

Workshop on improving civil protection through lessons learnt Copenhagen, 16-18 January 2012

Workshop Summary

The Copenhagen framework on lessons learnt

Summary

The workshop was held in Copenhagen January 16th to 18th and included experts from 28 participating states, the European Commission and the Council Secretariat.

During the workshop, the participants discussed the value of using lessons learnt to improve the EU civil protection cooperation, pointing to the need for a systematic, focused and coherent approach for gathering, analysing, disseminating and implementing lessons learnt. The need for keeping the lessons learnt process as simple as possible and ensuring ownership in all phases was pointed out.

Background

The existing Council Decision of 8 November 2007 establishing a Community Civil Protection Mechanism (recast) urges in Article 5(7) the Commission to "setting up a programme of lessons learnt from the interventions conducted within the framework of the Mechanism and disseminating these lessons through the information system". The 2011 Commission proposal for a revision of the European Union Civil Protection legislation reinforces the call to strengthen the programme and include lessons learnt from interventions, trainings and exercises. The programme should contribute to the overall objectives of ensuring a more effective, efficient and coherent disaster management. So far, several meetings and reports aimed at identifying lessons learnt have been conducted and communicated through a lessons learnt library.

Workshop theme

The purpose of the lessons learnt workshop during the Danish Presidency of the Council of the European Union was to discuss methods and tools for strengthening the EU civil protection approach to evaluation and lessons learnt.

The workshop departed from the assumption that increased integration of past experiences into the cooperation would strengthen the European disaster response and help ensuring that the Mechanism remains a dynamic and relevant instrument in the future.

Four phases were identified as vital prerequisites for a comprehensive and effective lessons learnt framework:

1. Collecting data and information from interventions
2. Analysing and validating relevant information
3. Disseminating knowledge
4. Implementing lessons learnt

The discussions focused on European disaster response, but it is envisaged that the framework also could be applicable or linked to evaluating exercises and other types of preparedness activities.

The following paragraphs present the general content of the discussions during the workshop.

1. Collecting data and information from interventions

Data collection and information gathering should take place in parallel to the mission in order to constitute a comprehensive and adequate basis for the evaluation. Information can be gathered from the disaster stricken country, the Commission, the deployed EU-teams, the participating states, UN, other international organisations and NGOs, or other relevant actors.

By making lessons learnt an integral part of the mission, focus on the most important issues could be easier to achieve. This could be done by organising the lessons learnt work around a function (a person or a team) in charge of collecting data and input to gather an overview of relevant issues. The process could be carried out in close cooperation with the EU team leader, key participating states and the Commission.

Information from the whole mission cycle would be relevant for evaluation. It was suggested that there ought to be an increased focus on gathering information from participating states, including information on the use of modules and other capacities deployed for disaster response.

In order to capture the essence of a mission, each team either deployed by the EU or by a participating state should be encouraged to pinpoint the most important issues and subjects that could be beneficial to share with the EU civil protection community. This focused information gathering could be made through an easy-to-use template, enabling comparison with data from other sources. A systematically conducted hot wash up should be considered at the end of a mission.

2. Analysing and validating relevant information

The analysis should assess the most important issues of the data gathering and information collection processes, focusing on constructive solutions to generic situations. The analysis should identify lessons of the mission and designate target groups.

The analysis should focus on assessing how relevant, effective, efficient and coherent the intervention had been. A designated function (person or team) in charge of data gathering could also play a key role in the analysis phase, with the task of taking a critical and constructive approach to the data, focusing on matters of general character with relevance for the larger civil protection community. Functions within the national headquarters and the Commission should be asked to validate the analysis.

In case of larger or more complex interventions a more comprehensive procedure should be considered in order to get a broader picture of the lessons learnt.

To draw lessons, which are significant for civil protection activities as a whole, regular (possibly yearly) stocktaking meetings could be carried out by the Commission. On the basis of the individual evaluation reports for the given period, a general lessons learnt document could be presented and discussed with the participating states.

3. Disseminating knowledge

Disseminating knowledge to the relevant actors is necessary for relevant follow-up actions or implementation. Target groups and tools for dissemination should be identified.

Lessons learnt meetings today constitute a forum for disseminating knowledge among the participating states. Other target groups or end-users should be considered, such as training coordinators, exercise managers and evaluators, national experts on module capacities, EU Civil Protection experts, Civil Protection Committee (and sub-working groups) as well as partner organisations. Structures placed within other DGs outside the civil protection community could also be relevant to consider. Lessons to be shared with any of the target groups could take the form of tailored meetings, gathering the lessons from a number of missions or through a regular report.

The Commission has an important role to play in translating the lessons learnt to the right level of implementation and also in specifying the most appropriate tools for sharing. The participating states

have a central role in spreading knowledge within the national organisation, sharing yearly sum-ups with all experts and module operators listed as national capacities. A lessons learnt officer at national level, with a function similar to the existing network of training coordinators, could play an important role in disseminating knowledge.

Tools for sharing lessons learnt should be modern and attractive to the end user. The present lessons learnt library could be developed to suit the objective, including a search function for pre-set indicators.

4. Implementing lessons learnt

Implementation of lessons learnt is a cornerstone in civil protection governance. Committed and joint ownership to the implementation process is thus vital. For instance stakeholders such as participating states and experts play an important role in supporting an adequate implementation of lessons learnt from European disaster response.

Today a number of working groups and other forums exist within the civil protection community. They could play a significant role in the concrete implementation of lessons learnt. National civil protection authorities also have a key role in implementing lessons learnt with regard to national preparedness and response (planning, development of national assets as well as national training and exercise activities).

The Commission could help in gathering an overview on the status of the implementation measures. The Commission could also provide tools or platforms for facilitating implementation in the member states. An executive report on the implementation of lessons learnt could be considered as a priority subject to discussions at the meetings of the civil protection Director-Generals and the Civil Protection Committee.

Workshop follow-up

As a follow-up to the workshop, the Commission could be asked to further develop the ideas on the lessons learnt programme taking into account the discussions of the workshop. Issues such as management, organisational, staffing and procedural and budgetary aspects should be considered in this context, if considered relevant.

The workshop outcome is relevant in the negotiation process on the Commission proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism.