

Special Report

Union Civil Protection Mechanism: the coordination of responses to disasters outside the EU has been broadly effective



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Special Report**Union Civil Protection
Mechanism: the
coordination of responses
to disasters outside the EU
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(pursuant to Article 287(4), second subparagraph, TFEU)

The ECA's special reports set out the results of its performance and compliance audits of specific budgetary areas or management topics. The ECA selects and designs these audit tasks to be of maximum impact by considering the risks to performance or compliance, the level of income or spending involved, forthcoming developments and political and public interest.

This performance audit was produced by Chamber III – headed by ECA Member Karel Pinxten - which specialises in external action, security and justice spending areas. The audit was led by ECA Member Hans Gustaf Wessberg, supported by Peter Eklund, Head of private office, Emmanuel-Douglas Hellinakis, Attaché of private office; Sabine Hiernaux-Fritsch, Principal Manager; Michiel Sweerts, Head of Task; Mirko Iaconisi, Kristina Maksinen and Dirk Neumeister, Auditors.



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Abbreviations and acronyms

CECIS: Common Emergency Communication and Information System

DG DEVCO: Directorate General Development and Cooperation

DG NEAR: Directorate General Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

DG SANTE: Directorate General Health and Food Safety

ECDC: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

ECHO: Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

EEAS: European External Action Service

ERCC: Emergency Response Coordination Centre

EUCP: EU Civil Protection Coordination and Assessment (team)

EUD: European Union delegation

EUFOR: European Union Force

FPI: Service for Foreign Policy Instruments

GOARN: Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network

HSC: Health Security Committee

MSF: Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders)

OCHA: Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

OSOCC: On-site Operations Coordination Centre

UCPM: Union Civil Protection Mechanism

UNDAC: United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination

WFP: World Food Programme

WHO: World Health Organisation

I Disasters can strike anywhere, anytime. The human, environmental and economic impact of disasters, whether natural or man made, can be considerable. When a disaster occurs, the reaction must be swift. Sound disaster management saves lives, and effective coordination among different responders is critical to the successful preparation for and response to disasters.

II The European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) was established to promote swift and effective operational cooperation between national civil protection services. It has two main objectives. Firstly, it aims to strengthen the cooperation between the Union and the UCPM's Participating States (Member States plus six non-EU countries). Secondly, it aims to facilitate coordination in the field of civil protection in order to improve the effectiveness of systems for preventing, preparing for and responding to disasters.

III The mechanism is managed by the European Commission. We examined whether the Commission had been effective in facilitating the coordination of the responses to disasters outside the Union through the UCPM. We did so by looking at the activations of the UCPM in response to three recent international disasters: the floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014); the Ebola virus outbreak in west Africa (2014–2016); and the Nepal earthquake (2015).

IV We conclude that the Commission has been broadly effective in facilitating the coordination of the responses to disasters outside the Union since the beginning of 2014.

V For each of the three disasters we examined, activation of the UCPM was timely, and the EU civil protection teams (EUCP teams) facilitated coordination on the ground with the Participating States' teams. The Commission's facilitation of coordination is strengthened through the widespread dissemination of information products. The coordination among Commission departments, as well as with other EU and non-EU bodies, was inclusive. The Commission also respected the UN's overall lead, and took steps to ensure a smooth transition into the recovery phase.

VI

Notwithstanding our overall conclusion, we found a number of areas for further improvement, including: possible time savings during the early phases of disaster response, CECIS (the Commission's communication and information platform), on-the-ground coordination and synergies, the Commission's and ECDC's financial and administrative arrangements for the large-scale deployment of epidemiologists through the UCPM, and UCPM performance reporting.

VII

We therefore recommend that the Commission:

- (a) identify ways to gain additional time during the pre-alert phase and during the selection and deployment of EUCP teams;
- (b) develop CECIS's features to improve the overview of assistance provided and requested, to allow for a better follow-up of priorities and to enhance user-friendliness;
- (c) strengthen on-the-ground coordination through improving the EUCP teams' reporting, exploiting the presence of ECHO Field Network experts and further involving EU delegations;
- (d) assess, together with the ECDC, potential changes needed to strengthen arrangements for the deployment of ECDC experts outside the Union through the UCPM;
- (e) improve reporting by automating the production of statistics and indicators, thereby strengthening accountability.

Background

01

Disasters can strike anywhere, anytime. The human, environmental and economic impact of disasters, whether natural or man made, can be considerable. According to one estimate, between 1994 and 2013 there were 6 873 natural disasters worldwide, which claimed 1.35 million lives — or about 68 000 on average annually¹. A UN estimate puts the economic loss resulting from disasters in the period 2005 to 2015 at 1.3 trillion US dollars².

02

When a disaster occurs, individuals, communities, governments and international organisations and donors must act very quickly. Sound disaster management³ saves lives, and effective coordination among different responders is critical to the successful preparation for and response to crises and disasters.

Legal framework

03

The EU's powers in the area of civil protection are enshrined in Article 196 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which states that Union action should aim to promote swift, effective operational cooperation within the Union between national civil protection services, as well as consistency in international civil protection work.

04

The Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) was first established in 2001. The current legal framework was laid down by Decision No 1313/2013, which applies since 1 January 2014 (hereinafter referred to as 'the Decision')⁴. The mechanism has two main objectives. Firstly, it aims to strengthen the cooperation between the Union and the Participating States⁵. Secondly, it aims to facilitate coordination in the field of civil protection in order to improve the effectiveness of systems for preventing, preparing for and responding to natural and man-made disasters.

- 1 Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, *The human cost of natural disasters 2015: A global perspective*, 2015.
- 2 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 estimates.
- 3 Defined by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as the organisation and management of resources and responsibilities for dealing with all humanitarian and civil protection aspects of emergencies, in particular resilience (mitigation, prevention and preparedness), response (relief and early recovery) and recovery (rehabilitation and reconstruction) in order to lessen the impact of disasters.
- 4 Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism (OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 924).
- 5 All EU Member States plus Norway, Iceland, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey. These are referred to by the Commission as 'Participating States', and this term shall be used throughout the rest of this report.

Union Civil Protection Mechanism

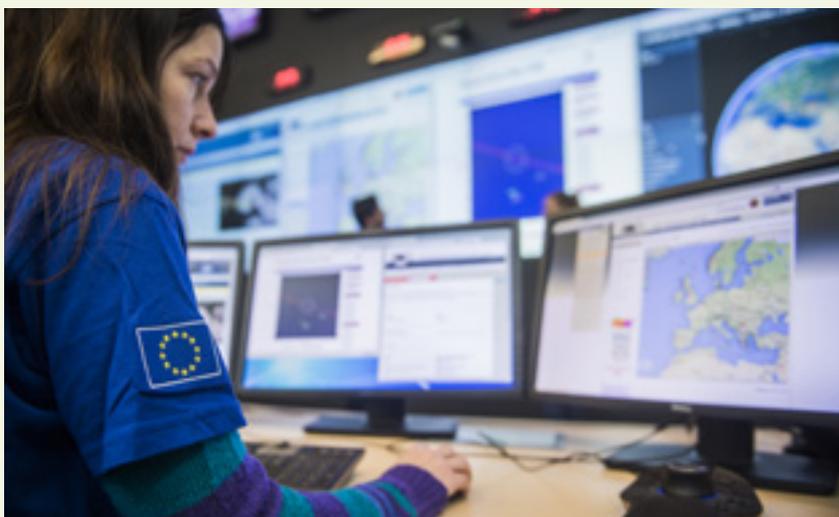
05

The UCPM falls under the responsibility of the European Commission's Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO). At its core is the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC). The ERCC is operational around the clock; it has a 24/7 situation room. The ERCC's key operational roles include: acting as a Commission and EU crisis monitoring and coordination platform; operating as a communication hub between Participating States, the affected state and the deployed field experts; developing and disseminating information products; and facilitating cooperation between civil protection and humanitarian aid operations. These functions are supported by a web-based alert and notification application known as CECIS (Common Emergency Communication and Information System)⁶.

- 6 The Commission's responsibility for the management of CECIS is set out in Article 8 of the Decision.
- 7 The impact assessment accompanying the legislative proposal for the Decision to establish the UCPM (Commission Staff Working Paper — Impact assessment— 2011 review of the civil protection regulatory framework accompanying the document Decision of the European Parliament and the Council on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism and on establishing a Civil Protection Financial Instrument for the period 2014-2020, SEC(2011) 1632 final, 20.12.2011) identified a number of shortcomings in EU disaster response capacity that the new legislation was designed to address.

Picture 1

The Emergency Response Coordination Centre



© EU/ECHO/Ezequiel Scagnetti, 2015.

06

The ERCC is supplemented by the European Emergency Response Capacity: a 'voluntary pool' of resources for a responding to disasters which have been pre-committed by the Participating States and are on standby only to be used when called upon by the Commission. The voluntary pool is one of a number of innovations introduced in the new Decision to address weaknesses in the previous mechanism⁷. In particular, the pool aims to help achieve the following objectives: to shift from a reactive and an ad hoc coordination to a pre-planned, prearranged and predictable system; and to identify and fill critical gaps in disaster response capacity in a cost-effective way. The voluntary pool is explained in **Box 1**.

Box 1

The voluntary pool explained

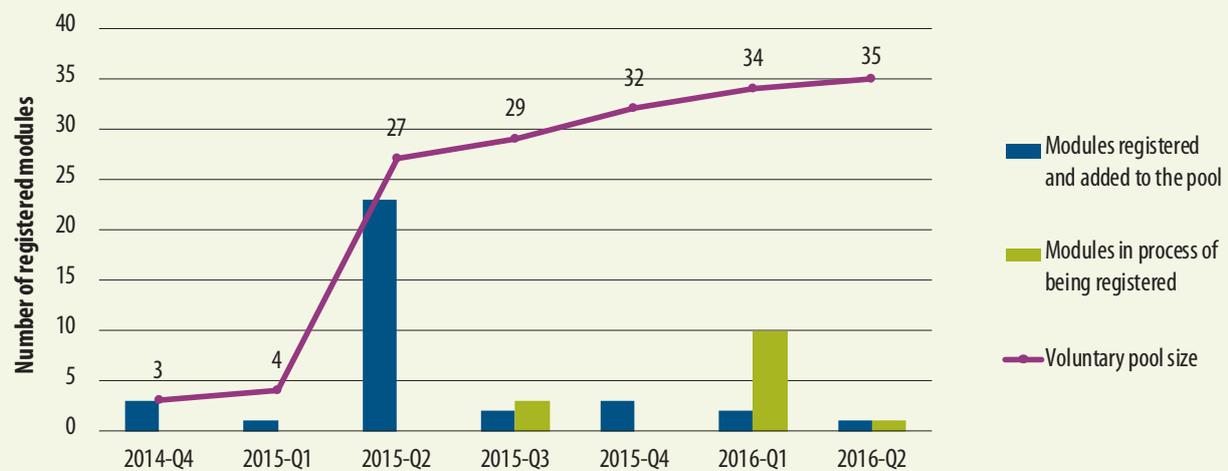
The European Emergency Response Capacity (or 'voluntary pool') brings together a range of relief teams, experts and equipment from a number of EU countries. These assets are kept on standby and made available as soon as needed for EU civil protection missions all over the world.

