, from Portugal to Greece, but also in regions that used to be less prone to such events, like the Nordic countries. These and other evolving risks have placed more attention on transboundary risks and led authorities to reorganise their structures, adopt new methodologies and mechanisms and make investments. National Red Cross Societies have also adapted their preparedness and response mechanisms and equipped themselves to be ready to deal with hazardous materials and ensure the safety of their staff and volunteers.

Smart preparedness planning takes into account changing risks and learns from past emergencies. Shared experiences in managing risks have inspired National Red Cross Societies to work more closely together. Subregional preparedness for current and future risks is increased through joint risk assessment methodologies and tools, common preparedness goals and plans, standardisation of equipment and procedures, establishment of emergency operations centres, and regular joint exercises nationally and across subregions.

At the same time as increasing the interoperability among them, National Societies are working with their authorities to strengthen future collaboration, including through mechanisms to request and host international assistance. Similarly, in potentially complex future scenarios, collaboration between different authorities at all levels is vital.

Strengthening effective response

Experience has confirmed that both local and central preparedness capacities must be enhanced, with skilled staff and volunteers. Proper coordination between authorities and the communities must be in place, as well as disaster laws.

It is essential to conduct regular trainings and exercises with civil society organisations, and to have the right kind of equipment and competence to meet the new risks. Likewise, insufficient legal preparedness can slow down emergency response and waste valuable resources: many European countries are not fully ready to respond to crises and had to urgently adopt legislative measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disaster and crisis information can also play a key role in improving the swiftness, quality and cost-effectiveness of operations. Having a real-time situational awareness helps National Red Cross Societies in efficient decision-making and communication to internal and external stakeholders, and also allows for fast exchanges between the emergency operations centres of all relevant organisations and the inter-agency coordination. Agreements to share data and services are therefore critical.

Disasters triggered by climate change and related developments will continue increasing in scope, frequency and intensity, with millions of people's lives and well-being at stake. But there is growing evidence on how to reduce these disasters, anticipate and prepare for them while minimising their human, economic, social and environmental consequences.

Introduction

Strengthening preparedness to disasters, increasing resilience of the most vulnerable people and saving lives are key areas of work of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies across Europe. They also implement a range of activities in support of their authorities contributing to the strengthening of their national disaster preparedness and disaster risk management systems.

Together with citizens across Europe, national governments, the European Union (EU) and other actors, National Societies are putting increasing efforts into reducing the impacts of extreme weather and other risks, including major disease outbreaks. They invest in better preparedness, strengthened anticipation capacity and early action for more frequent, intense and deadly heatwaves and forest fires, floods, and other complex, predictable and unexpected risks.

This booklet presents 25 cases from all over Europe to highlight some of the successes of the National Red Cross Societies' disaster risk management approach across the continent.

As auxiliary to their governments in the humanitarian field, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies enjoy a privileged relationship with authorities and support them in fulfilling their humanitarian responsibilities while adhering to the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's Fundamental Principlesⁱⁱ. National Societies strive to continuously strengthen and clarify their auxiliary role and mandate as set out in applicable laws. They also encourage and support authorities to review and develop legislation, policies and plans for disaster risk management and maintain an appropriate level of preparedness to provide their own timely and effective humanitarian assistance in times of crisis, reducing the vulnerability of people at risk.

While National Societies' tasks depend on the national context and specific mandates, there are similarities in their auxiliary roles in effectively managing disaster risks. This represents an opportunity to enhance the collaboration among the National Societies in Europe and in the subregions, such as the Baltic Sea and South-Eastern Europe. As the increasing risks do not follow any border, or sector, the importance of better preparing for transboundary risks, cross-border and multi-hazard response has also been stressed by the European Commission and its Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO).

Disaster risk management work across Europe is in line with the overall objective of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM).

ⁱⁱ Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary service, Unity, Universality.



Italian Red Cross volunteers helping people affected by Storm Alex in northern Italy in October 2020.

© Italian Red Cross

This is to strengthen civil protection cooperation between the EU Member States, six Participating Statesⁱⁱⁱ and the United Kingdom, with a view to improving prevention, preparedness and response to disasters while strengthening European crisis management and emergency response. The EU plays a major role in investing in preventing and minimising the impact of disasters through better preparedness, which is more cost-effective than response.

This booklet presents 25 cases from all over Europe to highlight some of the successes of the National Red Cross Societies' disaster risk management approach across the continent. This corresponds with the ambitions outlined in the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' (IFRC) Strategy 2030¹. To tackle the global challenge of evolving crises and disasters, the Strategy focuses on *being there at the right time* – investing before an event in disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation, and integrating these across all areas of work, *being in the right place* – effectively using technology and innovation to anticipate risks and disasters, *having the right capacity* – efficiently coordinating across networks and optimising locally-led action, *developing the right skills* – building the capabilities needed to respond to increasingly complex environments, and *having the right focus* – placing affected people and communities at the centre of preparedness and response.

ⁱⁱⁱ Iceland, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Turkey.

1.

Understanding risks – Increasing local resilience



Flåm, Norway, following the November 2014 floods in the area, the river crossed its banks and bridges and roads were washed away.

© Arild Blomkvist / Norwegian Red Cross

Identifying the most vulnerable people and areas is among the core capabilities of National Red Cross Societies. Assessments and analyses of vulnerability are improved by better and more easily accessible data. When this data is converted into understanding and made available to disaster risk management actors, decision-makers and the general public, they too can better understand the risks, anticipate them and make informed decisions to reduce these risks and prepare for disasters and crises. Collaboration between researchers and practitioners is therefore important.

People must be empowered to reduce their vulnerability to the risks they are increasingly facing, and have the skills and capacities in place to be able to respond immediately. In remote locations, resilience can be life-saving. In threatening situations, it is part of human

nature to help others; National Red Cross Societies make efforts to coordinate the thousands of people who are ready to help and integrate them into their preparedness to be mobilised when needed.

Europe, together with the rest of the world, has gained first-hand knowledge of the consequences of not being adequately prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic. Preparedness must look beyond expected risks, even if the requirements to prepare for such crises in concrete terms at personal, neighbourhood, society and global levels may be demanding. This is where science can also help.

This chapter presents examples from Norway, the Netherlands, Montenegro, Greece and Spain.

1.1 Preparing for expected and unexpected crises

Being fully aware that something unexpected can happen is the very core of disaster preparedness. Yet, not all crises are unexpected. For decades, researchers have been warning about the emerging climate crisis which is increasingly leading to devastating extreme weather and natural hazards that affect individuals, societies and nations on all levels. The consequences are the worst in risk-prone countries facing multiple threats, including poverty, war and conflict, but dramatic impacts are also expected in countries like Norway. Landslides caused by heavy rain have already led to climate-related deaths in residential areas. With climate change expected to cause increasing rainfall, the fear is that more lives will be lost.

The Norwegian Red Cross collaborates with research institutions and public emergency authorities to learn how the climate crisis affects it locally, and how to anticipate changes in targeted preparedness measures.

In 2019, the Norwegian Red Cross published the climate and emergency preparedness report *Norway's Climate 2071-2100*², in collaboration with the Norwegian Centre for Climate Services, the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate and the Norwegian Meteorological Institute. The report was presented to the Norwegian government and shows clearly for what preparedness must be scaled up in the coming decades: heavy rainfall and surface water, melting permafrost, rain floods, droughts and wildfires, avalanches, landslides and floods, quick clay landslides and sea level rise with the risk of storm surges.

Irene Brox Nilsen, a researcher and hydrologist at the Norwegian Water Resources and Energy Directorate, highlights the need to prepare for a warmer, wetter future involving more intense precipitation, an increase in flood magnitudes and more frequent landslides: *“Local climate conditions have always influenced where we settle, and local authorities must take climate change into account when planning residential areas and infrastructure. Areas that are not*

Areas that are not prone to natural hazards today may be so in the future.”

prone to natural hazards today may be so in the future.”

Together with the national public broadcaster, the Norwegian Red Cross made a [map](#) of Norway that reveals the climate in 2100. This shows where there is increased risk of extreme weather events, and informs the Red Cross of at-risk areas to prioritise and target. The future climate is a great cause for concern: there will be more heavy rainfall and surface water, rain floods, landslides and mudslides in all counties. Meanwhile, all coastal counties will experience increased sea levels and higher storm surge levels and there will be significant melting in all counties with permafrost.

Working in close cooperation with the municipalities on emergency preparedness through cooperation agreements is key. Local authorities must take climate change into account systematically and ensure they have contingency plans. The Red Cross ensures the authorities focus on at-risk groups such as older people who may not be able to prepare for crises or get to safety. More regular training exercises with civil society organisations, and the right kind of equipment and competence to meet the new risks, will be other decisive elements in whether Norway manages upcoming crises.

“People must learn to take greater responsibility for their personal preparedness”, says Anders Thorheim, Head of Unit for Civil Protection and National Preparedness in the Norwegian Red Cross. “This means preparing themselves for the fact that the power and water supply may disappear for several days, that communication networks may go down, or that access to food may become difficult for limited period of time.”

Collaborating with scientific partners is also crucial. The Norwegian Red Cross uses

“People must learn to take greater responsibility for their personal preparedness.”

Due to a storm in March 2019, a cruise ship with 1,300 passengers on board was close to sinking at Hustadvika in Møre og Romsdal. Norwegian Red Cross volunteers supported evacuated passengers with blankets and other items.

© Marius Tvinnereim / Norwegian Red Cross



scientific information in its humanitarian advocacy work to inform and improve the framework for emergency preparedness and to increase awareness of climate change among the population. Better analyses and uses of data lead to better understanding of risks and vulnerabilities. Ultimately, risks can be reduced and preparedness measures taken where they are most needed.

1.2 Volunteer network increases local resilience

Most of the Netherlands is situated beneath sea level, and has battled against the elements, especially water, throughout its history. A system of dykes along rivers and canals, totalling more than 17,000 kilometres, protects against flooding. In recent years, extreme weather events have increased. In the wet season, storms combined with heavy rainfall can take parts of these dykes to their extremes. During the dry season, the dykes dry out and risk losing their integrity and flooding. In both cases, the Dutch Water Authority can request support from the Netherlands Red Cross through a pre-arranged system.

