



# 2ND ANNUAL PRACTITIONER FORUM

„Training Edition“

24/11/2020 and 02/12/2020



# Background and objectives

In the past years, most notably in 2002, 2006, 2013 and in the summer of 2014, parts of the Danube River Basin District were being affected by very strong or extreme flooding events. These events caused significant human and economic damages in the affected countries and communities. In 2006, 4 casualties were reported in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and the costs and damages amounted to almost 600 million Euro in the whole basin. In 2010, there were 35 casualties, and damages of around 2 billion Euro occurred, a figure which was even surpassed in 2013 (2.3 billion Euro damages, mostly in Germany and Austria; additionally, 9 casualties were also reported from Austria and Romania). The Sava River Basin in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Serbia was hit very hard in May 2014, effecting 2.6 million people, killing 79, and causing almost 4 billion Euros damage in the three countries. (Source: ICPDR, PreventionWeb<sup>1</sup>)

Against the background of the current and future challenges **two key stakeholders have established a strategic collaboration** that aims to contribute to the enhancement of flood resilience in the Danube River Region by **providing a platform for cooperation** that facilitates discussions of relevant stakeholders.

The Horizon 2020 funded project DAREnet (Danube Region Resilience Exchange Network) and the EU Strategy for the EU Strategy for the Danube Region Environmental Risks Priority Area have jointly organised an online workshop with the aim to **align efforts to foster collaboration in the field of flood resilience in the Danube Region**.

The thematic focus of the workshop was on the subject of “training” in the context of flood risk management for which the following objectives were defined:

- Building a transregional community of flood practitioners
- Collecting practitioner needs
- Identify innovation opportunities
- Evaluating existing and future gaps
- Support practitioners in realizing their initiatives

The Second Annual Practitioner Forum was comprised of two parts:

**PART 1: Presentations and break-out sessions (24th November 2020)**

**PART 2: Panel discussion (2nd December 2020)**

<sup>1</sup> ICPDR: <https://www.icpdr.org/main/sites/default/files/nodes/documents/1stdfrmp-final.pdf>  
PreventionWeb: <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/view/61602#:~:text=Disastrous%20floods%20in%202014,up%20to%203.8%20billion%20Euros>

PART 1:

# PRESENTATIONS AND BREAK-OUT SESSIONS

24TH NOVEMBER 2020

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The first part of the workshop was attended by more than 50 persons of all countries of the Danube River Region, representing first responder organisations, academia, industry, and public authorities.

It aimed to facilitate discussions about **challenges, needs and solutions** in the field of training. During the workshop two innovative approaches from practitioner organisations from the Danube River region were presented and discussed among the participants in dedicated break-out sessions. It focussed on two subjects with related objectives:

## 1. Training aspects of spontaneous volunteers and responders

- trigger discussion between different organisations about their approaches towards the training of volunteer and responders
- identify good practices and training methods to improve training efficiency for spontaneous volunteers and responders
- share practices regarding the different training systems for spontaneous volunteers and responders of the Danube countries

## 2. National, regional and international training

- share practices and experience regarding the different training approaches at national, regional, international level
- trigger discussion about regional level disaster preparedness and response activities, compared to national and international systems
- identify good practices at national and international trainings which can be implemented at regional level
- exchange ideas about potential standardised training requirements at regional level

PART 2:

## PANEL DISCUSSION

2ND DECEMBER 2020

The second part of the workshop was attended by more than 50 persons of all countries of the Danube River Region, representing first responder organisations, academia, industry, and public authorities. It aimed to facilitate discussions on policy-level about how the challenges, gaps and needs that were identified in the first part could be addressed.

