

EVALUATION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION EXTERNAL ACTION

Interim Evaluation of the implementation of Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism, 2017-2022

Executive Summary

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Interim evaluation of the implementation of Decision No. 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism, 2017, 2022 - Annexes

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the executive summary of the interim evaluation of the implementation and performance of Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), undertaken by ICF on behalf of the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO).

Purpose and scope of the study

This interim evaluation assessed the effectiveness, relevance, efficiency, coherence, and EU added value of Decision No 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism between 2017 and 2022. More specifically, it supported DG ECHO to:

- Understand progress in implementing the Decision, including gaps and shortcomings;
- Understand the extent to which the Decision is achieving its objectives and the main quantitative and qualitative impacts;
- Improve implementation of existing legislative provisions;
- Provide inputs for possible proposal(s) to amend the Decision or its implementing acts;
- Inform, where appropriate, the review of the financial breakdown of the UCPM as set out by Article 19(5) of the Decision and identify potential room for improvement in UCPM budget implementation.

The evaluation covered the 27 European Union (EU) Member States¹, eight Participating States², and 19 eligible third countries.

Methodology

The approach to the interim evaluation of Decision No 1313/2013/EU was informed by research tools developed and tailored to build a rich and comprehensive evidence base covering a wide range of stakeholders. It combined complementary quantitative and qualitative research methods that collected data from relevant sources and mitigated the impact of data limitations to the extent possible. In line with the Better Regulation Guidelines (BRG), it provided a basis for triangulation and verification of data from different sources to answer the evaluation questions, draw conclusions, highlight lessons and develop recommendations.

The interim evaluation began in October 2022 and comprised several phases: i) inception; ii) research and consultation; and iii) analysis, triangulation and synthesis. In addition, the evaluation team undertook a baseline analysis, primarily informed by data reported in previous UCPM evaluations.

Several data collection activities informed the evaluation questions: a rapid review of documentation, followed by an in-depth desk review of qualitative and quantitative data, one inception workshop, six case studies, 108 key informant interviews, three focus groups, one expert validation workshop, and four online surveys (targeting civil protection authorities, DG ECHO desk officers, trainers/training and exercise contractors, experts in civil protection participating in UCPM activities). The case studies comprised a tailored review of relevant documentation and a series of additional interviews with key stakeholders, selected for their expertise or involvement with the topic in question. The consultation activities gathered stakeholders' perspectives on the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and EU added value of the UCPM, key lessons, main gaps and shortcomings across the evaluation period, as well as potential improvements for the UCPM going forward.

¹ United Kingdom (UK) was included as an EU Member State until 2020 (inclusive).

² Iceland, Norway, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Türkiye, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Ukraine joined the UCPM as a Participating State in April 2023, after the evaluation period.

Key findings and conclusions

Effectiveness

As per Article 3(1) of the UCPM Decision, **the UCPM has progressed towards its general objective of fostering cooperation and solidarity between the Union and Member and Participating States**. The UCPM facilitated cross-border and cross-sectoral cooperation across the evaluation period, which improved by applying the lessons from major disasters.

The activities that contributed most to the achievement of specific objectives in the field of prevention included risk mapping, achieved through the national risk assessment processes, the overview document of disaster risks in the EU, and the collection and consolidation of Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Summary Reports from Member and Participating States, as well as prevention projects within the Prevention and Preparedness Programme (PPP). Nevertheless, there is disagreement about the extent to which progress of prevention activities can be measured, given the long-term scope of such work. Additionally, civil protection authorities often face difficulties in carrying out prevention initiatives (notably, the production of DRM Summary Reports), given the cross-sectoral nature of disaster risk prevention and the challenges for civil protection authorities in leveraging cooperation from a wide variety of actors.

The UCPM significantly contributed to enhancing preparedness, particularly through the European Civil Protection Pool (ECPP) and rescEU, designed as a last resort tool to be mobilised in worst-case disaster scenarios when emergency assistance from the ECPP cannot be mobilised or is insufficient. Other activities that contributed to achieving the UCPM's preparedness objectives include: the Training and Exercises Programme; Early Warning Systems (EWS), preparedness projects funded under the PPP, and Host Nation Support (HNS) guidelines.