Crisis Coordinators from the Netherlands Red Cross are available at any time, night or day,

to be contacted by the Water Authority in case of emergency. The two parties have agreed on the types of emergencies and activities the Red Cross can help with, and their mutual responsibilities during the cooperation. This way, these arrangements are ready in advance.

In 2014, the Netherlands Red Cross started a new initiative: Ready2Help. Ready2Helpers can support the Water Authority in both the dry and the wet season by, for example, inspecting dykes. As a preventive measure, they can also do small-scale repairs and mitigation, reducing the risk of a disaster. When needed, Ready2Help can also help by placing sandbags to support or heighten the dykes.

Loosely based on ‘Team Austria’ from the Austrian Red Cross, this Ready2Help network of now nearly 90,000 people is scattered across the Netherlands and ready to be deployed at a moment’s notice. Red Cross Crisis Coordinators can use a web application (app) to alarm Ready2Helpers in a specific area and deploy those living closest to the site. After receiving details about the situation and the type of help needed, they report their availability on the system. The deployed Ready2Helpers receive the address for the site and name of their Red Cross contact by text message.

Ready2Help offers a channel to effectively help in case of an emergency or in anticipation of an extreme weather-related disaster. Anouk Ros, Coordinator for Ready2Help at the Netherlands Red Cross Head Office sums up, *“Ready2Help is all about making use of the enormous amount of knowledge and capacities in society including the willingness to help during and after an emergency. Ready2Helpers are enthusiastic, hard workers that the Netherlands Red Cross and our partners can rely on.”*

The Netherlands Red Cross is working together with several governmental and semi-governmental agencies to coordinate and facilitate the use of volunteers in flood risk reduction, food distribution and other emergencies, such as searching for missing people. The same philosophy applies to all deployments of Ready2Help: to add value and support efforts in the best possible way.

1.3 Increasing communities' flood resilience

Heavy rainfalls, long-lasting rains and melting of existing snow in mountainous regions can lead to a sudden rise of water levels in rivers and lakes, causing floods, covering homes, agricultural and pastoral land, and disrupting the functioning of infrastructure.

The Red Cross of Montenegro is working with flood-prone communities of the Skadar Lake basin, in the south-east of the country, to increase their resilience to floods. The Red Cross team facilitates the assessment of risks, capacities, needs and priorities on flood preparedness at local level, and informs and empowers local people to develop and implement flood preparedness activities and small-scale mitigation projects.

Together with target communities, Red Cross teams have analysed their capacities and

vulnerabilities using the Flood Resilience Measurement Tool.^{iv} This generates evidence about the ways in which a given area is already resilient to floods, helps assess risks and guides the further strengthening of resilience. It enables communities and local practitioners to make risk-informed decisions, and to better measure the impact of work.

The communities have been chosen based on their exposure to floods, recurrence of flooding and possibilities to directly link with and add value to local authorities who have adopted plans that contain hazard analysis, flood protection criteria, overviews of existing capacities and measures for flood protection – as was the case in several municipalities. In support of the Red Cross action, the authorities have shared their views on planned activities and linked the action with strategic flood protection documents adopted at local and national level. Authorities have contributed financially to the infrastructural projects identified to increase each community's resilience to floods, such as maintaining a clean and open canal waterway around the community. Securing funding for resilience and preparedness programmes remains challenging, although small contributions can make significant positive changes.

The Red Cross of Montenegro's role is fully integrated into the national response system, as defined by Red Cross law. It plays a key role in providing first aid and disaster preparedness training country wide. As part of flood resilience, teams run public trainings and school workshops to raise awareness of risks and hazards and plan response interventions to disasters at family

“ ***In the past, my house flooded several times and now I learned what measures should be taken.*** ”

iv. After data collection, the National Society teams grade 44 sources of resilience on an A–D scale (A being best practice, D being poor), compare source definitions with the collected data, and aggregate the analysis using five capitals – human (that is, human capital), social, financial, natural and physical and four Rs – robustness (ability to withstand a shock), redundancy (functional diversity), resourcefulness (ability to mobilise when threatened) and rapidity (ability to contain losses and recover in a timely manner). This analysis is then shared with community members, local authorities and other stakeholders and used as a starting point for creating the intervention activities.

A system of dykes along rivers and canals protects against flooding in the Netherlands. Ready2Helpers support the Water Authority in both the dry and the wet season by inspecting dykes or placing sandbags, among other activities.

© Pinta Mawi / Netherlands Red Cross



and community levels. Miško, from the town of Zabljak Crnojevica, attended one of these sessions: *“This was very interesting to me, as in the past, my house flooded several times and now I learned what measures should be taken, what is the procedure to follow, how to provide first aid if someone is injured,”* he said. Volunteers also distribute first aid kits to all the participants.

This flood resilience work is part of a multi-sectoral and multi-country partnership called the Zürich Flood Resilience [Alliance](#), which uses practical field-level experience to develop models to deliver effective community flood resilience programmes at scale and contribute to shaping the flood resilience agenda of policy-makers and donors.

Even though the frequency and severity of floods is increasing together with other effects of climate change, it is possible to reduce their impacts on people, livelihoods, the environment and the economy as expertise and investments in flood resilience grow.

1.4 Creating preparedness capacity in island communities

Greece is a country of a very particular geography: a peninsular with a mountainous mainland and islands of various sizes and

positions: some large and others small, some in groups and others isolated. The country's climate is hot and windy, especially in the summer. Every year, local communities are faced with the need to respond to various types of disaster such as floods, wildfires and earthquakes. Taking the example of floods, those in Mandra, Chalkidiki and Evia have cost lives and livelihoods, illustrating the impact of climate change and the need to increase preparedness capacities.

People need a better understanding of the risks and vulnerabilities in the areas they live. This knowledge will help them identify the main hazards and, in turn, activities which mitigate them. The Hellenic Red Cross is focusing on building capacity in disaster preparedness and response especially at local level, so local staff and volunteers can respond effectively to emergencies and disasters in their own area. This capacity building is linked with broader National Society development work. The Hellenic Red Cross has an extensive network across the country but, to also ensure capacities in smaller islands where there is no branch structure in place, the network of Branch Disaster Response Teams is being reinforced. The goal is to decrease the number of casualties and losses to livelihoods in potential future disasters.

In the most vulnerable and isolated communities, teams work to empower and train local people

to build resilience, reduce disaster risks and respond to emergencies. A National Disaster Response Team can be deployed to areas with no branch capacity or presence, to act as a mobile branch and liaison between the community and headquarters. However, it is important to have immediate know-how and capacities in place when an emergency strikes. Community members are being trained to analyse and manage risks in their islands, forming new Community Disaster Response Teams. Additional trainings, adapted to the needs and context, cover topics from needs assessments to crisis management, contingency planning, collaboration with civil protection authorities and cash transfer programming and protection.

Due to isolation and limited resources, collaboration among existing actors becomes invaluable. The strong ties, cooperation and auxiliary role of the Hellenic Red Cross with the local civil protection authorities are further strengthened and kept up to date by inviting them to participate in its trainings and simulations. The Hellenic Red Cross also regularly participates and brings expertise into local civil protection coordination fora.

Closer to people: enhanced accountability through innovation

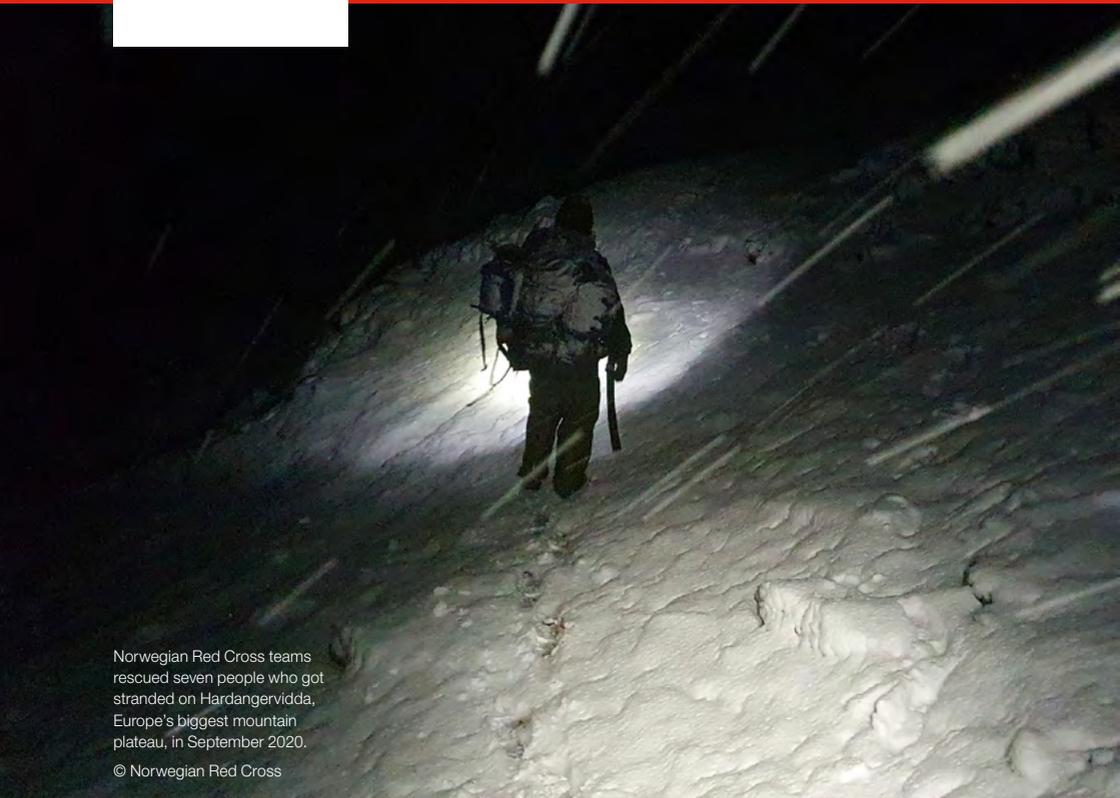
In a major emergency, where needs are immense and people offer substantial support, there is a clear need to show how aid reaches the most vulnerable people, and new technologies represent great opportunities to increase accountability – both to society and donors.

