

**Videoconference  
14<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting of the  
European and Mediterranean Major  
Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA)**

**“Building More Inclusive Societies  
through Better Risk Management”**

**REMARKS**

"Inclusion of vulnerable groups in preparing for and responding to disasters"

Associated themes:

1. Protection of vulnerable groups in case of a pandemic.
2. New threats resulting from changing climate (pathogens released by melting permafrost, tropical diseases appearing in temperate climate zones; heatwaves and drought increasing malnutrition, etc.).

Dear colleagues,

- Thank you for invitation to participate in this meeting. Thank you particularly to the Government of Portugal for hosting this important event.
- The protection of vulnerable groups of the population is a critical issue in the field of disaster prevention and response. It is also a moral obligation of any government. Of any society.
- The Medium-Term Plan 2021-2025, underscores that we must ensure that the vulnerable groups are not left behind when it comes to disasters.

- Women, children, people with disabilities, the elderly, people belonging to minority groups, refugees, are all particularly vulnerable in disaster situations.
- The Sendai Framework, endorsed by all states participating in the EUR-OPA Agreement, stresses the importance of inclusion in all aspects of Disaster Risk Reduction.
- Vulnerable groups are not only more severely affected by health emergencies of large scale. They are often victimized before a disaster happens.
- As a result, they are often at risk of double victimization!

- It is, therefore, our moral and political obligation to turn our attention to this direction. To create the right conditions for protecting these individuals.
  - First, we need to do more to integrate this dimension in all relevant policies and practices.
  - Second, we need to take into consideration the needs and feedback of these groups when designing and implementing relevant policies. Fortunately, an increasing number of plans and actions address this need.
- Climate change is a driver of threats affecting particularly vulnerable groups. Heatwaves, floods and droughts are only few examples.

- As climate change is accelerating, vulnerable groups are even more exposed to disasters.
- No country, however, can tackle this challenge alone. We have to join forces, to work together, to create synergies to face the climate crisis which is already under way.
- This is the way, the only way, to build resilient communities. Resilient societies.
- To that end:
  - We must strengthen the financial assistance mechanism for the weakest groups.

- We must reinforce the environmental rules and regulations regarding construction and urban planning.
- We must introduce in these environmental regulations dimensions that address the needs of vulnerable groups.
- Before I conclude, let me make a couple of points about the disaster risk in the Mediterranean.
- As you all know, during last summer devastating wildfires hit many Mediterranean countries: Greece, Italy, Turkey, Algeria.

- In fact, Greece experienced a record-breaking number of days with temperatures over forty (40) degrees Celsius. As a result we were confronted with forest fires of unprecedented intensity.
- Another clear indication that climate crisis, climate change is here! It's real. It's not fake news! And it affects all of us!
- Greece is grateful because it received assistance from many member-states of EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement. It was a true demonstration of solidarity in action.

- Let me take this opportunity to express a deep thank you on behalf of all Greeks.
- The last fire season clearly demonstrated that no country alone, regardless of its size and power, can face alone extreme physical phenomena like the megafires of last summer.
- During this difficult and devastating period vulnerable groups were affected even more.



- Therefore, further cooperation through the EUR-OPA network is paramount. The very nature of these threats and challenges demands cooperation and joint action. The excellent collaboration we have had until now can improve further. There is always room for improvement.
- I am sure that both the Committee of Permanent Correspondents and the network of the Specialized Centers of the Agreement will look deeper into our recommendations.

- And they will work further together to identify concrete measures for risk reduction and for resilient building of the society as a whole. But with special attention to the needs of vulnerable groups.
- Thank you