Since its launch in October 2014, 10 countries have committed their response resources, or 'capacities', to the pool. Thirty-five response units (i.e. modules) have been registered; these include, for example, 'urban search and rescue' teams, specialised medical air evacuation resources, water purification equipment, high-capacity pumping units and forest fire-fighting teams. Further Member State resources are currently being registered.

The countries participating in the pool can benefit from EU financial support to upgrade the offered national response assets, to pay for certification and training costs and to cover up to 85 % of the costs related to the transport of teams and assets to disaster areas.

Evolution of the voluntary pool

(Only registered modules — as at 20 June 2016)



Source: European Commission; ECA analysis.

Introduction

07

The UCPM can be activated through requests for assistance from affected countries or from the UN⁸. It can also be activated at the request of an EU Member State for support in providing consular assistance to EU citizens affected by disasters outside the Union.

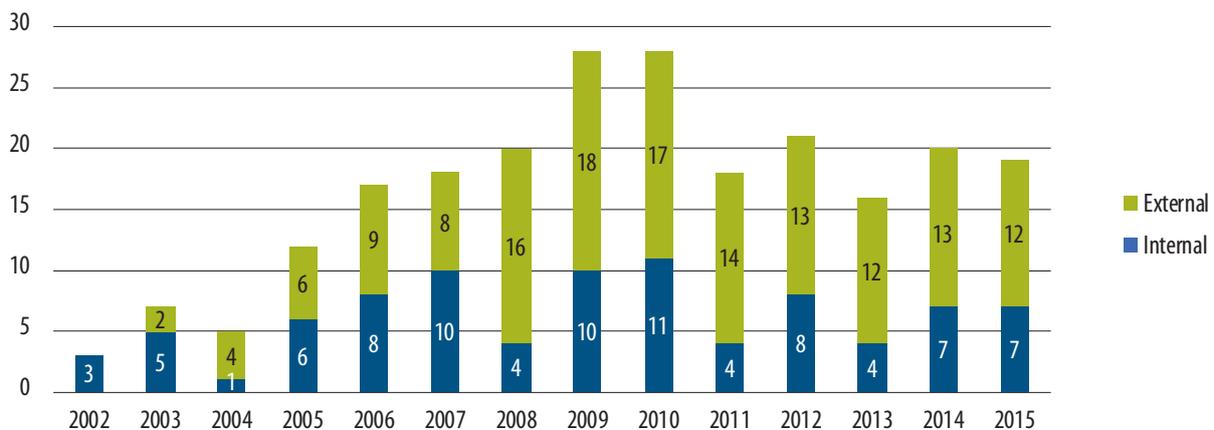
08

Prevention, preparedness and response activities address (potential) disasters inside the EU, although the mechanism can also be activated to respond to disasters outside the Union. In fact, of the 224 requests for assistance made in the 2002-2015 period, 63 % related to disasters outside the EU, as illustrated in **Figure 1**. The way the UCPM works is illustrated in **Annex I**.

8 UN organisations and certain other designated international organisations — the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) — have also been able to request assistance since 2014.

Figure 1

Requests for assistance through the UCPM (inside and outside the EU)



Source: European Commission.

09

The Participating States retain primary responsibility for civil protection and determine the level of assistance to commit to any disaster response — and how much of that will be provided through the UCPM. The Commission does not command or have control over the Participating States' teams, modules or other assets, which are deployed on a voluntary basis. Rather, the EU's role is to support the Participating States in strengthening disaster prevention, preparedness and response through the facilitation of cooperation and coordination. For an overview of the relationships within the UCPM, see **Annex II**.

Financing the UCPM

10

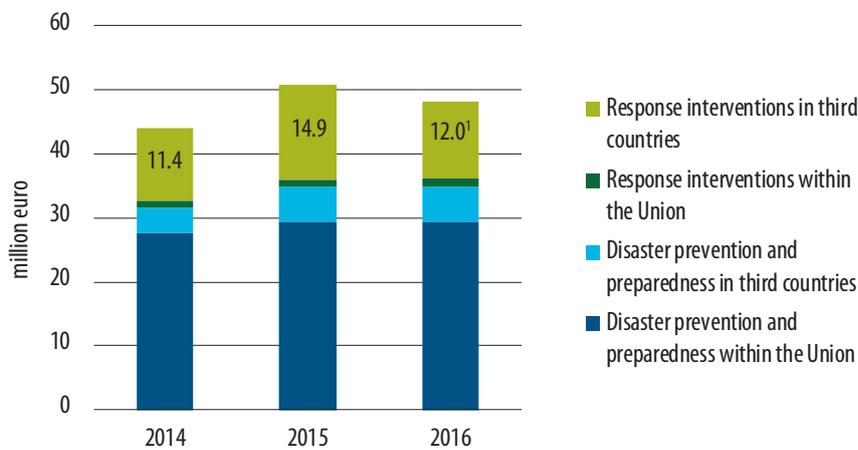
The annual budget appropriations for the 2014-2016 period for the UCPM are shown in **Figure 2**. Around 50 million euro per year is allocated to the operation of the mechanism, of which about one third is dedicated to response interventions in third countries. This includes EU co-financing of operations to transport modules to affected countries. The costs of operating civil protection teams and assets are borne by the Participating States.

11

The Commission will carry out an interim evaluation on the implementation of the Decision in 2017.

Figure 2

Implementation of UCPM budget 2014–2016



¹ 2016: budgeted amounts.

Source: European Commission; ECA analysis.

12

The audit aimed to assess whether the Commission had been effective in facilitating the coordination of the responses to disasters outside the Union since the establishment of the UCPM in 2014. In particular, this included the facilitation of coordination with Participating States, other EU institutions and agencies, the UN, the affected country and other relevant actors. We looked at how this coordination was implemented within existing structures and processes and examined the collection, dissemination and exchange of information with all of the aforementioned stakeholders.

13

The audit criteria were established on the basis of the provisions of the Decision (see paragraph 4). The audit scope did not include prevention and preparedness activities, the effectiveness of the interventions themselves or the design of the mechanism.

14

Three international disasters where the UCPM had been activated were selected for detailed examination⁹. These were selected on the basis of a range of criteria, including the type and scale of disaster, the role of the UCPM, the size of the EU response and the geographical spread. The disasters covered were the floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina (May 2014), the Ebola virus disease outbreak in west Africa (March 2014-January 2016) and the Nepal earthquake (25 April 2015). For a detailed overview of the disasters examined, see **Annex III**.

15

The audit work was carried out between December 2015 and May 2016. We met representatives of the European Commission¹⁰, the European External Action Service (EEAS) — including the EU Delegation (EUD) to the UN in Geneva — and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC). In addition, we also met with representatives of the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Health Organisation (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF). A field visit was carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where we met with the EUD/EU Special Representative's office, the European Union Force (EUFOR), the UN Development Programme, representatives of the authorities at state, entity, cantonal and municipal level involved in the flood response and the Red Cross of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

9 In the 2014-2015 period there were 25 requests for assistance outside the Union. The three disasters selected were among the largest responses requiring substantial coordination.

10 Representatives came from the Directorates-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), Health and Food Safety (SANTE), International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) and Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR).

16

Our work was primarily based on a review of the documents provided by the European Commission and EEAS. The auditors had access to CECIS. We collected users' perceptions of the mechanism and the responses to the three crises through a questionnaire sent to and answered by 11 Participating States. We also attended, in October 2015, the Commission's conference in Luxembourg on lessons learned from the Ebola outbreak and an information session on medical evacuations (or 'medevac') preparation by the Luxembourg Air Rescue services in February 2016.

The Commission made use of the coordination structures in place but some tools could have been exploited further

The Commission activated the mechanism for responding to emergencies on a timely basis but could have gained additional time for mobilising resources through better use of the pre-alert phase

17

When the Commission receives a request for assistance, it must notify the Participating States to that effect as soon as possible¹¹. In all three disasters, the Commission posted the request in a timely manner, thereby fulfilling its obligation to notify the Participating States without delay.

18

The formal start of a coordinated EU disaster response begins with activation of the mechanism upon receipt of a request for assistance. However, there may be signs that a disaster is imminent before any such request is submitted. The Commission can, but is not obliged to, open an emergency in CECIS ahead of activation in a so-called 'pre-alert mode'. This enables the Participating States to mobilise their assets ahead of a potential activation. The pre-alert mode was used in all three disasters. For the floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina (which can be considered a 'slow-onset' disaster), the magnitude of the threat was already clear when a state of natural disaster had been declared locally. However, the pre-alert mode was activated 1 day later, only 4 hours ahead of official activation. Prompter pre-alert activation could have bought additional time for mobilising resources.

19

The Commission kept no written log of any informal contacts made with Participating States having close ties to and a good knowledge of the affected country. Such a log would allow for follow-up on previous activations, which could help build a systematic approach, saving valuable time at the activation stage as well as ensuring good coverage of Participating States that are in a good position to assist an affected country.

11 Article 16(3)(a)(i) of the Decision.

EU civil protection teams facilitated on-the-ground coordination but their selection process and reporting from the field had shortcomings

20

When there is a need for EU coordination on the ground after Participating States’ offers of assistance are accepted by the requesting party, the Commission should put together an EU civil protection coordination and assessment team (EUCP team) for immediate deployment to the affected country¹². The aim of this team is to coordinate the work of the different Participating States teams and modules on the ground¹³, to provide technical advice and to facilitate coordination with the affected country. As illustrated in *Annex I*, the teams are selected by the Commission following nominations of experts by the Participating States, and each team is accompanied by a Liaison Officer deployed by the Commission.