Despite a substantial increase in activations (primarily due to forest fires, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine), **the UCPM successfully maintained a high response rate during the evaluation period, thus contributed effectively to response efforts**. The Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) played a crucial role in ensuring a rapid and efficient response to disasters by coordinating and supporting real-time response to emergencies within and outside the EU.

The UCPM contributed to raising awareness of disasters within the civil protection community and non-conventional stakeholders, primarily through rescEU and UCPM involvement in high-profile disasters (e.g. COVID-19). Its training and exercises and Exchange of Experts (EoE) Programme were invaluable resources in disseminating expertise and stimulating discussions. The UCPM could improve awareness of the Mechanism and disasters among the public and, to a lesser extent, non-civil protection sectors.

More recent initiatives are also expected to have a positive impact on the UCPM's performance, including the Union Disaster Resilience Goals, the Civil Protection Knowledge Network, scenario building, implementation of the new Training and Exercises Programme, and the ERCC 2.0 initiative.

Factors that facilitated the UCPM's effectiveness included the its adaptability in tailoring the legislative framework to needs emerging from the disaster risk landscape, enhanced cross-sectoral cooperation (including with the private sector, notably in the response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine), mutual trust and understanding between DG ECHO and national counterparts, and Member and Participating States' familiarity with the UCPM. Conversely, **hindering factors** included the changing disaster risk landscape (with increasing complexity and frequency of disasters), the complexity of some administrative procedures, lack of human and financial resources, and the increased focus on response – sometimes to the detriment of preparedness and prevention activities that go beyond supporting capacity development through rescEU and the ECPP.

The **UCPM produced positive unintended effects**, including heightened awareness of civil protection issues and challenges, increasing application of scientific tools and research, and serving as an inspiration for civil protection cooperation networks beyond the Union.

Efficiency

During the evaluation period, the UCPM budget experienced a considerable increase driven by evolving needs and gap assessments; while in 2017 the MFF UCPM budget was about EUR 52 million and there were some absorption problems, at the end of the evaluation period, the MFF budget was significantly higher, reaching EUR 354 million (and the total budget, which included NextGenerationEU funds, EUR 1,061 million).

Overall, the UCPM's budgeting system demonstrated a good level of flexibility to assist Member and Participating States in addressing evolving needs on the ground and unforeseen events.

While this flexibility was occasionally (and temporarily) achieved by reshuffling budget from prevention, it was mainly the result of budget reinforcements, frontloads and amendments made possible by the changes introduced by the revisions to the regulation and a budgetary authority that was reactive and supportive to the requests of UCPM for reinforcements to respond to crises (approvals took place in a time range of three weeks to two months). Nevertheless, in some instances, some elements limited the flexibility of the budgetary system during the evaluation period, for example the restricted applicability of NextGenerationEU fund to addressing health-related needs.

The interim evaluation found that the **anticipated benefits** of the UCPM were realised somewhat efficiently and outweighed the costs. However, there is a need for increased clarity on the costs associated with various UCPM activities. Additionally, DG ECHO staff had limited awareness and scrutiny of the cost-effectiveness of UCPM activities. DG ECHO revised the UCPM Decision to reinforce prevention and preparedness, recognising their potential cost-effectiveness. **While stakeholders considered results to have been achieved in the most cost-effective way, it was difficult to determine at macro-level whether the UCPM was the most cost-effective solution overall.** The interim evaluation identified various instances where cost-effectiveness was taken into account during planning, implementation, monitoring, revision/expansion and contract awarding, yet there were opportunities to reduce administrative burden, enhance data management systems, and increase human resources.

On internal monitoring, **the development of additional key performance indicators (KPIs) and various result and output indicators helped to measure the UCPM's performance on response activities.** However, the indicators and processes were insufficient to assess and monitor efficiency and cost-effectiveness, as they did not cover quality, use of resources, costs, or outcomes/impacts. Finally, UCPM data collection and management systems and tools were not appropriate to support sound collection and analysis of data, with tracking of assistance particularly limited.

Relevance

Overall, the UCPM activities under the prevention, preparedness, and response pillars were appropriate to address EU and national needs.

