

► Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

Belgian Midterm Report  
in contribution to the Midterm Review 2023  
Based on the Midterm Report Questionnaire provided by the UNDRR

## Situation

Belgium has endorsed the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 in 2015. It is in this context, our country will contribute to the Midterm Review (MTR) of this Framework which will take place in 2023.

The Belgian representation within the Sendai Framework is twofold. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs represents Belgium in the various forums of the Sendai Framework as the National Focal Point for Belgium. The Ministry of Interior, notably the National Crisis Centre (NCCN), was in turn assigned the role of Technical Focal Point in 2021. In this capacity, the NCCN was responsible for the coordination of the relevant data to draft the midterm report for Belgium. All the necessary input for this report was gathered on the basis of the questionnaire provided by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). This questionnaire was also used to structure the present report.

Furthermore, it should be noted that this present report mainly provides an overview of what currently exists in Belgium. As this is the first voluntary national report that will be submitted by Belgium, it was not possible to elaborate extensively on progress made but rather more suitable to give a state of play. However, we would like to mark this present report as the start of many more to come in the context of our participation to the Sendai Framework.

- Belgian institutional structure and crisis management:

Belgium is a federal State composed of three language-based communities (the Flemish Community, the French Community and the German-speaking Community) and three regions (the Flemish Region in the North, the Brussels-Capital Region in the centre and the Walloon Region in the South), each with its own executive and legislative bodies. Constitutional reforms and the regionalisation of the State have led to a three-tiered organisation: the upper tier comprises the federal State, the communities and the regions, all equal by law. They intervene on an equal footing but in different areas. The middle tier comprises the 10 provinces. They act within the framework of the federal, community or regional powers and are subordinate to all higher authorities. The lowest tier of the structure comprises the 589 municipalities, which are the level of power closest to the citizen. Like the provinces, they are subordinate to the higher authorities. Depending on the area of power being exercised, they are therefore accountable to the Federal Government, the community or the region. They are financed and controlled primarily by the regions.

It is important to stress the specificity of the Belgian institutional structure. Competences are either exclusively attributed to the federal, community or regional level, or shared between these entities. The federal level is also responsible for competences that are not expressly attributed to the regions or the communities. The position taken up by Belgium at European or international level is constructed based on input from all these entities. When we speak about 'national level policy documents', we mean those that are adopted and supported by the various competent entities.



As illustrated in this report, this complex structure of competences also exists with regards to crisis management which is structured on three levels, i.e. national, provincial and municipal level. Each administrative level has its own competences but these are closely intertwined which at the same time results in an intense level of cooperation between all levels. For example, the coordination and management of a crisis will be done by the mayor, governor or Minister of Interior, depending on the extent of the crisis. This will manifest in the declaration of respectively a municipal phase, provincial phase or federal phase regarding the coordination and management of the crisis.



## Content – questionnaire

### Highlights and Introduction

1. **Which natural and/or man-made risks<sup>1</sup> were the most impactful in your country during the last 7 years? Give a short description of these, what and why those happened.**

#### Natural:

- SARS-CoV-2

Following the emergence of the COVID-19 virus, many countries were confronted with a health crisis that soon became a worldwide crisis. On January 30<sup>th</sup> 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the international state of emergency for public health and subsequently, qualified the COVID-19 virus as a pandemic in March 2020. As the virus spread over the European territory, including Belgium, it resulted in an exponential increase in the number of infections and mortalities.

On March 10<sup>th</sup> 2020, the day the coronavirus caused its first fatality in Belgium, the National Security Council met for the first time. During this meeting the decision was made to introduce restrictive measures in an attempt to cope with the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. Given the severity of the health crisis and consequently, the need for crisis management at the national level, the federal phase regarding the coordination and management of the crisis coronavirus COVID-19 was declared on March 13<sup>th</sup> 2020.

Belgium was confronted with an important deterioration of the epidemiological situation: the hospital occupancy rates (in particular for intensive care units) became critical, regular health care was suspended and mortalities significantly increased (a peak in daily mortalities was reached on April 8<sup>th</sup> 2020 with 324 fatalities). Restrictive measures were regarded indispensable to slow down and reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus, and hence, avoid a further deterioration of the epidemiological situation. Moreover, this would in turn provide scientist more time to develop efficient treatments and vaccines.

