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**EUROPEAN AND MEDITERRANEAN MAJOR HAZARDS AGREEMENT (EUR-OPA)**

**MEDIUM TERM PLAN  
2016 – 2020**

**From words to actions: towards a European and Mediterranean region more resilient to natural  
and technological risks**

**adopted at the 13rd Ministerial Session of the  
European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA),  
2016**

## INTRODUCTION

Ten years after the adoption of the Hyogo Framework of Action, a long way remains to achieve truly resilient societies to natural and technological hazards. The increasing impact on people, property, livelihoods, heritage and the environment of natural and technological disasters in European and Mediterranean countries proves that, in spite of the constantly improved response capacity to disasters through an increased co-operation and better mechanisms of coordination, reduction of vulnerabilities and improved knowledge of risk and preparedness of societies remain far more complicated task to achieve.

The increased vulnerability of our societies to disaster is partly due to the continuous lack of sufficient preparedness but mostly relies on the the lack of featuring disaster risk considerations in socio-economic development and intrinsic dynamic of risks: climate change seems to be causing a rise in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events while land use changes contribute to increase the potential assets at stake. In that context, international co-operation has proved an efficient tool to promote Disaster Risk Reduction worldwide by allowing facilitating access to aid and expertise, to mitigate the effects of disasters and to speed recovery.

The European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA), an open co-operation group created in 1987 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, is indeed an appropriate tool to foster the Disaster Risk Reduction agenda in Europe and the Mediterranean region. The Agreement has promoted during almost three decades co-operation on prevention, preparedness, response and relief on major disasters at European and Mediterranean scales, based on political and technical approaches such as:

- disaster risk reduction guidance to inspire and promote appropriate policies improving prevention and response governance;
- knowledge-based instruments to assess and reduce vulnerability through science, technique, education and training;
- coordinated regional approach in addressing often neglected important issues and defining adequate mechanisms to cope with them.

The activities of the Agreement receive its political support from the Council of Europe constant wish to strengthen the security of European citizens by, in particular, developing and supporting integrated policies in the field of prevention and management of natural and technological disasters in a sustainable development perspective and in view of climate change consequences.

The Sendai Framework of Action 2015-2030 adopted at the 3rd United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in March 2015 in Sendai (Japan) also constitutes a global reference for the Agreement's future action. Endorsed by all the Agreements member states, it provides a clear-cut role to regional organizations in its implementation and success: disseminate good practices, share experiences, foster cooperation, promote resilience measures and enhance scientific and technical work.

In what concerns its technical aspects, the activities of the Agreement are supported primarily by the following input:

- the scientific and technical work developed by the network of European and Mediterranean Specialised Centres of the Agreement integrating 26 specialised Centres;
- the reports prepared by consultants to meet the specific requests of its governance bodies;
- the contributions from governments of member States on projects or research of particular relevance to other States;
- the information compiled by working groups created under the Agreement to examine technical matters of common interest;
- collaborative projects carried out with other national and international bodies in disaster risk reduction, in particular with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The objective of this Medium Term Plan is thus to provide an updated political and technical instrument containing new priorities and guidelines for the action of the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA) for the next five years, searching to improve with its moderate financial resources the effectiveness of its work in always more vulnerable European and Mediterranean societies.

#### PRINCIPLES APPLIED

1. Disaster risk reduction activities within the Agreement must cover the whole disaster management cycle. Alongside the always necessary attention to response to disasters, vulnerability reduction based on scientific and technical measures must be complemented by adequate population's involvement as well as by preparedness actions at all levels.
2. Created as an intergovernmental cooperation tool, the main goal of the Agreement should be to provide to member State authorities additional tools to better define their own national strategies in terms of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and to ensure revamped national strategies will also allow to adequately addressing trans-boundary risks.
3. The Agreement will continue streamlining its actions with other Council of Europe priorities in particular through strengthening its co-operation with all other concerned entities of the Council of Europe, such as the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Council of Europe Development Bank.
4. More than ever, co-operation with other international organisations remains a key element of its future work in order to benefit of increased synergies and to avoid any work duplication. A particular effort will be made towards reinforcing already existing collaboration with the other European and Mediterranean organisations involved in disaster risk reduction, and in particular:

- United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) European Regional Office, through the update of the specific actions linked to the Memorandum of Co-operation signed with UNISDR in 2008;
  - the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction, through an increased exchange of national experiences on specific topics;
  - the European Commission, through a development of common initiatives in domains where member states of the Agreement can play a significant role;
  - UNESCO, through a reinforced collaboration on common topics of interest such as education and awareness to risk or culture heritage protection.
4. The new Medium Term Plan 2016-20 will focus its attention on a number of priority fields of action linked to the implementation in the geographical space of the Agreement of the newly adopted Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

These will include:

- using scientific and technological knowledge to better assess evolving risks and adapt accordingly the resilience strategies;
  - developing cooperation among all decision-makers to better define authorities' adequate role in DRR;
  - promoting risk culture among population (children, adults and groups with special vulnerability);
  - fostering population's active participation (as individuals and as community) to DRR.
5. The statutory organs of the Agreement (Committee of Permanent Correspondents, Bureau and network of Specialised Centres) will further improve their synergies and streamline their activities along these fields of action to increase the Agreement's actual contribution. Collaboration with non-member States and other partners will also be promoted to ensure a more comprehensive approach as well as a greater diffusion of the Agreement's results in national and international fora.
6. The networking between the Specialised Centres of the Agreement will be reinforced as necessary, making sure that they provide the appropriate technical and scientific support needed to fulfil the disaster risk reduction objectives and goals set by member States. Funding by the Agreement to Specialised Centres will focus on projects contributing to the priority fields of action and useful for all member states.

## PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

### I. An enhanced role for authorities

The risks faced by contemporary societies and the associated tasks devoted to national authorities to prevent and cope with them are permanently evolving. To support authorities in this constant evolution, international cooperation can be of great help in mutualizing knowledge and resources by building on experience gained by other countries. Where experience is lacking the development of common methodology and guidance needs to be developed and facilitated.

#### 1. *Technical and scientific information for decision-makers*

At all stages of the risk cycle, better technical and scientific knowledge are necessary to define more accurate prevention measures but also to improve preparation plans and to ensure efficient intervention. To ensure that the technical and scientific work developed is useful, information concerning both the sources of the risk and its behaviour when it materializes must be collected and shared with all pertinent actors.

The actions developed in this domain wish to contribute to the implementation within its Member States of the first Priority for Action of the Sendai Framework, namely "Understanding disaster risk".

#### a. Risk knowledge as basis for public policies

A better knowledge on the sources of risk is a first step in designing pertinent prevention actions and adequate preparedness measures. Reviewing and identifying existing knowledge gaps will allow to gain better understanding of existing risks. However relevant actions should be taken towards reviewing emerging risks as by definition their sources and implications are less well known than already identified risks that benefit from many years of study and of experience.

The Agreement will thus use the competence of its network of scientific and technical centres to provide the national authorities the required information on hazards and vulnerability in order to plan in advance their action. Such user-oriented approach will require a significant effort to stress their practical implications, leaving the necessary technicalities behind the scene and focusing on the concrete actions to implement by the pertinent authorities.

#### b. Monitoring of risks as tool for public action

Once the theoretical component of risks are better known, it remains to monitor potential risky events in order to adopt adequate preventive and/or intervention measures in due time. Even if monitoring activity is generally considered a national task as it may involve sensitive data, the Agreement will try to develop new means to identify such potential risks and promote when adequate the collaboration of various states in the setting up of such monitoring tools in order to handle transboundary risks.

The Agreement will thus promote the proposition by the network of scientific and technical centres of general monitoring tools of both hazards and vulnerability providing as much as possible real-time information to the national authorities to better assess the actual extend of the event and to adjust accordingly their action either in terms of prevention if the disaster has not yet materialized or in terms of intervention if such preventive actions are no longer possible.

## 2. Reinforced cooperation between decision-makers

The complexity of defining accurate strategies for national authorities is increased by the growing role played by other actors, such as local and regional authorities, non-governmental entities or private firms. National authorities consequently have to consider a significant shift in their actual role, moving from a top-down directive role, where they dictate the way all the participants must behave, to a more transversal leadership role, where they coordinate the actual actions of various stakeholders. The goal is to highlight more the strengths than the weaknesses of such increased cooperation and to identify ways to better use such unavoidable synergies.

The actions developed in that domain wish to contribute to the implementation within its Member States of the second Priority for Action of the Sendai Framework, namely “Strengthening disaster risk governance”.

### a. Getting around international challenges

The Agreement, as an international cooperation instrument, will have to explore the possible problems arising between its member states when they have to deal jointly (either bilaterally or multilaterally) with common trans-boundary risks. It will explore the technical and administrative issues identified on the ground that presently avoid adequate collaboration and promote among member states ways to overcome such bottlenecks.

It will also consider the various technical, legal and economic proposals than can facilitate such international coordinated actions in all the phases of the disaster risk cycle. Introducing changes in legislation is certainly a national prerogative but, considering their potential negative or positive impact on future international cooperation, that aspect should be taken into account before their adoption at national level or anticipate corrective measures for trans-boundary risks management.

### b. Overcoming national challenges

As some of the issues on international cooperation in Disaster Risk Reduction have as origin the peculiarities of strategies adopted at national level, the Agreement will focus on the optimization of such national governance through in particular the lessons learned in other countries. The necessary split of responsibilities between various national entities constitutes a first important step but it has also to consider the role of subnational entities in supporting but also reviewing such national strategies.

It will also consider how a coordinated action between public sector and private sector can contribute to a better preparation to disasters and a more efficient intervention in that case. Private sector is becoming more and more a major actor in building and operating critical infrastructures essential for national strategies for Disaster Risk Reduction. The now unavoidable cooperation between private interest and public needs has to be developed in such a way that their possible antagonist logics are overcome.