On **prevention**, various activities demonstrated the UCPM's successful identification of EU and national civil protection needs. These included DG ECHO's funding of research projects to understand the needs of civil protection authorities, the compilation of the overview document of disaster risks in the EU, and recent changes to the PPP. Although stakeholders agree that there is a need for additional investment in prevention initiatives, the relatively limited resources of the UCPM suggests that further efforts could focus on coordinating and mainstreaming disaster risk management in other relevant EU funding instruments.

UCPM activities were highly relevant in ensuring increased **preparedness** to respond to disasters at both national and EU level. Nevertheless, although rescEU is intended to be a last resort tool when ECPP capacities cannot be deployed, some stakeholders raised concerns about the perceived prioritisation of rescEU compared to the ECPP. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that rescEU was used, as it was intended, as a “last resort tool”, with the ERCC verifying whether ECPP capacities could have been mobilised in the first instance.

UCPM **response** activities were also relevant to addressing national and EU needs, with requests for assistance (RfA) tailored to the needs of the countries in question.

Overall, the **UCPM was flexible to adapt to evolving needs on the ground, including unanticipated events**. These included activations in response to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as its cooperation with the private sector.

Beyond the period evaluated, the UCPM's flexibility might not be sufficient to address new and emerging needs and developments, given the increasing complexity and frequency of disasters (e.g. consequences of climate change). Indeed, concerns were raised about the sustainability of the UCPM's (and, more specifically, the ERCC's) ability to cope with future emergencies, in view of its increased workload. Concerns were also raised about the UCPM's growing role in third countries, with some stakeholders highlighting the need to ensure enhanced clarity in this respect.

The UCPM made significant efforts to address recommendations and lessons identified in external evaluations, particularly recommendations on the PPP, and the Training and Exercises Programme. Similarly, it capitalised and implemented some of the lessons identified in the Lessons Learnt Programme. Nevertheless, the interim evaluation found some margin to improve the systematic implementation and monitoring of lessons and to ensure better tailoring and attribution of those lessons.

Coherence

The interim evaluation found that the UCPM Decision sufficiently defines the prevention, preparedness and response pillars, thereby fostering synergies and complementarities. The expansion of UCPM activities between 2017 and 2022 did not affect its internal coherence.

Although the 2019 Article 6 reporting guidelines sought to enhance coherence among DRM Summary Reports, there is still some variability in the methodologies employed, risks assessed, and sectors involved. The ECPP and rescEU are inherently coherent, given the latter is designed to be a safety-net, to complement the ECPP in worst-case scenarios when Pool capacity cannot be deployed. The coherence of response activities was largely ensured by the ERCC.

On coherence across prevention, preparedness and response, the Lessons Learnt Programme provided a good forum to exchange lessons and good practices on a wide range of UCPM activities. Nevertheless, the internal re-organisation of DG ECHO somewhat hindered coordination across its prevention, preparedness and response activities. More specifically, the division between Directorate A (Emergency Management and rescEU) and Directorate B (Disaster Preparedness and Prevention) was not perceived as conducive to coherence³. Stakeholders highlighted that the process of developing capacity at UCPM level should be better informed by scientific evidence and adequate needs assessments, resulting in a clear overview of available capacities and gaps.

UCPM prevention and preparedness activities **successfully established synergies and complementarities with national civil protection activities**. For instance, the EWS was a valuable complement to existing national systems, while the training and exercises offered in the Training and Exercises Programme complemented national civil protection training. The UCPM effectively

³ The subsequent re-organisation of DG ECHO was beyond the scope of the interim evaluation.

coordinated its response with national civil protection actors and the private sector. However, a clearer framework is needed to regulate UCPM cooperation with the private sector.

There were synergies and complementarities between UCPM activities and EU-level interventions in other policy fields, although there is room for improvement. For instance, several steps were taken to improve synergies with: humanitarian aid, public health, and home affairs (e.g. EU Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Risk Mitigation). Civil protection actors deployed on missions did not always have a good understanding of humanitarian aid actors. In addition, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the UCPM experienced challenges in coordinating with national authorities beyond civil protection, highlighting the need to increase awareness of the UCPM (e.g. among Ministries of Health and Ministries of Foreign Affairs). Although the UCPM Decision, the 2019 Article 6 reporting guidelines, and other UCPM initiatives between 2017 and 2022 highlighted the need to consider climate change as a risk driver and its impacts on the increased severity of disasters, evidence shows that the UCPM's environmental sustainability could be improved.