During this federal phase, 47 consultative committees and National Security Councils were organized which resulted in more than 47 ministerial decrees and 11 royal decrees through which the restrictive measures were adopted. On March 11<sup>th</sup> 2022, following a substantial improvement of the epidemiological situation in Belgium, the aforementioned

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<sup>1</sup> DRR – disaster risk reduction – is the process of protecting the livelihoods and assets of communities and individuals from the impact of hazards. The hazards can be natural or human derived, and include earthquakes, floods, mudslides, droughts, price spikes, economic decline, social conflict and contagious diseases. DRR limits the negative impacts of these events by working to reduce their size, strength or how often they occur, and building the capacity of the people exposed to these hazards to anticipate, survive, and recover from them.



federal phase was lifted. On this date, already over 30.000 fatalities were identified due to the COVID-19 virus.

- Floods during the summer of 2021

On July 14<sup>th</sup> 2021, Belgium was hit by floods due to extreme rainfall. The consequences were dramatic with a total of 203 affected municipalities, spread over eight provinces. The province of Liège saw the highest rainfall totals, being the most affected with the overflow of the rivers Meuse, Ourthe and Vesdre. Widespread swaths of this province saw rainfall totals of a day representing more than an entire month's worth of rainfall. The total financial cost of the floods in Belgium is estimated at more than 350 million euros. In addition, the floods also had a human toll with 39 deaths.

On July 14<sup>th</sup> 2021 and on the morning of July 15<sup>th</sup> 2021, several provincial phases were triggered for the management of rescue operations. As several provincial phases were triggered for the management of rescue operations, the National Logistics Hub was activated. This Hub collects responses to the needs that local authorities cannot immediately satisfy by seeking adequate resources from its close partners or from private suppliers. A list of available resources was drawn up and made available to the Governors. In addition, the Hub brought together partners to explore the possible deployment of resources in several affected areas, such as voluntary aid.

On July 15<sup>th</sup> 2021, the Minister of the Interior decided to activate the federal phase regarding the coordination and management of the crisis. The Belgian National Crisis Centre fulfilled its coordinating role by setting up the crisis management structures needed to strengthen the coordination of available resources and started coordinating the management of the floods' impact on a number of strategic sectors. The Government allowed the relocation of 3,521 people affected through various measures. These measures derogated from the allocation of public housing, modular housing, municipalities and CPAS, tourist housing, social real estate agencies, etc. Furthermore, psycho-social assistance to the flood victims was provided by 10 mobile teams. These teams brought together a total of 25 specialists and their work will continue until the first quarter of 2023.

The federal phase for the floods was lifted on July 26<sup>th</sup> 2021.

### Man-Made:

- Conflict Ukraine-Russia

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine raised numerous different difficulties in Belgium, including the impact of the post-covid economic growth on the costs and the availability of raw materials (for example, fertilizers and agricultural machinery).

The conflict in Ukraine also has an impact in terms of immigration with many Ukrainian citizens fleeing their country, as well as citizens from the neighbouring countries. These



immigration flows were monitored in order to prepare for the arrival of over 58.000 of people that fled the conflict. To monitor the influx in Belgium an online dashboard is provided to centralise and dynamically make available statistical data on the temporary protection of displaced persons from Ukraine. The dashboard is a voluntary cooperation between the National Crisis Centre, the Immigration Department, the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seeker (Fedasil), the national registry and the Belgian statistics agency (Statbel). The dashboard currently reports on two data flows: data regarding temporary protection coming from the Immigration Department and data regarding persons in need of reception from Fedasil.

These initiatives and provided assistance are monitored on a national level. The Federal Coordination Committee (COFECO), which is chaired by the NCCN, creates a situation and evolution picture, proposes measures to protect the population to the policy cell and distributes available supra-local resources. This cell is composed of representatives of disciplines and government departments. To obtain accurate data, the evaluation cell collects information, carries out an evaluation of the situation and gives advice to COFECO. This cell is composed of experts and scientists from the various competent authorities or departments.