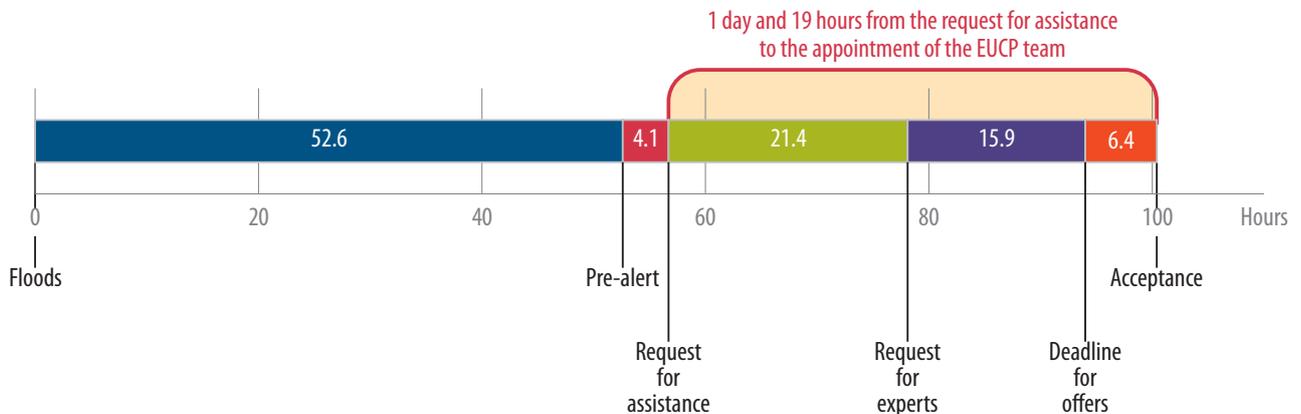
21

The deployment of EUCP teams is not dependent upon the approval of the requesting/affected country for disasters outside the Union. The ERCC is therefore not prohibited from sending Participating States requests for nominations as soon as a request for assistance has been received. In the cases of Nepal and Bosnia and Herzegovina, there were early indications that the disasters were major and that, as a consequence, EU coordination would most likely be needed. Nevertheless, in both disasters, the time which elapsed from the receipt of the official request for assistance to the request in CECIS for nominations for the first team was 21.4 hours for Bosnia and Herzegovina and 22.8 hours for Nepal, as shown in *Figure 3* and *Figure 4*.

12 Article 16(3)(a)(ii) of the Decision.

13 COM(2010) 600 final of 26 October 2010, ‘Towards a stronger European disaster response: the role of civil protection and humanitarian assistance’. Modules can consist of either civil protection assets or human resources, or a combination of both.

Figure 3 Timeline for selection of EUCP experts — Bosnia and Herzegovina



Source: European Court of Auditors.

Figure 4

Timeline for selection of EUCP experts — Nepal



Source: European Court of Auditors.

22

Requests for nominations of experts are sent through CECIS with a deadline that is set on a case-by-case basis. The length of the deadline varied: in Bosnia and Herzegovina it was set at 15.9 hours (a slow-onset disaster) after the request for nominations, while the equivalent for Nepal was 21.8 hours (a sudden-onset disaster). The auditors found no evidence of internal standards in this regard.

23

After the deadline for nominations, the selection of experts and the staffing of the team took an additional 5-6 hours. While the legislation sets high-level criteria for expert selection, the Court found that no predefined approach was used to determine which types of experts were needed and how many of each type. Moreover, we found no evidence of predefined criteria for selecting each type of expert in the form of checklists to be used during the selection process. The absence of clear selection criteria was acknowledged in an evaluation carried out in December 2014¹⁴, which recommended the use of ‘expert profiles for CP team selection’.

24

A predefined, standard composition of the team based on type of disaster and region could save the Commission valuable time before it sends out the initial request for nominations. For the subsequent selection from among the nominated candidates, a clear checklist could accelerate the process, even during times of low capacity at the ERCC (e.g. night shifts, weekends). Such a process could in addition allow for shortlists of potential team members to be drawn up ahead of the final deadline for nominations.

14 ICF International, *Ex-post evaluation of Civil Protection Financial Instrument and Community Civil Protection Mechanism (recast) 2007-2013 — Final report*, 16 December 2014.

Observations

25

The performance of individual experts is not evaluated. While the evaluation of Participating States' nominated experts can be a sensitive matter, adopting a structured approach to evaluating and documenting their performance could potentially save time during the selection procedure. An example of such a process can be found in the EU-funded¹⁵ election observation missions (EOM), where peer-to-peer evaluations are routinely carried out for each observer sent by the Member States in order 'to keep record of their professional performance and individual behaviour during any EU EOM in order to further facilitate and improve the selection process conducted by Member States and the EC'¹⁶.

26

The Commission should support common needs assessments through the presence of EUCP experts, and/or provide advice on the assistance required in view of the needs¹⁷. When needs are expressed by the requester for assistance (affected state or UN body), the ERCC ensures that these are shared with all Participating States via CECIS. There is also clear evidence to show that EUCP team members have participated in various assessment exercises on the ground. Where EUCP team members are integrated into UN OCHA's UNDAC teams, as was the case in Nepal, common assessments are typically produced through the UN. An unintended consequence of this integration, however, is that it limits the possibility of identifying the EU's individual contribution to these assessments (see also paragraphs 41 to 45).

- 15 European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights.
- 16 *Guidelines for EU election observer evaluation* (FPI4), p. 1, first paragraph.
- 17 Article 16(3)(a)(ii) and (v) and Article 16(3)(b).

Picture 2

EU experts visit Kathmandu and the hospital after the earthquake



© EU/ECHO/Pierre Prakash, 2015.

Observations

27

Even where EU coordination was not fully integrated with UN coordination, as was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we found only limited evidence of the causal link between needs assessments carried out on the ground by EUCP team members and the specific lists of needs being relayed to the Participating States. The quality of reporting varied between EUCP teams but generally focused on information sharing and planned and completed activities. Daily reports lacked dedicated sections for the identification and concrete follow-up of needs.

Although the voluntary pool was still of limited use at the time of the crises examined, the Commission played an active role in extending its scope

The voluntary pool was of limited use at the time of the crises examined

28

The Commission's duties towards the Participating States include making timely recommendations based on the needs on the ground and asking the Participating States to deploy specific resources¹⁸. If it is to make pertinent deployment recommendations, the Commission needs to be aware of the resources that are available for immediate deployment.

29

At the time of the examined disasters, only a very limited number of assets had been registered in the voluntary pool. As a result, the Commission was generally not in a position to make deployment recommendations or ask Participating States to deploy capacities from the voluntary pool.

30

In October 2015, 1 year after the launch of the voluntary pool, still only a handful of modules had been registered in the pool. According to the Participating States questioned, the main reason for the slow development of the pool was the heavy administrative burden involved in registering and certifying response units/modules, which in some cases may also entail additional administrative arrangements at the national level.

18 Article 16(3)(b) of the Decision.

The Commission played an active role in extending the capacities of the voluntary pool

31

The need for a medical evacuation service for medical staff and humanitarian aid workers in the field was highlighted by several actors as the Ebola outbreak developed. The legal framework¹⁹ provided only for a more general service for 'medical aerial evacuation of disaster victims'²⁰; it did not anticipate a service specifically adapted to evacuate (potentially) infected medical staff or humanitarian aid workers. The Commission nevertheless took an active role, pushing for a flexible approach and further capacities to be included in the voluntary pool. While the WHO was the only party authorised to request medical evacuations (or 'medevac'), the ERCC played an important role, acting as a clearing house, answering any questions coming from the stakeholders at the various stages of the medevac process (WHO, Participating States, UN agencies, NGOs, etc.), and deploying the planes from the voluntary pool. The coordination and collaboration needed to develop these capacities are described further in paragraph 66.

32

As a direct response to the lack of medical staff during the Ebola outbreak, the Commission established the EU Medical Corps as a new component within the voluntary pool to mobilise medical and public health experts and teams for preparedness or response operations inside or outside the EU²¹.

33

The ECDC made an important contribution to the EU's response to the Ebola outbreak through its 'rapid risk assessments' and coordinating the deployment of the ECDC's and Member States' epidemiological experts to the affected region (although these mostly happened after the peak of cases, as shown in **Annex IV**). The ECDC is not prevented by its founding regulation²² from deploying epidemiologists to countries outside the EU. The existing financial and administrative arrangements within the ECDC as well as between the Commission and the ECDC, however, do not lend themselves well to large-scale deployments outside the EU, in particular for through the UCPM. The ECDC is not equipped in terms of core staff and processes to support sustainable deployments and, because its mandate is primarily focused on threats potentially affecting the EU, dedicated budgetary resources have not been made available to support such operations outside the Union. In the absence of a dedicated EU mechanism to deploy epidemiologists, experts were deployed through the WHO's Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network. Under the terms of reference of these deployments, however, information restrictions applied and experts could not report directly to the ECDC and to the Commission.

- 19 Commission Implementing Decision 2014/762/EU of 16 October 2014 laying down rules for the implementation of Decision No 1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism and repealing Commission Decisions 2004/277/EC, Euratom and 2007/606/EC, Euratom (OJ L 320, 6.11.2014, p. 1).
- 20 Annex II, point 10 of the Implementing Decision.
- 21 This component has been operational since the beginning of 2016, and in May 2016 a team including ECDC epidemiologists was mobilised to respond to the yellow fever outbreak in Africa.
- 22 Regulation (EC) No 851/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 establishing a European centre for disease prevention and control (OJ L 142, 30.4.2004, p. 1).

Observations

EU civil protection teams benefited from substantial support from the EU delegations

34

The EUD in the affected country has an obligation to provide logistical support to the EUCP teams which, in turn, should liaise with the EUD²³. In all the crises examined, the EUDs provided — within the capacities available — substantial support in terms of logistics, security briefings, facilitating meetings with local authorities, advice and interpretation with local staff²⁴.

35

The auditors found evidence of effective collaboration between the EUCP experts and the EUDs. EUCP teams regularly shared information with the EUD staff. The EUCP teams used the EUDs' premises as the base for their operations, where they held regular coordination meetings.

36

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the national authorities requested the common security and defence policy mission 'EUFOR Althea' to provide first response support. The Commission involved EUFOR in the ERCC-organised coordination meetings from the outset, enabling EUFOR to provide information on the action it had undertaken. Coordination on the ground between the EUCP team and EUFOR was primarily facilitated by the EUD/EU Special Representative's office, which also coordinated the activities of the various EU actors and the Member States' missions. In this context, the EUCP team received direct assistance from EUFOR through the provision of a helicopter, which was then used to conduct an aerial assessment of the situation and a field visit.

37

Levels of awareness of what capacities the UCPM could offer or how affected countries should request its assistance varied across the EUDs in the affected countries. There are no dedicated 'civil protection focal points' in the EUDs. While the EUD to Bosnia and Herzegovina had previous experience in triggering the mechanism, the EUDs in the countries affected by the Ebola outbreak had limited awareness of the possibilities offered by the UCPM at the outset of the crisis, despite the note sent by ECHO in 2012²⁵. At a Health Security Committee meeting in August 2014, ECHO informed Member States that it had taken the initiative of contacting the affected countries; nevertheless, we were unable to obtain direct evidence of proactive steps taken by the Commission, either directly or through the EEAS, to encourage the affected countries to request activation.

23 Article 16(5) of the Decision.

24 In Nepal, the head of the EU delegation signalled the inadequate level of preparedness of the EUD itself in the event of a worst-case scenario 2 months prior to the earthquake striking. While the scale of the disaster was very significant, it was less severe than foreseen in this worst-case scenario, and therefore the EUD was able to provide the necessary support to the EUCP team.

25 The Commission sent notes to the heads of EU delegations in 2012 and at the end of 2014 explaining the workings of the UCPM and how affected countries could request assistance.

The Commission made use of the existing ECHO Field Network, but greater civil protection synergies could be sought

38

Following an activation, the Commission should seek synergies between the UCPM and other EU instruments, in particular with EU humanitarian aid²⁶. The implementing rules of the Commission's Decision do not explicitly address synergies and the Commission has not identified the practical steps involved in achieving them. When analysing the three disasters, we identified efforts to coordinate and link with other instruments, especially with humanitarian and development aid, although this was mainly done on an ad hoc basis.

39

In all three cases examined, ECHO Field Network experts were deployed on the ground at the same time as the EUCP teams and modules, providing information to the ERCC and attending coordination meetings. In this way, the Commission made good use of the existing network in its overall response.

40

Nevertheless, potential synergies have not been fully exploited between the civil protection and humanitarian assistance areas. The ECHO Field Network's staff are experts in the UN humanitarian aid system but are typically not trained in matters of civil protection. In its lessons-learned report on Nepal, the Commission acknowledged that 'Civil protection could make more/quicker use of the humanitarian aid partner network for assessments'.

The Commission respected UN OCHA's leading role and adopted flexible coordination structures in coherence with the overall UN set-up

41

According to the legal framework, the Commission's coordination activities should be fully integrated into UN OCHA's overall coordination efforts and respect UN OCHA's leading role²⁷. Although 'full integration' is not further defined, the draft operational guidelines for field cooperation between EUCP and UNDAC teams cite three areas where 'full integration is possible and desirable': assessment, coordination and information management²⁸.

26 Article 16(11) of the Decision.

27 Article 16(2) of the Decision. The obligation with regard to integrating the coordination only applies to UN OCHA, not to other UN organisations.

28 Draft operational guidelines for field cooperation between EU civil protection and UNDAC teams: Civil Protection Committee, information exchange on ongoing activities, 21-22 October 2009.

Observations

42

In practice, the degree of integration in the UN system falls across a broad spectrum. There might be joint EU/UNDAC assessment missions, EUCP teams integrated into the UNDAC-established On-site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC), parallel EU and UNDAC teams or no UNDAC team at all. There is no 'one size fits all' approach. How well EUCP teams will fit into the overall coordination structure is very context specific: the greater the EU contribution to rescue operations, the greater the need for a strong EU coordination role.

43

This is illustrated by the very different coordination structures with the UN in place for the three examined disasters. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, due to the absence of a UNDAC team, the UN resident coordinator and the EU head of delegation/EUSR agreed informally to assign to the EUCP team the responsibility for coordinating incoming civil protection assistance. At the same time, the EU respected the UN's lead on humanitarian aid coordination through the 'cluster system'²⁹ established by the UN Development Programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In Nepal, the EUCP teams were integrated into the UN OSOCC structure and the cluster system. During the Ebola outbreak, EU experts were deployed to the UNDAC teams as associated members. While these cases differed, the Court found that, in all three cases, the Commission respected the UN's lead.

44

The integration of EUCP experts into the UN OSOCC structure in Nepal made it difficult for us to clearly and separately identify the EU contribution to the overall coordination efforts and its added value. Although the EUCP team's activity reports highlighted regular contact with the modules deployed via the UCPM and provided first-hand information for the ERCC and the Participating States, the modules were mainly coordinated through the UN system (e.g. the allocation of areas of operation or concrete tasks).

45

While liaison officers and EUCP experts from regional mechanisms like the UCPM can be deployed to UN OSOCCs, their integration 'does not provide a sufficient basis for regional organisations to facilitate operational coordination for their members'³⁰. Therefore, the Commission has been tasked by the UN in 2016 with defining more precisely a specific role for regional coordination mechanisms within the OSOCCs' operations. This is intended to improve operational coordination among their own members, allowing for more common situational analyses and needs assessments³¹.

29 Clusters are groups of humanitarian organisations, both UN and non-UN, in each of the main sectors of humanitarian action, e.g. water or health. They are created when clear humanitarian needs exist within a sector, when there are numerous actors within sectors and when national authorities need coordination support.

30 ECHO, 2016, 'A new role for regional coordination mechanisms in the framework of the OSOCC', discussion paper for the Humanitarian Networks and Partnership Week, Geneva 2-5 February.

31 Ibid.

46

Cooperation is largely based on a high level of trust, and so personal relationships play an important role. The Commission has acknowledged, however, the need to formalise its relationships with UN OCHA and other UN agencies to strengthen cooperation and coordination in disaster preparedness and response. Since 2015 it has signed formal cooperation agreements with UN OCHA and the WFP, and further agreements with the WHO and the IOM are planned.

The Commission took steps towards ensuring a smooth transition into the recovery phase

47

Towards the end of a disaster, in the closing phase of the civil protection response, the Commission has an obligation to facilitate a smooth handover among all relevant actors³². To this end, handover meetings took place for all three disasters, aimed at ensuring a smooth transition to humanitarian aid/further investment (see **Box 2**).

48

For all three disasters, post-disaster needs assessments were carried out jointly by the UN, the World Bank and the European Commission. Following the floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ERCC actively participated in the selection of experts for the recovery needs assessment and carried out a related preparatory mission. ECHO also collaborated closely with DG NEAR ahead of the July 2014 international donor conference of the country¹.

32 Article 16(3)(e) of the Decision.

Box 2

Coordinating the transition into the recovery phase in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The case of the Austrian water purification module in the Posavina canton in Bosnia and Herzegovina can serve as an illustration of a thorough handover. As assistance was being phased out, the EUCP team collaborated with the local working group — in which local governments, water suppliers, international teams and several NGOs were represented — to agree on a strategy to provide drinking water until enough wells had been tested and, if necessary, cleaned. This resulted in the need for the Austrian team to stay for 2 months. Their large capacity made a phased withdrawal of the other teams possible and also ensured that the working group was connected to the national Unicef-led WASH³³ cluster.

33 Water, sanitation and hygiene.

While the Commission established a framework for collecting, disseminating and exchanging information, there is room for improvement on reporting

The Commission's CECIS communication platform is useful for information sharing, but further improvement is needed to enhance its impact

49

Information sharing lies at the heart of the UCPM and is instrumental in effective coordination. It is facilitated by the ERCC's key communication tool, CECIS. This provides a central platform for issuing updates on emergencies as they develop, distributing information products and keeping an overview of the assistance requested, offered, and accepted or rejected.

50

The assistance overview is a key feature of CECIS in responding to a disaster. Participating States have specifically expressed their appreciation of this feature. However, we found that there is room for improvement in both the presentation of the overviews and the efficiency of compiling them. For example, although the application offers a summary of requests and offers, it does not show the total accepted offers and outstanding needs per request, nor does it show a request's status. Requests that have already been met can be distinguished from those which are still waiting for offers, but this information can only be retrieved manually. This proves challenging where there is a high volume of requests. Such limitations make the summary complex to read and impair the ERCC's ability to provide Participating States with a central, real-time overview. Participating States have confirmed that this is a significant limitation.

51

Keeping track of all in-kind and financial contributions in a multifaceted crisis (like the Ebola outbreak), where civil protection assistance and humanitarian aid often overlap, is another challenge. The Commission has highlighted weaknesses in EDRIS³⁴, and outlined the immediate actions taken to mitigate these, in its Ebola lessons-learned report. In April 2016 the Commission enabled a real-time link between EDRIS and CECIS with the aim of providing a consolidated overview of both civil protection assistance and humanitarian aid. This feature was not available at the time of the audit, and so we were unable to assess its usefulness.

34 European Emergency Disaster Response Information System. EDRIS is a web-based information system used to identify EU humanitarian aid contributions. EDRIS is not part of the UCPM.

Observations

52

The lack of mobile access to CECIS constitutes an important limitation for deployed EUCP teams in the field. Having simplified, read-only access to the summary of requests and offers (see paragraph 50) could allow for a complete overview of the EU's accepted and pending offers, enabling the team to further facilitate coordination on the ground.

53

Messages exchanged between the ERCC and the Participating States — of which there may be hundreds during any given disaster — in the CECIS logbook can only be filtered with difficulty. Our analysis of the logbook highlighted that no distinction is made between operational messages and administrative communications³⁵, which may hinder the quick follow-up of important operational matters. A Commission internal audit on CECIS in 2012 underlined the underuse of the filtering system, especially by the Participating States, and recommended an awareness campaign targeting the ERCC duty officers and the Participating States. Despite such a campaign being undertaken, the situation remains largely unchanged.

54

The current procedure for introducing transport support requests is heavily manual and therefore time consuming for both the ERCC and the Participating States. This represents an unnecessary administrative burden, particularly in the context of crisis onset. Useful information concerning the shipment of the assistance (departure time, arrival time, etc.) remains locked in paper forms instead of being recorded in the CECIS database, making it unusable by the system in the production of reports and transport overviews.

Information products and maps were widely shared and there are indications that they were useful

55

The Commission should share assessments and analyses with all relevant partners³⁶. For all three disasters examined, we found sufficient evidence that the Commission had shared assessments and analyses with the Participating States by regularly publishing civil protection messages, situation reports and crisis flashes in CECIS.

35 For example, several types of communications coexist: important operational messages (such as requests for assistance or relevant logistical details), administrative communications (such as transport co-financing requests and grants), reports and meeting minutes.

36 Article 16(3)(a)(iii) of the Decision.

Observations

56

The Commission's Copernicus Emergency Management Service, which provides geospatial information derived from satellite remote sensing, was activated for all three disasters. The production of maps was coordinated with the UN's mapping service, Unosat³⁷, and the auditors found no evidence of duplicated efforts. The maps produced by Copernicus were available on the publicly accessible Copernicus website³⁸.

57

While plenty of maps were produced for each disaster examined, finding documented evidence of their relevance mid-response is by nature challenging. Nevertheless, the auditors found one instance where a Copernicus map contributed directly to the decision-making process during the floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina (see **Box 3**).

The Commission organised inclusive meetings which sought to promote information exchange with EU bodies and consistency in the delivery of assistance

58

The Commission is supposed to share its assessments and analyses not only with its civil protection partners but also with the EEAS, thus ensuring coherence between the civil protection operations and the Union's overall relations with the affected country³⁹. The Commission may also take any additional supporting or complementary action to ensure consistency in the delivery of assistance⁴⁰. For all three crises examined, ECHO organised interservice coordination meetings for all relevant DGs and EU agencies, and the EEAS⁴¹, making use of the ERCC as a central convening platform. We obtained evidence to suggest that these meetings proved to be inclusive and sought to mitigate the risk of overlap/duplication in the EU response.

- 37 We have evidence of a dialogue between Unosat and the ERCC, and they have access to each other's tools.
- 38 <http://emergency.copernicus.eu/mapping/>
- 39 Article 16(3)(a)(iii) and 16(4) of the Decision.
- 40 Article 16(8) of the Decision.
- 41 Bosnia and Herzegovina: DG NEAR and EUFOR; Ebola: DG DEVCO, FPI, DG SANTE, DG MOVE, DG RTD, ECDC, Eurocontrol; Nepal: DG DEVCO and FPI.

Box 3

Copernicus map contributed to improved decision-making in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In May 2014 the municipality of Odžak, a town located in the Posavina Canton in northern Bosnia and Herzegovina, was severely affected by the flooding of the river Sava. On 26 May 2014 the Danish team, based in Modriča, was ready to pump water in a particularly flooded part of Odžak. At a later stage, when the local pump station was re-established with the support of local engineers and Danish technical experts, the Danish and German teams jointly assessed the area, using maps provided by the EU's mapping service, Copernicus. The maps were provided by the EU OSOCC, based at Orašje Football Stadium. The maps were used to determine the depth of the mud and the status of the ground beneath. It was concluded that it was safe to simply dig deeper, letting the water sink into the ground, rather than selecting the more time-consuming option of pumping. The digging option also eliminated the need to relocate the water after pumping. Without such a map, the team would not have been able to assess the situation correctly and would most likely not have taken the risk of digging rather than pumping.

59

The Commission involved the EEAS (both the headquarters and the EUDs) from the outset of the analysed crises by including them in the coordination meetings and in a regular exchange of information. In fact, the ERCC was in contact with the EEAS even before each official UCPM activation. Member States did not request activation of the UCPM in order to obtain civil protection support for consular assistance in any of the disasters examined. In the case of Nepal, however, the EEAS did activate its Consular Online tool (CoOL) to share information with Member States and the ERCC; ECHO mainly provided the EEAS with flight information based on the overviews it had in CECIS⁴².

60

Coordination and collaboration among Commission departments generally worked well. DG DEVCO demonstrated flexibility in providing early additional humanitarian assistance to ECHO during the Ebola outbreak through the reallocation of funding from the EDF's B-Reserve, as well as the rapid deployment of its mobile CBRN laboratories. Moreover, ECHO coordinated closely with DG DEVCO for the High-Level Conference in March 2015, during the Ebola outbreak.

By acting as a forum for information exchange, the Ebola Task Force added value to the response, but should have been established sooner

61

The Ebola outbreak in west Africa was an atypical disaster from the point of view of the UCPM. The Commission and EU agencies reacted quickly to the initial reports of the outbreak: the ECDC circulated its first rapid risk assessment on the subject in March 2014; the European Mobile Laboratory was deployed to the region in April; the outbreak was discussed several times by the Health and Security Committees (HSCs) between April and August 2014; and funding was quickly mobilised for some key ECHO partners. The initial response, however, lacked a strategic approach and it was not decided who would be in charge. After the escalation of the crisis and the declaration of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the WHO on 8 August 2014, coordination meetings were organised, although these were often not results oriented and so lacked clear action and follow-up points.

⁴² In 2013, a joint ECHO–EEAS exploratory mission to Nepal recommended a joint EU preparedness plan for strengthening coordination on consular issues (and this recommendation was reiterated in a follow-up mission in 2014). While such a proactive, specific mission is an example of good practice, the preparedness plan was never devised.

62

An Ebola Task Force (ETF) was established in October, about 6 weeks after the European Council called on 30 August 2014 for increased coordination and the adoption of a comprehensive response framework (CRF). The CRF was developed throughout September and underwent numerous revisions over the following weeks. All of this occurred several months after the initial outbreak. At the end of October, the Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management was appointed the EU Ebola Coordinator by the European Council to provide political coordination.

63

The Coordinator played an important role in drawing Member States' attention to critical actions and the support needed to scale up the response (for example, organising a joint visit to west Africa in October 2014, as well as high-level meetings and the March 2015 Brussels Donor Conference). As can be seen in **Annex V**, these developments — while necessary — came after the number of cases had already peaked.

64

The establishment of the ETF — which was hosted by the ERCC — was welcomed by all stakeholders as an important step in strengthening the coordination and development of the EU's response. Its terms of reference were operational in nature, and included ensuring complementarity and identifying synergies. Its approach was inclusive: in addition to other Commission services, the EEAS, EU agencies, the Council Secretariat and Member States (including some national Ebola coordinators), and representatives of the WHO, OCHA, WFP, Unicef, IHP⁴³ and several NGOs acting on the front line of the response, attended the ETF meetings. According to numerous stakeholders, the real-time situation updates communicated by the EUDs and the ECHO Field Network representatives was of particular value. We found that the ETF served primarily as an information exchange platform to promote coordination, rather than as a decision-making body.

65

Despite some weaknesses in information management (information overload; distribution lists not always being up to date), the ETF was able to contribute to ensuring greater coordination and a more consistent delivery of response. Three examples illustrate this:

- (a) It emerged during discussions in the ETF that two separate EEAS and Commission (ECHO, DG DEVCO, DG SANCO and FPI) field missions were being organised for the end of October 2014. Steps were taken to mitigate the risk of overlap and duplication by producing a joint mission report.

43 The International Humanitarian Partnership (IHP) is a network between seven European emergency management agencies. The member countries of the IHP are also UCPM Participating States, but they nevertheless gave a presentation to the ETF on their activities as IHP members.

- (b) DG SANTE was able to channel the information shared in the Task Force towards the HSC, and to help plan and develop the DG SANTE and ECHO-organised workshops (on, for example, safety and control issues and the European Medical Corps).
- (c) ECDC staff and epidemiologists from ECDC fellowship programmes were deployed through the WHO's Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) to support epidemiological investigations at the district level, including case finding and contact tracing. While the cooperation between the epidemiologists and the WHO was considered to have worked well on the whole, the ECDC reported to the ETF that the deployed experts had faced considerable logistical problems. ECHO subsequently launched a mission to identify ways of improving the support for the teams.

66

During the Ebola outbreak, the fact that there was no guarantee of a medevac for (potentially) infected international healthcare and humanitarian aid workers deterred some such individuals from accepting deployment to the region. The collaboration both within and without the ETF between ECHO, DG SANTE and the WHO to establish an EU medevac system represents an example of effective coordination, although this took a long time to develop considering the urgency and central importance of the need (see **Box 4**).

Box 4

The development of the EU medevac system was a complex and lengthy operation

The acute need for medical evacuations of humanitarian aid workers and healthcare workers was expressed by MSF and the United Nations in August and September 2014 respectively⁴⁴. ECHO worked closely with DG SANTE and the WHO to develop standard operating procedures for an EU medevac system, which were approved by the HSC on 14 October. In parallel, the Commission looked for means of transport (planes) in both the civil/commercial⁴⁵ and military domain⁴⁶. After the Commission was unable to get the Participating States to commit to making civil assets available for medical evacuation efforts, on 5 September 2014 ECHO formally asked the EEAS to activate its EU Movement and Planning Cell (EUMPC), with the aim of finding a solution involving use of military assets. Despite the close collaboration between ECHO and the EUMPC, Member States' willingness to commit military assets was very limited. The lack of previous experience in this area, the absence of ready-made technical solutions and the time required to adapt the assets and register them posed further considerable obstacles to timely delivery. Eventually the EU medevac system was completed when Luxembourg pledged two planes to the voluntary pool, and it became available from mid February 2015.

⁴⁴ The acute need for medical evacuation was expressed explicitly by MSF on 11 August 2014; the UN OCHA sent a request for medical evacuation capacities to the ERCC and NATO on 1 September 2014.

⁴⁵ Although Member States were able to carry out medical evacuations on a bilateral basis, and the Commission had a commercial option available, this was not considered sufficient.

⁴⁶ It can be activated through a formal request from ECHO when no civil alternatives can fulfil the needs in a given crisis (in principle, military solutions should always be the last resort).

The Commission does not make full use of the information at its disposal to report on both its own and the UCPM's overall performance

67

In ECHO's annual management plans and activity reports, the Commission has defined one indicator relating to the response phase of a disaster⁴⁷, more specifically to the timeliness of the response. However, the indicator covers elements outside the Commission's control⁴⁸. This makes accounting for its own performance difficult.

68

The UCPM's main communication tool, CECIS, does not capture performance data in an automated, structured way, making identifying performance data a manual, time-consuming exercise. Since the dataset that can be automatically exploited by the system is limited, CECIS cannot produce detailed reports or management information on the operational efficiency of the different steps of an emergency response — whether or not those steps are under the Commission's direct control. A number of Participating States said that they would like CECIS to generate more aggregated performance information.

69

The absence of quantitative performance statistics on, for example, timeliness or outstanding requests awaiting offers deprives the Commission and the Participating States of essential information to measure UCPM performance and its added value, which could help strengthen its continued acceptance by its stakeholders.

47 Result indicator 1: Average speed of interventions under the UCPM (from offer acceptance to deployment).

48 For example, resources made available by Participating States, or nominations of Participating States' experts.

Conclusions and recommendations

70

We conclude that the Commission has been broadly effective in facilitating the coordination of responses to disasters outside the Union since the beginning of 2014. Our overall assessment has been confirmed by all the Participating States that responded to our questionnaire. They expressed satisfaction with the role played by the Commission in facilitating coordination.

71

For each of the three disasters we examined, activation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) was timely (see paragraphs 17 to 19), and the EU civil protection teams (EUCP teams) facilitated coordination on the ground with Participating States' teams (see paragraphs 26 to 27). The Commission's facilitation of coordination is strengthened through the widespread dissemination of information products, which were considered useful (see paragraphs 55 to 57).

72

The Commission adopted an inclusive approach towards coordination amongst its own services, as well as with other EU and non-EU bodies (see paragraphs 34 to 37; and paragraphs 58 to 66). Although the degree to which EU coordination activities were integrated into the UN system varied between disasters, we conclude that the Commission respected the UN's overall lead (see paragraphs 41 to 46). The Commission's coordination role extended to the end phase of the responses, taking steps to ensure a smooth transition into the recovery phase (see paragraphs 47 to 48).

73

An important innovation of the legislation establishing the UCPM has been the development of the European Emergency Response Capacity (or 'voluntary pool'), which establishes pre-committed resources for response. The development of the voluntary pool has been slow, meaning that the Commission was not in a position to recommend the deployment of specific assets in its response to the disasters we examined. Nevertheless, the Commission played an important role in extending the scope of the pool when needed (see paragraphs 28 to 32).

74

Notwithstanding our overall conclusion, we found a number of areas for further improvement. The Commission could gain time during the pre-alert phase and during the selection and deployment of the EUCP teams (see paragraphs 20 to 25). A number of features in CECIS, the Commission's communication and information platform, could be further improved (see paragraphs 49 to 54). There is room for further enhancement of on-the-ground coordination, and more synergies could be sought between civil protection and humanitarian aid operations (see paragraphs 38 to 40). The Commission's and ECDC's financial and administrative arrangements did not lend themselves well to the large-scale deployment of epidemiologists through the UCPM during the Ebola crisis (see paragraph 33). Finally, the Commission could improve UCPM performance reporting (see paragraphs 67 to 69). We make five recommendations below to address these points.

Recommendation 1 — Gaining time in the critical early stages of a response

The Commission should:

- (a) make earlier use of the pre-alert phase in CECIS for slow-onset disasters— as soon as first indicators of impact and/or needs arise — to allow Participating States to mobilise resources ahead of UCPM activation;
- (b) following requests for assistance, send out requests for nominations of experts immediately if a substantial response from Participating States to a major disaster can be reasonably expected;
- (c) identify ways to speed up the selection and deployment of EUCP teams, and invite Participating States to develop, together with the Commission, peer-based expert performance evaluations as well as post-mission feedback sessions between the team and Commission headquarters;
- (d) develop a written log of any contact made with Participating States having close ties to the affected country, which may therefore be in a good position to assist.

Target implementation date: end of first half of 2017

Conclusions and recommendations

Recommendation 2 — Improving CECIS' features

In order to improve the overview of assistance provided and requested, to allow for a better follow-up of priorities and to enhance user-friendliness, the Commission should redesign a number of key features in CECIS, including:

- (a) automating the gap analyses of requests made versus requests fulfilled and introducing a sorting option;
- (b) providing EUCP teams in the field with a simplified, real-time version of the summary of requests and offers;
- (c) automating the workflow for transport support requests to enable a faster end-to-end process and the production of statistics and real-time overviews;
- (d) taking further steps to filter operational and administrative messages effectively and identifying measures to strengthen the usage of this feature.

Target implementation date:

**Agreement of requirements and action plan with stakeholders:
end of first half of 2017**

Tendering, implementation and testing: end of 2018

Recommendation 3 — Strengthening coordination and potential synergies on the ground

The Commission should:

- (a) enhance the EUCP teams' reporting from the field by requiring clearer descriptions of the needs assessments carried out and concrete follow-up of identified needs;
- (b) identify how the ECHO Field Network might be further exploited to support the work of the EUCP teams in general, and situation and needs assessments specifically;
- (c) identify more opportunities for strengthening reciprocal knowledge between civil protection and humanitarian assistance providers, including those in the UN cluster system;
- (d) designate 'civil protection focal points' within the ECHO Field Network national and regional offices; it should also — together with the EEAS — designate 'civil protection focal points' among staff in EUDs in at-risk countries. These focal points, would be provided with regular training on developments in the UCPM and procedures for its activation.

Target implementation date: end of 2017

Conclusions and recommendations

Recommendation 4 — Exploring potential changes to arrangements for deploying epidemiologists

In the event that the EU decides to deploy epidemiologists through the UCPM in response to future large-scale emergencies with health consequences outside the Union — and taking full account of WHO's lead in this regard — the Commission and the ECDC should jointly explore possible changes to the existing administrative and financial arrangements that might facilitate rapid and flexible deployments.

Target implementation date: beginning of 2018

Recommendation 5 — Strengthening accountability through improved reporting

To provide itself and the Participating State with information that could further enhance the performance, added value and acceptance of the UCPM, the Commission should:

- (a) set key performance indicators in respect of those parts of the response that fall within its control and for which it can be held accountable;
- (b) develop automatically generated statistics and reports based on CECIS data to compare the responses to different activations and identify areas for improvement of the UCPM;

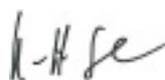
Target implementation date:

Definition of key performance indicators: end of first half 2017

Generation of statistics and reports: end of 2018 (see Recommendation 2)

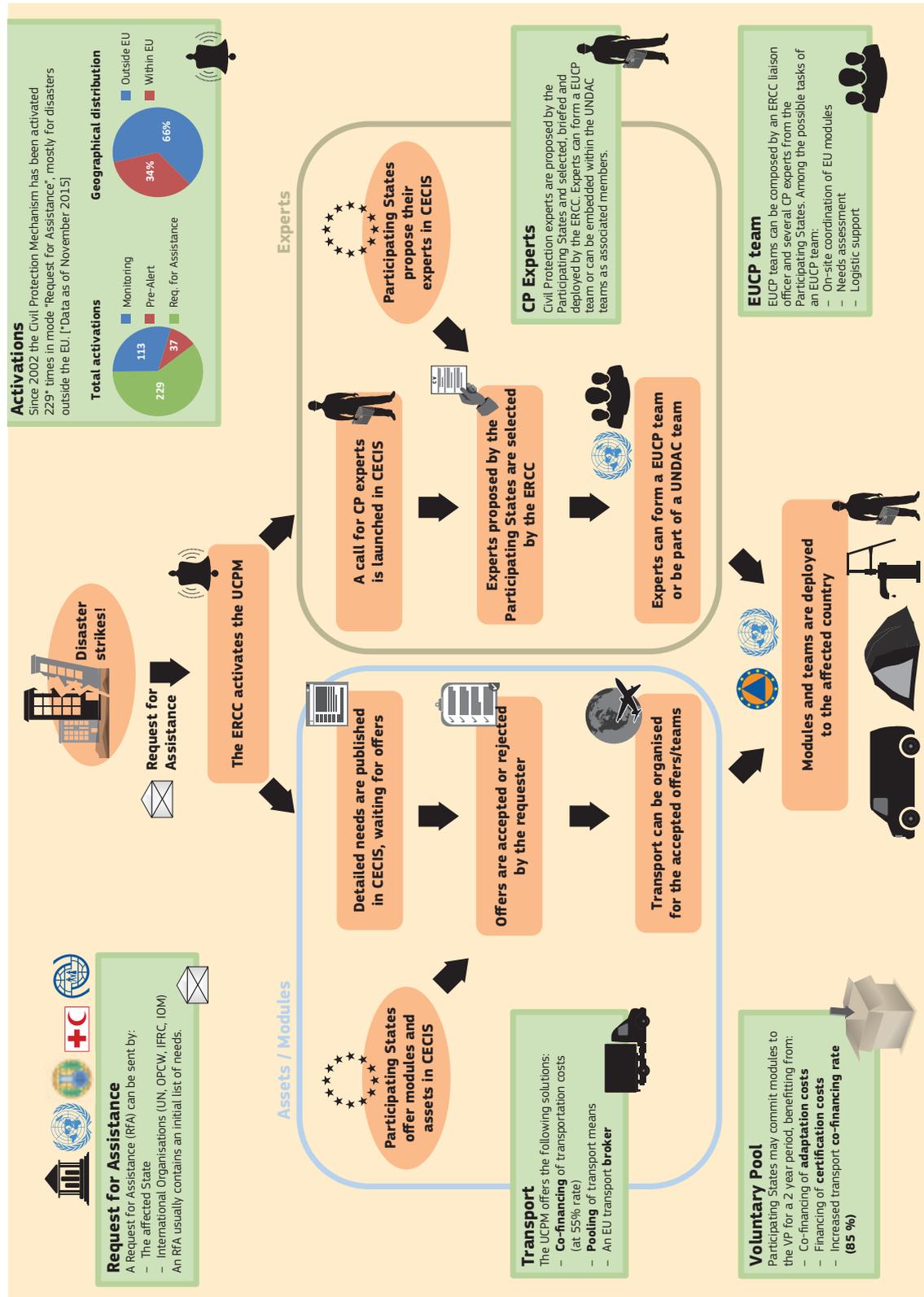
This Special Report was adopted by Chamber III, headed by Mr Karel PINXTEN, Member of the Court of Auditors, in Luxembourg at its meeting of 8 November 2016.

For the Court of Auditors



Klaus-Heiner LEHNE
President

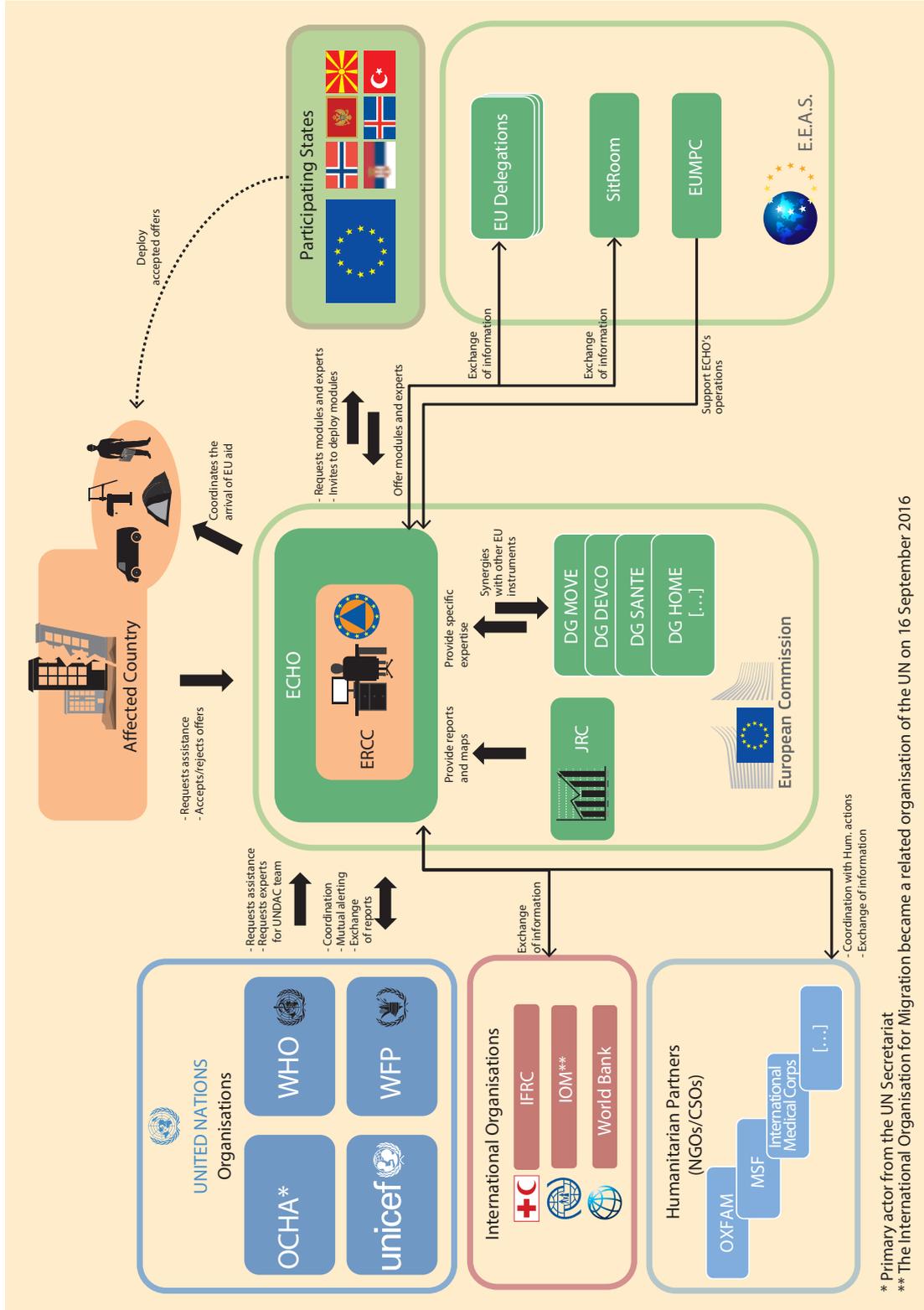
Activation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism for disasters outside the Union



Source: European Court of Auditors.

Annex II

Union Civil Protection Mechanism — Relationship among the actors as of 31 August 2016



* Primary actor from the UN Secretariat
 ** The International Organisation for Migration became a related organisation of the UN on 16 September 2016

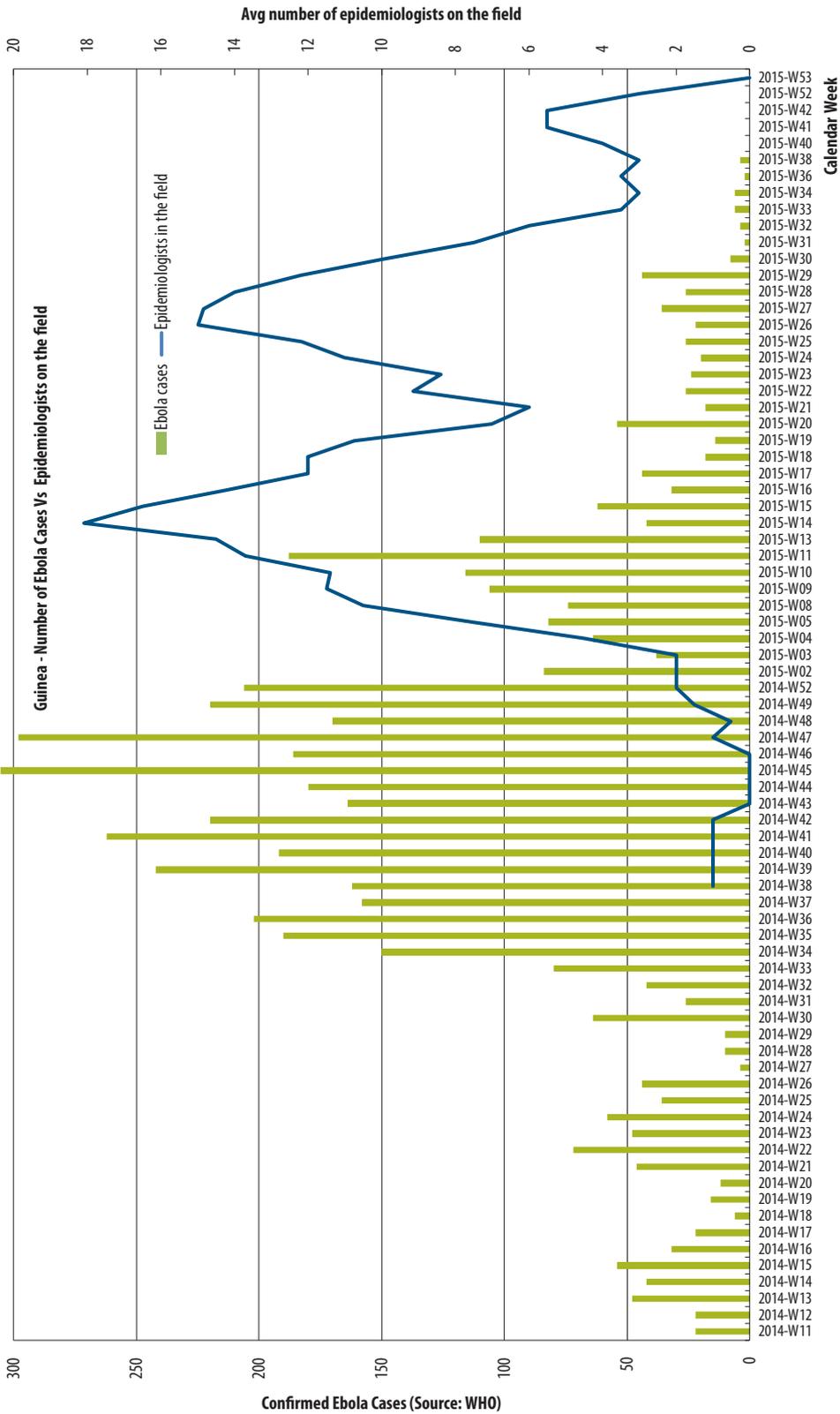
Source: European Court of Auditors.

Overview of the three disasters examined

	Ebola in west Africa	Earthquake in Nepal	Floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Type of crisis	Epidemic	Earthquake	Floods / Landslides
Start	March 2014	25 April 2015	13-15 May 2014
Duration of on-site support	22 months	~ 3 weeks	~ 2.5 weeks
Affected population	> 28 000 infection cases > 11 200 deaths	800 000 affected 8 700 deaths 2 200 injured	3 000 000 affected 76 deaths
Impact of the crisis	Devastating effects on security, health and economy of the whole region.	Several villages destroyed. > 510 000 houses destroyed > 286 767 houses damaged	Hundreds of thousands of people lost their livelihoods and key infrastructure was damaged
UCPM activation requestor	World Health Organisation (WHO) through UN OCHA	Nepali authorities	Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina
UCPM activation date	14 August 2014	26 April 2015	17 May 2014
UCPM Participating States taking part in the response	14	17	19
UN role	WHO was leading the response, supported by Unmeer, EU, US, UK, FR UNDAC team present	UNDAC team present and UN cluster system activated	No UNDAC team and cluster system officially not activated although similar structures were effectively in place
Main international actors	WHO, UNMEER, EU Ebola Task force (core: ECHO, DG DEVCO, DG SANCO, DG MOVE, ECDC, EEAS), US, UK, FR, MSF, other NGOs and bilateral donors	United Nations (OCHA, UNDAC, Unicef, WFP), Relief International, bilateral donors, NGOs	UN, World Bank, bilateral donors, Red Cross, EUFOR, NGOs
Deployed EUCP team	4 EU CP experts (as UNDAC team members) 1 ECHO Regional Logistic Coordinator	3 ERCC liaison officers 10 EU CP experts	2 ERCC liaison officers 10 EU CP experts 1 ECHO technical assistant
Assistance offered through the UCPM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food aid, medical kits, etc. • Blankets and chlorine • Mobile laboratories, treatment centres • Ambulances and field hospitals • Logistical support, airlifting, navy ships • Medevac 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search and rescue teams; base camps • Water purification modules • Medical teams • Tents, blankets, sleeping bags, shelters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water pumps, • Water purification units • Sandbags • Food aid • Helicopters, rescue boats • Tents, blankets, heaters, towels

Annex IV

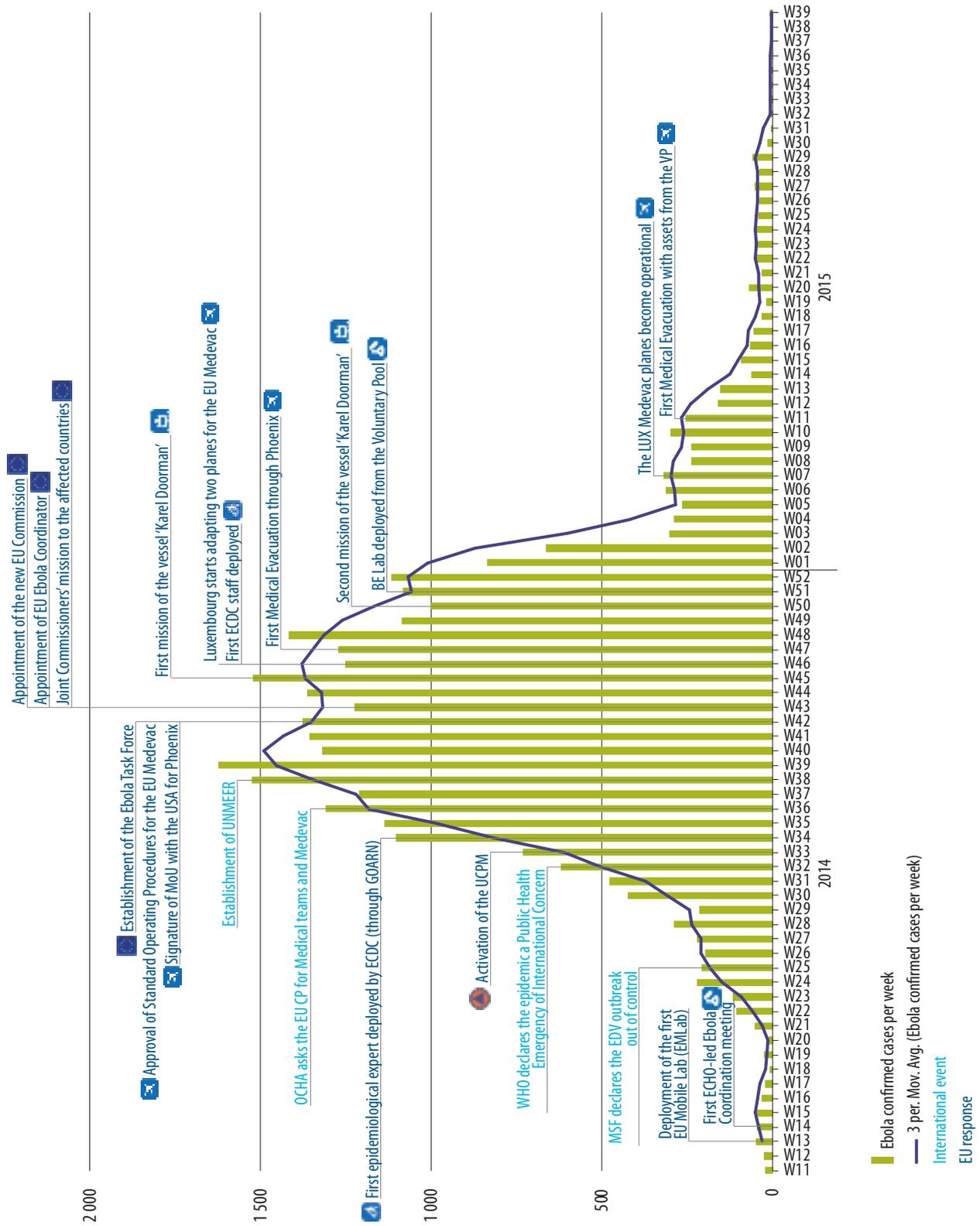
Deployment of EU epidemiologists to Guinea



Sources: WHO; ECDC; European Court of Auditors.

Annex V

Timeline of events in Ebola virus disease outbreak 2014-2015



Sources: WHO; European Commission; European Court of Auditors.

Executive summary

VI

The Commission welcomes the constructive approach taken by the Court, which identifies room for improvement. This report contains pragmatic recommendations, which, once implemented, will improve the contribution of the UCPM to the capacity of the Participating States as well as to the provision of rescue and relief to the people in need.

VII

The Commission accepts all the recommendations.

Introduction

Box 1 — The voluntary pool explained

As of 1 October 2016, 16 Member States have registered or are in the process of registering a total of 78 response capacities to the voluntary pool.

Capacities have been committed from Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. Capacities from the voluntary pool were deployed on eight occasions so far, involving the response to Ebola and to the 2016 yellow fever outbreak, to forest fires inside EU Member States, to Ecuador following the 2016 earthquake and to Haiti following Hurricane Matthew (2016).

These operations involved water purification units, forest fire-fighting planes, public health and mobile laboratories, and technical assistance and support teams. These operations show the added value of the pool, and also indicate that assets from the pool will be used more and more frequently.

Observations

18

The Commission has begun in 2016 to use the 'pre-alert' mode whenever such signs are detected/forecast, in particular considering opening a pre-alert when a red alert in GDACS appears (also corroborating the potential humanitarian impact). Since then the 'pre-alert' mode was used more than 12 times. For instance, for the earthquake in Ecuador (April 2016, a sudden-onset calamity), the pre-alert was opened almost 2 hours before the request from UN for expertise and 16 hours before the request from the affected country. Equally, during Hurricane Matthew in Haiti (October 2016, a slow onset), the pre-alert was opened 1.5 days before the request from the affected country.

21

This approach was used in the Ecuador earthquake (April 2016) when Participating States were informed about the EUCPT deployment 2 hours before offer and acceptance of a search and rescue team.

Common reply to paragraphs 23 and 24

The Civil Protection Committee established a specific Training Policy Group in order to discuss the EUCPT expert profiles and their functions within teams. However, it was agreed with the CPC that the Commission will bring another proposal about possible registration in the voluntary pool of categories of experts instead of individually named experts in the first half of 2017.

25

The Commission, in the new training cycle which started in May 2016, has started to implement in the training courses the principle that EUCPT candidates are being evaluated by the trainers and receive individual feedback at the end of the training. In addition, the national training coordinator may request to receive the evaluation forms for a specific expert of the same nationality.

29

After the significant increase of the pre-planned assets in 2016, it is expected that the use of the voluntary pool will significantly increase in the future. However, there are also disproportions and the Commission will adopt in the coming months a report on capacity gaps in the voluntary pool.

38

The Commission, as a result of the recent ERCC lessons learnt, promoted progressive levels of close coordination and cooperation EUCP and the humanitarian aid instruments. Among other, various formal mechanisms have been discussed by the Commission's actors involved in both civil protection and humanitarian aid, including those in the field, through regional and HQ seminars.

40

The improved cooperation and coordination between EUCPT and the Humanitarian Aid field network made possible, for instance, that during the recent UCPM activation for Hurricane Matthew in Haiti (October 2016) most of the gaps in terms of needs have been identified via the Commission's own humanitarian aid network. However, the Commission agrees that outreach to colleagues in ECHO field offices and EU delegations needs to become more systematic.

50

As the Commission has already indicated that the 'assistance overview' functionality should be redesigned in close collaboration with the users, the 12th Civil Protection Committee (June 2016) decided to call for a CECIS steering group meeting in order to address and regulate this kind of request.

51

The real-time link between EDRIS and CECIS is now implemented in CECIS. All actions taken in the context of a crisis, based on a common identifier, can now be displayed together on the same screen for civil protection and humanitarian aid. This functionality of EDRIS has been released in production still in 2016.

Reply of the Commission

52

While security in CECIS is a real and permanent concern for the Participating States, it was stated in the draft civil protection work programme 2017 that the option to develop interface web services or webpages in order to export CECIS information to other ERCC information tools, such as the ERCC portal for the field, will be explored.

53

As the Commission has already indicated that the CECIS logbook should be redesigned in close collaboration with the users, the 12th Civil Protection Committee (June 2016) decided to call for a CECIS steering group meeting in order to address and regulate this kind of request.

54

The draft civil protection work programme 2017 foresees to enable in CECIS a faster process for transport, and reduce the administrative workflow of support requests.

66

Significant efforts were needed to establish a functional and safe evacuation process, combining the medical and logistical needs of the patient, the safety of the aircraft and pilots and the capacity of the receiving medical entity.

Common reply to paragraphs 67-69

The Commission acknowledges the findings and will make full use of the recommendations for addressing the issue, in addition to the already planned developments for the next years for improving CECIS's usability and performance.

Conclusions and recommendations

73

The registration of assets for the voluntary pool has significantly increased in the last half of 2016. As of 1 October 2016 there are 78 capacities registered or in process of being registered.

74

The Commission welcomes the constructive approach taken by the Court, which identified room for improvement. This report contains pragmatic recommendations, which, once implemented, will improve the contribution of the UCPM to the capacity of the Participating States as well as to the provision of rescue and relief to the people in need. In addition the Commission will make use of the innovations of the legislation establishing the UCPM for extending resources use when needed.

Recommendation 1

The Commission accepts the recommendation.

Recommendation 2

The Commission accepts the recommendation. Significant developments are planned in the coming years to improve CECIS's usability in different domains. These points will be addressed with a steering/users group to define their priorities.

Recommendation 3

The Commission accepts the recommendation.

Recommendation 4

The Commission accepts the recommendation.

Recommendation 5

The Commission accepts the recommendation.

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Event	Date
Adoption of the Audit Planning Memorandum/Start of audit	24.11.2015
Official sending of draft report to Commission (or other auditee)	28.9.2016
Adoption of the final report after the adversarial procedure	8.11.2016
Commission's (or other auditee's) official replies received in all languages	7.12.2016

Disasters can strike anywhere, anytime. When a disaster occurs — whether natural or man made — the reaction must be swift. Sound disaster management saves lives, and effective coordination among different responders is critical to a successful response. The European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) was established to promote swift and effective operational cooperation between national civil protection services, with an important role for the European Commission to facilitate coordination. We examined whether the Commission effectively facilitated such coordination through the UCPM during three recent international disasters: the floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2014); the Ebola virus outbreak in west Africa (2014-2016); and the Nepal earthquake (2015). We conclude that, since the beginning of 2014, the Commission has been broadly effective in its coordinating role. We make a number of recommendations to help further improve the functioning of the UCPM during the response phase.



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