In the context of COVID-19, the Spanish Red Cross has created a public dashboard to make information about its operations readily accessible to everyone, at any time, just by a click. The [#CruzRojaResponde](#) open data system, updated on a daily basis, shows how many people have benefited from each type of assistance.

In addition, an internal dashboard provides data for analyses, allowing a deeper understanding of needs and leading to improved quality of assistance. Easy detection of any changes in the particular vulnerabilities and profiles of the people seeking help also informs and enhances future preparedness for public health crises.

2.

Anticipating and acting early



Norwegian Red Cross teams rescued seven people who got stranded on Hardangervidda, Europe's biggest mountain plateau, in September 2020.

© Norwegian Red Cross

Early alerts and warnings are powerful in reducing disaster risks and informing anticipatory and early action. It is therefore essential to monitor weather conditions and hazards and have early warning mechanisms and institutional arrangements in place.

The collaboration between National Red Cross Societies and meteorological services ensures that forecasts, alerts and early warnings reach isolated people and allow them to take action before an extreme weather event. Red Cross

volunteers' knowledge of the local conditions and individual situations of vulnerable people and those who may become vulnerable is important in meeting their needs and speeding up emergency response. While anticipatory and early action are critically important, preventive measures and raising public awareness of risks are even more so.

This chapter presents examples from Croatia, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands.

2.1 Using alerts to anticipate disasters and take early action in winter

In recent years, Croatia has encountered extreme weather conditions more frequently and this trend is expected to continue. Different parts of the country face different challenges, from extreme rains in brief time periods, to extreme droughts that cause forest fires and great damage to agriculture, to extremely harsh winter conditions that make isolated areas even more isolated, making it difficult to carry out any support activities.

Extreme winter conditions affect the mountainous central region of Croatia (Primorje-Gorski Kotar Karlovac and Lika-Senj Counties) where heavy snowfall and ice often block the roads and can cut power outage and water supply. In this area, several remote households are completely isolated.

Older people, especially those who live in a single household in remote areas, are the most vulnerable and thus need special attention and care. In general, these people have no regular contact or no contact at all with family or neighbours. It is challenging for any organised support from neighbours or the community to reach them and becomes even more difficult during harsh winter conditions.

Following years of the Croatian Red Cross voicing its concern for these vulnerable people and the need to improve preparedness and ensure early action, the situation has improved. Today early warnings immediately lead to all supporting services – fire, rescue and medical – being on standby.

A positive example is the local Red Cross branch in Slunj, a small town located in the mountain area in central Croatia with experience of operating in heavy winter and snow conditions. There, the usual Red Cross activities with older people, like visits with housekeeping, groceries and medical supplies, transport to medical services, house maintenance, firewood supply and feeding livestock become disaster response activities in such difficult circumstances.

The Slunj Red Cross local branch provides regular support for 160 older people in very remote areas through its home care project. Even in normal weather conditions these people are not easily accessible and a four-wheel drive vehicle is needed – hence heavy snow conditions are an additional challenge. Volunteers have a good knowledge of the territory which is essential as they need to walk the final kilometres. It is very difficult to recognise the exact positions of the roads covered in thick snow; an ongoing mapping of the roads will help them access at-risk people. The Croatian Red Cross is also establishing a contact database of people at risk, their neighbours and family members to make communications more effective.

The Croatian Meteorological and Hydrological Service usually issues a Red Alert for heavy winter/snow conditions a few days beforehand to warn communities and individuals to prepare for extreme weather. This is the trigger for the Croatian Red Cross to raise its level of alertness and activate its preparedness for the anticipated disaster. It immediately initiates meetings with civil protection authorities, firefighters, the Mountain Rescue Service and urgent medical services, who are equipped and trained to act in such circumstances. All these services put their capacities on standby and together set priorities for action based on Red Cross knowledge of at-risk people's individual situations and needs.

A Red Alert also triggers special activities for Red Cross home care providers with potentially affected people. Through home care visits made together with civil protection services, these people are warned about possible extreme weather conditions, advised on proper behaviour and measures, and their preparedness is improved by stocking additional firewood and medications, among other things. Also, with the support of the Croatian Red Cross Intervention Team, they help affected people through different measures such as clearing the snow around the houses and feeding livestock.

The Croatian Red Cross Intervention Team is made up of staff and volunteers trained to respond in different disaster scenarios that could

“
The fact that somebody cares for them and that there is an organisation they can rely on is much more important than any material aid.”
”

In emergencies, field teams support people in need ensuring their vulnerabilities and capacities are adequately factored in.

© Spanish Red Cross



affect Croatia. Providing goods is important, but the psychosocial component of home care activities is even more so. Mirjana Puškarić, the Red Cross of Slunj Branch Director says: “*The fact that somebody cares for them and that there is an organisation they can rely on is much more important than any material aid*”.

2.2 Mobilising people to act early

Early warning message from the Spanish Red Cross (original in Spanish):

“
As a member of the early warning service of the Red Cross, please take note that a high level of **forest fire risk** has been declared in your area. This area will be on alert the next few days. We recommend that you follow authorities’ instructions. You can find enclosed some advice on **preventive actions** and in case of **emergency**.”
”

In responding to disasters, speed is critical to reduce the impact of the hazard on people,

especially those who are most at risk and least able to cope. Early and anticipatory action – aimed at alerting the population about foreseen emergencies – multiplies response effectiveness since the exposure and thus the risk is reduced and people are more prepared to tackle the event.

The Spanish Red Cross has conducted an early warning pilot in different provinces in Valencia region, on the east coast, aimed at informing the population of upcoming hazards. In the pilot, they advised on the most suitable measures to take to reduce the risks. People who were part of the existing remote support programme (more than 30,600 recorded users in the database) and supporters of the National Society (*socios*) were the target population of this initiative.

The early warnings inform and sensitise people about a given situation, share the measures to be taken and guide them to available resources to meet their needs. The alerts come from civil protection authorities through the 112 system, where the Emergency Coordination Centre of the Spanish Red Cross in the region has a specific portal. This way, they are immediately informed of the alert level stated by authorities and support them in spreading the warnings and

information to the people. This collaboration on early warnings is part of the Spanish Red Cross agreement with the local authority: the Valencian Agency for Security and Emergency Response.

The good results of the pilot led to the project being expanded. In early 2020, in the face of Storm Gloria that affected Valencia, the alert systems included social media, SMS messages and face-to-face visits in addition to phone calls. This meant people in very vulnerable situations, such as homeless people, could be reached as well as isolated and hard-to-reach communities. In total, more than 51,000 people received information in advance.

Many steps were taken by the Spanish Red Cross before the early warnings could be issued. First, it defined the types of applicable emergencies (such as floods, heat/cold waves, snowfalls, strong winds). Then its local branches conducted a risk and vulnerability mapping to assess where the early warnings would be most needed and what would be the best way to reach the targeted groups. Next, a unified contact list was created from the databases of different programmes (health, relief, social intervention, fundraising, youth), and the feasibility of the alert system was ensured in collaboration with different

support services. The communications team developed videos related to the different threats, the volunteer department provided its up-to-date database and the Emergency Operations Centre added early warnings into the existing apps to reach people and to make and receive calls. There was a clear scheme of target groups, which identified the tools to be used to reach them, and what institutional resources were needed per emergency type.

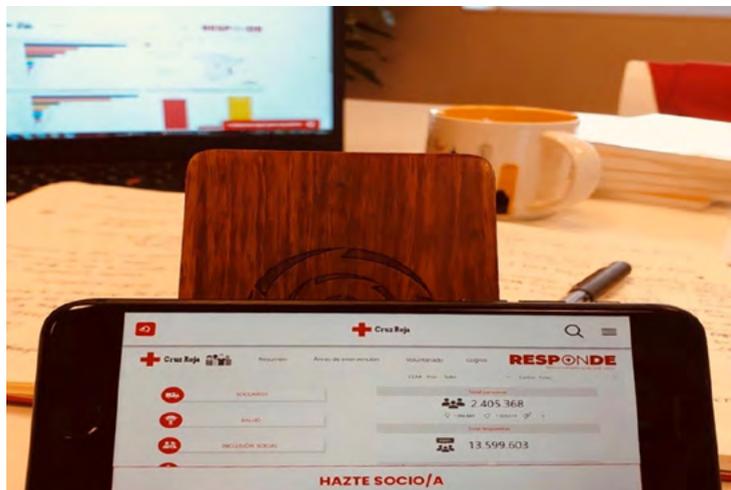
The potential amount of people reached by early warnings can be easily scaled up. The authorities may ask the Red Cross to send alerts to their register of potentially vulnerable people in their municipality or a company may ask the Red Cross to include their employees in the alert list. The programme mobilises people to take anticipatory action and reinforces preparedness. It reduces risks and damages from natural hazards, and makes response more effective and smooth and recovery quicker.

2.3 Early warnings complemented with more attention to prevention

No forecast is 100 per cent accurate, but those shared 24 hours in advance usually are. The

The #CruzRojaResponde open data system, updated on a daily basis, shows how many people have benefited from each type of assistance.

© Spanish Red Cross



quality of forecast models is increasing and there is a wider network of weather stations and new ways to spread early warnings such as through apps, enabling response actors and communities to prepare for a given situation and react on time.

In Italy, the authorities' meteorological bulletins are the official tool to raise or lower the alarm in a specific region. These identify alarming weather conditions, most commonly due to heavy rainfall, strong winds, snow or extreme high or low temperatures. The Italian Red Cross uses these warnings to activate or deactivate its alert level. In anticipation of an event, it can preposition materials and pre-deploy staff or volunteers, who are then ready for early action and can support evacuations.

In the case of floods, evacuating and rescuing people is part of the normal response, which can be anticipatory and very effective. Response is managed at local level, using the assets that are immediately available. Support can be requested from the whole national system if needed. However, more attention and resources are needed for prevention. The structural capacity to control flood water should ideally be enough to avoid any need for an evacuation.

For earthquakes, information from seismographs is automatically distributed among civil protection actors. As standard practice, due to its recognition in the civil protection system, the authorities ask the Italian Red Cross to check the situation with its local branches around the epicentre and contact the local authorities.

Overall, forecasts, early warnings and response are working well in Italy, but the Italian Red Cross sees the need to give more attention to prevention capacities and cross-border interactions in accordance with common protocols. The National Society is changing its strategy from disaster management to disaster risk management – focusing more on informing the public and involving it further ahead of disasters.

People's awareness of civil protection and how they can adapt to new hazards can be increased. The Italian Red Cross has learned that for messages to have an impact, they must be adapted to the local context, taking into account the way communities perceive and already live with the risks.

Managing data to improve the speed, quality and cost-effectiveness of operations

When managing operations in response to a crisis, having a central place to store and analyse all data processed becomes crucial.

In the Netherlands, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the 510 data team supported the Information Management and IT department of the Netherlands Red Cross to set one up.

The Disaster Information Management System supports decision-making by providing a situational overview, which is based on primary and secondary data collected in various ways and using different tools and formats, to plan faster and more efficient needs-based interventions.

Maps, dashboards, apps and other products are designed together with the end users to ensure they correspond fully to their needs. They inform operational decisions, and are useful in identifying priority areas, at-risk groups, volunteer capacities, locations and types of helpline requests or information about hospitals and other institutions.

3.

Saving lives – Raising awareness



The Mountain Rescue Service of the Bulgarian Red Cross in action.
© Bulgarian Red Cross

Any time, day or night, National Red Cross Societies' staff and volunteers can be requested to assist people in life-threatening situations, from someone caught in an avalanche to an older person severely affected by a heatwave. Saving lives is at the very core of their work, and it starts well before an emergency hits. For National Societies and authorities, preparedness measures and plans, adapted to various contexts, are key elements for life-saving actions. People who are ready for disasters are better equipped to protect themselves and their families and reduce the whole community's vulnerability.

In this sense, awareness-raising activities are a powerful tool to increase the understanding of risks and knowledge of preventive and early action measures that anyone can take. Partnering with local communities, authorities, the media, schools and others helps to extend the reach and impact of these activities and also reinforces the trust with the people who are most at risk of being impacted by a disaster.

This chapter presents examples from Bulgaria, Serbia, France and the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre.

3.1 High skills, capacities and dedication – mountain search and rescue saves lives

In high mountains, people often get lost, fall and break a limb or worse, get sick at night due to inappropriate clothes, overestimate their physical abilities and are not able to return that day. Last winter, a skier left the safe slopes of Bansko in the Pirin Mountains in Bulgaria, causing an avalanche. His friend alerted the mountain rescuers on duty, who rushed to the scene. Moving carefully, so as not to cause the collapse of new snow masses, they began searching the area until a slight movement of the snow directed them to the skier. Only a few minutes later he was pulled alive from the avalanche.

This is just one example of the intense round-the-clock work of the volunteers of the Mountain Rescue Service of the Bulgarian Red Cross, the sole structure that helps people in the mountains (and which has done so for more than 85 years). It has more than 530 active volunteer mountain rescuers, who are highly dedicated and consider their role a way of life. On average, the volunteers in 32 squads assist 2,600 people every year and carry out more than 120 specialised search and rescue operations. These often continue over many days and nights, and may involve several dozen mountain rescuers, military and forest rangers.

Since 1971, the Mountain Rescue Service has been a member of the International Commission for Alpine Rescue. It maintains contact with mountain rescue services around the world, and constantly updates its working methods, applying the experience of the largest Alpine nations. Mountain rescuers have been repeatedly trained in Germany, Italy, Slovakia and Slovenia, and the instructors from the Mountain Rescue Service Training Centre have also trained rescuers of the Red Cross of Montenegro on how to help victims on ski slopes. "At every training course, we ask the question: why do you want to become a mountain rescuer? And it turns out that the reasons are mainly two – love for the mountains, and desire to help people

in trouble" says Emil Neshev, the service's Director. Volunteers also regularly take part in joint exercises with civil protection, police and other governmental agencies, participating in rope and air rescue from collapsed buildings or train for search and rescue under debris using mountain dogs.

The service is an essential part of the Unified Rescue System in Bulgaria and is included in the state's National Program and National Disaster Protection Plan. Through its central 24-hour station, it connects to the national emergency call system (via 112) and receives requests for assistance in the mountains and in other emergencies.

Its dog rescue team has been searching for people in the mountains, but also in disasters and accidents, for 45 years. Its members have received well-deserved national and international recognition for their work in major disasters, such as earthquakes in Armenia and Turkey.

The Mountain Rescue Service monitors the weather conditions, such as temperature, sun or rain, wind speed, height of snow and avalanche risk, in the mountains on a daily basis, and informs and advises people on its website and social media. The Bulgarian Red Cross issues alerts and warnings to all media when there is high risk in certain areas and people should either not go or practice extreme caution.

The National Society also produces prevention materials – leaflets, information boards and stickers – and organises seminars on safe behaviour in the mountains in winter, attracting local people and tourists. The biggest threat is represented by people who go unprepared to the mountains, ignore alerts or overestimate their abilities. The key message for them:

"A mountain is beautiful and a wonderful experience, but it is not your friend. Weather and terrain can worsen quickly and if you don't wear appropriate clothes and shoes, if you skip taking enough food and water, or if you decide to challenge yourself on difficult or unmarked routes, your trip could turn into a tragedy. Be prepared and stay safe!"

Italian Red Cross volunteers rescuing a woman in Cercola in 2019.

© Italian Red Cross



To improve the safety of people in the mountains and to help eventual rescue in case of accidents, the Bulgarian Red Cross highly encourages everyone taking a mountain trip to install an app that can help locate them when in danger by automatically sending their coordinates to the dispatcher of the Mountain Rescue Service. Technology can make a life-saving difference.

3.2 Water life-saving and awareness raising

Accidental drowning is the cause of more than 5,000 lives lost every year in the European Union³. It is a serious public health problem that is underestimated.

The Red Cross of Serbia has been running a water life-saving programme for more than 50 years, which aims to reduce the number of drownings and injuries in bathing areas. This includes setting up and developing water life-saving services, training professional lifeguards through international standardised methodology and education programmes, assessing risks in bathing areas, and organising water rescue competitions. In addition, its awareness-raising activities target public and professionals about the risks in bathing areas.

The Red Cross of Serbia is in charge of implementing the water life-saving programme, as per the national Red Cross Law, and sits in the International Life Saving Federation, which gathers aquatic Lifesavers and aquatic Lifesaving organisations. Different national federations define rules, guidelines and criteria for each sport. At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the National Society was in charge of adapting recommendations and guidelines to include pandemic prevention within the life-saving services and legal entities in charge of water safety in bathing areas.

Furthermore, the Red Cross of Serbia is a member of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, and has a mandate to educate and spread awareness on water safety. It targets primary schools, pupils, their parents and family members, teachers and neighbours, as well as volunteers who are peer educators, volunteer programme instructors and trainers. The activities include evacuation drills, quizzes, local competitions and public campaigns. Experience has shown that youth volunteers trained in disaster risk reduction are valuable additional resources to help school teachers. The overall objective is to reinforce local communities' capacities by raising awareness about existing hazards and risks, the early warning system,

and preventive, self-protection and common protection measures.

3.3 Heatwave preparedness protects people and increases resilience

Heatwaves are becoming more recurrent and intense and can cause serious health problems – including death. Exposing a person to a high temperature for a prolonged period of time, without the required time to cool enough, is likely to cause serious complications by exceeding the thermal regulation capacities of the human body. Periods of high heat also trigger certain pathologies, and aggravate pre-existing ones, especially in vulnerable populations.

In 2003, France suffered an intense drought and extremely high temperatures (40°C on average) day and night for an unusually long period. This had serious consequences on nature and the economy, for example on farmers who lost cattle that died in the heat. Emergency interventions notably increased, with the most at-risk populations evacuated to hospitals, particularly older people. Despite the efforts made, the death toll in Europe was alarmingly high and particularly so in France with 19,490 heat-related deaths⁴.

France then decided to introduce heatwave preparedness measures. A warning system for heatwaves was set up, with a response mechanism designed to better react to future heatwaves. Following the national initiative, the French Red Cross developed its Heatwave Plan, which mainly focuses on two priority groups: older people and homeless people. In implementing the plan, it collaborates with government counterparts at local, regional and national levels to monitor weather forecasts, prepare the population and respond to heatwave events.

For older people, volunteer teams carry out several complementary actions such as visiting the homes of isolated people identified by the municipalities, supporting health personnel (hospitals, emergency services) and firefighters

and transporting people in need to retirement homes during the day so they can enjoy their cool areas. For homeless people, they launch or reinforce social patrols (*maraudes*) and distribute water, caps and maps to indicate where water points can be found.

During the summer of 2019, maximum temperature records were broken in several EU countries. France experienced two heatwave episodes, with a new heat record of 45.9°C. The French Red Cross activated its National Operations Centre to support and follow up the activities carried out by nearly 1,300 volunteers. Their actions during the first episode were visible during the second one, where the morbidity and mortality rate were much lower. This confirmed that volunteers and the population in general were better prepared and more resilient.

When the COVID-19 pandemic started, the Heatwave Plan was adjusted to include preventive health measures. These included using and renewing personal protection equipment and cooling systems in French Red Cross premises, and rescheduling social activities to avoid the warmest hours and congregation of people. Developing the capacity to adapt to new situations swiftly and efficiently, and having staff and volunteers prepared and available to respond to unexpected situations, is essential.

Staff and volunteers actively monitor wildfires, and deploy emergency teams where needed – including doctors, nurses and psychologists.

© Portuguese Red Cross



Adapting to extreme heat

One of the clearest and most certain impacts of climate change is the rise in extreme heat, which will result in an increase in deadly heatwaves in cities at both 1.5°C and 2°C of warming and in some areas may surpass physiological thresholds for humans to withstand⁵.

