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**Proposed discussion document for the Working group meeting:
“Civil Protection Volunteers”**

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Subject: Civil Protection Volunteers. Follow up of the third meeting of Civil Protection Directors-General (12 February 2019) of the Partner Countries of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and Working Group on international assistance (26 November 2019).

Objective: To discuss and identify common challenges, best practices, lessons learned and propose a set of priority actions at national, sub-regional and regional levels, addressing both policy and capacity building.

This document serves as basis for discussion at the meeting and will be further developed reflecting participants' inputs during the meeting and comments received afterwards. The document should be finalised prior to the final Working group meeting, taking place in 2021.

The actions proposed under this working group will be complementary to the work carried out under all three other working groups (*i. Preparing for efficient mutual assistance in the Euro Mediterranean area; ii. Engaging citizens in disaster risk management; iii. Civil protection volunteers*) identified in the recommendations of the UfM Director Generals meeting¹ (February 2019) and in the Action plan of the Preparing for efficient mutual assistance in the Euro Mediterranean area².

1. - Introduction

Climate change is making natural disasters worse and more likely. These natural catastrophes can cause immense economic and human losses. Floods, storms, earthquakes, tsunamis, droughts, forest fires and volcanic eruptions are among the most devastating types of natural catastrophe.

¹ <https://ufmsecretariat.org/directors-general-of-civil-protection-meeting/>

² <https://ufmsecretariat.org/mutual-assistance/>

In addition, man-made disasters including explosions, major fires, marine pollution, aviation, shipping and railway accidents, oil spills or release of toxic substances into the environment are becoming increasingly frequent and severe.

Not to mention public health emergency such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact of these threats on populations and infrastructures can have a regional, national and even cross-border impact.

Prior to the intervention of public civil protection services and international assistance, experience has shown that a crucial factor to limit the impact of these disasters is founded on a strong local first response services network.

Effective local civil protection services and well-trained and coordinated volunteer groups for common emergencies are a crucial factor when disasters strike. It is important to develop and promote an organised civil participation, in particular of young people in this field.

The Union for the Mediterranean Civil Protection Director Generals' of the partner countries recognized the crucial importance of engaging citizens in disaster risk management and build-up effective and operational civil protection volunteers system.

The UfM Working Group will discuss the challenges and concrete actions to be taken to support efficient development and sustainability of volunteerism in civil protection and disaster risk management. These actions will be proposed to the Senior Officials meeting for possible implementation at national, sub-regional, and/or regional levels.

The disasters that countries of the Mediterranean basin may experience are common and may have cross-border implications whatever their origin: natural (earthquakes, forest fires, floods, flash floods, tsunamis, landslides, storms, health emergencies etc.) or man-made.

Their occurrence and scale can profoundly and lastingly affect the continuity of activity in geographical areas of varying size.

On top of that, marine pollution can have a long-term adverse effect on the coastline environment and wild life.

The enhancement of human potential will facilitate the levels of commitment, integration, training and sustainability of models for the development of volunteering in civil protection and disaster risk management in the Mediterranean area.

Given the fact that population plays an important role in risk prevention and preparedness for emergencies and considering that, citizens are usually the first responders to disasters, a second work group based on "**Public awareness in civil protection**" has been set up. The objectives and outcomes of the two working groups are strongly interlinked.

2. CIVIL PROTECTION VOLUNTEERS

A major concern of current crisis and disaster management approaches is to enhance the resilience of all involved actors and mainly the affected population in the various phases of the disaster life cycle.

This approach requires a comprehensive emergency response system and the commitment of strong volunteer organizations.

Mobilising volunteers in the case of natural and man-made disasters is an important factor that could be of an added value in disaster risk management, especially when addressing the needs of the most vulnerable people.

There are various examples³ of involving volunteers in disaster risk management. There are different approaches to mobilize volunteers, in conventional or non-conventional ways. Increasing limitations of existing systems involving volunteers stress the importance of searching for new, alternative and sustainable ways on how to involve people in civil protection and disaster risk management volunteerism.

The health crisis linked to COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of having a civil protection system that is complementary to the health system, this further stressing the importance of inter-institutional cooperation. In addition, COVID-19 pandemic stressed a challenge with the resilience of hospitals or other health facilities, including patient transport and the availability of unaffected human resources to ensure business continuity.

By definition, this pandemic has affected the entire planet and put many of our health organisations under stress. Civil protection actors had to cope with multiple actions in many countries, mobilisation of volunteers has ensured link with the population. During the COVID-19 pandemic, citizen initiatives were created and all generations were able to mobilise help for the most vulnerable people in the situations that had not been anticipated.

It is important to capitalise on the commitment of citizens and to offer opportunities to integrate them in the existing civil protection/disaster management systems in the countries. Intergenerational solidarity has made it possible to maintain strong links between people. Young people have been particularly involved and are a target audience for becoming civil protection volunteers. The social media campaigns are useful tools to inform the public on how to behave in disasters. In addition, they could also play a role in encouraging young people to volunteer, e.g. the Virtual Operation Support Teams (VOST) initiative⁴, where volunteers help officials to prevent and face disasters.

³ <https://www.posow.org/>

<http://pprdsud3.eu/en/homepage/>

IPCAM and IPCAM II: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/funding-evaluations/financing-civil-protection-europe/selected-projects/increasing-preparedness-0_en

⁴ VOST TEAM: <https://www.vosteuropa.eu/>

Suggestions for axes of reflection	
Major themes	Topics
1. Volunteers recruitment strategies in civil protection	Target the profiles of volunteers, civil, military and civil servants, with policies adapted to urban, isolated or rural areas.
	Recruiting equally youth, adults and senior citizens, with a specific attention to gender and disabled, through information campaigns, raising awareness in schools, or senior citizens who can provide support and logistical assistance.
	Interest of the volunteers who make up the social fabric, with knowledge of the area, take part in its development, form local communities.
	Volunteers that can constitute a pool of different skills, such as special knowledge in meteorology, man-made or natural risks, medical and para-medical professions, etc.
	Territorial coverage and the level of organisation (national, regional, local) must be integrated into the risk analysis, emergency response plans and insurance scheme.
	Cross-border cooperation or deployment abroad can benefit from volunteer civil protection teams.
	Creation of Virtual Operation Support Teams (VOST) initiative, where volunteers help officials to prevent and face disasters.

Major themes	Topics
<p>2. Volunteers in civil protection and disaster risk management are a precious resource. Therefore, it is necessary to build a well-suited organisational and operational framework for volunteering.</p>	<p>Clearly define volunteers' rights, responsibilities and insurance schemes. Include reflection on the administrative position of volunteers, giving them a regulatory framework, an insurance policy, etc.</p>
	<p>The retention of volunteers remains a long-term challenge, such as: recognition, allowances, salaries, pension provision or bonuses, agreements with employers or administrations, tax benefits, supplementary health insurance, bonus points for university entrance, medals, congratulation letters, etc.</p>
<p>3. Initial preparation, training and development of volunteers</p>	<p>Definition of employment framework, scope of missions for volunteers teams.</p>
	<p>Level of training, adapted to risks, specialisation, supervision, financing, logistics, infrastructure, academy, etc.</p>
	<p>Best practices to train volunteer in disaster preparedness and response. For example, volunteers educate young students and population to life-saving techniques in some countries at schools and at the same time increase public awareness of domestic risks and prevention and preparedness measures to be taken in case of a disaster.</p>
<p>4. Mobilisation of volunteers for carrying out civil protection tasks</p>	<p>Operational readiness during prevention, preparedness and response phase.</p>
	<p>Defining criteria taking into account seasonality of certain risks (forest fires, floods, etc.) and cross border nature of disasters.</p>
	<p>In complementarity with "<i>Preparing for efficient mutual assistance in the Euro Mediterranean area</i>" working group, volunteers can assist and support when receiving assistance in close coordination with civil protection and disaster risk management authorities.</p> <p>The COVID-19 pandemic revealed solidarity among different services including volunteers (e.g. medical students).</p>

On marine pollution volunteers contributions to survey and clean oiled or polluted shoreline is crucial. Best practices for volunteer preparedness and management for oil spill response, in order to ensure safety and efficiency of operations.

In connection with “*Preparing for efficient mutual assistance in the Euro Mediterranean area*” working group, the example of the 2002 “The Prestige” oil spill, which occurred off the coast of Galicia, in Spain, is a good example; The leaked oil polluted more than thousand beaches on the Spanish, French and Portuguese coast, as well as, causing great harm to the local fishing industry. This event showed an important mobilisation of thousands of volunteers to help clean the affected coastline. Most of these volunteers became environmental ambassadors and prevention agents against oil spills.