To cope with the large immigration influx, Belgian authorities requested the support of other European countries through the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism. Notably 5.000 field beds were requested and provided in order to temporarily shelter the displaced persons. Belgium in turn also provides support to Ukraine, supplying key medical and life resources.

- Terrorists threats

Following the Paris bombings a manhunt took place in Brussels in November 2015. During several months, Belgium was confronted with a terrorist threat because one of the perpetrators of the Paris bombings was hiding in Brussels after fleeing the French authorities. In this context, entire neighbourhoods were put in lockdown several times. Although the respective individual was eventually caught, a few days later bombings in Brussels were carried out by other extremists and the threat level across Belgium was raised to its highest level, 4.

These terrorist bombings took place in Brussels Airport and the subway station on March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016. It was a coordinated terrorist attack of three suicide bombings, consisting of two attacks that were carried out at Brussels airport and one in the subway station 'Maalbeek'. The bombings killed 32 civilians and many more were wounded. The attacks were planned and executed by Muslim extremists who were linked to the Islamic State.

Due to the major impact of the terrorist attacks, the Parliament decided to appoint a parliamentary committee of inquiry in order to investigate the course of management of the situation and to formulate recommendations for the future. This committee was assigned to conduct a chronological and historical reconstruction of all the facts that led to the attacks of March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016; to analyse the assistance provided to the victims; to



verify whether all competent services adequately functioned to cope with a terrorist threat; to analyse the deeper causes of the development of radicalism; and to analyse the evolution of existing national criminal legislation and its application in the context of the fight against terrorism.

## 2. Highlight examples of achievements, good practice, opportunities, challenges, lessons identified and recommendations in addressing these risks, and what can be still done to reduce these risks and its impacts:

- Post-crisis reviews

Following the occurrence of each emergency situation, a post-crisis review is conducted. The competent authority reviews whether the procedures have been properly conducted, whether these proved sufficient to manage the situation and which improvements can be implemented to address future crises. The points for improvement from this evaluation are incorporated into the emergency and intervention plans. The decision can be made to take special measures or to provide additional equipment or personnel as well.

In major emergency situations at national level, the Parliament may also decide to appoint a parliamentary committee of inquiry. This committee investigates the course of crisis management during a particular crisis and formulates recommendations. Such an inquiry committee was appointed after the terrorist attacks of March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016, as well as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Lessons learned from the floods

Firstly, Belgium does have an effective emergency planning and crisis management system. This system worked correctly and is currently being evaluated. We cannot emphasize the excellent interdepartmental collaboration enough that we witnessed.

Secondly, the floods have demonstrated the importance of a solid legal basis for emergency planning and crisis management, with basic structures that can be complemented by additional bodies depending on the type of emergency. In this regard, it is important to note that we are currently drafting a new law concerning the Belgian National Crisis Centre which will replace the outdated royal decree of 1988 that established the Coordination and Crisis Centre of the Government (now called the National Crisis Centre). This new law will contribute to an even stronger structure for emergency planning and crisis management in Belgium as it will, amongst other things, implement the recommendations made by different Parliamentary Committees of Inquiry that were established after the terrorist attacks of March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2016, the COVID-19 pandemic and the floods of July 2021. Those recommendations concerned, for example, the organisation of the NCCN, its decision-making procedures and the implementation of its decisions.



Thirdly, an important aspect of federal crisis management is the allocation of available public and private resources. To this end, the National Logistics Hub was activated. The Hub was a necessity and worked well. An analysis will be made to further develop this specific structure.

- Three main issues identified in response to the floods

Firstly, an ever-increasing juridification of crisis management and conditions imposed on the government's action sometimes makes it difficult to take the necessary decisions. For example, the exchange of personal data became increasingly more difficult under the GDPR-legislation or the enforcement of evacuation orders. In order to manage this situation optimally, the NCCN had to set up - and this was already the case during the COVID-19 crisis – a permanent team of lawyers that is very intensively engaged in providing legal support for crisis management.