Extreme heat has become a renewed area of focus at the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, whose work supports the IFRC's commitment to massively scale up early warning systems – including for heatwaves – through the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership.

Partnerships with scientists have looked at the role of climate change in extreme events and found that the risk of deadly heatwaves in Europe is increasing due, in part, to climate change. As a member of the Global Heat Health Information Network, the Climate Centre has organised the first-ever global expert forum on heatwaves in 2018, and has developed virtual, global masterclasses and dialogues on extreme heat.

Immediate action needed in cities

The Climate Centre's landmark guides, *Heatwave Guide for Cities*⁶ and *City Heatwave Guide for Red Cross Red Crescent Branches*⁷, help National Societies take local action on extreme heat in support of municipal authorities. The guides highlight the importance of working to both anticipate and respond to heatwaves, as well as doing long-term urban planning to reduce the amount of heat in a city.

Heat action case studies include the Spanish Red Cross' action on heat safety at beaches and contacting and advising at-risk people on what to do during heatwaves. Likewise, the Netherlands Red Cross has supported the Dutch government to create its National Heat Action Plan and elaborated its own communications strategy targeting highly vulnerable groups.

4.

Preparing for changing risks



In 2017, Estonian Red Cross and Finnish Red Cross held a joint evacuation exercise in Saaremaa, Estonia.

© Aino Salmi / Finnish Red Cross

In the last decades, changes and increases in the type, scale and intensity of disasters and emergency situations have challenged first responders. They have also reconfirmed the need to further develop and reinforce preparedness and the operational capacities and effectiveness of response.

Interconnection and interoperability between the Red Cross, the authorities and other civil protection actors are crucial in this effort: from cooperating on the development of response preparedness planning processes to ongoing fast and clear communications during complex emergencies.

Local preparedness capacities and skilled staff and volunteers are at the core of the effectiveness of Red Cross response. To ensure their capacities remain relevant to the changing risk landscape, National Societies develop these in partnerships with others. Experiences of subregional collaborations show the added value of the Red Cross network being local, but at the same time able to scale up and use the available national, regional and global resources efficiently.

This chapter presents examples from Portugal, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, countries from the Baltic Sea region and France.

4.1 Investing in response capacities to changing risks

Forest fires have severely affected European countries in recent years. The risk, further exacerbated by extreme weather conditions, is increasing every year in Mediterranean countries, and is now impacting regions in northern and western Europe that would usually be less prone to fires.

From 2013 to 2019, a third of the requests for assistance through the UCPM were in response to forest fires. A series of deadly wildfires in Portugal in 2017 left behind dozens of victims and injured people and thousands of hectares of destroyed land. The forest fire on 15 October was considered the biggest and deadliest in the world that year.

As an immediate response to these events, the national civil protection authorities reorganised their emergency response structure. New methodologies and response mechanisms were designed to better equip the response teams in the face of these new challenges. Significant investments were made in track machines, fire brigades transportable by helicopter and the development of decision support teams, for example through trainings and access to different tools.

The Portuguese Red Cross has also adapted its response tools and capacities and rethought its emergency mechanisms. This has enabled a better response to the changing and growing severity of natural and climate change-related hazards and the increasing requests from authorities to support them as auxiliaries. It invested in new technologies such as an operations management system and Communications Centre and further developed its training and operational plans. One way it did this was by improving its management of the information it receives from different sources, in order to support the emergency operations with a more structured and quick response.

The Portuguese Red Cross has strengthened its emergency response capabilities during the recent summers with recurrent fires, and

throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It improved its situational awareness by creating a National Control and Command Centre that serves it nationwide. This enables it to keep track of information on upcoming challenges by monitoring scientific information, news coverage and local and regional response capabilities of the National Society.

The operational guidelines of the Portuguese Red Cross consider new types of crises. Depending on how the situation evolves, there is a need to define how and where test teams and those managing hazardous materials will be deployed. Training programmes have been designed for volunteers on individual protection equipment procedures, hazardous materials, dead body management, meteorological and climate-related information and psychological first aid, among others. Better preparedness has enhanced the capabilities of volunteers, allowed for safer interventions and made response faster.

4.2 Responding to emerging challenges in the heart of Europe

The devastating flooding in Moravia, in the eastern part of the Czech Republic in 1997, was among the first disasters associated with climate change in the country. In order to respond to the urgent needs of affected people, the Czech Red Cross provided nearly 3,000 truckloads of material assistance, as well as psychosocial support, emergency accommodation and meals, and found solutions to multiple challenges, such as how to evacuate persons with disabilities.

Based on its experiences in the flood response, the Czech Red Cross has adapted its disaster preparedness and response mechanisms to the various natural hazards that are expected to be exacerbated by climate change, as well as others, including terrorism, civil unrest, traffic accidents, fires and explosions. *“In 21st century every year is a new experience, especially in a vibrant city like Prague. It does not matter if we undergo floods, demonstrations or large fires: we have to adapt our training and aid delivered to the place of need”,* says a Red Cross volunteer.



Portuguese Red Cross teams continue assisting people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

© Portuguese Red Cross

Recently, many new types of emergencies have been identified and prepared for. One of them concerned the Vaclav Havel Airport Prague, an important flight hub in Central Europe. An increasing number of flights together with more frequent weather events increases the likelihood of cancelled or diverted flights and raises the risk of aeroplane accidents. The Czech Red Cross is now prepared to ensure psychosocial support, emergency accommodation and food for hundreds of people with high stress levels, in cooperation with the airport and some of the airlines. It has already set up a temporary assistance centre for emergency situations several times. Regular trainings and exercises are organised to ensure capacities are in place and procedures are known among staff and volunteers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, disinformation and fake news can endanger lives. The Czech Red Cross noticed many incorrect or dangerous pieces of so-called advice related to the virus, and started a social media information campaign called 'We will overcome it' (#zvladnemeto) to fight hoaxes. The campaign was run entirely by volunteers, who actively informed people of the messages and engaged in debates on social networks to reach as many people as possible.

The Red Cross is known as a trusted information source and can therefore support public authorities in delivering the right information in many different situations (beyond public health matters), and making sure people have access to this information.

The variety of emergency situations has shown that for effective response there must be both local and central preparedness capacities, coordination and skilled personnel and volunteers. To ensure good local-level coordination for effective preparedness and response, one local branch is authorised in each region to coordinate other branches. Local staff, members and volunteers are strongly connected to the local community – they know local conditions and resources and can provide immediate adapted responses in emergencies: only a local person knows how to bypass a damaged bridge in case of floods, or how to obtain warm meals for evacuated people after a fire in the middle of the night. They also play a crucial role in long-term resilience building of local communities. *“Every single person who has passed a first aid, volunteering or disaster preparedness training of the Czech Red Cross can start local action in case of emergency,”* says Martin Srb, member of the Czech Red Cross.

4.3 Collaborating at all levels to face climate change

With its diverse landscape, Slovenia is prone to a variety of hazards and impacts of climate change. Its authorities have recognised the need to strengthen capacities to forecast and anticipate disasters, make investments, take care of vulnerable social groups, and educate and communicate effectively, while emphasising the prevention and reduction of risk. Moreover, recent disasters, such as floods and hailstorms have drawn more attention to transboundary issues in terms of both preventive and relief actions. Cross-border cooperation programmes address challenges identified through a common assessment of priority sectors and risks.

The Interdepartmental Working Group on Climate Change Adaptation, made up of different ministries and external experts, serves as a main reference point in the process of developing adaptation policies. The Slovenian Red Cross, as part of the National Protection System, plays an active role by working closely with the Administration for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief at the Ministry of Defence and by raising people's awareness, for example through climate change campaigns. *"It is crucial to continuously invest in the strengthening of knowledge about climate change impacts, and to raise competence and awareness in order to reduce exposure, sensitivity and vulnerability of the society while increasing resilience and adaptive capacities,"* states Matej Kežzar, Slovenian Red Cross Senior Disaster Management Officer.

The Slovenian Red Cross plays a key role in providing first aid and disaster preparedness training across the country, as defined by Red Cross law. The *Resolution on the National Programme of Protection against Natural and Other Disasters* highlights that preventive measures have been applied increasingly in the country and further recognises the role of the Slovenian Red Cross in preventing disasters. It also calls for practical implementation of various acts and regulations including organisational, technical, technological and functional solutions for all types of hazards in a coordinated and planned manner at all levels. The *Strategy on the*

Adaptation of Slovenian Agriculture and Forestry to Climate Change highlights the effective use of water in drought areas, the establishment of conditions for ensuring proper drinking water, improvement in the management of floods and other disasters, plant pests and diseases. Concrete adaptation measures include placing fire danger signs in forests with high fire risk, protecting agriculture from hail, putting in place mobile flood barriers and using water effectively in drought areas.

Collaboration between civil protection and health authorities is important in public health emergencies and disasters with health consequences. This works well in Slovenia, where, to ensure emergency health care in any disaster, the Slovenian Red Cross has developed its response preparedness together with the authorities. Its field medical care services, including a field mobile unit with a capacity of up to 120 patients, shelter units and first aid teams, are integrated into the authorities' preparedness plans.

The Slovenian Red Cross is also part of the Neighbours Help First network, which brings together the National Societies in South-Eastern Europe facing similar hazards. When an earthquake struck Croatia in 2020, it took action and, for example, launched a fundraising campaign to support people who had been affected in cooperation with the Croatian expat community in Slovenia. Likewise, during the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers from Slovenia, Italy and Croatia worked together to overcome border blockades and ensure that items unavailable in one country could be received from another and given to the older people who needed them. Recent emergencies have inspired the National Societies to work together more, to exchange good practices and to consider ways to strengthen future collaboration.

4.4 Towards smart preparedness planning in the Baltic Sea region

The Baltic Sea region is home to around 90 million people in nine states of which eight are part of the EU. In recent years, the National

Red Cross Societies in the region have focused on improving and optimising the quality and interoperability of their regional response capacity.^v

A joint subregional disaster preparedness planning process has increased understanding of the potential emergency situations that would require cross-border response, the importance of planning, and how to request or host support from neighbour National Societies. It aims to strengthen the understanding of cross-border risks and hazards as well as joint knowledge of available capacities to address national and cross-border emergencies.

