

RESPONDING TO EMERGENCY SITUATIONS: GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATIONS

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SHORT INTRODUCTION TO EMERGENCY SITUATIONS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

South-East Europe region is increasingly threatened by various types of natural disasters (floods, droughts, temperature extremes, earthquakes, landslides, storms, etc.), technical and technological accidents, hazardous incidents and other emergencies, and this situation calls for an emergent and adequate response of responsible national and local actors.

Emergency management can be defined as an ongoing process to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from an incident that threatens life, property, operations, or the environment¹. It is the quintessential (national and local) government role, and it is their duty to provide support and assistance when the resources of citizens are overwhelmed.

In recent history, the national emergency management system is a complex network of public (state and local authorities), private (companies providing services to governments by contract) and non-government organizations (nonprofit and charitable organization, official and *ad hoc* volunteer groups, etc.) and individuals. Regardless of concrete form this emergency management system is organized in specific country, it is always set by strict regulations and clear duties and obligations of major actors. It usually starts from the principle that crisis should be solved **where** it occurs and in this sense, an important part of responsibilities is transferred to local governments. Having in mind that firstly, this transfer of responsibilities is not always accompanied by necessary legal and institutional 'upgrading' of the system, material and technical investments and staff trainings, and secondly, that there is a great discrepancies between municipalities in their capabilities to react properly in case of emergency, involvement of association of local authorities (i.e. *association* in further text) is to some extent expected and often required.

Disaster risk management refers to the systematic process of using administrative decisions, organization, operational skills, and capacities to implement policies, strategies, and coping capacities of the society and communities to lessen the impacts of natural hazards and related environmental and technological disasters². This includes all forms of activities, including structural and nonstructural measures to avoid (prevention) or to limit (mitigation, preparedness, and response) the adverse effects of hazards (adapted from UN/ISDR, 2004). Disaster risk management is usually divided into three main areas of activity:

1. disaster risk reduction (**prevention**, mitigation, and preparedness),
2. **disaster response** (rescue and relief), and
3. disaster recovery (rehabilitation and reconstruction).

With a clear notion that in reality these areas of activity overlap and affect each other, the following guidelines should help associations to respond properly in emergency with emphasis on the following stages within disaster risk management: **PRERAREDNESS activities** within the first phase (disaster risk reduction), **RESPONSE ACTIVITIES** as the second component followed by suggestion of **activities to be conveyed by the association in the post-emergency stage** for purpose to strengthen local and national capacities for future responses. Depending on type of emergency and kind of activities done by associations, these **FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES** in certain cases can refer to disaster recovery (stage 3 of disaster risk management) but usually are more related to long-term reform and system changes in national and local emergency management.

In short, the manual presents the basics for the associations of local authorities on preparedness and responding in emergency with emphasis on providing support to the municipalities. *Since the associations of local authorities in the region of South-East Europe are of different size and capacity, it is suggested for each of them to adjust these guidelines to its human, technical and other resources.* Finally, even though the associations are mostly member organizations, in times of emergency it is of key importance to assist and provide support to **ALL** affected municipalities regardless of their membership status.

1 NFPA 1600 Standard on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs, NFPA 1600:2007)

2 http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSF/Resources/Building_Resilient_Communities_Complete.pdf

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASSOCIATIONS IN THE EMERGENCIES

The roles and responses of association in emergency situations depend on type and size of crisis that hit certain municipality(ies) but in general, association should be recognized as a focal point of all (member) municipalities, and the main coordinating and mobilizing actor on their behalf.

In short, the role of association can be seen as such:

1. to **mobilize support and assistance for affected municipalities** through efficient and regular communication and coordination between municipalities (association as an organizer of peer-to-peer-support);
2. to **enable additional state support for affected municipalities through effective communication and coordination with key state institutions** and synchronized actions with national level;
3. to **gather the international support**³ (financial, material, technical, expert) for affected areas through prompt and efficient communication and coordination with international actors.

Information and communication activities of the association and raising (both national and international) public awareness should pervade all mentioned roles becoming incorporated function in each of them.

Finally, it is of key importance to state that response of association in emergencies has **to be approved by and coordinated with national institutions** in charge of managing concrete emergency such as, national government and state crisis team, ministry of interior and sector for emergency management, agencies and directorates for rescue and protection, other line ministries, national army, directorate for commodity reserves, etc.



(IN ACCORDANCE TO ITS HUMAN, TECHNICAL AND OTHER CAPACITIES) THE ROLE OF ASSOCIATION IN EMERGENCY IS TO MOBILIZE LOCAL (PEER-TO-PEER) SUPPORT AND ASSISTANCE FOR AFFECTED MUNICIPALITIES, TO ENABLE ADDITIONAL STATE SUPPORT THROUGH SYNCHRONIZED ACTIVITIES WITH KEY NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AND TO GATHER THE INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT FOR MUNICIPALITY(IES) IN NEED.

³ Support of international institutions and organizations, professional/body organizations and associations, other non-affected national associations of local authorities, etc.