Building upon the outcomes and recommendations of the first part, the panellists discussed how innovation in flood risk management training in the Danube River Region can be enhanced through strategic partnerships. The focus was put on four subjects:

1. Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the training activities in the field of civil protection
2. Existing funding possibilities to address the identified gaps and needs
3. Transfer of knowledge with a regional approach
4. Regional harmonisation and standardisation

The panel was comprised of the following EU representatives:



FELIX BLOCH

Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations,  
European Commission - DG ECHO



PHILIPPE QUEVAUVILLER

Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission - DG HOME



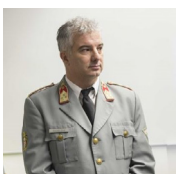
JOHAN MAGNUSSON

Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission - DG REGIO



GUSZTÁV CSOMOR

Danube Transnational Programme - DTP



ZSOLT KELEMEN

European Union Strategy for the Danube Region, Environmental Risks  
Priority Area, Disaster Management Working Group

# Training aspects of spontaneous volunteers and professional responders

## PRACTITIONER INITIATIVE “FLOOD TRAINING FACILITY”

The research channel at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU) offers a unique facility with outstanding possibilities to train responders (e.g. practitioners from firefighters' organisations, water rescue, etc.) and spontaneous volunteers (i.e. the public) and under real life conditions of a flood environment. The channel provides the ideal environment to conduct stationary and dynamic flood trials under safe conditions with water discharges of up to 10 m<sup>3</sup>/s and a water depth of up to 3 m. Providing a real flood experience can not only enable the training of correct behaviour and the recognition of accompanying dangers of a flood (e.g. driftwood or strainers), it also helps to reduce the psychological impacts on the individual and therefore improves their resilience if faced with a flood situation in the future. The initiative gains knowledge about how the training improves participants' disaster resilience, knowledge and competencies.



## SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSIONS

***Dedicated flood training facilities contribute greatly to an enhanced risk awareness of the public and offers unique training possibilities for first responders in the field of flood response and swift water rescue.***

Until now such facilities are extremely scarce in Europe or other installations with different backgrounds (such as the Ice channel Augsburg) need to be used, resulting in direct competition with their originally intended purpose. To enhance the general qualification of responders, to increase the number of specialised responders and to raise the risk awareness of the public (see earthquake awareness in project SEISMOPOLIS in Greece) such kind of installations should be available in all European countries.

***New technologies can greatly contribute to an enhanced realism of training and exercises (VR/AR).***

New immersive technologies such as Virtual and Augmented Realities (VR/AR) offer various opportunities and allow for more mobile and flexible training systems.

Such technologies can be even used for immersive and realistic training for those situations which are not possible to train in the real world, such as levee failures. Furthermore, they could provide command staff with immersive situational awareness during an event or could also be used to raise public risk awareness, as demonstrated by the Earthquake simulator. Although examples of such approaches exist, the costs for development and maintenance, the differences in training cultures as well as the lack of funding (i.e. equipment and staff) pose challenges. Most examples are demonstrators or even prototypes. Therefore, huge opportunities for further development exist.

***An exchange about best practices for the structured interaction with spontaneous volunteers in flood response is required to make better use of the available knowledge.***

Recent flood events showed that there is a growing willingness of the public to support response efforts, with varying degrees across the region. While this might be a great resource (i.e. sand-bag filling, human chains) the structured interaction between trained responders, especially the chiefs of command, and spontaneous and untrained volunteers have been a big challenge (e.g. legal liability, work safety, on-the-job training, documentation of involved persons). Various initiatives, such as Team Österreich or the Volunteer Event Manager application for the Carpathian Basin have already developed new and promising approaches to deal with such kinds of questions. But the exchange of best practices and lessons learned need to be improved to promote, support and implement them on a wider scale.

***The structured integration of responders in a cross-border context remains challenging due to a lack of harmonisation/standardisation.***

Across the basin strong variations and a large inhomogeneity of training and equipment can be witnessed, this hampers the efficient cooperation in cross-border response operations. To improve the situation in the short-term, information about capabilities needs to be exchanged between the involved parties to ensure efficient deployment and task assignment. Ultimately a harmonised and integrated approach should be targeted.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish and operate dedicated flood response training facilities to increase the availability of skilled responders and to enhance the flood risk awareness of citizens.
2. Apply new technologies on a wider scale to better exploit the innovation potential for simulating flood risks in a rather cost-efficient manner.
3. Improve the transfer of knowledge about best practices for the structured interaction with spontaneous volunteers in flood response
4. Explore and support innovative approaches to enable an improved comparison of skills and competencies of responders in a European context (e.g. multilingual e-learning, "Responder ID-card")

