

## Red Alert.

National Red Cross Societies managing disaster risks in Europe



## Recommendations

for disaster risk management actors in the EU

At the end of 2020, the Red Cross EU Office, together with National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Europe, the Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) published "*Red Alert. National Red Cross Societies managing disaster risks in Europe*" – a series of examples showcasing how the Red Cross is investing in preparedness and working to address rising disaster and climate-related risks in the region.

National Red Cross Societies are increasingly contributing to strengthening national and EU disaster management systems. They are also strong partners to civil protection authorities in their unique auxiliary role and to the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM). Drawing from the operational experience highlighted in Red Alert, the following key messages are intended to national and EU disaster risk management actors.

**All must improve multi-risk assessments and analyses, increase cooperation to better understand the risks, how to manage them, and ensure more effective and better coordinated responses.**

- **Enhanced collaboration between research institutions, public authorities, and National Societies would improve the identification of risks and their consequences locally, as well as the most effective measures to reduce them.**

When forecast based models and analyses are better connected to potential societal impacts and adaptation options they can make a difference in risk mitigation and early action. For example, instead of just predicting extreme rainfall, there is a need to know about the possible effects of flooding on people and assets and how these risks can be mitigated.

- **Early alerts and warnings can be powerful in reducing disaster risks and informing anticipatory and early action.**

As experienced by National Societies, increased use of technology, such as 112 alerts, web applications and platforms, and SMS can make a life-saving difference. However, these mechanisms only work if people know how to act based on early warnings and appropriate institutional arrangements are in place between weather forecast services and the National Society to enable efficient interactions.

- **Improved risk awareness among the general public is needed and at-risk people must receive actionable early warnings, taking account of differences in risk perception across countries and contexts.**

People should be empowered to reduce their vulnerability to the risks that they increasingly face and to develop their skills and capacities to be able to act immediately. This can be lifesaving, especially in remote locations.

Many National Societies conduct awareness-raising activities about the preventive and early action measures that anyone can take. They partner with local communities, public authorities, the media, schools, and other relevant actors to extend their reach and impact to build trust with the people who are most at risk. The knowledge of Red Cross volunteers about local conditions and the individual situations of people already or potentially vulnerable is important in addressing needs and speeding up emergency response.

### Recommendations specifically addressed to the Civil Protection authorities:

- **Operational reach, scale, and impact can be increased through collaboration with National Societies.**

As part of their auxiliary role, National Societies are at the forefront of helping people and supporting the authorities. Local preparedness capacities and skilled staff and volunteers are at the core of the effectiveness of the Red Cross' response. In addition, the Red Cross network adds value by being able to scale up; efficiently using its national, regional, and global resources and surge capacities.

- **Good information management increases operational agility and speed, enhances coordination, and enables National Societies to support the national crisis management system.**

Agreements to share timely data between organisations and services are critical for the overall response's success. Common real-time situational awareness helps in decision-making and interactions between stakeholders.

National Societies manage emergency operation centres (EOCs) for effective information management, analysis, and data sharing. EOCs enable fast and clear communications during complex emergencies, facilitating inter-agency coordination and exchanges with the emergency operation centres of all key actors.

- **Disaster management actors must know each other's systems, working structures, guidelines, and standard operating procedures.**

Joint trainings and exercises, 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. Increased investment in inter-agency and cross-border cooperation is also needed – including by inviting civil society representatives to civil protection coordination bodies, task forces and working groups at different levels.

- **Smart preparedness planning considers changing risks, learns from past emergencies, and builds on interoperability and knowledge of key stakeholders' ways of working.**

Jointly developing response preparedness plans and exchanging lessons learnt from past emergencies are invaluable processes to strengthen collaboration between actors.

- **While the European disaster management framework is advanced, substantial legislative preparedness is still needed at national level.**

Disaster laws make communities safer, facilitate assistance, and improve the protection and inclusion of the most vulnerable people when faced with a crisis. Insufficient legal preparedness, including to receive international assistance can slow down emergency response and waste valuable resources. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many European countries were not fully ready to respond to the crisis and had to urgently adopt legislative measures.

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies across Europe stand ready to work with communities, public authorities, and other stakeholders to plan for a more resilient future and build capacities at all levels to scale up preparedness and response to growing risks.