ASSOCIATION'S (LGA) RESPONSE IN EMERGENCY SCHEME

PREPAREDNESS activities:

- Defining of LGA internal structure in charge of responding
- Preparing of action plans for responding in emergencies
- Preparing of guidelines for LGs on cooperation with the association in times of emergency
- Preparing of procedures for information management and keeping data bases up-dated
- Initiating/strengthening cooperation with state

LGA RESPONSE IN EMERGENCY

In first 24 hours!

Activation of LGA internal structure: CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM and subordinated teams (for coordination with municipalities, national and international institutions, visits to affected LGs, etc.)

Communication with key state institutions on LGA role in emergency

Releasing of **OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT ON LGA ROLE IN EMERGENCY**, planned activities and types of support needed

Activities towards **MUNICIPALITIES:**

- detailed analysis of situation in affected areas and support needed;
- sending **APPEALS FOR CONCRETE HELP TO NON-AFFECTED LGs**;
- introducing 24/7 help-desk;
- opening emergency phone line.

Activities towards **STATE:**

- communication & coordination on hourly basis;
- regular informing on new findings and special needs of affected;
- sending official appeals on additional help need from state.

Activities towards **INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:**

- sending an **OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT ON EMERGENCY AND HELP NEEDED**

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

In following days

Activities towards **MUNICIPALITIES:**

- regular monitoring of situation;
- sending up-dated **APPEALS FOR HELP TO NON-AFFECTED LGs**;
- keeping clear records on support still needed and support already provided to affected LGs;
- opening of bank account for national donations collecting.

Activities towards **STATE:**

- regular communication, coordination & synchronization of activities;
- informing on current findings and needs of affected;
- launching joint initiatives to help affected LGs.

Activities towards **INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:**

- regular informing on situation and support needed in affected LGs;
- sending concrete **APPEALS FOR HELP** to affected LGs;
- opening of bank account for collecting of donations from abroad.

FOLLOW-UP activities:

- field work (visits to affected LGs);
- further coordination of support for affected LGs;
- internal/LGA performance evaluation;
- analysis of municipal response in emergency;
- if needed, adjustment of internal (LGA and municipal) procedures for responding in emergency;
- LGA meetings and expert round-tables, analysis and initiatives for future.

PREPAREDNESS ACTIVITIES TO BE TAKEN BY ASSOCIATIONS

Preparedness activities assume that trained staff and other resources are identified and available to respond in case of emergency.

Proposed preparedness actions to be implemented by associations in order to be ready to urgently react in time of emergency crisis, are as follows:

- ✎ **Defining of internal structure** i.e. crisis management team as leading factor and other responsible bodies within the association which are in charge of responding in emergency situation. This managing structure should be on time introduced to association's employees and (member) municipalities also.
- ✎ Identifying of potential disasters/hazards and **preparation of association's action plans for responding** in at least the most probable ones⁴;
- ✎ **Preparing of unified guidelines** for municipalities on how to cooperate with the association in time of emergency;
- ✎ **Preparing of procedures for information management** (PR, information and communication activities) in time of crisis;
- ✎ **Preparing of up-dated data bases with contacts of relevant stakeholders**, e-mailing lists, etc. for quick emergency response;
- ✎ Initiating/strengthening **cooperation with national institutions** in charge of managing emergencies through **meetings, joint conferences, actions and initiatives raised**, etc. Signing the **memorandums of understanding** (MoU) with most responsible ones could also be an important way to confirm mutual interests in this area and presents a good platform for determining the association's role in emergency situations.



EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS IS A CONTINUOUS ACTIVITY, ASSOCIATION SHOULD WRITE ITS PLAN AND EXERCISE IT!

⁴ It is of course should depending of type of emergency specify: 1) internal structure responsible in concrete emergency situation with detailed explanations on roles and responsibilities of each team; 2) key (national and international) institutions responsible in concrete emergency and ways of communication and coordination with them; 3) types of support municipalities would probably need in concrete emergency and ways of communication and coordination with local level; 4) key communicational channels and tools for concrete situation. This kind of planning helps the association to respond properly and on time.

RESPONSE ACTIVITIES IN EMERGENCY SITUATION, STEPS TO BE TAKEN

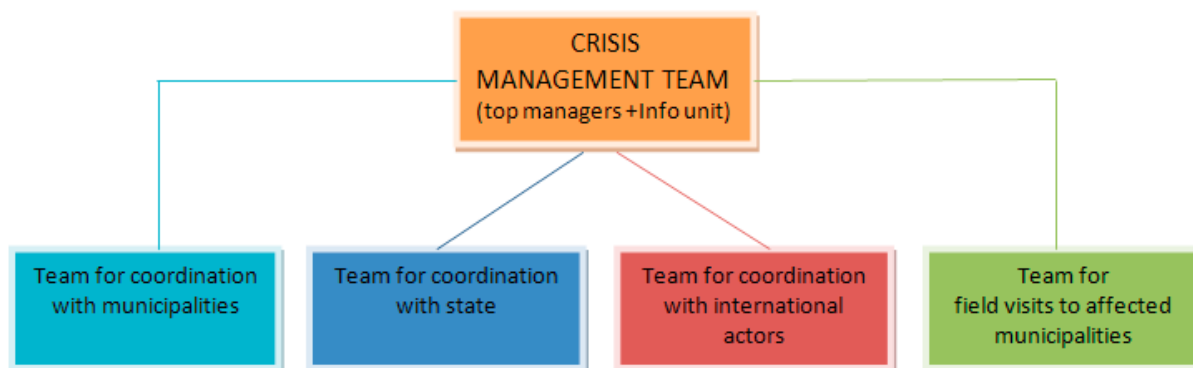
Step 1 - Activation of internal structure in charge of managing emergency followed by:

- Informing the association's employees on activation of the internal structure and emergency situation ahead (meeting with staff, e-mail);
- Official informing of municipalities on activation of the internal structure and emergency situation (e-mail, association's web-site);

Internal structure in time of emergency requires forming of **CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM** (consisting of association's core managers⁵ plus Press Officer/Information Unit) which is in charge of overall managing and decision making process. This crisis management team monitors the situation, manages the overall process and makes key decisions on activities the association should implement.

This key authority (crisis management team) forms, depending on type of emergency, subordinated bodies in charge of concrete activity such as **TEAM FOR COORDINATION WITH MUNICIPALITIES, TEAM FOR COORDINATION WITH KEY NATIONAL/STATE INSTITUTIONS, TEAM FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, TEAM FOR FIELD VISITS TO AFFECTED MUNICIPALITIES**, etc. Each of these teams performs tasks from its area of work and regularly up-date the crisis management team on developments. In order to enable effective and smooth in-house communication and coordination, it is proposed that **each of these subordinating teams is led by a top manager, already active in main, crisis management team.**

Example of association's internal structure during emergency:



As previously mentioned, since the associations are of different size and capacities, it is of great importance for them to adjust the proposed structure to its human capacities. In case of smaller associations with fewer employees, crisis management team possibly corresponds with top management structure in charge of managing the association in regular time; no matter this, it is very important this internal structure responsible for emergency response to be set clearly and prior to crisis with detailed explanations on roles and responsibilities of each member of crisis and other teams. Furthermore, instead of proposed teams responsible for coordination with different (local, national and international) actors, in case of smaller associations, one person/employee can be in charge of one concrete function; on very extreme occasions, one employee can comprise two roles and be responsible for coordination with, for example, national and international arena.

In order to be capable enough to assist and provide support, associations are also advised to detect (research) the concrete needs of municipalities in times of emergency and then prior to crisis 'equip' themselves (prepare human, technical and other resources) for adequate support. A short survey on municipal expectations on the association's role in emergency can be of great assistance for the associations while preparing to respond in emergency. This could be especially useful for smaller associations enabling them to prioritized assistance to municipalities and prepare its capacities in accordance to clear expectations of municipalities.

⁵ Apart of top managers as more professional staff, president of the association (i.e. highest elected representative) should be also fully involved in Crisis Management Team decision-making process. On certain occasions, few proactive members of the association's Executive Board should be also involved but it is very important to be aware that in order to be fully effective this Crisis Management Team should not be overburdened with too many members.

Step 2 - Initiation of horizontal and vertical communication and coordination of support

Horizontal and vertical communication refer to different levels of information flow; in this concrete case, communication between the association and municipalities can be defined as horizontal communication while communication of association with national and international community presents a vertical information flow.

In this **HORIZONTAL COMMUNICATION**, association presents itself as a focal point for all municipalities, main networking body between municipalities and official exponent of local interest before national and international stakeholders.



The overall horizontal communication is led by **crisis management team** and **team for coordination with municipalities** with clear distinction of responsibilities between them.

In case of emergency, the very first step of association is to release an **official announcement** to all municipalities on its **role** in concrete crisis, **activities planned** to be realized by the association and clear information what municipalities and other institutions are invited **to do** in order to help.

This announcement should be sent to all municipalities **via e-mail** and posted on association's **web-site** and other media.

Depending on type of emergency, association should react promptly showing it is at full disposal to all municipalities for assistance and help (possible activities include: **enabling 24h emergency assistance to affected municipality(ies)**, **opening emergency phone line**, **coordinating of support to affected areas**, **opening special domestic and foreign bank accounts**, **launching donation campaigns**, etc.).

The most efficient communication channels and tools in horizontal (peer-to-peer) support:

1. **direct e-mailing to mayors and their cabinets** for regular briefing and sending of individual and group appeals for help.
2. **individual phone calls** to mayors and other local representatives.
3. (if possible and if needed) **meetings** and sessions of relevant association's bodies.
4. addressing municipalities through the **association's media** (web-site, public and internal social networks, blogs, etc).

VERTICAL COMMUNICATION refers to association's communication and coordination efforts with national and international stakeholders.

In relation to state level, response of association in emergency has to be **approved by and coordinated with national institutions** in charge of responding in concrete emergency case (depending on state organization, these institutions could be: **national government and state crisis team**, **ministry of interior and sector for emergency management**, **agencies and directorates for rescue and protection**, **other line ministries**, **national army**, **directorates for commodity reserves**). The role of association in concrete emergency should be confirmed with responsible institutions **prior** to releasing public announcement on association's involvement in crisis and should be coordinated with state throughout whole emergency period.

This communication with key national institutions is usually conveyed through **official letters, face-to-face/direct talks, meetings, phone calls and e-mails**. In state of emergency, association should use official corresponding when it is necessary to have it in written and signed(!) but if possible, daily operational issues should be confirmed in more efficient manner through direct and e-mail communication.

The overall coordination and communication at this level should be done through special **team in charge of coordination with key national stakeholders**.

COORDINATION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY involves different activities with numerous institutions and organization that can be of great help in providing material, financial and expert support for affected municipalities, such as international institutions and organizations, donor community, professional/body organizations and associations, sister-associations of local authorities, twinning municipalities, etc.

These activities are done by a special team in charge of coordination with stakeholders from abroad. This team regularly informs top management on developments in this field and important information are disseminated to national stakeholders as well. For easier communication and coordination of activities within the association, it is proposed the leader of this team should be someone from top management

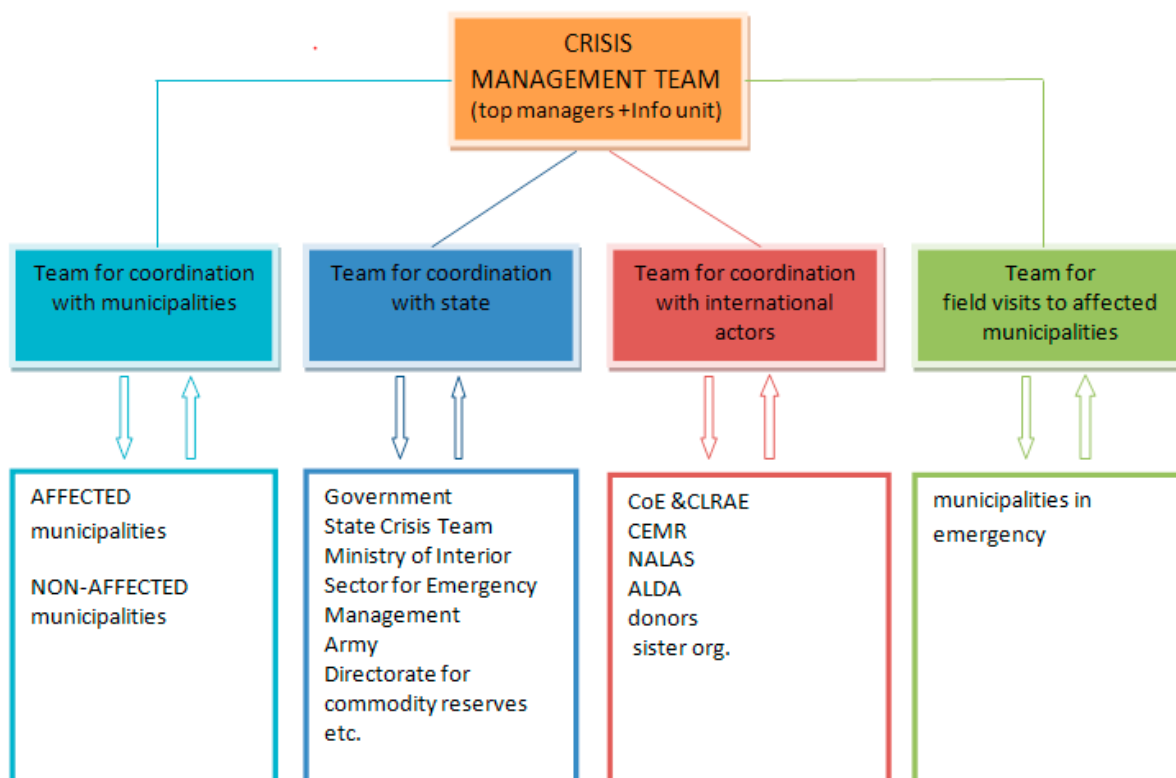
who is, for example, in regular times in charge of international cooperation, and already a member of main, crisis management team.

➤ In case of association of local authorities, important international institutions and organizations are Council of Europe and Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA), key international donor organizations with special emphasis on donors operating in concrete country, sister-associations from the region and worldwide, etc.

Depending on type of disaster and concrete support needed, there are also at disposal different international/donor funds available to help in risk reduction, but also in response and disaster recovery period, such as:

- European Union (IPA offering funds to both EU candidate countries and potential candidates, EU Solidarity Fund for member-states);
- UN (World Food Programme, World Health Organization, Central Emergency Response Fund-CERF, UNDP, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNOPS, UNICEF, etc.);
- World Bank (including IFC, IDA, etc.);
- and numerous international aid/humanitarian organizations such as: Red Cross (including Disaster Relief Emergency Fund-DREF), Oxfam, CARE, Save the Children, etc.

Example of association's coordination process and key stakeholders:



Step 3 - Association's assistance in mobilizing support

Support to affected municipalities vary depending on concrete emergency situation; furthermore, types of this support change on daily (sometimes hourly) basis i.e. what is needed one day is not needed a day after. It means that association should be deeply familiarized what kind of assistance and help is needed in crisis region.

This support to affected municipalities could be, for this purpose, divided into:

- a) **'horizontal support'** provided by association and non-affected municipalities to those affected: material, financial and expert support, and in this sense, the associations should be a mobilizer and coordinator for this support.