## National, regional and international training

### PRACTITIONER INITIATIVE: REGIONAL MULTI-AGENCY COOPERATION EXERCISES

Based on recent events and past experiences the International Security and Emergency Management Institute (ISEMI) from Slovakia proposed to initiate regional multi-agency cooperation exercises. Such exercises would have the overall objective to **improve the cooperation of different units in the context of cross-border/regional level intervention**. They can be used to create favourable conditions for the enhancement of future interventions and can directly build upon examples such as the UCPM Module field exercise (MODEX) or the Full-scale field exercises (FSX) (e.g. EUWA).



The direct benefits of such kind of regional cooperation exercises are to:

- Improved familiarization with the available capacities and capabilities (procedures, responsibilities, equipment, resources etc.)
- Build closer and friendly relationships to improve future communication
- Promote cooperation, experience sharing and information exchange

In order to achieve the implementation of such exercises the following needs were identified:

- Simplification of exercises implementation (organization & logistics)
- Facilitate financial sources
- Support communication
- Harmonisation and standardisation of procedures

### SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

***A wealth of knowledge exists in the field of training (MODEX, FSX exercises) and the distinct focus of national vs. international (UCPM) is acknowledged. But regional level exercises and improved knowledge sharing approaches are needed.***

Full-scale field exercises (FSX), as compared to national exercises that focus on skills, provide an opportunity to focus on the training of cooperation and a common management (assess, plan, act and deliver) in an international setting. In the past years, a total of 12 MODEX flood exercises were implemented resulting in various lessons identified and learnt.

A gap that still exists are regional level exercises primarily focussing on cooperation in a cross-border situation. While evaluation reports of exercises exist how to access them is not widely known and needs to be improved. Several other ways, such as job shadowing, train-the-trainer have proven to be good ways of sharing methods of exercise organization. A summer school with regional focus would greatly support the management level training, as would a specialised tool or guide to support the preparation of similar well-structured exercises.

***National capacities exist that are used regularly in cross-border/regional response missions that don't aspire to become a UCPM module, such capacities also require dedicated training support.***

Local teams exist that will never become an international certified teams/UCPM module, still they are relevant capacities that are regularly deployed in cross-border/regional response missions. These units are in many cases smaller and do not have UCPM module level (e.g. full self-sufficiency), as it is not needed in cross-border/regional assistance. Even if international (UCPM) standards are not being achieved or aimed at, regional level requirements are. Such capacities should therefore be strengthened through a regional framework that also focuses on training aspects.

*Bilateral agreements and procedures exist between countries, but Host Nation Support (HNS) is adopted not widely enough.*

Receiving assistance is the key challenge, but Host Nation Support (HNS) is not fully adapted in many countries throughout the region. Agreements, Memorandum of Understandings and also procedures exist between countries (not only between neighbours) that could be developed further into regional standards / harmonisation. Regional exercises would enable this target group to better reflect on the required but different procedures of providing assistance on this level.

***The focus should be on the output (capacities and capabilities) when standardisation, harmonisation and certification is addressed.***

When national modules are developed for international deployments, the UCPM framework is applied as the standard approach. It provides a good basis of international requirements, but standards are lacking for cross-border and regional assistance. UCPM standards are related to the performance and capabilities and not to specific technical equipment. This should be considered as a guiding approach for regional level as well. Full harmonisation is unrealistic and not the goal, but the main elements to be harmonised for cross-border/regional activities should be identified.