Secondly, both COVID-19 management and crisis management of the floods were subject to disinformation (hybrid threats). Misinformation was launched and undermined the necessary bond of trust between government and population in times of crisis. Belgium has a platform for hybrid threats and will consider how best to deal with them in the future.

Finally, there was a lack of immediately available resources. We had to conclude that our emergency services did not have sufficient specialized resources to deal with this exceptional situation. Also, the reception of foreign aid was not always optimally organised.

- Ensuring sustainable reconstruction

To ensure a fluent reconstruction phase, the Walloon Region, which was most affected, created a special reconstruction commission, namely the “Federal Support Cell”(CAF). The aim of the CAF was to coordinate federal support during the transition between crisis management and reconstruction. The task of this unit was to organise the operational mobilisation of the federal departments still active on the ground. Support was provided through the maintenance of the National Logistics Hub and of the regular contacts by the NCCN with the governors as well.

In response to the floods, at the level of spatial planning, urban planning and housing, multiple actions were undertaken:

Firstly, the Vesdre Master Plan, a multidisciplinary strategic plan that will establish an operational methodology for a sustainable reconstruction of the territory.





Secondly, the "Sustainable Neighbourhoods" programme, which aims to develop a more precise approach to the operations to be carried out in 11 neighbourhoods located in 9 municipalities that have been severely affected.

Thirdly, the heavily affected Walloon Government is also working on environmental reconstruction (hydraulic/hydrological modelling of the Vesdre basin) to reduce the risks in the event of new floods, but also in terms of climate risks.

- International cooperation, exchange of good practices and experience sharing

These last years, the various security and safety crises we faced made it clear that collaboration between member states is becoming more crucial in order to be able to respond in an efficient way to the different challenges we face. In fact, acting bottom-up upon this necessity, Belgium created a Network of Directors-General of European crisis centres to enhance collaboration and exchange of good practices, as explained more detailed in the answer to question 10.

However, it is important to mention that cross-border cooperation does not solely entail the actions on international level. During the interventions in response to the bombing attacks on March 22<sup>th</sup> 2016, in which the emergency centres of Brussels and Flemish Brabant had to work together without any preparation, it became clear that the division based on geographical zones of the emergency and intervention services, worked to the disadvantage of cross-border cooperation. Therefore, such cooperation requires better preparation and be exercised.

- Broad network of key players in the field of crisis management

In order to facilitate rapid contact with the required institutions and actors when a crisis occurs, it is of great importance to have a clear overview of the different authorities and key players in critical sectors, as well as their competences. Establishing and maintaining a broad network, such as the Network of Directors-General of European Crisis Centres (DG Network) and continuous cooperation in the context of the Benelux Union, has shown very useful in enabling crisis management actors to reach out directly to key players in the sector, during the response to crises.

Within this context, it is also important to note that many international organisations are located in Brussels which provides various opportunities for establishing networks, including in the field of crisis management. In addition, bilateral contacts and partnerships are also facilitated by the presence of many foreign embassies in our capital.

- The importance of resilience

In today's world national resilience is critical to a country's robustness. It fosters a nation's self-assurance that it can respond to different crises adequately, even in the most difficult



circumstances. The importance of resilience was long underestimated, however, these last years and these last crises we faced, made it very clear that making our society, our critical sectors and infrastructure, and our citizens more resilient to severe incidents is as important as being able to perform decent crisis management.

In fact, in Belgium, both preparedness and resilience are now part of the same risk-cycle upon which we're working, as we believe crisis management and resilience are critical national competences, and they both need to be addressed through an all of society approach on the national level, but also well-coordinated and aligned on a multilateral level. In this regard, a national resilience strategy for our country is currently under construction.