At international level, the UCPM is coherent with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, with DG ECHO and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) taking steps to avoid overlaps and duplication of effort. Despite the UCPM effectively coordinating its response with other international level actors (e.g. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)), the interim evaluation identified some further synergies.

EU added value

The interim evaluation found that the UCPM added value to Member States, Participating States and third countries. It was instrumental in producing results that could not have been achieved at national, regional, or local level alone. The benefits were tangible and clear for all countries involved in civil protection activities (whether receiving or giving), particularly small countries with limited prevention, preparedness and response capacity.

The main elements generating added value for national civil protection activities included enhanced coordination (through the ERCC), pooling of resources (rescEU, ECPP), cost saving, sharing of knowledge and expertise, capacity development through training and exercises, and risk awareness, solidarity and international influence. For instance, the Knowledge Network and the periodic compilation of DRM Summary Reports into an overview document of disaster risks in the EU have intrinsic EU added value for Member and Participating States, notwithstanding some shortcomings and potential to improve.

The potential discontinuation of the UCPM would have negative consequences for Member States, Participating States, third countries, and the civil protection community at large.

National, regional and local interventions would likely continue, albeit in a fragmented, less efficient and less effective way. The absence of the UCPM would be difficult to fill through national level interventions or initiatives established via bilateral/regional agreements or multilateral cooperation.

While it is possible to infer that benefits have materialised for all countries involved in civil protection activities, the concrete ways in which the UCPM's external dimension adds value to Member and Participating States remain unclear.

Recommendations

The study proposes eight strategic recommendations, accompanied by a series of operational recommendations to improve the effectiveness, relevance, coherence and EU added value of the UCPM. These are presented below.

1. The European Commission should strengthen cross-sectoral cooperation to prevent, prepare for and respond to disasters

Operational recommendations

- Strengthen cross-sectoral coordination (through the ERCC) with EU and international stakeholders. For example, DG ECHO should consider:
 - a) Continue to develop/ regularly check SOPs and administrative agreements with existing and new stakeholders and for the logistical hubs;
 - b) Further developing ERCC 2.0 initiative, to enable it to become the Commission's cross-sectoral crisis hub for joint situational awareness, early warning, anticipation, information exchange and operational coordination, including between civilian and military stakeholders. This should be done, to the extent possible, in close cooperation with other EU-level crisis management instruments, including those under development (such as the Single Market Emergency Instrument);
 - c) Encouraging regular deployment of Liaison Officers (LOs) from other Commission DGs to DG ECHO;
 - d) Introducing thematic Commission inter-service meetings to deepen understanding of other services' work and focus on streamlining efforts. This would also link civil protection and broader crisis management activities of EU actors more closely, decreasing the risk of fragmentation and duplication of emergency and crisis management structures;
- Sustain efforts to raise awareness of the UCPM among national authorities beyond civil protection (e.g. creating lists of non-civil protection contact points, material/protocols on steps and actors involved in UCPM activations, ad hoc sessions on changes to the Mechanism);
- Establish structural cooperation with the private sector to complement and alleviate national activities (e.g. dedicated workshop on framing cooperation with the private sector, resulting in consistently updated SOPs).

2. DG ECHO should simplify procedures and administrative requirements to enhance flexibility and reduce administrative burden

Operational recommendations

- Simplify the procedures and administrative requirements for UCPM activation, particularly transport and logistics of ECPP deployments, rescEU capacities and in-kind assistance (e.g. automated forms, an optional 'accelerated procedure' for large-scale, complex and transboundary emergencies, incorporating a transport module in CECIS 2.0 to aid follow-up of co-financing);
- Consider increasing the co-financing rate to 100% for transport and operations of ECPP deployments (including feasibility study on the potential (financial) impact).