- b) **'vertical support'** i.e. support coordinated with state (for example, support in food negotiated with state directorate for commodity reserves) and/or international actors (material, financial and expert support).

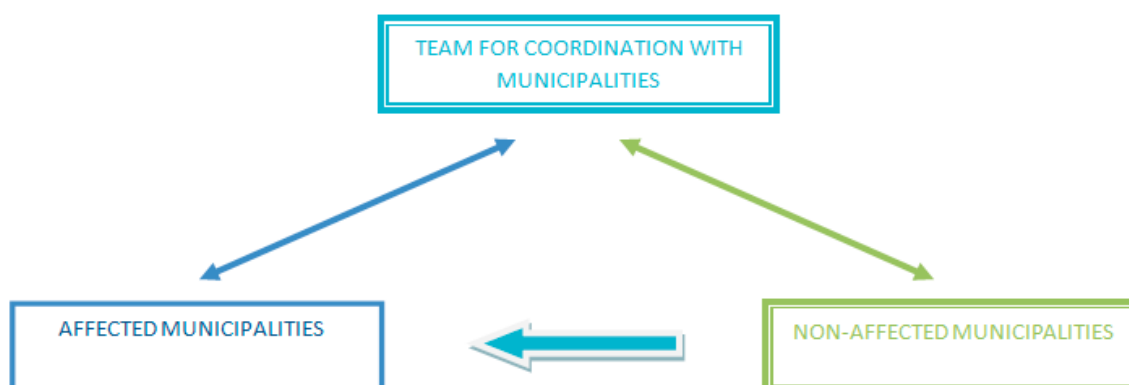
As said, support⁶ going from the association to affected municipalities largely depends on type of emergency and generally speaking this support can be defined as:

1. **material support** in drinking water, food, hygiene products, clothes and footwear, etc. This is probably the easiest task to be performed by association and its team in charge of communication with municipalities. By sending (via e-mail) regular up-dates and **appeals** to non-affected municipalities to help colleagues and citizens in crisis areas, large amount of these supplies can be collected.
2. **technical support** in heavy machinery (tracks, large transporters, bulldozers, water drainage pumps, drying equipment, etc.) which also can be organized by association's team in charge of communication with municipalities. In addition to this, team in charge of international cooperation can also ask the international community to enable this technical support.
3. **financial support** gained through donations from the country and abroad. In order to collect enough financial resources, association is usually allowed to open domestic and foreign bank accounts so all funds can be collect at one place and distributed from there directly to those in need. This is probably the heaviest activity for the association due to many regulations and restrictions existing in financial field.
4. **expert support**, especially important in time of sanitation works. This support can be locally arranged (on request, neighbouring municipality can send its experts to affected areas) or internationally organized when partner organizations from abroad send their experts to provide local support.

PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT i.e. HORIZONTAL SUPPORT FROM NON-AFFECTED TO AFFECTED MUNICIPALITIES - Probably the most important role of association in emergency is to obtain this support through coordination with non-affected municipalities. Moreover, it could be said it is the association's responsibility to organize this peer-to-peer support between affected and non-affected municipalities putting itself on the top of the coordination chain.

Association should present itself as a focal point for all municipalities and a main networking body between affected and non-affected municipalities. In short, **association becomes an initiator and organizer of peer-to-peer support between municipalities.**

Example of coordination of support between municipalities:



⁶ In order to achieve better results, smaller associations with limited resources can concentrate, for example, on providing only material, or material and technical support, rather than expanding its activities to all mention support areas with less results.

➔ After the emergency is declared and it becomes clear the assistance is needed in certain areas, association starts with coordination of support between non-affected and affected municipalities by sending an **official announcement** to all municipalities stating 1) it will assist municipalities in collecting necessary aid and 2) those municipalities in need should contact the association with concrete list of urgently needed supplies.

Mobilization, coordination and distribution of support between non-affected and affected municipalities should be done by a **team in charge of coordination with municipalities**. Like in other teams, this team is led by one of top managers who is also a member of main, crisis management team.

The main role of this team is to regularly contact (by phone and/or via e-mail) all non-affected municipalities and check if and what type of support they can offer and, in accordance to this, make up-dated **records on available support**. On the other hand, this team has to be in daily communication with affected municipalities and regularly check what kind of help is needed in concrete moment. Comparison of these two data will immediately show what kind of support is available and can be delivered to municipalities in need.

While it is coordinating support between municipalities, it is very important this team is in regular (in-house) communication with other teams, especially with those coordinating international support in order to enable full synchronization of activities.

If the emergency hits a large number of municipalities, for easier coordination of help it is proposed that every member of this team becomes responsible for communication with certain/concrete municipalities i.e. a kind of **liaison officer** who is in daily contact with same municipalities.

For better and more effective coordination of help, association could advise affected municipality(ies) to also **delegate a person from municipal staff** (someone who is active in local emergency team and deeply involved in emergency matters) to be at full disposal of association's liaison officer. In this way, communication on the relation association-municipality would not be jeopardized with possible cacophony.

The main communication channels in this coordination process are:

- phone calls and e-mails
- but also direct visits to affected municipalities and field assessments.