- 3. Provide national statistics during the period of 2015-2022 for:**
- a. Number of deaths and missing persons per 100,000 population attributed to disasters**  
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  - b. Number of directly affected people per 100,000 population attributed to disasters**  
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  - c. Direct economic loss in relation to gross domestic product attributed to disasters**  
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  - d. Damage to critical infrastructure attributed to disasters**  
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  - e. Has your country adopted and implemented a national disaster risk reduction strategy? If yes, for which period and is this strategy supported by an action plan?**

In order to enhance preparedness, it is essential to identify and be well aware of the relevant risks to which Belgium could be exposed. To that end, since 2015, the National Crisis Centre has been coordinating periodic national risk assessments in accordance with Article 6 of Decision 1313/2013 /EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the Union's Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM). With the Belgian National Risk Assessment (BNRA), the NCCN aims to identify and evaluate the relevant risks to which Belgium may be exposed. Belgium is currently working on a new iteration of this risk assessment that will cover the period 2023-2026. This risk assessment is an important foundation for national emergency planning.



**f. How much international support has your country received for disaster reduction purposes?**

• International support provided by the UCPM:

Many countries, including Belgium, are able to request and receive support by the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism. During 2022, for example, the global setup of rescEU medical stock (therefore not only provided to Belgium ) amounted €34.000.000.

- UCPM: build-up EMT 2 capacity: €1.600.000.
- EU emergency support instrument (for the combat against COVID-19): €8.200.000
- UCPM: build-up High Capacity Pumping capacity: €250.000.
- UCPM: the organisation of 4 on-site integration courses (not only for Belgium, but for UCPM as a whole): €296.000.
- UCPM: yearly organisation of one international assistance table top exercise in Belgium: €35.000.

• International support in response to the floods:

In response to the floods that hit Belgium and its neighbouring countries, no manpower nor resources from the Belgian emergency services were deployed to assist neighbouring countries, as all available resources were applied to meet the needs at home. Due to the exceptional circumstances, resources proved insufficient and Belgium requested international support for its own rescue operations, both bilateral as well as through the activation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism. A clear overview of the international support received, can be found below.



Country	UCPM/ Bilateral	Capacity	Personnel	Vehicles	Location of the rescue mission
Austria	UCPM	FRUB	96	33 vehicles and 12 boats	Theux Pepinster
France	UCPM - European Civil Protection Mechanism	FRUB	40	15 vehicles and 12 boats	Pepinster Trooz Chaufontaine
France	UCPM	helicopter	4	1 helicopter	Pepinster
France	UCPM	zodiacs and divers	17	3 boats	Angleur Chenée
Italy	UCPM	helicopter	12 (1 crew of 8 and 1 maintenance team -4 persons)	1 helicopter	Tilff Esneux
Italy	UCPM	FRUB	12	2 vehicles and 3 boats	Tilff
Luxemburg	Bilateral	FRUB (Flood rescue Using boats)	6	2 b	Chênée
The Netherlands	Bilateral	FRUB	80	30 vehicles and 16 boats	Trooz Fraipont Tilff
ERCC	UCPM -	Liaison officer	1		/

**g. Has your country put multi-hazard early warning systems in place?**

In 2014, the Belgian National Crisis Centre launched the BE-Alert pilot project. BE-Alert is a warning system that allows the government to inform its citizens in an emergency situation. For two years, 33 municipalities could test and evaluate BE-Alert and therefore make improvements. Since 2017, BE-Alert has been operational throughout Belgium. Currently, 1,093,897 addresses are already registered and more than 87% of the municipalities are registered on BE-Alert.

At present, all authorities in Belgium have a warning system to ensure the safety of their residents. A mayor, governor or minister has the authority to activate BE-Alert in order to send a message through SMS, e-mail or voice call to everyone impacted by an emergency situation. In this way, residents can quickly receive the necessary recommendations, like closing windows and doors in the event of a fire.

BE-Alert is an ongoing project, as the NCCN continues to search for new technologies and channels to alert people wherever they are. The program has sufficient capacity to



inform a large number of residents at the same time via different channels. This capacity remains under continuous testing on a regular basis.

- How does it work?

Depending on the nature and scale of the emergency situation, the relevant municipality, province or the Minister of the Interior can send a message through BE-Alert with the necessary recommendations for the citizen's safety.

