

Press release – Greater EU Civil Protection capacity needed in light of lessons from COVID-19



The EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) has supported member states to save lives in the midst of earthquakes, hurricanes and floods. It has helped fighting forest fires and evacuating EU nationals – including [more than 75.000 EU citizens](#) during the current COVID-19 crisis – by coordinating and assisting in civil protection efforts. Medical equipment such as ventilators, personal protective equipment, vaccines and therapeutics and laboratory supplies have also been procured through [rescEU](#) to support national health services during the pandemic.

However, MEPs believe that while the EU Civil Protection Mechanism was used successfully during the COVID-19 crisis, it also exposed limitations in the current crisis management set-up. When many member states are hit by the same emergency simultaneously they cannot rely on own assets and voluntary support. RescEU must therefore be strengthened to enable the EU to help quickly to fill these critical gaps so no one is left alone to deal with such emergencies.

To take these concerns into consideration, the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee today with 72 votes to 6 and 1 abstention, updated its position adopted on [5 March 2020](#).

Preparing for large-scale emergencies

The committee repeated its call from 5 March that a significantly larger amount should be allocated to preparedness, including for the purchase of necessary new rescEU equipment, materials and resources to be better able to assist member states when national capacities are overstretched. This would make it possible to respond swiftly and effectively to large-scale

emergencies or to low probability events with a high impact including medical emergencies such as the COVID-19.

To be more transparent about the use of EU funding, MEPs also believe that it is necessary to specify how money is allocated across the three pillars of the mechanism “prevention, preparedness and response”.

Quote

After the vote the rapporteur, [Nikos ANDROULAKIS \(SD, Greece\)](#) said: *“There is a need for more EU solidarity. With our proposals we better protect and assist European citizens, no matter in which member state they reside as we increase the co-financing rate to 100%, improve prevention actions and give the Commission the possibility to acquire, rent or lease the necessary capacities. Parliament is ready to start the negotiations. We want the Mechanism ready to address not only a possible second wave of the pandemic or forest fires but any other natural or man-made disaster in the future.”*

Next steps

The full House will vote during the 14-17 September session after which Parliament is ready to start negotiations with member states to allow for entry into force of the revamped mechanism by January 2021.

Background

The Civil Protection Mechanism was set-up in 2013 to help member states deal with increasingly frequent natural disasters. Until 2019, it was only based on a voluntary system. In 2017 alone, the Mechanism was used 18 times for forest fire emergencies in Europe. Portugal, Italy, Montenegro, France, and Albania all received assistance via the Mechanism to respond to forest fires.

Since 2019, when rescEU was created, the EU can now also directly assist member states hit by disasters when national capacities are overstretched.