The UCPM and other international (e.g. [INSARAG](#)) (re-)certifications/classifications are well-developed systems. They can serve as a good basis for developing certification framework for capacities in regional deployment. However, the certification should be done at national level. The requirements are different for national, regional and (certified) EU capacities, which should be reflected in the certification systems.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop a harmonised regional level framework for regional response capacities (not necessarily UCPM modules): training, adapted and standardised capability definitions, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
2. Improve transfer of knowledge from UCPM to national/regional level (lessons learned/ best practices from exercises/trainings/guidelines towards practitioner organisations)
3. Support the harmonisation of (re-)certification system on a regional level
4. Improve the adoption of HNS guidelines in countries receiving assistance

## Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the training activities in the field of civil protection

To set the scene and to better understand the current circumstances the panel started off with a discussion about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the training activities in the field of civil protection in Europe.

### FELIX BLOCH (DG ECHO)

The pandemic has had a major impact on UCPM training activities. The limited options available were closely and openly discussed with the civil protection authorities in the Member States. No one wanted to risk the well-being of the people involved or even organise super-spreader events, therefore almost all UCPM training and exercise activities had to be suspended from one day to another. This decision resulted in a **delay and back-log in the certification process** for the voluntary pool of response capacities as well as budgetary implications for DG ECHO (outflow of funds), but fortunately **not in an immediate scarcity of UCPM trained personnel**. Nevertheless, suitable arrangements to develop remote training and exercises must be found. Therefore, new virtual/digital MODEX Table-Top exercises and blended virtual Medical MODEX exercises are currently developed and the UCPM training and exercise will work towards **incorporating virtual/digital elements** as we are going forward.

### ZSOLT KELEMEN (EUSDR PA5 DMWG)

The COVID-19 pandemic does not postpone wildfire or floods events. Priority therefore needs to be given to develop new approaches and procedures, in particular **distance learning**. The current situation has demonstrated that it is possible to minimise the costs (no travel) and while maximising the impact of training when appropriate distance learning approaches are applied. It should therefore be regarded as an **opportunity to rearrange the current structures and systems**. Furthermore, a **reorientation from funding multinational exercises towards local and regional level training** and “train-the-trainers” activities should be made.

## PHILLIPE QUEVAUVILLER (DG HOME)

Even if DG HOME is providing funding to research and not directly to training activities is the question of **how to bring research outputs to capacity building and training** a prime focus for DG HOME. The close working relationship with DG ECHO is of high importance in the ongoing process of research programming for Horizon Europe. Not all pieces of the puzzles on how the different DGs should logically interact with each other in the future are in place yet, but these important discussions will continue. In the future DG HOME wants to **continue financing initiatives that are facilitating the dialogue between different stakeholders**.

## PANEL DISCUSSION SUBJECT 2

### **Existing funding possibilities**

The panel continued discussing about the existing funding possibilities to address the needs identified during the first part of the event.

## JOHAN MAGNUSSON (DG REGIO)

DG REGIO is responsible for the EU cohesion policy with its funding tools the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the Cohesion Fund (CF), which sets the broader framework, while the individual programme sets their priorities. Many funding opportunities exist, where financial support is also given to risk reduction activities.

The next programming period is ongoing, and the final modalities are about to be agreed. In particular the **Policy objective for a “Greener low carbon Europe”** and the aspect of “climate change adaptation” offers the **possibility to fund prevention and preparedness measures** (i.e. equipment, training, etc.).

## GUSZTÁV CSOMOR (DTP)

The Danube Transnational Programme (DTP) focuses on territorial developments and not necessarily on specific topics. The programme **finances complex approaches** to challenges that are best addressed in a **transnational partnership of countries in the region**. Therefore, integrated, and trans-boundary cooperation between different sectors and actors are required. The DTP does **not finance infrastructure, but capacity building or harmonisation activities** would fit into the frame of the programme. Currently no calls are open, and the new programme is under preparation, where environmental risks will again be part of it.

PHILLIPE QUEVAUVILLER (DG HOME)

The new **Disaster Resilient Society (DRS)** calls within Horizon Europe will allow the financing of such activities and is structured into three pillars: 1) Societal Resilience 2) Integrated disaster risk management 3) Technologies for first responders. A more **horizontal component, similar to the current network of practitioners** is included to ensure the continuation of these activities. The work programme is planned to be **released soon and should be adopted during February or March 2021.**

FELIX BLOCH (DG ECHO)

As current programmes stand, DG ECHO cannot finance training installations, but is limited to the implementation of training activities as such.