## II. The need for greater population's action

The role of authorities is certainly essential to prepare for disasters as they are in charge of the majority of technical services involved in DRR and they will ultimately intervene in case of a major event. However, many past events have shown that the preparation of the population is also crucial to guarantee a successful intervention by authorities. Consequently the role of the population at all stages of the disaster risk cycle is also a priority for the competent authorities and addressing it can be split into two equally important phases.

### 1. *Awareness-raising as a prerequisite*

Awareness of risk by people is a major factor to implement successful actions in DRR but also to make them understand the actual limits of any potential intervention in case of disaster. In general, disasters are not frequent enough in Europe to justify a strong memory effect supporting DRR measures and, even when disasters happen, their impact (notably in terms of human losses) is rather limited with respect to other regions of the world, explaining the absence of significant "risk/safety culture" among society. Confronted to the increase of human and economic tolls associated to emerging risks, the need for a good perception (not a fear) of potential risks is even more crucial to support the action adopted by authorities, including their financial implications when trying to cope with them.

The actions developed in that domain wish to contribute to the implementation within its Member States of the fourth Priority for Action of the Sendai Framework, namely "Enhancing disaster preparedness".

#### a. Addressing the present citizens

The Agreement will put a special emphasis on the information on risks of adult population as they are the ones that in the short term will have to take adequate decisions in view of potential risks. If people living in the vicinity of a hazardous area (nuclear plant, chemical factory, dam, etc.) are clearly more sensitive and easier to reach directly, providing general information on all potential risks to general population not confronted directly with them still remains difficult as they generally undervalue the potential risks.

It will also explore the best ways to reach that population both in terms of media and of content. Population may resort to traditional media (TV, radio and newspapers), supposedly independent of authorities and trust worthy: adequate communication tools must thus interest non-specialized journalists by providing them with material really useful for their work. The growing importance of other media as sources of information is an even greater challenge as they are not really regulated: authorities must remain active in real-time in the follow-up of the information release.

## b. Addressing the future citizens

The Agreement will continue its effort to increase the knowledge among young people concerning risks as they should be in the future a major actor in mainstreaming DRR in day-by-day policies and decisions. Providing pertinent information to these future citizens on hazards and risks, and not solely on the local ones, through the formal school curricula is essential to reach them even if formal inclusion of a specific slot for DRR in already full curricula seems difficult in many countries.

It will consequently promote alternative non-formal or even informal training to complement the previous way to reach the children. Once again, the main challenge is to find the right way to reach them as the usual academic approach is considered unattractive for young people, especially outside the school context. The most pertinent tools to privilege should be based on their own references in terms of communication, such as attractive audio-visual products or the use of social networks to interact with them and between them.

## 2. *People's involvement as a duty*

Awareness-raising is an important aspect to mobilize the population but without associated concrete actions of prevention and preparation, it will remain mostly non effective in case of disaster. When people are fully aware of the potential impact of disasters, it is very unlikely that they remain inactive, especially when their actions can have a significant impact on overall resilience to disasters through their individual action but also their collective action. In all cases, adequate behaviour by individuals is a major asset in ensuring the effectiveness of many DRR measures taken by the authorities while wrong decisions generally imply the failure of such measures.

The actions developed in that domain wish to contribute to the implementation within its Member States of the third Priority for Action of the Sendai Framework, namely "Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience".

### a. Individual action for own resilience

The Agreement will focus on the promotion of adequate individual decisions to reduce the overall risks level of our contemporary societies. A major motivation to take decisions related to one's own protection against disasters is to realize that disasters can affect you directly and that your individual decisions can be essential to protect you. In terms of prevention, it can mean making housing choices taking into account potential risks or undertaking specific work to better protect it. Concerning preparedness, it can imply the setting up of individual evacuation plans in case of disasters and stocking the necessary goods to face it.

It will also stress the importance of taking into account the individuals' opinion on the setting up of procedures designed to prevent, prepare and cope with disasters. The goal is a double one: to involve personally each citizen in the success of such strategies as well as to take into account all the factors implying the specific individual behaviours. The capacity to transform that citizen's involvement in actual commitment, through for example voluntary work at any level, must also be explored and adequate decisions to promote it have to be identified.



b. Collective action for social resilience

The Agreement will devote a particular effort in exploring the added value of actions by larger groups of persons organised in communities, including for example NGOs or other kind of associations, to foster the resilience of societies as a whole. By either proposing concrete actions or simply raising the issues at the adequate level (local, regional, national or even international), they can significantly contribute to the promotion of DRR by helping to protect a sizeable group of people.

It will also explore the best ways for the competent authorities to consider such actions more as a potential asset to better protect societies than as an additional burden. They must try to involve such communities when it is pertinent to decision-making as they can either greatly support the proposed measures or constitute a significant obstacle to their adoption. The collective action can also be an efficient way to change the individuals' perception of risks and in turn modify their actual behaviour towards more risk-sensitive ones'.