This message will always be sent to the residents who are directly involved in case of emergency (e.g. local residents of a street, neighbourhood, nuclear emergency planning zone). However, citizens must register in advance on BE-Alert to receive such a message. In case a citizen wishes to receive an alarm for multiple locations, they can also register different addresses and different phone numbers: e.g. second residence, workshop, etc. *Example: I am subscribing to BE-Alert to receive an alarm in case of an emergency situation in my neighbourhood. By registering, I will receive information even if I am not at home.* This way the competent authority knows who to notify at a particular location. If a citizen has not subscribed to BE-Alert, it will not receive a message of their municipality notifying a flood in its district.

In case of a major emergency situation, it may be important to inform citizens, regardless of where they are at that moment. Thanks to a unique technology in Belgium, the government can also send out a text message to citizens who are physically present at the location of a major emergency situation. In this case, the citizen does not need to be registered in order to receive a notification. *For example: I am shopping in the city and due to an emergency situation a certain zone must be evacuated. I can then receive a text message, asking me to leave a danger zone, even though I am not registered on BE-Alert.*

The message citizens receive will give them the necessary recommendations or inform them about the evolution or the end of the emergency situation. Depending on the nature of the situation, you could receive the following information:

- the recommendation to take shelter (enter the nearest building, close windows and doors, and listen to the media)
- the recommendation to evacuate the zone concerned and related information about a shelter
- information about how the situation evolves
- ...

- In which emergency situations will a message be sent?

BE-Alert can be used for different types of emergency situations, such as a fires, floods, power outages, terrorist attacks, ... However, BE-Alert is not always the best channel to inform the population concerned. Depending on the time (day or night, during the week or during the weekend, before or after school...), the place (in a field or in the city centre, in an industrial area or close to a day-care centre...), or type of risk or incident (fire, flood,



explosion, ...), it can sometimes be better to use other resources. For example, you're more likely to be warned via the traditional media (such as TV, radio...) of an emergency situation with a major impact.

- How will citizens be informed?

When using BE-Alert, the government can choose from different channels, such as text messages, voice calls via telephone or mobile phone, e-mail or social media. In case of a text message, citizens will receive a message from the unique BE-Alert number 1789.

This communication will contain an urgent recommendation for citizens such as the advice to shelter, the call for an evacuation, etc. *Example: Warning alarm. This is a message from your mayor. Following a fire in company X, we recommend that you close windows and doors until further notice. More info on ... "*

In case of an urgent recommendation, BE-Alert can also be deployed through digital notice boards in buildings or streets, smartphone apps, GPS systems, etc. *For example, a mayor can send out an SMS and display the same message on the information screens in the streets.*

## Methodology and Process

### **4. How did you prepare and conduct the various consultations for the voluntary national report so that each segment of society could contribute?**

As coordinator for crisis preparedness and management on the national level, the National Crisis Centre already had a lot of relevant information in its position to draft this present report. However, to obtain a holistic understanding of all actions conducted, regarding the implementation of the objectives of the Sendai Framework, external relevant stakeholders were identified and contacted as well. It is also in its role as national coordinator that the NCCN collaborates intensively with external partners and hence, could gather all necessary input from these additional stakeholders. All relevant information supplied by these stakeholders, was assembled on the basis of the questionnaire provided by the UNDRR.

Looking forward, measures such as the establishment of templates to harmonise the voluntary national reports for Belgium and the introduction of permanent consultations of key actors and/or representative federations, as well as informal communications with partners from other sectors to limit cross-sectoral impacts can allow us to report more comprehensively.



**5. How did you measure the indicators, gather and process statistical data with relevant technical partners and academia?**

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**Retrospective Review**

**6. Are disasters' causes and effects better understood by the wider public since 2015? How have government and civil society actors achieved this?**

- Risk awareness raising in general

The National Crisis Centre has been actively campaigning to raise risk awareness in Belgium, in collaboration with different national, regional, provincial, and local partners. These risk communication campaigns are designed with the following objectives: 1) increase resilience and knowledge about risks in Belgium, and 2) bring about real change in behaviour before, during and after an emergency. Examples of previous risk awareness campaigns were: 'BE-Ready', an educational package for primary schools, 'mijn noodplan.be'; a website to create a personal emergency plan and 'Inform yourself'; a campaign to boost the subscriptions to BE-Alert, the Belgian early warning system.

All risk communication campaigns have a specific theme, but four pillars keep returning:

- Inform yourself (e.g. BE-Alert, official (social) channels in an emergency, ...)
- Act efficiently (e.g. how do I shelter correctly? What should I do in case of an evacuation?)
- Prepare yourself (e.g. know the risks in your own area, make your own emergency plan, ...)
- Work together (e.g. how can I help in an emergency situation? What can I do without putting myself at risk?).

In 2022 the National Crisis Centre is also conducting a large-scale quantitative and qualitative research regarding risk perception, knowledge, preparation and expected behaviour of the Belgian population during emergency situations. This research consists of various focus groups, online questionnaires and interviews with experts that work with vulnerable groups. The results of this large-scale research will be made available at the end of 2022 and used to refine the strategy of a new information campaign which will be performed from 2023 until 2026. We expect to conduct this research every 4 years to be able to identify certain trends, evolutions or discrepancies.

- Awareness raising during the COVID-19 pandemic

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government and scientists communicated regularly with the public about the virus and its consequences. For example, the Risk Assessment Group (RAG) that is coordinated by Sciensano (a scientific public institution in the epidemiology of infectious diseases), assessed the risks of the health crisis for the Belgian population on the basis of epidemiological and scientific data. It published



scientific reports on the epidemiological situation on a weekly basis. In turn, the Management Strategy Expert Group (GEMS) made recommendations to the government concerning the restrictive measures that it should adopt to prevent a further deterioration of the epidemiological situation. These recommendations were included in reports that are accessible to the public. All the previously mentioned reports contributed to the public's understanding of the health crisis, notably its evolution and consequences. In addition, press conferences were organized after each Concertation Committee in order to inform the public about the results of the consultations between the federal authorities and the federated entities within this Committee with regards to the restrictive measures.

- 7. Have women, youth, displaced and persons with disability been increasingly engaged in discussions and joint preparations to counter disasters? Give examples for each group.**
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- 8. How have local communities been engaged in discussions, setting up early warning systems and other joint preparations to reduce risks or prevent disasters?**

As Belgian crisis management is organised at 3 levels: national, provincial, and local, it goes without saying that any initiative we engage in at national level must therefore involve the provincial and local levels. A tight network is in place at any time: there are regular contacts between the National Crisis Centre and the security authorities of the 11 Belgian provinces, who themselves have regular contacts with the localities in their province.

As far as communication is concerned, two main examples are important to mention: the communication between authorities and the communication from the authorities towards citizens in case of an emergency situation.

1) Communication between authorities

The communication between authorities in case of an emergency is facilitated by ICMS (Incident & Crisis Management System). It is a platform used by all crisis management competent authorities to communicate between themselves quickly and efficiently, not only during an emergency, but also during the monitoring of an important event, or to engage in an exercise. It contains contact information (entered, updated and managed by the local communities to have the most current data), discussion tools, a very wide emergency plans database, and maps with all relevant layers, among other things. The NCCN organises training on a regular basis for the staff of all local authorities that may be involved in crisis management, whether there are beginner users or willing to develop their knowledge of the tool. It also provides assistance in case of technical problems or need of guidance. Those contacts between the NCCN and the local users of ICMS provide the Crisis Centre with valuable lessons learned that allow it to continuously improve the platform.

For the future, the IT team of the NCCN is currently developing a new platform, which will be called Paragon. Paragon will have the same functionalities as ICMS but, being an in-house tool, will give us more freedom in developing new functionalities. Paragon should





go live in 2024. Before that, one of our priorities is to appropriately train the local users of what currently ICMS is in order to be able to transfer smoothly to the use of the new tool.