3. The European Commission should enhance the monitoring systems and tools to track/evaluate the UCPM's performance across prevention, preparedness and response activities

Operational recommendations

3. The European Commission should enhance the monitoring systems and tools to track/evaluate the UCPM's performance across prevention, preparedness and response activities

- Develop the UCPM-wide monitoring and evaluation (M&E) policy to establish a multiannual framework to measure performance and achievements that covers all UCPM activities (M&E framework, intervention logic, indicator framework across all activities, M&E Plan);
- Improve reporting on budget per activity and pillar to inform decision-making and funding allocation (see recommendation #4);
- Replace standard MS Office tools with more innovative and tailored IT and information management systems to collect and monitor data on UCPM activities. Such a system should ensure common monitoring of ECPP and rescEU capacities, common tracking of the delivery of in-kind assistance, common database of experts, and tracking of implementation of lessons learnt and recommendations identified.

4. The European Commission should streamline and strengthen the UCPM's funding instruments to ensure a common European approach to crisis management

Operational recommendations

- Strengthen links between EU budget instruments to introduce a more streamlined approach and alleviate resources strain (e.g. for cross-sector activities, such as risk mapping);
- Establish a mechanism to ensure safeguards across all phases of disaster risk management cycle in the case of emergencies of an unprecedented scale/multitude;
- Hold discussions on the general funding of the UCPM in light of the evolving disaster risk landscape (e.g. adequacy of the UCPM's general funding, possibilities to ringfence prevention and preparedness budgets);
- Establish sustainable funding for development and maintenance of rescEU capacity.

5. The European Commission should promote further integration of evidence-based knowledge (e.g. scientific findings) and technological innovation in civil protection activities

Operational recommendations

- Introduce structural links between UCPM strategic anticipation and foresight activities and the development of capacity through rescEU and ECPP;
- Ensure that scientific expertise (including generated through UCPM activities) influences the implementation of UCPM activities (e.g. use of the Knowledge Network, implementing ERCC 2.0 by enhancing ERCC anticipatory capacity);
- Further support the enhancement of EWS (e.g. cover more hazards, include additional quality control measures and innovative data sources) to ensure that information is less fragmented across EU and domestic EWS;
- Foster initiatives to support increased quality of DRM Summary Reports, resulting in enhanced comparability for the overview document of disaster risks in the EU;
- Enabling the identification of emerging technological innovation and fostering cooperation with industry;
- Introduce innovative methodologies/tools within the Training and Exercises Programme.

6. The European Commission should ensure clarity of the UCPM's role in third countries and disasters not conventionally in the field of civil protection

Operational recommendations

- Develop SOPs for situations where the UCPM is confronted with simultaneous RfA, so that third countries are aware of the functioning and capacity of the Mechanism;
 - Evaluate the feasibility, impact and benefits of revising the UCPM Decision to expand its mandate and resources, given the increasingly cross-sectoral nature of civil protection, and to develop the ERCC as a crisis hub within and outside the EU. The study should clarify the UCPM's interactions with other EU-level crisis management instruments, as well as its role as an international actor.
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7. DG ECHO should strengthen coherence and leverage untapped synergies between the UCPM and humanitarian aid efforts

Operational recommendations

- Increase knowledge and understanding of the roles, missions, and responsibilities of humanitarian aid actors among the civil protection community within UCPM preparedness activities. This could be carried out through additional training modules, increased joint training, tailored workshops, and the EoE Programme.
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8. The European Commission should raise awareness of the UCPM and disasters with relevant stakeholders and with the public

Operational recommendations

- Encourage systematic awareness-raising of the Knowledge Network and other less well-known UCPM activities during UCPM events (e.g. training, exercises, DRMKC conferences);
 - Improve communication of UCPM changes and initiatives to Member and Participating States;
 - Step up activities to raise public awareness of the UCPM's activities and civil protection matters (e.g. dedicated communication strategy, social media);
 - Consolidate information on the UCPM for key stakeholders in one main point of access, e.g. the Knowledge Network online platform.
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The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations - ECHO

ECHO Mission

The primary role of the Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) of the European Commission is to manage and coordinate the European Union's emergency response to conflicts, natural and man-made disasters. It does so both through the delivery of humanitarian aid and through the coordination and facilitation of in-kind assistance, specialist capacities, expertise and intervention teams using the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)

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