SUPPORT FROM THE STATE - In regard to support coordinated with state, it is mostly concerning relations and cooperation with national government and state crisis team, ministry of interior and sector for emergency management, other line ministries, national army, directorate for commodity reserves, etc.

There are different tasks to be performed by the association in this area:

1. due to association regular communication with affected municipalities, it should present itself as one of key 'insiders' with relevant information on current state and support needed; having this role, association regularly up-dates relevant state institutions what kind of support is needed from national level;
2. due to prior good relations with state institutions, association can ask for certain aid to be urgently send to affected areas (for example, in communication with national government, association can appeal concrete commodity reserves to be sent to those in need);
3. in joint action with state institutions, association can launch action and initiatives in order to support affected municipalities.

This communication with key national institutions is usually conveyed through **official letters, face-to face/direct talks, meetings, phone calls and e-mails** but, as said, the main prerequisite for good cooperation in this field are previously established good relations.

SUPPORT FROM ABROAD – This kind of assistance is very much related to the extent of emergency and prior relations of the association with international community. Addressing international institutions for support should be a practice in case of larger crisis and when national and local resources are not satisfactory for proper response, and it can be of great help in providing **material, financial and expert support** for affected municipalities.

Communication with the international community conveys the team in charge specifically for this task but in full accordance with instructions of crisis management team. **The very first step of this team** is informing international arena on emergency situation happening in the country, its size and catastrophe, and providing clear inputs what kind of help is needed from outside. This initial informing should be **official** (letter e-mailed to official addresses and personal e-mails of chief executives) but followed with phone calls done by association top management. Later on, this communication should be continued on lower level though team in charge for this task who will continue to inform the international community on current situation⁷ daily.

Communication with international institutions is mostly conveyed via **e-mail and phone calls**, but it is also important to regularly inform on foreign donations on the association's web-site.

As previously mentioned, this cooperation is mostly done by the team in charge of coordinating with international institutions led by a top manager already familiar with this field.

Other activities - Finally, there are also many other activities to be performed in order to organize the support:

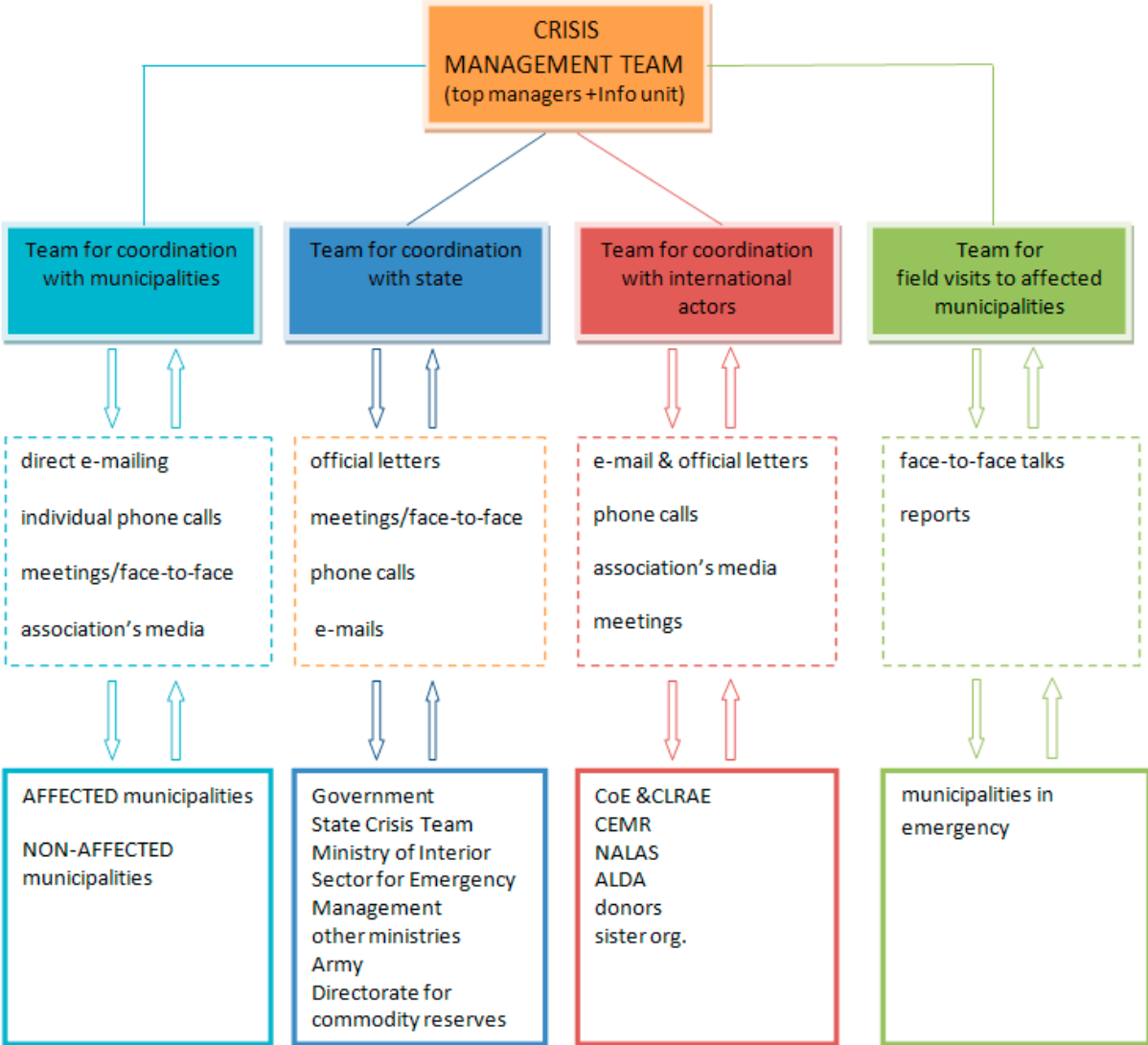
- Donation campaigns;
- Introducing a special phone number for collecting financial resources;
- Launching volunteering activities.