The German Red Cross has been driving the planning process, which builds on desktop studies mapping existing capacities and mechanisms for collaboration. The plan gives an overview of National Red Cross Societies' presence and resources in the Baltic Sea region and considers the mechanisms of requesting and hosting international assistance within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It also elaborates on cooperation and coordination between the states and through the UCPM.

The National Red Cross Societies' auxiliary roles and cross-border and international experiences allow them to gain and share knowledge and good practices on disaster preparedness planning both internally and towards their authorities. Most National Societies in the Baltic Sea region are involved in national disaster preparedness planning with their respective civil protection authorities, and work on how to introduce and implement the subregional plan in their own country in support of the authorities.

Although there are many different interests and actors involved in disaster preparedness, one learning is that an open and consultative planning process and ongoing dialogue are important. The process has provided a forum to discuss both alert mechanisms and responding practices to ensure that assistance can be given and hosted when requested. To be able to share good practices, National Red Cross Societies have established a subregional Technical Working Group for Disaster Management.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that traditional sector-specific disaster preparedness planning must be revised to better take into account cross-border and cross-sectoral hazards. Although the contexts and roles of National Red Cross Societies vary between countries, they are



Croatian Red Cross volunteers help people to prepare for flooding.

© Croatian Red Cross

^v The **BALTPREP** project 2019-2020 funded by DG ECHO: Enhancing the Baltic Sea Regional Preparedness and Response Capacity for Major Accidents in the Baltic Sea region (Finnish Red Cross, Danish Red Cross, German Red Cross, Estonian Red Cross, Latvian Red Cross, Lithuanian Red Cross and Polish Red Cross).

united by flexibility and professionalism. The joint planning process has made it clear that many National Societies already have a long history of cooperation.

The Latvian Red Cross and the Estonian Red Cross have a long history of joining other National Red Cross Societies for an exchange training called Disaster Management Summer School, organised yearly by the Belarus Red Cross. Cooperation has contributed to strengthening the capacity of the Latvian Red Cross disaster management teams. Moreover, employees and volunteers of the Latvian Red Cross regularly participate in various emergency trainings. These take place in their own country, and in Belarus, Finland, Italy and Poland, and allow participants to improve disaster response skills, gain international experience, build relationships for cross-border collaboration and share knowledge.

The Finnish Red Cross and the Estonian Red Cross have also developed their collaboration over the past decade. They have participated in each other's preparedness exercises to test and pilot capacities and surge mechanisms, and the Finnish Red Cross has regularly invited the Estonian Red Cross to its international trainings. In Visaginas, Lithuania, the

Disaster Response Team of the Lithuanian Red Cross holds joint trainings for emergency preparedness and social welfare activities together with the German and Norwegian Red Cross.

An interesting challenge is how to ensure planning is also in place to prepare for complex operating environments and how traditional sector-specific planning will be transformed into multi-sectoral planning. The centuries-old cooperation within the Baltic Sea region provides an excellent laboratory when seeking modern and smart ways for subregional disaster preparedness planning. The National Red Cross Societies, in cooperation with the authorities, continue to build new capacities and shape planning to help people in need.

Strengthening preparedness for multi-site and multi-risk response

New types and scales of disasters and major incidents happening close to each other in time and in multiple places are challenging emergency responders. Understanding their complexity is essential to ensure appropriate and flexible crisis management and coordination.

The Multi-Site Events Response and Coordinated Intervention (MERCİ) project aims at increasing resilience in large European urban areas facing these kind of events by improving coordination between volunteer organisations and public authorities.

The project suggests that rather than developing additional mechanisms, existing ones should be adapted to the increasing complexity of the response. It is also necessary to ensure that the information going to the general public is clear and does not add confusion in the context of complex emergencies, particularly in urban areas.

The MERCİ Project (2017–2019) was led by the French Red Cross, in partnership with the Spanish Red Cross, the Portuguese Red Cross, the Italian Red Cross, the Bulgarian Red Cross and the Red Cross EU Office

5.

Strengthening effective response



Annual International Disaster Management Exercise of the Hungarian Red Cross in Pécsvárad.

© Márton Neményi

Emergency situations are now so varied that response capacities are unlikely ever to be sufficient and therefore need to be used even more effectively. National Red Cross Societies contribute to reinforcing national crisis management systems. They make use of their auxiliary role to the authorities, which benefits from the variety of their capacities, their cross-border and subregional collaborations, and their ability to scale up the response and preparedness as needed in a very agile and flexible manner. The auxiliary role is also the backbone for advocacy towards more effective disaster laws.

Joint trainings, exercises and inter-agency collaborations, including in partnerships

with the UCPM and all key actors, are useful in testing whether operational coordination is strong enough and procedures clear for effective response.

National Societies also aim to systematically assess the strengths and weaknesses of their disaster risk management systems for better response preparedness. They continue to invest in more efficient inter-agency collaboration and new technologies. They increasingly use emergency operations centres as an effective way to manage operations and to coordinate and communicate.

This chapter presents examples from Austria, Hungary, the IFRC (secretariat and Regional Office for Europe) and Italy.

5.1 Reinforcing institutional capacities for effective response – PER approach

Recent disasters and emergency situations in Europe have reconfirmed the need to further develop and strengthen Red Cross and Red Crescent response preparedness capacities. IFRC has developed a Preparedness for Effective Response (PER) approach to enable National Societies to systematically assess, measure and analyse the strengths and weaknesses of their response system. As a result, they can take immediate actions to improve their response preparedness and develop an evidence-based multisectoral plan with practical indicators.

Through the PER approach, National Red Cross Societies undertake a comprehensive review of their disaster response system, looking at five inter-related areas – 1) Policy, Strategy and Standards, 2) Analysis and Planning, 3) Operational Capacity, 4) Coordination, 5) Operations Support – and 37 components that form a National Society Disaster Preparedness Mechanism. The PER process is made up of five key phases:



The five key phases of the cyclical PER process (Source: IFRC)

During the PER assessment phase, the National Society assessment team is supported by an external team of experienced disaster managers and experts in institutional preparedness with International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement experience. Based on the PER assessment results, National Societies prioritise the areas where measures will be taken in the next two years, before a new assessment is done with the support of Movement partners and in collaboration with their civil protection authorities.

Improving the capacity of National Societies and local communities to prepare for and respond to emergencies is a high priority for the IFRC Regional Office for Europe. In the region, most progress has been made so far on response and recovery planning. During the COVID-19 pandemic, business continuity has been a critical area of focus and 12 National Societies have been supported in developing and actioning their business continuity plans.

European National Societies have invested in their analytical skills, operational capacities and coordination. They have updated their risk matrixes to guide further preparedness for response, developed essential sets of standard operating procedures for more efficient emergency response and elaborated Movement-wide contingency plans to achieve greater synergies in supporting the needs of affected populations in different disasters. Many National Societies have established emergency operations centres or updated their surge capacity trainings. They have also focused on the readiness of support services such as finance, procurement, fleet and information technology to review their responsibilities and procedures to scale up and speed up actions needed in response to emergencies.

Globally, the experience has shown many positive impacts of the PER approach on operations, such as decreased response time, improved prioritisation of vulnerable groups, higher quality of first responders, increased inclusion of women in response committees, diversified income sources, better internal and external coordination, and improved awareness

“ *It is critically important to better know each other’s systems, working structures, guidelines and standard operating procedures.* ”

French Red Cross staff working at the Emergency Operations Centre.

© French Red Cross



and use of policies and procedures. The vision now is that all National Societies are able to objectively demonstrate an enhanced ability to respond effectively and efficiently, with timely and appropriate actions that meet the needs of the people most affected by disasters and crises.

5.2 Expanding impact through government–civil society collaboration

Successful disaster risk management and emergency response requires the commitment of relevant actors and stakeholders as well as the proper coordination of the combined knowledge, innovation, expertise and institutional capacities of the main two actors involved in a disaster: government and civil society. Authorities can provide institutional capacity to manage disasters and emergencies, while community-based organisations such as the Austrian Red Cross can offer expertise for connecting with the population by means of participatory approaches that help to have a larger impact.

One example of this is the national initiative, Team Austria (Team Österreich), designed to encourage citizens to register in a database and be available to volunteer during disasters. Team Austria has been widely used since its creation

in 2007 in a collaborative campaign between the Austrian Red Cross and the country’s main radio station, Ö3, and has inspired the Ready2Help network in the Netherlands. It aims at integrating spontaneous volunteers to support large-scale emergencies such as the European floods, the migration situation in 2015 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Their assistance helps emergency response organisations have additional resources to tackle large disasters, while empowering citizens to be part of their own recovery.

The national crisis and disaster management system in Austria includes cooperation between the authorities and the Austrian Red Cross, fire brigades, police and alpine rescue teams among others. The Austrian Red Cross plays an important role in disaster risk management and emergency response across the country, as specified by Red Cross law. It coordinates all humanitarian actions and contributes to and co-develops the national strategy for collaboration during emergencies and disasters, including training and exercises. It balances its involvement with keeping its independence in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and maintaining trust from Austrian citizens.

As active partner in the UCPM, the Austrian Red Cross is part of a European consortium that has organised trainings for technical experts and many field and discussion-based exercises in recent years. One example is IRONORE, which involved several actors in Austria, including the Ministry of the Interior, which activated the UCPM to request help from teams in Croatia, Hungary and Germany. This tested coordination with European bodies as well as national host support guidelines for incoming rescue teams.

Joint activities between the authorities, the Austrian Red Cross and others have further enhanced the crisis and disaster management system, proven effective during large-scale emergencies. As a good practice, crisis management experts from the National Society were placed at the premises of the Ministry of Health and Ministry of the Interior to include their expertise in the coordination of response activities. Successful coordination during emergencies relies not only on clear and well-described operational procedures, but also on appropriate joint trainings, exercises and inter-agency cooperation.

5.3 Exercises pay off in more effective response

Cooperation at different levels is one of the keys to an effective response to disasters, as the Hungarian Red Cross has witnessed through its disaster management and national, regional and international work. As disasters do not follow any border, there is a need to prepare for cross-border response and relief operations. When neighbouring countries share common preparedness goals and run regular joint exercises within the subregion, collaboration becomes smooth.

The Hungarian Red Cross is active in organising annual complex disaster response exercises to prepare its staff and volunteers to cooperate with neighbouring National Red Cross Societies' units and relevant national and local authorities. Regional exercises are a good practice developed over eight years, that has led to more effective responses in neighbouring countries. During

the migration response in Europe in 2015, for example, the Hungarian Red Cross supported the Hellenic Red Cross together with the Austrian Red Cross. More recently, it has managed snowstorm relief operations with support from the Austrian Red Cross and assisted the National Societies in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia in flood operations.

The Hungarian Red Cross was a consortia member of the IRONORE exercise, led by the Austrian Red Cross, which also focused on cooperation and coordination. It tested the activation of the UCPM and used *EU Host Nation Support Guidelines*⁹ and other EU and UN-related platforms and guidance such as WHO Emergency Medical Team Guidelines – elements of which should be included in future exercises to improve collaboration between global and regional organisations. Dr Brigitta Sáfár, Head of Disaster Management for the Hungarian Red Cross, says *"It is critically important to better know each other's systems, working structures, guidelines and standard operating procedures. This will make future response operations more efficient."*

The Hungarian Red Cross has developed its disaster management strategy in recent years and is continuously improving its simulation exercises, based on its operational experience. These cover scenarios from extreme conditions and floods to population movement and test capacities in first aid, psychosocial support, emergency health care, operational, base camp and relief logistics, water rescue, hygiene promotion, shelter, restoring family links and overall operations management and cooperation with partner organisations and authorities – as well as international cooperation. *"In preparedness we trust"*, says Dr Brigitta Sáfár, *"We have mainstreamed preparedness in all disaster management projects and seen that by increasing the self-rescue capacity of the population and enhancing our response capacities, we are able to provide a more effective humanitarian assistance. Awareness-raising activities for disaster-prone communities have also been developed and implemented all over the country, demonstrably increasing the resilience of the population."*

Considering the importance of scientific and academic knowledge in disaster risk management, the Hungarian Red Cross has added elements to its annual international conference, Effective Response. Exercise scenarios, innovative technologies and technical solutions are presented for response teams to then practice in safe conditions. The National Society also takes part in research projects related to community resilience and emergency response.

It is vital to ensure that all levels, all responsible persons and all units of the Hungarian Red Cross have a clear role and work well together. Regionally, the aim is to involve representatives of neighbouring National Red Cross Societies to be part of the planning process, and to capitalise on their knowledge and experience. Cooperation with governmental organisations, authorities and NGOs is being further developed and agreed, not only in the case of exercises but for real emergencies as well.

5.4 Supporting authorities in Europe to strengthen disaster laws

Legal preparedness for effective disaster risk governance is key to a well-functioning disaster risk management system, and essential to prevent and reduce the impact of a changing climate and disasters. Disaster laws provide the legal and institutional basis for all aspects of disaster risk management – from risk reduction and climate change adaptation to preparedness for response and recovery – and contribute to strengthening the resilience and protection of at-risk and disaster-affected populations. Together with the IFRC, National Red Cross Societies also have a mandate⁸ and expertise to support governments in developing and implementing adequate disaster laws.

As auxiliary to their government in the humanitarian field, National Societies enjoy a privileged relationship. This role is the backbone for legislative advocacy, as it gives them unique positioning and a seat at the table, keeping in mind the framework of the Fundamental

Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

Insufficient legal preparedness before a disaster can mean overlapping roles and responsibilities of responders, slowing down the response and wasting valuable resources. Experience has shown repeatedly, and specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic, that many countries in Europe and beyond are not fully prepared to respond to crises and had to quickly adopt legislative measures.

For example, restrictions of movements and border controls had an important impact in the export, import, transit and trans-shipment of goods and materials such as personal protective equipment for COVID-19, both inside and outside the EU. Red Cross and Red Crescent recommendations on international disaster response laws, rules and principles, which have been used in the development of the *EU Host Nation Support Guidelines*, advise on the legal mechanisms which should be in place to manage international assistance inside the EU and for requests from EU or non-EU countries. The Spanish Red Cross published a case study¹⁰ highlighting its experience as a recipient of international aid during the COVID-19 response, underlining the importance of having customs facilitation and tax-exemption measures in place to help the entry of international supplies.

When National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies carry out activities critical to the safety and well-being of communities, it is essential that countries classify them as ‘frontline’, ‘emergency’ or ‘essential’ workers, or any other classification that allows them to remain exempt from curfews, limitations on business opening hours and other general population-control measures. It is also critical they are included in the coordination mechanisms and communication channels put in place in the response efforts to any crisis. A good example of this is Italy, where the Italian Red Cross was recognised as an emergency service and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, exempted from population-control strategies.

Joint exercise on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) threats in October 2020.

© Italian Red Cross



Despite an advanced European disaster management framework regionally, substantial legislative preparedness still needs to be done at national level. The UCPM is calling for mutual support and coordination in Europe to respond to disasters. EU Member States are to submit assessments of risk and risk management capabilities to the European Commission, and peer reviews are encouraged. The assessment includes legislative preparedness for which Red Cross Red Crescent recommendations and tools on disaster law could be useful. Namely, the recent *Checklist on Law and Disaster Preparedness and Response*¹¹ provides recommendations for states to revise and strengthen laws and policies for climate, disaster risk management and emergency preparedness and response.

European National Societies are encouraged to continue leveraging their auxiliary role and influence regional, national and subnational processes, applying 20 years of Red Cross and Red Crescent experience in disaster law to make communities safer, facilitate humanitarian assistance and improve the protection and inclusion of the most vulnerable people when faced with crises.

5.5 Strong subregional collaboration strengthens preparedness in the neighbourhood

National Red Cross Societies in South-Eastern Europe share a common background, face similar challenges, have a comparable auxiliary role to authorities and have similarly structured response mechanisms. In recent years, there has been strong subregional cooperation in many areas, especially in connection with response and recovery from various humanitarian emergencies.

As a result of this collaboration, 12 National Societies decided to further strengthen cooperation in disaster and crisis preparedness and response. In 2018, they established the Neighbours Help First network^{vi}, open for cooperation with civil protection authorities and other similar networks, such as the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe. In these collaborations, the importance of clearly defined auxiliary roles for National Societies has been recognised.

vi Members: Albanian Red Cross, Red Cross Society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgarian Red Cross, Croatian Red Cross, Hungarian Red Cross, Macedonian Red Cross, Red Cross of Montenegro, Romanian Red Cross, Red Cross of Serbia, Slovenian Red Cross, Cyprus Red Cross, Slovenia Red Cross. Observers: Austrian Red Cross, Italian Red Cross, Slovak Red Cross, Czech Red Cross, ICRC, IFRC.

With the possibility of strengthening subregional cooperation at Red Cross level, National Societies in South-Eastern Europe are also contributing to their respective national security strategies and disaster preparedness plans. Although the goal of the network is to facilitate knowledge and experience sharing, its top priority is to support membership to respond to future crises and emergencies using regional solidarity, resources and knowledge. In addition to enhanced subregional coordination, areas of collaboration include developing human resources, strengthening the Red Cross auxiliary role to public authorities, using new technologies and innovations and mobilising resources.

Several National Red Cross Societies which are geographically not linked to South-Eastern Europe have joined the Neighbours Help First network as observers; they may contribute to the network's crisis response activities. Both the IFRC and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) hold an observer's status and a prominent role as technical advisors.

The network has prioritised actions in areas with high potential for progress in subregional cooperation. Six National Red Cross Societies have now worked together to standardise equipment and procedures by setting up emergency operational centres, organising cross-border and local simulation exercises, and planning and developing risk assessment methodologies and tools. They are also developing a regional flood contingency plan and use the same online tool to conduct and share flood risk scenarios.

The Neighbours Help First network is compiling good practices from the response to COVID-19 to make these available for all National Societies to consult and learn from each other. Other plans are linked to establishing joint stock management (a virtual warehouse) and regional databases of human resources and trainings. This network is an excellent example of subregional collaboration. National Societies'

commitment to work together in strengthening preparedness will lead to increased operational capacities in every country – and will make collective readiness for disaster and crisis response as effective as possible in the region.

5.6 Digitalising preparedness for effective response

“Building communication and coordination capacities for effective preparedness and response in South-Eastern Europe is an opportunity to kick start the digital transformation approach in National Societies” highlights Nebojsa Medojevic, Disaster and Crisis Preparedness Delegate at the IFRC Regional Office for Europe.

Six National Societies in South-Eastern Europe – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Republic of Serbia – have joined efforts to increase their interoperability and emergency management capacity, to prepare and respond to emergencies, both within national boundaries and across the subregion, more adequately and effectively. This also includes standardising trainings and maintaining a database of operations to learn lessons and inform future response.

The National Societies are creating emergency operations centres^{vii} in their headquarters that are closely connected through digital tools. Once fully in place, the new technology will allow emergency responders to share various details about any incident, including the GPS location or images via mobile devices. This will maximise real-time situational awareness and help find a coordinated, appropriate response to emergencies.

The purpose of each emergency operations centre is to support the National Red Cross Society headquarters, local branches and disaster response teams with real-time disaster and crisis information for efficient decision-making and communication with internal

vii The usual process to establish emergency operations centres: 1) National Red Cross Society undertakes capacity analysis for centre organisation and management and elaborates its concept and requirements; 2) centre is created in an allocated space at the headquarters and standard operating procedure for its work are introduced; 3) once necessary equipment and software is procured and installed, staff and volunteers are trained in using them; 4) centre is validated through a table-top simulation to test the functionality and interoperability at country and subregional level.

and external stakeholders. The approach is strengthening the subregional early warning system, as well as communication and exchange of critical information in real time through a common online platform.

