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EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT (EUR-OPA)

RECOMMENDATION

Citizen-centred prevention and preparedness in the face of natural hazards connected to climate change

Adopted at the 84th meeting of the Committee of Permanent Correspondents and of the
Directors of Specialised Centres (joint meeting)

6-7 November 2025, Paris

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of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement*

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Recommendation on citizen-centred prevention and preparedness in the face of natural hazards connected to climate change

The Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA),

Recalling that the Reykjavik Declaration “United around our values” adopted at the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, held in Reykjavik, Iceland, on 16 and 17 May 2023, recognised that human rights and the environment are intertwined and that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is critical to the full enjoyment of human rights by present and future generations;

Noting that in the Reykjavik Declaration, the heads of State and government recognised “the urgency of additional efforts to protect the environment, as well as to counter the impact of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity on human rights, democracy and the rule of law”;

Noting that the Council of Europe Strategy on the Environment – United around our values for people and the planet (2025-2030), adopted at the 134th Session of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 14 May 2025, recognised that the Council of Europe is uniquely placed to support States in their efforts to protect wildlife, ecosystems, habitats and landscapes and called for action aimed at fostering co-operation and co-ordination to better prevent and respond to major natural and technological hazards, to assess and reduce risks and to improve preparedness and post-crisis analysis;

Recalling that in the Medium-Term Plan 2021-2025, adopted at the 14th Ministerial Meeting of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement on 24 November 2021 in Matosinhos, Portugal, the ministers recognised that the adequate involvement of the population and preparedness at all levels are the key principles that must cover the entire disaster management cycle;

Recognising that the United Nations Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 calls for policies and practices for disaster risk management at national and local levels to be based on an understanding of disaster risk in all its dimensions of vulnerability, capacity, exposure of persons and assets, hazard characteristics and the environment and to that end, non-sensitive loss-disaggregated information concerning hazard exposure, vulnerabilities, risks and disasters should be made freely available and accessible;

Welcoming the principles established by the Preparedness Union Strategy of the European Union, adopted on 26 March 2025, namely an all-hazards, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, with the aim of fostering a culture of preparedness and resilience among citizens;

Considering that the effect of disasters can be reduced if people’s capabilities are reinforced by access to the available science-based knowledge of disaster risk in all its dimensions and by citizens’ involvement in the decision-making process, in order to be prepared and know how to act individually and collectively in emergency situations;

Underlining that robust scientific evidence on climate risks now exists, enabling States to propose solutions to mitigate the impact of these risks on human lives;

Recognising that, in addition to punitive and restorative responsibility, under international law, including the newly adopted Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law (CETS No. 228, to be opened for signature on 3 December 2025), States bear a long-accepted obligation of prevention based on due diligence, a fundamental component of which is the responsibility to prepare populations, as risks are inevitable,

1. Recommends that member States of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement:
 - a. develop, as part of prevention and preparedness planning, national policies, a legal framework, plans and programmes to support initial and further training for all. Accordingly, education in climate risks should be included as part of initial and further training, targeting all children and adults, including public policy makers, taking into account sensibilities and vulnerabilities and incorporating a cultural dimension;
 - b. ensure the effective right to prior, detailed, accessible and clear information as a key component of the capability to protect oneself from the risks to which one is inevitably exposed, and the effective right to take part in decision making and provide clear and specific information that is tailored to cultural and linguistic groups, thus ensuring that information provided by State, regional and local authorities is understandable and accessible to various audiences, notably to groups at higher risk;
 - c. promote the right to science, which is critical for ensuring appropriate governance and, in particular, access to scientific knowledge and its benefits, entailing an obligation to support and disseminate high-quality, independent and public scientific results;
 - d. set up effective channels of exchange between a plurality of academics, civil society at large and decision makers and seek to resolve conflicts of interest through dialogue in science–policy interface mechanisms;
 - e. engage with the public with a view to achieving genuine citizen participation in the preparation, response and recovery stages, at different tiers of decision making, particularly at the local level, taking into account the specific circumstances of persons in vulnerable situations and taking a culturally sensitive approach;
 - f. provide information to the Committee of Permanent Correspondents of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement on measures taken and problems encountered in implementing this Recommendation, with a view to examining its impact at the national level and sharing best practices;
 - g. promote meetings on the ground between the EUR-OPA secretariat, experts and relevant partners in the member States involving all stakeholders, including civil society, with a view to promoting best practices and addressing particular issues encountered in implementing this Recommendation; and
2. Instructs the secretariat to submit this Recommendation to the Committee of Ministers for information and possible distribution to all member States of the Council of Europe.