PANEL DISCUSSION SUBJECT 3

## **Transfer of knowledge with a regional approach**

Next the question was discussed how the **transfer of knowledge** can be ensured considering a **regional approach.**

PHILLIPE QUEVAUVILLER (DG HOME)

This aspect is **difficult to tackle for DG HOME** as local and regional actors are not in the focus of the programme, but ways have to be established to relay the results also on a regional level. Regional platforms, similar to the Community of Users on Secure, Safe and Resilient Societies (CoU), are considered as a way to stimulate community building in the member states. Spain can be considered as an example where first good steps are taken in this respect, but strong partnership with MS and agencies are needed.

FELIX BLOCH (DG ECHO)

The regional dimension is not commonly used from a UCPM perspective. This is related to the **current “UCPM mindset” which mainly revolves around the activation of the mechanism** and a coordinated, common European response. However, the main purpose of the legislation, which aims at strengthening Civil Protection in Europe, would allow for a much broader view. The **next UCPM annual work programme will therefore have regional/trans-border exercise components.** The idea of regional sub-networks dimension is also discussed with the Member States within the framework of the **Knowledge Network**, with general openness to also **establish regional sub-networks.**

## ZSOLT KELEMEN (EUSDR PA5 DMWG)

The **elementary building block of Civil Protection in Europe is the trained individual that is equipped properly**, who is local and not supranational. When it comes to the usage of equipment, the MSs have different rules and requirements regarding occupational safety. The Knowledge Network can also serve as a platform to share information regarding these systems. The European-level directive concerning volunteer work should be determined in a longer run, where the DG Employment might have a great relevance as well.

## JOHAN MAGNUSSON (DG REGIO)

The **macro-regional dimension**, in this case the Danube, is of particular importance for DG REGIO. While there are mechanisms at national and international level, the focus should also be to strengthen regional cooperation at macro-regional level as in the Danube region.

## PANEL DISCUSSION SUBJECT 4

# Regional harmonisation and standardisation

The next subject of the discussion dealt with **regional harmonisation and standardisation activities**, and the possibilities and requirements for to qualify for **financial support for national capacities that do not plan to reach international standards** (UCPM module) but are regularly involved in response missions on a regional level.

## FELIX BLOCH (DG ECHO)

The UCPM modules are quite rigidly defined and such a **regional concept has not yet been discussed**. Even if currently no specific opportunities exist to provide financial support in such cases this discussion should be held based on a **thorough understanding about the kind of capacities to be targeted**.

## JOHAN MAGNUSSON (DG REGIO)

The legislative framework for the upcoming period does not specify what is eligible other than at general level, and the **specific objective supporting disaster resilience can support national capacities**. However, the decision on what to support is made at programme level.

## GUSZTÁV CSOMOR (DTP)

The scope of the **DTP in general is supporting harmonization**, if it is justified and needed at transnational level. All relevant actors from Danube basin level should take part in such cooperation to establish methods, standards and capacity building. These **harmonized tools should be adaptable at national level** by local actors. It is still to be discussed and justified if emergency response should be harmonized between countries which are located along the same river.

## ZSOLT KELEMEN (EUSDR PA5 DMWG)

It is difficult to expect responders to respond properly in large international events if they are not **trained properly** locally. Training should therefore be given priority and will continue to be the **focus and key objective of the DMWG**.

# Conclusions and recommendations

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The 2nd Annual Forum was regarded as a big success by the participants and considered to be an important starting point.

The main results and recommendations that can be summarised are the following:

## **1. Shared understanding about the main challenges and requirements**

The event allowed for the identification and elaboration of practitioner needs in the field of training. The facilitated discussion with policymakers about the approaches how to address these needs was regarded as highly beneficial, and it was stressed that the dialogue that has been initiated has to be continued. The organisers have agreed to continue the collaboration and will facilitate the dialogue among the stakeholders.