Between disasters, emergency operations centres are used for trainings and meetings. During disasters, they accommodate different technical teams that work together either in those spaces or remotely, avoiding working in a siloed approach as much as possible. They also help position National Societies in the crisis management system in line with their auxiliary role and represent a critically important tool for effective coordination in emergency responses. Many National Red Cross Societies are exploring links and synergies in their countries with the emergency operations centres of civil protection authorities and other stakeholders and making agreements for sharing data and services.

The digital transformation of tools and processes used in preparedness and response activities usually takes a long time, and involves a comprehensive process of going through all available data sources and tools and making these accessible in a digitalised and exchangeable format with major in-country and regional stakeholders. Yet, these initiatives eventually lead to increased operational agility and speed for emergency response.

The key role of emergency operations centres in coordination

During the first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Italian Red Cross managed more than 530,000 services such as meal distributions, patient transportations and health surveillance. It mobilised thousands of volunteers for more than 600,000 working days through over 600 local, 22 regional and 1 national emergency operations centre. This was facilitated by continuous fast exchanges of information between the emergency operations centres of all relevant organisations, and inter-agency coordination. Through this collaboration, the Italian Red Cross also received externally defined scenarios and situational analyses to which it actively contributes through its own data on vulnerabilities.

Channelling all the prevention and preparedness activities through emergency operations centres proved to be a winning formula. An always active, pre-organised network of centres is part of the solution to coordination problems. It connects structures instead of people, creates fast and recognised communication lines, and allows decisions to be taken where things happen. It links incident sites in charge of local tactical coordination with other parts of organisations and the entire community of responders.

Conclusions

© Spanish Red Cross



All actors must improve their multi-risk assessments and analyses, increase attention to prevention, disaster risk reduction and anticipatory action, and adopt more inclusive and comprehensive systems approach to managing risks.

This booklet shows examples of National Red Cross Societies' ambitions to meet the needs of vulnerable people even better, faster, more effectively and in collaboration with each other and their respective authorities. Committed to preventing and minimising human suffering, staff and volunteers of National Societies know how to reach the most remote areas and most exposed people, save lives in severe weather conditions and make sure no one is left behind. They speak to local authorities on behalf of at-risk people to improve their safety and resilience.

With attention moving towards managing disaster risks rather than disasters, it is critical to partner with different actors to gather data on increased or new risks. This allows for an improved assessment of where early warnings are most needed, and the best way to reach potentially affected people and to further raise their awareness of local risks.

In a well-functioning system, National Societies receive support requests and alerts from authorities, warn people about the dangers and activate their preparedness for the anticipated disaster. However, the system only works if people know how to act based on early warnings. National Societies' experience shows that increasing the awareness of disaster and climate change-related risks among the population has led to better preparedness. Technology, such as 112 alerts, web apps, platforms and SMS messages can make a life-saving difference.

Multi-hazard or complex situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic also require real-time situational awareness to help find a coordinated, appropriate response to emergencies. National Societies have established emergency operation centres for more effective analysis and data sharing and linking with the authorities' systems. Improved information management has increased operational agility and speed for emergency response, enhanced coordination and enabled National Societies to play their role in the national crisis management system.

To prepare for a coordinated emergency response, disaster management actors must know each other's systems, working structures, guidelines and standard operating procedures. Joint organisation of and mutual participation in each other's trainings and exercises, and investment in inter-agency cooperation – including by inviting civil society representatives to the civil protection coordination bodies at different levels – are useful in

expanding this knowledge. Good practices also include placing a crisis management expert from the National Red Cross Society in the premises of relevant ministries for coordinating the response. These have proven effective in the responses to the most recent floods, storms, heatwaves, population movements, forest fires and human-induced disasters.

While the European disaster management framework is advanced, substantial legislative preparedness still needs to be done at national level. National Red Cross Societies can leverage their auxiliary role to governments and influence regional, national and subnational processes, applying 20 years of Red Cross and Red Crescent experience in disaster law to make communities safer, facilitate assistance and improve the protection and inclusion of the most vulnerable people when faced with a crisis.

Disasters often induce important changes: emergency response structures of the civil protection authorities and/or National Red Cross Societies are reorganised; new legislation passed; new methodologies designed; tools, capacities and trainings adapted; response teams and volunteers equipped to face new challenges; or attention given to specific areas such as inter-sectoral and transboundary collaboration. Along the same lines, the EU's disaster risk management system is being strengthened with an important opportunity to invest more in prevention to reduce the vulnerability of people and societies.

The network of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Europe is enhancing its cross-border preparedness and response, contributing to the respective national and regional disaster preparedness planning and systems. Severe cross-border impacts are expected on climate change-related risks, future pandemics and others. Thus, collaboration between neighbouring countries and regions including the key actors must be done at larger scale. Better linking of scientific data, such as flood forecasts, between Member States and National Societies and with civil protection and disaster management practitioners and at-risk people is important. All actors must improve their multi-risk assessments and analyses, increase attention to prevention, disaster risk reduction and anticipatory action, and adopt more inclusive and comprehensive systems approach to managing risks to prevent and reduce human suffering and losses.

Sources and further information

1. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Strategy 2030 - Platform for change. Local Action, Global Reach*, 2018
<https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/general/S2030-EN.pdf>
2. Norges Røde Kors, *Norges klima 2071-2100. Felles beredskap – Felles ansvar IV*, 2019
<https://www.rodekors.no/aktuelt/klima2100/>
3. European Commission, Eurostat, *Deaths by accidental drowning and submersion*, 6 August 2020
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200806-1>
4. Robinea, J-M., Cheung, S. L. K., Le Roya, S. et al., *Comptes Rendus Biologies*, Volume 331, Issue 2, *Death toll exceeded 70,000 in Europe during the summer of 2003*, 2008
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1631069107003770>
5. Mora, C., Dousset, B., Caldwell, I. et al., *Nature Climate Change* 7, *Global risk of deadly heat* 501–506, 2017
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318173438_Global_risk_of_deadly_heat
6. Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, *Heatwave guide for cities*, 2019
<https://www.climatecentre.org/downloads/files/IFRCGeneva/RCCC%20Heatwave%20Guide%202019%20A4%20RR%20ONLINE%20copy.pdf>
7. Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, *City heatwave guide for Red Cross Red Crescent Branches*, 2020
<https://climatecentre.org/downloads/files/RCCC%20Heatwave%20Guide%202019%20NS.pdf>
- 8.1. International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent 2003, *Final goal 3.2 Enhance international disaster response through support for the compilation and application of the laws, rules and principles applicable to international disaster response*, 2003
<https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/resolution/28-international-conference-resolution-1-2003.htm>

- 8.2. International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, 30th
International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent
2007, *Resolution 4. Adoption of the Guidelines for the Domestic
Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and
Initial Recovery Assistance*, 2007
[https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/
resolution/30-international-conference-resolution-4-2007.htm](https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/resolution/30-international-conference-resolution-4-2007.htm)
- 8.3. International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, 31st
International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent
2011, *Resolution 7. Strengthening normative frameworks and
addressing regulatory barriers concerning disaster mitigation,
response and recovery*, 2011
[https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2019/03/
R7_Disaster_Laws_EN.pdf](https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2019/03/R7_Disaster_Laws_EN.pdf)
- 8.4. International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, 32nd
International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent
2015, *Resolution 6. Strengthening legal frameworks for
disaster response, risk reduction and first aid*, 2015
[https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2015/04/32IC-Res6-
legal-frameworks-for-disaster_EN.pdf](https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2015/04/32IC-Res6-legal-frameworks-for-disaster_EN.pdf)
- 8.5. International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, 33rd
International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent
2019, *Resolution 7. Disaster laws and policies that leave no one
behind*, 2019
[https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2019/12/33IC_
R7-Disaster-Law-resolution-adopted-EN-1.pdf](https://rcrcconference.org/app/uploads/2019/12/33IC_R7-Disaster-Law-resolution-adopted-EN-1.pdf)
9. European Commission, Commission staff working document,
EU Host Nation Support Guidelines, 2012
[https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/about/COMM_PDF_SWD%20
20120169_F_EN_.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/about/COMM_PDF_SWD%2020120169_F_EN_.pdf)
10. Spanish Red Cross, *Logistics Development Case Study,
Increasing the supply chain agility for PPE during the COVID-
19 response*, 2020
[https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/06/
Spanish-RC-case-study_Customs-and-supply-strategy-during-
COVID-19_v10-EN.pdf](https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/06/Spanish-RC-case-study_Customs-and-supply-strategy-during-COVID-19_v10-EN.pdf)
11. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies,
The Checklist on Law and Disaster Preparedness and Response,
2019
[https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/11/
DPR_Checklist_Final_EN_Screen.pdf](https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/11/DPR_Checklist_Final_EN_Screen.pdf)

Sources and further information

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Contingency Planning Guide*, 2012

<https://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/preparing-for-disaster/disaster-preparedness-tools/contingency-planning-and-disaster-response-planning/>

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance*, 2013

<https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2019/05/EN-Principles-and-Rules-RCRC-Humanitarian-Assistance.pdf>

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Introduction to the Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance*, 2017

<https://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/125652/1205600-IDRI%20Guidelines-EN-LR.pdf>

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Model Emergency Decree for the Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance*, 2017

https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2017/12/Model-Decree_EN-LR.pdf

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *Disaster Risk Management Policy - from prevention to response and recovery*, 2019

https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/04/DRM_policy_Final_EN.pdf

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and International Committee of the Red Cross, *The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief*, 1994

<https://www.ifrc.org/Global/Publications/disasters/code-of-conduct/code-english.pdf>

International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, *Ambitions to address the climate crisis*, 2020

<https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/02/Movement-Climate-Ambitions-2020-final.pdf>

Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre and UK Met Office, *The Future of Forecasts: Impact-based forecasting for early action*, 2020

<https://www.forecast-based-financing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Impact-based-forecasting-guide-2020.pdf>

The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality

It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality

In order to continue to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence

The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service

It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity

There can be only one Red Cross or one Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all Societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.