Association can also partner:

- national health institutions in their duties to take full care about public health during and after emergency crisis;
- humanitarian organizations (such as the Red Cross, different UN agencies, etc.), non-government and community-based organizations in their volunteering actions.

⁷ Once the emergency situation is ended, association should send official thank you letter to all institutions and organizations addressed in initial communication.

Example of association's coordination process: key communication channels and stakeholders



INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Alongside all previously mentioned activities, factor of great importance and often a result changing factor are information and communication activities that never stop in time of emergency. In short, without proper communications, the effectiveness of the response can be jeopardized. The general public is obliged to know what is the real situation in affected municipality(ies) and this is a great opportunity for the association to present itself as a reliable source of information.

As already mentioned, information and communication activities pervade all association's actions becoming incorporated factor in all of them. In order to convey these activities in professional, responsible and effective manner and have full control over situation, all public relations activities should be realized in close cooperation with the association's top management meaning that Press Officer/Information Unit should be a part of Crisis Management Team and as such involved in overall management and decision-making process.

In this communication to general public, association uses different channels and tools to convey the message:

- **traditional media** (TV and radio, press) and in relation to this, different tools to send the information: press conferences (only on very important occasions!), official press announcements/press releases, individual press statements, formal and informal briefings for journalists, etc.
- **online media** (association web-site, public and internal social networks, blogs, etc).

Even though certain emergencies can, for example, make great damage on power/phone/Internet supply and cause problems in association's performance, it is of great importance for the association to stay online and continue informing on emergency happening at certain municipalities. Due to many benefits of 21st century such as electricity generators, portable computers and smart phones, press officers and web administrators are not obliged to work exclusively from the office but anywhere with only one prerequisite – a stable Internet connection. There are many reasons for the association but also for affected municipalities to be online in time of emergency, and the most important are: 1) expert and wide public would believe more and offer their support quicker **ONLY** when it is official and there is no better way to make it official than publish through official online media; 2) in case the association collects material, financial and other support for affected areas, web-site and social media are the most effective tools in providing technical details on support needed (collection centers, distribution, bank accounts, etc.); 3) online media, better than any other channel, enable up-to-date informing on situation putting the association and/or affected municipality on top of communication.

Therefore, in case of emergency, **association's web-site** should be regularly (hourly) up-dated in order to provide (1) reliable information on situation, (2) help that is needed and (3) ways how to help to those in need. In short, the web-site is one of main communication tools for dissemination of information on current state in the emergency areas, type of support needed and proposed actions and ways of support (all these information should be clearly presented in separated and visible web sections!).



Home-page of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities' web-site during fbods in May 2014

When dealing with **social media**, using social networks to communicate emergency, safety and preparedness information has become a standard operation. Social media tools allow emergency managers to disseminate information to wider audiences, interact with the public, get better situational awareness, and improve collaboration for sharing information during an emergency and sharing of best practices and lessons learned. Secondly, the public is turning to social media technologies to obtain up to date information during emergencies and to share data about the disaster in the form of geo data, text, pictures, video, or a combination of these media. For that reason, social media have become one of main tools for better informing and awareness raising, as well as for support and aid collecting.

But for purpose to use these media in proper way, it is very important to have a previous experience in this field and to know how each of them operates. Managing of social media (Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Google+, LinkedIn, etc.) is a serious responsibility especially in time of emergency, and in order to obtain positive results in this communication it is very important to have trained and experienced social media managers. In case this condition is fulfilled and association has at its disposal trained staff, **communication on social media starts with the moment emergency begins and ends after emergency is officially ended with covering post-emergency developments**. Throughout emergency, communication never stops and association should on hourly basis report on situation, help needed, support already provided, new developments, etc.

The main benefits of using social media in emergency response are:

- fast information flow and effective information exchange;
- two-way communication and interaction with wide audience;
- efficient coordination of support;
- large visibility of actions.

👉 **Photo and video** – As already mentioned, since a picture is worth a thousand words, live footage from the emergency area, recorded appeals for help, photo scenes from affected territories, easily attract wide attention and become viral, and as such they are also useful tool for the associations in their efforts to achieve visibility. Photo and video materials are especially important in communication of association on web-site and social media, where prove to be one of main tools for drawing attention to concrete subject.

USEFUL TIPS ON COOPERATION WITH THE MEDIA:

- 👉 always present only information that are reliable.
- 👉 have one spokesperson on behalf of association, someone who is calm, trustworthy and 'good with camera'.
- 👉 use the media to send urgent appeals for help needed in affected areas.
- 👉 organize for mayors of affected municipalities to give the press statements, especially for those coming from small municipalities and unable to attract the media attention.
- 👉 present the association as a speaker on behalf of affected municipalities and keep the media attention on high level by regular informing on current situation but be careful not to overdo it since it can leave a bad impression the association is only eager for attention and cheap promotion.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES TO BE IMPLEMENTED BY ASSOCIATIONS

The support from the association to affected municipalities should not be stopped with the official ending of emergency situation but it should be continued in numerous follow-up activities such as:

- ✦ Field work such as visits to affected municipality(ies), meetings with local official and face-to face discussion on problems and further support they need from the association;
- ✦ Continuation of providing material, technical, expert and financial support to those in emergency in accordance to their needs;
- ✦ Internal performance evaluation – analysis of effectiveness of the association’s response in concrete emergency comprising secretariat (internal staff) estimations and member municipalities’ opinions;
- ✦ Deep (expert) performance analysis of municipal response in the crisis situation;
- ✦ If needed and based on previous performance evaluation, adjustment of internal (both association and municipal) procedures for responding in emergency situation;
- ✦ Organization of meetings of association’ bodies and expert round-tables involving key state institutions and discussing overall response (national and local) in order to make proposals for improving the efficiency in future;
- ✦ If needed, based on previous, launching initiatives (association on behalf of members) for reform of certain system’s issues in order to provide better response in emergency situation in future.



EMERGENCY RESPOSE STARTS WITH EMERGENCY SITUATION AND ENDS LONG AFTER THE CONCRETE EMERGENCY IS OFFICIALY ENDED – DO NOT FORGET TO PROCEED WITH FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES!

DETECTED PROBLEM AREAS

Emergency response requires efforts and commitment of the association. Communication between the association and affected municipalities starts with the day emergency occurs and ends when all effects of crisis are eliminated and full recovery proceeds. This means that association faces a serious work which can last for months. Due to previously mentioned, its capacity to handle such events must be built, and preparations are essential.

Possible problems in the association's response to emergency are:

- ✎ association is not fully prepared to respond effectively in time of crisis. In order to avoid this, it is of key importance to implement preparedness activities described in chapter 4 of this guide.
- ✎ association has not full support from responsible national institutions and is not able to react properly. Hence, it is very important (prior to emergency!) to build a positive reputation in state arena through regular contacts, meetings, etc. (also described in chapter 4).
- ✎ association is not responding on time (when the emergency starts) and misses the opportunity to put itself on top of coordination and communication chain.
- ✎ association is reacting properly at the beginning of emergency but it reduces activism in the long run for various reasons (not enough internal capacity to manage the situation, loses interest, etc).

All mentioned and other problems are detected in the area of responding to emergency, and can be eliminated with proper preparatory activities.

CONCLUSION

As other stakeholders involved in emergency response, it is also expected the association of local authorities to **BE FULLY PREPARED** and to **RESPOND PROPERLY** in time crisis i.e. its full involvement in each of separate phases: **preparedness, response and post-emergency** becomes a necessity for municipalities but also highly appreciate by national actors as well.

The association should, in accordance to its human, technical and other capacities, presents itself as a provider of emergency response services for municipalities, exponent of their interests and needs, and main networking body and coordinator of support in time of crisis. All these efforts should be regularly coordinated and communicated with state (and international arena) and delivered to municipalities in most efficient way.

In order to react properly in time of emergency, the association should always keep in mind the following:

- ✎ Be **ready (prepared, trained)** for response.
- ✎ React **promptly**.
- ✎ Be **proactive** and **always at disposal**.
- ✎ Be **transparent in your work and open for communication**.
- ✎ Present yourself in media, but **not overdo** it.
- ✎ Do not neglect **follow-up activities**.
- ✎ **Send thank you letters** to all actors involved in providing support to affected region.

WHO WE ARE?



NALAS is a network of associations of local authorities of South East Europe. The Network brings together 16 Associations which represent roughly 9000 local authorities, directly elected by more than 80 million citizens of this region. The NALAS Secretariat, based in Skopje, is responsible for the overall coordination and the implementation of the activities.

NALAS was created in 2001 following the first Forum of Cities and Regions of South-East Europe (Skopje, November 2000), organised by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. The Network was established under the auspices of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (Working Table 1) and the Council of Europe. During the first years, NALAS functioned as an informal organisation with regular meetings, seminars and training programmes. In July 2005 NALAS became an officially registered association with its seat in Strasbourg. The NALAS Secretariat was established in March 2007.

NALAS promotes the process of decentralisation in cooperation with central governments and international organisations, considering local self-government as a key issue in the current process of transition affecting the various countries in South-East Europe. NALAS builds partnerships in order to contribute to the reconciliation and stabilisation process in the region and henceforth contributes to the process of the European integration of the whole region.

NALAS initiates and carries out regional initiatives for its members and helps the associations to become viable representatives of local authorities vis-à-vis central government. NALAS aims to provide services to local governments for the benefit of the citizens in the region and wishes to develop itself as the knowledge centre for local government development in South-East Europe, recognised among all relevant stakeholders.

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