

**Draft video message by the Assistance Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the 14th Ministerial Meeting of the Council of Europe's
European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement**

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Ministers, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address you all at the 14th Ministerial Meeting of the Council of Europe's European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement.

The European and Mediterranean region is highly exposed to a variety of natural hazards. Every year, extreme weather and geological events take lives, cause severe infrastructure damage and exacerbate the living conditions of the most vulnerable, affecting millions. With climate change, the frequency and intensity of these events is growing, leading to even more disasters. The numbers are clear: between 2000 and 2019, over 90% of people affected by natural hazards were affected by weather-related events.

Biological hazards also disrupt lives, as COVID-19 has shown. Although these hazards are included in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction for the 2015-2030 period, the world was unprepared for the pandemic. It is therefore time to act decisively on biological hazards by applying a multidimensional risk management approach, as we do for other hazards.

Therefore, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) is increasingly on the agenda of the UN System. While the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 is the roadmap for DRR, other global agendas including the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement and the New Urban Agenda have targets which cannot be attained without DRR.

In this meeting, two important subjects will be discussed: first, how to ensure the inclusion of vulnerable groups in disaster preparedness plans; and second, how to develop EUR-OPA's actions to meet the new challenges posed by natural, technological and biological hazards. Both are crucial topics to increase resilience to disasters.

With its unique mandate in education, natural and social sciences, culture, as well as in communication and information and through its Headquarters in Paris and field offices in Venice, Brussels and Geneva, UNESCO is a major actor on DRR in the European region. For that reason, the organization is well equipped to support the Member States in building resilience through providing assistance adapted to the context of each country using our vast expert network.

An example of such, is the work with several European partners on strengthening community resilience and reducing social vulnerability through the EU funded RURITAGE project. In this project, 18 European territories, including five UNESCO Global Geoparks, are using their unique natural and cultural heritage to regenerate rural areas and therefore demonstrate that it is possible to have within Europe, dynamic, sustainable, and safer rural communities.

On another EU funded project – OPERANDUM - the research consortium is developing tools and methods for the implementation of nature-based solutions that enable the reduction of the hydro-meteorological risks in European rural areas. In the project of nine territories, the “open-air laboratories”, are deploying and successfully testing innovative green solutions.

UNESCO implements the VISUS methodology, which is a multi-hazards risk assessment of school buildings, in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2022. VISUS, focuses on capacity building for decision-makers, technical staff, and universities, providing stakeholders with tools and information to make science-based decisions for enhancing school safety.

UNESCO and the Council of Europe have a long history of cooperation and partnership. In 2020 UNESCO and the Council of Europe collaborated on a research project to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education and explore the opportunities that the current crises can provide to reshape the education systems with a view to full student participation in Europe and in the Middle East and North Africa.

While major actions have been implemented by the global and regional DRR community, more joint efforts should be put in place. UNESCO, being an active international partner of EU EUR-OPA, commits to keep a very close watch on the discussion and act to it.

I wish the 14th Ministerial Meeting a fruitful discussion to further advance disaster risk reduction. I look forward to enhanced collaboration between UNESCO and European countries in future activities and undertakings.

Thank you for your attention.