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European Civil Protection



Programme for Prevention, Preparedness and Response to Floods in the Western Balkans and Turkey – IPA FLOODS Lots 1-2

Border-crossing procedures (BCPs) and Host Nation Support (HNS) lessons learnt report

Background

The floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia in May 2014, floods in Albania in January 2015, and floods and landslides in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in August 2015 have yielded numerous experiences and numerous meetings and workshops have been organised individually by international organisations such as the European Commission, NATO, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and many more on the topic of lessons learnt through these floods.

Conclusions of these meetings and conferences could be summed-up into: prevention measures need to be strengthened, and additional efforts invested in capacity building, training and equipping the protection and rescue services.

Since then many efforts have been made in that regard on national as well as international level boosting up national capacities in the field of both prevention and response preparedness.

In order to add to the overall efforts of the IPA FLOODS programme and in order to compile experiences, with an emphasis on BCPs and HNS, a questionnaire was designed by the IPA FLOODS implementing Consortium with the aim to list experiences in one place and pinpoint areas on which further attention should be paid.

Questionnaire

Q1: Did you encounter obstacles when requesting assistance and informing other states during the request?

All countries stated that cooperation and communication with the *Emergency Response Coordination Centre* (ERCC) was efficient. When disasters occurred in 2014 and 2015 countries didn't have connection to the *Common Emergency Coordination and Information System* (CECIS) and ERCC posted their request in timely manner, keeping all parties informed at all times. Nevertheless, all countries emphasised that connection to CECIS would be very useful.



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Q2: Were the necessary documents for border-crossing clearly communicated in advance?

Regarding communication on necessary documents for border-crossing, most of countries have communicated in advance, procedures were clear and cooperation with all national authorities was satisfactory. If there have been some problems in procedures they have solved them in direct communication with customs and border police.

Q3: Was communication towards border-crossing authorities clear enough in order to facilitate border crossing?

All countries responded that cooperation with border-crossing authorities was satisfactory, some of them emphasising excellent cooperation.

Q4: Did foreign teams communicate well their needs for HNS?

Representatives, e.g. national authorities of stricken country had communication with civil protection authorities of sending countries (collecting information about teams, number of personnel, vehicles, equipment, time of arrival, border crossing, team' possibilities). *European Union Civil Protection Teams (EUCPT)* and *United National Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC)* teams (where present) held daily meetings and exchange of information both with foreign teams and receiving country representatives.

Q5: Were you able to address their needs?

During missions in affected countries, needs of foreign teams were completely fulfilled. National civil protection authorities (constant, in some countries twice a day) communication with teams solving daily needs and providing accommodation, meals, parking space, security and medical assistance, etc.

Q6. Did on-site task assignment run smoothly? And Q7: Was the work of foreign teams coordinated by national/local on-site commander?

Foreign teams were deployed jointly national civil protection and other national teams and assigned with liaison officers who provided direct contact with on-site commanders. Thus, operations were clearly communicated and run smoothly throughout mission duration.

Q8: Was the end of the mission communicated clearly (debriefing)?

The end of the mission was clearly and timely communicated. National civil protection authorities did not experience any problems with hand over.

Q9: Were EUCPT and/or UNDAC teams sent during the disaster, as support? And Q10: Did their arrival have added value?

When EUCPT was deployed, their role had added value. In one case (Serbia floods), both EUCPT and UNDAC teams were present. National authorities provided facilities and working conditions to best of their abilities (internet connection, maps, information, meals) as well as daily meetings with exchange of information and joint field visits.

Q11: Do you have any recommendations for a more efficient EUCPT /UNDAC engagement in the region?

Several counties expressed opinion that selecting EUCPT/UNDAC experts from the region is very important for several reasons: no language barrier, good knowledge of the region, similar cultures.

Also, they stated that region has good pool of experts because under several programmes and project experts from region were trained and could be deployed as members of EUCPT.

Conclusions

- The floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia in May 2014 led to one of largest activations of *Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)* in Europe with more than 22 participating states providing assistance through the UCPM.
- More than 800 relief workers together with their equipment were deployed through UCPM.
- The floods in Albania in January 2015 and floods and landslides in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in August 2015 although not so hefty in international response produced valuable experiences also.
- All affected countries generously shared their lessons learned on numerous occasions on lessons learnt meetings, seminars and conferences organised in different *fora*.
- These disasters conceded vast and valuable experience, among others, in the field of HNS which exceeds practical experience of most EU Members States in area concerned.
- BCPs for foreign teams, reception, and accommodation, tasking and regular briefing (parts of HNS) are well known and applied in efficient manner in all countries during floods. It is clear that most of countries have HNS procedures put in place.
- Countries which hosted EUCPT during floods have positive experience in working with EUCPT, although in some cases countries recommended arrival of EUCPT much earlier, preferably before first foreign teams.
- Selection of experts for EUCPT from the region was mentioned by all countries filling the questionnaire. As advantage countries have stated that quality would be even higher if there wasn't language barrier, good knowledge of the region and understanding of national procedures (similar cultures). Also, they stated that region has good pool of experts because under several programmes and projects experts from region were trained and could be deployed in EUCPT.
- Border-crossing and HNS procedures should be exercised and test in the region as often as possible within bilateral, regional and EU exercises.