



NEWSLETTER No. 1 - December 2021

FOREWORD

by Ivona Olhova IPA FF Program Officer, DG ECHO

"As the effects of climate change are upon us and increasingly affect our lives a programme like IPA Floods and Fire (IPA FF) seeks to bring the focus to what can be done to prevent two of its most serious effects. Considering the most recent forest fires, that severely affected the region this summer, the timing of the programme is more than pertinent. With its objective to seek to improve prevention, preparedness, and capacity to respond to forest fires at central, regional and EU level IPA FF will drive the capacity of beneficiaries to respond better to future challenges. I would like to welcome you to the first issue of the IPA FF newsletter, which is a quick and easy tool to keep up to date on disaster risk reduction in the Western Balkans and Turkey and I look forward to the next steps of the action."



INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM.

by Agostino Goretti IPA FF Program Director, Italian Civil Protection Department

As we're aware, the Western Balkans and Turkey have witnessed a growth in natural disasters in the past decade and more. Moreover, climate change projections for the region anticipate even more frequent disasters in the coming years with reference to flooding and forest fires events. This perspective requires improved regional cooperation mechanisms and increased mitigation and preparedness capacities at national, regional, and EU levels.

In this context, the EU Support to Flood Prevention and Forest-fires Risk Management in the Western Balkans and Turkey capacity building initiative was launched under the auspices of DG ECHO to build on the results of previous IPA initiatives and support the region in the process of further EU approximation and consolidation of capacities for comprehensive floods and forest fires risk management.

For this purpose, IPA FF supports the region, on the one hand, in further developing risk management plans and early warning systems for floods and, on the other, in creating a harmonized methodology for forest fire risk assessment and improving operational capacities for response to

established jointly with the Administration of the Republic of Slovenia for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief, CIMA Research Foundation, Italy, the Romanian General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, the Fire Rescue Brigade of Moravian-Silesian Region, Czech Republic, and APELL, National Center for Disaster Management Foundation, Romania, as an affiliated entity.

The IPA FF Consortium is committed to adopting an implementation approach based on a set of guiding principles including but not limited to an active role of all partners towards programme development, the relevance of activities to local capacity development needs, local ownership of Program benefits, effective use of existing capacities and resources, inter-institutional cooperation, and alignment with EU and other international frameworks.

WHAT HAPPENED AT IPA FF SO FAR.

Since early 2021, the partners of the IPA FF consortium have closely coordinated with civil protection authorities and other relevant local institutions in the region as well as with the local EU Delegation and Offices to officially launch the program and start implementing the inception phase.

As part of the overall coordination effort a network of National Program Coordinators and Focal Points designated at local institutions was established to constitute the backbone of the program governance and implementation structure.

Following program launch with all relevant stakeholders a series of fact-finding meetings involving consortium experts and experts from local authorities and institutions have been conducted under the different program work-packages. The objective of fact-finding meetings was to contribute to conducting a baseline analysis and increase understanding by the consortium of the current situation and the existing capacities and resources in the domains addressed by the program, identify priorities and plan first program activities accordingly.

So far, due to the ongoing COVID-19 emergency, meetings could be held only online. We look forward to the next phases of the program and to meeting with all the partners and stakeholders, hopefully in the upcoming months.



Interview with Dejan Radinovic

Head of Section for European Affairs - Sector for Emergency Management, Ministry of Interior, Serbia,
IPA FF National Coordinator

In your opinion, to which extent is the IPA FF scope relevant to the regional context and what do you expect for Serbia from this new initiative?

A continuity of the EU support in raising disaster response and disaster risk reduction capacities is surely well received among all IPA beneficiaries, including the Republic of Serbia. In the specific context of COVID-19 pandemic, despite many limitations in implementation of this type of regionally oriented program, we see additional dynamics and a much broader and more proactive approach

and postponed activities requesting the physical presence of participants, with this adaptation to new circumstances more than ever before one can see that, beside traditionally present emergency management and civil protection authority that coordinates activities as a national contact point, with its new concept the IPA FF programme also involves other institutions and relevant actors in the field of flood and forest fire prevention as partners on both national and local level in such way making a significant step forward in widening networks of professionals and supporting inter-institutional collaboration.

What is your take on the importance of inter-institutional cooperation in disaster risk management, and what are the key areas where inter-institutional cooperation could be improved in the framework of IPA FF?

National legislation gives the national emergency management and civil protection authority a coordinating role in the national system but also establishes different levels of coordination and management descending from national to local level and therefore the lines of communication while the competence of each actor in the system on different levels is very clear. However, the joint work and mutual understanding is of great importance since local self-government units and especially local emergency management staff headed by the president of the municipality or the city mayor, represent the first level of disaster risk reduction, but also the level of the first response, while the Sector for Emergency Management of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia with its branches in administrative districts is coordinating these activities having direct responsibility and authority to save and protect human lives and property in emergencies. What is the added value of further inter-institutional cooperation within the IPA FF is the possibility to use this programme for expert support on specific issues as well as to compare the work done so far at the regional level and with the European practice in this area.

Over the past years, Serbia suffered the worst floods. How local people's perception of natural disasters has changed in the past decade?

Since 2014, when our country was hit by major floods, the emphasis of action has shifted from responding to emergencies towards improving prevention and preparedness for future similar events. The general impression is that at the local community level, more than ever people understand disaster risks while with this awareness raised both local community and local self-government units are now much more oriented towards disaster prevention and preparedness. It should also be mentioned that many campaigns and initiatives taken in previous years have obviously given expected results while there is still a room left for further strengthening of prevention and preparedness. As an example of such activities let me just mention that the Sector for Emergency Management of the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Serbia supports the campaign 'Making Cities Resilient 2030' as an initiative led by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and its partners to support cities in taking action to reduce disaster risk in alignment with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. In addition to our commitment to further work on disaster risk reduction and the future challenges we will face, we expect that the implementation of IPA FF program will also contribute to this regard by strengthening capacities from the national to the local level.



Consortium experts

Chiara Paniccia, Romanella Vio, Stefania Renzulli
Italian Civil Protection Department
Marta Giambelli, Miranda Deda, Sabrina Meninno
CIMA Research Foundation

Your Work Package is related to the integration of Flood Risk Early Warning System into Emergency Response Plans. Why is it so important?

The integration of early warning systems into emergency planning is essential for reducing the impact of flood events. The more consolidated the Early Warning System (“EWS”) is, the more effective are the actions to reduce as much as possible the impact of the event. Therefore, all preventive actions prior to the event are fundamental in mitigating the effects on the population.

Integrating the EWSs with emergency planning allows for a gradual and coordinated activation of the response phase and the resources that will eventually be used. This process promotes a timely and effective exchange of information at all levels, so that the population can adopt those specific measures provided in the plans.

According to the above mentioned, EWSs must be considered essential in emergency response planning.

The disastrous Central Europe flooding of July 2021 has highlighted the importance of effective flood forecasting and warning system. Which pivotal characteristics should an EWS chain of communication have to be effective?

One of the essential premises for an effective early warning system is a clear understanding of all the actors that are involved, including their tasks, responsibilities, and interaction between different roles. It is not enough to define who should do what, and when actions should be taken. A clear context of roles and responsibilities, a coordinated exchange of information, a coherent definition of the process are fundamental to ensure that the system works well and people receive timely information in the right way.

All it takes is one weak link for the communication chain to fail, in which case the EWS would be ineffective.

Furthermore, it is important to establish a connection between early warnings and early actions in emergency response plans and consider them as a consequential process, not as separate tasks.

Which weak and strong points did you recognize in the procedures already existing in the Western Balkans and Turkey?

We are still in the process of identifying weak and strong points of existing procedures. From the very beginning, this analysis has been developed within a framework that aims at addressing the complexity of the system previously described. It envisages the involvement of all the multi-level EWS stakeholders of beneficiaries, in relation to the 4 key components of an EWS (disaster risk knowledge, monitoring and forecasting, dissemination and communication, preparedness and response). Such an approach has required different gradual steps. First, with the support of Partner Countries, we analysed the institutional and legal framework through a questionnaire to identify the key EWS stakeholders. Then, we conducted a preliminary and overall analysis of the whole EWS related to flood risk. This step has been implemented by organizing a workshop which engaged all the key actors and by preparing and analysing results from an EWS self-assessment tool.

Western Balkans and Turkey in their process of resilience building and to assist them in strengthening measures and regional cooperation in comprehensive flood and forest fire risk management.

In the context of our activities, the biggest challenge ahead is reinforcing the capacity of the beneficiaries to include flood early warnings into emergency response plans, bringing all the stakeholders around the same table, engaging them and stimulating a continuous and fruitful dialogue.

We share this challenge with the partners, with whom we want to build an exchange of expertise and to develop pilot actions in local case studies.

Ultimately, regional institutional capacity development initiatives should enhance cooperation with the Union Civil Protection Mechanism and ensure further integration into the EU framework for disaster prevention, preparedness, and response.

NEWS FROM OTHER REGIONAL PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES



The EU-funded Transition towards Low Emissions and Climate-resilient Economy in the Western Balkans and Turkey – TRATOLOW project contributes to climate change mitigation and adaptation and the development towards a resource-efficient, low emissions and climate-resilient economy. With the help of a European consortium, namely Umweltbundesamt and NIRAS, the European Commission, represented by the Directorate General Climate Action is supporting the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey in the areas of climate protection and adaptation to climate change.

The scope of the project covers five thematic components: 1. support in the implementation of the Paris Agreement, the EU Climate and Energy Framework 2030 & 2050 long-term strategy; 2. Capacity Building on Domestic Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventories; 3. Monitoring, Reporting, Accreditation and Verification Requirements Targeted at Operators, Authorities, Verifiers and CSO under the EU ETS; 4. Support to the National and Regional Adaptation Planning and Actions and 5. compliance check of Legislative Acts.

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