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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

Guidelines on Population Preparedness under the EU Preparedness Union Strategy

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COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION

GUIDELINES ON POPULATION PREPAREDNESS UNDER THE EU PREPAREDNESS UNION STRATEGY

The European Union faces an increasingly complex risk landscape, shaped by geopolitical shifts, climate change, rapid technological change and pressures on democratic resilience and social cohesion.

The EU Preparedness Union Strategy was adopted by the European Commission in March 2025 (Communication JOIN(2025) 130 final) in response to the evolving risk landscape and common challenges facing the EU, building also on the findings and recommendations of **the Niinistö report on preparedness and readiness of the EU**. The Strategy sets out the framework to strengthen the Union's collective ability to anticipate, prevent, prepare for and respond to crises. It promotes an integrated, all-hazards, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach that brings together public authorities, citizens, communities, civil society, businesses, social partners and the scientific and academic communities across all levels of governance.

Central to this approach is strengthening population preparedness, strengthening societal resilience by ensuring that citizens are prepared, including children, older people, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups and/or groups in situations of risk, have access to reliable information and the skills needed to understand risks and take appropriate action before, during and after emergencies. Population preparedness constitutes one of the seven building blocks of the Strategy.

The Commission is hereby providing guidelines on four actions of the Strategy:

- **Action 27:** risk communication;[1]
- **Action 28:** reaching a population self-sufficiency of a minimum of 72 hours;[2]
- **Action 29:** preparedness in school education curricula and training of educational staff;[3,4]
- **Action 33:** disability inclusive emergency preparedness and first response training, a flagship initiative of the Enhanced Disability Strategy.[5]

The guidelines, while non-binding, are intended to encourage EU Member States (MS) and UCPM Participating States (PS) to develop their preparedness initiatives according to their own national organisation.

For the implementation of these guidelines, four accompanying Staff Working Documents[6] explain how to implement them, including a collection of good practices that

[1] SWD(2026)825.
[2] SWD(2026)826.
[3] This guidance was informed by analytical work undertaken through the Technical Assistance Financing Facility for Disaster Prevention and Preparedness (TAFF).
[4] SWD(2026)827.
[5] SWD(2026)828 and the accompanying TAFF advisory reports.
[6] Available at https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/preparedness_en

build on the EU's wider work on disaster prevention and preparedness under the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), including the 2023 Union Disaster Resilience Goals (DRGs).

This guidance was drafted together with experts from EU MS and UCPM PS, civil protection authorities, other disaster risk management stakeholders and other relevant stakeholders and builds on the preparEU pilot project and on the recommendations from the European Citizen Panel on Preparedness, organised in March-May 2026 with 150 randomly selected citizens from all 27 Member States.[7]

While EU MS and UCPM PS remain the primary actors in civil protection, preparedness and crisis response, the EU's support complements national efforts by strengthening the knowledge, skills and practical capacities that enable people and communities to prepare for and respond to emergencies.

GUIDELINES ON INCREASING AWARENESS ABOUT RISKS AND THREATS (ACTION 27)

Effective risk communication is a critical component of preparedness and societal resilience. By helping people to understand risks, make informed decisions and take appropriate action, it strengthens the capacity of individuals, communities and institutions to anticipate, prepare for and respond to a wide range of hazards and threats.

Successful risk communication depends on trust, participation, coordination and a clear understanding of audiences and their needs. Communication strategies should be evidence-based, inclusive and adaptable, drawing on behavioural insights, stakeholder engagement and continuous learning and adaptation.

The Commission proposes the following guidelines to the civil protection authorities and other agencies and stakeholders involved in disaster risk management:

1. **Treat risk communication as a core capability for achieving citizen preparedness.** Involve citizens and relevant stakeholders in co-designing communication to ensure that messages reflect people's needs, address barriers and provide clear, practical actions they can take.
2. **Plan risk communication across all disaster risk management phases.** Use clearly defined roles, target audiences, spokespeople, partnerships, communication channels, exercises, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Coordinate communication efforts across authorities, sectors and stakeholders and allocate appropriate and continuous resources.
3. **Take into account the different needs and tailor communication to diverse audiences**, ensuring accessibility from the earliest stages of design and adapting messages, formats, channels, narratives and messengers to different socio-demographic groups and local contexts, as well as to the diverse needs of persons with physical, sensory, intellectual and psychosocial disabilities.
4. **Evaluate and adapt communication approaches** to changing risks, audiences and information environments.

[7] SWD(2026)829.

GUIDELINES ON REACHING A POPULATION SELF-SUFFICIENCY OF A MINIMUM OF 72 HOURS (ACTION 28)

Household preparedness encompasses both the ability to meet essential needs, such as food, water, medicines and communication, cash and the knowledge, skills and confidence to manage disruptions, (e.g. cooking without electricity, cooperating with others and making sound decisions under stress).[8] Strengthening household preparedness empowers citizens as active contributors to societal resilience and helps build a lasting culture of preparedness.

Although crises may have different causes, their consequences for households are often similar, particularly disruptions to essential services, communications and supply chains. Household preparedness should therefore follow an all-hazards approach, focusing on the practical consequences of crises and the measures needed to address them.

The first 72 hours of a crisis are critical, as strengthening household self-sufficiency during the first 72 hours of a crisis helps households meet their essential needs, reduces pressure on emergency services and enables assistance to be prioritised for those most in need.

The Commission proposes the following guidelines to the civil protection authorities and other agencies and stakeholders involved in disaster risk management:

1. **Establish a coordinated, risk-informed approach to household preparedness.** Promote at least 72 hours of self-sufficiency as a minimum baseline, focusing on common consequences of crises, such as disruptions to essential services. Define clear objectives and responsibilities across authorities, civil society, businesses and communities, recognising household preparedness as complementary to public emergency response.
2. **Provide clear, practical and achievable preparedness guidance.** Help households meet essential needs for at least 72 hours. Encourage emergency plans, evacuation bags and practical skills, such as first aid. Promote affordable, gradual steps adapted to individual circumstances, rather than focusing solely on supplies.
3. **Make preparedness accessible, inclusive and a shared effort.** Tailor advice to different needs and capabilities, particularly those of persons with disabilities, low-income households and others facing barriers. Use accessible formats, trusted messengers and multiple channels, while encouraging cooperation and mutual support among households and communities.
4. **Monitor preparedness behaviours and continuously improve measures.** Regularly assess whether households understand risks, have taken practical action and can meet essential needs during disruptions. Use surveys, behavioural indicators and feedback to identify barriers, address inequalities and adapt communication and preparedness measures over time.

GUIDELINES ON PREPAREDNESS EDUCATION (ACTION 29)

Preparedness education builds the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to prevent and reduce risks, prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and disruptions. It

[8] See preparEU pilot project, Final recommendations (2025), chapter 4, page 34.

should be integrated into existing curricula, everyday learning and educator training. A whole-of-government, whole-of-society and all-hazards approach should uphold children's rights, inclusion, and well-being, while enabling schools to act as community resilience hubs.

Policymakers, national and local government officials

Preparedness education is a long-term investment in societal resilience. Policymakers and relevant authorities should establish the conditions for its sustained implementation, building on existing education and civil protection systems, and other relevant services, and adapting measures to national and local risk contexts.

The Commission proposes the following guidelines:

1. **Review existing laws, policies and preparedness arrangements, and establish a sustained framework** with clear responsibilities and coordination across education, civil protection and other sectors. Involve educators, social partners, children, families and community organisations in development and implementation.
2. **Embed preparedness in existing curricula and competence frameworks** by defining age-appropriate, measurable learning outcomes, informed by national and local risks. Preserve flexibility for schools and educators to adapt teaching methods.
3. **Assess the levels of children's preparedness and the conditions for implementing the reinforced curricula and competence frameworks**, including educator capacity, accessibility and resources. Use feedback and regularly review results to identify gaps, address inequalities, and improve policies, curricula and support.
4. **Enable implementation through initial and continuing educator training, practical teaching resources, adequate financing and cooperation with civil protection authorities, first responders and other relevant services.** Address capacity gaps and support inclusive, safe, and resilient schools with emergency and continuity planning.

Educators

Educators play a central role in translating curricula for preparedness into practical learning experiences that help children understand risks, build confidence and act appropriately during emergencies.

The Commission proposes the following guidelines:

1. **Integrate preparedness into everyday teaching, play and routines, rather than introducing a standalone subject**. Link activities to local risks and school emergency plans, using supportive, inclusive, and age-appropriate approaches that build confidence and encourage critical thinking without creating fear or anxiety.
2. **Engage children, families, educators, civil protection actors, first responders, health and social services and community organisations in preparedness education**. Respect children's rights and meaningful participation and connect classroom learning to household and community preparedness.
3. **Teach, practise, and exercise preparedness competences,** such as recognising hazards and official warnings, identifying reliable information, seeking help, knowing

when and how to call 112, basic first aid, showing resilience, solidarity and empathy, exercising and taking age-appropriate action.

4. **Assess what children can do** through observation, practical exercises and feedback. Use the findings to adapt teaching, identify gaps and strengthen educators' own preparedness through training and professional development.

GUIDELINES ON DISABILITY INCLUSIVE PREPAREDNESS (ACTION 33)

In line with the EU Preparedness Union Strategy's whole-of-society approach, effective preparedness and emergency response needs to be accessible and inclusive, enabling everyone to understand risks, access information and act safely before, during and after emergencies. Disability-inclusive preparedness strengthens the participation, autonomy and safety of persons with disabilities throughout the disaster risk management cycle, while equipping civil protection authorities and first responders to deliver accessible, appropriate and rights-based assistance that respects individual circumstances, autonomy and dignity.

Civil protection authorities and other first responders

Authorities should ensure that preparedness measures address the diverse needs and preferences of persons with disabilities, while equipping first responders with the knowledge, skills and practical tools to understand different needs of persons with disabilities, communicate effectively and adapt assistance to individual circumstances and to provide appropriate, accessible and rights-based assistance. This requires integrating accessibility and inclusion into emergency planning, communication, training and response arrangements.

The Commission proposes the following guidelines:

1. **Engage persons with disabilities and their representative organisations**. Involve persons with disabilities and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) in preparedness planning, exercises, training and evaluation, drawing on their expertise and lived experience.

2. **Integrate accessibility into emergency arrangements**. Ensure that warnings, communication, evacuation, transport, shelter and support arrangements account for different accessibility and assistance requirements.

3. **Strengthen first responder capacities**. Equip first responders with the knowledge, skills and practical tools to communicate effectively, recognise individual support needs and provide assistance that respects dignity, autonomy and informed choice.

4. **Test, evaluate and improve**. Use exercises, operational experience and feedback from persons with disabilities and OPDs to identify gaps and continuously improve procedures, equipment and training.

Organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and persons with disabilities

Strengthening disability-inclusive preparedness requires supporting persons with disabilities in developing their individual preparedness,and meaningfully involving them and their respective OPDs in the design, implementation and evaluation of preparedness measures, drawing on their lived experience to identify barriers, improve accessibility and strengthen resilience at individual, community and institutional levels.

The Commission proposes the following guidelines:

1. **Develop and support individual preparedness arrangements.** Consider personal emergency plans that reflect local risks, communication preferences, essential supplies, medication, assistive devices and individual support requirements, including preparedness for at least 72 hours.
2. **Strengthen support networks.** Identify trusted contacts, available support services and accessible evacuation or shelter arrangements, taking account of individual circumstances and needs.
3. **Participate in preparedness planning and implementation.** Engage with relevant authorities and service providers, including through OPDs, to help ensure that preparedness measures reflect lived experience and address accessibility barriers.
4. **Review and adapt preparedness measures.** Regularly update personal arrangements and share experiences and feedback to support continuous improvement of individual and community preparedness.

FROM POPULATION PREPAREDNESS TO A MORE RESILIENT UNION

The next step is to translate guidance into sustained action for a better prepared population and a resilient Union. Within the framework of solidarity and mutual cooperation of the UCPM, EU MS and PS as well as relevant authorities are encouraged to monitor both implementation and effectiveness, including through appropriate indicators, exercises, feedback from communities and lessons learned from emergencies, using the findings to continuously improve preparedness measures and ensure they remain accessible, inclusive and responsive to evolving risks.

The Commission will continue to support cooperation, knowledge exchange and capacity-building under the UCPM, including through its Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network. As part of an ongoing collaborative process, the guidance may be reviewed at a later stage, taking into account feedback and lessons learnt and, where relevant, incorporating new examples and practices identified over time.

Building a Preparedness Union is a shared endeavour, requiring collective efforts to empower people and communities to understand risks, prepare for disruption and act appropriately during emergencies, ultimately contributing to **a stronger culture of preparedness**.

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For the Secretary-General

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Decision-making & Collegiality
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