## **2. Best practice examples exist and should be built upon**

Besides the practitioner initiatives that were introduced a reference was made to a transnational project between Romania, Serbia and Hungary which developed a regionally harmonised concept (equipment, training, SOPs) that was even applied in a flood situation. Even if this project is not operational anymore it can clearly serve a best practice example to be considered for this purpose.

## **3. Current funding landscape is too complex to navigate**

Numerous funding opportunities exist to address the gaps and needs identified, but it is very difficult to understand and navigate the current landscape. A more coherent and integrated programme design as well as a transparent presentation to the outside is therefore urgently needed. DG ECHO is currently working towards this objective by establishing the so-called Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network that aims to provide guidance to the practitioners to navigate their way through these complexities. The Community of Users (CoU) initiative of DG HOME aims in the same direction through extensive stakeholder dialogue activities.

## **4. Involvement of additional stakeholders would be beneficial**

While the event was jointly regarded as a good starting point to come together and take this important matter further. It was nevertheless suggested to consider the involvement of additional stakeholders, namely DG Employment & UN/EU DRR regional.

## **5. COVID-19 provides an opportunity to reflect**

While the COVID-19 pandemic poses challenges on many levels it also provides a window of opportunity to reflect on the suitability of existing structures and procedures while considering the reorientation of existing strategies and approaches.

# The organising projects



DAREnet is a 5-year Coordination and Support Action funded by the European Commission. The DAREnet consortium forms the backbone of the transnational, multi-disciplinary network. It brings together a unique combination of renowned institutions and players in flood mitigation and civil protection. This consortium provides a broad and complementary coverage of the needed capabilities, the geographic balance, and strategic motivation to succeed. A long history of previous collaboration providing the basis for an effective execution of DAREnet and beyond.

DAREnet is organised as a network of national practitioner networks, led by dedicated DAREnet National Contacts (DNC). The DNCs are building in their countries multidisciplinary practitioner communities to collect information about innovation needs and opportunities in an ongoing dialogue. The DAREnet project will unite these national communities in an open ecosystem to foster synergies, innovation and its uptake across the Danube Region. The network is supported by a broad range of stakeholders from policy, industry and research.

The DAREnet project will enable Flood Management Practitioners in the Danube River Region:

- to connect and exchange with national and European stakeholders in a truly collaborative environment;
- to identify and analyse by and for themselves relevant innovation gaps;
- to translate the gaps into a joint innovation strategy to improve flood resilience in the future.





The main objective of the European Union Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) is to increase growth and strengthen cooperation at a macro-regional level through priority areas. As territorial development framework, the aim is to reduce disparity and harmonise development policies connecting 14 countries along the Danube River.

Flood risk management is a significant target of the Environmental Risks Priority Area (PA5). In order to achieve reduction of flood risk events EUSDR PA5 provides and enhance continuous support to the implementation of the Danube Flood Risk Management Plan. As part of prevention measures, PA5 supports the assessment of disaster risks in the Danube Region, encouraging actions to promote disaster resilience, preparedness and response activities, in order to achieve the goals set out in its Action Plan.

The Disaster Management Working Group (DM-WG) was established to concentrate on emergency response and preparedness elements of managing environmental risks. Extending the cooperation and joint efforts of the countries in the Danube Region presents an opportunity for reaching a common understanding and developing standards at regional level.

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF DM-WG

- support the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (DG ECHO) in cross-border and regional level disaster management with the involvement of authorities and (volunteer) non-governmental organisations;
- cooperate with International Commission for the Protection of Danube River in all activities concerning water management to achieve good synergy and to contribute to their work with disaster response viewpoint;
- trigger discussions and activities concerning disaster preparedness and response elements in the management of environmental risks;
- work on the development of recommendations for volunteer organizations involved in disaster response in the Region;
- support this initiative at policy level by developing “Minimum standards for civil protection organizations and fire and rescue services involved in international or cross-border disaster response in the Danube Region”;
- identify existing practices and procedures to minimise duplications;
- provide a platform for cooperation between relevant stakeholders of the 14 Danube countries in the field of disaster management.

The coordination of PA5 is managed by Hungary and Romania.

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