

## Communication on European disaster response

*The communication adopted today by the European Commission, represents a first step towards the development of a reinforced EU disaster response capacity, both in terms of civil protection and humanitarian assistance. These are the two instruments used by the EU to deliver relief assistance to people affected by disasters. The creation of a European Emergency Response Capacity, based on Member States' assets, and the development of a European Emergency Response Centre, are proposed as the cornerstones of strategy to strengthen the EU disaster response system. It will provide the basis for an improved EU disaster management system which is more effective and efficient (in terms of rapidity of deployment and appropriateness of action), coherent (operational and political coordination) and visible.*

### Why is this new policy necessary?

There has been a marked increase in natural and man-made disasters on a global level. The annual number of disasters worldwide has increased fivefold since 1975, from 78 to nearly 400 today. This year has been marked by some of the worst natural and man-made disasters in recent years, such as the Haiti earthquake, the explosion of the Deepwater Horizon drilling well in the Gulf of Mexico, the floods in Pakistan.

This trend can be attributed to several factors which include climate change, population growth, increasing urbanisation and increased industrial activity.

In the light of this increase in natural disasters, the European Union's disaster response was reviewed to determine its ability to cope and respond effectively to such emergencies both in and outside Europe. The strengths and weaknesses of the existing disaster management instruments were ascertained and a series of suggestions put forward. These are designed to increase effectiveness and efficiency, coherence and strengthen coordination of EU assets in emergency situations, in a **cost effective** manner, avoiding a duplication of effort and refraining from creating new structures and additional levels of bureaucracy.

### A More Efficient Response

The EU civil protection response is currently based on *ad hoc* offers of assistance from Member States, which makes planning for emergency operations difficult. The Communication proposes the creation of a **European Response Capacity** based on **pre-committed** Member States' emergency assets on standby for the EU operations and **pre-agreed contingency plans**. In this way, **advanced planning** would increase effectiveness, efficiency and coherence of EU response.

The arrangements would take the form of a pool of pre-identified assets from the Member States participating in the Civil Protection Mechanism, which would be made available for EU disaster relief operations both inside and outside the EU. Registration of assets in the pool would be voluntary. They will continue to remain under national command and control and at the full disposal of Member States for national purposes when not used for EU operations.

The rapid deployment of these on-call assets would form the nucleus of any EU civil protection operation; they would be complemented by additional offers from the Member States provided in the same way that civil protection assistance is currently organised. Joint efforts would thereby promote cost-effectiveness by maximising the complementarities in national response capacities.

There is a provision to provide regular training and exercises to enhance the interoperability of these assets.

The Communication also proposes to simplify and reinforce the pooling and financing of **transport** assets, logistics and coordination of assistance.

Furthermore, a closer look is needed into the gaps in civil protection response capacities that could be filled by complementary EU-funded assets. Both standby arrangements and EU-funded assets have been successfully tested on a pilot basis by the Commission and Member States.

### **A More Coherent Response**

The second pillar of the Communication strategy is the creation of a **European Emergency Response Centre** by merging the humanitarian aid (ECHO) and civil protection (MIC) crisis rooms into a genuine 24/7 response centre. This centre will draw on information and expertise in both areas on a permanent basis to watch, alert and respond, and to be responsible for the coordination of the EU's civilian disaster response.

This disaster response strategy is based on coordination of information and resources rather than new overarching structures, in order to avoid duplication and maximise cost effectiveness.

For each major emergency, the Emergency Response Centre will prepare an immediate response plan, matching the needs identified on the ground with the capacities available from the voluntary pool. The Centre will then request Member States to deploy the capacities that are most needed.

Although Member States will retain final responsibility over their capacities and thus decide whether to deploy, it is expected that capacities will be made available for EU operations if there is no pressing domestic need.

For disaster response outside the EU, the Emergency Response Centre will be responsible for collecting information on all available European in-kind and other assistance and ensuring its coherence vis-à-vis the United Nations coordination system and the affected country.

This improved EU co-ordination will reinforce the United Nation's role by enhancing needs assessments, by increasing the capacity of EU assessment teams to cover a larger territorial scope and, where necessary, plug gaps in the UN capacity.

### **A More Visible Response**

Although visibility is not an aim in itself, the Communication also outlines the need for **increased EU visibility** in its disaster response operations, so that the European citizens have an accurate and complete understanding of how the EU deals with disasters. It proposes appropriate measures such as a more extensive use of EU symbols in the field (where appropriate), and ensuring that the Commission's humanitarian partners give adequate visibility to assistance funded by the EU.

For further information: [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm)