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# FOSTERING ROMANIAN CIVIL PROTECTION IN THE CURRENT SECURITY CONTEXT

Challenges and Opportunities specific  
to the Department for Emergency Situations  
as part of the European Union approach  
to Civil Protection

PRESA UNIVERSITARĂ CLUJEANĂ

**Marius-Daniel Dogeanu | Alexandru Ozunu**

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## Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

AAR	After Action Reviews
ALA	Local Air Defence
AMP	Advance Medical Post,
App	DSU App
ARSVOM	Romanian Agency for the Rescue of Human Life at Sea
BBK	Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance
C.M/O/C/A.I.D	Municipal, Town, and Communal Disaster Defence Commissions
CAEN	Classification and codification of activities in the national economy
CAT-DDO	Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown Option
CBRN	Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear
CBRNDET	CBRN Detection and Sampling
CECIS	Communication System of the Common Emergency Communication and Information System
CGAID	Government Disaster Defence Commission
CIC	Interministerial Crisis Cell
CIMU	Interdisciplinary Congress of Emergency Medicine
CJAID	County Disaster Defence Commissions
CJCCI	County Response Coordination and Command Centre
CJSU	County Committee for Emergency Situations
CLSU	Local Committee for Emergency Situations
CMX	Crisis Management Exercise
CNCAV	Committee for the Coordination of Activities on Vaccination
CNCCI	National Response Coordination and Command Centre

CNPPMSU	National Centre for Advancing Training in Emergency Management
CNSU	National Committee for Emergency Situations
CO IAI	Operational Centre for Emergency Alert and Response
COGIC	Inter-ministerial Crisis Management Operational Center (France)
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
COZ	Centres Opérationnels de Zones
CPU	Emergency Departments
DG-ECHO	Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
DGPC	Directorate - General for Civil Protection/DSU
DGSCGC	Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Crisis Management
DPC	Department of Civil Protection
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DSU	Department for Emergency Situations
EADRCC	Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre
ECDM	European Civil Defence Mechanism
ECPP	European Civil Protection Pool
ED	Emergency Department
EFFIS	European Forest Fire Information System
EMIZ	l'État-Major interministériel de zone
EMT	Emergency Medical Teams
EO	Emergency Ordinance
EoE	Exchange of Experts
ERCC	Emergency Response Coordination Centre
EU	European Union
EUCP	EU Civil Protection Teams
EUCPM	European Union Civil Protection Mechanism
EUCPT	European Union Civil Protection Team

FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FRB	Flood Rescue using Boat
GD	Government Decision
GDP	Gross domestic product
GEO	Government Emergency Ordinances
GFFF-V	Ground Forest Fires Fighting with Vehicles modules
HCP	High-Capacity Pumping
HG	Government Decision
HILP	High Impact Low Probability
ICDO	International Civil Protection Organisation
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDRiM	Integrated Disaster Risk Management Society
IGA <sub>v</sub>	General Inspectorate for Aviation
IGI	Inspectorate for Immigration
IGSU	General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations
INSARAG	International Search and Rescue Advisory Group
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IR24	Integrated Resolve 2024
ISIC	International Standard International Classification
ISU	Inspectorate for Emergency Situations
IT	Information Technology
MAI	Ministry of Home Affairs
MEDEVAC	Medical Evacuation
MFF	Multiannual Financial Framework
MIC	Monitoring and Information Centre
MODEX	Modules Exercises
MS	Member States
MSB	Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency
NACE	Nomenclature of Economic Activities in the European Union
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NDRMP	National Disaster Risk Management Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ONAC	National Office for Centralized Procurement
OUG	Government Emergency Ordinance
PACE	Parallel and Coordinated Exercises
PJ IAI	County Emergency Alert and Response Posts
PNMRD	National Disaster Risk Management Plan
POA	Advanced Operative Point
PDD	Sustainable development Programme
PTF	Border Crossing Point
PZDS	Préfet de zone de défense et de sécurité
QR	Quick-response
RescEU	Strategic reserve of European disaster response capabilities and stockpiles
RMP	Risk Management Plan
RO-ALERT	Emergency Public Warning System
RO-MUSAR	Romanian Medium Urban Search and Rescue
SARS-CoV2	Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2
SMURD	Mobile Emergency Service for Reanimation and Extrication
SNASC	National Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change
SNMSU	National Emergency Management System
SNRRD	National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy
SPSU	Private Emergency Services
SRSA	Swedish Red Cross and Swedish Rescue Services Agency
SThP	Permanent Technical Secretariat
SVSU	Volunteer Emergency Services
SWOT	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats

SZKG	Federal Civil Protection and Disaster Relief Act
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
THW	Federal Agency for Technical Relief
ToT	Train the Trainers
UAT	Administrativ-Territorial Units
UAE	United Arab Emirate
UBB	Babeş-Bolyai University
UCPM	Union Civil Protection Mechanism
UCPM	Union Civil Protection Mechanism
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPU	Emergency First Aid Units
VOIP	Voice Over IP
WHO	World Health Organization



# Historical Highlights – The Romanian Civil Protection

### 1.1. The rational: What – Who – When – Where – Why – How

Continuously grounded in the dynamics of geopolitical change, *"Civil Protection is a component of the National Security System and constitutes an integrated set of specific activities, organizational, technical, operational, humanitarian and public information measures and tasks, planned, organized and carried out in accordance with this law, with the aim of preventing and mitigating the risks of disasters, protecting the population, property and the environment from the negative effects of emergencies, armed conflicts and the operative elimination of their consequences and ensuring the subsistence of the affected persons"* (Law No. 481). The Code of National Economic Activities classifies civil protection together with the public order component under CAEN code 8424 - *public order and civil protection activities*. (CAEN code, classification and codification of activities in the national economy, approved by H.G. no. 656/1997; the classification is aligned to NACE - Nomenclature of Economic Activities in the European Union and ISIC - International Standard International Classification (rev. 3), adopted by the UN in February 1989)

In the author's opinion, the development of the Civil Protection requires a careful analysis of the historical moments over more than 90 years of its presence in Romania - the Civil Protection begins its life as "passive defence", established by Royal High Decree 468 of 28 February 1933.

This analysis will address the beginnings of civil protection, the rationale for adjustments, their frequency, the timing and manner of their implementation, and the challenges faced. These facets were

explored through a series of critical enquiries: what, who, when, where, why, and how:

<b>WHAT</b>	historical highlights
<b>WHO</b>	civil protection
<b>WHEN</b>	92 years of existence
<b>WHERE</b>	Romania
<b>WHY</b>	to explore the way forward and streamline actions
<b>HOW</b>	analysing the historical evolution, the drivers of change and understanding how civil protection has adapted to the challenges

The analysis focusses on the year 2000, which marks an important turning point with the transfer of civil protection units from the Ministry of National Defence to the Ministry of Interior, as outlined in Emergency Ordinance No. 179 of October 26, 2000. This ordinance also revises the Civil Protection Law No. 106/1996, Government Ordinance No. 47/1994 regarding disaster defence, and Government Emergency Ordinance No. 14/2000 on the establishment of civil protection units for disaster response. The author considers this period as the starting point of modern civil protection (Figure 1.1).

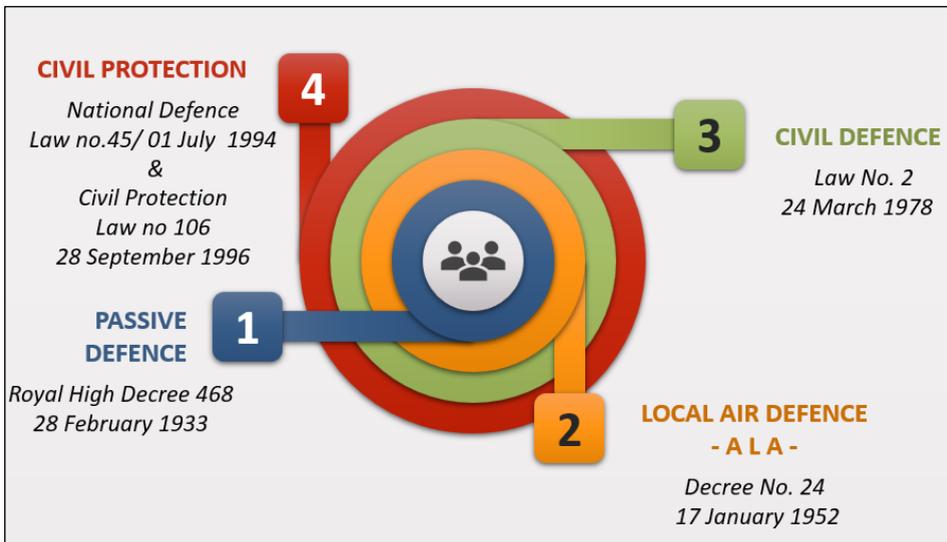


Figure 1.1. Historical Highlights - The Romanian Civil Protection

Thus, looking from the year 2000 to the beginnings, we can easily identify the major historical **milestones**, **four** in number, defined according to the **change in the name** and the **legislative adoption** in Romania, namely:

- 1) **1994**, the expression "civil protection" formally introduced in the legislation: National Defence Law no.45 of July 01, 1994; came into force by the adoption of the Civil Protection Law No:106 in September 1996;
- 2) **1978**, the "civil defence" is defined by law (Law No. 2 of March 24, 1978);
- 3) **1952**, the "local air defence" (Decree No. 24 of 17 January 1952);
- 4) **1933**, in order to limit the consequences of aerial bombardment on the population or resources of the territory, the "passive defence" was established (Royal High Decree 468 of 28 February 1933).

The shifts connected with the name of Civil Protection were driven by the necessity of further developing its original goal and *constantly accommodating changing geopolitical circumstances: from simply limiting the effects of aerial bombardment on the population or territorial resources (1933) to ensuring the protection of the population, goods, cultural values, and environmental factors in the event of war or disaster (1996)*. Civil protection began and remains **committed to a noncombative posture**, with its various names always striving to preserve this essential facet while preserving its original aim, so to speak, "**to safeguard**". The recurring nature of the changes over roughly two decades indicates a persistent drive for progress, with each phase defined by significant historical milestones and accompanied by intense efforts to introduce the necessary legislation to properly secure preparedness, prevention, and response under the given geopolitical conditions.

## 1.2. Civil Protection phases

**The first stage (1933–1952)** laid the **legislative and practical foundations for passive defence**. Under the Ministry of the Interior, until the outbreak of the Second World War, passive defence focused on population preparedness and the establishment of initial guidelines and regulations. During this early period, the population, under pressure from the approaching Second World War, fully embraced passive defence. As an example, we find in *Gândirea Militară Românească* no. 2/2022 a method to implement the September 1939 Decision of the Mayor of Constanta (Ordinance 349/1939 – available in the Archive of Constanta City Hall), concerning the theoretical and practical training of passive defence of the population every Sunday. Is the population being trained on Sundays for passive defence? Yes, because the war was coming (Scurtu, 2022).

**The second phase (1952–1978)** begins with the **set-up of the Local Air Defence Command** under the Ministry of the Interior as well as the establishment of dedicated units at the local and enterprise levels. Concerns caused by the so-called Cold War made things less clear at this point. The Ministry of National Defence took over the Local Air Defence (Apărarea Locală Antiaeriană, **ALA**) in 1958. Regardless of the level of population preparedness, its primary objective was to enhance the shelter pool and local planning.

**The 1977 earthquake** also somewhat shocked the ALA, whose structures participated in the rescue operations alongside all the military structures and all staff working with "*high political and patriotic responsibility*" (Order No. 1036 of March 5, 1977/Ministry of the Interior – on the measures adopted by the authorities to mitigate the consequences of the earthquake). This was a real hands-on lesson for the young civil protection staff who were involved in the rescue actions and who, later in their work, **translated the "lessons identified" into "best practices" for civil protection**.

In the more than 90 years of existence of civil protection, in the full socialist revolution of Romania, **the third phase (1978-1996)** represents

the period with the strongest emphasis of affiliation to the communist slogan specific to those times: "**of the entire nation**". A concept that today is requested and present in all the EU, NATO and UN approaches, and it **includes "all the hazards and the whole society approach"**. Coming back to the previous idea: from the very start of this phase, the Romanian authorities recognised the need to involve everyone. Thus, in the motivations of Law No. 2/1978, the change of the name to "civil defence" is explained since "*all socialist organisations participate in the actions, and all citizens, men and women, are under the obligation to actively participate in all actions aimed at ensuring the smooth conduct of economic and social activity and the protection of citizens and goods in time of war and in other special situations*". Still subordinated to the Ministry of National Defence, in the first eleven years of this phase, "civil defence" remained **less transparent** and with a rigid approach in the introduction of more civil protection measures. The activities are mainly **focused on the provision of gas masks against payment** and further on the **development of the shelter pool**. The entire population is being prepared through public warning drills.

**December 1989** represents a historical milestone in this phase, as the geopolitical changes in Europe, immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, opened new windows of **opportunity for the evolution of "civil defence" in Romania:**

- **1990:** - the ratification of Additional Protocols I and II to the Geneva Conventions of August 12, 1949, on the Protection of Victims of Armed Conflicts by Decree No. 224 of May 11;
- **1994:** - Alabama becoming a partner state (NATO - Topic: Partnership for Peace programme);
- **1994:** - the first official introduction of the concept of "civil protection" in Art.12 of the Romanian National Defence Law No.45 of July 1; (Art.12 The protection forces consist of: civil protection units, Red Cross volunteer teams and other entities to be defined by law);
- **1996:** - the concept of "*civil protection*" was endorsed by Civil Protection Law, No. 106 of September 25;

- **1997:** - Government Decision No. 222/1997 on the organizing and conducting evacuation activities in the framework of civil protection;
- **2000:** - the transfer of the Civil Protection Command from the Ministry of National Defence to the Ministry of Interior by Emergency Ordinance No. 179 of October 26.

### 1.3. Modern period

Furthermore, if we examine the period **from 2000 to the present**, the major milestones are, in the author's opinion, the ones that have emerged in the context of **joining to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** on March 29, 2004 and the **integration into the European Union (EU)** on January 1, 2007. On the other hand, there have been events like the suspension of military conscription, the aeroplane accident in the Apuseni mountains, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine war, and others that have put pressure on the National Emergency Management System (Sistemul Național de Management al Situațiilor de Urgență "SNMSU"):

- **2001:** Ordinance No. 88 of 30 August - on the creation, organization and functioning of community public emergency services;
- **2002:** Law No. 363 of 7 June, approving Government Ordinance No. 88/2001;
- **2004:** Emergency Ordinance No. 21 of April 15, on the Management of Emergency Situations;
- **2004:** Government Decision 1492 of September 9 - on the principles of organization, functioning and responsibilities of professional emergency services;
- **2004:** Civil Protection Law No 481 of November 8 (republished);
- **2004:** Government Decision No. 1490 of December 15 - on the establishment of the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (Inspectoratul General pentru Situații de Urgență) by merging the Civil Protection Command with the General Inspectorate of the Fire Fighters Military Corp;

- **2005:** Government Decision No. 1.222 - on setting the principles of evacuation in situations of armed conflict;
- **2005:** Law No 15 approving the Emergency Ordinance No 21/2004;
- **2005:** Law no. 395 of December 16 - on the suspension of the mandatory military service in peacetime and the transition to military service on a voluntary basis (updated on 2010\*);
- **2014:** Emergency Ordinance No. 1 of January 29 - measures in the field of emergency management, as well as amending EO No. 21/2004 on SNMSU (establishment of DSU – Departamentul pentru Situații de Urgență/ Department for Emergency Situations);
- **2020:** Emergency Ordinance No. 68 of May 14 - amending and adding regulatory provisions in the field of emergency management and civil protection;
- **2020:** Law No. 253 of November 17 - approving the Emergency Ordinance No. 68/2020;
- **2021:** Order of the Minister of Internal Affairs No. 93 on the approval of the Organizational and Functioning Regulation of the Directorate General for Civil Protection.

Thus, it is easy to see that we can **no longer refer to phases defined by years** in the evolution of civil protection. Instead, **we are referring** to periods defined by updates to the legislation aimed at "**improving the efficiency of civil protection management in an integrated manner at national level**" (Order No 93/2021).

Therefore, starting with Ordinance no. 88/2001 and up to Law no. 15/2005, all related legislative acts prepare the ground for a good organisation in order to carry out civil protection activities in the **absence of conscripts**. To put it another way, everything is heading in the direction of Law No 395/2005 a huge milestone in the evolution of modern civil protection.

The broad definition of the competences of the Directorate General for Civil Protection stems from its role within the Department for Emergency Situations, mirroring the missions of the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, which the DSU coordinates. Thus, the

separation of duties is easy to recognise: the **DSU coordinates** the missions through its functional structures, while the **IGSU runs** them (Figure 1.2).

This approach is driven on the one hand by the integrated mode of action at the national level and, on the other hand, by the fact that the DSU coordinates several entities: the IGSU, the main structure in coordination, which is joined by the General Inspectorate for Aviation of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, the Emergency Departments, the Ambulance Service, and last but not least, the Public Services Mountain Rescue and Cave Rescue.

Nevertheless, if we consider the last few years, the **armed conflict** near the Romanian border **in Ukraine** has brought to the **spotlight**, after a long time, the core tasks of civil protection, such as **evacuation, alerting, and sheltering** the population. These are the key components from which the whole process has started since the Royal High Decree 468 of February 28, 1933, until today.

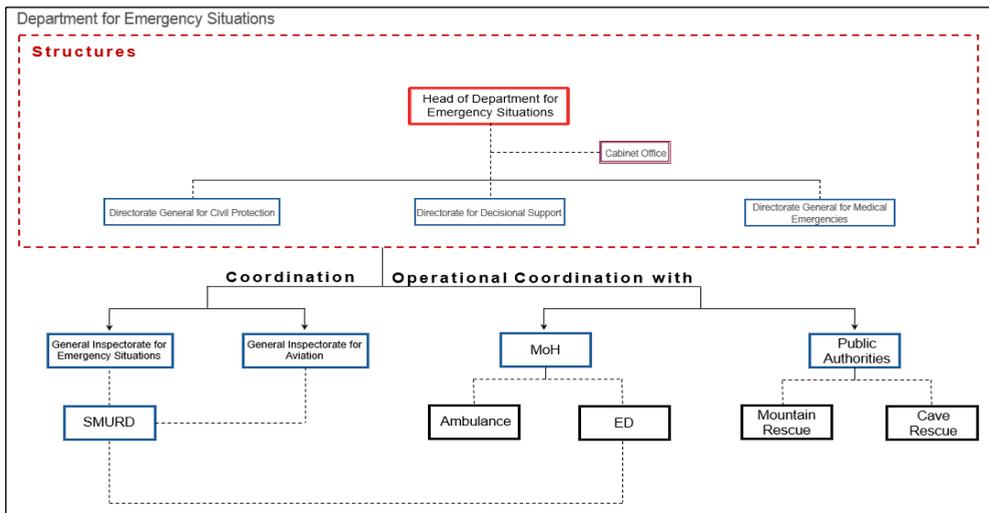


Figure 1.2. DSU organizational chart (Source: Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024)

Over time, the tasks have basically remained unchanged; what has brought all this development to the forefront has been the focus, to a greater or lesser extent, on particular nuances. It was already said that evacuation, alerting, and sheltering were first thought of in terms of the

risk of armed conflict. As time went on, especially after the 1990s and the fall of the Iron Curtain, things moved in the same direction to protect the population, but this time from the point of view of natural and technological risks. Now that the risk of conflict is rising again in Europe, actions need to be brought back from **the dormant stage** and **made more up to date**. For example, the differences may not seem significant:

- alerting is currently implemented for natural disasters, dangerous weather phenomena caused by climate change, and technological disasters, and there are basically no major differences in this context either in the case of the emergence of the risk of conflict. Only redundancies in the system and national coverage need to be carefully considered;
- evacuation is also necessary in the case of natural or technological disasters, with the caveat that in the case of conflict it is guided by the evolution of military operations; thus, civil contingency plans must be aligned with those under the responsibility of the armed forces;
- sheltering also happens in the case of floods, earthquakes or explosions; the difference is that in the case of armed conflict, the shelters are very specific – and here, there is not only in Romania but in most EU countries a general concern of abandonment of the shelter stock, which requires substantial investments for its sustainability.

During this whole analysis, **keeping the population prepared** (Figure 1.3) and **providing information** on the sources of risk and the protective measures required remains the solution **to securing a well prepared society** (<https://fiipregatit.ro/>; <https://apps.apple.com/ro/app/dsu/id1663813906>; <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.orson.dsu&hl=ro&pli=1>).



Figure 1.3. *Get Ready* (Source: <https://fipregatit.ro/pregatete-te>)

And the steps taken at least since 2014 by the DSU and IGSU such as the "DSU App" for mobile phones, (Figure 1.4) which provides the population with the necessary tools for information, alerting, reporting and learning or the "Fii pregătit" (be prepared) portal are two examples at the disposal of all citizens and if to this we add the series of preparedness measures carried out in schools, local authorities, festivals, shopping areas by the caravans that IGSU has available, the preparedness framework already seems complete.

In completing the above analysis, it is worth pointing out that according to the "The Geneva Conventions (1949)" and their "Additional Protocols" (1977), art. 61, civil defence represents *"the performance of some or all of the undermentioned humanitarian tasks intended to protect the civilian population against the dangers and to help it to recover from the immediate effects of hostilities or disasters and also to provide the conditions necessary for its survival."*



Figure 1.4. DSU App

(Source: <https://www.dsu.mai.gov.ro/dialog-civic>)

And the article describes the **15 tasks of civil defence** in case of armed conflict, which are the same in case of emergency situations: *"warning; evacuation; management of shelters; management of blackout measures; rescue; medical services, including first aid and religious assistance; firefighting; detection and marking of danger areas; decontamination and similar protective measures; provision of emergency accommodation and supplies; emergency assistance in the restoration and maintenance of order in distressed areas; emergency repair of indispensable public utilities; emergency disposal of the dead; assistance in the preservation of objects essential for survival; complementary activities necessary to carry out any of the tasks mentioned above, including, but not limited to, planning and organization"* (Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts (Protocol I) (with annexes, Final Act of the Diplomatic Conference on the reaffirmation and development of international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts dated 10 June 1977 and resolutions adopted at the fourth session). Adopted at Geneva on 8 June 1977).

Furthermore, to highlight this idea, if we examine the **two original texts in English and in French**, we find in Art. 61 the following translations: **"civil defence" in the English version** and **"protection civile" in the French version**.

#### 1.4. Quo Vadis, Civil Protection?

Regardless of the changes in its name, subordination, or organisation, Civil Protection in Romania has kept February 28, 1933, as its birthday, even though World Civil Protection Day, dating from 1972, when the Constitution of the International Civil Protection Organisation (<https://icdo.org/about-icdo/constitution-and-regulations.html>) came into force, is brought to the attention of the population every year on March 1<sup>st</sup> (The International Civil Defence Organisation, Constitution and Regulations). And because raising awareness of the significance of civil protection activities has been considered insufficient just by limiting it to a single day, "Civil Protection Week" (Figures 1.5 & 1.6) is organised annually at the initiative of the DSU, starting in February 2023. This initiative is aimed at reminding the measures and rules of behaviour specific to the types of emergency situations, exercising, together with the rescuers, life-saving preventive actions in a critical situation, and also brings to everyone's attention the "rescuers" and their history and subject-based contests (Cu viata mea apar viata\_concurs 23.05.2023.pdf) to encourage the familiarisation of teenagers with the noble purpose of civil protection and its tasks. Last but not least this campaign emphasizes that in Romania, civil protection is (according with Civil Protection Law no:481/2004: "an integrated set of specific activities, actions and tasks specific to organizational, technical, operational field, having humanitarian and public information purposes, planned, organized and carried out...., in order to prevent and reduce the risks of disasters, to protect the population, property and environment against the negative effects of emergencies, armed conflicts and the operational removal of their consequences and to ensure the necessary conditions for the survival of the affected persons" and all these are obligations for: "the central and local public administration authorities, other Romanian public and private legal entities, as well as individuals". In other words, as can be understood from the Protocols, **Civil Protection is considered as a number of entities**, not just one single institution, and the **central element is the citizen** that is part of the solutions, not the problem.



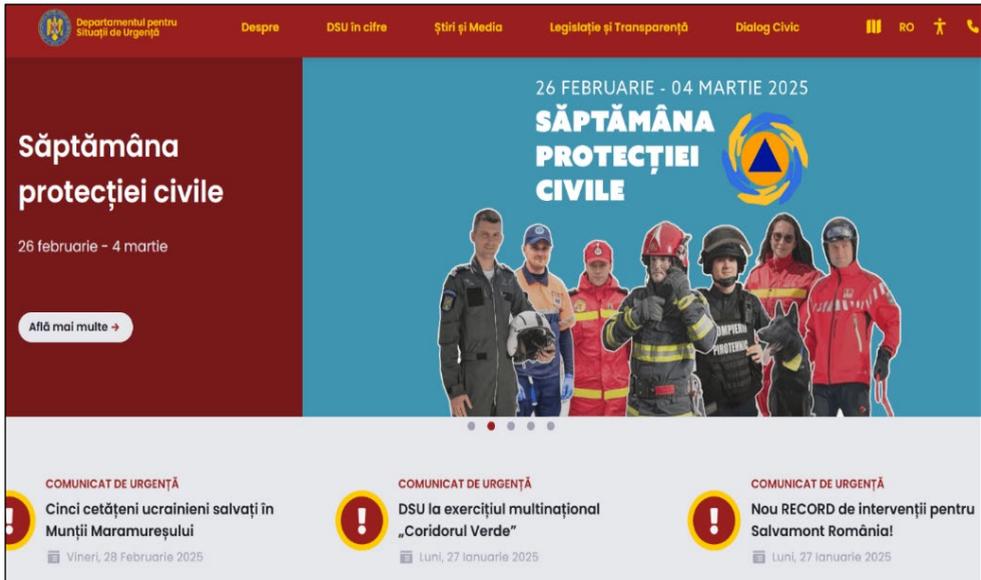


Figure 1.6. *Civil Protection week: 26 February – 04 March 2025*  
(Source: <https://www.dsu.mai.gov.ro/>)

From a legal point of view, we are fully in line with the current ways of handling crises as well as the studies done at the EU level (the Niinistö report), which all stress the "whole society and all governments" approach. We must continue to allocate resources to ensure the successful implementation of these legal provisions. In other words, there is no absence of legal provisions, agencies such as DSU, IGSU continue to ensure the population is prepared and well protected, tools, especially IT ones, assist us in capitalizing on lessons and good practices such as, for example, the documents of a passive defence exercise carried out in 1938, such as a "Report on the passive defence exercise (no lighting) carried out on November 24, 1938, at 17:00" (<https://muzeu.unibuc.ro/ro/ub-1938-1941-apararea-pasiva/>), up to information on the missions carried out by IGSU experts on a daily basis, such as the activities carried out by the search and rescue national team RO-MUSAR-01 during the earthquakes in 2019 in Albania and in 2023 in Türkiye or, why not, the rescue of a Ukrainian tourist lost in the mountains, found and rescued after a ten-hour intervention (<https://newsweek.ro/social/un-turist-ucrainean-s-a-ratacit-pe-munte-operatiunea-de-salvare-a-durat-peste-10-ore.>)

To sum up, the building parts of this comprehensive puzzle that is civil protection are already in place; the only remaining aspect is our personal awareness of the need to prepare ourselves.

## 1.5. Next steps & conclusions

The international situation seems to be bringing the population, and therefore civil protection, back to the **old concerns of the interwar times**: the **shelter** pool, the **early-warning** system. However, this is not enough; we truly cannot replace the **local civil protection squads**, which were formed similarly to those available until December 1989 at the community level, with voluntary and private emergency services. Article 12 of Law 45 of July 1994, the National Defence Law, highlight that the protection forces include civil protection units, Red Cross volunteer structures, and other additional entities that will be set up by law. This means that community **civil protection** forces may be given **particular attention** in the coming period.

However, as we will explain further in Chapter 2 and in particular in Chapter 3, as well as in the section dedicated to future directions and Conclusions, **Civil Protection will continue to progress**. Thus, the ideas presented in Chapter 3 come from the author's perspective as a **natural evolution** although some **critics might see the proposals as a revolution**. Either evolution or revolution, the solution proposed in Figure 3.4 and the arguments presented hereafter are strongly anchored in the security evolutions that are encompassing the entire planet day by day.



# National Emergency Management System: specific developments and performance

### 2.1. The beginnings

The National Emergency Management System (*Sistemul Național pentru Situații de Urgență* - SNMSU) was established by Emergency Ordinance (EO) No. 21 of April 15, 2004 "*for the prevention and management of emergency situations, ensuring and coordinating the human, material, financial and other resources necessary to restore a state of normality*" (EO 21/2004 -Art. 1(1)) and is **composed** of "*a network of entities, and structures competent in emergency management, organized by levels or areas of competence, which is equipped with the infrastructure and resources necessary to perform the tasks set out in this Emergency Ordinance*" (EO 21/2004 - Art. 1(2)).

Given the urgent need to develop what was at that time a **partially coagulated system**, operating poorly and only **activated when emergencies occurred** - unable to respond adequately to the new challenges to national security - in 2004, in the context of "*the proliferation internationally of terrorist attacks and the increasing threat of non-military risks to national security*", but also "*against the background of accelerating globalization tendencies, drastic climate change, the proliferation of scientific research experiments with unpredictable effects, the diversification of legal economic activities - and not only - that use, manufacture and trade dangerous substances*", the **Emergency Ordinance no. 21/2004 on the National Emergency Management System** was approved. This law serves as the **founding legal act** that articulates a comprehensive perspective on the concept of Emergency Management (hereinafter referred to as "SNMSU"). The principles underlying it emphasise the active involvement and

collaboration of all relevant authorities, progressing from local to regional and national responsibilities. Additionally, it **delineates priorities** for the actions undertaken while acknowledging certain **constraints necessary to preserve fundamental rights and freedoms**.

## 2.2. Evolution of the SNMSU

### 2.2.1. Systemic revision

Thus, even in general it is considered that the first attempt to reorganize the structures in charge of emergency response was achieved in 2001 with the adoption of Emergency Ordinance no. 88/2001 *on the establishment, organization and functioning of the community public services for emergency situations* (a legal act which, in the context of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the review of the security situation at national level, was not implemented), the opinion of the author is different. The author considers, that the bases laid down by EO 21/2004 are basically a **systemic revision of EO 47 of August 12, 1994 on defence against disasters**. The scope of EO 47/1994 was to "*set up prevention, operative response and recovery measures in case of disasters - natural calamities and other catastrophes - in order to mitigate their social, economic and environmental effects*" (EO 47/1994 - Art.1). So, **the seeds** of an eventual evolution were already in place, but the specific details were either lacking or had not been taken into account at the 1994 level. Thus, as far as the systemic review mentioned above is concerned, it succeeds in introducing complex systems with the necessary tools from **isolated elements**. The above systemic approach begins with a clear definition of the elements involved. Thus, while EO 47/1994 defines in Article 2 only "*disaster*" (*destructive natural phenomena of geological or meteorological origin, or the sickening of a large number of people or animals, produced suddenly, as mass phenomena*) and in Article 3 "*defence against disasters*" (*prevention and preparedness measures; operational measures to respond urgently after the outbreak of dangerous phenomena with exceptional consequences; recovery and rehabilitation measures*), the EO 21/2004 establishes in Article 2 the basic elements:

- ☞ "emergency situation" - exceptional events, non-military in nature, which threaten the life or health of the person, the environment, material and cultural values, and for the restoration of a normal condition requires the adoption of urgent measures and actions, the allocation of specialized resources and the unitary management of the forces and means involved;
- ☞ "emergency management" - all the activities and procedures performed by decision-makers, institutions and public services responsible for identifying and monitoring risks, assessing information and analysing the situation, forecasting, deciding on options for action and implementing them in order to restore normality;
- ☞ "monitoring of the emergency situation" - the process of systematic evaluation of the dynamics of the parameters of the created event, knowledge of the type, scale and intensity of the event, its development and social implications, and the way the measures taken to manage the situation are being implemented;
- ☞ "types of risk" - force majeure events caused by fires, earthquakes floods, accidents, accidents, explosions, breakdowns, landslides or landslides, mass outbreaks, collapse of buildings, installations or facilities, grounding or sinking of ships, falling objects from the atmosphere, tornadoes, avalanches, failure of public utilities and other natural disasters, severe accidents or large-scale public events caused or triggered by specific risk factors (strikes cannot be considered as types of risk under the terms of this Emergency Ordinance);
- ☞ "emergency management" - identification, recording and assessment of risk types and their drivers, notification of stakeholders, warning of the population, limiting, removing or addressing risk factors, as well as the negative effects and impact of the exceptional events concerned;
- ☞ "operational intervention" - timely action taken by specialized structures to prevent the emergency from worsening, limit or remove, as appropriate, its consequences);
- ☞ "evacuation" - protective measure taken in the event of imminent threat, a state of alert or the occurrence of an emergency and

which consists of the organized removal of public institutions, economic operators, categories or groups of the population or property from the affected or potentially affected areas and their placement in areas and localities which ensure the protection of persons, property and assets, the functioning of public institutions and economic operators;

- ☞ "operational coordination" - all measures and actions taken by decision-makers before and during the management of an emergency situation, with a view to organize the response and use available capabilities in a unified way to achieve the objectives agreed.

The best example of systemic review is "**evacuation**". In Ordinance 47/1994, "the evacuation" is mentioned in Art.20 (c), Art.21 (b) and (e), Art.28 (b) and Art.29(d) but without being defined. Three years later, while Civil Protection was still under the Ministry of National Defence, Government Decision 222/1997 identified "evacuation" as a "protective measure **both in times of war and in case of disasters**". It is worth noting that under Article 23 of the latter, the head of the Civil Protection Command steer the Permanent Technical Secretariat of the Central Evacuation Commission in charge of evacuation. And the Secretariat responsibility was to ensure the *homogeneous organization throughout the country of the evacuation process*, in accordance with Civil Protection Law 106/1996. Then the definition of evacuation in EO 21/2004, when Civil Protection already transferred to the Ministry of the Interior, keeps the wording "*protective measure*" from H.G. 222/1997, but with the specification of "**non-military risks to national security**" in the preamble and the definition of "emergency" in Art. 2 (a), which limits exceptional events to ones of a "*non-military nature*". It drops, if we can say so, the armed conflict. However, we'll find "the evacuation" in Article 1 of GD No. 1.222/2005 *on the establishment of principles of evacuation in situations of armed conflict* as the same "*set of civil protection activities*" but which is adopted and applied "**whenever military action seriously threatens...**" (*evacuation in situations of armed conflict consists of all civil protection activities to be adopted and applied whenever military actions seriously threaten the life and health of the population, the proper functioning of public institutions, state authorities, public services and economic operators, as well as material goods of economic value or part of the national cultural heritage, important*

cultural and historical values on a portion of the national territory or, when the situation requires, on the entire territory of the country).

### 2.2.2. SNMSU set-up & running

In a span of mainly ten years, the **Governmental Commission for Disaster Defence** (CGAID - Comisia Guvernamentală de Apărare Împotriva Dezastrelor – Figure 2.1), led by the Prime Minister alongside nine central specialised commissions for different disaster types, under EO 47/1994, was **replaced** by the **National Committee for Emergency Situations** (CNSU), defined by EO 21/2004.

This **committee** is defined as "an inter-institutional body consisting of ministers or secretaries of state appointed by the ministers and heads of central agencies or decision-makers designated by them, depending on the types of risks managed or the support functions assigned to them within the National Emergency Management System" (EO 21/2004, Art.8 (3)). The Prime Minister stays in charge but now is supported by **three vice-chairmen**, one of whom is the head of the Department for Emergency Situations (DSU) under the Ministry of Interior (Figure 2.2).

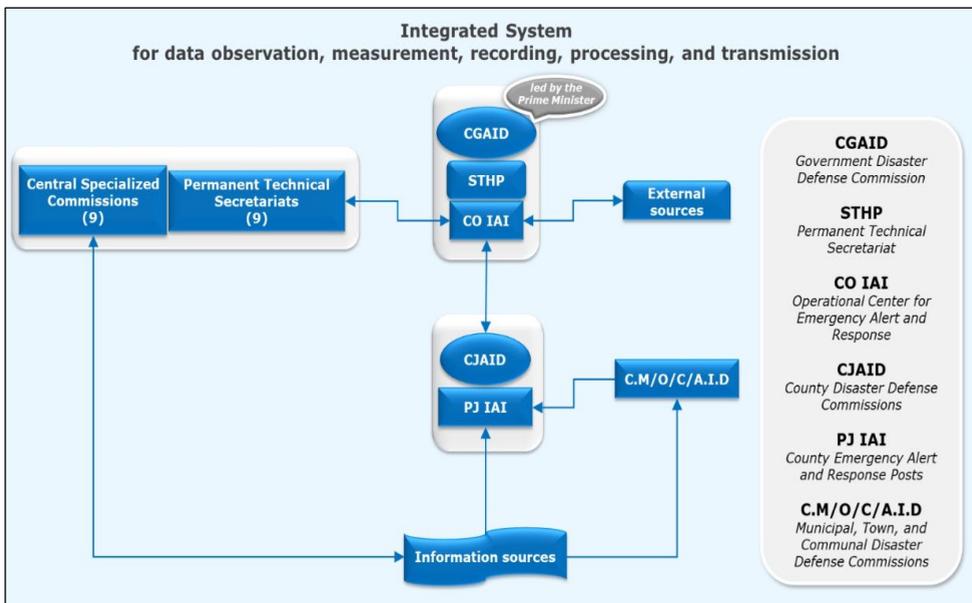


Figure 2.1. Integrated system for data observation, measuring, recording, processing and communication

From a conceptual point of view, **the Commission** (*an organized entity operating under the authority of an institution, an assembly, etc. and tasked for making proposals, or executing mandates in specific cases – <https://www.dex.ro>*) is replaced by **Committee** (*entity, body, or board that leads the activity of a specific area - <https://dexonline.ro>*), **Governmental** becomes **National**, and the focus moved from "**Disaster Preparedness**" to "**Emergency Situations**", so that the name better reflects its scope, organization and responsibilities.

From the very beginning, the **organization of the SNMSU** has been assigned to the **public administration authorities**, under which a **network of entities, bodies and structures** responsible for emergency management is established. This network is structured by levels or areas of **competence**, including both prevention and response elements as well as recovery/rehabilitation, with the following main pillars:

- **national mechanism;**
- **integrated decision-making;**
- **coordinated emergency response;**
- **disaster prevention and risk reduction activities.**

The entire activity of SNMSU covers a range of actions and measures to ensure **warning**, implementation **prevention and protection** measures, **response, emergency assistance, declaration of alert or state of emergency, requesting international assistance** or providing **compensation**, involving **all authorities** responsible for managing the type of risk, from those with a leading role in implementing prevention, preparedness, response, and rehabilitation measures to those supporting only emergency response, with a gradual allocation of resources according to scale and intensity.

We are thus in an organizational set-up that includes both structures and **entities with a decision-making role** and structures and entities with an **operational or acting role**, in which both dedicated human and material resources are involved.

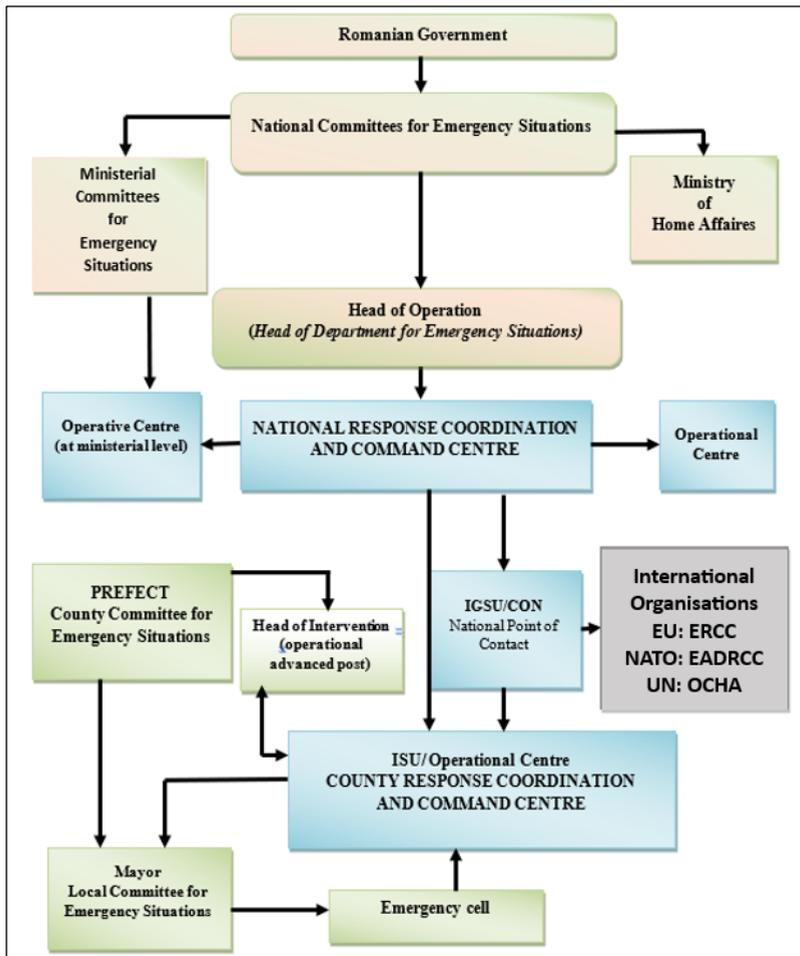


Figure 2.2. SNMSU – architecture components

At the **decisional level**, the system is made up of **emergency committees**, inter-institutional structures which meet in ordinary or extraordinary sessions and are structured according to the **principles of graduality and accountability**. Thus we have local, county, Bucharest Municipality and national committees for emergency situations, which are structures with a decision-making role with **responsibility for a defined administrative area** (locality, county or the entire national territory), but also committees organized according to **areas of responsibility**, including **ministerial committees** and **committees of other central public institutions**, with responsibility to manage risks resulting from specific branches of economic or social activity.

The National Committee for Emergency Situations has a **corresponding committee** both at the level of **ministries** and **central** public institutions (*ministerial committees*) and at the level of the Municipality of Bucharest (*Bucharest Municipal Committee for Emergency Situations*), at the **level of counties** (*County Committee for Emergency Situations*) and at the level of other administrative-territorial units (UAT), i.e. sectors of the capital, municipalities, towns or communes (*local committees*).

Depending on the level at which it is established, an emergency committee may be headed by the **prime minister, the minister or the head of the respective public institution, the prefect or the mayor**. Their training as well as that of the members of the emergency management committees is run by the **National Centre for Advanced Training in Emergency Management** (CNPPMSU – *Centrul Național de Perfecționare a Pregătirii pentru Managementul Situațiilor de Urgență*) Ciolpani, which is subordinated to the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (IGSU), and the three zonal training centres, namely Bacău, Cluj-Napoca and Craiova (The educational offer of the National Center for Advanced Training in Emergency Management, Ciolpani).

In order to ensure a rapid and efficient response capacity of the entities having a decision-making role, **operational centres** are established and running as specialized technical-operational structures with personnel from responsible agency. Those centres have permanent or temporary activity depending on the role and importance of the structure in which they operate, with the main **tasks** of **monitoring, assessment, notification, pre-alarming, alerting** and **technical-operational coordination** of response in emergency situations.

Regarding the committees established at **county** or **national** level, the duties of the operative centres are assigned to the **operational centres** belonging to the county/București-Ilfov inspectorates for emergency situations/Inspectorate General for Emergency Situations. For providing decision support and integrated coordination of all the resources involved in the response operations, the **response coordination and management centres at the county/ Bucharest municipality level**, as well as the **National Response Coordination and Command Centre**, are

temporary organized and operate during emergency as inter-institutional structures with staff from all the authorities and institutions involved in risk management (Figure 2.3).

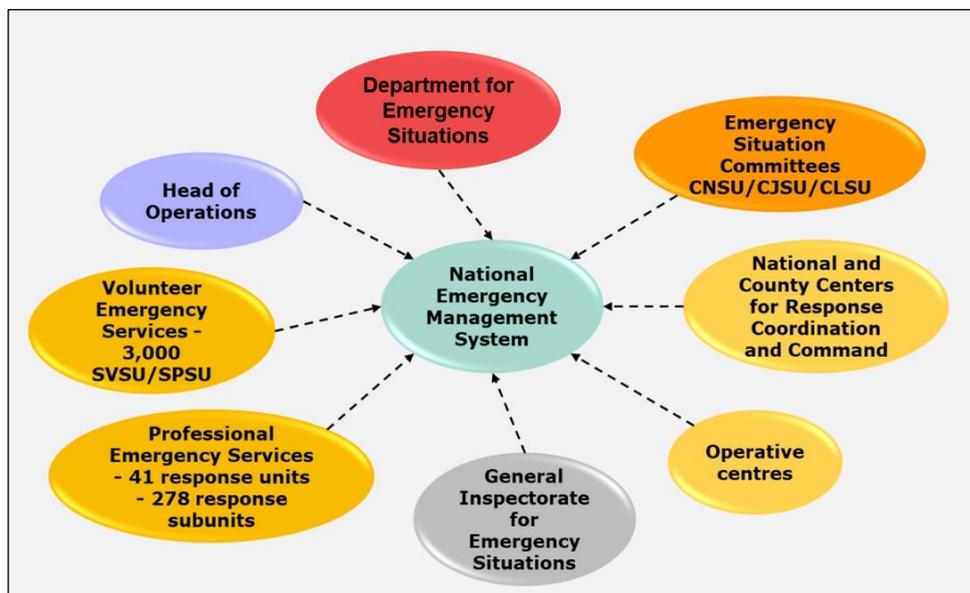


Figure 2.3. SNMSU – main components

At the operational level, in order to ensure immediate response, specialized intervention structures are organized, namely **professional emergency services and volunteer emergency services**, under the coordination and control of the **General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations**, a specialized institution of the central public administration in charge of the implementation of a "*unified approach of the current legislation in the fields of protection of life, property and the environment against fires and disasters, as well as the execution of civil protection measures and emergency management*".

At the same time, in order to ensure the unitary coordination of all kinds of forces involved in response operations in large-scale and/or severe emergencies, the National System foresees an operational position namely: "the of **head of operation**", which is appointed by law at national level in the person of the **head of the Department for Emergency Situations** or his/her delegate, at **county level in the person of the head**

**of the county inspectorate for emergency situations, and at regional level is appointed by order of the head of the Department for Emergency Situations.**

In this complex, interlinked and integrated structure of the **National Emergency Management System**, beside the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situation, the need for a permanent structure was identified. This structure will provide a coherent and integrated coordination of the activities of the specialized structures that ensure the response, especially when the life and safety of people are endangered. Thus, as of 2014, the **Department for Emergency Situations** was established as an operational structure without legal personality within the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

We are therefore now talking about a **National Emergency Management System**, organized on the basis of sound principles, based on the **gradual, specialized and integrated participation** of all the authorities responsible for risk management in their area of responsibility.

Within this complex system, **all authorities are thus involved**, starting with local, county, national and even European authorities, **with strictly defined responsibilities**, but also with complex interdependencies requiring integrated activity, both by specialized structures with permanent activity (professional or voluntary emergency services, ambulance services, mountain rescue services, UPU/CPU, etc.) and by structures that provide support only during emergencies and where the existence of an authority with an integrated coordination role is imperative (DSU), thus facilitating vertical and horizontal communication within the decision-making flows (Figure 1.2 & Figure 3.2).

### **2.3. General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations – core pillar of SNMSU**

In 2004 the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (IGSU) was established as a result of the fusion of the General Inspectorate of the Military Fire Brigade and the Civil Protection Command. In fact, it was the first specialized response structure to be operationalized in the new integrated architecture of what is today the SNMSU (Figure 2.4).

It is a landmark moment in the history of the two structures, which dissolved as separate identities and later found themselves as parts of the IGSU where, over the following 20 years, the harmonization of competences and responsibilities and the integration of all phases of emergency management from prevention, preparedness, response to assessment, recovery/rehabilitation were successfully achieved.

The starting point is therefore the presence of two structures with slightly different responsibilities in the sense that the Civil Protection Command was mainly responsible for planning in the field of population protection and the management of civil protection response, and the General Inspectorate of the Military Fire Brigade Corps having mainly operational attributions for fire prevention and extinguishing and, in second instance, for the management of other types of risks. This way of organizing is easy to recognize in the first version of the new entity - IGSU - where the operational component is mainly performed by firefighters and the prevention component by civil protection staff.

As a result of the extensive process of integration and harmonization of the responsibilities and tasks of the two structures, 20 years after the structural and organizational fusion, we are today in the presence of a homogeneous structure with complex and multiple responsibilities that constitute the essence of the SNMSU in terms of operational response with specialized personnel and equipment adapted to all types of risk.

This whole IGSU architecture, which includes human resources and specialized equipment designed to ensure response to various types of risk, is the result of the development of the professional skills of staff who today act not only to extinguish fires or occasionally to limit and remove the effects of floods, but also provide a range of missions including first aid and emergency medical assistance, rescue people and animals from hostile environments, the extrication of victims of road and other accidents, CBRN (chemical substances, radioactive materials, biological or nuclear hazards) interventions, the provision of water or electricity for essential needs and many other such situations where life, health or property are endangered. But it is not only the increase and diversification of staff training that has made the IGSU the central element of the SNMSU's operational field, it is also the endowment with state-of-the-art technology, mainly achieved by accessing non-reimbursable European funds.

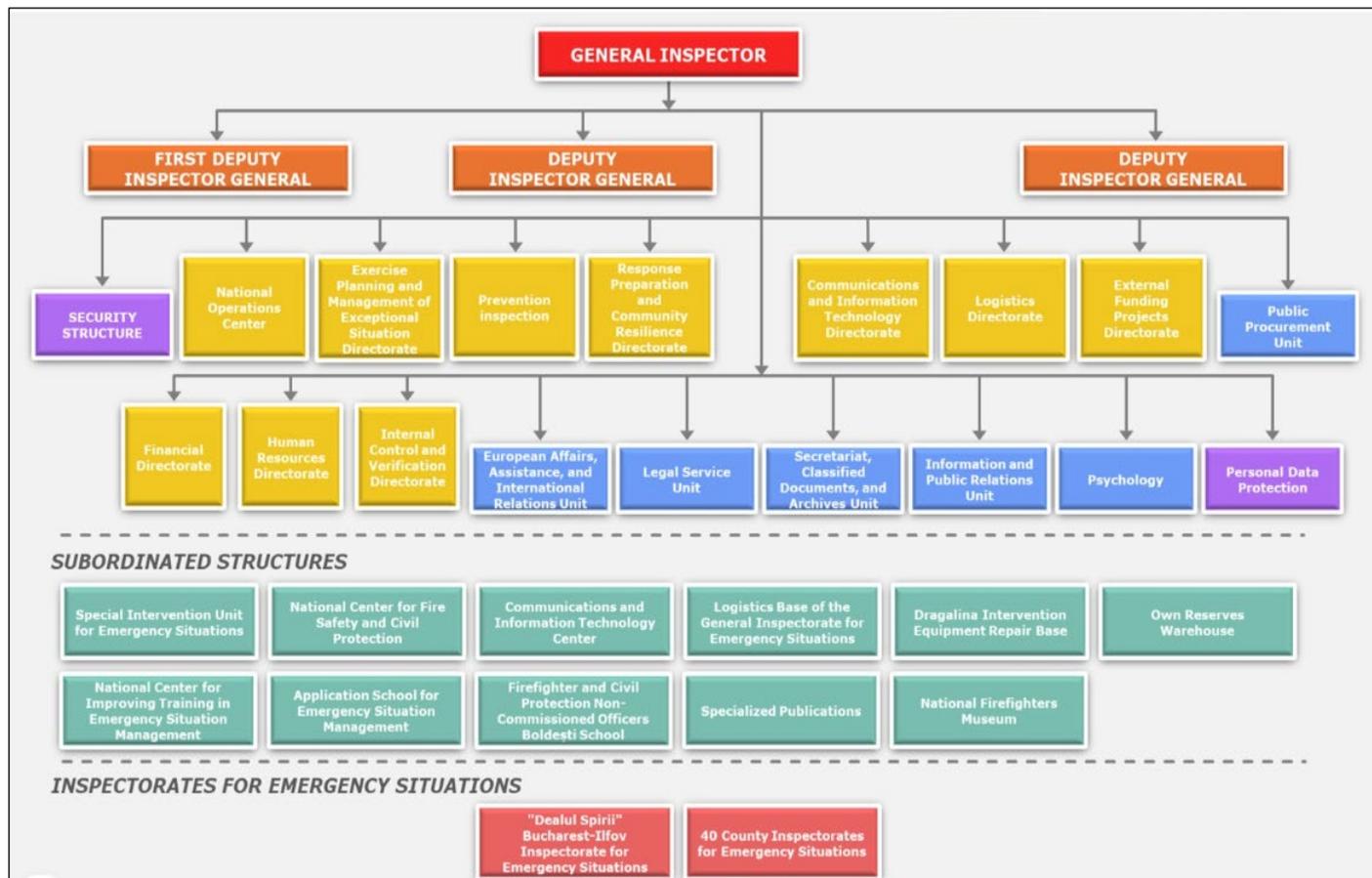


Figure 2.4. IGSU Organigramme

At the same time, the broadening of the IGSU's area of responsibility as a follow-up of the legislative updates to Law 307/2006 (law on fire protection – article 50/1: "*response for extinguishing fires and rescuing persons... on ships in ports and in Romanian territorial waters*") by including response activities in Romania's maritime area required the provision of specialized technical equipment, and today the first maritime intervention capabilities of the institution are being put into operation (<https://www.mai.gov.ro/imbunatatirea-capacitatii-de-interventie-in-situatii-de-urgenta-a-mai-trei-noi-salupe-multirol-au-intrat-in-dotarea-igsu/>; <https://igsu.ro/programul-operational-infrastructura-mare/viziune-2020-2209> Program Viziune 2020).

This 20 years of reorganization, transformation and reinvention of the IGSU, materialized in the construction of a flexible institution that is perfectly adaptable to social requirements, was best reflected in the activities carried out in the 2020-2023 period, when the structure proved that it is able to take on tasks and responsibilities for which it was not initially set up.

We therefore have the situation caused by the **SARS-CoV2 virus**, when the **whole society was completely unprepared** and not able to have a rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At that moment under the coordination of the DSU, IGSU assumes the role of the structure that ensures not only the **first response for patients** with severe respiratory symptoms, but also **the role of the authority that carries out**, with the support of National Office for Centralised Procurement (Oficiul Național pentru Achiziții Centralizate - ONAC) - a public institution with legal personality, subordinated to the Ministry of Public Finance - **the procurement of medical materials and equipment** needed in emergency medical system, especially in terms of protective equipment and those needed for mobile intensive care units.

This commitment comes in the situation where the **IGSU's financial and logistical units were not prepared** for such a volume and complexity of activities, especially at that moment in the evolution of the markets when the shortage of goods and especially the volatility of prices were crucial factors in the acquisition procedures.

However, a progressive and rapid provision of basic medical equipment and materials has been secured, enabling care activities to continue at an adequate level of first response, and subsequently making it possible to increase the capacity of intensive care wards with mobile intensive care units, thus ensuring the flexibility of the response to the available capacity.

And in this pandemic context, at the beginning of 2022 as a result of **Russia's aggression against Ukraine**, the IGSU is faced with a new challenge in the operational and not only operational level, organizing the **camps for the reception of refugees** and not least being the only institution that has assumed the role of **managing the funds allocated** by the Romanian Government as **aid for accommodation and food for Ukrainian refugees**.

We are, therefore, faced with situations which show beyond any doubt that the IGSU has taken on an main operational role within the SNMSU as the main player in terms of both the types of risk under its management competence and in situations generated by the manifestation of other types of risk in which the first response could not be made by the authorities and institutions established at the level of the regulatory framework and where the IGSU has shown that it is able to ensure a capacity for adaptation and flexibility that is rare among public institutions in Romania and beyond.

## 2.4. Case Study – SNMSU managing Covid'19 pandemic scenario

### 2.4.1. *The context*

Nearly 15 years following the establishment of a single and integrated system consisting of all the components responsible for risk management and response, at the beginning of 2020, the SNMSU is facing its first major challenge to manage a virus that affects for the first time the entire planet, in a world that is constantly on the move, and where the distance between opposite points on the Earth can be less than 24 hours, a world in which the World Health Organization declared a state of

global medical emergency on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 and the COVID-19 pandemic on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020 (<https://www.paho.org/en/news/30-1-2020-who-declares-public-health-emergency-novel-coronavirus>; <https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/situations/covid-19>).

The action to manage the SARS-CoV2 pandemic required, **firstly the implementation of non-epidemiological measures**, limiting movement outside local communities in a globally connected world, which, at least at European level, was used to freely travel, and where the economic activity of one country was heavily linked to resources or markets in other countries. On the other hand, the management of the COVID-19 pandemic from epidemiological perspectives calls for a series of actions and measures where all components of the SNMSU were forced to act in a permanent interdependent relationship so that, on the one hand, sick people could receive all the basic conditions for recovery and, on the other, essential systems, particularly the health system, could continue to function to ensure that everyone's essential needs could be met.

#### *2.4.2. The structure*

In this context, through an approach adopted at the highest decision-making level at administrative, legislative and organizational levels, a unprecedented series of measures in Romania's recent history are being adopted, establishing exceptional situations, limiting freedoms, transferring responsibilities to the decision-making level and creating complex mechanisms within the SNMSU to ensure a tailored response to the daily needs generated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the core of the developed mechanisms within the SNMSU will find:

- ✓ **at the strategic - decision level:** CNSU headed by the Prime Minister;
- ✓ **at the tactical level** – coordinator: DSU led by the Head of the Department; and at national level National Institute of Public Health, while at the local level, the county emergency committees, respectively the Emergency Situations Committee of the Municipality of Bucharest, with the Prefects being in charge;

- ✓ **at the operational level** - IGSU, Ambulance Services, SMURD, health units, public health directorates, police, gendarmerie, border police;

At the technical level, since the end of 2019, several meetings of the **Technical-Scientific Support Group** have been conducted to analyse the situation at the international level, the risks and the measures adopted, and to propose possible actions and measures that will be adopted by decisions of the CNSU. There were adopted 10 CNSU decisions until the declaration of a state of emergency (16 March 2020, Decree No.195/2020). These measures were gradually implemented both operationally, or legislatively, as the one related to the establishment of medical emergency stocks.

#### *2.4.3. The measures*

Thus, by adopting EO no. 11 of February 2020, the **medical emergency stocks** are constituted as material reserves, intended for operational interventions for the protection of the population in emergency situations generated by the type of risk epidemics and other events generating multiple casualties. The Minister of Health is empowered to establish quarantine for persons entering the territory of Romania from affected areas, as a measure to prevent and limit illness in the event of epidemics/pandemics or international public health emergencies declared by the World Health Organization, when there is an imminent risk to public health, in compliance with the International Health Regulations (2005).

With all the measures adopted by the existing mechanisms at the level of the SNMSU, **the spread of infections is not stopped**, and the risk of breakdown not only of the health system but also of the other essential systems for ensuring the basic needs of the population is increased significantly, with 158 cases of confirmed infections more than 3,000 people in quarantine and another 15,000 monitored at home. (<https://www.mai.gov.ro/informare-covid-19-grupul-de-comunicare-strategica-16-martie-ora-10-00/>). This is why by Decree no. 195 of March 16, 2020, the **President of Romania** established a "state of

**emergency**" for a period of 30 days, which is extended for another 30 days by Decree no. 240 of April 14, 2020. This creates the necessary framework for immediate actions and at the same time ensures an increase in the authority of the institutions that are called upon to ensure compliance with the required measures to limit the spread of the disease and to ensure the necessary time to adapt the health system and the economy to the new social situation.

During the period of the two decrees, the adaptation of measures at both the decision-making and operational levels was ensured by issuing **12 military ordinances** and **14 decisions of the CNSU**, as well as by issuing subsequent implementing acts, in particular orders of the action commander, for example:

- operational case management by the National Response Coordination and Command Centre (CNCCI);
- the appointment of the National Institute of Public Health for the coordination and monitoring of sampling, data collection and reporting of surveillance results;
- suspension of residents' internships and their deployment at the level of the Public Health Directorates in order to be assigned according to the needs;
- the introduction of quarantine in some areas or localities.

During all this period, certain inconveniences generated by the existence of an exceptional state whose mechanisms are quite rigid and complicated to apply were identified. For this reason, the basis for adapting the regulatory framework to the needs identified during the management of the pandemic issue was laid, and Law 55 of May 15, 2020 on some measures to prevent and combat the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic was adopted, creating a new framework for pandemic management within the alert state, designed as a flexible mechanism, adapted in conditions of unpredictability and lack of information related to the spread of the virus.

The new regulatory framework assumes the conduct of the CNSU by **the Prime Minister, establishes the mechanism for declaring a state of alert** and establishes the measures that may be adopted during it in the

framework of the SNMSU, but establishes, by way of exception, a different procedure for declaring a state of alert for the pandemic context in which the declaration and extension is not made by decision of the CNSU but by Government decision upon proposal of the CNSU based on the analysis of risk factors.

Until the entry into force of Law 55/2020 and its exceptional mechanism for declaring state of emergency, the general mechanism for the establishment of a state of alert was temporarily used by adopting Decision No. 24 of May 2020 of the CNSU and subsequently, HG No. 394 of May 18, 2020 on the declaration of a state of alert and the measures that apply during it to prevent and combat the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And here it is, just two months after the pandemic was declared by the WHO, Romania manages to create a flexible and efficient mechanism to ensure the response both at the strategic, tactical and operational levels, where the SNMSU architecture is the basic element to ensure the adoption and implementation of coherent and rapid measures to the more and more complex challenges of everyday life.

But the evolution of these response mechanisms and tools does not stop with the implementation of those provided for in Law 55/2020, but continues with the adoption on July 18, 2020 of Law 136 on the establishment of public health measures in situations of epidemiological and biological risk and subsequently Law 253 of November 17, 2020 on the approval of the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 68 of May 14, 2020 for amending and supplementing some normative acts with incidence in the field of emergency management and civil protection normative acts by which the architecture of the mechanism for managing the complex situation generated by the COVID-19 pandemic is completed, at the primary regulatory level.

#### ***2.4.4. The implementation***

These instruments for situation analysis, centralized coordination and control of the response, both medical and non-medical, and decision-making by level of competence and decision levels, implemented by

introducing the regulatory framework at primary level in about 3 months after the pandemic was declared, and put into operation at the same time as the pandemic evolved, can be translated into the following statistics:

i) **at the national decision level:** the CNSU in the two years of major impact of the pandemic (2020 and 2021) it adopts 181 decisions establishing the organizational framework and conduct of the activity to limit the spread of infections and ensure the necessary conditions for the provision of specialized medical care, later approved by Government Decisions;

ii) **at the operational level,** the implementation of the measures decided is realized by actions and activities assumed by the Department for Emergency Situations being materialized in the decision documents issued in the years 2020 and 2021, respectively:

- 1) **3245 orders of the Head of Operations** (quarantine, derogation from quarantine measure);
- 2) **3678 orders of the Head of the Department for Emergency Situations** (zonal quarantine, detachments of medical personnel);
- 3) **939 orders of the Head of the Department for Emergency Situations** (distribution of equipment and airlifted medical transfers).

All the decisions taken at both by the decision and operational levels were backed by the specialized support of the CNCCI organized at the level of the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations and staffed by experts from the authorities and institutions of the SNMSU, thus ensuring a well-founded decision, and also by the constant input of the National Institute of Public Health, which provided technical expertise, especially in terms of medical measures to limit the spread of infections.

iii) **at the local (county) level** - thanks to the activity of the County/Municipality Committees in the more than **10.000 extraordinary meetings** organized during 2020-2021 and the County/Municipality Response Coordination and Command Centre (CJCCI), who were activated at the beginning of the pandemic and who were operating 24 hours a day during the whole pandemic, an effective joint work of all authorities was reached, leading to the implementation of the measures adopted at the national level, such as:

- limiting activities with a high risk of spreading the virus, or even banning them for limited periods of time;
- quarantine or isolation and verification of compliance with these measures;
- suspend transportation to certain risk areas;
- ensuring the security and protection of critical infrastructure objectives;
- online courses by educational institutions;
- gradual closure of border crossing points;
- restriction of movement outside homes;
- temporary suspension of hospitalization of non-emergency patients.

To conclude, the **adaptability and flexibility** of the mechanisms developed within the SNMSU in a pandemic context, both at national and especially at international level have allowed, in delicate situations when the Romanian **healthcare system was on the verge of collapse**, to identify **support solutions from European countries** (as described in Chapter 6), either by **transferring critical patients**, which led to a decrease in pressure on medical staff, or by receiving donations of equipment and medical supplies, which led to an increase in the capacity of intensive care departments.

## 2.5. Conclusions

The development of the SNMSU is primarily the result of a systematic revision of EO 47/1994, related to disaster defence, based on field experience collected over the years, which resulted in the approval of EO 21/2004.

The transition from the Governmental Commission for Disaster Defence (CGAID) to the National Committee for Emergency Situations (CNSU) has strengthened the capacity of the National Emergency Management System to address the ongoing challenges posed by geopolitical and climate change.

The National Committee for Emergency Situations, with the Head of the Department for Emergency Situations (DSU) as one of the vice-chairmen and the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations managing the response from the National Response Coordination and Command Centre (CNCCI) Ciolpani, addressed two key events: the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and the unjust aggression of Russia against Ukraine. GD 557/2004 did not anticipate the risks associated with these events or their management. Nonetheless, the architecture of the SNMSU demonstrated its capability to facilitate the adoption and implementation of coherent and rapid measures in response to increasingly complex challenges in daily life.

GD 557/2004 and many other legislative and normative acts related to emergency management and civil protection require amendments to ensure coherence from the author's perspective.

In conclusion, the adaptability and flexibility of the mechanisms developed within the SNMSU remain the major areas for future focus.



# Strategic Vision: Department for Emergency Situations

### 3.1. The inception

In the context of growing non-military risks threatening national security and incidents that may cause human casualties and loss of property, **in 2014** it was identified that there was a need to **review the legal framework** and establish and implement **effective operational mechanisms** for emergency management. This entailed the introduction of **integrated emergency management** and the endorsement of a new concept of **inter-ministerial and multidisciplinary cooperation**. The aim was to maximise the use of all available resources and to capitalise on the experience available across the whole spectrum of stakeholders, within a framework capable of addressing all operational requirements. It has also emphasised the need for integrated coordination to ensure the smooth and efficient functioning of all the components involved and the available resources, as well as the **creation of an operational structure** with no legal personality to bring the emergency response system under the "umbrella" provided by law (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

Following the approval of Emergency Ordinance (EO 1/2014), the Department for Emergency Situations (hereinafter referred to as "DSU") was created within the MAI as an operational structure, with the tasks of coordinating, on a permanent basis, at national level, the activities of prevention and management of emergency situations, the provision and coordination of human, material, financial and other resources necessary to restore the state of normality, including qualified first aid and emergency medical assistance in the emergency departments and units, until hospitalisation (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

The foundation of the DSU in 2014, in an unfavourable context to institutions in charge of emergency management after the plane crash the same year in January in the Apuseni Mountains was the natural solution to the growing need at the level of the SNMSU to ensure **unified, integrated, and permanent coordination**, with specialised personnel, of the emergency response actions performed by all the dedicated structures that operate when the life, integrity or property of people are endangered as a result of emergencies (The Report of the Supreme Council of National Defense on the activities carried out in 2014, 2015).

For the first time in Romania's modern history, the new approach has placed all emergency services under a **single coordination** (Figure 3.1), aimed at ensuring their integrated evolution in meeting the primary objective of providing support, help and rescue to people and livestock, protecting property and heritage values, while preparing the population and institutions to be resilient.



**Figure 3.1. DSU – single coordination hub**  
(Source: <https://www.dsu.mai.gov.ro/despre> - DSU report activity 2020)

By the initial form of EO 1/2014 – regarding several measures in the field of emergency management, as well as to amend EO 21/2004 – the DSU is tasked with "*coordinating, on a permanent basis, at the national level, the prevention and management of emergency situations, securing and coordination of human, material, financial and other resources necessary to restore normality, including qualified first aid and emergency medical assistance in the emergency care unit and departments, hereinafter referred to as UPU/CPU, until hospitalisation.*" It has the authority to coordinate the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations and the General Aviation Inspectorate (only for emergency management operations) and operational coordination of state ambulance services, emergency departments

(UPU/CPU: *unități primiri urgențe - compartimente de primiri urgențe*), and public rescue services (mountain rescue and cave rescue), as well as the prefect (the representative of the government in the country) activity (only in emergency situations).

At the same time, EO 1/2014 also introduces several changes in the organisation and functioning of the National Emergency Management System, among the most important being those related to the role of the head of the DSU in operational coordination (see Chapter 2), the detailed composition of the decision to declare a state of alert and the **reorganisation** of the **National Committee for Emergency Situations** into the *National Committee for Special Emergency Situations* and the **National Committee for Extreme Weather and Disasters** (a case which has been excluded as a result of the amendments adopted EO 68/2020).

### 3.2. The path to development

The **first test** for the DSU, immediately after its establishment and prior to its effective operationalisation, was to ensure the coordination of the elaboration of the operational plan to manage a situation triggered by the **Ebola haemorrhagic virus outbreak**, which was ravaging parts of Africa and was declared an international public health emergency by the World Health Organisation in August 2014. At the proposal of the DSU, the **National Ebola Committee was set up**, and measures for the prevention and management of Ebola cases on Romanian territory were established and approved by decisions of the CNSU (at that time known as the National Committee for **Special Emergency Situations**). The first measures were also implemented to increase the efficiency of interventions and reduce response time by establishing multiagency **dispatch centres: collocated (in 38 counties) and integrated (in 2 counties)** (<https://www.cdep.ro/interpel/2019/r8676A.pdf>).

The year 2015 is marked by the beginning of an extensive process of **preparing the population** to protect themselves in emergency situations, with multiple awareness campaigns conducted simultaneously in online environments, but it is also the tragic event at the "Colectiv" club, which

revealed several problems in the Romanian healthcare system as well as in the fire prevention area.

There then follows a 4-year period **between 2016 and 2019** where intense work is done to coagulate the efforts of the structures under the coordination responsibility of the DSU, both at the national level to **adapt the legal framework**, improve information and **alert means and methods for the population** and their **preparedness**, as well as the staff of the emergency structures, and at the international level, by attending exercises, as well as by **active participation at the European and Euro-Atlantic level**.

### 3.3. 2014÷2025: DSU key outputs

The DSU brings with it a major transformation of the MAI, **improving its capacity to prevent and rapidly respond to disasters**. It will contribute substantially to **strengthening and improving preparedness** to manage risk scenarios in a way that meets today's requirements. Throughout this process, the adequate **endowment**, staff **training** and, in particular, the building of **public education** represented the key objectives of the DSU (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

Access to **non-reimbursable funds has been the main vehicle** for achieving this goal. Thus, in more than 11 years of existence of the DSU, projects financed by non-reimbursable external funds have been submitted and are being implemented both at the level of the Department for Emergency Situations and the structures under its coordination, for a total amount of approximately **1.043 million euro** (<https://igsu.ro/programul-operational-infrastructura-mare/viziune-2020-2209>). This amount, of course, reflects the intense and wide-ranging work carried out mainly by the IGSU, and although the sum seems impressive, the fact that it was absorbed in an extremely short period of time **highlights the chronic lack of funding of civil protection structures over the last 30 years**, but also the needs that continue to exist.

Technically, the **VIZIUNE-2020 Programme**, which is valued at over 675 million euros and was co-financed by the **Cohesion Fund through the Operational Program Large Infrastructure 2014-2020**, is the

benchmark in terms of strategic enhancement of the SNMSU. The project's overall objective was to develop and strengthen the disaster and **HILP** (High Impact Low Probability) event response capacity of the responsible authorities through the development of the following strategic pillars: **land, sea/river, air**. Thus, IGSU was able to **change the firefighting engines** with highly modern ones that ensure the actual energy efficiency standards and a **reduced carbon footprint**, while simultaneously **decreasing the response time**. In addition, Romania increased its capacity to manage extremely complex emergencies without asking for international assistance by procuring all categories of intervention tools in the areas of **search and rescue, CBRN, sheltering, command centres, and flood management**, just to mention a few. The emphasis on rethinking the response based on modern principles, which involves the **use of robots** to absorb the risks that first responders are typically exposed to, is also noteworthy. In this manner, the IGSU can ensure a prompt and effective response to a diverse array of hazards, including earthquakes, floods, forest fires, man-made emergencies, etc. As previously stated, the **preparedness vision encompassed all pillars: land, sea/river, and air** (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

The **air** emergency response **capabilities** were customised to accommodate a wide range of missions. For instance, the **helicopters** that were bought were designed to be capable of **performing multiple tasks**, like logistical missions, such as the transportation of logistical material or personnel; medical airlift for critical patients; and forest fire suppression. Moreover, after nearly 40 years (since before 1986) as a follow-up of the legislative updates to Law 307/2006 (law on fire protection – article 50/1: "response for extinguishing fires and rescuing persons... on ships in ports and in Romanian territorial waters") and the investments made through the VIZIUNE-2020 Programme (<https://www.mai.gov.ro/imbunatatirea-capacitatii-de-interventie-in-situatii-de-urgenta-a-mai-trei-noi-salupe-multirol-au-intrat-in-dotarea-igsu/>) since last year, the Romanian fire-fighters have at their disposal again the capacity to provide response at sea. Now they possess the ability to conduct **marine depollution missions, search and rescue operations**, and to provide **response in maritime fires** (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

The series of actions carried out for an **inclusive approach to disaster risk management** includes **projects funded** through the various instruments like those made available by the **World Bank**:

- the "Strengthening Disaster Management" project, valued at around \$100 million USD, intends to **adapt the energy and structural resistance of 35 facilities** belonging to the county inspectorate for emergency situations by 2027. The project also foresees **institutional capacity building, operational preparedness through training, procurement** of essential emergency equipment and implementation of various public awareness activities. At the same time, this project involves the **purchase of mobile training centres**, thus being able to cover the entire national territory and implicitly to increase the number of people trained annually, an essential activity in **increasing resilience and improving inclusive disaster risk management**;
- the project "*Safer, Inclusive and Sustainable Schools in Romania*", with an amount of 121 million USD, which is in the implementation phase, continues Romania's inclusive approach to disaster risk management, training teachers on how to react during emergencies. Using a "train-the-trainers" (ToT) format, **teachers from 22 schools across the country will benefit from this training**, together with the purchase of automated external defibrillators and first aid kits;
- furthermore, through a \$500,000 Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery grant, in the last two years, a set of steps have been taken to improve inclusiveness of emergency response, **with a particular focus on the needs of people with disabilities**. Activities **included disaster preparedness training for teaching and non-teaching staff and students from schools for children with disabilities**. Also, a total of **22 training courses** were held nationwide for professional firefighters on **how to address the needs of people with disabilities and how to communicate** with them in emergency situations. **Over 500 firefighters** were trained in how to adapt emergency response interventions to the needs of people with disabilities (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

On the other hand, the activities carried out by the DSU in the period 2014-2020 in the context of regulatory, operational, human resources management, and international, as well as in accessing non-reimbursable funds, have highlighted the inadequate size of the structure in relation to the commitments and the need to reorganise the DSU as a key element of the National Emergency Management System (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

In the context established by Law 253/2020, functional bodies were created within the DSU, specifically the **General Directorate for Medical Emergencies**, the **General Directorate for Civil Protection**, and the **Directorate for Decision Support** (Figure 3.2).

Additionally, to strengthen strategic capabilities, the DSU made substantial contributions to:

a) **reviewing the legislation in terms of risk management** – in today's practice we are talking about two work lines at the MAI level: **emergency situations and public order**. Romania has taken steps towards a proactive and comprehensive approach to disaster risk management by initiating the **risk assessment process** (RO-RISK project) and developing the National Disaster Risk Management Plan (NDRMP) and a number of **sectoral/hazard-specific frameworks** contributing to the Disaster Risk Management agenda, in parallel with broader efforts related to climate change mitigation and sustainable development.

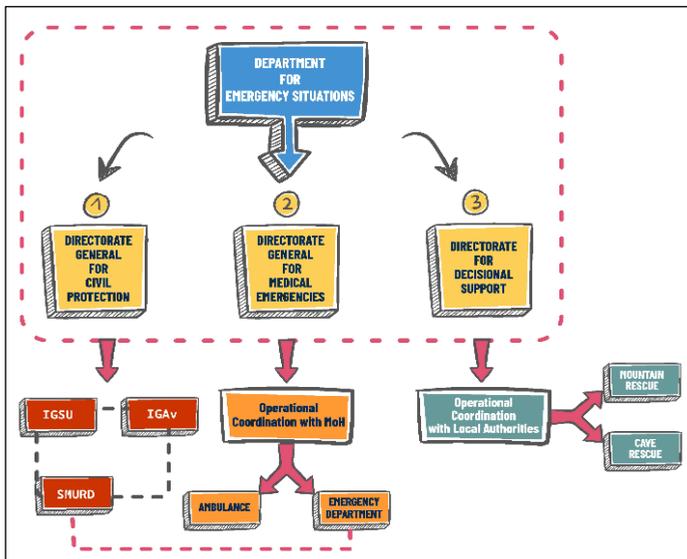


Figure 3.2. DSU organizational chart

In addition, the provision of the **GD 557/2016 creates the framework to organise the management of risk types** into several main areas of activity: **prevention, response, assessment/investigation and recovery/rehabilitation**, thus defining much more clearly the responsibilities of the competent authorities in carrying out the actions that make up the management of each of the **24 risk types identified at the Romanian level**. As regards to those risks identified in the Annex to GD 557, the reality of the last five years reveals that also this GD must be added to the list of legislative texts that require revision. If in the case of the pandemic, the situation was easily framed within the legal provisions, what followed, namely the management of the aftermath of the consequences of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and side issues, calls for a more detailed review. Thus, the flow of refugees, the management of drones (that have entered the national territory without permission) with destructive potential - the shelters, including the shelter pool, crisis situations on the internal European market, hybrid threats and disinformation are just few of the cases that should be dealt with as specifically and, above all, as soon as possible.

A novelty introduced by this piece of legislation is the **division of the competent authorities into primary and secondary authorities** in order to define who **has the main responsibility** in this field and **who supports the execution** of the tasks in the respective field.

In addition, in July 2024, the Government approved the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (SNRRD – *Strategia Națională de Reducere a Riscurilor de Dezastre*), which adopts a multi-risk and multi-sectoral approach, involving cooperation between central public authorities, civil society and the private sector. The SNRRD covers all relevant risk types in Romania but has been prepared taking into account the specific legislation and the status of risk reduction efforts for the **10 risk types assessed in the RO-RISK project (floods; droughts; fires; landslides; earthquakes; nuclear and radiological accidents; major accidents**

**involving dangerous substances (Seveso operators); transportation accidents involving dangerous substances; epidemics; zoonoses),** as well as for extreme weather events (**storms and blizzards, massive snowfalls, tornadoes and extreme temperatures**). These risks were selected from the list of risk types identified at the Romanian level on the basis of historical impact and the results of hazard and risk assessments carried out by the relevant central public authorities (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024; Ro-risk project - Need, objectives, achievements).

At the same time a series of other legal documents were approved like: **amendments to Law no. 95/2006** - on health reform - were also made, in order to integrate aspects related to the national system of emergency health care and qualified first aid; **EO 74/2017** - on the appointment of the IGSU as the centralized procurement unit for the centralized acquisition of ambulances; **EO 46/2019** - on the implementation of the "**RO-ALERT**" (Emergency Public Warning System), **as well as other** subsequent **normative acts** aimed at the management of emergency situations triggered by extreme hydrometeorological phenomena resulting in floods, hydrological droughts, incidents/accidents at hydro-technical constructions, accidental pollution of water courses and marine pollution in the coastal area.

**b) to assure an integrated approach to emergency management** with a view to increasing the operational efficiency of all stakeholders, including at the decision-making level. In this respect, the figures from the pandemic are evident (DSU Activity Report for the year 2021).

In 2021 alone, 626 orders of the commander of operation, 2,305 orders of the head of the Department of Emergency Situations (zonal quarantine and medical personnel deployments – 10636 medical personnel), and 413 provisions of the head of the Department of Emergency Situations (equipment distribution and medical transfers) were issued (Figure 3.3).

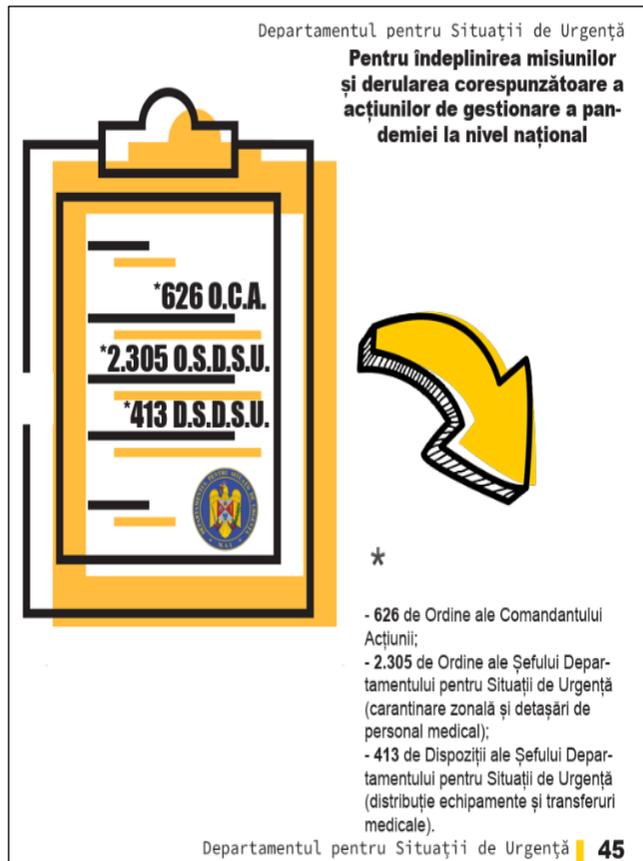


Figure 3.3. DSU/2021: management of pandemic context.  
Source: DSU Activity Report for the year 2021.

Additionally, to consolidate the activity in the operational field:

- exercises are organised to increase the level of preparedness and to identify vulnerabilities, such as SEISM 2016, UNITY 2018, SEISM 2018, EU-MODEX and VIGOROUS WARRIOR 2019.
- the Integrated Centre for Emergency Management of the Bucharest-Ilfov region has been operationalised,
- the "National Post-Earthquake Response Framework" has been developed and approved,
- ten aeromedical stations are being operationalised across the country to ensure the rapid reaction in case of aerial interventions in emergency situations.

The unjustified war that Russia engaged in in Ukraine is in itself a special case in terms of the coordinating role that the DSU has and the work carried out by the IGSU. Since February the 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022, the DSU has effectively managed the response activities to the humanitarian refugee crisis (see Chapter 7). This was done at the level of the **National Response Coordination and Command Centre (CNCCI – Centrul Național pentru Coordonarea și Conducerea Intervenției)**, which fully supervised the emergency response at the national level. This involved a close and efficient collaboration with **local authorities, national non-governmental organisations**, as well as **international entities** present on Romanian territory, the novelty element being the establishment within the CNCCI of a **Civil Society Working Cell** (GD 574, 2022) (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

**c) informing and educating the population in the field of civil protection** – the *Fii pregătit* (Get Ready) **platform** and the **DSU mobile app** are valuable resources developed with the objective of providing citizens with efficient and quick access to information. This platform offers specific sections dedicated to information on how to act and behave in emergency situations or during natural disasters (<https://fiipregatit.ro>). In addition to a wide range of first-hand information clarifying the measures people are advised to consider **before, during, and after a disaster**, the revised version of the platform in February 2024 **introduces the work with AI**. For the first time globally, **a civil protection-trained virtual assistant assists citizens** in preparing for all types of emergencies (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

**d) implementation of the RO-ALERT system** – according to the provisions of EO 46 (2019): *the RO-ALERT system is operated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs through the Department for Emergency Situations, the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations and the county inspectorates for emergency situations, and the Special Telecommunications Service is responsible for implementing the technical measures necessary for the proper functioning of the system*. The system has proven to be very useful; **in 2023**, more than 4415 messages were transmitted (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024; IGSU Activity Report for year 2023).

**e) increasing Romania's contribution in the international arena** – capacities that DSU/IGSU have prepared to reach international standards (INSARAG – UN standard for urban search and rescue teams or EMT – WHO standard for emergency medical response teams) (OCHA, 1991) and all the civil protection modules that Romania registers in the European Civil Protection Pool under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism are self-explanatory ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/emergency-response-coordination-centre-ercc\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/emergency-response-coordination-centre-ercc_en)). In the last 4-5 years, IGSU experts have been deployed to manage the aftermath of earthquakes in Albania (2019) or Turkey (2023) or forest fires in Greece, France, Slovenia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia (*see details in Chapter 6*).

**f) increasing the capacity to access funding** while strengthening the position of civil protection in Romania as the main pillar of the UCPM. Thus, in less than 2.5 years since the establishment of the new structures of the DSU, 13 projects elaborated by DSU specialists are worth more than 188 million euros (DSU Activity Report for year 2022).

Strengthening the role of the Department for Emergency Situations (DSU) within the National Emergency Management System remains a priority, focusing on enhancing mechanisms for the integrated coordination of civil protection activities both vertically and horizontally, with impacts at national and international levels. This effort also aims to increase the resilience of Romanian society in facing future disasters. Through agencies such as the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (IGSU), the General Inspectorate for Aviation (IGA<sub>v</sub> – Inspectoratul General de Aviație), Emergency Units/Departments, Ambulance Services, and, importantly, public rescue services like Salvamont (Mountain Rescue) and Salvaspeo (Cave Rescue), the DSU will continue to serve as the essential link ensuring that, through collaborative efforts, authorities, civil society, business, and academia can jointly build the capacity to withstand crises (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

To summarise, the evolution of the SNMSU over the last 11 years has been primarily driven by the establishment and development of the DSU. It has, of course, not developed in isolation but at the same time as the

other structures specialised in emergency management, all contributing to the transformation of the SNMSU into a complex and integrated system.

However, it must be highlighted that the system has potential for improvement. The evolution of the geopolitical situation in recent years shows that there is a constant need for constant development and adaptation in order to transform it into a more stable and resilient structure, ready to face any future challenges.

### 3.4. DSU way ahead

#### 3.4.1. *The context*

The latest significant challenges we have faced since the beginning of this decade, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the war in Ukraine, and especially starting this year, a realignment of geopolitical spheres of influence have highlighted the **urgent need to strengthen emergency management capacity at the government level**. We have also witnessed the hottest year (2024) in recorded history, and the disaster in the province of Valencia in Spain is proof that climate changes exacerbate the power of natural disasters, and the **fragmentation of responsibilities at the national level can easily become a vulnerability**.

The challenges the world faces have triggered an EU-wide **report**, requested by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and prepared by Special Adviser Sauli **Niinistö** – former President of Finland. The report examines and complements several initiatives already underway at the European level, looking at **crisis management and EU policies** in key areas such as civil protection. Stating that "**the world around us will not wait for Europe to be ready**", in his recently published report, Mr Niinistö urges a forward-looking approach and underlines the need for our readiness to change the ways we work together to ensure our ability to respond effectively to threats. In the context of the new European Commission 2024-2029, the development of a **Union Preparedness Strategy** has been committed to and will build on elements of the report on EU civilian and military preparedness, mentioned above.

The strategy will aim to pave the way for action at the Member State level to ensure a **"whole of government"** approach by clarifying roles and responsibilities, strengthening the architecture of national emergency management systems and linking all actors involved – from citizens and private entities to civilian and military actors and from European and national authorities to local and regional ones – fully respecting the competence of Member States in the field of national security.

At the Romanian level, the complexity and seriousness of these events **demanded close cooperation between multiple ministries and institutions in different fields of activity**, each with a cross-cutting impact on the entire governmental spectrum.

The involvement of all institutions in Romania, vertically, from field interventions up to the governmental and even presidential level, as well as the collaboration with private and non-governmental actors, demonstrated the need for an **integrated approach and an updated institutional framework**.

The **Prime Minister**, in his capacity as **Head of Civil Protection, Chairman of the National Committee for Emergency Situations (CNSU)** and of the **National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction**, has a wide range of responsibilities in the field of emergencies that require a strong and efficient structure directly under his authority. The **multi-sectoral impact** of recent events has shown us that the **present structure** of the government's structure is **undersized** and that the **coordination competences cannot be covered by a single ministry**, thus creating links that make it **difficult to respond to complex emergencies** and to implement prevention and preparedness policies. To underpin this decision and coordination framework, it is essential to **optimise the support mechanisms** and **strengthen the institutions' response capacity**.

These lessons have shown us that, in order to face the challenges ahead, it is imperative to **update the way inter-institutional collaboration works**, to provide **increased decision-making support** to the Prime Minister and to ensure that government structures are prepared to effectively manage any major cross-sector crisis, especially in the current geopolitical security context.

The objective of this exercise is to substantially **increase the operational efficiency** of the DSU, **optimise the use of resources** and improve the **ability to respond** to the complex and diverse challenges that may arise in the future. Over the last ten years, the Romanian emergency system has evolved considerably, demonstrating its ability to cope with increasingly complex and unpredictable crisis situations, both domestically and internationally. This has been made possible thanks to the dedication and professionalism of the structures within and under the coordination of the DSU, as well as strong international partnerships.

However, the increasing frequency and intensity of crises globally – from natural disasters and pandemics to technological incidents and security threats – calls for a more **robust, flexible and coordinated emergency system**. The proposal allows for both alignment with the guidelines of the political orientations for the next European Commission (e.g., the development of a central operational coordination crisis hub within the Commission to facilitate cross-sectoral coordination) and for faster strategic decision-making, better allocation of resources and optimised inter-institutional coordination, thus contributing to the effective protection of people and assets.

Disasters will not stop striking no matter who is in charge. Pandemics, war and the climate crisis are just some of the challenges that have shaken our lives in recent years, reminding us that we need to act now to mitigate the devastating effects of the disasters that may threaten us tomorrow. We have a responsibility to take action now to limit losses and build an effective system.

#### *3.4.2. DSU Strategy – a time of institutional development acknowledgement*

The strategy for the consolidation and development of the role of the DSU - design by the team lead by the author - was approved by **Government Decision 776 of 2024**. This represents an **essential step in strengthening the national emergency response capacity** and recognising the **need for institutional development** of the DSU within the SNMSU.

In the current context of the European Union, the need to increase the collective resilience of member states to anticipate and respond effectively to future disasters was emphasised. Thus, five general objectives have been set to increase disaster resilience:

- **anticipation** – improve risk assessment mechanisms and risk management planning;
- **preparedness** – increase public awareness and preparedness to reduce the impact of disasters;
- **alert** – improving early warning mechanisms;
- **response** – increase response capacity at the national level and within the EU Civil Protection Mechanism;
- **security** – ensure a robust civil protection system operational 24/7.

The DSU strategy is aligned with these European objectives and aims to strengthen the national emergency management system, an objective also committed to in the 2023-2024 Government Program. The approval of this strategy is a moment of major importance for the institutional development of the DSU. Although its implementation will significantly strengthen Romania's capacity to respond effectively to future challenges, the vision presented in this document will streamline and simplify decision-making, logistical and financial processes, unifying efforts under centralised coordination, thus developing a robust system ready to protect the population and national assets much more efficiently and with reduced efforts.

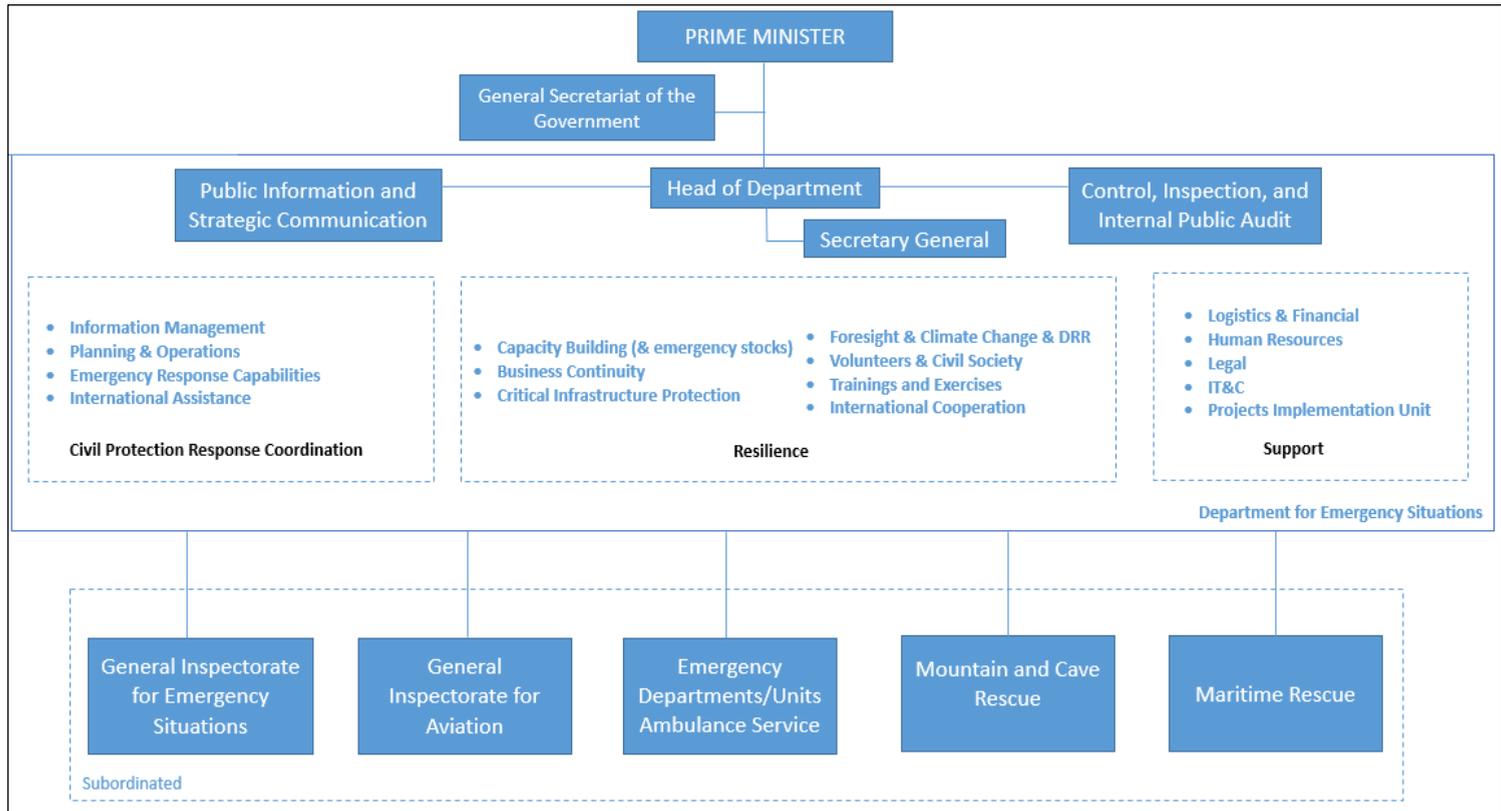
### *3.4.3. The concept*

Through reorganising the existing set-up, placing the **DSU under the direct coordination of the Prime Minister** constitutes a strategic measure to ensure an even fast and efficient response to emergency situations. It will allow direct line access to government assets, facilitating faster allocation of funds and support in crisis situations. This arrangement will also allow **closer coordination between the DSU and other national ministries and agencies**, thus streamlining a real whole-government effort for a more effective response and a unified approach at the national level.

### **3.4.3.1. The architecture**

The draft concept of the new institutional architecture proposal (Figure 3.4) is based on **three essential building blocks** aimed at organising and further strengthening the activity:

- **resilience** – this pillar looks both at the necessary measures for anticipation and mitigation of the impact of disasters and at the preparedness of the population, communities, and responsible authorities. Key elements shall include:
  - ❖ capacity building & emergency stocks,
  - ❖ business continuity planning,
  - ❖ critical infrastructure protection,
  - ❖ foresight & climate change & DRR,
  - ❖ training & exercises,
  - ❖ volunteers & civil society,
  - ❖ international cooperation;
- **civil protection response coordination** – this pillar manages immediate response and rescue operations, ensuring effective coordination of available resources:
  - ❖ information management,
  - ❖ planning & operations
  - ❖ emergency response capabilities,
  - ❖ international assistance;
- **support** – entails the administrative and support functions necessary for the smooth running:
  - ❖ logistical & financial,
  - ❖ human resources,
  - ❖ legal,
  - ❖ IT&C,
  - ❖ projects implementation unit (non-reimbursable funding).



**Figure 3.4. DSU architecture (proposal)**

#### **3.4.3.2. Institutional relations: direct subordination**

- **IGSU** - will remain the main operational arm of the DSU, responsible for the implementation of emergency response operations, resource management and national coordination of intervention teams.
- **IGAv** - will continue to provide essential air support for rescue missions, medical transportation and rapid interventions in remote areas. Direct subordination will facilitate rapid and efficient mobilisation of air resources.
- **Ambulance services** will operate under the coordination of the DSU to ensure integrated management and prompt response to medical emergencies.
- **Emergency Departments (UPU/CPU)** will be an integral part of the DSU network, ensuring an efficient flow of patients to hospital wards.
- **SALVAMONT and SALVASPEO:** by integrating these services, the DSU network will ensure maximum efficiency in mountain and speleological rescue operations through better coordination and optimal use of resources.
- **ARSVOM** – the Romanian Agency for the Rescue of Human Life at Sea – will provide sea capabilities, a specialised pool of expertise unique to the southeast of Europe in search and rescue operations and pollution response over the sea.

#### **3.4.3.3. Operational impact**

By integrating all structures under the unitary coordination of the DSU, directly subordinated to the prime minister, **operational efficiency will be significantly improved**. The centralised allocation of financial resources will allow for more efficient management, **eliminating overlapping expenditures and ensuring that funds are directed to strategic priorities**. This will enable the DSU to quickly mobilise the necessary resources for coordinated and effective interventions, **maximising the impact of the field actions**.

#### 3.4.3.4. Legislative impact

This rather evolution than revolution will require necessary legislative adaptations, including amendments to primary and secondary legislation. **Civil Protection Law** (481/2004), EO 21/2004 (**SNMSU**) and other important pieces of legislation will be updated to reflect the new structures and responsibilities. These amendments will ensure the **alignment** of the legislation with the **new operational realities** and will support an efficient functioning of the DSU under the coordination of the Prime Minister.

Although the legislative impact is significant, this **would address a persistent problem** that the emergency system is still facing today, namely the clear need for **harmonisation and unification** of emergency legislation. This would **eliminate overlaps and uncertainties**, thus ensuring a **coherent and efficient legal framework** to support the new structures and responsibilities.

#### 3.4.3.5. Financial impact

The **financial impact will be minimal**, as the existing structures already benefit from allocated budgets. However, financial efficiency could be significantly increased by centralising the funding of all structures within and subordinated to the headquarters. Careful management of resources will allow for a minimal impact on the state budget, and a unified coordination at the governmental level could increase the absorption of European funds for all structures within the new agency as well as for other structures subordinated to the government with emergency management responsibilities.

#### 3.4.3.6. Logistical impact

The proposal requires the identification of suitable headquarters. This location should meet essential criteria such as accessibility and the ability to accommodate the necessary staff and equipment. It is also important that the premises are strategically located to host meetings of the **CNSU, the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction** and a space for the **CNCCI**. Funding is already allocated through EU non-reimbursable funds, which reduces the financial burden on the national budget.

### **3.4.3.7. Human resources impact**

It is essential to continue to **engage and integrate qualified staff already employed in the SNMSU**. If necessary, experts in areas such as risk management, civil protection, emergency medicine, logistics, finance and communication will be recruited to fit the new organisational structure of the DSU. Training and education programmes will also be developed to ensure that staff are prepared to meet the specific challenges of emergency management. The integration of existing human resources **will ensure the continuity of the operational capacity of the DSU**.

### **3.4.3.8. Challenges and vulnerabilities**

- **institutional resistance among the transferred entities:** some institutions or structures taken over may oppose change, which could create difficulties in harmonising procedures and workflows, leading to inefficiencies in the initial phases of reorganisation;
- **political and social resistance:** the process of setting up the new architecture and the redistribution of resources or authority within the emergency system may be subject to some political or social actors' resistance, who may perceive these changes as a threat to their own interests or positions. The example of October 2015, Collective Club fire, proved that emergency situations management can easily lead to a change of government, no matter the real consequence management. Therefore, even from a political perspective, ensuring a direct link between the prime minister and the responsible institution in the field of emergency situations does not create additional risks.
- **administrative and managerial capacity:** ensuring effective and competent leadership within the agency and developing a team capable of managing challenges and crisis situations could be a vulnerability if human resources and expertise are not adequately available.

### **3.4.3.9. Strategic advantages**

- **improved coherence and coordination:** by the subordination of the DSU directly to the Prime Minister, a more cohesive and integrated coordination of all structures involved in emergency

management will be ensured, eliminating existing gaps and inefficiencies. Furthermore, the coordination of operative centres established in the ministries will be strengthened;

**Faster and more effective response:** more centralised decisions at the prime ministerial level will increase the agency's ability to respond promptly and effectively to threats and crises, expanding its scope and areas of intervention. At the same time, it could mark the first step towards a wider streamlining of the system by designing the proposed structure as a modular organisation, capable of gradual and continuous development. This approach would allow constant adaptation to evolving risks, including critical and emerging risks, optimal management of strategic reserves and stocks, and protection of critical infrastructure in line with European directives. By monitoring risks more closely and understanding them better, the DSU will be able to take evidence-based decisions, essential in the context of climate change;

**Optimal use of resources:** by better integrating financial, human and material resources in the field of emergencies, the DSU will be able to allocate resources efficiently, avoiding waste and maximising the impact of investments. This "one-stop shop" will allow rapid and flexible allocation of funds, ensuring that resources are directed to the most critical areas and needs;

- **increased responsiveness:** the DSU will develop more effective response strategies and plans by integrating new structures and strengthening response and support capacity for all types of hazards, thus ensuring high protection of people, property and the environment;
- **strengthening transparency and accountability:** having the DSU directly subordinated to the Prime Minister will increase transparency and accountability, providing a sound frame for decision and reporting, which would boost public trust in the Romanian government;
- **improved international cooperation and management of external funds:** unifying the management of external funds and humanitarian assistance will optimise the process of accessing

and mobilising international resources, facilitating an integrated coordination of stocks and resources, thereby increasing the ability to access non-reimbursable funds;

- **streamline and increase access to external funds:** improved coordination across multiple agencies under the DSU and the government will facilitate access to external grants and increase efficiency in their management. Through centralised management, the DSU will be able to attract and manage external funds more effectively, ensuring that resources are strategically allocated to maximise the positive impact on Romania's response capacities.

Through **reorganizing the existing set-up**, placing the DSU under the direct coordination of the Prime Minister **constitutes a strategic measure** to ensure an even fast and efficient response to emergency situations. It will allow direct line access to government assets, facilitating faster allocation of funds and support in crisis situations. This arrangement will also allow closer coordination between the DSU and other national ministries and agencies, thus streamlining a real whole government effort for a more effective response and a unified approach at national level.

### 3.5. Conclusions

The **evolution** and the **positioning of the DSU** under the **direct coordination of the Prime Minister** is an **essential step** to enhance the **efficiency of emergency and civil protection services** in Romania. By better **integrating and coordinating resources**, this measure would contribute to improving prevention, preparedness and response capacities in emergency situations, ensuring a more prompt, efficient and well-structured intervention system.

In a global context of increasingly dynamic emerging risks and heightened uncertainty, alignment with the *European vision of building resilience and response capacity becomes imperative*. **Reinforcing decision support at government level**, together with the **development of analysis**

**and foresight capabilities**, would allow more **accurate anticipation of threats, reduce losses** and **optimize the use of resources**. Such an approach would lead not only to lower costs, but also to more effective protection of human lives, thus strengthening the security and stability of society in the face of future challenges.

To conclude, the **proposed solution** should not be perceived as **shocking**, except **by those resistant to evolution**, this concept is not particularly new. The proposal for a Civil Protection Agency emerged shortly after the establishment of the IGSU in 2005, as certain limitations of the new structure became apparent. The subsequent phase (establishment of DSU) initiated in January 2014, ten years post-establishment of the IGSU, serves as an **intermediary measure** to address the initial deficiencies, aiming at achieving the foundational concept of 2005 in a more refined manner to meet current requirements.

More than that, it should also be recognised that emergency situations not managed appropriately can lead to a change of government – as was the case in November 2015 after the fire in the Collective Club. Therefore, even from a political perspective, ensuring a **direct link** between the prime minister and the responsible institution in the field of emergency situations **does not create additional risks**.

# International cooperation and disaster response tools: The European Union Civil Protection Mechanism – role & features

The evolution of European civil protection has not necessarily been a linear process but is the result of a growing imperative to build a coherent system that can respond quickly and effectively to more complex and interlinked disasters. The European Union has developed a robust framework for civil protection as part of its competence to foster collective security and preparedness against an array of both natural and man-made disasters (Widmalm et al., 2023). Established in 2001, the **Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) is a collaborative tool that enables cooperation between the EU member states and ten participating states (as of December 2024) in the field of prevention, preparedness, and response to disasters.** The UCPM represents today the most successful story of the EU tools for coordination and support of the Member States actions in coping with disasters. As described by Decision No 1313/2013/EU, the UCPM covers the entire disaster management cycle, from prevention and preparedness to response and recovery. The Mechanism facilitates coordination between Member States and the European Commission, providing operational, logistical and financial support to optimize the response to emergencies.

The objective of this chapter is **to explore the structure and evolution of the UCPM**, focusing on the operational and legal challenges that impact its effectiveness in disaster management. In addition to addressing the **legal framework governing the UCPM, funding mechanisms, interoperability of resources and lessons to be learned** from recent activations of the Mechanism will be explored. In particular,

the focus will be on the impact of the changes introduced since 2019, such as the **establishment of the "rescEU"** (see Chapter 4.1.1), which has reshaped the Union's ability to respond rapidly and in a coordinated manner to large-scale emergencies.

The reflection will consider both the institutional dimension of European civil protection and the practical aspects of field deployment, providing an insight into the effectiveness of the Mechanism in relation to new global challenges. It seeks to highlight future directions for strengthening the UCPM so that it will become an even more robust and adaptable tool in the face of the complexity of nowadays risks.

Through this integrated approach, the focus was not only on clarifying key aspects of the functioning of the UCPM, but also on identifying innovative directions to strengthen it. The emphasis has been on improving international cooperation, developing operational capabilities and adapting existing arrangements to emerging challenges so that the European Union can respond more quickly and effectively to disasters of all kinds.

As such, this chapter is intended to contribute to a thorough understanding of how European civil protection can be optimized and strengthened, providing a clear perspective on the challenges and solutions existing within the framework of the UCPM.

## **4.1. The role and state of play of the UCPM**

### *4.1.1. The born of the UCPM*

With regard to the steps taken at European level, although the year 2001 is considered as the moment of birth of the UCPM in the light of the adoption of Council Decision of 23 October 2001 establishing a *Community mechanism to facilitate reinforced cooperation in civil protection assistance interventions* (2001/792/EC, Euratom), it should not be ignored that the roots of European solidarity in disaster management have a longer history.

Thus, *"believing that cooperation between the Member States in the civil protection field seems likely to increase the ability of all Member States to respond*

according to circumstances and requirements; whereas such cooperation could improve the efficiency of individual disaster management operations; whereas practical steps are therefore called for at Community level, such as the drawing up of a Guide to Civil Protection in the European Community" as written in the Resolution of the Council and the representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 25 June 1987 on the introduction of Community Cooperation on Civil Protection (87/C 176/01), and later by Council Decision 98/ 22/EC of 19 December 1997 establishing a Community Action Programme in the field of Civil Protection, which already at that time emphasized the need for "a Community action programme (hereinafter called 'the programme') in the field of civil protection" to be established "in order to contribute to the protection of persons, environment and property in the event of a natural or technological disaster, without prejudice to the internal division of competences in Member States" are basically the first bricks of legislation that have laid the ground for cooperation and development in this field of civil protection at European level.

The UCPM was developed as a coordination and support tool between Member States and participating states, aiming to improve the collective response capacity to natural and man-made disasters. Since then, the UCPM has undergone a process of development, adaptation and consolidation to respond more adequately to the increasingly complex needs of civil protection at European and international level.

Initially, the Mechanism was designed to facilitate the exchange of information and the coordination of disaster response operations, based on the principle of solidarity between Member States. From an operational perspective the first stage of development was the establishment of the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC). "The operational heart of the Mechanism" became operational in once the Commission Decision (2004/277/EC, Euratom) - laying down rules for the implementation of Council Decision 2001/792/EC, Euratom establishing a Community mechanism to facilitate reinforced cooperation in civil protection assistance interventions was approved, which later in 2013 evolved in the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) once the Decision no 1313/2013/EU (of the European Parliament and of the Council)

on a *Union Civil Protection Mechanism* (Article 7) was adopted. With the adoption of Decision No 1313/2013/EU, the UCPM was significantly reformed and expanded, with a greater focus on prevention and preparedness in addition to the response component. This decision set the framework for the development of funding programs to improve Member States' response capacities and created mechanisms to support third countries affected by disasters.

At its first stage, the Mechanism comprised a limited number of participating countries in addition to the EU Member States. Over time, it has expanded so that today we have a total of 10 non-EU countries, known as participating countries, which have gradually joined the UCPM: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Serbia, Türkiye and Ukraine ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection_en)). Today, the 37 countries working under the UCPM umbrella represent the largest community in the world that actively provide solidarity in disaster management. This expansion is a living proof of the shared commitment of these nations to work together in civil protection, ensuring a coordinated and effective response to natural and man-made disasters.

In 2019, with the increasing frequency and intensity of disasters, mainly related to climate changes, the European Union established *rescEU* which represent "*our safety net*", a strategic feature of the UCPM designed to provide additional resources in the event of a major emergency.

Today, the UCPM continues to evolve, playing a key role in strengthening European resilience to disasters and crises. It acts based on an integrated system of prevention, preparedness and response reducing the impact of disasters and to protect people and critical infrastructure. The continued development of the Mechanism reflects the European Union's commitment to ensure a rapid and coordinated response to emerging challenges, including those related to climate change and new cross-border threats.

#### **4.1.2. From initiative to consolidation: the evolution of the UCPM**

Currently the UCPM is ruled by a robust legal framework, based on the European and international treaties governing civil protection cooperation. When a disaster overwhelms a country's response capacities, that country can request assistance through the UCPM, ensuring a coordinated and rapid European response (Parker et al., 2019; Zwęgliński and Smolarkiewicz, 2023). It is relevant to underline that, the **European Commission can only supplement the actions of the Member States (MS)** through the UCPM. This is regulated in **art. 196** of the **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)**, from which results that the **competence in the field of civil protection lies with the Member States**. But in the same time, the legal provisions introduced in 2009, by the Treaty of Lisbon provided a stronger foundation for the UCPM, establishing the **supporting competences at the EU level**. Additionally, the Solidarity Clause in Article 222 TFEU reaffirmed the importance of the UCPM in **coordinating disaster response and effective cross-border risk management**.

According with Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024, since its foundation in 2001, the UCPM has evolved through three main phases (Figure 4.1):

- **the 'commodity exchange' phase 2001-2007** – according to the EC 792(2001) decision, the original blueprint of what today we call the **Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)** was *Community mechanism to facilitate reinforced cooperation in civil protection assistance interventions*. At that time the aim was to create an instrument to facilitate reinforced cooperation in civil protection assistance interventions by facilitating support in the event of major disasters which may require an emergency response. This tool was intended to facilitate the mobilization of intervention teams, experts and other resources as required. The focus at this stage was on exchanging information, providing international assistance, disaster preparedness, and joint participation in exercises and training. To coordinate requests for assistance and operate the common emergency communication system, the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) was established in 2003, primarily staffed by civil protection personnel seconded from Member States.

Several major disasters occurred during this phase: floods - Czech Republic (2002), earthquake - Algeria (2003), tsunami - Indian Ocean (2004), earthquake - Pakistan (2005). The assistance provided consisted mainly of goods sent by Member States. The EU's coordination function was to align needs with available resources at the Member States level.

- **'consolidation' phase: 2007 – 2013** - legislation is being revised to strengthen the response capacities of the UCPM and improve preparedness. New pillars are being developed, such as:
  - **European Emergency Response Capacity** - consisting of a voluntary pool of pre-committed response capacities of the Member States, including teams (modules), other response capacities and experts;
  - **EU Civil Protection Expert Teams** - experts (assessment/coordination) from Member States;
  - **Program of courses and exercises;**
  - **Funding disaster preparedness projects** - developing response capacity.

In the meantime, in 2010, the **Civil Protection Unit** which was at that time part of Directorate-General Environment merged with the **EU Humanitarian Aid Office under DG-ECHO** - as it is known today as the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations. This has allowed better coordination between mechanisms in disaster response both inside and outside the EU.

- **'development' phase: 2013 - present** - in 2013 the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) is established, improving coordination, planning and response tools. The ERCC plays a central role in the UCPM, acting as the coordination and mobilization hub for assistance. The ERCC monitors global events 24/7, ensuring the rapid deployment of emergency support and maintaining direct liaison with national civil protection authorities (Parker et al., 2019).

In 2019, **during the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union**, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism was upgraded and **rescEU was created**, initially consisting of **aircraft, helicopters and**

**specialized medical equipment.** RescEU represents **the first-ever strategic reserve at the EU level.** The Commission makes the final deployment decision, while EU Member States and UCPM Participating States host the capacities and remain their legal owners. The EU fully funds this initiative, which aims to protect citizens against disasters and manage emerging risks by providing an additional layer of protection.

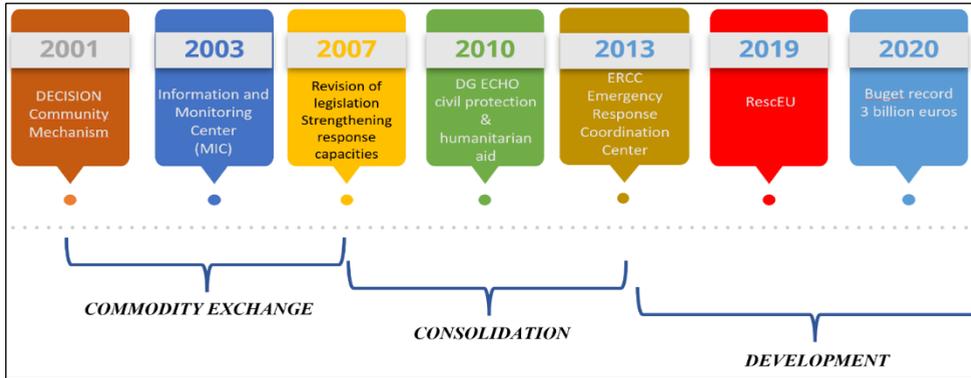


Figure 4.1. Key milestones in the development of the EUCPM

As presented, over the years, the UCPM has been adapted and improved through a series of legislative amendments reflecting the emerging needs of the European Union. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of strengthening response capacities by creating strategic *rescEU* stocks, which included essential medical equipment such as medical protective equipment (masks, etc), ventilators and vaccines. At the same time, the war of aggression against Ukraine has demonstrated the capacity of the UCPM to go beyond the traditional civil protection by engaging in a broad spectrum of cross-sectoral actions. The Mechanism coordinated the delivery of humanitarian aid, facilitated the transfer of patients between Member States and provided logistical support to Ukraine's neighbours, helping to create safe humanitarian corridors (for example the medical corridor to transfer medical patients from Ukraine via Poland in whole Europe).

Today *rescEU* comprises a fleet of firefighting planes and helicopters, a medical evacuation plane, and several essential stockpiles. These include field hospitals, transport assets, energy and shelter items,

critical medical supplies, and equipment to respond to chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) emergencies. The geographical coverage of the rescEU reserve is extensive, with around 50 rescEU capacities being hosted by 22 Member States and UCPM Participating States. This coverage ranges in distance from Portugal in the West to Türkiye in the East, as well as the Scandinavian countries in the North and Mediterranean countries in the South (DG ECHO, 2024).

The constant fine-tuning of the legal framework over time shows an integrated and cross-sectoral approach designed to improve the effectiveness of the Mechanism. Over the years, the European Union has integrated - and is continuing to do so - **the UCPM into the wider European security context** through legal instruments and strategies covering areas such as **humanitarian aid, critical infrastructure protection, post-disaster recovery** and so on. In this way, the UCPM has become an essential tool for Europe's crisis response, demonstrating its capacity to continuously adapt and strengthen in the face of global challenges.

As regards the harmonization of national legislation in the context of the UCPM, national authorities are encouraged to align their legislation with the European framework governing the Mechanism on the one hand, and to contribute to its strengthening and development on the other. This process of legislative convergence contributes to enhancing interoperability and, why not, to improving cooperation between states, ultimately ensuring effective coordination across the broad spectrum of crises. Harmonizing national legislation with the UCPM framework offers significant benefits, including facilitating the mobilization of resources and creating a compatible legislative infrastructure to receive international assistance.

The harmonization process also supports the exchange of best practices and facilitates the interoperability of disaster management systems, contributing to a unified emergency response. It can be concluded, therefore, that the entire legal and legislative framework of the UCPM continues to evolve to respond to today's challenges. By promoting legislative convergence and embedding it in a unitary system,

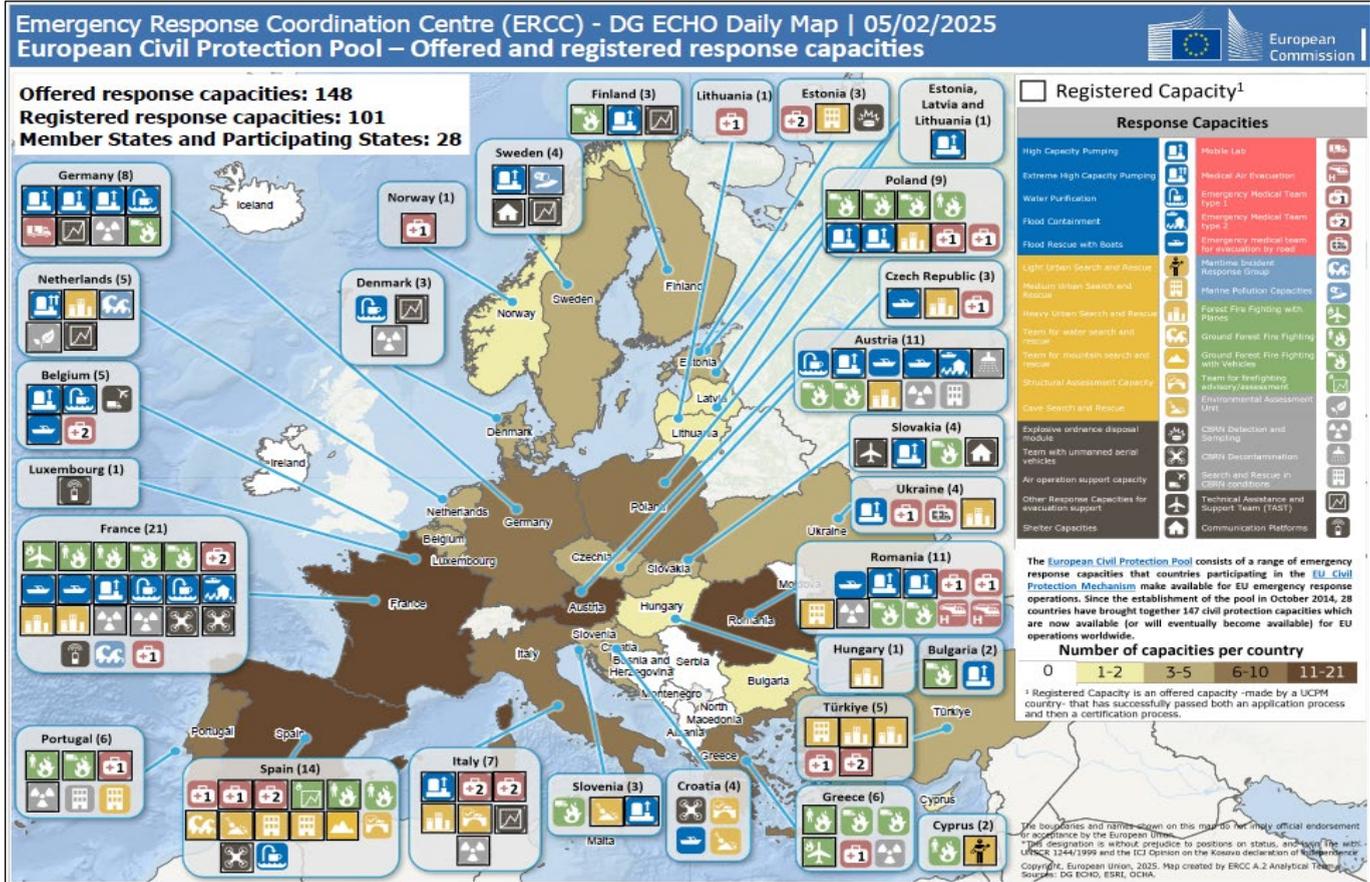
the collective disaster resilience of the European Union is strengthened, thus supporting effective civil protection tailored to meeting current needs.

#### ***4.1.3. UCPM - the architecture of international cooperation***

Currently, the UCPM showcases a unique worldwide model of international solidarity and collaboration. This architecture enables a swift and coordinated emergency response from 37 nations, no matter national boundaries. Countries engaged in the UCPM choose to participate due to the real benefits it offers. By bringing them together, the countries have access to common assets, logistical and financial assistance, and European expertise, whilst at the same time strengthening collective disaster response capacities.

The architecture of international cooperation in the framework of the UCPM is built on a founding principle of solidarity, which translates into the rapid mobilization of resources and expertise in support of any Member State or participant, but also to any corner of the world, in need. This approach not only increases the effectiveness of the response, but also creates a continuous learning environment in which countries exchange best practices and develop their national capacities on the basis of standards that eventually become common.

A central aspect of this architecture is the contributions of countries both to those capabilities that are part of the European Civil Protection Pool (ECPP) (Figure 4.2) and to the *rescEU* reserve, which covers the strategic capabilities for disaster management mentioned above (fire-fighting aircraft, CBRN equipment and medical stocks - Figure 4.3). This integration makes efficient use of resources and supports operational coordination in major disasters. Last but not least, this design highlights the fact that a collective response, based on solidarity and operational coordination, is fundamental to protect people, cultural heritage, property and the environment.



**Figure 4.2. ECPP Map of offered and registered response capacities**  
 (Source: <https://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ECHO-Products/Maps#/maps/5182>)

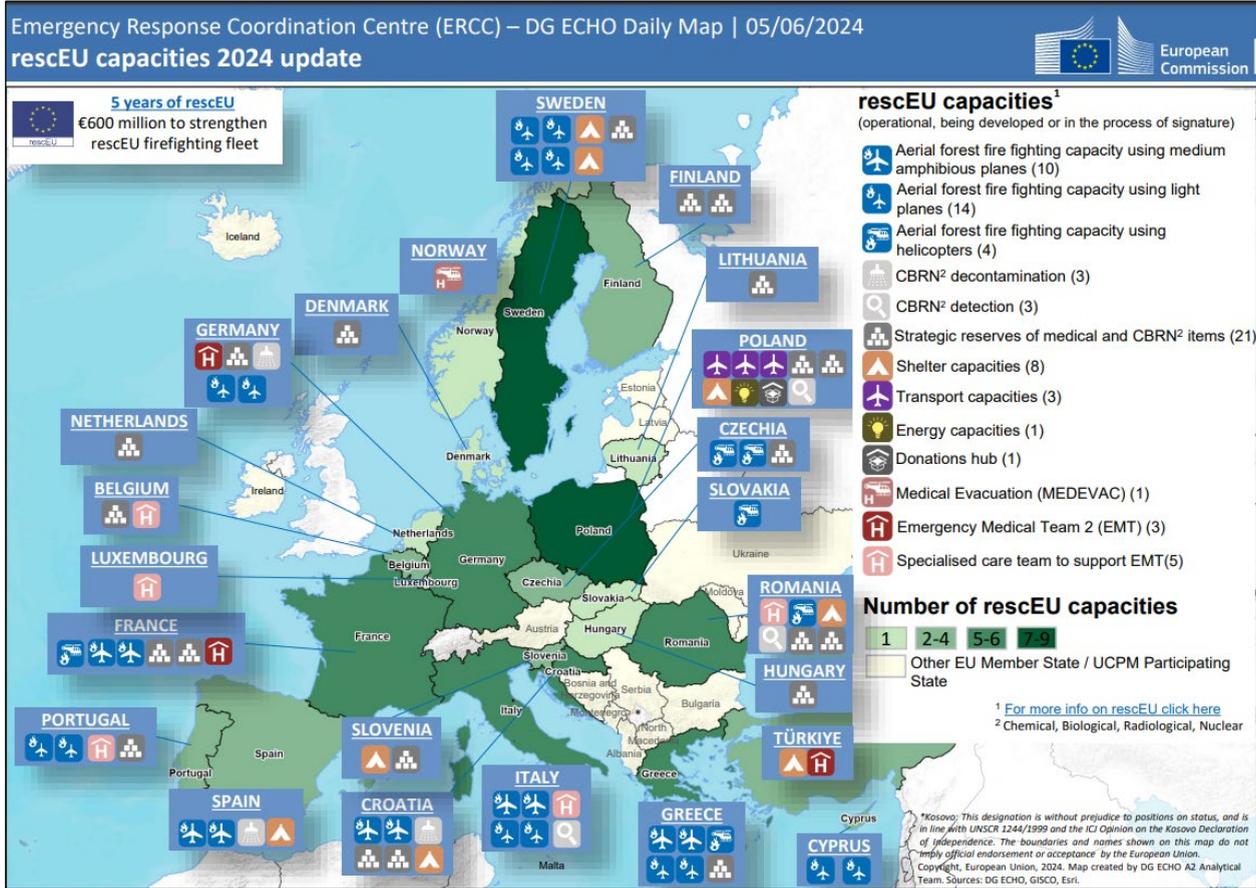


Figure 4.3. rescEU capacities map  
 (Source: <https://erccportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ECHO-Products/Maps#/maps/4887>)

## **4.2. The main pillars of the UCPM**

As presented by Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024, in *Fostering resilience in Romania through European Collaboration: Challenges and Perspectives specific to the Romanian Department for Emergency Situations as part of the Eu Civil Protection approach*, the Commission supports capacity building of national civil protection and disaster risk management authorities of Member and Participating States through its UCPM capacity building toolbox. In the last two years, assistance has been made available also to support the implementation of the Disaster Resilience Goals, and priorities for funding have been aligned with the Goals.

### ***4.2.1. Risk prevention and vulnerability reduction***

Mitigating risks and addressing vulnerabilities to disasters is essential within the UCPM to guarantee a high level of protection for the population and critical infrastructure. In the context of accelerated **climate change**, increased **extreme weather** events, and **systemic interdependencies**, prevention demands a unified framework for action. This framework must be equipped with coherent policies, rigorous planning tools, and financial support mechanisms tailored to emerging risks. Therefore, in accordance with Article 6(1)(d) of Decision No 1313/2013/EU, Member States are asked to prepare and submit **summaries of national risk assessments** to the European Commission, to enhance prevention. The summaries include the identification of principal risks, an evaluation of management capabilities, and the prioritisation of preventive and preparedness measures essential to mitigate risks with cross-border consequences, as well as, when appropriate, low-probability and high-impact risks (Commission Notice Reporting Guidelines on Disaster Risk Management, Art. 6(1)d of Decision No 1313/2013/EU2019/C 428/07 ). Article 6 talks about how important it is to improve disaster prevention. It supports an integrated approach that uses regular risk assessments and proactive strategies to lower the chances of disasters happening. This obligation arises from the necessity to establish a cohesive civil protection system at the European

level, where prevention is regarded not as a secondary phase of disaster management but as an ongoing process of adapting and enhancing strategies for reducing vulnerability. The development of **standardised risk assessment methodologies** enabled comparable outcomes across exposure levels and supported a coordinated response to emergencies.

An essential component of **the prevention framework** is the development of **National Disaster Risk Reduction Plans**, strategic documents that prioritise actions and regulations to mitigate the impacts of disasters. These plans are established through robust scientific principles and risk assessments, integrating climate change, security, and critical infrastructure considerations. The European Commission's role is to ensure the coherence of these plans via the reporting and benchmarking tool, providing guidance and support in order to enhance prevention capacity.

The integration of prevention measures into sectoral policies is crucial for effective risk mitigation. Critical infrastructure development, ecosystem protection as natural disaster barriers, and energy security must clearly include risk reduction aspects. Implementing strict requirements in the development of essential infrastructure can considerably diminish its vulnerability to natural disasters. Also, protecting and rehabilitating ecosystems like wetlands and forests may function as natural barriers against floods and landslides. Also, making sure energy stability by using a variety of sources and keeping important energy infrastructure safe lowers the risks that come with power outages during emergencies.

An important phase in the evolution of European risk prevention policies took place following the initial **European Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Report**, published by the European Commission in 2024. This document has synthesised progress in implementing prevention strategies and highlighted areas where structural improvements are needed. The report analysed both the measures taken at national level and synergies with other international initiatives, setting the premises for integrated risk governance at EU level (*Report on progress in the implementation of Article 6 of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism -*

*Decision No. 1313/2013/EU, Brussels 12.3.2024, COM (2024) 130 final*). It has also facilitated the alignment of European objectives with those of **the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030**, thus strengthening the position of the UCPM as a central tool in promoting a systematic approach to prevention and resilience. By referring to the Sendai principles, the European Commission has reaffirmed the EU's dedication to integrating risk management into all relevant sectoral policies. This will allow for a coordinated and long-lasting response to new problems.

**The Peer Review Program** is a key tool in the attempt to lower risks and improve prevention abilities. It is a major pillar of the UCPM framework and plays an important role in improving national prevention strategies and building up institutions' disaster risk management abilities. This mechanism allows countries to have their civil protection systems evaluated externally by other countries, which facilitates an objective exchange of best practices and the identification of possible shortcomings. The peer review is not limited to a mere technical analysis but is an exercise in collaborative governance, through which countries calibrate their prevention policies against the most advanced European and international standards (<https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/disaster-prevention-and-risk-management/ucpm-peer-review-programme>). The assessment process is structured in several stages, including an initial self-assessment of the country under review, followed by field visits by teams of experts to collect relevant data and conduct an in-depth analysis. The findings from these assessments are synthesised into concrete recommendations to guide countries in strengthening their prevention capacities and alignment with benchmarks. This mechanism, although voluntary, has a significant impact on the European civil protection architecture, facilitating the **transfer of knowledge** and the homogenisation of approaches to disaster risk reduction. A defining aspect of this program is the active involvement of the European Commission, which not only facilitates the evaluation process but also capitalises on the collected data to identify directions for improvement at the systemic level. Centralising and

analysing the results of the evaluations allows the Commission to **adjust policy orientations** and propose appropriate **legislative changes**, thereby strengthening prevention tools. Moreover, the regular reporting under the programme helps to maintain a continuous monitoring of the progress of the countries and to ensure a coherent framework for improving prevention capacity.

At the same time, to support the implementation of prevention measures, the UCPM also provides **financial and technical support** in the form of grants to enhance disaster risk reduction and resilience, using scientifically backed and internationally approved practices. By financing prevention and preparedness projects, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism promotes cross-border cooperation to effectively manage both natural and man-made disasters, thereby protecting lives and economies. These grant opportunities, offering funding for **single-country** and **multi-country projects**, are designed to achieve a higher level of protection against disasters with cross-border impacts, be aligned with the **EU Disaster Resilience Goals** and the **Wildfire Prevention Action Plan**, and intend to build competencies, skills, knowledge, and expertise in civil protection and disaster risk management. To cover all these areas, the funds are divided into two major areas ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/funding-evaluations/financing-civil-protection/prevention-and-preparedness-projects-civil-protection\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/funding-evaluations/financing-civil-protection/prevention-and-preparedness-projects-civil-protection_en)):

- the "**Technical Assistance for Disaster Risk Management**" grants support strategic activities in eligible countries with the aim to prepare investments or to strengthen the institutional and policy framework for disaster risk management;
- while the "**Knowledge for Action in Prevention and Preparedness**" (KAPP) grants focus on multi-country initiatives, supporting action on disaster prevention and preparedness, and providing a testing environment and learning opportunity through full-scale field exercises.

By mobilising financial and technical resources such as those mentioned above, the UCPM not only supports disaster prevention but

also contributes to making it an essential pillar of European security and development policies. This integrated model, based on strategic investments, international collaboration, and efficient use of available resources, ensures a strengthened capacity to anticipate and manage risks while minimising their impact on communities and critical infrastructure.

A key element of the prevention process in the UCPM is **learning from past experiences** and integrating **lessons identified** into risk reduction strategies: the Lessons Learnt Programme (<https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/eu-civil-protection-mechanism/ucpm-lessons-learnt-programme>). This process not only optimises preventive measures but also contributes to the development of more effective mechanisms for managing future emergencies. Regular retrospective analysis of disaster response and management helps to identify shortcomings and areas for improvement. To this end, at the UCPM level, international exercises and courses are evaluated by AAR (After Action Reviews) processes (<https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/news/ucpm-peer-review-programme-lessons-learnt-and-next-steps>), which serve as platforms for increasing the effectiveness of preventive measures and improving their operational response. A central component of this process is the development of systematic mechanisms to collect and analyse data on past interventions. This approach enables the consolidation of a knowledge base that facilitates both informed decision-making and evidence-based policy development. The use of information collected from the field also contributes to the fine-tuning of national risk management plans, thus ensuring continuous adaptation to emerging challenges.

Through the lessons learnt mechanism, the UCPM promotes the **exchange of best practices** by facilitating the **dissemination of solutions that have proven their effectiveness** in different emergency contexts. This process is supported by the **Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network**, which will be presented later in this chapter. It provides an organised framework for benchmarking experiences and adjusting national strategies to operational realities. Integrating lessons learnt in prevention is not limited to adjusting strategies and policies; it also

involves improving operational preparedness through simulation exercises and the continuous training of personnel involved in disaster management. This process contributes to *building a culture of resilience and increasing response capacity, which are both important for making Europe less vulnerable and improving civil protection (Commission Recommendation of February 8, 2023, on the Union objectives for disaster resilience—2023/C 56/01)*. It is essential to embrace the concept which emphasises that prevention should not be seen in isolation, but as part of a comprehensive strategy combining risk assessment, integrated planning and efficient use of financial resources. The UCPM plays a crucial role in facilitating this process by providing a framework for cooperation between states, promoting legislative convergence and supporting the implementation of best practices in the field of risk reduction. Through such an approach, the European Union can ensure not only an effective response to disasters but also a real reduction in exposure to risks, thereby strengthening the collective resilience of European society.

#### **4.2.2. Civil protection preparedness**

The evolution of climate, health and technological threats, in combination with the growing interdependence between states in managing cross-border risks, has created a need for an integrated mechanism to collect, analyse, and disseminate knowledge relevant to European civil protection. Responding to this strategic need, the European Union has established **the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network**, an institutional framework to support the development of expertise and the improvement of capabilities for prevention, preparedness and rapid response to disasters. The network's multidimensional approach makes it easier for national strategies to be harmonised, for lessons learnt to be shared, and for response procedures to become more standardised. This makes Europe more resistant to new risks.

The network concept fits organically into the architecture of the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism, providing a formal space for cooperation and the dissemination of validated methodologies. Through exercise programs, training, applied research, and the exchange

of experience, the network contributes to the development of innovative risk management solutions, thus providing cross-dimensional training not only for operational staff but also for decision-makers, policymakers, and inter-institutional coordination structures (Figure 4.4).

 <p><b>UCPM Training Programme</b> Training for experts to work together on prevention, preparedness and response activities as part of the UCPM.</p>	 <p><b>Awareness-raising activities</b> Initiatives improving public awareness of disaster risks and civil protection activities in prevention, preparedness and response.</p>
 <p><b>Exchange of Civil Protection Experts</b> Exchange programme that allows experts to spend a period abroad to share experiences and gain new operational skills.</p>	 <p><b>Community engagement</b> Regular dialogue with Member and Participating States and other stakeholders on all aspects of the Knowledge Network.</p>
 <p><b>UCPM Lessons Learnt Programme</b> Lessons and good practices drawn from deployments and other activities to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of the UCPM.</p>	 <p><b>Partnerships facilitation opportunities</b> Funding of initiatives to bring the civil protection and disaster management communities closer together and foster their collaboration.</p>
 <p><b>Scientific advice &amp; innovation</b> Connection with scientific networks to provide the UCPM with specific expertise and stimulate research and innovation.</p>	 <p><b>Civil protection exercises</b> Exercises such as EU MODEX improving preparedness and enhancing collaboration among European civil protection authorities and teams.</p>
 <p><b>Thematic workshops &amp; conferences</b> Learning and networking opportunities designed around specific existing or emerging needs and risks.</p>	 <p><b>Email</b> <a href="mailto:echo-cp-knowledge-network@ec.europa.eu">echo-cp-knowledge-network@ec.europa.eu</a></p> <p><b>Platform</b> <a href="http://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu">civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu</a></p>

**Figure 4.4. Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network activities**  
(Source: <https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/ucpkn-factsheets>)

This training element is essential for the continuous improvement of response mechanisms, allowing rapid adaptation to the changing dynamics of emerging threats.

The distinctive feature of the network is its ability to shape and harmonise participants approaches so that they have a unitary methodological framework. Through a set of initiatives, such as the **civil protection training program**, the **exchange of expert platform**, and **pilot projects**, the Knowledge Network has had a direct impact on the efficiency of prevention and preparedness activities.

Applied research complements its educational dimension, facilitating collaboration with academic institutions and centres of excellence.

It supports the development of emerging technologies tailored to civil protection, such as advanced simulation systems, predictive models based on artificial intelligence and digital solutions for optimising the response. In addition to the development of response methodologies, the network contributes to evidence-based public policy and thus strengthens the European risk prevention architecture. This strategic approach allows not only to improve response capacity but also to create a civil protection system that is more resilient and adaptable to future challenges.

By integrating all these dimensions, the Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network has become an essential part of the European Union's preparedness and response architecture, securing continuity in the professionalisation process and reinforcing a decision-making framework based on knowledge, collaboration, and strategic anticipation.

- **training programs, exercises, and exchanges of experience** - the disaster response capacity of members and participating states cannot be effective without a rigorous preparedness process based on coordination, interoperability, and continuous adaptation to operational circumstances (Special Report - The Union Civil Protection Mechanism: coordinating the response to disasters outside the EU has been generally effective - Court of Auditors, Romania – 2016). Preparedness is not limited to the development of response procedures; it involves systematic training, constant evaluation, and continuous optimisation of existing capabilities to ensure an effective and coordinated response at the European level.

In a context marked by the diversity of risks and growing interdependence between states, the interoperability of civil protection structures is becoming an operational necessity. The standardisation of operational methodologies, the harmonisation of response protocols, and the constant exchange of best practices between member states and participating states are essential elements for optimising the collective response to disasters. This process requires functional coordination tools and programs capable of ensuring the rapid integration of available resources and their efficient deployment in emergencies.

Technological progress, changing risk typologies, and lessons learnt from past interventions drive the constant adaptation of response methodologies. This dynamic requires permanent flexibility in the preparedness architecture through the implementation of training programs adapted to operational realities and recurrent testing of response capacities. Thus, **preparedness is not a static process** but an evolving component of civil protection, indispensable for building resilience at the European level.

The effectiveness of a civil protection mechanism depends not only on the technical infrastructure available but also on the level of preparedness of those involved in emergency management. In response to this imperative, the **European Union Civil Protection Mechanism Training Program** has been designed as a strategic tool to develop the skills needed for an effective and coordinated response to disasters. Designed according to rigorous methodological principles, the program not only trains operational staff but also supports decision-makers, policymakers, and technical experts involved in the European civil protection architecture.

The training program matches the strategic objectives of the UCPM by **embedding the educational dimension in the disaster management cycle**. Through a combination of theoretical lectures, practical sessions and complex exercises, participants are exposed to multidimensional scenarios designed to develop their anticipation, decision-making and operational response capacities. These courses are not limited to the technical aspects of interventions but include advanced modules on interinstitutional coordination, resource management, and the integration of new technologies in civil protection.

One of the fundamental pillars of the program is the promotion of interoperability within UCPM by providing joint training sessions for staff from members and participating states. This approach facilitates the standardisation of response procedures, allowing a unified reaction to disasters with cross-border impacts. At the same time, the program places a strong emphasis on the exchange of best practices in the field of civil protection through interactive sessions and case studies based on previous operational experiences.

Over time, the courses offered under this program have been expanded and refined to better respond to the specific operational needs of the member states and the ten participating countries of UCPM. They cover a broad spectrum of skills, from strategic emergency management to the use of innovative technologies to increase the efficiency of interventions. This evolution reflects the constant need to adapt to changing operational realities and emerging challenges facing civil protection at the European level.

A central component of the program aims to provide specialised training for those seeking to be part of the EU Civil Protection Teams (EUCP Teams) - which are pivotal elements in the deployment of international assistance in UCPM missions (<https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/media/annex-1-eucpt-function-profiles>). These advanced courses are designed to train experts able to manage rapid needs assessment, the coordination of multi-country operations and the application of European civil protection standards. The training program thus directly contributes to strengthening the European Union's rapid response capabilities to international crises while ensuring optimal interoperability among intervention teams. With its systematic approach and focus on excellence, the UCPM Training Programme is a catalyst for the professionalisation of European civil protection, strengthening the response capacity of the countries and contributing to the creation of a protection system based on knowledge, collaboration and innovation. This educational structure is essential to maintaining a high level of preparedness and ensuring a rapid, effective, and well-coordinated response to current and future challenges.

A fundamental element of the preparedness architecture is the **Exercises Programme** (<https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/civil-protection-exercises>), designed to test the ability to respond to complex scenarios and to identify operational gaps which require fine-tuning. The international exercises, regularly organised under the umbrella of UCPM, known as MODEX, enable the assessment of interinstitutional coordination, the adjustment of operational protocols, and the improvement of communication flows in a multi-agency response.

Additionally, these exercises aim to test the operational capabilities of specialised emergency response teams. The modules, which come from member states, are trained to work quickly and effectively in an international mission. The exercises test how well modules can work together in a multinational response, making sure that the tools and methods used are compatible.

At the tactical and operational levels, MODEX conducts large-scale field simulations and table-top to test decision-making skills in crisis situations:

- *the field exercises* involve the mobilisation of civil protection modules and specialised intervention teams, which are subjected to complex scenarios designed to simulate natural disasters, industrial accidents, CBRN incidents, or humanitarian crises. By replicating realistic operational conditions, these exercises make it possible to assess the rapid response, interoperability of the structures involved, and effectiveness of existing procedures.
- *table-top exercises* are also an essential way of fine-tuning the decision-making process architecture. They create a space for structured dialogue where representatives of the relevant institutions can explore multiple operational options, coordinating effectively to harmonise the response at an interinstitutional level (Facilitation Guide for TTX (Tabletop Exercise) in Digital Security Training).

By Decision No 1313/2013, the Commission was mandated to monitor the overall quality of response capabilities by developing a certification and registration process for the response capacities provided by Member States and Participating States to the Pool (Guidelines “Certification and Registration” of Response Capacities in the European Civil Protection Pool ECPP). In this circumstance, EU MODEX becomes as the most appropriate platform for the certification of Modules and Other Response Capacities for the European Civil Protection Pool (Figure 4.5).

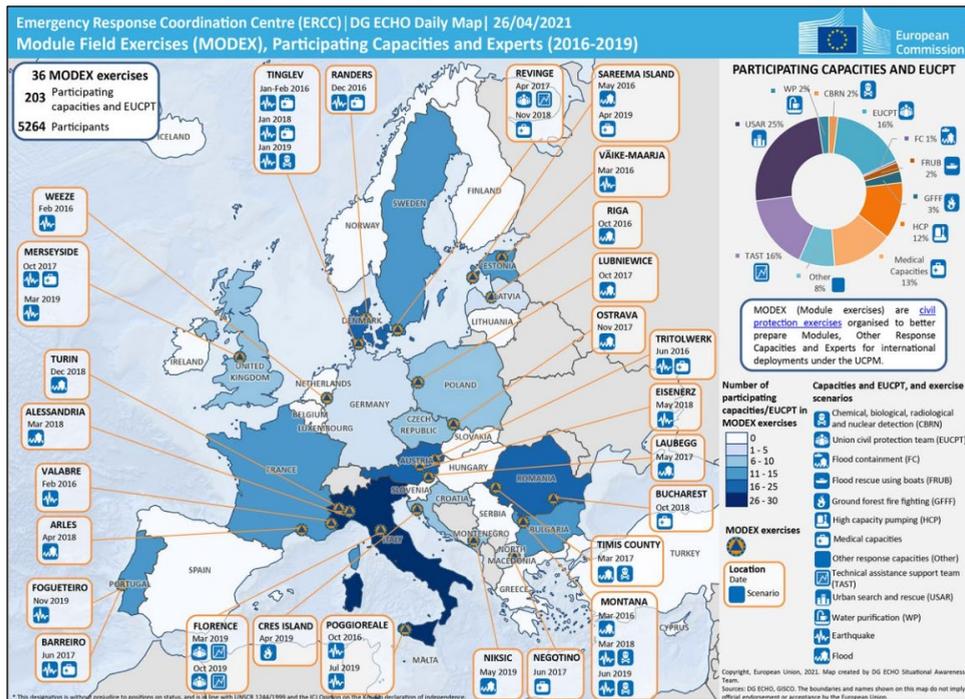


Figure 4.5. MODEX exercises organised between 2016 and 2019  
 (Source: <https://10years.eu-modex.eu/history>)

In addition to Modex, "FULL-SCALE" exercises involving all participants in civil protection assistance interventions are conducted to enhance civil protection preparedness and response to various disasters within or beyond the Member States of the UCPM.

Under the "OTHER exercises" option, there are two types of training that can be used to test the use of UCPM experts and capacities outside of the EU and how they fit into third countries' overall relief efforts:

- plug-in exercises: gives the possibility to join large-scale exercises that will involve a complex response that include EUCPT, Modules, and/or other Response Capacities;
- host nation support table-top exercises - based on the difficulties a country that has been impacted by a disaster might face when it comes to receiving, integrating, and coordinating international assistance. (<https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/civil-protection-exercises>).

Exercises are frequently improved by digital simulations, providing decision-makers analytical solutions for understanding complex operational scenarios. These tools may recognize institutional weaknesses and enhance decision-making processes within a strategic framework that addresses the current issues of civil protection. The integration of AI-driven modelling tools, advanced IT solutions, and immersive technologies transforms conventional emergency simulations into close to reality training environments. AI facilitates real-time scenario evolution, allowing for dynamic adjustments of conditions based on the actions and decision-making patterns of participants, as opposed to static scenario planning. Machine learning algorithms assess the past responses to emergencies to identify weaknesses and enhance methods of training for improved effectiveness. Additionally, digital twins - virtual replicas of real-world environments - allow for accurate testing of planning hypothesis in more than realistic conditions. Virtual and augmented reality further amplify this by immersing participants in unpredictable, high-pressure situations that push limits, making decision-making not just reactive but anticipatory. These innovations don't just enhance simulations—they redefine how we prepare for complexity and uncertainty.

By conducting these exercises systematically, the UCPM aims not only to strengthen intervention capabilities but also to improve cooperation mechanisms between Member States. Post-exercise evaluation is an essential component of this process, providing a detailed analysis of the performance of the structures involved and offering recommendations for adjusting response strategies. This approach contributes to reinforcing a culture of anticipation and preparedness, which is essential for effective risk management and the protection of the population from disasters.

Increasing the effectiveness of European civil protection requires not only standardised technical equipment and procedures but also a **profound understanding of the coping mechanisms in different countries**. The European Union Civil Protection Mechanism's **Exchange of Experts (EoE) programme** responds to this need by facilitating the

mobility of civil protection practitioners, giving them direct access to the experiences and know-how of other countries. Through this program, civil protection professionals can participate in training courses, observation missions, and practical activities aimed at improving coordination and interoperability in the event of an emergency (<https://www.exchangeofexperts.eu/about-programme/>). Not only does this initiative allow cross-comparative analysis of institutional structures and response mechanisms, but it also creates a framework in which practitioners gain an applied perspective on how other countries manage risks. The exchange of best practices and the integration of lessons learnt contribute to strengthening a European civil protection system that goes beyond national boundaries and provides a better articulated collective response capacity.

One of the main benefits of the program is the facilitation of a direct dialogue between experts in the field, thereby promoting not only the exchange of best practices but also the strengthening of sustainable collaborative networks. This interaction contributes to the development of a more integrated European civil protection system capable of reacting quickly and effectively to cross-border crises.

Over time, the EoE program has evolved to better respond to today's civil protection needs, including diversified formats, such as short- and long-term exchanges, mentoring activities, and bilateral exchanges between national authorities. It is also open not only to staff from governmental structures but also to representatives of the private sector, non-governmental organisations, and research institutions, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of modern civil protection, which has been referred to throughout this document.

The experiences gained through this programme have shown that participation in expert exchanges not only enhances the technical capacity of specialists but also provides them with a deeper understanding of the complexities of international assistance missions. In a structured framework, experts learn to navigate different civil protection systems, adapt to varying procedures and deal more effectively with the challenges that may arise in cross-border cooperation.

This continuous learning process contributes to standardised operational approaches and strengthened coordination mechanisms at the European level.

Moreover, the program is not only about individual benefits for the participants but also supports the creation of a common European civil protection culture. The gradual standardisation of methodologies, mutual trust among national institutions, and the development of networks of experts that can be rapidly mobilised in crisis situations are the direct results of this program. Exchanges of experts thus not only enhance national response capacity but also contribute to strengthening a unified and effective European civil protection.

By integrating these training methodologies, the UCPM has succeeded in providing a holistic training framework aimed at strengthening the robustness of intervention capabilities and cultivating a culture of anticipation and continuous improvement. This strategic approach not only enhances the technical and tactical skills of national disaster management authorities but also promotes a proactive and innovative mindset. In this way, the European Union strengthens its resilience to systemic risks, making civil protection a fundamental pillar of collective security.

The preparedness dimension of the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism is a fundamental pillar of the collective response capacity, providing a structured framework for competence development, standardised procedures, and optimised interventions. This component is not just an auxiliary process of disaster response but an essential element that contributes to reducing the impact of disasters and strengthening operational resilience.

Through the diversity of programs implemented, from advanced training to large-scale simulation exercises, training in the UCPM has evolved towards an integrated model that combines technical expertise, knowledge sharing, and the use of the latest civil protection technologies. These initiatives not only allow a rapid and efficient response but also ensure methodological consistency across member and participating states, thus reducing fragmentation of national approaches.

Investments in training infrastructure and in the development of continuous learning mechanisms have been key to aligning response capabilities to the requirements of a changing operational environment. Also, incorporating applied research into the process of getting ready has led to the creation of new ways to handle crises better and make better use of the resources that are available.

The dynamic nature of civil protection requires constant review of preparedness strategies to reflect the complexity of emerging risks. Lessons learnt from past interventions, coupled with advances in risk analysis and disaster management, are essential for continually adjusting and improving training mechanisms. In this respect, the Lessons Learnt program plays a key role in recalibrating training methods and strengthening a culture of anticipation and adaptability.

Thus, training in the UCPM is not just a technical process but a strategic dimension contributing to the development of a more robust and better-coordinated European civil protection system. Through the arrangements put in place and the commitment of the participating states, it not only improves operational efficiency but also creates the prerequisites for a proactive civil protection system capable of successfully responding to future challenges.

#### *4.2.3. Response framework: UCPM – core strengths*

The UCPM has continuously **improved its regulatory framework** to provide a **coordinated and efficient response** to disasters, both **within the Union and beyond**. **As improvements have been made over time, the UCPM can now play an active role in coordinating complex events, being equipped with better response times and faster financial solutions.** The wider scope of its responsibilities has facilitated rapid resource mobilisation and strengthened strategic worldwide partnerships, ensuring a more **coherent and coordinated response**. This evolution has been driven by the necessity for an operational tool capable of addressing the dynamics of emerging risks that are characteristic of a changing international landscape. The blurring of operational boundaries between emergency typologies - be they natural disasters, health

emergencies, or technological challenges - has required the **adaptation of the UCPM** and the related legal framework to reflect current realities. Concerning these matters, the key element of this transformation process has been to strengthen the European Union's capacity to support member states with **dedicated resources** while **reducing the exclusive dependence on ad-hoc** voluntary **contributions**. In this context, the changes of the legal framework enabled the Mechanism to serve as a **reference model**, acknowledged for its capacity to pull together **resources and expertise at the European level** in an efficient response.

A key element in the response field under the UCPM framework is the **complementarity between European and national levels**. The Union does not substitute for the responsibilities of Member States; rather, it assists them through an institutional framework that maximises available resources. This complementarity is crucial for preserving the balance between national responsibility and European solidarity and thereby enhancing the ability to respond collectively to emergencies.

The UCPM tools are founded on **interoperability and standardisation**, which are **two critical prerequisites** for an effective response. The **establishment of standardised procedures, expert networks, and coordination centres supports them, enabling swift deployment worldwide**. Standardising is crucial in cross-border operations, where the interoperability of equipment, operational standards, and coordination structures are essential for mission efficacy.

UCPM has **progressively broadened its operational scope to cover global emergencies, demonstrating its ability to mobilise European assistance in response to worldwide disasters in addition to its actions within the European Union**. The UCPM has established itself as an essential stakeholder in the global civil protection framework through partnership agreements and participation in several important humanitarian missions, contributing to the establishment of international standards for disaster management. This worldwide aspect illustrates the **Union's commitment to solidarity** and the necessity for a cohesive strategy to address risks that transcend Europe's geographical limits.

As a result, the UCPM response's legal and institutional framework has become a model that is adaptable, strong, and focused on efficiency. It can consider lessons identified and change how it responds to new global challenges. This framework allows a swift and coordinated response while promoting an ongoing enhancement process of European civil protection, so enhancing collective resilience to emerging risks.

Prior to analysing the structural elements of disaster response architecture available under the Mechanism, it is pertinent to succinctly review the evolution of UCPM operations from their inception to the present, covering over two decades of transformation, adaptation, and improvements.

- *2001–2010: first activations and lessons learned - "the commodity exchange"*

The establishment of the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism in 2001 marked the beginning of an intensive effort at the European level to strengthen cooperation in disaster management. **The first mobilisation of the UCPM was mainly reactive, with a focus on mobilising ad hoc resources to support countries affected by natural disasters.** Events such as the severe floods in Central Europe in the summer of 2002 and the forest fires in Greece in 2007 highlighted the importance of a more effective coordination tool, demonstrating the need for standardised procedures, more predictable available resources, and a more robust logistical system. During this period, the essential elements of the Mechanism took shape, including the first uses of the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/community-response-to-the-flooding-in-central-europe.html?fromSummary=16and>) and the Communication System of the Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS), facilitating the real-time exchange of information and coordination of available resources (Community response to the flooding in central Europe, 2002).

- *2010-2020: Consolidation & Development of the Mechanism*

The following decade saw a significant enlargement of the UCPM, both in terms of its scope and its operational structure. The Ebola crisis in

West Africa (2014-2016) was a turning point in the EU response mechanism, highlighting the need for strengthened capacity to manage health crises. In this context, international partnerships were intensified, and the Mechanism was activated for large-scale disasters outside the Union, such as the Haiti earthquake (2010), Typhoon Haiyan (2013), Nepal earthquake (2015) or Hurricane Matthew (2016).

Moreover, the response to the forest fires in Portugal and Sweden demonstrated the limitations of the system based solely on voluntary contributions - the voluntary pool - from member states. This shortcoming led to the creation of *rescEU* in 2019, a strategic reserve element designed to fill critical gaps in response capacities.

Still, the change of MIC into ERCC (Emergency Response Coordination Centre) and its further growth have been big steps towards making it easier to handle multiple crises at the same time while still providing quality response operations.

- *2020-present: Crises coordination – way ahead: COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine conflict and more*

Until 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was the biggest large-scale activation of the UCPM since its inception, with the Mechanism being used to coordinate the transportation of medical equipment, facilitate critical patient evacuations and ensure a unified logistical response at the European level. It was also the opportunity to use *rescEU* on a large scale, demonstrating the need to strengthen the EU's capacity to respond effectively to systemic crises but at the same time underlining the importance of widening the scope of *rescEU* in terms of developing stocks like medical reserves, followed by other areas like CBRN, shelters, energy, etc.

Then, the war in Ukraine brought a new dimension to the activation of the Mechanism, reinforcing the UCPM not only as a civil protection tool but also as an essential mean of humanitarian support in the context of armed conflicts. In addition to the delivery of traditional civil protection and humanitarian aid assistance, ranging from rescue equipment, food, and medical material to shelters and energy items, the UCPM has been used to coordinate medical evacuations and to provide

capacity building support to relevant Ukrainian authorities. This crisis highlighted the Mechanism's ability to adapt to complex situations, marking an extension of its scope beyond the classical natural disaster response.

In the last years, the UCPM has demonstrated its effectiveness in responding to multiple crises simultaneously, from global pandemics to conflicts and climate change, and it has become an essential provider of European solidarity. The lessons identified from these recent interventions shape the future directions of the Mechanism, highlighting the need for greater operational autonomy and logistical capacity to face emerging challenges.

A core purpose of the UCPM is to fortify collective disaster preparedness through shared planning, resource allocation, and training (Gromek, 2023). By pooling specialized assets, the UCPM ensures that each participating country has access to a wide array of resources, from firefighting planes to medical teams and high-capacity water pumps. This shared approach allows the EU to overcome limitations that individual countries may face when responding to large-scale disasters. Each participating state, regardless of its size or resources, benefits from the expertise, equipment, and personnel available through the UCPM, which fosters resilience across the continent (Widmalm et al., 2023). The UCPM model adopted by the Commission for effectively and efficiently coordinating emergency responses and its corresponding added value relies on several core strengths (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024):

- **24/7 Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC)** that lies at the heart of the UCPM and works around the clock to detect hazards through an all-hazard approach, anticipate disaster impact and mobilise assistance. This enables a rapid EU solidarity response, whenever disasters hit, or emergencies arise.
- **civil protection response capabilities** available to the UCPM, notably (i) the European Civil Protection Pool (**ECPP**), containing national capacities, and (ii) **rescEU**, the first-ever EU-proper strategic reserve of emergency response capacities. The rescEU reserve can be mobilised to provide assistance in overwhelming

situations where capacities at national level prove insufficient. Since its inception in 2019, the EU has invested approximately EUR 3 billion in developing and maintaining rescEU, including a sizeable investment in stockpile items. Its scope has been increasing in direct response to recent unforeseen crises, such as COVID-19 and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine. rescEU thus serves as an important tool that reflects the EU's strong commitment to solidarity and collective response.

- **close synergies between civil protection and humanitarian response**, as evidenced by the fact that the ERCC serves as an important coordination hub for the effective and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance in unforeseen, sudden-onset crises. The EU's response to the 2023 earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria and the ongoing support operations in Ukraine and Gaza evidence the interconnectedness of both civil protection and humanitarian response.

These core strengths notwithstanding, the risk landscape is transforming, influenced by disasters generated by climate change and the emergence of new and intensifying conflicts and wars in Europe's proximity.

In the architecture of UCPM, **the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) is the heart of the system, the focal point of emergency coordination, and a critical instrument for the rapid and efficient mobilisation of resources in the face of disasters of all kinds.** It is one of the most important parts of the European Civil Protection Mechanism. It combines strategic skills, technical know-how, and cutting-edge technologies to make sure that emergencies are handled quickly and effectively, no matter how complex they are. Its evolution has been driven by the need for a Mechanism capable of addressing increasingly complex emergencies, strengthening the Union's capacity to respond rapidly and effectively to catastrophic events.

The ERCC is active 24/7, constantly monitoring the evolution of global emergencies and facilitating the mobilisation of available resources. It acts as a central hub, integrating information flows, situational

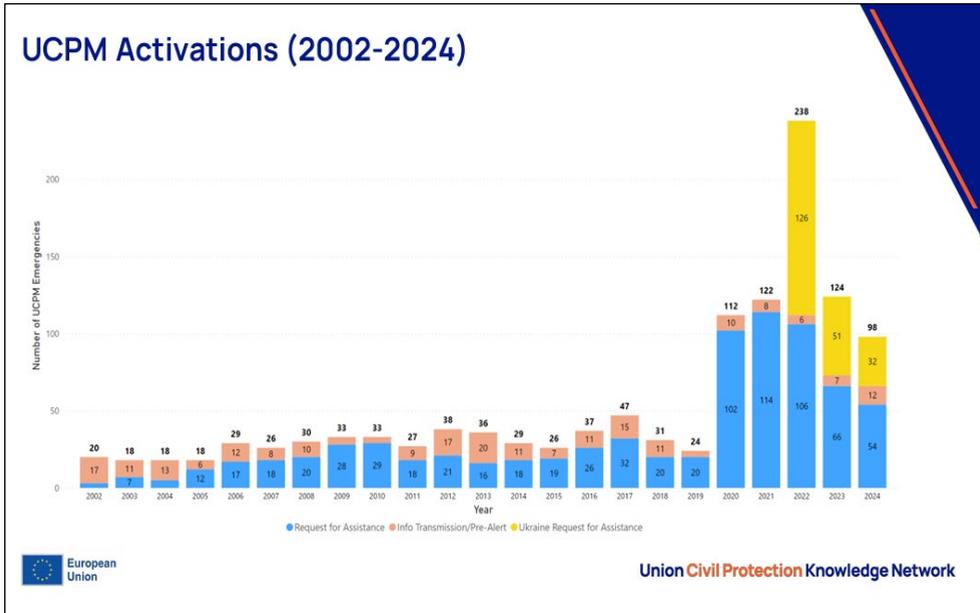
assessments, and logistical resources for emergency responses. Through it, disaster-affected countries benefit from rapid and coordinated support, reducing response times and optimising resource use.

One of the fundamental strengths of the ERCC is its ability to facilitate an **integrated response** based on a **rapid assessment** of needs and an **optimised allocation of resources**. This mechanism allows the efficient mobilisation of civil protection teams (the EUCPTs mentioned earlier in this chapter), specialised intervention modules, and logistical equipment needed in the field. In addition, the ERCC coordinates the activation of the capabilities available in the ECPP (European Civil Protection Pool) and in rescEU. The rescEU capabilities represent a significant operational asset, giving the European Union a high degree of autonomy in responding to major crises.

Through its flexible nature and immediate response capability, the ERCC demonstrates that European Civil Protection is not just an international assistance response tool but can present itself as a **model of cross-border cooperation**, capable of rapidly integrating the resources available in member and participating states to provide a coherent and effective response to any major emergency.

Over time, the ERCC has been instrumental in expanding the role of UCPM beyond the traditional civil protection sphere and has become a multifunctional crisis coordination centre involved in responding to pandemics and complex crises. Figure 4.6 therefore shows the number of activations of the Mechanism since its inception until the end of 2024. An essential feature of the ERCC is the integration of advanced digital platforms for information sharing and emergency management into one main solution: the Common Emergency Communication and Information System, which ensures a seamless flow of real-time data between the Commission and civil protection authorities. This digital tool, which has been refined over time, not only facilitates rapid decision-making but also enables efficient coordination of international efforts in the event of large-scale crises. However, the effectiveness of a disaster response depends not only on the capacity to mobilise resources but also on a coherent information flow allowing integrated coordination and rapid

responses. In this context, CECIS is the backbone of the digital infrastructure of UCPM, facilitating the exchange of essential information between member states, participating states, and the European Commission. This advanced platform provides a robust and secure communication mechanism that eliminates fragmentation in decision-making and maximises the efficiency of cross-border operations.

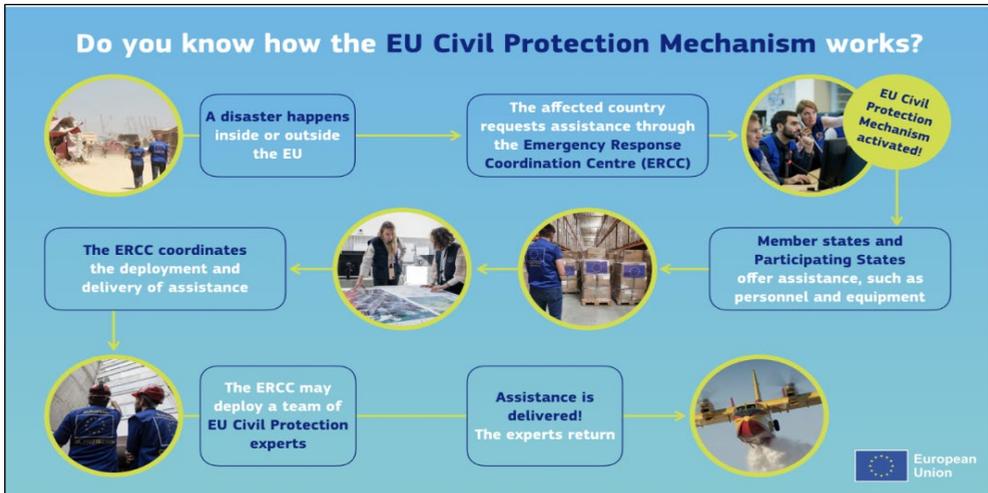


**Figure 4.6. UCPM activations (2002-2024)**  
 (Source: [https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/system/files/2024-11/ntc-2024\\_ucpm-operational-updates-by-ercc.pdf](https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/system/files/2024-11/ntc-2024_ucpm-operational-updates-by-ercc.pdf))

As a tool for connecting civil protection authorities, CECIS operates as a centralised system for **managing requests for assistance**, allowing national authorities to request support, monitor intervention offers, and distribute critical information in real time. Its secure access and interconnected structure allow seamless coordination, avoiding administrative delays and ensuring optimal allocation of available resources.

The thing that made CECIS unique is its real-time operational capability, providing an efficient framework for a prompt and well-informed response based on up-to-date data. When a crisis overwhelms national capacities, affected states can activate the assistance mechanism

through the platform, and countries with adequate resources can provide support in a structured and coordinated way. This not only optimises the allocation of resources but also prevents duplication of effort and maintains high operational efficiency. In fact, the way the CECIS works reflects the basic functioning of the Mechanism as it was originally designed (Figure 4.7).



**Figure 4.7. Steps to activate the UCPM**

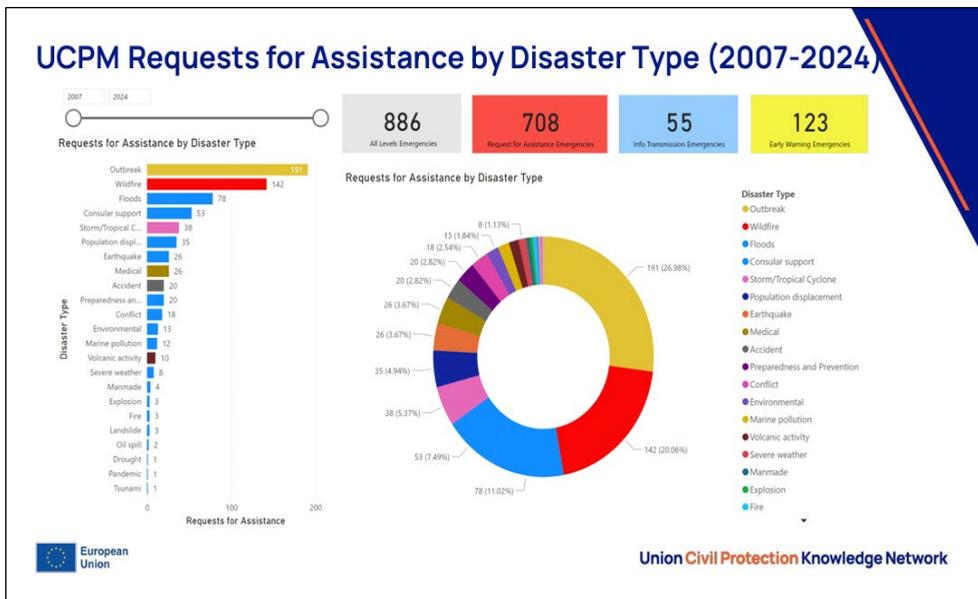
(Source: [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism_en))

But CECIS is also used for complex interoperability testing exercises between Member States and relevant institutions, helping to reduce response times and improve communication flows. These simulations enable the refinement of response strategies and their adaptation to the dynamics of emerging threats, thus enhancing the operational preparedness of the UCPM.

CECIS is not just a technological tool but an essential vector for strategic cooperation in civil protection. By ensuring rapid and secure communication between member states and the European Commission, it contributes to making interventions more efficient, optimising the distribution of resources, and strengthening the EU's ability to act in concert to meet the challenges of today's crisis. In this respect, the

platform not only supports the immediate operational response but also becomes an indispensable element in the European resilience architecture.

To sum up, the UCPM operations initially were aimed at supporting "classic" civil protection interventions such as consequence management following natural disasters -earthquakes, floods, forest fires - or events requiring logistical support and technical expertise. However, the constant evolution of risks and the ability of the Mechanism to adapt to emerging challenges have allowed its scope to expand. The UCPM has become a rapid response tool in the face of health crises, conflicts, humanitarian crises, and consular challenges, providing a flexible framework for intervention in situations beyond the national capacities of Member States and Participating States (Figure 4.8).



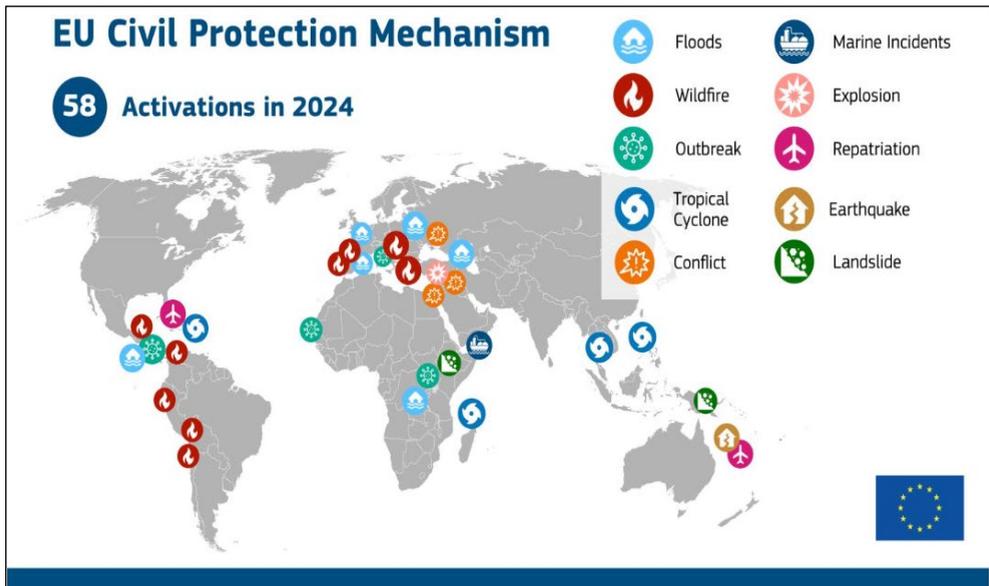
**Figure 4.8. Requests for activation by type of risk**  
 (Source: [https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/system/files/2024-11/ntc-2024\\_ucpm-operational-updates-by-ercr.pdf](https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/system/files/2024-11/ntc-2024_ucpm-operational-updates-by-ercr.pdf))

The resilience of the Mechanism has also been demonstrated in the context of health crises, where the UCPM has evolved beyond the classical civil protection spectrum. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted

the need for a European mechanism capable of supporting affected states through coordinated deliveries of medical equipment, facilitating medical evacuations, and optimising the distribution of critical resources.

Regarding humanitarian crises and armed conflicts, the Mechanism was activated to respond to large-scale situations such as the war in Ukraine, where it facilitated the transportation of humanitarian aid, medical equipment and logistical support. The UCPM has also been mobilised to respond to the humanitarian needs generated by the conflict in Gaza, facilitating the dispatch of essential aid, medical equipment, and logistical support to the affected population, as well as medical evacuations.

This evolution of the Mechanism reflects not only its operational adaptability but also the European Union's commitment to strengthen an integrated civil protection system capable of responding to emerging challenges in a flexible and efficient manner. Thus, below, the Figure 4.9 shows the detailed situation of the Mechanism's activations in 2024.



**Figure 4.9. UCPM activations in 2024**

(Source: [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism_en))

### 4.3. Challenges and prospects for strengthening the UCPM

In March 2024, the Commission shared its first report (*Brussels, 12.3.2024/ COM (2024) 130 final*) regarding the implementation of Article 6, which contains recommendations for "**future-proofed**" **disaster risk management**. The report's major findings reveal that **national risk assessments** might **neglect** to account for **complex and cascading consequences**, resulting in a underestimated risk assessment. The emphasis is also on short-term (acute) risk, with **insufficient consideration of climate change scenarios**, which may result in potential risks being minimised. The report recommends improving the risk assessment guidelines, increasing knowledge exchange on risk assessments and practices (for example, through the Knowledge Network). The commitment to improving disaster resilience was reflected in the 2021 modification of the UCPM legislation, which came against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. This modification **added the need to set up Disaster Resilience Goals. (anticipate, prepare, alert, response, secure)** These goals, although non-binding, reflect a shared vision of the strategic direction for UCPM action towards resilience until 2030. They also serve to guide the work on disaster resilience at both EU and national levels (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

In an increasingly unpredictable global environment, marked by complex and interconnected risks, the **European Union needs to adapt** its current tools to meet emerging challenges. From extreme weather phenomena amplified by climate change to pandemics, technological risks and hybrid threats, to conflicts threatening the security of Member States, anticipation, prevention and response capacity must be strengthened through systemic, *whole-of-society* and *whole-of-governmental* approaches, integrated at European level.

The UCPM has evolved significantly since its creation, becoming an indispensable tool for crisis response. However, recent evaluations, such as the report prepared under the coordination of former Finnish President Sauli Niinistö, highlight **the urgent need to strengthen the UCPM** to meet future challenges. The issues highlighted in the Report on

the **vision for the future of the ERCC** and the **development of rescEU** underscore the need for both greater operational empowerment of the UCPM and sustained financial envelope ([https://commission.europa.eu/topics/defence/safer-together-path-towards-fully-prepared-union\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/topics/defence/safer-together-path-towards-fully-prepared-union_en)).

Moreover, analysis of the 2024 Eurobarometer survey highlights a considerable gap between public perception of risks and the actual level of preparedness of the population. This reality calls not only for a technical approach to strengthening the UCPM, but also for a collective effort to develop a culture of resilience across European society.

At the end of this chapter, the challenges and future perspectives for the UCPM will be explored through several key strategic aspects: management of low probability risks with a high impact, broadening the capacities of *rescEU*, redesigning the roles of the UCPM and the ERCC, holistic approach and strengthening the involvement of civil society (Decision EU 2019/420). In this context, it is essential that the European Union adopts a flexible approach to ensure collective resilience and effective protection of European citizens in the face of increasingly unpredictable crises.

#### ***4.3.1. From High Impact, Low Probability (HILP) events to rescEU***

The concept of **high impact, low probability (HILP)** events refer to those catastrophic incidents that have a low probability of occurrence, but which, if they occur, have devastating consequences. These risks have been clearly visible in recent years, ranging from large-scale forest fires and floods, extreme heat waves and the continuing COVID-19 crisis, the Ukraine war or hybrid threats. However, at European level, there was no agreed definition nor methodology to characterise HILP and unexpected events, resulting in differing impact scales and a lack of comparability of risk ratings among National Risk Assessments.

High-impact, low-probability events and their cascading effects raise many challenges for governments, businesses and decision-makers, including defining where the responsibilities lie in preparing for both individual shocks and slow-motion trends (e.g. global warming, tipping points, sea level rise) that tend to increase their magnitude and frequency.

Romania's Presidency of the EU Council in 2019 brought to the forefront the need for a reinforced European strategy for the governance of HILP events (<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9407-2019-INIT/en/pdf>). In this regard, a workshop on HILP preparedness was organized on 30-31 January 2019, in Bucharest, bringing together experts from countries participating in the UCPM, representatives of the European Commission, the UN and NATO. The main purpose of the meeting was to define common principles for identifying, preventing and managing such risks. A central aspect of the discussions was the **identification of key criteria for categorizing an event as HILP**. The unpredictability of the event and its cascading effects on critical infrastructure were key elements analysed, as well as the complexity of the impact, with the potential to disrupt the functioning of affected states. The longevity of the effects, which may exceed national response capacity, and the need for specialized resources, often beyond the capacities of individual Member States, were also highlighted.

A direct result of the Romanian Presidency conclusions was the strengthening of *rescEU*, a key pillar of the UCPM to address situations where national capacities are overwhelmed. Decision (EU) 2019/420 of the European Parliament and of the Council, adopted on March 13, 2019, marked a key moment in this transition by establishing a European Civil Protection Reserve to support Member State in the event of major disasters.

The 2019 revision of Decision 1313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism also brought attention to high impact low probability risks and events, now requiring Member States to take prevention and preparedness measures to address them where appropriate, and the EU fully financing capacities through *rescEU* to respond to high impact low probability events.

Later in 2020, the process of identification of capacities established to respond to low probability risks with a high impact was defined through the Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2020/452 of 26 March 2020, as to be based on their strategic relevance, carried out in a transparent manner, and in close cooperation with Member State.

This initiative focused on developing European intervention capabilities such as fire-fighting aircrafts, emergency medical equipment and CBRN disaster management resources. Reducing response times was another central objective, achieved by pre-positioning resources in regional logistics hubs. In parallel, the focus was on improving cooperation with NATO and the UN to better integrate response structures in the context of global emergencies.

Subsequent discussions in the EU Council underlined the need for an extension of the *rescEU* through additional financial allocations in the MFF 2021-2027 (Multiannual Financial Framework – the EU’s 7 years budget; [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/2021-2027/whats-new\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget/2021-2027/whats-new_en)). This increase was essential to strengthen European resilience, facilitating the development of strategic capabilities and the co-financing of response operations, including for HILP risks.

In practical terms, 2019 was the point at which the consolidation phase of the UCPM, which started in 2013 with the adoption of Decision 1313, came to an end and paved the way for its development phase, a process which is ongoing (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024). Thus, following the steps initiated since 2018, *rescEU* has become an instrumental tool of the European Union for strengthening resilience to major disasters, providing a concrete solution for the management of high-impact, low-probability events.

By its initial set-up, *rescEU* has paved the way for the establishment of a pool of critical resources, ranging from air assets for forest fire-fighting to emergency medical capacities to support a coordinated response to major-impact crises. However, evaluation of recent interventions has highlighted significant structural limitations, in particular the reliance on voluntary contributions from Member States and the fragmentation of logistical resources at European level (Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the evaluation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism-Strengthening EU’s emergency, preparedness, 2024). These vulnerabilities call for the adoption of an integrated vision, involving the development of a robust

network of logistical hubs, sustainable funding and an agile decision-making mechanism capable of mobilizing the necessary resources quickly and efficiently in emergencies.

The operational autonomy of rescEU is a key aspect for the future effectiveness of the Mechanism. This implies not only the creation of permanent assets at European level, but also a decision-making framework that does not rely solely on Member States' capacities. Strengthening partnerships with NATO, the UN and other international players could contribute to the integration of the EU Disaster Response Mechanism into a global disaster response framework, facilitating a more effective cross-border response. Such autonomy is not just about logistical self-sufficiency, but also implies the development of strategic anticipation capabilities, enabling proactive actions before a disaster reaches its tipping point, thus limiting the scale of its effects.

The increase of the rescEU budget in the MFF 2021-2027 was a fundamental step to strengthen the mechanism, but recent realities demonstrate the need for more flexible multiannual funding that is tailored to emerging challenges. The European Commission's 2024 evaluation of the UCPM concluded that the Mechanism is under constant pressure due to the increasing number of activations, which requires more robust strategic planning and additional resources to maintain operational efficiency. The Commission's recommendations highlight the need for deeper integration of rescEU into the wider European crisis management framework, strengthening disaster prevention and preparedness capacities as well as inter-institutional coordination mechanisms. In this respect, a priority is the scale-up of logistical resources and the establishment of response capacities able to operate when the situation so requires.

The future of rescEU must be shaped around the principle of proactive resilience so that the European Union can ensure an effective and rapid response to emerging crises. Strengthening this mechanism is not only an operational necessity, but also a strategic imperative for the protection of European citizens in an increasingly complex and unpredictable geopolitical landscape.

### **4.3.2. Evolution of the UCPM and future Mechanism architecture**

In the recent years, the European Union has faced several challenges that have accelerated the need to review and strengthen the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism. Lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic have led to significant enhancements in response capabilities, but these developments have been rapidly tested by new crises that have reshaped Europe's strategic and operational landscape. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has fundamentally changed the European security context, putting pressure on existing civil protection mechanisms and highlighting the need for a more robust and autonomous response system. In parallel, the outbreak of the conflict in Gaza added an additional dimension of complexity, while changes in the **US administration in early 2025 have considerably influenced the global political agenda with direct repercussions on the international cooperation in crisis management.**

All these events have triggered a series of debates in various formats at the level of the European Commission and the EU Council on the future of the UCPM, with a view to strengthening and reinforcing its capabilities to respond to multiple and complex crises. The discussions underlined that the ERCC is the most appropriate setting to be developed into a European crisis coordination hub, with a consolidated structure and an operational track record already in place to effectively coordinate response. This topic has, however, been long debated, given the differing views of Member States on whether this structure should be preserved or evolved.

In this context, several options have been explored to strengthen the UCPM. One of the priorities was to reinforce the logistical capabilities and essential resources available for emergency response. Recent experience has shown that the need for adequate strategic reserves goes beyond the actual framework of rescEU and needs to be integrated into a broader response architecture. The creation of regional hubs for stockpiling and distribution of essential resources was discussed to ensure adequate response time in case of simultaneous crises.

Another key issue was the need to improve the decision-making process and strengthen joint planning tools for crisis response. The COVID-19 pandemic and the conflict in Ukraine demonstrated that while effective coordination arrangements are in place, decision-making processes need to be accelerated and information sharing between stakeholders optimized. To this end, it has been suggested to develop common standards of action for specific complex emergency scenarios so that the response at European level can be faster and more efficient.

Another important element to note from the findings of the *Eurobarometer on Disaster Risk Awareness and Preparedness of the EU population*, published in 2024, is the positive perception of European citizens on the strengthening of civil protection mechanisms (<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3228>). Most respondents believe that the EU should play a more active role in coordinating crisis response and in supporting Member States with additional funds and response equipment. The survey also revealed an increased demand for the development of more effective prevention mechanisms, reflecting growing public awareness of emerging risks and the importance of preparedness.

At the same time, the proposed reforms cannot be achieved without a revision of the financial framework for the functioning of the UCPM. Increasing demand for deployments and the growing complexity of crises require more flexible budget planning. As a result of the analysis carried out at the level of DSU, the need for the adoption of a *multi-multi-annual financial framework* has emerged. This instrument would supposedly aim at ensuring the continuity of resources and sustainability of strategic capacities, regardless of the limits of a single financial cycle. Through this mechanism, a flexible and long-term management of the resources needed for emergency response, e.g. for the *rescEU* capacities, could be ensured:

- ongoing maintenance of existing resources, ensuring that equipment is in optimal working condition;
- renewal and modernization of capacities, including stocks, to replace exhausted or technologically outdated resources;

- expanding capacities as required, based on emerging risks analysis and Member States' needs;
- creating flexibility in the allocation of resources in cases of multiple or simultaneous risks requiring an immediate response.

Such a mechanism would allow for greater predictability and adaptability of financial allocations, reducing vulnerabilities linked to short-term budgetary constraints and allowing the European Union to maintain its response and preparedness capacity at an optimal level.

In the light of these developments, the future of the UCPM needs to be shaped around a principle of adaptive resilience, capable of rapidly integrating lessons learned from recent crises and providing a coherent response to future challenges. This process of consolidation is not only an operational necessity but also a strategic imperative, given the dynamic and unpredictable nature of the risks affecting the European Union.

**Regarding** the integration of the UCPM into a broader civil preparedness framework, the debates underlined **the importance of cooperation with NATO**, the UN and other international stakeholders to ensure better preparedness and enhanced logistical support in the face of emerging risks. These partnerships are essential to create a civil protection system that works in a complementary way with security and defence structures, avoiding duplication of efforts and ensuring better management of resources.

The cooperation of the European Union with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is guided by the **Warsaw Joint Declaration** (July 2016) and further developed by the **Brussels Joint Declaration** (July 2018). The **Warsaw Joint Declaration** outlines the **areas of cooperation**, whereas the **Brussels Declaration** sets the focus **on implementation** and tangible progress with concrete deliverables.

**The third EU-NATO Joint Declaration was signed on January 10, 2023.** It sets out a shared vision of how the EU and NATO will act together against common security threats while expanding and further developing their cooperation.

Cooperation activities are based on a set of **74 common proposals** agreed by the respective Councils in December 2016 and December 2017 and implemented by the staffs of the two organisations.

In line with relevant EU Council Conclusions, cooperation takes place in the spirit of full **openness and transparency**, in full respect of the decision-making **autonomy** and procedures of both organisations and in close cooperation with and with the **full involvement of all Member States**. It is based on the **principles** of inclusiveness and reciprocity without prejudice to the specific character of the security and defence policy of any Member State.

The Warsaw Joint Declaration outlines **seven areas of cooperation**:

- 1) countering hybrid threats;
- 2) operational cooperation including at sea and on migration;
- 3) cyber security and defence;
- 4) defence capabilities;
- 5) defence industry and research;
- 6) exercises; and
- 7) building partners' defence and security capacities.

EU and NATO have added an **eighth area**: "strengthening political dialogue".

The military threat on the EU's doorstep has highlighted the need to enhance the cooperation with NATO. In view of a **whole-of-society and all-hazards approach** to civil protection and crisis management, the strategic interoperability of activities between military and civilian actors is crucial.

One such effort, the "Structured Dialog on Resilience" for example promotes synergies and coherence between EU and NATO initiatives (e.g., the *Disaster Resilience Goals*, the *Critical Entities Resilience Directive*, and the *Seven NATO baseline requirements on resilience*). Since 2017, EU and NATO have also **strengthened cooperation on exercises**. In 2024, the EU and NATO agreed on renewing the concept of the Parallel and Coordinated Exercises (PACE) for 2024 and 2025. Therefore, as the ERCC was responsible to organise and conduct the EU Integrated Resolve 2024 (IR24) in October 2024, NATO will continue through its Crisis Management Exercise (CMX) in March 2025.

To ensure greater coherence in response operations, the ERCC has established good cooperation with NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster

Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), for example by ensuring complementarity in responses to COVID-19 and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

#### ***4.3.3. The future of European civil protection: challenges and ways ahead***

In a geopolitical and climatic context characterized by heightened volatility, as outlined before, the UCPM is under unprecedented pressure. The whole geopolitical and climatic spectrum makes it evident that the current crisis management paradigm needs to be reconfigured. The European Union can no longer approach civil protection solely as a response mechanism but must redefine it as a fundamental pillar of its security and resilience architecture.

Recent assessments of the UCPM, including the report coordinated by Sauli Niinistö - *Strengthening Europe's civilian and military preparedness and readiness*, emphasize the need for a better integrated and autonomous civil protection mechanism capable of anticipating and preventing the effects of emergencies, not just reacting to them ([https://commission.europa.eu/topics/defence/safer-together-path-towards-fully-prepared-union\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/topics/defence/safer-together-path-towards-fully-prepared-union_en)). At the same time, the results of the above-mentioned Eurobarometer show considerable public support for strengthening civil protection at European level, in parallel with measures to increase the prevention and preparedness actions. The European Union will therefore need to develop coherent strategies that include not only operational response, but also education and risk awareness mechanisms aimed at strengthening societal resilience to future challenges.

In the last four years, the **UCPM was activated at an unprecedented pace**, which has highlighted both its strengths and its systemic limitations. Recent experiences have shown that, while the mechanism has allowed a coordinated and rapid response in multiple crises, it suffers from a number of vulnerabilities that need to be urgently addressed in order to remain relevant and effective.

The Niinistö report provides a **detailed analysis of these challenges**, underlining that the UCPM needs to be **strengthened** through increased **decision-making** and **financial autonomy**. One of the main issues

identified is the need for a faster and better coordinated response to simultaneous crises, which can affect multiple Member States. The report also highlights the importance of a more efficient allocation of resources and the development of autonomous strategic capabilities, aimed at reducing the Mechanism's dependence on voluntary contributions from Member States.

In addition, the report emphasizes the use of an integrated, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to enhance preparedness and resilience. This strategy, partly inspired by Finland's total defence model, emphasizes the need to cultivate trust and confidence as a prerequisite for an inclusive approach at societal level. In practice, this involves pooling Member States' resources and sharing information, thus ensuring effective collaboration between all sectors of society (<https://www.gmfus.org/news/prepared-union>).

The report also promotes the adoption of an all-hazards strategy, recognizing that while hazards may vary in their source (natural, technological, societal), they often pose similar challenges to health systems and require a multisectoral response. Thus, risk reduction actions, emergency preparedness, response, and community recovery activities are usually implemented using the same model, regardless of the cause (<https://www.who.int/europe/emergencies/our-work-in-emergencies/key-approaches>).

The 2017-2022 evaluation of the UCPM confirms these findings, showing that while the Mechanism has been instrumental in managing an increasing number of natural disasters and health crises, it continues to operate on a predominantly reactive model. The report also points out that the success of UCPM interventions has been conditioned by the availability of Member States' national resources, leading to inconsistency in response capacity. A striking example of this is the EU response to the COVID-19 pandemic, where initial delays in mobilizing medical equipment and allocating essential resources demonstrated the limitations of a mechanism based on voluntary contributions.

The results of the Eurobarometer on risk awareness and preparedness of the European population add a complementary dimension to this

analysis, highlighting that while public support for strengthening civil protection is high, the level of preparedness of citizens remains sub-optimal. This mismatch between public perception and the reality of practical preparedness points to the need for better structured educational strategies, integrating both training of the general population and cross-border crisis simulations aimed at ensuring an effective response to emergencies.

All in all, the analysis of these documents converges towards the same conclusion: the future of the UCPM cannot be built solely based on current capabilities, but requires a profound reshape, integrating prevention and preparedness at its core. This paradigm shift will entail not only operational and financial adjustments, but also a redefinition of how Member States work together and with other stakeholders to ensure a civil protection system capable of anticipating and responding effectively to future challenges.

With this context as a starting point, in February 2023, the European Commission adopted a recommendation on common objectives for building resilience to disasters (Commission recommendation, 2023). These objectives, known as the European Disaster Resilience Objectives, aim to:

- **anticipation:** improving risk assessment and anticipation, and disaster risk management planning;
- **preparedness:** Increasing risk awareness and public preparedness;
- **alerting:** Improve early warning systems to ensure effective delivery of warning messages;
- **response:** Strengthening the response capacity of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism to provide rapid and effective assistance;
- **security:** Ensure the continuous functioning of civil protection systems, including during and after disasters.

The implementation of these objectives is essential to create a coherent and integrated risk management framework to enable the European Union and its Member States to anticipate, prepare for, alert, respond to and maintain security in the face of disasters, but these

recommendations are currently non-binding. However, for the European Union to become truly resilient, it is imperative that all Member States achieve a minimum level of compliance with these objectives. Different levels of resilience between Member States can lead to systemic vulnerabilities, given the economic, social and logistical interdependencies across Europe. Thus, any Member State that is insufficiently prepared can become a weak point that undermines the Union's collective capacity to respond, underlining the need for mandatory minimum standards and rigorous monitoring of progress in implementing these objectives.

The adoption of a **European Preparedness Strategy** is an essential step to strengthen the European Union's resilience to emerging threats (Kancs, 2024). In a European space increasingly vulnerable to cross-border risks, the definition of a coherent, functional and effective preparedness architecture becomes a strategic necessity. The creation of such strategy must be based on a set of guiding principles to ensure the coherence of preparedness at all administrative and operational levels, optimize existing resources and foster interoperability between Member States. But, in the absence of a **uniform reference frame**, the level of **preparedness differs significantly between Member States**, creating systemic **vulnerabilities** that can compromise the effectiveness of the collective response. It is exactly against this background the recommendations in Chapter 1 of the Niinistö report: *Safer Together – Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness*:

- i. define at EU level vital societal and governmental functions, for which continuity needs to be ensured,
- ii. develop EU-level Preparedness Baseline Requirements for each of the identified vital functions, become particularly relevant. Thus, to ensure congruent approaches it is necessary to have a common understanding at European level regarding the following aspects:
  - what are **vital societal** and **governmental functions** essential to ensure **EU continuity**;
  - it is relevant to develop **EU-level Baseline Requirements** for all vital functions;
  - what are the **criteria to be considered** when developing EU-level Preparedness Baseline Requirements.

Still, it is common sense to consider that the adoption of mandatory minimum requirements would ensure a more rapid and efficient coordinated response, reducing the risks of operational failure in large scale crises. At the same time, such an approach would facilitate the integration of civil protection into the overall European security architecture, positioning it as a strategic pillar of collective defence.

Large-scale exercises based on realistic and multidimensional scenarios must be routinely conducted to determine the interoperability of first responders, logistical chain efficiency, and decision-making capacity in the face of complex emergencies. These tests shouldn't be limited to civil protection but should be integrated into NATO exercises as well as those performed in collaboration with the United Nations and other international bodies. By establishing an official framework to assess response capabilities, the EU may identify shortcomings and prioritise investments based on identified vulnerabilities.

In terms of preparedness and **resilience finance**, a systematic and sustainable approach is required to secure appropriate **long-term resources**. Civil protection funds are frequently dependent on annual allocations, resulting in gaps and delays in the implementation of critical projects. Adopting the **multi-MFF** mentioned above is necessary to make **long-term plans** for **investments** in important **infrastructure**, **preparedness** programs, and building up **logistical capacity**. Integrating co-financing schemes at the European and national levels could lower Member States' financial burdens while also facilitating the adoption of innovative risk management solutions. Diversification of funding sources, such as encouraging the **private sector** and international financial institutions, could help to improve the resource base required to meet the strategic goals.

Finally, **civil protection** should no longer be viewed as a support tool in emergency situations but rather as a **strategic component of EU security**. The COVID-19 outbreak and the conflict in Ukraine have demonstrated the growing blurring of boundaries between civil protection and security issues. **Strengthening civil protection** requires a broader framework that includes **energy security**, **critical infrastructure**

**protection**, and response to **hybrid threats**. Integrating civil protection into the larger EU security architecture will improve coordination, reducing duplication and maintaining more efficient use of available resources.

For these reforms to work, civil protection needs to change from a reactive to a proactive approach based on prevention, preparedness, and strategic anticipation. Creating a culture of resilience at the European level, **integrating governmental agencies**, the **business community**, and **civil society**, is critical to ensuring the European Union's ability to meet future challenges. This **process must not be fragmented** but rather directed by a clear strategic goal, supported by **strong political will** and well-defined implementation methods. All these considerations complement those suggested in the previous chapter (Chapter 3) on **consolidating the role of Civil Protection** in Romania, and **placing it as close as possible to the level of the prime minister**. Last but not least, taking into account the ongoing developments at the European level, the launching of some steps to re-adapt the civil protection architecture in Romania would lead our country to be exactly on the security trajectory that is presently being developed in Europe.

The European Preparedness Strategy must therefore be based on the concepts of foresight, cooperation, and adaptation, ensuring that the European Union has the instruments it needs to effectively protect populations and critical infrastructures. The key elements of this approach include strengthening response capacities, establishing minimum preparedness criteria, regularly assessing current procedures, and providing sustainable funding. The goal is to make civil protection a central component of the European security architecture.

#### *4.3.4. European Civil Defence Mechanism – really an added value?*

This chapter cannot conclude without addressing the debate related to the European Civil Defence Mechanism. The risk landscape is continuously changing, influenced by climate change-related disasters, emerging and intensifying conflicts and conflicts in Europe's vicinity, and, more lately, a confusing understanding of the US-EU cooperation.

In the past five years, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) has been modernised to effectively address the increasing complexity of climate and security concerns that are often cross-border and multi-sectoral. The EU and its Member States have to improve preparedness measures to cope with multiple hazards. In this setup, starting with former Finnish President Niinisto's report on a "Preparedness Union," the Political Guidelines for the European Commission 2024-2029 push for the **development of a European Civil Defence Mechanism.**

**Is this really a way ahead?**

The proposal for a European Civil Defence Mechanism (ECDM) should be very carefully considered. While the ECDM is in line with the EC President Ursula von der Leyen's declaration about "ReArm Europe", the possible **advantage must be assessed against the risks of duplication and inefficiency.**

This analysis argues that **improving the current Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) is a better and more efficient way to move ahead.** One main point of argument is that the planned ECDM and the already-established UCPM **don't seem to be very different** from one another. Both concepts are strongly equivalent. In fact, we already described in Chapter 1 how **civil protection evolved out of civil defence**, meaning that the core function of "protecting people during the war" was always there, but in a dormant phase, which today is not anymore the case. So, it is **hard to spot the differences** in the management of the consequences of rescuing people from bomb-damaged buildings or those devastated by earthquakes, or evacuating people from areas affected by disasters such as forest fires, floods or conflict, to give just a few examples. From these perspectives, the **argument that the UCPM focuses on natural and man-made disasters**, while the proposed **Civil Defence Mechanism would handle broader crises, including those with security dimensions** (e.g., hybrid warfare, large-scale cyberattacks), **is not a valid one.** The reason is simply because the preparedness and response phases are already considered under UCPM, so there is **no need to duplicate efforts**, as for both instances **the actions are the same.** When it comes to

preventive measures, without a doubt, any type of deterrence or hybrid warfare countermeasure is not under the competence of the European Commission, no matter how open the Treaty of Functioning of the EU could be read.

From the author's views, **developing the ECDM will probably end in financial fragmentation, as allocating funds between two similar mechanisms can weaken both instruments.** Consistent and **increased funding to strengthen and expand the existing UCPM's capabilities represents a more strategic approach** than the establishment of a potentially competing entity. The setting up of a new framework may introduce **further bureaucratic layers**, which might prevent fast and efficient crisis responses.

And finally, the **absence of clear delineations in responsibilities** between the UCPM and ECDM may lead to confusion and conflicting priorities. This may be especially harmful in high-pressure crisis response scenarios. The existing UCPM structure, while not perfect, already proved its functionality during two major crises: the Covid-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian conflict.

Therefore, the proposal of creating an ECDM lacks empirical evidence justifying the development of a separate mechanism. No compelling case has been made that an ECDM would provide a demonstrably superior or more efficient crisis response than a modernised, adequately funded UCPM. A thorough cost-benefit analysis comparing these two approaches, accompanied by clearly defined and non-overlapping responsibilities for the ECDM, is imperative before proceeding with this potentially costly and potentially redundant initiative. Until then, prioritising investment in the **UCPM represents a far more effective strategy for enhancing European resilience.**

#### **4.4. Conclusions**

This chapter highlights the complexity and magnitude of strengthening the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), emphasising both the progress made and the ongoing challenges to improving the EU's response capacity. As security in the European Union becomes less predictable, it is important **to include civil protection in a comprehensive strategy for preparedness, prevention, and response in order to address emerging risks effectively.**

This analysis concludes that **the UCPM has significantly evolved into an essential vehicle for coordinating response to major crises.** The rising frequency of Mechanism activations proves that reliance on voluntary contributions from member states is inadequate to address the complexities of contemporary risks. It is essential to reconsider the management and mobilisation of resources, particularly by establishing specific capacities at the European level.

The Niinistö report highlighted the significance of a comprehensive **whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach**, as well as the implementation of an **all-hazards strategy in risk management.** The concepts highlight that **crisis preparedness and response** should not rest solely with civil protection authorities; rather, it **should engage all societal sectors**, including the private sector, academia, and local communities. Enhancing European resilience necessitates improved coordination among national and European authorities, alongside the active participation of citizens.

The study also examined the testing of the actual capabilities of the UCPM. Large-scale exercises, grounded in complex and multidimensional scenarios, are essential for identifying vulnerabilities and enhancing response mechanisms. The integration of these exercises with NATO and UN activities may enhance the consistency of the operational framework and improve the interoperability of response structures.

The studies analysed suggest the current budget of the UCPM does not meet the increasingly demanding requirements of the Mechanism. **The adoption of a multi-MFF is necessary** to ensure predictability and

sustainability in resource allocation. The implementation of co-financing mechanisms at both European and national levels may enhance the development of innovative risk management solutions and strengthen logistical capacities for effective response.

The situation highlights the importance of a more **effective educational and awareness campaign** that fosters not only the sharing of knowledge but also active citizen engagement in disaster prevention and preparedness initiatives.

Based on these conclusions, the European Preparedness Strategy should be founded on the principles of anticipation, coordination, and adaptability. The fundamental pillars of this strategy include strengthening response capacities, establishing minimum preparedness requirements, continuously testing existing mechanisms, and ensuring sustainable funding. The integration of civil protection into the European security framework has transitioned from simply a recommendation to an essential requirement, considering the evolving risks confronting the European Union.

In conclusion, **the UCPM must continue its transformation process** to enhance its ability to respond to future challenges. This process calls for both **technical and operational improvements**, as well as a fundamental shift towards **recognising civil protection as a strategic component of European security**. Strengthening the Mechanism requires a serious and committed approach to ensure that the European Union is equipped to address future threats, thereby protecting the lives of its citizens and critical infrastructures.

# Comparative study of civil protection systems in the EU – *SWOT analysis*

Starting from the question that stands at each national administration in the European Union which also reflects on civil protection authorities in Member States, the purpose of this comparative study is to **review performances and weaknesses of centralised and decentralized structures**. For the purpose of the study, several countries with recognised international civil protection systems have been selected: France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Romania.

The study will look into each of the organisations from an **administrative and operational perspective** in relation to their national activities as well as in regard to international operations within the UCPM framework.

### 5.1. General overview of selected civil protection systems

#### *5.1.1. Centralised systems*

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**France's civil protection system** is a comprehensive framework designed to ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens in the face of a variety of hazards, ranging from natural disasters to industrial accidents and public health emergencies. The system is structured around national coordination, regional and local implementation, and active involvement of volunteer organizations (<https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Le-ministere/Securite-civile>).

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**The Directorate-General for Civil Protection and Crisis Management** (DGSCGC), within the Ministry of Interior, is responsible for anticipating and monitoring crises affecting internal and civil security.

The DGSCGC contributes to interministerial planning for national security and monitors national operational activity through its operational centre (COGIC). It has national resources to support local rescue operations (airborne resources, armed civil security forces, deminers). The Directorate ensures the management of civil security and major crises entrusted to the minister of the Interior by implementing an "interministerial crisis cell" (CIC).

The territory is subdivided into 12 defence and security zones on whose prefect (PZDS) has extended competencies in terms of coordination and mobilisation of resources when an exceptional situation is likely to exceed the limits or capacities of a department. To this end, he has an interministerial headquarters (EMIZ) and an operational centre (COZ).

When crises strike, the departmental prefect ensures the coherence and unity of public action through coordinating public, private, and associative actors and local authorities.

Emergency services are provided daily under the mayor's authority, by municipal or departmental, civilian or military bodies, with **22% of civil and military firefighters** and **78% of firefighters being volunteers** ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/national-disaster-management-system/france\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/national-disaster-management-system/france_en)).

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**Italy's civil protection system** is widely regarded as one of the most sophisticated and integrated in Europe, designed to tackle a wide range of natural and man-made disasters. Given the country's vulnerability to natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods, and volcanic eruptions, the system is focused on preparedness, response, and recovery, with a decentralized but coordinated approach. Italy's system benefits from a well-defined structure that balances centralized coordination with decentralized execution.

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**The Department of Civil Protection (DPC)** provides oversight at the national level and ensures that emergency management efforts align with national policies. At the same time, the regional and local authorities are responsible for carrying out the response based on their specific needs

and contexts. This decentralization allows for a tailored approach to disaster management, particularly in areas with distinct geographical or socioeconomic challenges (<http://www.protezionecivile.gov.it>).

In Italy, civil protection is a function attributed to an integrated system: the National Civil Protection Service, established in 1992 by Law no. 225 and reformed in 2018 by the Civil Protection Code. It provides for implementing all activities to protect lives, property, settlements, animals and the environment from disasters and their damaging effects. All levels of government are part of the National Civil Protection Service: the State, the Regions, the Autonomous Provinces, and the Local Authorities ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/national-disaster-management-system/italy\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/national-disaster-management-system/italy_en)).

One of Italy's key strengths is the integration of various national, regional, and local agencies. The **Italian National Fire Corps** (Vigili del Fuoco), **Carabinieri**, and other emergency services work in close collaboration with regional entities. Additionally, Italy's robust involvement of **volunteer organizations**, such as the **Italian Red Cross**, the **National Alpine and Speleological Rescue Corps**, and other NGOs, allows for rapid mobilization and a community-based response, which significantly strengthens the system's capacity. Civil protection activities also benefit from the contribution of professional orders and boards as well as private companies, especially those linked to strategic sectors such as communications, transport, and essential services networks.

The direction and coordination of the National Civil Protection Service are entrusted to the President of the Council of Ministers, that is the Prime Minister, who exercises these functions through the Civil Protection Department.

### *5.1.2. Decentralized systems*

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**Germany's civil protection system** is well-organized and operates at multiple levels, ensuring preparedness for disasters and emergencies. The structure is designed to manage and mitigate a variety of risks, from natural disasters to large-scale emergencies and even threats from industrial accidents or terrorist events. The federal

structure of Germany is reflected by its national disaster management system of shared responsibilities between the Federation and the federal states. "Civil protection" in the general sense of "protection of the population" ("Bevölkerungsschutz") is an overarching term and comprises 2 different elements: "Katastrophenschutz" and "Zivilschutz" ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/national-disaster-management-system/germany\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/national-disaster-management-system/germany_en)).

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According to the Constitution, the **federal states** ("Länder") are responsible **for disaster management ("Katastrophenschutz") in times of peace**. They have enacted respective disaster management laws, defining - inter alia - the responsible disaster management authorities and delegating several administrative and operational tasks to the regional and local level.

In the case of defence, e.g. in times of war or armed conflict, the Federation oversees civil protection ("Zivilschutz"), as laid out in the **Federal Civil Protection and Disaster Relief Act (ZSKG)**.

For some of its tasks in civil protection, the Federation draws on Länder resources and complements these if needed (integrated emergency response system). The Federation provides additional equipment, supplies and training to the Länder and may support them in case of disaster upon request (disaster assistance).

The Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI) is the superior federal government authority for civil protection. It coordinates interministerial collaboration and is generally responsible for national/internal security (<https://www.bmi.bund.de>). The BMI supervises the 2 national civil protection agencies:

**i) The Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance (BBK):** it carries out specific tasks of the Federation concerning civil protection, such as risk management, warning of the population, information and resource management, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence (CBRN) and health protection, protection of critical infrastructure and cultural property, research, international cooperation, etc. The BBK's experts develop strategies, conduct crisis management exercises and raise awareness among the public to enhance self-protection (<https://www.bbk.bund.de>);

**ii) The Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW)** is a governmental non-profit organisation. As a technical and operational agency, its tasks include technical relief and assistance in a large number of emergencies, within Germany and abroad. The operational basis at the local level relies on the volunteer potential of e.g., the fire services, local disaster management authorities and participating relief organisations and the THW. More than 1.8 million volunteers constitute the backbone of the system, which is reinforced by professional full-time staff (<https://www.thw.de>).

Civil-military co-operation, due to the shared responsibilities in times of peace or conflict as described earlier, is particularly relevant in Germany and is carried out at all administrative levels and includes planning, training and exercises. At a national level, the BBK and the Joint Support Command of the Federal Armed Forces (Bundeswehr) coordinate civil-military activities.

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**Sweden's civil protection system** is designed to effectively manage a wide range of risks, including natural disasters, accidents, and social disruptions. The system emphasizes decentralization, coordination, and resilience, with a strong emphasis on collaboration between different government levels, agencies, and volunteer organizations. Sweden's civil protection system is built on a collaborative, multi-tiered framework that operates at the national, regional, and local levels. The crisis and emergency management system is based on 3 principles. The principle of responsibility that means that actors retain their ordinary responsibilities in situations of crisis and disaster. This principle also includes a responsibility to support other involved parties as necessary. The principle of proximity that means that crises and disasters should be managed as close as possible to those primarily concerned. The principle of similarity, which means that the methods and structures used in crisis and disaster management, should be as similar as possible to those used in normal circumstances. The geographical responsibility to manage an event lies with those parties most directly affected. The rescue services are organised at the local level ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/national-disaster-management-system/sweden\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/national-disaster-management-system/sweden_en)).

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**The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB)** is the central authority responsible for national civil protection efforts. It works under the Ministry of Defence and is tasked with coordinating disaster preparedness, response, and recovery at the national level. MSB develops and implements national plans, provides training, and supports local and regional authorities with resources during large-scale emergencies (<https://www.msb.se/en>).

Sweden's 21 counties are responsible for coordinating regional civil protection efforts. At the local level, municipalities handle the initial response to emergencies, supported by local emergency services, such as fire brigades and healthcare providers. Each region has its own **County Administrative Board**, which manages local coordination and resources during crises.

Sweden benefits from a strong network of volunteer organizations, including the **Swedish Red Cross** and **Swedish Rescue Services Agency (SRSA)**, which significantly enhance the capacity for disaster response. These organizations provide specialized services such as medical aid, logistics, and search-and-rescue operations, often in collaboration with government agencies.

Sweden has an efficient crisis communication system that disseminates timely and accurate information to the public. MSB coordinates public information campaigns, including alert systems through mobile apps, media, and social networks.

## 5.2. SWOT analysis

A qualitative SWOT analysis of the above mentioned national civil protection systems was conducted from the standpoint of the UCPM involvement as well as in regard to the changes to Romania's civil protection system that followed the establishment of the DSU in Romania.

### 5.2.1. Method

SWOT analysis is a strategic method used to evaluate an organization, project, or initiative by identifying internal and external factors that may influence their success (Gürel, 2017). SWOT is an acronym for:

- ☞ **Strengths:** positive internal elements that provide competitive advantages or support the achievement of objectives. These may include resources, capabilities, technology, or unique competencies.
- ☞ **Weaknesses:** internal factors that limit or hinder the achievement of objectives. These can be **limited** resources, skill shortages, organizational issues, or other disadvantages.
- ☞ **Opportunities:** external factors or trends that may provide advantages for the organization or project, such as new markets, changes in regulations, or emerging technologies.
- ☞ **Threats:** external factors that could jeopardize the success of the organization or project, such as increased competition, economic changes, or regulatory risks.

SWOT analysis helps identify effective strategies for leveraging strengths to capitalize on opportunities while addressing weaknesses to mitigate threats (Gürel, 2017).

### *5.2.2. Comparative study of civil protection authorities by SWOT Analysis*

The purpose of the study on civil protection systems is to look into the working arrangements for coordinating civil protection measures nationally as well as the contributions to the UCPM by the respective selected Member States and the dynamics compared with the Romanian system. The selected systems (France, Germany, Italy and Sweden) are recognised as organisations with high performances both nationally and internationally within the European Union. The basis of this research was to examine several national civil protection systems considering their participation and coordination at the European level in regard to the establishment of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism.

The idea arises from the **lack of a definition for "civil protection" in European legislation**, leading to varied interpretations of civil protection responsibilities at the national level. The **disparity** may stem from **broad**

**national administrative bodies, political considerations concerning governmental systems, or historical factors.** The absence of a definition has facilitated flexibility in making critical decisions about system development; however, in the present geopolitical context, it may also result in inconsistencies, as evidenced by recent discussions concerning the application of civil protection in demining operations (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2024) or the engagement of civil protection modules in conflict zones (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

The comparative analysis, based on open data available on the official websites of the national civil protection authorities, was developed taking into account **four parameters** considered essential to characterise the features of these systems most eloquently, such as: **civil protection structures/organisation**, provision of specialised **personnel**, main **preparedness** approaches and relevant **country-specific issues** (Figure 5.1). Thus, the analysis of these data from the civil protection systems of France (MI, 2011), Germany (FIC, 2024), Italy (IG, 2024), Sweden (SCCA, 2024) and Romania revealed a **wide range of approaches** and numerous **variations** when it concerns the **means mobilised** in the field of emergency management (Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024).

	structure	staff profile	preparedness	miscellaneous
FRANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- centralized system at the level of the Ministry of Interior</li> <li>- responsible structure: General Directorate of Civil Protection and Crisis Management (DGSCGC).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 78% of the firefighters are volunteers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- includes mandatory exercises</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- DGSCGC coordinates 12 regional defense and security zones,</li> <li>- the regions are led by prefects</li> </ul>
GERMANY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- decentralized federal system</li> <li>- responsibility at Land level</li> <li>- the federal level can provide support on request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 1.8 million volunteers supplement the professional staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- includes extensive training and exercise programs</li> </ul>	
ITALY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- centralized system coordinated by the Civil Protection Department,</li> <li>- strong responsibilities at local and regional level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- multiple categories of personnel: firefighters, military, police, but also contributions from research /science health field,</li> <li>- well-developed volunteer system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- frequent exercises at local and regional level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- well-developed alert/warning systems</li> </ul>
SWEDEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- decentralized system</li> <li>- municipalities have the primary responsibility</li> <li>- national structure: Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) within the Ministry of Defense</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- system of volunteers including roster from all over the world</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- emphasis on courses provided by the MSB</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- prevention plays a key role</li> <li>- comprehensive risk assessment.</li> </ul>
ROMANIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- centralized/integrated system</li> <li>- decision body: the National Committee for Emergency Situations,</li> <li>- operational body Department for Emergency Situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- staff with multiple expertise</li> <li>- poorly developed volunteer system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- well-developed exercise system at subunit/unit level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- DSU/IGSU – the main response structure</li> </ul>

**Figure 5.1. Analysis of the civil protection system in France, Germany, Italy, Sweden and Romania**  
 (Source: Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024)

Although Romania has significantly less experience in the international arena, the comparative data in the table below (Table 5.1.) shows that our country has developed a highly effective system over the past decade. Based on these broad factors and the reports and statistics frequently provided by DG ECHO (2024) the data was compiled in the following table to construct a country profile within the UCPM.

These statistics reveal several features that delimitate the countries' profiles regarding their contributions to the Union Civil Protection Mechanism:

- the **larger countries** (France, Germany, Italy) **provide most of the capacities** to the international assistance process - which is justified by the size, resources and variety of risks they face. This provides a consistent base on which the UCPM is built;
- the **large number of experts mobilized by Sweden** is invaluable for providing specialized expertise and facilitating better coordination (even though Sweden has a significant lower number of inhabitants). It is worth mentioning, however, that Sweden attracts civil protection experts from outside the country through **the MSB roster**, where experts from all over the world can apply. This guarantees a higher number of experts, a wide variety of backgrounds and expertise, and maximises geographical distribution. However, this emphasizes that neither the number of inhabitants, nor the surface of the country's territory would necessarily reflect a more active involvement to provide international assistance;
- **all countries can provide essential expertise;**
- Romania and Sweden contribute with critical response capabilities in the rescEU (that enhance the overall capacity of the UCPM). The conclusion is that any **country can fill niche roles;**
- the scale of repatriations (using UCPM-facilitated flights) during the COVID-19 pandemic generally aligned with the size of populations, highlighting how **larger countries orchestrated more flights** (France repatriated 50,470 citizens, Germany repatriated 50,470 citizens, Italy repatriated 1,924 citizens, Romania repatriated 201 citizens and Sweden repatriated 2,285 citizens)

([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/bringing-stranded-citizens-home\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/stories/bringing-stranded-citizens-home_en));

- Italy's offer of specialized engineering teams (structuralists) demonstrates how **niche capacities are valuable for specialized responses**;
- the diversity of contributions in terms of capacity and types of skills demonstrates how the **Mechanism benefits from complementarity between larger and smaller countries**;
- **solidarity**: addressing requests for assistance in a consistent way underlines the effectiveness of the Mechanism.

Another key element which has a direct implication into the effectiveness, performances and results of a national civil protection authority is the position within the governmental structure. Whilst a civil protection authority should be positioned to fulfil its mission and function in the most effective manner, we may clearly observe from the analysed countries that some of the authorities are positioned in the **Ministry of Interior** (France, Germany and Romania), in Sweden it performs under the **Ministry of Defence** whereas in Italy it's positioned at the **Prime Minister's Office**. Of course, we may see rationales for each type of placement in the governmental organisation as well as **advantages and disadvantages**. Recent discussions in the UCPM landscape regarding **differences and similarities between "civil protection" and "civil defence"** have led some MS to make organisational changes to respond more effectively to current security challenges.

Table 5.1. *Country profile within the UCPM (December 2023)*

Country	UCPM Activations (After 2016)	UCPM Offers (After 2010)	Experts Deployed in UCPM Missions (After 2016)	Capacities Offered in Civil Protection Pool (ECP)	RescEU Capacities
France	11	91	60	20	6
Germany	5	56	24	8	5
Italy	10	55	24	6	4
Sweden	6	30	45	4	5
Romania*	7	37	13	10	6
* pre-positioning missions are not included in the number of UCPM activations Romania has responded to					

As civil protection often deals with emergencies, crises, and internal security, which are traditionally under the purview of the **Ministry of Interior (Home Affairs)** – in this organisation they should be able to coordinate with police, fire services, and emergency medical teams, ensuring a swift response to natural disasters, pandemics, or civil unrest.

If the Civil Protection Authority's role involves a significant focus on preparedness for large-scale threats, including terrorism, large-scale civil unrest, or even military responses in certain emergencies, it could be under the **Ministry of Defence**. Being under the same ministry **may facilitate the synchronisation of civil protection and defence strategies and plans**. In crisis scenarios, especially under increased international pressure, there is a possibility that **resource allocation** within the same ministry **may prioritise defence over civil protection**. In the present setting, it is likely that the initiative "ReArm Europe" will concentrate on the defence sector, undermining a comprehensive strategy that incorporates elements of civil protection. Also, if there is an armed conflict, **staff working in civil protection** within the same ministry **could be labelled as combatants**, even though **civil protection is normally non-combatant**, as already described. However, in certain cases, a Civil Protection Authority **may report directly to the head of government** or a central coordinating body, **particularly in systems where emergency preparedness is prioritized at the highest level**. Therefore, a setup within the **Prime Minister's Office** might ensure a swiftly and decisively response during a crisis. In this situation, which more and more countries from the EU are exploring nowadays, a **central governmental** body would allow for **faster and more coordinated response** during large-scale emergencies and would support the organisation's authority and autonomy without competing interests from law enforcement or other ministries. Such placement into the government would also support a greater strategic oversight and **improved cross-sectoral coordination during crises**.

Considering the aforementioned elements, the research was expanded based on the initial information about the organization of civil protection systems, conducting a SWOT analysis on **centralised versus decentralised disaster management approaches** as illustrated in the Figure 5.2.

Category	Decentralized Management (e.g. Germany, Sweden)	Centralized Management (e.g. France, Italy, Romania)
STRENGTHS	<p><b>Flexibility:</b> quick adaptation to local conditions and needs</p> <p><b>Community involvement:</b> high potential for community involvement and volunteering</p> <p><b>Local knowledge:</b> relies on local experience for risk assessment and management</p>	<p><b>Resource allocation:</b> Efficient allocation and mobilisation of resources</p> <p><b>Standardisation:</b> Similar standards and practices at national level</p> <p><b>Strategic planning:</b> High capacity for long-term strategic planning</p>
WEAKNESSES	<p><b>Dispersed resources:</b> possible unequal distribution of resources.</p> <p><b>Difficult coordination:</b> possible challenges in coordinating efforts between different regions.</p> <p><b>Inconsistent standards:</b> potential variations in standards and procedures</p>	<p><b>Bureaucratic risk:</b> possible bureaucratic delays</p> <p><b>Low local involvement:</b> may have lower levels of community involvement.</p> <p><b>Centralized control:</b> challenges in managing all elements centrally</p>
OPPORTUNITIES	<p><b>Innovation:</b> potential for innovative local solutions</p> <p><b>Capacity building:</b> opportunities for capacity building at local level</p>	<p><b>National programs:</b> the ability to implement initiatives and programs at the national level.</p> <p><b>International cooperation:</b> strong approach on international cooperation and support</p>
THREATS	<p><b>External dependencies:</b> high dependence on external support in the event of major disasters</p> <p><b>Limited resources:</b> smaller/less developed regions will have limited access to resources</p>	<p><b>Dependence on the central authority:</b> regions can become overly dependent on central support</p> <p><b>Misallocation:</b> Risk of misallocation of resources due to lack of information at local level</p>

Figure 5.2. SWOT analysis of disaster management systems / centralized vs. decentralized  
(Source: Dogeanu & Ozunu, 2024)

### 5.3. Conclusions

To conclude the **centralised organization** typically allows for the **rapid mobilization** of resources at the national level but can easily become inconsistent with local needs. **Decentralised systems are more responsive to community needs** but may face significant coordination challenges among local actors or between regions.

Each system has its strengths in terms of local adaptation, speed of response, and overall coordination, with opportunities for cross-border collaboration and resource-sharing that could further enhance resilience. Overall, the diversity of approaches is beneficial for the European mechanism, bringing together the strengths of each model.

Choosing the "best" civil protection system depends on a variety of factors, including the specific risks and challenges faced by a country, the resources available, and the goals of the civil protection framework. Each system - centralized, decentralized, or a hybrid - has its advantages and disadvantages. Ideally, a **hybrid model** that combines the best aspects of both centralized and decentralized approaches would offer the most balanced solution for most countries, particularly in a complex and diverse region like the European Union. This approach should maximize **resilience, efficiency, and adaptability**, allowing for a coordinated response to emergencies of varying scales, while still empowering local authorities to respond to region-specific risks.

Various disasters have demonstrated that they know no borders and can simultaneously hit one or several countries without warning. A joint approach further helps pool expertise and capacities of first responders, avoids duplication of relief efforts, and ensures that assistance meets the needs of those affected (<https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu>). European cooperation in civil protection, strengthened in recent years with rescEU and ECPP, remains crucial for saving lives and the success depends on leveraging synergies between national systems.

# Romanian Civil Protection: "National Export Product" – a radiography of civil protection international assistance missions

## 6.1. The rationale

According to the Romanian National Defence Strategy for 2020-2024, *"the fundamental objective of our foreign and security policies is to raise Romania's international profile"*. Under this goal in Romania, **Civil Protection** has **evolved** from a purely **nationwide domain**, focused on domestic risk management, into an essential **pillar of European humanitarian diplomacy**.

This Chapter does **not intend to examine the fundamentals of international cooperation**, analyse mechanisms for mutual support, or consolidate an efficient operating architecture at the international level. Based on very limited data that can be found on the websites, the social media pages of the Department for Emergency Situations, or the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations but not compiled in any way, this **analysis provides an in-depth look at Romania's role in international aid**, putting into action the commitments made by the country at the EU, North Atlantic Alliance, UN, or bilateral levels. It does this from the point of view of **both experts and practitioners**. This chapter in one way or another reflects a large part of the author's professional life. Since 2003, when he joined the "International Relations" structure of the Civil Protection Command, and until today, all the international assistance missions organised by Romania, the achievements and challenges that Romania addressed at the international level, and practically all international cooperation have been the author's work as part of the teams in charge or as coordinator.

This Chapter examines Romania's path in assuming an **active role in international assistance** through its Civil Protection. We will analyse the institutional mechanisms through which this commitment is conducted, the structures involved and the means through which the necessary resources are mobilized. At the same time, the **logistical, financial and operational challenges** faced by the Romanian teams in the field will be **highlighted**, providing a practical perspective on the **efficiency of interventions and how to optimize them**. Last but not least, this study will prove how these missions have contributed to the strengthening of **Romania's position as a humanitarian security player**, providing a comprehensive overview of the impact of these interventions on the European, and global, civil protection system.

A fundamental aspect of this endeavour is the **learning and adaptation process of national civil protection structures**. By constantly evaluating the lessons learned from each intervention, Romania is continuously improving its response capacity, refining operational procedures and adapting to international standards. In this respect, participation in joint exercises and the exchange of expertise with other UCPM member states have played a key role in enhancing the efficiency and speed of interventions.

In addition to the strictly operational dimension, Romania's active presence in civil protection missions also reflects a **broader strategy of humanitarian diplomacy** (De Lauri, 2018). By providing prompt and well-coordinated support, **Romania** strengthens its relations with its European and international partners, demonstrating its **commitment to the values of solidarity and international cooperation**. This proactive role not only increases the country's influence in international fora, but also contributes to shaping European policies in the field of disaster management.

Equally, this change in Romania's civil protection must also be seen from the broader perspective of **strengthening domestic resilience**. According to *Systematic Self-Reflection model* developed by Monique Crane and her colleague building resilience is a process of experience learning, specifically "learning through reflection on doing" (Crane et al,

2019). It is just in this perspective that all the actions performed in the field of civil protection have proved that this model is, no doubt, a fully viable one, and all the experiences gained from international missions not only improve the preparedness of intervention teams, but also generally contribute to the **development of a more robust national civil protection system**. The solidity of the civil protection system is exactly linked to the fact that the **legislative framework** has been **continuously refined and adapted** on the light of the **lessons identified**, thus leading to the adoption of numerous legal acts such as:

- Strategy for strengthening and developing the role of the Department for Emergency Situations within the National Emergency Management System 2024-2030 ([https://webapp.mai.gov.ro/frontend/documente\\_transparenta/603\\_1701959876\\_Strategie.pdf](https://webapp.mai.gov.ro/frontend/documente_transparenta/603_1701959876_Strategie.pdf));
- National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction 2024-2035 (Official Journal of Romania, no. 662 of July 11, 2024);
- National Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change (SNASC) for the period 2024-2030 (<https://www.mmediu.ro/articol/guvernul-romaniei-a-aprobat-strategia-nationala-privind-adaptarea-la-schimbarile-climatice-pentru-perioada-2024-2030/7305>);
- Strategy for strengthening and developing the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations for the period 2016-2025 (<https://igsu.ro/InformatiiGenerale/ProgrameStrategii?page=3>);
- National Disaster Risk Management Plan (PNMRD) (<https://igsu.ro/InformatiiGenerale/ProgrameStrategii?page=1>);
- National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and a number of five disaster response frameworks (<https://igsu.ro/InformatiiGenerale/Biblioteca?Length=18>);
- National Epidemic Response Framework, National Post Earthquake Response Framework, National Flood Response Framework, National Forest Fire Response Framework and National nuclear - radiological accident response framework, just to mention few of them (<https://igsu.ro/InformatiiGenerale>).

So, this **blend of legal framework coupled with an increased allocation** of financial resources (mainly through EU structural funds

but not limited) and not least the leadership and vision has paved the way to able to respond effectively to emerging risks. This continuous cycle of improvement and innovation makes civil protection a key strategic area for national and European security.

## **6.2. Romania – a reference partner in international civil protection assistance**

Understanding that international cooperation is a major step in building preparedness in dealing with emergencies, in the last 10-15 years, Romania has consolidated its position as a key player in European and international civil protection mechanisms through the efforts of DSU and its subordinated structures. This approach not only ensure a **rapid and efficient response to disasters at national level**, but have also become a reference point in **fostering international assistance**, actively contributing to **European and global solidarity**.

Almost at the same time, when Romania was seeking to improve its national disaster management, at the European Union level, in order to enhance the collective response capability to both natural and man-made disasters, the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) was created - in 2001, as a coordination and assistance tool between Member States and participating States. To continue to better address the ever-more complex needs of civil protection at the European and global levels, the UCPM has since undergone an ongoing process of **development, adaptation, and consolidation**.

By actively participating in the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), the DSU has proven **Romania's capacity to mobilize resources and expertise** in support of other countries in need. The international missions carried out in recent years, such as the interventions following the earthquakes in Albania and Türkiye, the medical support provided during the COVID-19 pandemic or the forest fires in Greece, France, Montenegro, North Macedonia, have highlighted Romania's institutional robustness and its commitment to the values of European solidarity.

ROMANIA'S  
CURRENT STATUS OF MEMORANDUMS OF UNDERSTANDING  
IN THE FIELD OF CIVIL PROTECTION AND EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

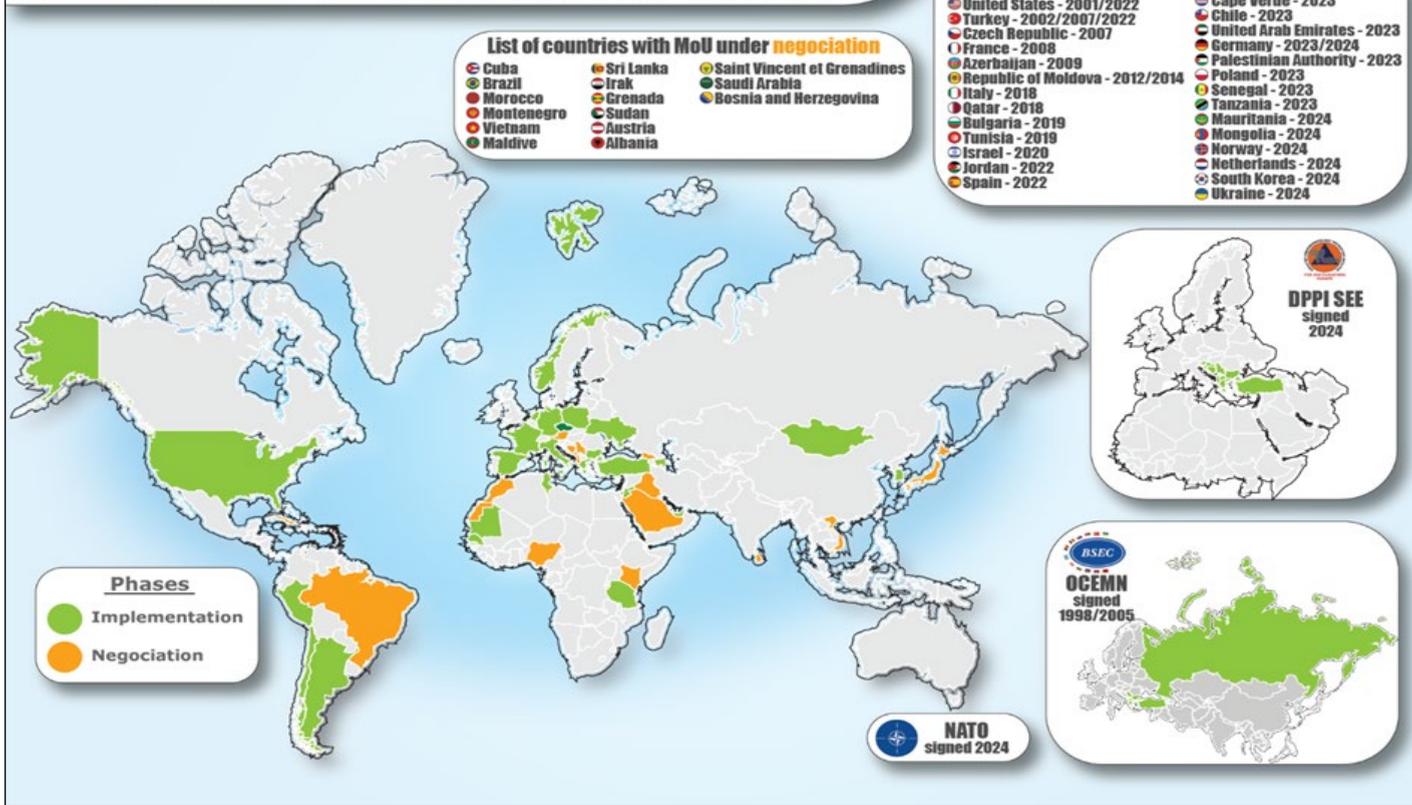
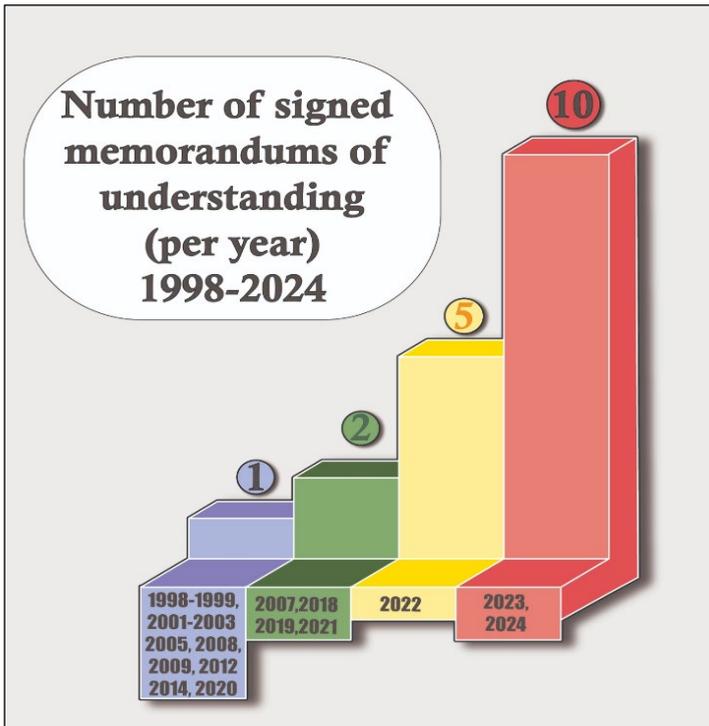


Figure 6.1. Overview of civil protection and emergency cooperation agreements

Another key aspect of promoting international assistance is the close cooperation with similar structures in all EU Member States and outside the EU borders. In this respect, Romania, in addition to its close links with the UCPM, as well as with other major international entities (such as NATO or various UN institutions), has signed numerous **cooperation documents with civil protection services** around the world, creating a fertile ground for the development of common plans for all spheres of civil protection: prevention, preparedness, response. For the past ten years, their number has grown substantially (Figure 6.1 and Figure 6.2 - own presentation based on open sources collection from <https://dsu.mai.gov.ro> & <https://igsu.ro>), underlining Romania's growing commitment to the international civil protection and humanitarian aid support community. As previously mentioned, the author of this thesis was directly involved in the materialization of all these cooperation instruments, and as shown in Figure 6.2, they have grown exponentially with the DSU enlargement after 2021.



**Figure 6.2.** Overview of signed partnership instruments by year (own presentation based on open sources collection from <https://dsu.mai.gov.ro> & <https://igsu.ro>)

These partnerships not only ensure enhanced interoperability during emergency interventions, but also increase response capacity through access to additional expertise and resources. By exchanging best practices, conducting joint exercises and developing standardized intervention procedures, Romania has created its own network to streamline rapid and tailored support to the needs required by the broad spectrum of disasters. This collaborative approach optimizes emergency response time and contributes to aligning intervention standards with international best practices.

Returning to the European dimension, Romania has also been actively involved in the decision-making process at the EU level, by participating in working groups (Civil Protection Working Party/ EU Council & Civil Protection Committee/ EC comitology) dedicated to civil protection (<https://igsu.ro/InformatiiUtile>). Thus, the concerns highlighted in 2019, when Romania had the rotating presidency of the EU Council, on the consequences of High Impact Low Probability (HILP) events were extremely necessary. In practice, that was the starting point that triggered the subsequent decision that resulted in the developments we have seen both at the national level in terms of leadership, coordination, and the development of civil protection structures, as well as the enhanced role of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism - with all of the dimensions on which the RescEU, the EU's safety belt in terms of civil protection capabilities, was later evolved. By promoting initiatives aimed at improving response mechanisms and supporting policies that encourage the development of response capacities, as before described, the DSU has strengthened Romania's role as a reliable partner in disaster management at the global level. At the same time, there is a remarkable development in the number of international partnerships, which comes along with the structural changes at the DSU level introduced by Law 253 of 2020. therefore, the General Directorate for Medical Emergencies, the General Directorate for Civil Protection and the Decision Support Directorate are established within the DSU, aiming to support the growing presence and role of Romanian civil protection on the international arena (Figure 6.2).

To summarise, as it can be seen from the above figures, Romania is continuously developing strategic partnerships with external partners in order to strengthen cooperation and exchange experience and best practices, concluding bilateral cooperation documents with relevant stakeholders in the EU and abroad.

Only in 2024, DSU signed partnership instruments with important stakeholders such as the Bavarian Ministry of Interior, Sport and Integration, FEMA, the Norwegian Civil Defence, the Ministry of Interior and Community Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, the National Emergency and Disaster Management Authority of the United Arab Emirates or the Ministry of Interior and Security of the Republic of Korea.

#### *6.2.1. Actions to develop response capacities through national measures and European support*

Over the last 10 years, Romania has significantly reinforced its civil protection response capacity through a combination of considerable financial support from the European Union and with a number of national efforts coordinated by the DSU. This achievement is the result of an integrated strategy aimed not only at developing operational capabilities and skills improvement of our first responders, but also at increasing international cooperation. To ensure that Romania can fulfil its commitments at the international level, preparedness measures have been implemented nationally by upgrading and broadening the equipment to address the full range of risks.

At the same time, international exercises have been organized, the most relevant being SEISM 2018 - EU MODEX, a large-scale exercise involving staff and equipment from several areas of Romania and a number of teams from: Norway, Austria, Germany, Italy, Israel, Slovak Republic, Sweden. The exercise was focussed on the coordination and collaboration of medical modules (EMT/ Emergency Medical Teams type: 1 to 3 – according with WHO standards, AMP – Advance Medical Post, MEDEVAC/ Medical Evacuation) and with its number of teams and participants it was the largest Medical Module Exercise within the

framework of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism. This EU MODEX was hosted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Romania and took place in different sites across the area of Bucharest (<https://10years.eu-modex.eu/magazin/artikel/largest-medical-eu-modex>). This was an excellent opportunity to identify valuable ways for improving the national response system not only to major earthquakes, but also applicable to major disasters (<https://gov.ro/ro/guvernul/procesul-legislativ/note-de-fundamentare/nota-de-fundamentare-oug-nr-68-14-05-2020>). As a rapid and tangible example, legislation has been amended to simplify the process of requesting or offering international assistance.

However, this is not the sole instance. Since 2015, at author's initiative, Romania has emerged as an important contributor at the European level regarding exercises involving civil protection modules. This development is attributed to IGSU's collaboration with the Apell National Centre for Disaster Management Foundation, which initially proposed a project to the European Commission - DG ECHO, for the organisation of three exercises. This partnership was responsible to coordinate exercises on floods, forest fires, and CBRN disasters for the last ten years, organising more than 24 training opportunities in real field conditions. (<https://www.apell-euromodex.eu/>).

On the other hand, given the bilateral relations developed between the DSU and other corresponding authorities around the world, Romania has gain from valuable exchange of expertise. These exchanges have made it possible to consolidate emergency response capacities by adopting the best available practices and technologies, thus contributing to greater efficiency in emergency management.

As stated above, the European Union has played an essential role in supporting the development of Romanian civil protection capabilities by its financial instruments articulated at the level of EU member states and not least by the tools that the UCPM has introduced in the preparedness phase and most critically in the disaster response stage. Thus, through the structural funds dedicated to Romania, the EU has allocated substantial allocations for the modernization of equipment and training

of personnel, while granting Romania access to financing for the further improvement of its intervention capabilities ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/funding-evaluations/financing-civil-protection/cp-calls-proposals/european-civil-protection-pool-ecpp-adaptation-grants-2025\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/funding-evaluations/financing-civil-protection/cp-calls-proposals/european-civil-protection-pool-ecpp-adaptation-grants-2025_en)). For example, as stated in the IGSU Activity Report for the year 2023, the amount that was accessed within the framework of programs financed by non-reimbursable European funds exceeded 980 million euro by the beginning of 2024 (Activity Report of the Inspectorate for Emergency Situations for year 2023).

This example reveals two sides - on the one hand the evident **shortages that were accumulating in the emergency response services** led to the allocation of a quite substantial amount to cover certain needs, so that in less than 10 years alone, roughly 1 billion euro of funding was allocated, and on the other hand it also reveals an **extraordinary ability to mobilize** so that in an extremely short time these sophisticated procurements could be carried out under very laborious legislation and in a totally hostile context, generated by the Covid 19 pandemic or Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, which have strongly impacted supply chains.

Additionally, it is also worth highlighting the fact that in the more than 20 years since its establishment, the UCPM has coordinated the assistance provided by Member States in more than 700 emergencies ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism_en)). This impressive achievement is grounded on the provisions of Decision 1313/2013, according to which Member States sending international assistance benefit from EU financial and logistical support, covering in some cases up to 100% of operational and transportation expenses ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/funding-evaluations/financing-civil-protection/transport-and-operations-co-financing-procedures-under-union-civil-protection-mechanism\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/funding-evaluations/financing-civil-protection/transport-and-operations-co-financing-procedures-under-union-civil-protection-mechanism_en)). These provisions that decreased budgetary pressure were essential for Romania's participation in international assistance missions and rapid disaster response.

Last but not least, the excellent collaboration between DSU and the other structures of the SNMU should be emphasized. The components of the SNMSU have contributed, according to their specific competences, to the preparation, planning, organization and implementation of international assistance actions. Thus significant is the contribution of the Ministry of National Defence, which has carried out numerous missions of transportation of first responders and their technical means in various countries affected by disasters (e.g. the earthquake in Albania 2019 or Türkiye 2023, the fires in France, summer 2022 ([https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/albania-eu-mobilises-emergency-support-following-earthquakes-2019-11-26\\_en?prefLang=cs](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/albania-eu-mobilises-emergency-support-following-earthquakes-2019-11-26_en?prefLang=cs); [https://romania.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/cutremur-ue-mobilizeaza-asistenta-de-urgenta-suplimentara-pentru-siria-si-turcia-2023-02-13\\_ro](https://romania.representation.ec.europa.eu/news/cutremur-ue-mobilizeaza-asistenta-de-urgenta-suplimentara-pentru-siria-si-turcia-2023-02-13_ro); <https://gov.ro/en/news/romania-grants-aid-to-french-authorities-to-help-fight-forest-fires&page=1>; [https://armed.mapn.ro/3321\\_romania-acorda-sprijin-autorita%C8%9Bilor-din-fran%C8%9Ba-pentru-stingerea-incendiilor-de-padure](https://armed.mapn.ro/3321_romania-acorda-sprijin-autorita%C8%9Bilor-din-fran%C8%9Ba-pentru-stingerea-incendiilor-de-padure)) or even by direct intervention with its own aircrafts in emergencies missions to extinguish wildfires (such as the fires last year in Albania and North Macedonia – <https://agerpres.ro/comunicate/2024/07/17/comunicat-de-presa---ministerul-apararii-nationale--1328795>). In the same way it was also appreciated the cooperation and coordination with the Ministry of Health during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. sending a medical team to Italy, Republic of Moldova and Tunisia, or the medical evacuation of 20 paediatric patients and 61 custodians, from the Gaza Strip), with the National Administration of State Reserves (in the case of numerous donations from Romania to several countries), and with many others, including civil society and various public and private partners of the DSU.

### ***6.2.2. National civil protection response teams available for international assistance missions***

Starting with 2014, Romania has developed and operationalized a number of teams (civil protection modules, which are units of personnel and equipment that are ready to be mobilised - in accordance with the

*Decision No:1313/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council*) fully complying with European Union standards, some of which are already included in the European Civil Protection Pool (ECPP) – a voluntary pool of pre-committed Member States' disaster response resources (Figure 6.3). These modules are essential to ensure a rapid and efficient response in case of disasters and contribute in the framework of the UCPM to European solidarity, anywhere in the world (Malešič, 2025). The upgrading and enhancing of response capacities to create a proper environment for the development of a more secure society both for the Romanian and the European citizens was another priority for the DSU. In order to achieve this objective Romania is currently contributing in the framework of the UCPM/ ECPP (European Civil Protection Pool) with eleven civil protection modules as follows:

**i) certified/classified - according with EU or UN standards:**

- High-Capacity Pumping (HCP) modules - intended for interventions in case of severe floods as follows:
  - RO-HCP-01 – currently counting a number of 25 staff from Bucharest-Ilfov Emergency Situations Inspectorate was certified at EU level in 2018 and recertified in 2023, with participation in exercises: EU MODEX SIBIU SIBIU 2022, MNE-MODEX FX Romania / Timisoara - 2021, MNE-MODEX FX Montenegro - 2019, EUROMODEX CZECH MODEX - OSTRAVA – 2017 (<https://www.apell-euromodex.eu/>)
  - RO-HCP-02 - operationalized at Timiș County Inspectorate for Emergency Situations level, was certified at EU level in 2018 and recertified in 2023. The 25 staff team gained experience in exercises like: EU MODEX ARGEȘ - 2022, ITA MODEX ITALIA - 2018, AU MODEX LAUBEGG 2017, ForFirEX 2019 CARAȘ-SEVERIN (<https://www.apell-euromodex.eu/>).
- Medium Urban Search and Rescue (M-USAR) module - classified to INSARAG standards for response in case of collapsed

structures - RO-USAR-01 ([https://vosocc.unocha.org/usar\\_directory/membercountriesoverview.asp](https://vosocc.unocha.org/usar_directory/membercountriesoverview.asp)) is a joint pooling of resources from both the Ministry of Internal Affairs (from national level) and the Ministry of Health or civil society through NGOs. Classified INSARAG as Medium team in 2014, reclassified in 2019, due to conduct INSARAG classification exercise as Heavy team in October 2026.

*Structure of the personnel:*

- 59 staff and 4 search and rescue dogs as Medium USAR,
- 80 staff and 4 search and rescue dogs as Heavy USAR.

*Relevant missions/exercises:*

- missions in Albania -2019 and Türkiye - 2023
- exercises: NATO/EADRCC Ukraine - 2015, EU MODEX France-2016, NATO/EADRCC Bosnia and Herzegovina - 2017, NATO/EADRCC Serbia - 2018, EU MODEX Bucharest-2018, EU MODEX Portugal-2019, EU MODEX Austria-2023.

- Medium Urban Search and Rescue (M-USAR) module RO-USAR-10- organised at Bucharest level, currently in process of INSARAG classification as medium team.

*Structure:*

- 58 staff and 4 search and rescue dogs;

*Relevant missions/exercises:*

- mission in Türkiye – 2023 / exercises: EU MODEX Italy-2022.

- CBRN Detection and Sampling (CBRNDT) module - identifying and monitoring chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear substances in affected areas - RO-CBRNDT, national team of 42 staff, being certified at EU level in 2023.

*Relevant missions/exercises:* - EU MODEX, Montana, Bulgaria - 2019, EU MODEX, Targu Mures, Romania - 2022, EU MODEX, Lyon, France - 2023.

**ii) under certification**

- Emergency Medical Teams Type 1 (EMT1 - in accordance with WHO requirements),
  - RO-EMT1-B-IF (42 staff) – under classification
    - Relevant exercises:* - EU MODEX Macedonia 2017, EU MODEX Bucharest 2018, EU MODEX Estonia 2019, EU MODEX Targu Mures, Romania - 2022, EU MODEX Türkiye 2023, EU MODEX Italy 2024 (<https://www.eu-modex.eu/home>).
  - RO-EMT1-MS (50 staff) under classification.
    - Relevant exercises:* - EU MODEX Bucharest 2018, EU MODEX, Gornești (MS), Romania - 2021, EU MODEX, Targu Mures, Romania - 2022, EU MODEX Italy 2023, Vigorous Warriors Hungary – 2024 (<https://www.eu-modex.eu/home>; <https://www.coemed.org/resources/vw>).
- Aerial Medical Evacuation Module (MEDEVAC) - for the transportation of critical patients from disaster areas to safe medical facilities.
- Ground Forest Fires Fighting with Vehicles modules (GFFF-V) - specialized in large-scale interventions to extinguish forest fires:
  - RO-GFFF-V-01 – national team, currently in process of certification.

*Structure:* - up to 150 staff (light level 60, medium 90, full team 150).

*Relevant missions/exercises:* - firefighting missions in Greece 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024.

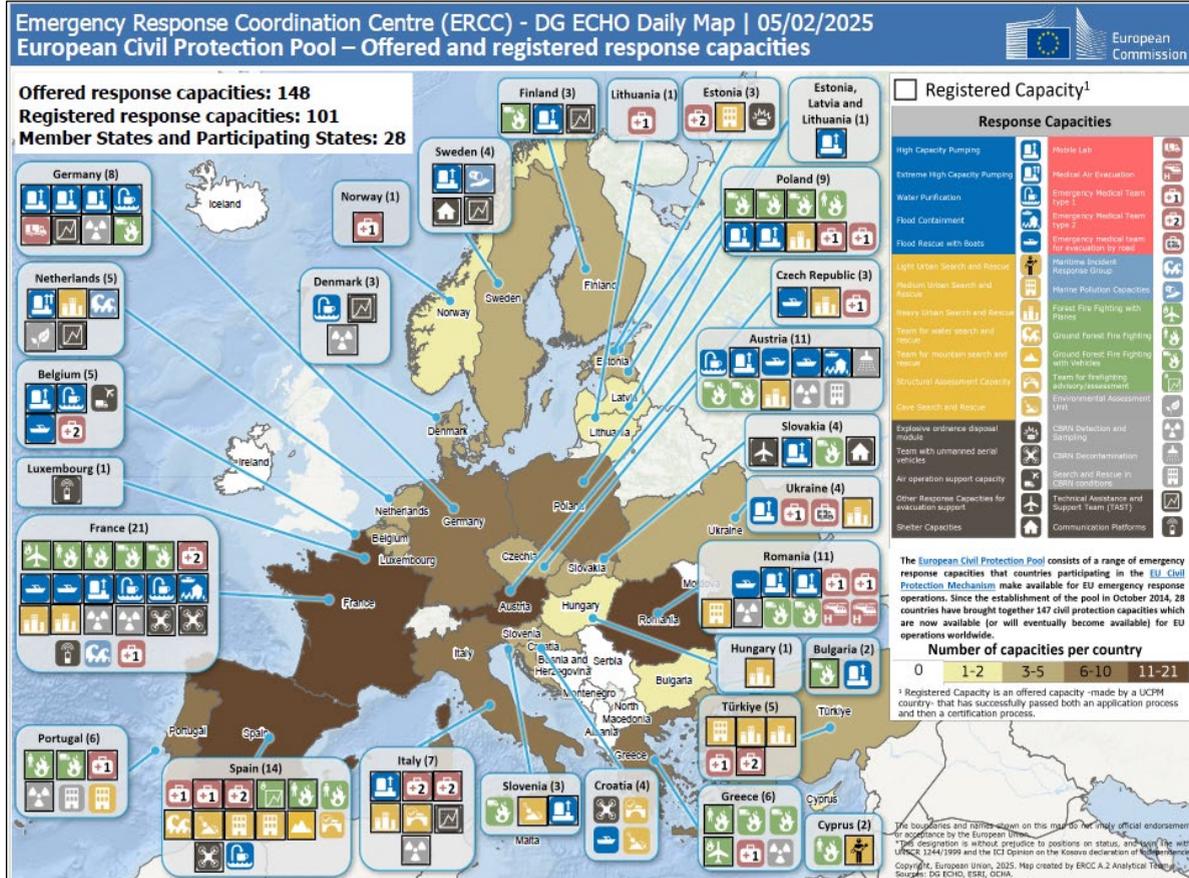
- RO-GFFF-V-02 – national team, currently in process of certification

*Structure:* - up to 150 staff (light level 60, medium 90, full team 150);

*Relevant missions/exercises:* - firefighting mission in France 2022, 2023 and 2024 (<https://gov.ro/ro/media/comunicate/romania-acorda-sprijin-autoritator-din-franta-pentru-stingerea-incendiilor-de-padure>).

- Flood Rescue using Boat (FRB) module - designed for rescue operations in flooded areas or large areas of water - RO-FRB, operationalized by Timiș County Inspectorate for Emergency Situations level, is currently in certification process at EU level. The team of 40 staff, participated EU MODEX Sibiu, Romania - 2022. (<https://www.apell-euromodex.eu/>).

Regarding the FRB module, MEVAC as well as one of the GFFF-V modules are funded by DG-ECHO in the form of an adaptation grant to reach the level of equipment and training in line with EU quality standards.



**Figure 6.3. Overview of response capacities at EU level**  
 (Source: [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/european-civil-protection-pool\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/european-civil-protection-pool_en))

The typical architecture of a module is developed around three pillars: the management unit, the operational structure and logistics and support unit:

- *the management unit* is responsible for the coordination of all activities of the module during the conduct of specific missions, including: leadership, planning, operation, reporting, mission evaluation, communications, media relations, and personnel safety and security. The management structure includes: the team leader, deputy team leader, head of operations, liaison officer, responsible for communications, logistics, safety and security and spoke person.
- *the operational structure* is responsible for running emergency operations and is set up according to the current operational situation in the area of the incident.
- *the logistics and support unit* is responsible for ensuring all logistical aspects of mission deployment, including operationalization and management of the base of operations, supply and warehouse management and transport.

A key pillar of preparedness to which the DSU attaches particular importance is the development, maintenance, replenishment and adaptation of strategic stocks of equipment and resources available to support Member States in case of need. Currently, Romania hosts and develops **rescEU assets**, which are essential components of the European strategic reserve to support Member States in emergencies. These capabilities are, in fact, a "safety belt" of the European Union, consisting of civil protection capabilities that can be mobilized when Member States' capacities are overwhelmed and international assistance from other Member States is not available (Faulkner, 2024; <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ%3AL%3A2019%3A077I%3ATOC>; [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/resceu\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/resceu_en)). Thus, as described in Figure 6.4, the following **stocks** are currently in place being established under DSU coordination:

- **medical countermeasures or personal protective equipment of medical equipment and essential medicines stockpile** - used for the management of health emergencies, including pandemics. Established in 2020, as described in the next chapter, the stock was several times used during the Covid 19 pandemic.
- **temporary shelter stockpile** -reserves of high-quality emergency shelter units, including light prefabricated structures, and emergency tents, providing people with a safe and secure place to live in the aftermath of a disaster or emergency. Established at the beginning of Ukrainian war it was used to support Ukrainians people as well as in the aftermaths of the earthquake in Türkiye.

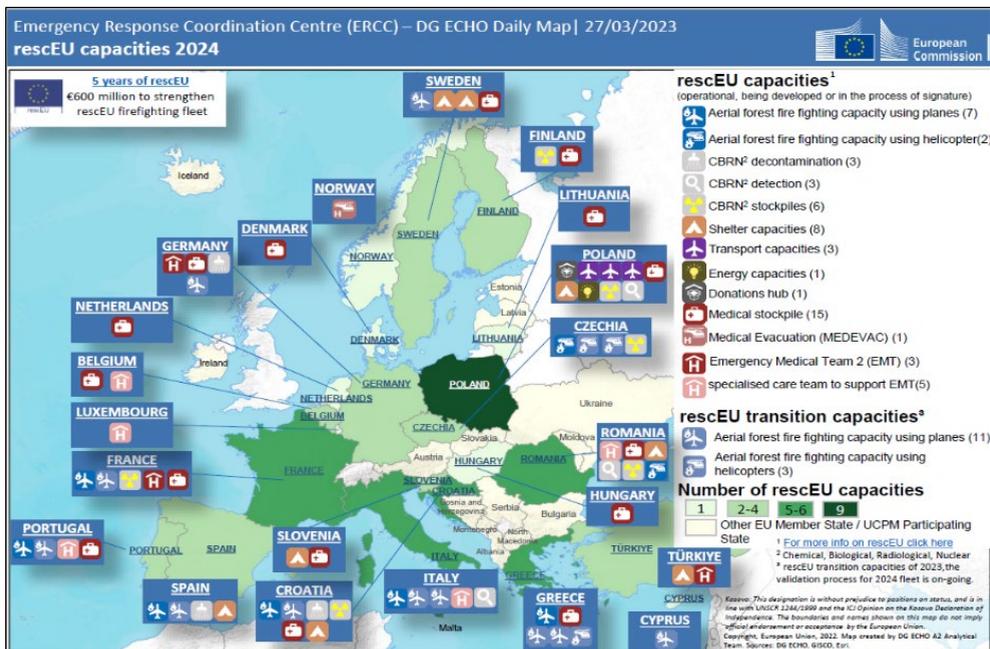


Figure 6.4. Overview of rescEU capacities 2024  
 (Source: DG ECHO Daily Map)

Last but not least, since 2024 Romania in agreement with European Commission is currently also developing rescEU **response capabilities** in the form of:

- **wildfire fleet**: in light of multiple record-breaking wildfire seasons across Europe, rescEU is constantly reinforced to provide

more aerial means each year. In the long run, the European Commission has set aside substantial funds to purchase 12 new firefighting planes for Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Croatia, and Greece, as well as three helicopters for Slovakia, Czechia, and Romania.

These aircraft will form the "permanent rescEU fleet".

- **rescEU EMT:** EU granted funds to a consortium consisting of 7 Member States (Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Romania) and 1 participating state (Türkiye) of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to develop the rescEU Emergency Medical Team (EMT), the first pan-European field hospital. The objective is to boost emergency medical support to populations affected by large-scale natural or man-made disasters. The project will establish 3 Emergency Medical Teams Type 2 (EMT2), which will include surgery and diagnostic services. ([https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_2273](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_2273)). The rescEU EMT, currently under development, aims to become the largest field hospital globally, providing a modular, highly specialised medical response to disasters.
- **rescEU CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear) capabilities:** decontamination capabilities as well as detection, sampling, identification, and monitoring capabilities are currently being developed to respond to CBRN threats.
- **strategic stockpiles of medical and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) equipment and therapeutics** - specialized reserves to respond more quickly to needs caused by health crises and CBRN threats such as the COVID-19 pandemic or large-scale human-induced disasters. The reserve enables the swift delivery of items, including different types of therapeutics, medical, CBRN and personal protective equipment.

Depending on the needs arising from disaster events, additional resources may be made available in the form of **experts** on specific fields or **donations - in-kind assistance**. These contributions allow for a more flexible and tailored response to the specific needs of each disaster,

allowing for enhanced assistance to the affected states. Romania is actively contributing to the European Union's civil protection teams by providing experts trained to participate in international missions. These specialists are trained through dedicated courses in the framework of the UCPM's Preparedness Program, being able to support DG ECHO operations in disaster-affected areas, facilitating the coordination and rapid implementation of response measures (EUCP Team Function Profiles).

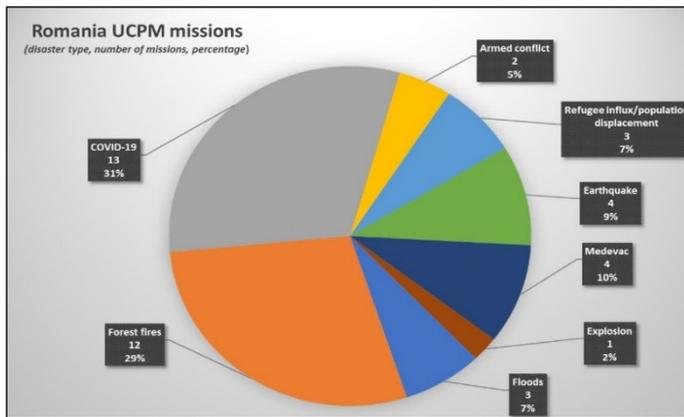
### *6.2.3. Romania's international assistance missions*

The political changes that have marked both Romania and the other countries of the communist block since the end of the 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's have brought with them an interest in external cooperation and solidarity in case of disasters, which, despite the prevention measures, have continued to have major consequences. It is also quite eloquent at least for Romania that the investments in the civil protection system until the mid-2010's ensured only survival. The governments that succeeded each other at the helm of the country did not manage to turn their attention to this system except when disasters occurred and when it was too late for prevention-preparedness measures but there was a complete focus of media coverage on response measures. Against the background of this chronic lack of preparedness measures our very limited involvement in the international emergency arena is also explained, even though the 1990's are the years when international mechanisms for coordinating disaster response such as the UN's INSARAG or NATO's EADRCC were emerging and developing.

As underlined before, until 2014, when the DSU was established and substantial allocations were made to equip the emergency services - fire brigade, ambulance, aviation - Romania's presence in international assistance missions was only sporadic. But with the revision of the legislation in the field of emergency management with the emergence of the DSU and financial resources of over one billion euros, but not least with the membership of NATO and the EU, Romania's role in this area is growing. Basically, we are starting to demonstrate a solid commitment in

providing international assistance in crisis and disaster situations, becoming today a key player in the framework of the UCPM providing support both inside and outside the EU.

From traditional assistance in cases of earthquakes and floods, to extended missions in pandemic or geopolitical contexts, Romania has demonstrated a rapid and efficient reaction capacity that today many European countries cannot compete with. What has fostered this is first of all the centralized structure at national level and the integrated emergency response system, but also the extremely well-articulated legislation that allows, through quick decisions, to access various national resources of the several authorities that make up the SNMSU (Mocioi, 2023). Thus, with an increasingly efficient logistical backbone and experienced human resources, Romania's presence at international assistance appeals has become a routine.

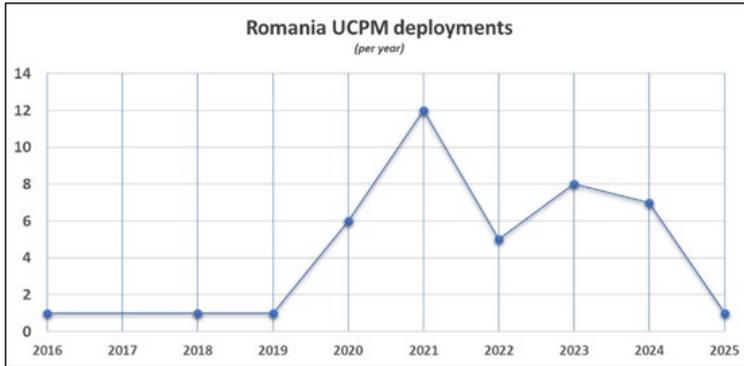


**Figure 6.5.** *Romanian UCPM missions per risk type developed on data presented in Annex 1*

The diversity of situations in which Romania has stepped in is vast (Figure 6.5 personal contribution based on data presented in Annex no 1 - *International assistance offered by Romania between 1999 and 2024*) including earthquakes, floods, forest fires, health crises and armed conflicts. While in the early years interventions focused on typical civil protection situations, since 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic and major geopolitical changes, Romania has considerably expanded its scope of

action (Annex no 1 – according with open sources from <https://igsu.ro>; <http://www.dsu.mai.gov.ro>), adding missions to deliver medical equipment, humanitarian support for refugees and participation in international risk evaluation.

As stated, initially, Romania's participation in international assistance missions was sporadic, but since 2020, as can be seen in the Figure 6.6, there has been a significant increase in their frequency.



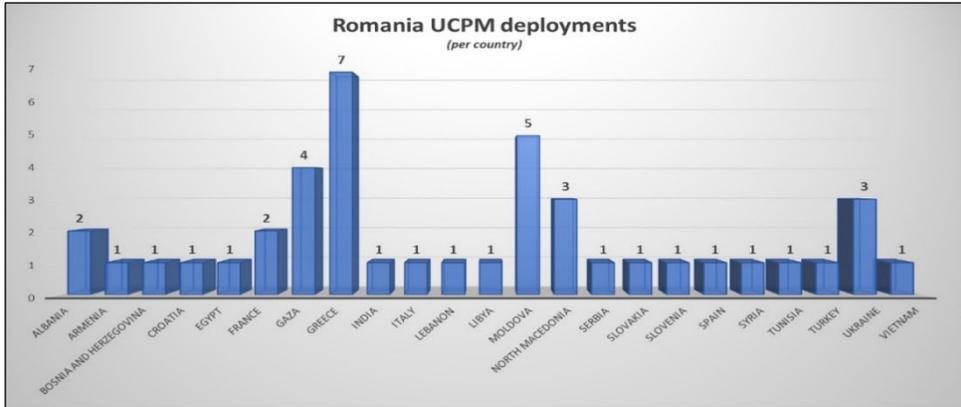
**Figure 6.6.** Romanian UCPM deployments based on Annex no. 1

This growth reflects both the development of Romania's response capacities and the increased confidence of international partners. Romania is now one of the main providers of assistance in the framework of the UCPM, playing a central role in mobilizing intervention teams and ensuring a rapid and coordinated response at European level.

This development has been triggered by the need for a swift response to global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts, reinforcing Romania's position as a strategic partner in international assistance. There has also been a diversification of intervention typologies, from in-kind assistance during natural disasters to integrated responses to multiple complex crises. This adaptability reflects the maturity of the Romanian civil protection system and its ability to respond promptly to the specific needs of each emergency.

Moreover, as reflected in the Figure 6.7, Romania has consolidated its status as a source of international solidarity by supporting not only neighbouring countries or countries members of the UCPM, but also

went well beyond these borders, assisting when needed even areas in faraway Asia (geographically speaking) such as Vietnam or India and not only.



**Figure 6.7.** Romania UCPM deployments per country (see Annex no 1 data)

Particularly in the context of humanitarian crises, our country has made available logistical resources, essential equipment and qualified personnel to manage large-scale emergencies. The complexity of missions has increased significantly, moving from ad hoc donations of materials and equipment to the deployment of expert teams specialized in urban search and rescue, logistical support and advanced medical operations. This transition underlines not only the broadening of Romania's operational capabilities, but also the high level of expertise achieved in international deployments.

It should be noted that these efforts have had a twofold significance. On the one hand, Romania has strengthened its own civil protection capabilities, its personnel have gained crucial experience in carrying out such missions, and on the other hand, it has demonstrated a strong commitment to the principles of European and international solidarity. This evolution, is likely to confirm that as global risks diversify, Romania will continue its pro-active role in supporting the international community, further contributing to building resilience at the global level.

### **6.3. Case studies – forest fires, Covid'19 pandemic, Middle East humanitarian crisis**

#### *6.3.1. Forest fires*

In the face of climate change, forest fires have become an increasingly threat in Europe, calling for prevention, preparedness and response measures by Member States and European institutions.

In Romania, the possibility of forest fires is considerable; nevertheless, the impact level is very modest relative to other types of risks. Climate projections suggest that countries such as Romania, who have not historically encountered a substantial risk of forest fires, would face an escalation of this threat in the coming future. Therefore in 2018, the National Response Concept in case of forest fires was developed to establish the role and responsibilities of all stakeholders responsible for planning and carrying out the response and preparing the conditions for recovery after a forest fire emergency (National Response Concept). Romania typically experiences a low incidence of wildfires each year; however, there has been an increase since 2017, when 65 wildfires were documented annually. As of 2022, the European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS) had documented 719 wildfires. In 2023, however, the number decreased to 124 (<https://forest-fire.emergency.copernicus.eu/apps/effis.statistics/seasonaltrend>).

In this context Romania has initiated to start building through the *Vision 2020 program* (<https://mfe.gov.ro/alti-682-de-milioane-de-euro-din-bani-europeni-alocati-inspectoratului-general-pentru-situatii-de-urgenta/>) a number of capabilities to address forest fires, which were used to demonstrate a solid solidarity in this field, promptly stepping in to international requests for forest firefighting and consolidating Romania's position as a reliable partner in the framework of the UCPM.

Although there had been two limited experiences in Greece in 2007 - Ministry of Interior helicopters equipped for firefighting and in 2018, when Romania sent Ministry of Defence aircraft, practically 2021 marks the moment when Romania starts to become a significant player at European level in this field. Thus, in 2021, still in the midst of the

pandemic situation, Romania provided support to Northern Macedonia in fighting the forest fires, sending an intervention aircraft, a logistic aircraft and 20 firefighters who contributed on the ground to the emergency management. The same year also marked the beginning of large-scale interventions in Greece, one of the European countries most affected by forest fires in the last decade, where firefighting teams were sent with fire engines, cisterns and other logistical means necessary to carry out the intervention. In 2022, the number of personnel sent to the same country will reach 142 firefighters, reinforcing operational support. In fact, every year since 2021, Romania has responded to calls for assistance from the Greek state, deploying teams and equipment for emergency management.

Starting from 2022, at the initiative of the European Commission, a program with proactive measures for the management of forest fires is being implemented. In this context Romania, deploys two specialized forest fire fighting modules in Greece as part of a pre-positioning program coordinated by DG ECHO. This mechanism allowed a rapid emergency response and contributed to reducing the impact of fires on the population and ecosystems.

Romania's international actions also continued in other European countries. In 2022, Romania sent three aircraft of the Ministry of National Defence to Slovenia and supported the interventions in France with 17 intervention assets and 77 firefighters. This mission introduces a new milestone in terms of response time to such an emergency. With the support of the Ministry of National Defence which facilitates the availability of both its own aircraft and two C17 - Globemaster from Pápa Air Base, Hungary, the Romanian module manages to reach in record time from one part of Europe to another, from Romania to France and to contribute decisively to the stabilization of the situation and minimizing the effects of forest fires. The aforementioned pre-positioning program was maintained in 2023 and 2024, where Romania contributed with two strategically placed forest firefighting modules in Greece and France, and is to be resumed in 2025. It is worth mentioning that in both 2023 and 2024, at the request of the Greek authorities, Romania supplemented its initial teams with additional resources for the management of large fires.

In 2024, Romania again extended regional support by mobilizing air assets from the Ministry of National Defence for interventions in North Macedonia (see below Annex no:1).

### 6.3.2. Covid'19 pandemic

At the **beginning of 2020, the SNMSU is faced with its first major challenge**, in which it must act to manage a virus affecting the entire planet, and all this in a world that is always on the move and where travel between two diametrically opposite points on the globe can be accomplished in less than 24 hours. A world where the World Health Organization has declared a global medical emergency on 31.01.2020 and a COVID'19 pandemic on 11.03.2020.

Although the reality revealed that the world was not prepared to manage the pandemic, I must emphasise that already a year before, in 2019, steps were taken at Romania's initiative. So, understanding the challenges that civil protection faces at European level, in order **to strengthen the EU's collective capacity** to face natural disasters, **during the Romanian Presidency of EU Council**, by Decision (EU) 2019/420, amending Decision No. 1313/2013/EU, the **"rescEU" reserve is introduced**. This provides an **additional reserve of response resources** at European level.

Speaking of the achievements of the national team (which I coordinated), in charge of civil protection activities during the Romanian Presidency of the EU Council, I have to bring up two events that were planned and organized and **highlighted a year before the pandemic** was declared: "the need for more applied emergency management preparedness at the European level".

In this context, as head of the Romanian civil protection team, I was in charge of preparing the workshop: "*Preparing for low probability high impact disasters - way ahead*" held in Bucharest (30 January–1 February 2019) where more than 100 experts from EU level reflected on principles and criteria for a common understanding of "**high impact low probability**" events. Then, in February 2019, the Romanian Presidency of the EU Council and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering

Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE) organised a two-day workshop focused on **EU-NATO cooperation in civil protection**, focusing on the significance of a shared **understanding of hybrid threats**. The workshop assessed EU and NATO preparedness for civil protection through a **tabletop exercise based on a medical scenario** (<https://www.hybridcoe.fi/news/medical-based-scenario-highlights-significance-of-eu-civil-protection-mechanism/>). Unfortunately, the findings that **Europe, the world is not prepared for the pandemic were validated a year later**.

Following the violent outbreak of the Covid '19 pandemic in March 2020, our proposals have been materialized by the *Implementing Decision 2020/452 on the capacities established to respond to low probability high impact risks*. By this decision, the stocks need is endorsed and the criteria for financing the RescEU strategic medical stocks are defined. (Glencross, 2022). (<https://www.asktheeu.org/en/request/6868/response/22513/attach/html/9/st09407.en19.pdf.html>) Thus, in less than a week (actually in 4 days) after the approval of the Implementing Decision 452/2020, on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020, DG-ECHO is signing, based on the draft proposal I developed with my colleagues, with the IGSU **for the first time at EU level a direct grant of up to €10 million to set up an initial stockpile of medical counter-measures**, which will consist in the first phase of personal protective masks and medical ventilators for intensive care. The expected results is making available medical supplies available in the shortest time possible and their delivery to the affected countries according to the ERCC indication ([https://igsu.ro/Resources/FinantareExterna/Prezentare\\_grat\\_agreement\\_under\\_rescEU2020.pdf](https://igsu.ro/Resources/FinantareExterna/Prezentare_grat_agreement_under_rescEU2020.pdf)). The COVID-19 pandemic presented an extraordinary challenge, highlighting the importance of international solidarity and cooperation in managing health crises. Romania faced multiple challenges, having to rapidly adapt its response strategies and work with international partners to ensure the protection of the population and the functioning of the healthcare system.

As we look back now almost five years after the declaration of the Covid'19 pandemic, we have to recognize that despite the lack of protective materials was a problem, but one common to all states, through the measures decided at the level of the National Committee for

Emergency Situations, Romania managed the early phase of the pandemic at an acceptable degree when compared to most European countries.

At the technical level, there have been concerns since the end of 2019, and beginning in January 2020, several meetings of the Technical-Scientific Support Group have been held to analyse the situation at the international level, the risks and the steps taken and to propose ways of action and measures that are adopted by decisions of the National Committee for Emergency Situations (CNSU), with 10 decisions being adopted until the declaration of a state of emergency, measures that are gradually implemented at the operational, organizational or legislative level, such as the one related to the setting up of medical emergency stocks.

Thus, through these measures, the Romanian authorities manage to keep the number of Covid'19 virus infections down, so that the emergency care units can deal with the cases and provide specialized assistance to those in need. Moreover, with the apparition of the vaccine at the end of December 2020, Romania had a very good start in terms of vaccination of the population and it seemed that with all the variants of evolution of the virus the measures in place would be effective and would allow a proper management of the cases of infections. However, with the beginning of the summer of 2021, misinformation campaigns and fake news propagated initially on social media but then also on some TV news channels create a lack of trust among the population regarding the need for vaccination and the effects of the virus and thus two immediate directions of development emerge. The number of infections increases due to the lack of compliance with prevention measures (wearing masks, distancing, etc.) and the rate of vaccination drops sharply so that a critical mass of vaccinated people cannot be created to counter the spread of the virus. These things are happening while most European countries are reaching vaccination rates of over 80%, while Romania, according to CNCAV (National Committee for the Coordination of Activities on Vaccination against SARS-CoV-2 data, is only reaching 42% at the end of the pandemic (<https://vaccinare-covid.gov.ro>). In this context, from

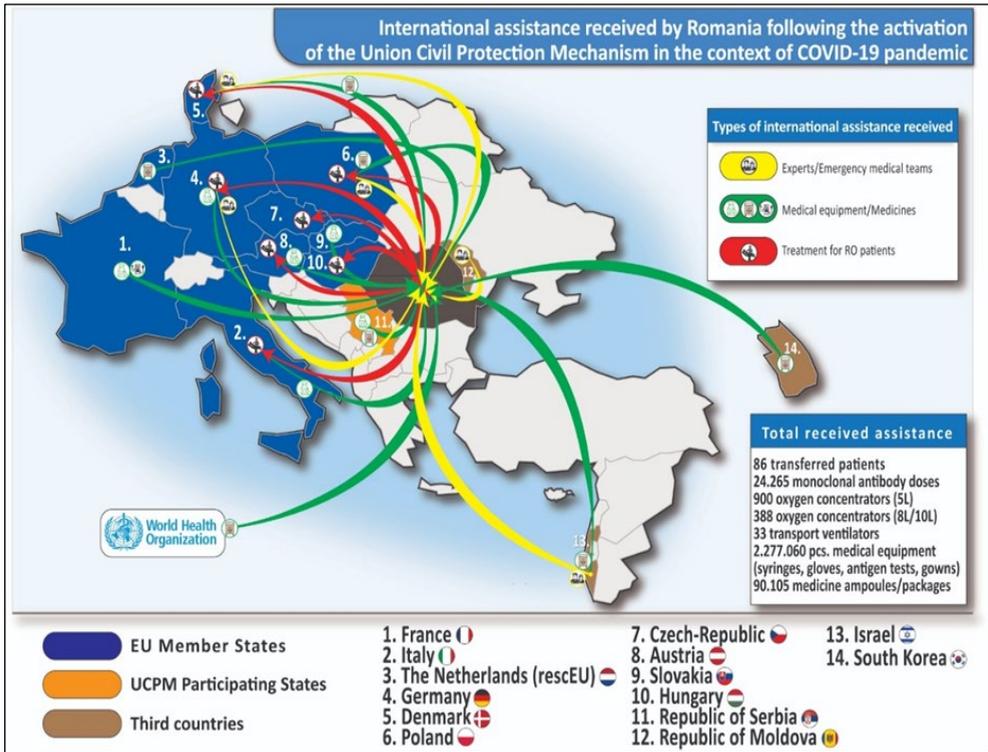
September 2021 onwards, the number of COVID'19 infections increases uncontrollably and the fourth and last wave of the pandemic becomes critical for Romania. According to CNCAV data, record after record is being registered as follows:

- 19 October 2021: record in terms of number of infections 18863 cases;
- 02 November 2021: the highest number of daily deaths – 591;
- 04 November 2021: highest number of patients hospitalized in emergency units – 1902.

These figures have created a panic in the population and slightly increased the vaccination rate, but nevertheless Romania is forced to seek international assistance.

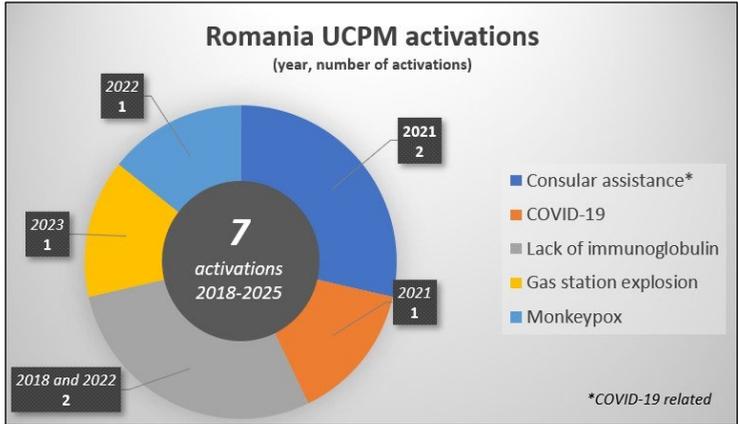
If until then as we were showing earlier Romania was the champion in terms of international assistance missions both through donations of protective equipment and medical countermeasures (vaccines) as well as medical intervention teams, fall 2021, we bring us the position of requesting that international assistance. The principle of solidarity makes its presence felt immediately and Romania is receiving support from 14 states (both member or participating in the UCPM but also from outside) as highlighted in Figure 6.8.

The solidarity towards Romanian citizens in need is ensured with medical teams but also with equipment and materials (syringes, gloves, tests, etc.). because the emergency care units are overwhelmed by the large number of cases, teams of doctors from the Republic of Moldova, Denmark, Poland, Israel arrive in Romania to support the medical staff in the hospital units. But at the same time teams from Germany also arrive to select patients and transfer them for treatment outside Romania. In total about 90 patients are transferred to Hungary, Poland, Austria, Germany, Czech Republic, Denmark and Italy.



**Figure 6.8. International assistance received by Romania in the Covid'19 context**  
 (Source: DSU activity report 2022 - <https://www.dsu.mai.gov.ro/despre>)

So, Romania not only provided, but also benefited from external support in the form of medicines, medical equipment, vaccines and medical expertise, provided through the European Civil Protection Mechanism and bilateral agreements (Figure 6.9). Among the countries contributing to the effort were South Korea, the UAE, Qatar, the USA. In addition, four medical teams from Germany, Poland, Denmark and the Republic of Moldova have supported the Romanian authorities by sending medical staff and equipment to combat the effects of the pandemic.



**Figure 6.9. Romania UCPM activations /**  
(Source: <https://ercportal.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ECHO-Products/Maps#/maps?pageIndex=1&pageSize=10&mt=Daily%20Map&c=ROU>)

In addition to efforts to manage the crisis domestically, Romania has taken an active role in providing international assistance to affected countries. Only from April 2020 until mid-2021, more than 20 countries have benefited from Romanian support, including medical specialised emergency care medical teams deployed in Italy, Moldova, Slovakia and Tunisia, as well as in kind donation missions consisting of protective equipment from the rescEU stock of medical countermeasures organised in Romania or vaccines from national reserve, not only in many neighbouring countries, members of the UCPM, but also in more widely spread areas such as India or Vietnam, as presented in Figure 6.10.

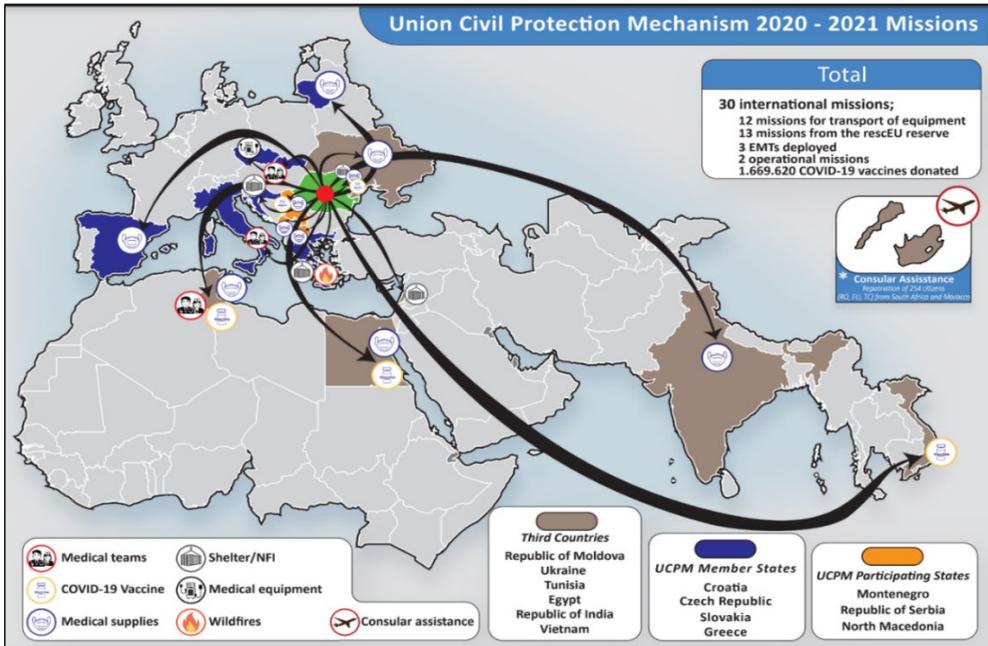


Figure 6.10. Romania UCPM deployments during 2020-2021 Covid'19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a test for national health systems, but also a valuable lesson on the role of cross-border collaboration and integrated response mechanisms. Romania has managed to consolidate its position as a reliable partner in the management of health crises, both through the support it has received and the help it has offered to other countries, reaffirming its commitment to international solidarity and European cooperation in emergencies.

### 6.3.3. Romania's involvement in humanitarian assistance in the Middle East

The escalation of the crisis in the Middle East since October 2023 has brought with it an unprecedented deterioration in the humanitarian situation of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Romania was among the first countries to denounce the brutal terrorist attacks on the one hand but at the same time expressed solidarity and the importance of securing the protection of all civilians at all times, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

In this context starting from end of October 2023 and during whole 2024, Romania renewed its commitment to international solidarity by contributing to humanitarian assistance missions to the population affected by the conflict in the Middle East. Thus, the support was articulated on 3 pillars: food and basic goods, providing specialized medical care in medical facilities in Romania or other EU member states for Palestinian children and support to neighbouring countries treating patients from the Gaza Strip.

Humanitarian support consisting of food and shelter materials was initially channelled through the air bridge established through the European Humanitarian Response Capacity over 230 tons were delivered by the end of 2023 ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/european-humanitarian-response-capacity-ehrc\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/humanitarian-aid/european-humanitarian-response-capacity-ehrc_en)). Then, with the establishment of the maritime corridor and the logistics hub organized in Cyprus, Romania was again at the first line in terms of humanitarian support, being involved in the first shipment organized in May 2024) and in the last one at the end of 2024 ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/news/eu-mobilises-assistance-gaza-cyprus-maritime-corridor-2024-05-17\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/news/eu-mobilises-assistance-gaza-cyprus-maritime-corridor-2024-05-17_en)). Last but not least, it also supported neighbouring countries such as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan with medical equipment and materials, necessary for the sanitary activity of the Jordanian Field Hospital in Gaza Strip.

A distinct action line focused on specialised medical assistance. Starting in September 2024, Romania executed four operations for the medically-assisted transport of patients from conflict-affected regions in the Gaza Strip (<https://gov.ro/en/news/the-gaza-children-impacted-by-conflict-will-receive-medical-care-in-romania>). A total of 86 paediatric patients, along with 216 companions were successfully evacuated from Gaza via Israel to receive appropriate medical care in a secure setting (Romania, Norway, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Albania ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/palestine\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/middle-east-and-northern-africa/palestine_en))). This mission revealed Romania's capacity for rapid and effective response to humanitarian emergencies, thereby providing protection the most people in need.

Additionally, in October 2024, Romania deployed a new international support mission to assist the civilian population in the Republic of Lebanon. This included both delivering humanitarian aid and facilitating the evacuation of Romanian citizens in distress. The intervention once again demonstrated Romania's commitment to protecting its citizens and supporting international efforts to stabilize the region.

## 6.4. Conclusions

An in-depth analysis of the involvement of the Romania's civil protection, in international assistance missions reveals a **remarkable transformation in the way the DSU has strengthened its operational capacities, becoming a key player in the field at EU and international level**. From its initial modest presence in isolated support missions, the Romanian Civil Protection has built up a **robust portfolio of operations**, based on the **professionalization** of its structures, the **diversification** of its operational units and the **integration into a European rapid response network**.

This development - where the author not only witnessed but also actively participated in this transformation - has been backed both by internal efforts to **modernize equipment** and further **qualify staff**, and by the constant support of the European Union, which has provided financial, logistical and technical expertise. The **UCPM has been an essential platform for this development**, allowing Romania to use funds to adapt intervention modules, participate in large-scale international exercises and improve its operational procedures by sharing best practices with other Member States.

Through this rapid transformation in a relatively short time, the **DSU has demonstrated an exceptional capacity to mobilize in the face of diverse disasters** - from forest fires in Greece, to devastating earthquakes in Albania and Türkiye, to supporting humanitarian efforts in armed conflicts, such as in Ukraine and the Middle East. The **flexibility and rapid reaction capacity** of the Romanian authorities proved essential in **building the confidence of international partners** and validating their status as a **reliable security provider**.

Another fundamental aspect that has contributed to strengthening the international profile of the DSU in the field of civil protection is the development of specialized modules integrated into the ECPP, such as the Urban Search and Rescue teams, Emergency Medical Units, CBRN decontamination and monitoring or Flood Response capabilities. In addition, the hosting of rescEU reserves on the national territory demonstrates Romania's long-term commitment to reinforcing European disaster resilience.

In addition, the synergies created between the DSU and other competent risk management authorities such as the Ministry of Defence, the National State Reserve, the Ministry of Health, civil society and many others, have enabled the effective management of complex crises, including pandemics, armed conflicts and natural disasters. The ability to rapidly mobilize resources, both human and material, highlighted the viability of the national integrated emergency management system and demonstrated the value of an integrated approach.

Before closing, it is appropriate to highlight that the source of the data on which this study was conducted is based on very few postings on the official websites of the Romanian Government, DSU, IGSU, or the ministries with responsibilities within the SNMSU. As a rule, these postings emphasize missions carried out quantitatively. Even this weak indicator, in conjunction with the number of press statements and data available at the European Commission level, was the trigger for determining the **key role played by Romania in the field of civil protection at the international level**. Consequently, simply the existence of fragmented 'pieces of a puzzle' dispersed throughout, along with the absence of a comprehensive overview of Romania's endeavours in this domain, alongside the generally low interest of researchers in this field, served as an important push to uncover an area in which Romania excels. Finally, the authors' expertise in the subject, the scarcity of current studies, and the inherent complexity of providing or receiving international assistance were compelling justifications for the value of this analysis.

In conclusion, **Romania's** evolution in international assistance through civil protection is a clear demonstration of its **progress, professionalism and commitment to European and global solidarity**. The continuation of this effort requires not only maintaining the current development trajectory, but also a **long-term strategic vision** aimed at ensuring that Romania remains an **essential partner in disaster management and the protection of vulnerable communities at international level**.

However, one question in the author's view **still needs to be answered**: "*if from Figures 6.2 and 6.6 it is clear without further interpretation the explosive impact of the emergence of the DSU, what would be the situation in the context of the reorganization of the DSU as proposed in chapter 3?*" - this should of course be the target of a future research.

*Note: this chapter follows closely the article: Romanian Civil Protection: "National Export Product" - a radiography of civil protection international assistance missions; Marius Dogeanu et al 2025; Advances in Environmental Sciences - International Journal of the Bioflux Society (AES Bioflux, 2025, Volume 17, Issue 1), <http://www.aes.bioflux.com.ro>.*

# Cooperation with civil society: a case study on managing Ukrainian refugee flows

## 7.1. Background

### *7.1.1. General context of Ukraine's refugee crisis*

On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, launching the **largest unprovoked military offensive since World War II**, leading to a major flow of refugees to neighbouring countries and the European Union. More than three years after the beginning of the conflict, deadly bombardments and rocket and drone attacks continue, destroying, injuring and killing innocent people. Critical infrastructure is also affected and many people are in distress, unable to meet their basic needs, including food, water and essential medicines. The **delivery of humanitarian aid remains a challenge**, as access to areas where the conflict is still ongoing is not assured ([https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/news/new-eu148-million-eu-humanitarian-aid-package-ukraine-2025-01-13\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/news/new-eu148-million-eu-humanitarian-aid-package-ukraine-2025-01-13_en)). The Russian invasion has generated the **largest refugee crisis in Europe** since the Second World War, with a devastating impact on those displaced, and has also caused new challenges, hardly anticipated for Romania and its neighbouring countries, considering their proximity to the conflict zone, and their status as a "gateway" to the European Union. Although there has been overwhelming support for the Ukrainians and global condemnation of the Russian invasion, economic pressures, security concerns and the energy crisis are factors which placed an additional burden on the neighbouring countries and **affect** their approach to **refugee integration and inclusion**.

### *7.1.2. The importance of cooperation between authorities and civil society*

Cooperation between authorities and civil society is a cornerstone for effectively managing social, economic and security challenges. This cooperation must be based on principles such as: **transparency, mutual accountability**, respect for **human rights** and **complementarity of resources** and **competences**. Public institutions have the authority and the legislative framework for strategic decision-making, while **civil society**, through non-governmental organizations, academia and local communities, **provides expertise**, flexibility and greater proximity to citizens' needs.

**The added value** of this cooperation lies in making the response to crises more effective, strengthening public confidence in government institutions and ensuring an inclusive and participatory perspective in the development of public policies. By involving civil society, the government can benefit from innovative solutions, access to additional resources and better monitoring of the impact of the measures implemented. This synergy helps prevent social conflict, protect vulnerable groups and increase the resilience of communities.

At the same time, narratives such as "**everyone wants coordination, but no one wants to be coordinated**" have been observed quite often. This slogan reflects a reality frequently seen, including in the management of crises with a strong emotional impact on society, such as those related to migration.

There are **risks and vulnerabilities associated with poor or unequal cooperation**. Lack of clear coordination can lead to **duplication of efforts and inefficient allocation of resources**. Also, in the **absence** of an appropriate **legal framework**, frictions may arise between authorities and civil organizations, especially in sensitive contexts such as migration or emergency management.

Another major risk is the **instrumentalization of civil society for political or ideological purposes**, which can affect its credibility and independence. Moreover, in crisis situations, the high flow of information and the lack of a clear communication mechanism can generate misinformation, mistrust and panic among the population. For this interaction to be effective, it is essential that the partnership between state and civil society is based on **constant dialog, mutual respect and clear coordination**

**mechanisms.** Only a joint and well-structured effort can create sustainable policies and effective responses to the challenges facing society.

### **7.1.3. Case study methodology**

The whole argument on which this chapter is built is grounded in a case study that analyses how governmental authorities and civil society worked together to address a massive influx of refugees and the challenges encountered along the way. The main objective was to identify the problems encountered, assess the effectiveness of the response, and provide possible ways to better coordinate and integrate refugees into society. The analysis was constructed around the following questions, which were shared with a wide number of civil society representatives with whom the DSU worked directly through signed cooperation agreements or simply as a result of their involvement in the process of Ukrainian refugee support and integration:

- a) How was the management of this influx organized and what difficulties were encountered?
- b) To what extent has the current legislation been adequate to this situation and where adjustments are needed?
- c) How did the responsible institutions work together and what were the main bottlenecks in coordination between them?
- d) What solutions can be applied to improve the integration of refugees in communities?
- e) How was data on refugees collected and managed and what problems were identified in this process?

## **7.2. Background and general response framework**

### **7.2.1. Overview of refugee flows in Romania since the beginning of the conflict**

Since the beginning of the conflict in Ukraine, Romania has experienced a significant influx of refugees. According to *Romania's response to the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis Report*, published by Prime Minister's Chancellery, by the beginning of 2023, more than 3 million Ukrainian citizens crossed Romania's borders, of which about 107,000 chose to stay in our country (Romania's response to the Ukrainian refugee

crisis, 2023). Updated data indicate a considerable increase in these figures. As of January 16, 2025, more than 11 million Ukrainian refugees have entered Romania, according to Border Police data. However, the number of those who chose to stay in Romania has decreased over time. At the end of 2023, about 83,765 Ukrainian refugees were registered, but by the beginning of February 2024, the number had dropped to 78,700. This decrease can be attributed to both the return of some refugees to Ukraine and their further movement to other countries. (DSU activity reports).

### *7.2.2. Main challenges in managing the crisis*

The management of the Ukrainian refugee crisis involved multiple challenges for the Romanian authorities and partners involved. One of the main **difficulties** was the **transition from emergency assistance to long-term integration actions**. This required additional efforts to ensure the refugees' independence by providing access to employment and integrating children into the Romanian education system.

Another significant challenge was the **language barrier**, which made it difficult for refugees to communicate and integrate into local communities. Language differences affected access to essential services and employment opportunities, highlighting the need for Romanian language support programs for refugees.

In addition, providing **long-term housing solutions** was a major challenge. Many of the initial accommodation facilities were intended for temporary stays, and identifying suitable and sustainable housing options required additional resources and planning.

**Coordination** between different **government institutions, international organizations** and **civil society** was essential but also difficult, given the large number of actors involved and the need for a unified approach. The management and centralization of refugee data was also difficult due to the diversity of sources and platforms for collecting information, which limited the accuracy and timeliness of the available data (Figure 7.1).

Last but not least, ensuring access to health and social services for a large number of refugees has put pressure on existing systems, requiring adaptations and additional resources to respond to the specific needs of this vulnerable segment of the population.

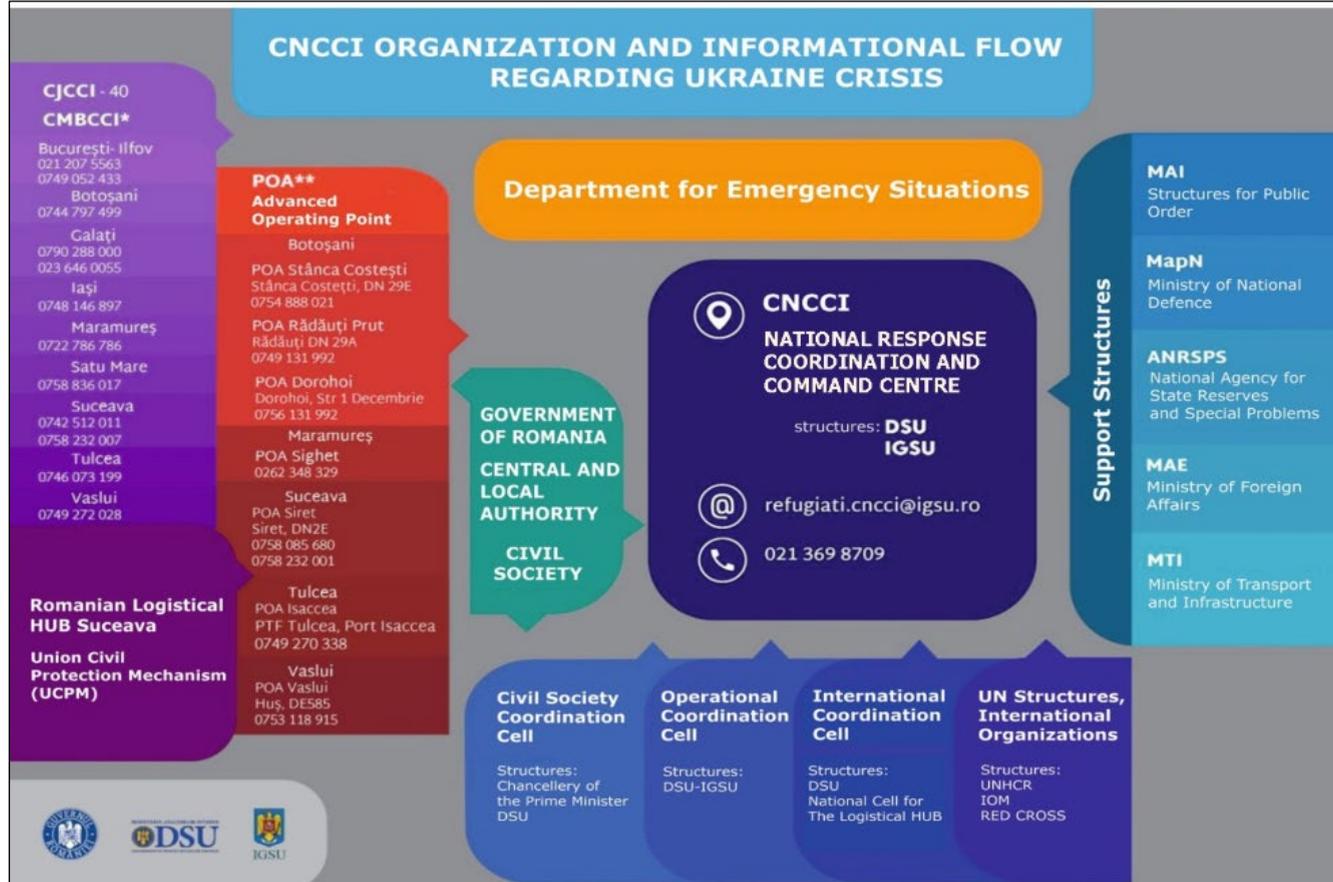


Figure 7.1. Civil Society Coordination Cell in CNCCI  
 (Source: DSU Activity Report for year 2022)

### **7.2.3. The role of stakeholders: public authorities, NGOs, volunteers, international organizations**

After a global health crisis that had not yet ended (the COVID-19 pandemic), the military conflict in Ukraine placed an additional burden on the Romanian SNMSU. With the CNCCI active since the pandemic (see Chapter 2; March 2020 - [https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/INFORMARE\\_Parlament.pdf](https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/INFORMARE_Parlament.pdf)), the response to the refugee crisis was **rather a recalibration and scaling up of existing mechanisms adapted to the new humanitarian challenges generated by the conflict.**

- The response to the refugee crisis in Ukraine was organized on two distinct levels. The **first level, coordinated by the DSU**, focused on the **emergency response** and included **immediate measures** such as the **management of transit centres** at border crossing points, the provision of humanitarian **transportation**, temporary **shelter**, **food** and basic **medical assistance**. DSU through the **IGSU mobilized** both huge **logistical and human resources** to respond rapidly to the influx of refugees, working with local authorities, NGOs and international organizations.
- The second level was medium - and long - term **protection and integration**, coordinated at the strategic level by the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, through the elaboration and implementation of **the National Plan of Measures** for the Integration of Ukrainian Refugees (EO 100/2022).

## **7.3. Emergency response**

It is worth mentioning that in the very first days of the invasion, due to the major emotional impact generated by the population fleeing the war, a basic solution (Google form - Figure 7.2) for collecting aid offered by civil society (private companies, NGO's and citizens), called "**Împreună ajutăm mai mult**" (together we help more) was operationalized at the DSU level – by the team coordinated by the author, thus overcoming the difficulties of managing the multitude of offers received. Building on the "**Împreună ajutăm mai mult**" initiative, which **collected over 7,000 offers of support from individuals and companies in just a few days**, an integrated system for managing resources for refugees was developed

with the support of civil society. Thus, the Emergency Support platform (<https://sprijindeurgenta.ro/>), a project developed by Code for Romania in partnership with the Department for Emergency Situations, was launched, allowing the **centralization and efficient management of resources offered by civil society and individuals and legal entities in critical situations**. The resource management and accommodation management platform **Dopomoha.ro** (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.leviancode.android.dopomoga>) and the website: **protectie ucraina.gov.ro** which provides refugees with official information about the rights and services available in Romania, were also fully operationalized.

The image shows a screenshot of a web form for reporting humanitarian aid offers. At the top, there is a banner with the Romanian government logo and the slogan 'ÎMPREUNĂ AJUTĂM MAI MULT' (Together we help more), with the subtitle 'Inițiativă guvernamentală coordonată' (Governmental coordinated initiative). The main title of the form is 'Centralizare oferte asistență umanitară / Humanitarian aid offers'. Below the title, there is a brief instruction: 'Prin completarea acestui formular vei contribui la o coordonare eficientă a tuturor resurselor oferite / By filling in this form you will contribute to efficient coordination of all the resources offered'. The form is divided into several sections: 1. 'Cine oferă sprijin / Who offers support' with radio buttons for 'Persoană fizică / Individual' and 'Persoană juridică / Legal person'. 2. 'Tip resursă oferită / Resource offered' with radio buttons for 'Bunuri materiale (ex. generatoare, corturi, soluții de iluminat, etc.) / Material goods (e.g. generators, tents, lighting solutions, etc.)', 'Servicii / Services', 'Produse alimentare / Food', 'Spații cazare / Accommodation spaces', 'Facilități transport / Transport facilities', and 'Altele / Others'. 3. 'Locație resurse / Resource location' with a dropdown menu labeled 'Alege'. 4. 'Timp necesar pentru operaționalizare/livrare / Time required for operationalization/delivery' with a text input field. 5. 'Resurse necesare pentru ajutorul oferit (ex. transport, motorină, voluntari pentru instalare, etc.) / Resources needed for the help provided (e.g. transport, diesel, volunteers for installation, etc.)' with another text input field. The form is presented in a clean, white layout with grey borders.

Figure 7.2. Humanitarian support form (Source: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQL SeyirIDJ2dD-SMm8wPLRxLTdagDQoCxVY-QBn1uE2t7GUZnjQ/viewform>)

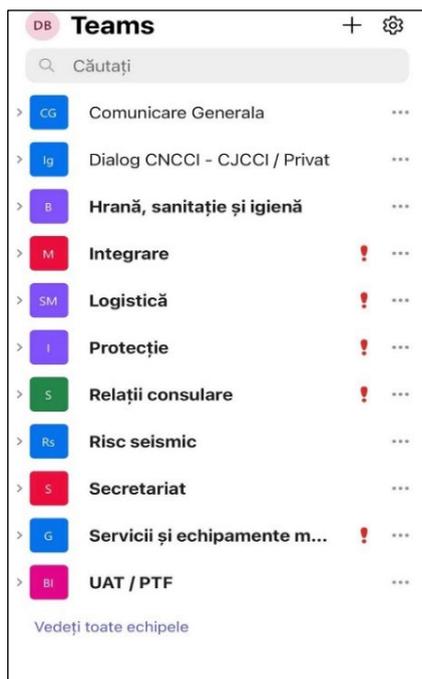


Figure 7.3. DSU – Civil Society Microsoft Teams Cooperation Platform  
(Source: [www.dsu.mai.gov.ro/](http://www.dsu.mai.gov.ro/))

A key element in the communication with civil society was the initiative of the DSU to set up a **WhatsApp group** from the very first day of the outbreak of the conflict. This group facilitated daily meetings between civil society representatives and decision-makers, from PM Chancellery and DSU. However, this **solution proved to be limited compared with the high numbers of partners that joined the effort**, quickly reaching the maximum number of participants allowed by the platform.

To overcome this limitation, Microsoft Romania provided **Microsoft Teams** accounts for civil society partners. This platform allowed the **creation of groups dedicated to different areas of activity** (Figure 7.3), thus improving the coordination and efficiency of communication between stakeholders.

This collaboration has demonstrated the government's openness to civil society and vice versa, underlining the importance of digital logistics in the effective management of humanitarian crises. Bogdan Ivănel, Code for Romania founder, noted: *"This is the second time in the last two years that we see the opening of the Government to civil society and the opening of civil society to the Government. Together we can!"*

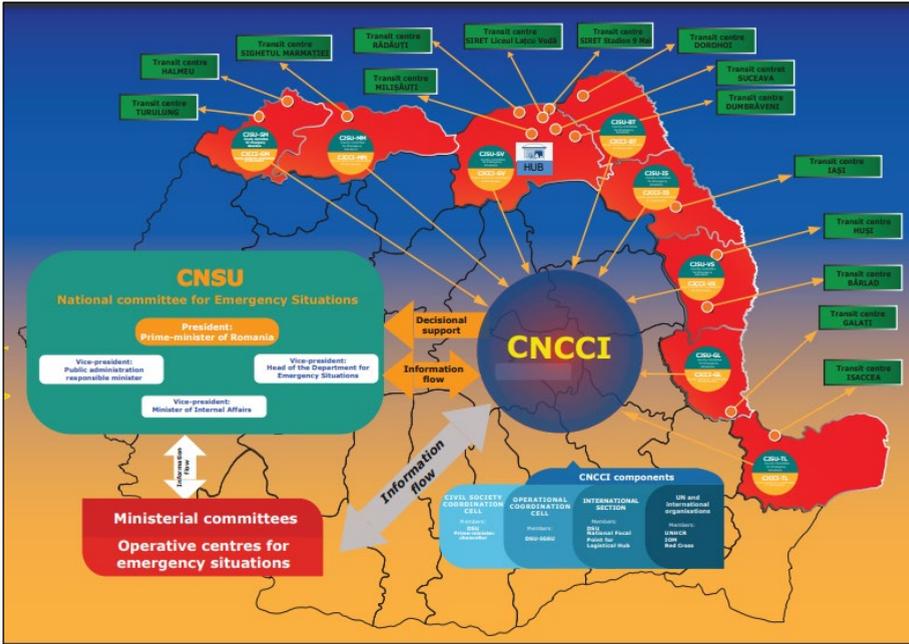
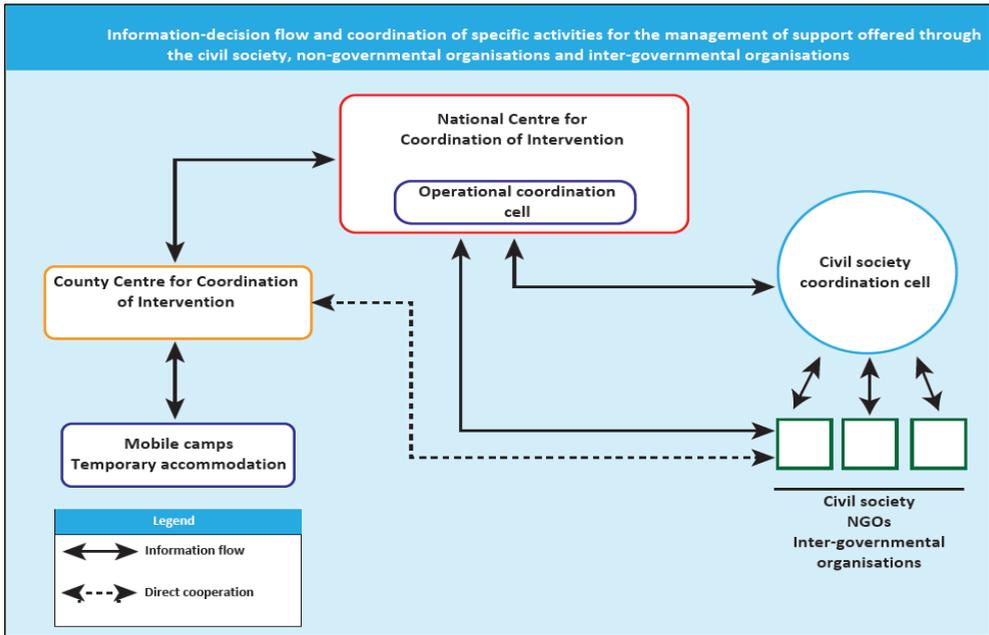


Figure 7.4. Emergency Response plan: transit centre for UA refugees  
(Source: DSU Activity Report for year 2022)

The implementation of Microsoft Teams has facilitated **real-time collaboration and communication**, providing the possibility to **share documents**, organize **virtual meetings** and **coordinate activities** in a structured and efficient way. This integrated approach has strengthened the partnership between authorities and civil society, ensuring a coordinated and effective response to humanitarian challenges.

As part of the emergency response mechanism, based on the Concept developed by the Directorate-General for Civil Protection, at the DSU level, in the counties bordering Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, the IGSU set up **15 temporary transit centres, which at the peak of the crisis had a capacity of over 4,000 places** (Figure 7.4). These centres ensured the reception, registration and accommodation of refugees and provided basic services for their needs. Operational coordination was provided by the CNCCI, which integrated the support provided by non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations through a **Civil Society Coordination Cell** (Figure 7.5).



**Figure 7.5.** *Information-decision flow and coordination of specific activities for the management of support offered*

By the beginning of 2025, more than 21,000 people had been accommodated in transit centers, and some 7.5 million people had received assistance through them.

A key element in the management of humanitarian assistance was the **Logistics Hub in Suceava County**, operationalized under the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM). This hub was created for the storage and distribution of humanitarian aid for the population of Ukraine, provided by the UCPM member states and international organizations. Under the coordination of the DSU, the Hub acted as a central point for the collection and redistribution of emergency materials, facilitating an efficient flow of aid to conflict-affected areas (Figure 7.6).

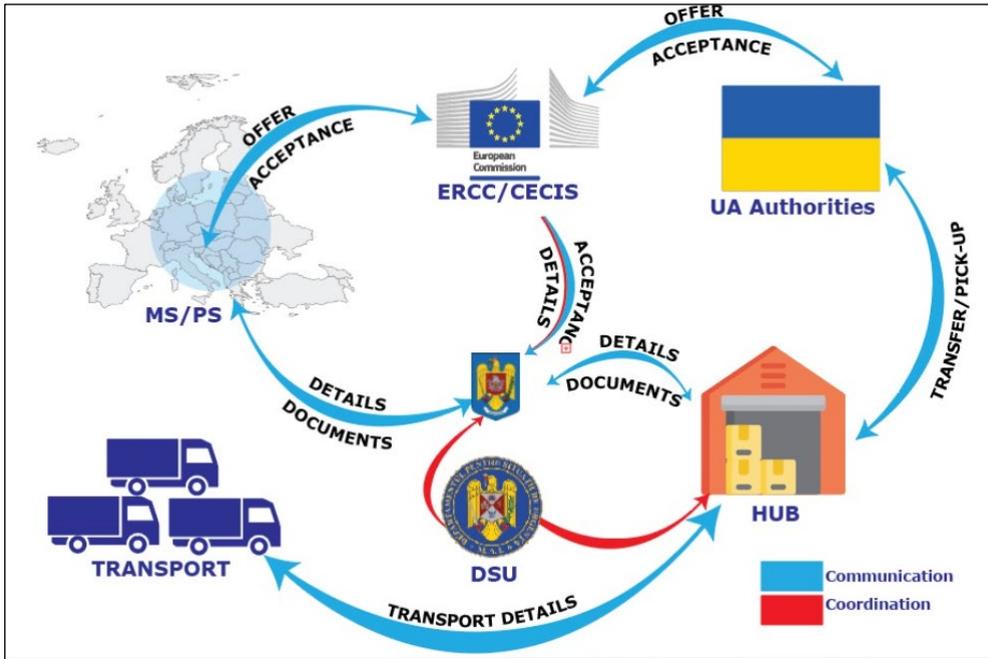


Figure 7.6. International assistance flow via Logistic HUB  
(Source: DSU Activity report for year 2022)

Through this mechanism, aid that could not be transferred directly to Ukraine was temporarily stored, inventoried and prepared for transportation under optimal conditions. With the support of the Suceava County Council, the location was equipped with the necessary logistical infrastructure for the efficient coordination of international transportation. Until the beginning of January 2025, the Hub managed 136 international assistance missions, through which 580 truckloads of aid were transported to the Ukrainian authorities. The aid included medical supplies, life-saving equipment, food, water, shelter items and other essential goods (DSU Activity Report for year 2023). The shipments came from 18 countries, including Italy, France, Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, Austria, Greece, Sweden and Spain, reflecting a collective European effort. Based on requests received through the European Emergency Response Centre (ERCC), the Hub also provided transfers of international assistance from non-governmental sources, reinforcing humanitarian support to the affected population in Ukraine.

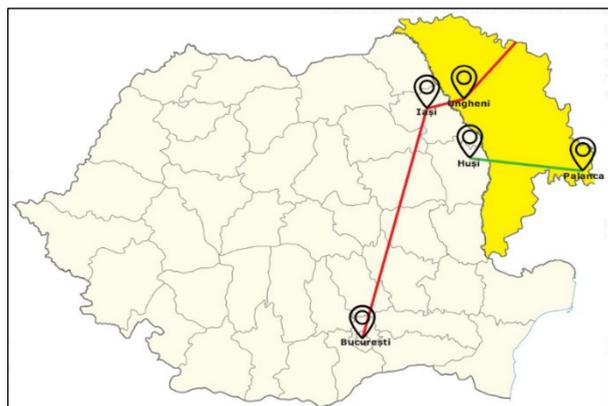


Figure 7.7. Green corridor

Furthermore, the DSU throughout IGSU facilitated the **transportation of refugees across counties and countries**. As of early March 2022, following an agreement with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Romania had established a **green corridor** along the Huși -

Palanca route for the transportation of Ukrainian refugees arriving in the Republic of Moldova to Romania. In total, about 21,000 individuals have been transferred directly from the Ukraine-Republic of Moldova border (Palanca) to Romania (Huși) – Figure 7.7. Additionally, a railway solution for the Ungheni - Iasi route was set up to facilitate the relocation of over 12,000 refugees (Regional Ukraine Response, Situation report #21, 2022).

In the 15 transit centres operationalized, both DSU and IGSU personnel were deployed to streamline coordination between the authorities and NGOs, preventing duplication of efforts and ensuring optimal support to people in Ukraine.

Local and international NGOs provided legal and social counselling, material support and educational services, and volunteers helped distribute food and essential goods. Organizations such as UNHCR, UNICEF and the Red Cross provided logistical support and protection, strengthening the response capacity.

The main objective of DSU and IGSU staff was to **streamline and manage resources, avoiding duplication of efforts and creating a coordinated system of assistance**. To this end, thematic meetings were organized and efficient cooperation systems were implemented in some areas, structured according to the type of services and products offered to refugees.

### 7.3.1. Initial situation after the outbreak of the conflict

Being personally deployed, to coordinate a team of experts from DSU and IGSU, at the early days of the conflict at the border with Ukraine area, in the next part, we will mainly look at two points: first, **how civil society "organized" itself** in the area of the Punctul de Trecere a Frontierei (PTF Siret - Siret Border Crossing Point), and second, the **measures taken to improve the efficiency of civil society's support and facilitate the process of providing international assistance.**

In view of the emotional impact of the large influx of Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war - mostly women and children, heading in hope for a safer but at the same time unknown place - there was a **massive mobilization** of numerous **non-governmental organizations, church representatives, private companies, as well as local and national authorities.** (Figure 7.8).



Figure 7.8. Refugees flow sign prepared by DSU response team for Siret Border Crossing Point

They quickly organized themselves to collect and distribute humanitarian aid. As this mobilization was carried out in an ad hoc manner, without a well-defined coordination mechanism, it was necessary to

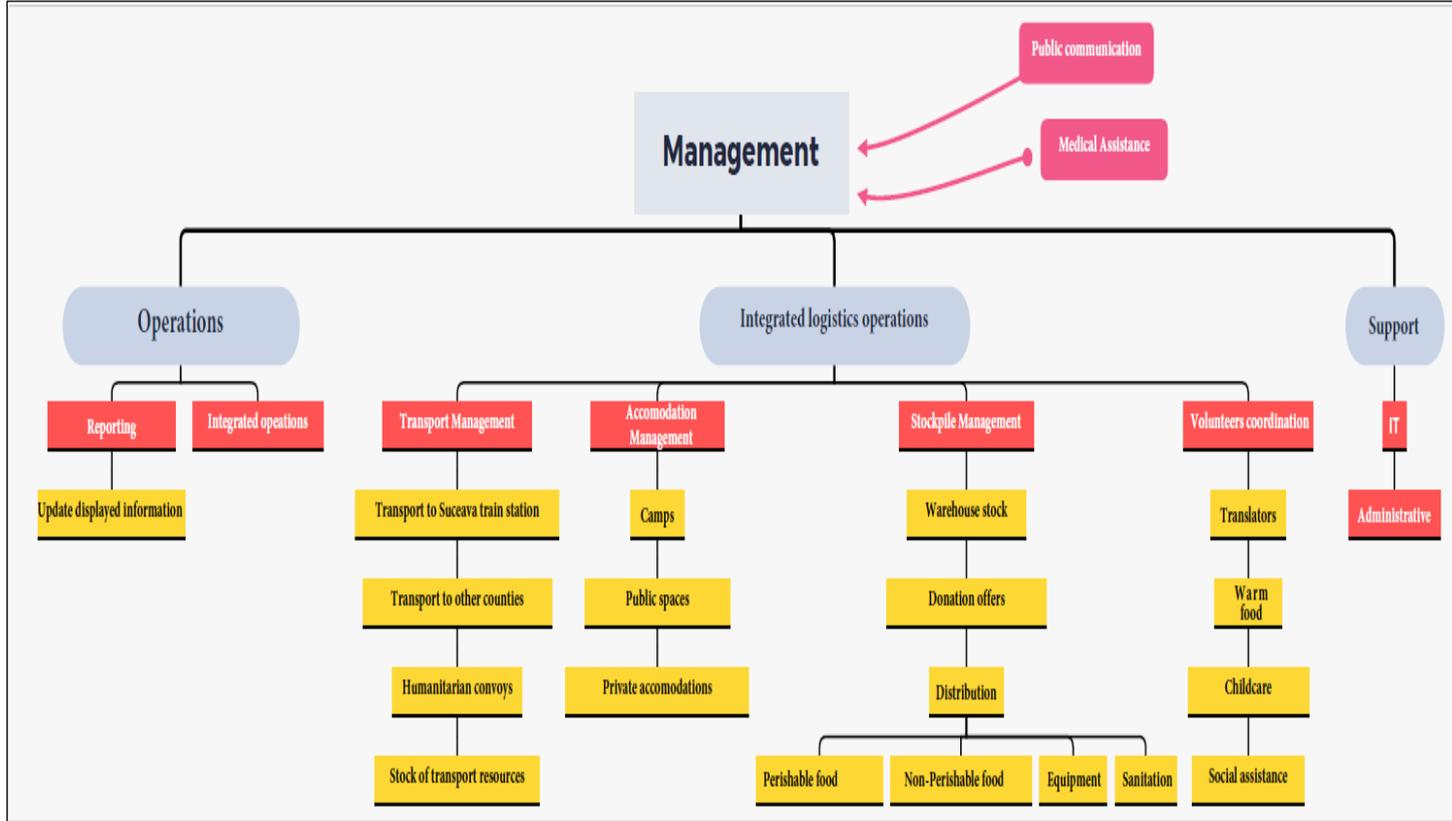
organize meetings with all those involved in the relief effort. The initial arrangement of resources and support structures was done in the sequence of arrival of volunteers and organizations, which made it difficult to manage space and resources efficiently. Thus, one of the first actions identified as necessary was to **establish** a clear **coordination mechanism**. At the level of the Advanced Operative Point (POA) Siret – organised by Ministry of Home Affairs with representatives from local structures as well as from headquarter - these coordination meetings were organized on a regular basis, bringing together representatives from local authorities - as well as from the Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (ISU), Gendarmerie, Police, Border Police and General Inspectorate for Immigration (IGI) - and non-governmental organizations. Most of the time, these meetings were chaired by the Suceava President of the County Council and the Prefect of Suceava County, with the main objective of optimizing the management of resources and humanitarian assistance provided to refugees.

### *7.3.2. Efficient coordination and reorganization of the refugee reception site*

In view of the multitude of actors involved, one of the first actions implemented was to **register all** those who came to support the efforts of the authorities by offering services or products. This process made it possible to identify the types of resources available, but also possible gaps.

In such situations, there is always a risk that individuals or organizations with malicious intentions will try to take advantage of the desperation of refugees. Therefore, the first step when someone presented themselves at the POA was to register them, which also facilitated **identity verification**.

This made it possible to **organize meetings by fields of activity and types of aid offered**. The main categories identified were: **food, non-food items, transportation, accommodation, interpretation, psychological support**, etc. (Figure 7.9).



**Figure 7.9. Organizational chart of civil society support – Siret prepared by DSU response team for Siret Border Crossing Point**

The next step was to **designate a coordinator for each area of activity**, thus ensuring more efficient management of resources and clear communication between all those involved.

In order to improve the communication flow and create a clearer picture of the actors present in the POA Siret, the refugee reception area was reorganized so that essential services were prioritized and others were grouped according to specific categories of products or services offered. In addition, with the support of a private company, an information screen was installed displaying essential information for refugees as well as a map of the location, thus facilitating quick identification of the services needed.



In order to be granted access inside the on-boarding zone, please scan the QR code and fill in the form. Based on the necessities identified, you will be contacted by one of the command post representatives.

**Figure 7.10.** QR access code prepared by DSU response team for Siret Border Crossing Point

### *7.3.3. Using simple and accessible solutions to streamline communication*

In order to facilitate the information management on assistance offers as well as NGOs present in Siret, specific templates and QR codes were created, thus simplifying the process of registration and data centralization (Figure 7.10).

Given the limited parking space near the border crossing point and the need for more efficient monitoring of transport offers, a control mechanism was developed in cooperation with the police. Each operator wishing to transport Ukrainian citizens was required to fill in a form with information about the carrier, the destination and the cost of transportation (many trips were offered free of charge). The implementation of this system helped to reduce the risks associated with this type of service and improved the transparency of the process.

To support and facilitate the sharing information with Ukrainian citizens, screens were installed in the transit areas displaying real-time information about available journeys, including destination, number of free seats, date and time of departure and cost (free of charge or, where appropriate, the fare).

By using simple and accessible solutions, various types of forms were developed which allowed the efficient collection and management of available resources, thus optimizing the humanitarian assistance process.

#### ***7.3.4. First steps towards the operationalization of the Logistic HUB***

As regards the operationalization of the logistical HUB in Suceava, as soon as the invasion started, the local authorities took steps to make sure that there was a steady flow of international aid from Romania (government agencies, Red Cross, NGOs, private operators, etc.) or other countries to those in need in Ukraine. Thus, in the **first days** when the quantities of materials had not exceeded a huge volume, **the solution used was a warehouse** located within the area of PTF Siret, from where the Ukrainian authorities were taking international assistance from the free border area. After that, until the grant prepared by the response team deployed to Siret, coordinated by the author, from the European Commission's DG-ECHO was approved, the **Suceava County Council supported the operation by providing free access to the Bucovina Economic Center** a storage facility. Initially, the logistic HUB was set up in five storage spaces with a capacity of 2500 m<sup>2</sup> each, having the possibility to expand with additionally 8000 m<sup>2</sup>. In addition, 6000 m<sup>2</sup> of tarmac areas have been assigned exclusively for the handover of materials. The added value of this solution was provided by the vicinity to the Suceava international airport. In this way, the logistic HUB in Romania has provided, from the first stage of operationalisation, **solutions to accommodate the transit of international assistance by road, rail and air**. In order to ensure efficient transport management and warehouse security, the Ministry of National Defence and the IGSU were involved in the first phases of the operation. The army supported the organization of the logistical infrastructure, creating the necessary conditions for storage and transport, while the IGSU helped coordinate operations and implement security measures. In parallel, an inter-institutional coordination mechanism was established which included the customs service, border police, gendarmerie and other relevant authorities, thus facilitating the management of international aid flows.

## Workflow on transfers of humanitarian assistance provided by NGOs through the Suceava logistics HUB

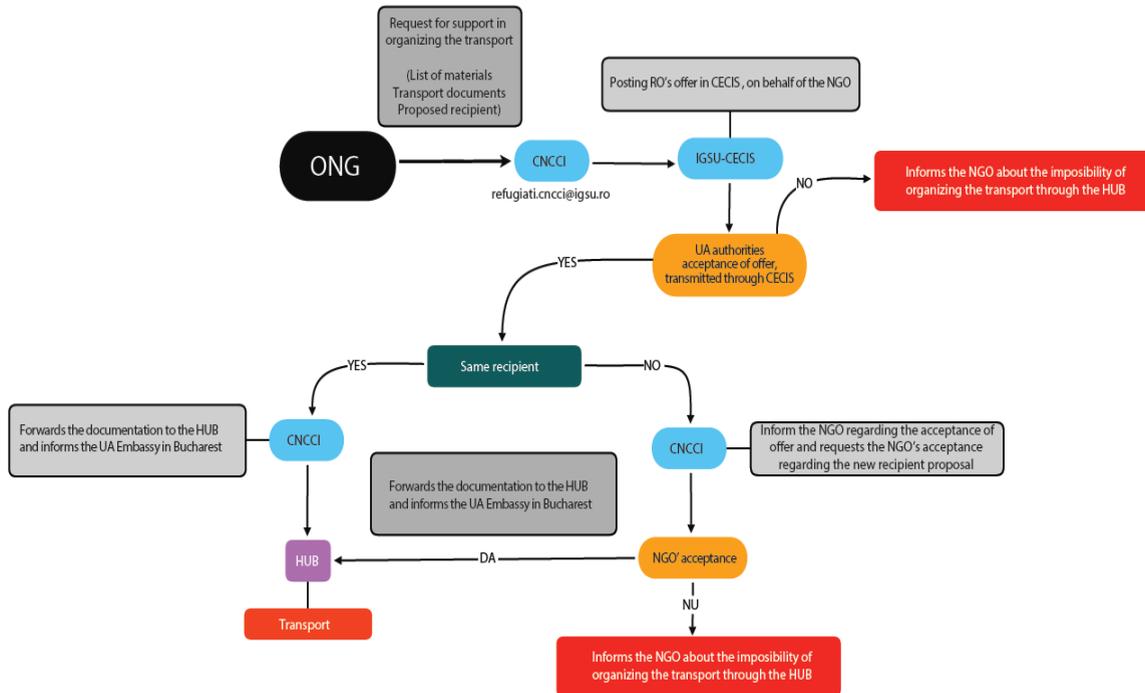


Figure 7.11. International assistance workflow as design by DSU response team for Siret Border Crossing Point

In order to streamline the distribution of humanitarian assistance, the HUB was designed to take over the assistance and transfer it to the Ukrainian authorities. To this end, a **Transport Coordination Cell** was set up within the CNCCI, which liaised with donor countries and the Ukrainian side, working out logistical details and organizing the procedures for the handover and receipt of aid. Depending on the needs, transportation was carried out by several modes: road, air-road, rail-road, rail-road or rail-rail, due to the proximity of the HUB to Suceava International Airport and Suceava railway station.

Thus, through a close collaboration between the DSU, the Romanian Army, the Suceava County Council and private companies, the Suceava Logistic HUB has become an essential point for the management of international humanitarian aid, facilitating the rapid delivery of the necessary support to Ukraine (Figure 7.11).

#### **7.4. Refugees protection and inclusion**

At the strategic level, the Romanian Government has established a coordinated response through an **inter-institutional Task Force** aimed at managing the integration of Ukrainian refugees and ensuring an effective and sustainable support framework. This structure, organized under the coordination of the Prime Minister's Chancellery, involved ministries, government agencies, international organizations and civil society, with the aim of developing comprehensive national policies. To this end, six sectoral working groups were set up – health, education, labour, vulnerable and children - each with the role of tailoring the institutional response to the needs of refugees (Figure 7.12).

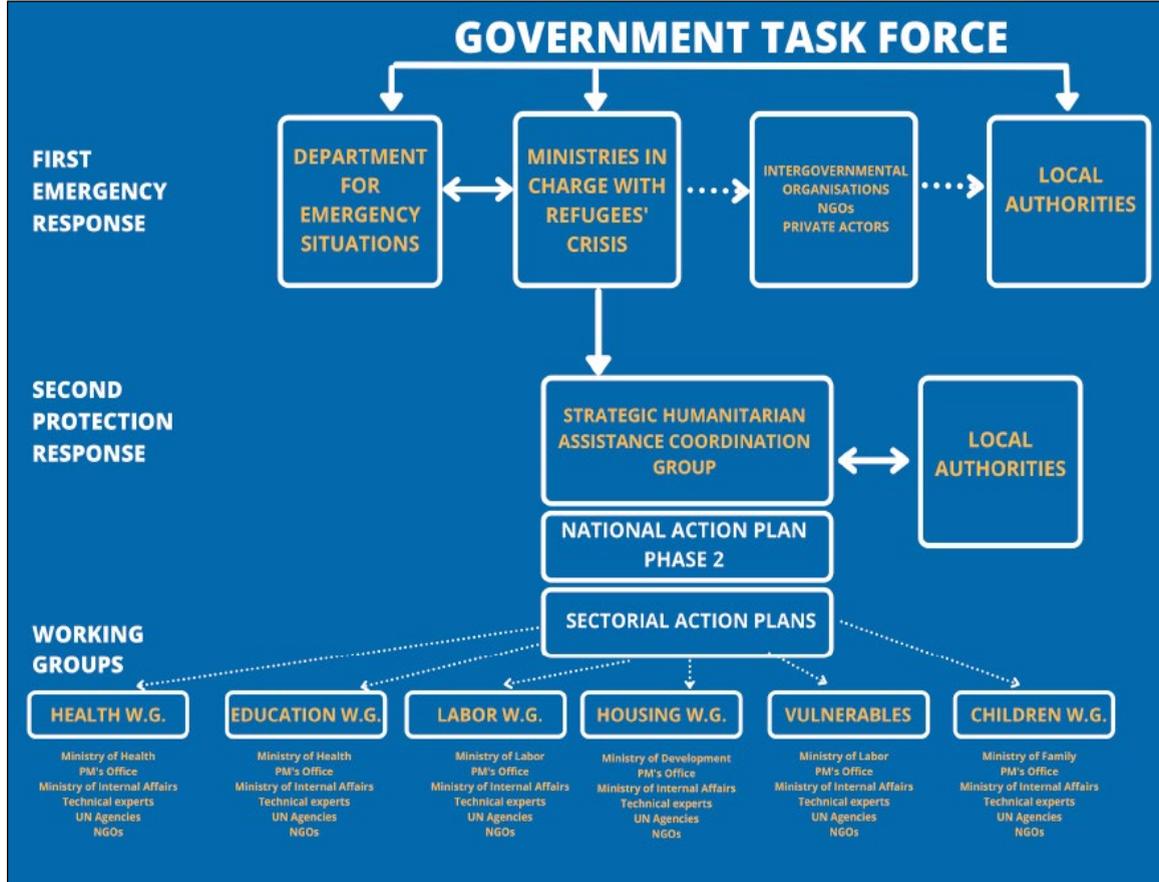


Figure 7.12. Governmental decision-making and coordination structure  
 (Source: Romania's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis, 2023)

As soon as the Romanian authorities had established at the DSU level a blueprint for the management of the emergency response phase to the Ukrainian refugee influx, the Romanian Government shifted to the second phase of the crisis management, where the focus was on the protection and integration of Ukrainian refugees. This phase was coordinated by the **Steering Group for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance**, which developed the **National Action Plan - Phase 2** and a series of **Sectoral Action Plans** for each area of assistance. The role of this phase was to provide medium and long-term support to Ukrainian refugees, moving from an emergency approach to a consolidation, supportive approach aimed at enabling their social, economic and broader integration. Also, a critical element of this process was the active involvement of local authorities, which had the responsibility to implement the measures decided at national level in the community hosting refugees.

#### **7.4.1. Working Groups**

To effectively coordinate the government response, sectoral working groups were set up, each with a specific role in managing the inclusion process. These were chaired by the line ministries (e.g. health - Ministry of Health, social issues - Ministry of Labor, etc.) but also included representatives from the Prime Minister's Chancellery, Ministry of Interior, technical experts, UN agencies and NGOs, and had clearly defined tasks:

##### **7.4.1.1. Health Working Group**

This group was under the coordination of the Ministry of Health and aimed at integrating refugees into the national health system. The main measures adopted included:

- access to health services for all refugees regardless of their legal status;
- provision of drugs and medical supplies through the social health insurance system;
- integration of refugees into national communicable disease prevention and control programs to reduce epidemiological risks;
- digitalization of health services to facilitate access to consultations and treatment.

#### **7.4.1.2. Education Working Group**

The Ministry of Education coordinated this group, which dealt with the integration of Ukrainian children and students into the Romanian education system. The main measures implemented were:

- creation of special classes for refugee children, with teaching in Ukrainian and Romanian.
- recruitment of Ukrainian teachers to facilitate the transition of children into the new education system.
- equipping schools with material and digital resources, including access to online platforms for distance learning.
- working with UN agencies and NGOs to develop psychological support programs for refugee children.

#### **7.4.1.3. Working Group on Employment and Vocational Integration**

This group, coordinated by the Ministry of Labor, aimed to facilitate the access of refugees to the Romanian labour market. The main initiatives adopted were:

- simplification of procedures for obtaining the right to work, without the need to recognize diplomas in certain fields;
- organization of vocational training programs and Romanian language courses for refugees;
- inventorying the skills of refugees in order to match job offers with their abilities;
- increase the administrative capacity of employment agencies so that they can manage the integration of large numbers of people.

#### **7.4.1.4. Housing and Accommodation Working Group**

The Ministry of Development, Public Works and Administration managed this group, which was tasked with ensuring adequate housing for refugees. Measures taken included:

- access to social housing;
- rehabilitation of unutilized buildings for use as accommodation for refugees;
- construction of social housing to meet long-term demand;
- working with the private sector to facilitate the rental of housing by refugees.

#### **7.4.1.5. Working Group for the Protection of Vulnerable Persons**

This group, coordinated by the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, aimed to protect vulnerable persons, including women, the elderly and persons with disabilities. The main measures taken were:

- identifying the specific needs of vulnerable persons and matching them with available resources.
- ensuring access to social services and social assistance benefits.
- combating trafficking and abuse through prevention and protection measures.
- creating personalized support mechanisms tailored to each category of vulnerability.

#### **7.4.1.6. Child Protection Working Group**

The Ministry for Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities was responsible for this group, which was tasked with protecting refugee children from abuse and exploitation. Key measures included:

- registration and monitoring of refugee children to prevent disappearances and family separation.
- integration of children into the national child protection system and access to essential services.
- ensuring personalized support for children with special needs.
- develop the network of youth centres, including mobile centres, for educational and social support.

In order to ensure a coherent legislative and procedural framework, the Government has issued a set of key pieces of legislation, including Emergency Ordinances (GEO No. 15/2022 on humanitarian support, GEO No. 20/2022 on social protection, GEO No. 100/2022 on the National Plan of Measures for the Integration of Refugees), Government Decisions (GD No. 336/2022 on the reimbursement of expenses for individuals hosting refugees, GD No. 367/2022 on the granting of temporary protection) and inter-agency protocols with international partners. In order to ensure effective implementation, the authorities have organized monitoring and coordination mechanisms, with regular reporting and constant evaluations carried out at the central level. It should be noted that the legislation has been constantly adjusted as the legal framework

on the status of refugees in Ukraine has been constantly modified at the European level, but also in line with the Romanian budget provisions. Thus, a first area for improvement would be the identification of multi-annual budget funding solutions - this would ensure predictability and at the same time would avoid limiting the bureaucratic process and redundant activities.

On the other hand, according to the information gathered from IGSU (<https://igsu.ro/plati-efectuate>) for the **settlement of expenses incurred for the accommodation and meals** of refugees from the war in Ukraine, by individuals and legal entities on the territory of Romania, in the period 2022-2024, the institution has allocated 1,758,777 thousand RON, the situation by year being as follows:

- ➔ in **2022**: 603966000 RON;
- ➔ in **2023**: 938842000 RON;
- ➔ in **2024**: 215969000 RON.

The Romanian government's financial support for Ukrainian refugees during the initial phase of the invasion, from its onset until April 2023, was administered through the "50/20" program (EO 15/2022), which allocated 50 RON (approx. 10 euros/day/person) for accommodation and 20 RON (approx. /4 euros/day/person) for meals. The funds were not provided directly to the refugees; instead, they were allocated to those who were hosting them. This caused significant variations in the real estate market, particularly in major economic centres like Bucharest, Cluj, Timisoara, and Constanta, where rents increased considerably. This programme resulted in a substantial influx of refugees into Romania, as the conditions provided were markedly more favourable than those in other countries.

In May 2023, the government implemented a differentiated approach to cover accommodation expenses, allocating 750 RON per month for individuals and 2,000 RON per month for families. The government allocates an additional 600 RON per person per month for food expenses. Eligibility required that adults be registered with a county employment agency or Bucharest municipality or, alternatively, be employed in Romania while enrolling their children in an educational program.

## **7.5. Methodology**

This analysis is based on a combined research method, including analysis of **official documents, direct observation, consultations with NGO representatives** and **policy impact analysis**. The data and information used comes largely from open sources, such as government reports, legislative documents, studies by international organizations and materials provided by institutions involved in the response to the crisis. At the same time, a significant part of the information presented is first-hand, as a result of personal involvement in managing the refugee crisis, including through displacement at the most transited border crossing point. This experience provides an inside and detailed insight into how government structures, international organizations and civil society have reacted and coordinated to respond to the needs of refugees. Direct access to the decision-making and operational process allowed a detailed analysis of the challenges and solutions implemented. By integrating practical experience with the analysis of official documents, this research provides a balanced approach between crisis management theory and its applicability on the ground, highlighting lessons learned and aspects that can be refined in the future.

## **7.6 . Key outcomes and recommendations on government-civil society cooperation**

### *7.6.1. Questionnaire conclusions*

*a) How was the management of this influx organized and what difficulties were encountered?*

1. **cross-sectoral cooperation framework should be developed** to align government efforts with those of civil society and the private sector through effective coordination mechanisms;

2. **centralized coordination mechanism** – main challenge: the fragmentation of efforts among various NGOs and government agencies. Need to create the mechanism of coordination - see Civil Society Coordination Cell under CNCCI that ensures all actors work together;

3. **standardized communication and data sharing platform** - integrating NGOs into a shared digital platform for real-time data sharing can improve decision-making. Geographic Information Systems (GIS), early warning systems, and artificial intelligence (AI)-powered analytics can enhance situational awareness and resource allocation. Standardized reporting frameworks also prevent misinformation and delays;

4. **collaborative planning and coordination** - The National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Romania supports national authorities in implementing international and regional disaster risk reduction strategies, fostering collaboration among various stakeholders. The disaster prevention platform is replied at the local level which ensure the legal framework for local authorities to include the NGOs in the overall planning and preparedness activities;

5. **lessons identified transformed in lessons learned** and valuable practical and technical solutions to be implemented.

*b) To what extent has the current legislation been adequate to this situation and where adjustments are needed?*

1. **revision of HG 557/2004** - by explicitly including refugee influx as a manageable risk, integrated into a clear response framework with specific tasks for each responsible authority involved and rapid funding mechanisms for such situations. This update should include clear terms of reference, the establishment of risk indicators and the creation of a flexible legislative framework to allow rapid adaptation to complex humanitarian crises. Analyze if the system of the emergency support functions for a situation like this are feasible and really can be implemented;

2. **establish a nationally responsible structure** for foresight and analysis of emerging risks, to serve as a mechanism for foresight and strategic planning, integrating the expertise of national authorities, academia and the private sector. This structure would have the role of monitoring, analysing and proposing proactive measures for crisis scenarios, contributing to the development of contingency plans based on global data and trends, thus reducing the reactive nature of institutional responses. (see Chapter 3: Strategic Vision- DSU);

3. **revision of Uncontrolled Movement Concept;**
4. **updating and modernizing of the Romanian National Disaster Risk Reduction platform** and including the **civil society also in the prevention and preparedness plans** also.

*c) How did the responsible institutions work together and what were the main bottlenecks in coordination between them?*

1. **NGOs national register** - which can support in case of a crisis (regardless its nature) defining their level of organization, area of support where it can contribute, the possible level of involvement and the support needed from authorities;

2. **developing specific upscaling procedures** for the activation and involvement of the civil society in a crisis. This will allow the integration of each NGO in response to a crisis of the nature of that generated by the refugee crisis from its initial phases;

3. **create scenarios and planning** for such crises by integrating authorities and civil society resources;

4. **training & exercises** - exercises, cross-sector training, and scenario-based planning enable NGOs to understand protocols, roles, and expectations in disaster management.

*d) What solutions can be applied to improve the integration of refugees in communities?*

1. **different level of needs of refugees depending on their backgrounds** – (ex. qualification);

2. **special attention to women with kids or accompanied minors** - provides intensive case management by social workers, educational support, language training, career and educational counselling, mental health care, and social integration support, identify where and how the education can absorb the incoming refugees. Bare in mind the need for providing occupations for mothers.

*e) How was data on refugees collected and managed and what problems were identified in this process?*

1. **Data collection is fragmented** and depends on the authorities involved. Having differing data management practices among various

stakeholders challenged the comprehensive understanding of the refugee population;

2. **Systems are not easily configurable** by disaster or risk type. This leads to delays, inconsistencies, and gaps in information sharing and coordination;

3. Refugees' **reluctance to provide personal information** given concerns about their privacy has limited the accuracy of the data, leading to challenges in understanding their needs;

4. The transitory nature of refugee flows made it difficult to keep **accurate records**, calling for customized data management tools.

### *7.6.2. Outcomes & recommendations*

#### **a) lack of clarity in dealing with the risk of a large influx of refugees from another country**

The experience of the response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis has highlighted the lack of a clear framework for managing a massive influx of displaced persons from another country.

Although the existing coordination structures at national and county level adapted from the dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic to the management of a large influx of people and were able to act effectively in the first phase of the crisis, the response was based more on operational adaptation.

Romania had not been confronted with a risk of such magnitude until February 2022. The situations to which Romania had been exposed until then were generally on the western border in the Timis area at the border with Serbia and targeted a rather limited number of migrants from the Syrian route arriving on the territory of Romania, which was not at that time part of the Schengen Area and therefore not a target. Thus, the plans for managing such a situation were adjusted at the level of DSU which introduced the solution of the 15 transit centres meant to offer a temporary accommodation solution to those in need (subchapter 7.3 – Figure 7.4).

Although the concept of ensuring the emergency response was based on the Uncontrolled Movement Framework designed well in advance as

NATO requirement, the lack of experience in the field resulted in the early days in a reactive rather than a preventive response ([https://www.nato.int/cps/bu/natohq/topics\\_132722.htm#resilience](https://www.nato.int/cps/bu/natohq/topics_132722.htm#resilience)).

**Recommendation:** there is a need to **establish a national strategic framework on the management of massive refugee flows**, including contingency plans, operational scenarios and inter-agency integration mechanisms, tested through regular exercises to prevent coordination bottlenecks – this must be connected with "**Uncontrolled mass movement framework**" developed as a NATO resilience requirement.

**b) at a time of growing emerging risks, the legislation simply cannot address all types of risks, and HG 557/2004 does not cover all types of risks**

The current emergency management legislation does not foresee specifically the scenario of a mass influx of refugees, which has created gaps in the allocation of responsibilities and necessary resources. HG 557/2004, which regulates emergency management, does not include this type of risk as one that requires a standardized approach and specific preparedness. This legislative vacuum has led to the need for emergency ordinances to cover certain aspects of refugee protection and support.

**Recommendation:** HG 557/2004 should be **revised** by explicitly **including refugee influx** as a manageable risk, integrated into a clear response framework with specific tasks for each responsible authority involved and rapid funding mechanisms for such situations. This update should include clear terms of reference, the establishment of risk indicators and the creation of a flexible legislative framework to allow rapid adaptation to complex humanitarian crises.

There is also a need to **establish a nationally responsible structure** for foresight and analysis of emerging risks, to serve as a mechanism for foresight and strategic planning, integrating the expertise of national authorities, academia and the private sector. This structure would have the role of monitoring, analysing and proposing proactive measures for crisis scenarios, contributing to the development of contingency plans based on global data and trends, thus reducing the reactive nature of institutional responses.

The solution at hand is to pinpoint the adjustments needed to the actions outlined in the Uncontrolled Movement Framework.

**c) the role of the DSU in the first phase of the response and the need for a holistic approach to the integration of UA citizens**

In the first phase of the crisis, the DSU provided adequate management of emergency logistics, transportation, accommodation and medical support to refugees. However, the integration of Ukrainian citizens into society requires a coordinated inter-agency response, including education, social assistance, labour market integration and legal protection. These issues go beyond the area of competence of the DSU and require cross-cutting and vertical decisions across all responsible institutions.

**Recommendation:** Setting up a **centralized mechanism at governmental** level for refugee integration, including ministries, local authorities and civil society organizations, thus ensuring a holistic view of the whole integration process.

**d) involvement of all relevant society stakeholders;**

Refugee integration is not solely the responsibility of the government but also of civil society, the private sector and local communities. Experience in dealing with the Ukrainian refugee crisis has shown that NGOs, volunteers and the private sector have been instrumental in providing material support, counselling and facilitating access to services. However, the lack of a formal mechanism to integrate these actors into government plans has sometimes led to duplication of efforts and inefficiencies in resource allocation.

**Recommendation:** Establish a **cross-sectoral cooperation framework** to align government efforts with those of civil society and the private sector through effective coordination mechanisms.

**e) data management and information gathering challenges;**

Although we live in an era of digitalization, **managing and centralizing refugee data** has been a **fragmented process**, hampered by multiple sources of information, parallel platforms and lack of a unified monitoring system. In addition, after major crises such as COVID-19, some data management systems are moved from one institution to another, affecting continuity and the possibility of long-term monitoring.

**Recommendation:** The creation of an **integrated government-wide digital solution** is needed to ensure interoperability between all institutional systems, from the central to the lowest administrative level. This platform must be scalable and adaptable, capable of handling any type of crisis situation, be it emergencies, refugee flow management, health crises, natural disasters or national security risks.

## **7.7. Conclusion**

Romania's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis was both **tailor-made** and **effective in the short term**, but **required high operational and logistical efforts**. The experience of this process highlights the need for **structural reforms to optimize cooperation between the authorities and civil society**, thus **preventing bottlenecks and duplication of efforts**. Improved **legislative clarity**, more effective **inter-institutional and government-wide coordination**, inclusive **integration mechanisms** and **digitization** of refugee management processes are essential for a faster, more coherent and more sustainable response to similar future crises.

As a solution to such challenges was already described in Chapter 3 - a framework for the development of the DSU, which could address a number of shortcomings identified in the management of recent crises.



# Conclusions & prospective developments

### 8.1. SWOT analysis of the national civil protection environment

The entire rationale so far demonstrates that more than ever there is a need for **joint action** towards the **development of Civil Protection in Romania**, and that the lines of development with all the current evolutions of today's world **rests anchored in the 15 tasks set out in Protocol I** established in June 1977 - Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (applicable to disasters as well - Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the protection of victims of international armed conflicts (Protocol I), of 8 June 1977. More than that, since all the chapters describing civil protection challenges, from **Chapter 1 to Chapter 7, include comprehensive sections with recommendations, directions for future action or conclusions**, the author considered it appropriate that this last chapter, the one "**summarising the findings**", **be based on a SWOT analysis** - to underpin the analysis of identified challenges. Being, as mentioned above, a chapter focusing on the compilation of a wide range of partial conclusions, this SWOT analysis was carried out with a rough granularity in order to **highlight the main courses of action** to be taken in the coming period on the evolution of Civil Protection in Romania and, thus, of the DSU (Table 8.1).

**Table 8.1. SWOT analysis of Civil Protection in Romania**

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the regulatory framework of the SNMSU has been continuously revised over the last 20 years;</li> <li>• decision-making system: in place, operational and efficient;</li> <li>• committed role of the entities that are part of the SNMSU;</li> <li>• strong emergency response force;</li> <li>• existence of sectoral response strategies for: climate change, National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy – including its implementing Plan, a strengthening role of DSU;</li> <li>• centralized coordination of response structures;</li> <li>• existence of specialized civil protection structures at MAI/DSU level;</li> <li>• decision-making structures and coordination and leadership mechanisms in place at national level;</li> <li>• maintaining and strengthening the role of authority alongside the role of response structure;</li> <li>• national, integrated and flexible response system;</li> <li>• rapid allocation of additional resources;</li> <li>• National response frameworks for major hazards (earthquake, forest fires, floods, pandemics, CBRN);</li> <li>• "National export product" in the field of international cooperation;</li> <li>• capacity to respond to requests for international assistance;</li> <li>• new and modern response capabilities;</li> <li>• development and operationalization of a national warning system (RoAlert);</li> <li>• national preparedness and information solutions (web portal, modern IT applications);</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inadequate financial resources to cover all needs, especially in the upcoming future for continuous upgrading of equipment;</li> <li>• training of personnel needs improvement and adaptation to emerging types of risks - aligned with Career Guide" for the IGSU staff as well as training technique (focus more on practical aspects);</li> <li>• reform of the Fire Fighters Faculty and IGSU school for emergency management;</li> <li>• still old infrastructure in many counties, not adapted to current needs, especially in rural areas (World Bank, PDD);</li> <li>• IGSU&amp;IGAv logistic structure currently under developing - transport capacities for large number of people - by roads or aerial, refugee camps and emergency stocks;</li> <li>• lack of highly- qualified and experienced teachers - both at the level of the Firefighters College and IGSU training schools;</li> <li>• complex and dense regulatory framework, constantly amended over the last 20 years;</li> <li>• emergency system heavily reliant on authorities with low community and volunteer involvement;</li> <li>• young people's not finding it motivating to be active in this field;</li> <li>• relatively weak links with the research or academic environment;</li> <li>• substantially dependent on funding from external grants versus budgetary solutions;</li> <li>• complex and bureaucratic administrative procedures for the proactive engagement of local authorities;</li> </ul>

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• implementation of quality management by establishing certified standards and working procedures;</li> <li>• capacity to attract and implement external funding;</li> <li>• public perception and confidence in the institution's role as an emergency response authority and structure;</li> <li>• partnerships with public institutions, private companies and relevant NGOs;</li> <li>• approval of "Career Guide" for the IGSU staff;</li> <li>• establishment of School of Applied Management for Emergency Situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• difficulties in recruiting and securing qualified staff;</li> <li>• the hierarchy of positions in the IGSU structures is less attractive for moving from local to county or national level</li> <li>• the need to improve and diversify methods of preparedness and awareness-raising;</li> <li>• lack of disaster continuity and recovery plans for essential institutions and services (regulatory framework on continuity of governance);</li> <li>• vulnerability to new and emerging risks such as cyber-attacks and technological risks, artificial intelligence, but also to classic ones like refugee influx;</li> <li>• weak human resources policy and foresight.</li> </ul>

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ international strategic framework (Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030) - to steer the upgrading of national legislation;</li> <li>☞ national strategy for disaster risk reduction - the action plan sets specific courses of action;</li> <li>☞ European disaster resilience goals - to direct future courses of action at EU and national level;</li> <li>☞ accessing external grant funding - for the development of national and European response capacity;</li> <li>☞ consultancy and financial assistance provided by international bodies with expertise in the field (e.g. World Bank - CAT-DDO);</li> <li>☞ contribution to the strengthening and development of international cooperation mechanisms;</li> <li>☞ consolidation of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction with a role in the implementation of strategic objectives in disaster risk reduction;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events due to climate change;</li> <li>• rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation, which can lead to increased vulnerability to natural disasters;</li> <li>• aging infrastructure insufficiently prepared to deal with large-scale disasters;</li> <li>• hybrid threats that can affect emergency response capacity;</li> <li>• limited financial and human resources dedicated to disaster preparedness and response;</li> <li>• dependence on international aid and technical assistance for emergency management for minor emergencies;</li> <li>• the fragility of communities as a result of the lack of preparedness of the population for emergency situations;</li> <li>• public health problems and possible epidemics that may follow a major disaster;</li> </ul>

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☞ continued development of early warning systems at local level;</li> <li>☞ modernization and extension of the response sub-units network with positive impact on the services level and the response time;</li> <li>☞ legal framework of filling the staffing gaps of the IGSU and its structures;</li> <li>☞ implementation of a national framework for the assessment and measurement of consequences (development of a methodology for damage assessment and implementation of the UN system - DESINVENTAR);</li> <li>☞ improved cooperation with NGOs and civil society;</li> <li>☞ REPowerEU/Recovery and Resilience Plan - improving infrastructure: seismic strengthening combined with energy efficiency measures, updates of the earthquake risk building list;</li> <li>☞ increasing the level of preparedness of the population - developing multiple mobile preparedness solutions (acquisition of mobile training centres through the World Bank program)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● addressing vulnerable groups (children, elderly, people with disabilities) during emergencies is currently in the initial stages of development - with no national culture in this sector at the time being;</li> <li>● the need to constantly update and adapt emergency plans and response strategies;</li> <li>● the risk of undermining public confidence in the authorities' ability to effectively respond to emergencies caused by fake news and disinformation.</li> </ul>

## 8.2. Challenges and Perspectives – The path forward for DSU and Romanian Civil Protection

The above SWOT analysis suggests **six "hotspots"** where **further action should be focused**. These are basically the **lines of action** where the author considers that efforts should be directed in the next phase in order to continue **to ensure the further evolution of the system** while maintaining **Romania's status as a generator of civil protection**:

**I. updating the legislative framework:** the Civil Protection Law 481/2004 has undergone adjustments over time. The legislative package

regarding the coordination and emergency response component is aligned with current requirements, however, at the moment the urgency is to harmonize roles and responsibilities in a single piece of legislation. Also, the revision of GD 557/2004 - by explicitly including refugee influx as a manageable risk, integrated into a clear response framework, is part of this attempt. This update should include clear terms of reference, the establishment of risk indicators and the creation of a flexible legislative framework. Moreover, in the light of the last years events – ex: the Covid Pandemic '19, Ukraine's war or the conflict in Gaza - updating certain missions and tasks of stakeholders is urgently required at least for the next matters:

- ❖ **shelter:** Romania is dependent on the shelter stock built basically until the early 2000s, characterised by the absence of significant investments in this area in the last 20 years. The legal measures are therefore needed to trigger the development of new shelters. This have to be built on a National Sheltering Framework – which establish the categories of population in need of shelter during a conflict, how to achieve national shelter coverage (by economic, social, cultural centres, but also solutions identified for isolated localities that are not necessarily targeted but experience indirect damage). One of the potential solutions is to reconsider the way of securing shelter solutions for the population by increasing the degree of sheltering similar to the model of the Nordic countries - over 75% sheltering possibilities in countries such as Norway, Finland;
- ❖ **evacuation:** rethinking how to manage the matter by establishing responsibility at the DSU/IGSU/ISUJ level with the support of local authorities. In the case of small and medium-sized localities, the lack of logistics and infrastructure (in & out access) for such operations can lead to the failure of the activity;
- ❖ **alarming:** the RO-ALERT system has proven its viability, but it needs to be updated by integrating the possibilities offered by the INTERNET (the technical solution upgrades may require

consideration of VOIP or e-mail options, and last but not least, integration with AI), as well as developing more types of alerts - for specific types of risks. Also, GSM coverage has proven to be a limiting factor in some instances. Last but not least, the development of the sirens alarm system should become a mandatory requirement. It should be complementary to RO-ALERT as well as a backup solution, and perform periodic testing exercises;

- ❖ **funding:** setting by law a percentage of GDP for civil protection actions within the defence package – this will to ensure the resilience of the nation and thus a consistency and efficiency of the EU and national defence policy;
- ❖ until the moment of the evolution described in Chapter 3, there is a need for a clear distinction – including through the regulatory framework - of the **two lines of work** at the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MAI): **public order** and **civil protection**, as well as adjusting CAEN code 8424 - *public order and civil protection activities*;
- ❖ **strengthening of the role of DSU:** the process may be initiated by starting legal actions aimed at integrating the Mountain Rescue and Cave Rescue – institutions under the local authorities, as well as sea rescue services (ARSVOM) which is currently under the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure.

## II. reinforce the integrated emergency response:

- securing appropriate level of human resources to provide rapid response;
- development of strategic transportation capacities (both terrestrial and aerial) and strategic storage facilities necessary to ensure the permanent availability of strategic stocks;
- updated equipment for the civil protection structures. This will be done by using advanced technologies like **robots, drones and AI solutions**;
- increasing **the level of training** by:

- a) developing training centres/ areas - making use of grant funding opportunities;
- b) exercise program - developing an exercise package at ISU and/or regional level;
- c) use of innovative methods of training – using virtual and augment reality to reduce the cost of field exercises;

**III. implementation of sustainable financing solutions** for the continuation of the endowment on the three pillars: naval, air, land, through the national budget - establishment by law of a fixed percentage of GDP for civil protection activities (similar to the defence funding mechanism under NATO level agreements), in parallel with grant funding solutions (from EU budget) or loan agreements with the World Bank. Moreover, the coherent approach in view of the recent debates on the defence budgets at NATO and EU level would be that **the percentage assigned should also consider resilience/civil protection**. This approach has in mind that to reach **a high level of preparedness** it is not enough to focus only on the defence sector but also to **take into consideration the whole spectrum of resilience**. The financing solution from the national budget is identified as the most feasible in the medium and long term, considering that Romania's eligibility for cohesion measures is substantially reduced on the future EU financial framework.

**IV. active participation of the whole of society.** As has already been pointed out in Chapter 1, already before 1990, in Romania we were considering the civil protection of "the whole society of the whole nation". Perhaps this syntagma did not have a level of support, neither from the authorities nor from the population, but the legal framework was present, and the actions were being implemented. This situation persists to this days, as the Civil Protection Law contains the necessary legal provisions, but its **implementation methods remain highly questionable**. Despite the fact that nowadays voluntary emergency services have been developed at the level of mayor's offices, especially in rural areas, and there are also NGOs or private services that deal with emergency response, there is still a low level of public commitment to civil

protection. However, it is necessary **to work** persistently on the **population mentality**. There is a need to engage everyone in this field. Nowadays reality shows that when disaster situations occur, the population is expecting the authorities' response. Large-scale disasters like massive floods or earthquakes, among others, may cause delays in response due to the overwhelming number of demands. This is why it is critical to build a **real volunteering system** that can be designed based on the French model, where volunteers are trained and equipped in a similar way as professionals and are paid when they participate in interventions. It is, of course, possible that in the event of a large-scale earthquake in Romania, the system of payment for volunteers will no longer be sustainable, but even so, developing it until that moment will, in any case, contribute to decreasing the pressure on the professional forces. **Thus, the most important recommendation from this thesis is the urgent need for a system of volunteers as well as a structured involvement of local authorities.** This is why the following three measures are considered critical in terms of whole society commitment:

- building a culture of prevention and preparedness for disasters and educating the public on the importance of resilience and safety measures related to emergencies;
- developing voluntarism in the field of emergency response and disaster preparedness;
- integrating civil society actions in civil protection activities;

V. enhancing Romania's role in international cooperation mechanisms by maintaining a **key role at EU level** in contributing to the development and implementation of measures under the European Civil Protection Mechanism & increasing active participation in international initiatives (NATO, UN, OECD, etc.) for disaster risk reduction and disaster response mechanisms;

VI. Romania becomes a **key actor of the RescEU** - on the storage component (sheltering, CBRN, and medical), logistic capabilities (strategic airlift), CBRN response capabilities;

### 8.3. Conclusions

**Scope:** as stated from the very beginning, this thesis is intended: to **enhance general knowledge by providing to the research sector and the academic community a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities of Civil Protection in Romania, within a defined timeframe (2014-2025) and emphasizes the context of the emergence of the DSU.** To offer at the end a very detailed picture – **a complete puzzle, as the pieces are continuously present around us,** in the legislative framework that not many people discover or understand in depth, in the everyday actions that pop up in the news, on social media sites; **but the pieces are disconnected** and not always create the **true image of reality.** For this reason, and considering the **lack of recent scientific papers in this field,** the author found it an appropriate choice.

**Objectives:** through this **thesis,** the author **expected** first and foremost **to provide an in-depth analysis** of the Romanian Civil Protection in the last 10 years. In this period, the Romanian **civil protection** system has evolved substantially, becoming a **robust framework** that embraces the **highest international standards** for disaster preparedness, response, and resilience. Case studies deepened this **multi-level introspection,** motivating the actions taken or, where appropriate, justifying the conclusions and recommendations presented.

Through sustained **involvement in the UCPM activities,** Romania has **strengthened** its disaster **management capabilities,** increased its **staff skills** participating in joint training and exercises, and developing a **strategic approach** to emergency management that emphasizes **cooperation, efficiency, and solidarity.**

The comparative **SWOT analysis of centralised and decentralised** civil protection frameworks reveals Romania's **reliance** on a largely **centralised model,** which **facilitates rapid resource mobilisation** and **decision-making** at the **national level.** However, it also highlights the need for **greater flexibility and responsiveness to local needs,** suggesting that a hybrid approach combining centralised oversight with regional autonomy could offer the best of both worlds. Such a system

would enable Romania to optimise its disaster response by balancing national coordination with regional adaptability.

Despite Romania's progress in civil protection, the thesis **identifies key challenges** that continue to impede the system's full potential. **Financial limitations, outdated infrastructure, and administrative complexity** limit local authorities' proactive engagement and delay modernisation efforts. These issues point to a need for sustainable and diversified funding mechanisms, including increased national investment and exploration of external grants or international partnerships. Furthermore, **prioritising continuous training and professional development** for emergency personnel will be essential for **addressing emerging risks**, including those associated with **climate change** and **technological hazards**.

Last but not least, this thesis served to illustrate that we are living in a **highly interconnected environment** made up of diverse but interdependent systems. This global interconnectedness has shown us how quickly national disruptions can escalate and impact entire regions and then spread globally. We need continued and **increased public awareness** of disaster risk reduction, prevention, and risk understanding.

Additionally, Romania's contributions to European disaster response efforts, such as international assistance provided, underline its key position in disaster management at the EU level. Through these efforts, **Romania demonstrates its capacity to provide critical support** in response to both natural and man-made crises, which **enhances its reputation** within the EU as a **reliable partner in civil protection**.

*Recommendation:* to further strengthen Romania's civil protection capabilities, the thesis proposes several **strategic priorities**. **Legislative updates** are needed to modernise the regulatory framework, incorporating a better coordination process and ensuring effective involvement at all administrative levels. Additionally, expanding and **modernising training programs** will allow emergency responders to handle a diverse range of threats with greater expertise. **Sustainable funding** strategies must also be developed, which could involve setting aside a fixed percentage of GDP for civil protection as well as leveraging

external funds through international financial institutions and EU support. **Strengthening partnerships** with the **whole society** - non-governmental organisations and local communities - is equally crucial, as it can foster public preparedness and community resilience. But all these **resources** - equipment, funding, and legislative adjustments - **cannot ensure** any **progress** without a **well-skilled human resource** - **be it professionals, or be it civil society and volunteers** (citizens, NGOs, or the business sector). The Civil Protection system is now in **urgent need** of an infusion of manpower, and **the solution in the current context is volunteerism**.

Ultimately, the DSU plays a crucial role in ensuring that authorities, civil society, business, and academia can withstand crises through collaborative efforts. Actually, the reality is that at the moment, after more than 10 years of existence, there is **a need to develop the DSU** in order to continue to ensure alignment with current tendencies. Actually, in the author's opinion, this means **being closer to the decision level of the Prime minister** is exactly the evolution that the civil protection system in Romania needs.

Now at the end, summarising, **the objective of the thesis** was to outline **courses of action** in terms of the evolution of Civil Protection with a strong emphasis on the structure coordinating at the national level – DSU. The **evolution steps of the SNMSU**, the author traced in this context, are aiming to explore the factors that sparked these changes and their impact. For this purpose, tools such as **SWOT analysis** were used, as well as a description of a number of significant **case studies** for the last five years, such as the pandemic context and the geopolitical situation triggered by the war of aggression in Ukraine or the crisis in Gaza. **The outcomes** of these analyses, from the perspective of the evolutions and challenges to DSU and Romanian civil protection, can be structured in four major directions:

1) an **evolution of the architecture** as it is presented in Chapter 3, by reducing the prime minister-DSU decision-making chain;

2) an **update** to the current context of the **legal framework** - by simplifying the informational and decision-making flows, reassigning responsibilities to the central and local authorities, and to society in general;

3) **bringing the citizens to the forefront** – enhancing the **role of volunteering and community involvement** with immediate effects in increasing national resilience;

4) defining a consistent and **predictable funding framework** based on the national budget – against the background of Romania's future decreasing eligibility for European grant funding.

To compress into a few paragraphs all the conclusions and recommendations detailed in all eight chapters of this thesis has been a challenging exercise. In the author's opinion, all the proposals are worth capitalizing on to demonstrate their sustainability. However, considering the extensive area covered by the thesis – a true **compendium of the activity of the DSU and Civil Protection in Romania** – the author chose to select in this part of the thesis only a few of them whose immediate implementation would lead to a domino effect that would eventually reach a much larger number of recommendations.

**Added value:** before concluding, it is pertinent to mention that the primary hurdle to the development of this thesis was the **absence of data from official sources**. This circumstance may suggest that this thesis relies on a weak evidence base. It's important to make it clear that the **research is based on: interviews** (see survey responses in Chapter 7), **official documents** (citations can be found in all chapters) that the author was able to make available on the updated DSU portal as part of his job, and **personal experience** gained since 1999 in civil protection system at the national and international level. This combination aligns well with the study's objectives, despite its limitations, from the author's perspective as a practitioner.

Furthermore, the author's opinion that the **low number of research projects about Romanian Civil Protection and its challenges** is justified, particularly due to this **limited data context**. Last but not least, the few publications related to the Romanian civil protection stakeholders are mostly the result of "**laboratory analysis**"- type evaluations and less internal analysis, technical and specific ones, at the level of competent structures.

For this reason, **the added value of this work - the author's personal contribution** - lies in the fact that once collected, all this scattered information that has been the object of this thesis and of the recommendations made for the future action will from now on be **the starting point for other studies**. With the finalisation of this thesis, the **following research works will certainly have a much broader evidence base**. And this means that the outcomes of **future scientific analyses will be more successful**, as these will **secure better and better knowledge**. In turn, this improved scientifically based knowledge will ultimately result in **enhancing civil protection** and therefore **saving lives and properties**.

## **Dissemination of research outputs & future research works**

### **i) personal contributions**

The writing process of this thesis led to the publication of **three original articles** (with recognised impact factor like: ISI, BDI or US international e: book) with an **additional article** currently in the final stage of **revision for publication**, as follows:

#### **➤ publications:**

1. Marius Dogeanu and Alexandru Ozunu, 2024 - *Fostering Resilience in Romania through European Collaboration: Challenges and Perspectives Specific to the Romanian Department for Emergency Situations as part of the EU Civil Protection Approach*, Environmental Engineering and Management Journal (**ISI listed**), September 2024 Vol. 23, No. 9, 2005x, <http://doi.org/10.30638/eemj.2024.161>;

2. Marius Dogeanu, Alexandru Ozunu and Cosmin Bunoiu - *Romanian Civil Protection: "National Export Product" - a radiography of civil protection international assistance missions*; Advances in Environmental Sciences – (**BDI listed**) International Journal of the Bioflux Society (AES Bioflux, 2025, Volume 17, Issue 1), <http://www.aes.bioflux.com.ro>;

3. Alexandru Ozunu and Marius Dogeanu - *European disaster risk scenarios of large cities, challenges, and prospects for Romania as part of Southeast Europe approach to Disaster Risk Reduction in large cities; Megacities and Disaster Management: Challenges and Prospects 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Bijayanand Misra, **Lambert Academic Publishing**, e-book: 9786207805907;

4. Marius Dogeanu, Alexandru Ozunu, Daniel Gheorghita, Jordan Gavrilă and Mihai Lupu - *Cooperation with civil society from Romanian Civil Protection perspective: a case study on managing Ukrainian refugee flows*; **article in final revision**.

On the other hand, the author's contribution must also be seen through his participation in **international conferences** organized by the academic world (UBB, IDRiM, SICHEM or CIMU) or **professional conferences** organized by the EU or the UN. All of these activities have contributed to the dissemination of the insights developed in this thesis both among practitioners and at the academic level

➤ **presentations at International Conferences:**

1. Marius Dogeanu - *How can we better link preparedness with anticipatory action and response efforts?* - Optimizing Emergency Preparedness for Effective Anticipatory Action and Response; Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks; Geneva; March 2025; - practitioners;
2. Marius Dogeanu - *Organisational and Community Resilience Systems for Health* - Strategy and emergency management under social, technology, population migration challenges; the 10th Edition of the Interdisciplinary Congress of Emergency Medicine, July 4, 2024, Cluj; - academics;
3. Marius Dogeanu, Alexandru Ozunu - *Contributions on the use of Virtual Training in improving the Response to Civil Protection contexts*; SICHEM 2024, (SA OP04); -academics;
4. Marius Dogeanu – *Misinformation/Disinformation Management in Emergency Response/ Scientific Expertise and Disaster Management Interface: Challenges and Prospects for Better Policy and Practice*; IDRiM Café Talk - Integrated Disaster Risk Management (IDRiM) Society, on-line; November 2023; academics;
5. Marius Dogeanu & all – *“How to face the unthinkable?”*; 7th European Civil Protection Forum: *“Towards faster, greener and smarter emergency management”*, Brussels, June 2022; - practitioners;
6. Marius Dogeanu - *Strengthening Global Collective Civil Protection Capacity/ Regional Approach to Disaster Management Response* -

European Union Civil Protection Mechanism; IDRIM Café Talk - Integrated Disaster Risk Management (IDRiM) Society, on-line; August 2021 - academics.

Moreover, as project leader for **field exercises** with forces responding to floods, forest fires or CBRN risks since 2015, in almost 25 such examples (MODEX), the author had the unique opportunity to verify and adapt the concepts described in this thesis. Furthermore, the quality of the Director General of the DGPC within the DSU has been instrumental in the successful implementation of the approaches outlined in this thesis, which of course can and should be further developed.

➤ **field activities:**

**real missions** – head of the Romanian mission deployed to Türkiye in the aftermath of the earthquake, leading the response of 110 Romanian search and rescue experts, in Hatay, 08<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> February 2023;

- head of DSU response team deployed to Siret, to support the Ukraine refugee; 01<sup>st</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup> March 2022; Siret, Romania;
- head of Romanian medical team deployed to Moldova in the support of Covid'19 management; 30<sup>th</sup> April – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2020; Republic of Moldova;

**simulations:**

a) EU MODEX NEW WAVE POLAND 2023 – Poland; 05<sup>th</sup> – 08<sup>th</sup> September 2023; water-related exercise with participation from: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, and Ukraine;

b) EU ROMODEX 2021 – Romania (Arges); 17<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> November 2021; water-related & CBRN exercise with participation from: Slovenia, Moldova, Portugal and Romania;

c) EU ROMODEX 2021 – Romania (Arges); 20<sup>th</sup> -23<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2021; water-related exercise with participation from: Slovenia, Baltic countries, Belgium, Spain, Croatia, Slovak Republic and Romania;

d) EU MODEX PT 2023 – Portugal; 02<sup>nd</sup> -06<sup>th</sup> May 2023; forest fires exercise with participation from: Greece, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

From this perspective, the author concludes that the **objectives** outlined in the introductory part of the thesis **have been successfully**

**achieved**, resulting in significant **original contributions** that **enhance the understanding of civil protection concepts and institutional frameworks** in Romania.

**ii) future research works**

This thesis highlights the necessity for additional research and provides key opportunities for further exploration in the field of civil protection, as outlined below:

- ✓ through the issues addressed, this thesis offers an original contribution by pointing out the necessary facts that will inspire researchers to consider the development of civil protection (with focus on Romanian system), particularly with regard to the gaps in the paradigm recently introduced by the Niinistö Report and the EU Policy Guidelines 2024-2029, related to the **differences between “civil protection” and “civil defence”**;
- ✓ this thesis has addressed the gaps identified in the scientific research on the implementation of emergency management in Romania, where no research has scientifically documented the solutions adopted at national level. Therefore, this thesis contributed to both the analysis through specific examples of the emergency situation system performance and also offered structural adaptations, such as the re-engineering of the **DSU architecture**. Thus, this thesis, by the **proposed model**, contributes to the grounding of the integrated coordination concept. At the same time, it is an invitation for researchers from different fields to **review the proposed idea from several angles**;
- ✓ another substantial element in which the thesis contributes considerably is the assessment of the way Romania participates at the international level in civil protection cooperation mechanisms - Romanian Civil Protection: "National Export Product". It highlights for the first time in a scientific analysis the progress and the major recognition Romania's civil protection specialists enjoy all over the world. This entire process, which demonstrates how Romania has easily reached this level, could serve as a focus for **future research to develop comparable models for interested**

- countries**, ultimately contributing to the improvement of civil protection services at the national level;
- ✓ this thesis addresses the issue of **cooperation with civil society**, a topic that is highly current in political and professional discussions, but it appears to **lack inspiration in the academic world**. This is particularly relevant in a context where a growing number of everyday examples demonstrate how an unprepared and misinformed society, unaware of the risks involved, can significantly complicate the recovery process following a crisis. That is why, in the author's opinion, the whole analysis of the refugee crisis in Ukraine highlights the **model used by the Romanian authorities** and prepares the ground for future research that will take into account the **initial response** to the emergency, the early measures, and the organizational structure required to include all relevant actors, as well as the **integration measures**;
  - ✓ certainly, an area in which researchers must absolutely make their presence known is the **impact of climate change on emergency management**; it is urgently needed to design a scientific model of the response procedures as well as to develop new equipment suited to this context. Also, the preparation of the population to face climate change should play an essential role; the broadening of **research on how to communicate with the population** and the measures to be taken at the individual level, with scientific algorithms that can prove the actions proposed, will complement the authority's action;
  - ✓ last but not least, the **SWOT analyses** that identify the challenges and opportunities for the future development of the civil protection system in Romania and from which the proposed strategic directions derive must be considered as **sources** for the scientific documentation of the **scientific research** that is at this stage essential to address the four main areas identified in section 8.3: Conclusions.



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## ANNEX No. 1

**International assistance offered by Romania between 1999 and 2024**  
*(data collection and compilation from open sources – web pages  
or social media – the Romanian Government, Ministry of Internal Affairs,  
Department for Emergency Situations, and General Inspectorate  
for Emergency Situations)*

No. crt.	Country	Type of assistance	Emergency	Year
1.	Türkiye	Search and rescue team	Earthquake	1999
2.	Türkiye	Search and rescue team	Earthquake	1999
3.	Morocco	In-kind	Earthquake	2004
4.	Bulgaria	In-kind (anti-pollution materials)	Danube pollution	2006
5.	Hungary	In-kind (flood protection)	Floods	2006
6.	Greece	Aerial forest fire-fighting	Fires	2007
7.	Hungary	In-kind – (flood protection)	Floods Red Sludge	2010
8.	Moldova	In-kind - flood protection materials & rescue teams	Floods	2010
9.	Libya	Consular - air evacuation	Conflict	2011
10.	Türkiye	In-kind (Van earthquake)	Earthquake	2011
11.	Bulgaria	In-kind – (flood protection)	Floods	2012
12.	Serbia Bosnia and Herzegovina	In-kind & pumping teams	Floods	2014
13.	Slovenia	Electric generators (blizzard, ice)	Extreme weather conditions	2014
14.	Serbia	In-kind	Migration flows	2015
15.	West Africa	In kind (Ebola)	Health crisis	2016
16.	Macedonia	In kind - flood protection materials	Floods	2016
17.	Greece	Aerial Fire-fighting	Fires	2018
18.	Albania	USAR & in-kind	Earthquake	2019
19.	Greece	In kind	Migration flows	2020
20.	Italy	medical team (ICU) Covid19	Health crisis	2020
21.	Italy	Personal protective equipment from the Romanian rescEU medical stockpile	Health crisis	2020

No. crt.	Country	Type of assistance	Emergency	Year
22.	Republic of Moldova	medical team (ICU) Covid19	Health crisis	2020
23.	Spain	Personal protective equipment from the Romanian rescEU medical stockpile	Health crisis	2020
24.	North Macedonia Montenegro	Personal protective equipment from the Romanian rescEU medical stockpile	Health crisis	2020
25.	Lithuania	Personal protective equipment from the Romanian rescEU medical stockpile	Health crisis	2020
26.	Czech Republic	Ventilators from the RO rescEU medical stockpile	Health crisis	2020
27.	Serbia Montenegro	Personal protective equipment from the RO rescEU medical stockpile	Health crisis	2020
28.	North Macedonia	Personal protective equipment from the Romanian rescEU medical stockpile	Health crisis	2020
29.	Lebanon	In kind (Lebanon explosion)	Technological disaster	2020
30.	Croatia	In -kind shelter	Earthquake	2020
31.	Republic of Moldova	Personal protective equipment from the Romanian rescEU medical stockpile	Health crisis	2021
32.	Slovakia	ICU medical team Covid 19	Health crisis	2021
33.	Republic of Moldova	In-kind Covid 19 Vaccine doses	Health crisis	2021
34.	Republic of Moldova	In-kind Covid 19 Vaccine doses	Health crisis	2021
35.	North Macedonia and Montenegro	Personal protective equipment from the Romanian rescEU medical stockpile	Health crisis	2021
36.	Serbia	In-kind Covid 19 Vaccine doses	Health crisis	2021
37.	Republic of Moldova	In-kind Covid 19 Vaccine doses	Health crisis	2021
38.	India	In-kind medical equipment	Health crisis	2021
39.	Republic of Moldova	In-kind Covid 19 Vaccine doses	Health crisis	2021

*Fostering Romanian Civil Protection in the current security context*

No. crt.	Country	Type of assistance	Emergency	Year
40.	Ukraine	Personal protective equipment (masks, coveralls, disposable gloves)	Health crisis	2021
41.	Republic of Moldova	In-kind Covid 19 Vaccine doses	Health crisis	2021
42.	Ukraine	In-kind Covid 19 Vaccine doses	Health crisis	2021
43.	Republic of Moldova	In-kind Covid 19 Vaccine doses	Health crisis	2021
44.	Greece	Ground Forest firefighting forces with vehicle	Fires	2021
45.	Greece	Ground Forest firefighting forces with vehicle	Fires	2021
46.	Tunisia	ICU medical team & Covid 19 Vaccine doses	Health crisis	2021
47.	Vietnam	In-kind Covid 19 Vaccine doses	Health crisis	2021
48.	Egypt	In-kind Covid 19 Vaccine doses	Health crisis	2021
49.	Republic of Moldova	In-kind Covid 19 -tests	Health crisis	2021
50.	Ukraine	In kind (shelter & gas)	Conflict	2022
51.	Republic of Moldova	In kind – energy crises (fuel)	Conflict	2022
52.	Ukraine	In kind (Food and fuel)	Conflict	2022
53.	Republic of Moldova	Transportation of refugees	Conflict	2022
54.	Republic of Moldova	Injured patients' transportation	Conflict	2022
55.	Ukraine	rescEU medical stockpile - EU Logistic HUB	Conflict	2022
56.	Slovenia	Aerial fire-fighting equipment at the UCPM	Conflict	2022
57.	Republic of Moldova	In kind – medical items	Conflict	2022
58.	France	Forest Fire Fighting with Specialized Vehicles (GFFF-V)	Fires	2022
59.	Greece	Forest Fire Fighting with Specialized Vehicles (GFFF-V) pre-positioning pilot program	Fires	2022
60.	Republic of Moldova	Transportation of NATO medical supplies	Health crises	2022

No. crt.	Country	Type of assistance	Emergency	Year
61.	Ukraine	rescEU shelter stockpile generators donation	Conflict	2022
62.	Türkiye	2 x MUSAR	Earthquake	2023
63.	Syria	Shelter tents/modules from the RO-SHELT rescEU shelter stock hosted by Romania	Earthquake	2023
64.	Türkiye	Shelter tents/modules from the RO-SHELT rescEU shelter stock hosted by Romania	Earthquake	2023
65.	Syria	In kind (food& NFI)	Earthquake	2023
66.	Türkiye	Logistical equipment from the RO-SHELT rescEU shelter reserve hosted by Romania	Earthquake	2023
67.	Greece	Forest Fire Fighting with Specialized Vehicles (GFFF-V) pre-positioning pilot program	Fires	2023
68.	France	Forest Fire Fighting with Specialized Vehicles (GFFF-V) pre-positioning pilot program	Fires	2023
69.	Greece	ground forest firefighting intervention team	Fires	2023
70.	Greece	ground forest firefighting intervention team	Fires	2023
71.	Jordan	In kind for Gaza refugee	Conflict	2024
72.	Ukraine	Experts - European Civil Protection Team	CBRN	2024
73.	Gaza Strip	Food and NFI (via Cyprus)	Conflict	2024
74.	Gaza Strip	Evacuation of injured persons	Conflict	2024
75.	Republic of Lebanon	In kind - food products and NFI	Conflict	2024
76.	Chile	Expert in European Civil Protection Team	Fires	2024
77.	France	International support mission for rapid response to forest fires in the framework of the pilot pre-positioning program of the MCPMU	Fires	2024
78.	North Macedonia	Aerial forest fighting	Fires	2024
79.	Albania	Aerial forest fighting	Fires	2024
80.	Greece	Ground forest fighters with vehicle / pre-positioning program	Fires	2024
81.	Bosnia and Herzegovina	In-kind	Landslides	2024

“A practical map for turning crisis into coordinated action”

**Marius Dogeanu**, together with Prof. **Alexandru Ozunu**, charts the development of Romania's civil protection system within the larger context of European resilience.

The authors provide an overview of how the Department for Emergency Situations (DSU) has turned the experience of pandemics, refugee flows, and natural catastrophes into useful models for quick, coordinated action, with a focus on governance, international cooperation, and field-tested emergency management. Recognizing that High Impact, Low Probability (HILP) events require exceptional readiness, they highlight how preparedness remains the most effective answer to unpredictable but devastating crises.

This study connects research with real-world action, demonstrating how shared knowledge, preparation, and solidarity can strengthen society's ability to face uncertainty.



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