## 2) Communication towards citizens

When an emergency strikes, a good first reaction of the impacted citizens is crucial. In order to inform and advise the Belgian citizens in a timely manner of an emergency, the previously mentioned BE-Alert tool was created. As in the case of ICMS, the NCCN provides training and assistance about this tool which in turn provides the possibility to gather feed-back and improve the system. Moreover, monthly tests are organised with local authorities, which gives the NCCN the additional advantage to communicate to the citizens about their work on BE-Alert. The current challenge concerning BE-Alert is to multiply channels to enhance the possibility for each citizen to receive the appropriate information. Among the new channels that are used, are digital information boards that can be found in train stations, hospitals or other public facilities.

- COVID-19 – Local outbreak management:

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a local outbreak management procedure has been developed to establish a sustainable system to follow up on the spread of the COVID-19 virus throughout the country in the periods of lower levels of nationwide spread, where the number of national health measures has been reduced to a minimum. The procedure is based on the responsibilities of the regional governments and local authorities to monitor and assess the health situation in their territories and manage COVID-19 outbreaks on a local level to prevent a surge in nationwide spread. An early warning system has been designed with the input of the federal and regional health authorities, the institutions responsible for the data collection and processing and the provincial governors. This system, based on multiple numerical indicators, will trigger a warning message to the municipalities that reach an alarming level of spread of the virus on their territory. In response to this warning, the mayor is expected to make a qualitative assessment of the health situation on its territory, with the participation of the regional health authorities and other emergency services. A toolbox, consisting of measures that can be taken to contain the spread of the virus (e.g. limiting public activities and events or issuing orders to wear masks in certain settings) is provided to the local authorities as a guideline, suggesting only the measures whose epidemiological effectiveness have been confirmed by the scientific expert group. Several formalities are also included to ensure that the different levels of government are informed of local outbreak measures being taken.

## 9. **Have you been informed of the national DRR and/or local strategy? Have you seen and participated in its implementation? If so, give an example.**

Yes. In Belgium, emergency plans are developed at three administrative levels: national, provincial and municipal. Provincial and municipal emergency plans are available and shared on a digital platform provided (and secured) by the Ministry of Interior. Moreover,



there is an intense level of cooperation between the three levels. Consequently, experiences, evolutions and problems regarding disaster risk reduction are being shared on a daily basis, both through the digital platform as well as in (live or online) meetings.

- General national emergency plan

At the national level, Belgium has two types of emergency plans:

- A general emergency plan, which aims to facilitate the management of any emergency situation of national scope, regardless of its origin. To date, it is not very detailed.
- Specific emergency plans which organise crisis management for specific risks such as terrorism, a nuclear accident, etc.

In the past, there was a tendency to multiply the number of special emergency plans at national level. As soon as a new risk was identified, a special plan at national level was drafted. However, experience in recent years has shown how crucial it is in an emergency situation to quickly create order in chaos. To achieve this, it is essential that national emergencies, regardless of their origin, are managed from the very beginning with the same canvas. The aim is to create automatisms and to ensure that the crisis structure is known by all the partners who have a role to play.

On the basis of this observation, we are currently updating our general emergency plan at national level. This text will define more precisely the organisation of crisis management at national level and broaden its scope so that most national emergencies can be managed according to the principles and structures it describes. In order to establish these plans, other countries were consulted regarding their approach and best practices.

This national emergency plan will include general principles that will be applicable in most national crises. It will be supplemented by a series of appendices designed to operationalise it.

- Emergency planning sheets covering different risks: These sheets will allow crisis managers to get a first overview regarding the risk and the expected impact of the emergency, and to identify partners and organisations that should sit in the various crisis cells.
- Generic management measures: The idea is to have a « toolbox » that will include various potential measures as well as the points of attention/prerequisites for their implementation.
- Specific management procedures that will apply to very specific risks.

In addition to this general emergency plan at national level, there will be a number of specific national emergency plans for particular risks and which supplement or derogate from the principles laid down in the general emergency plan. However, these specific national emergency plans will remain an exception.



**10. Have you been informed or part of the development or implementation of regional or cross-border disaster risk reduction strategies and plans in your region? Please give examples.**

- Benelux Union

The Benelux Union is an intergovernmental partnership between Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, allowing these countries to collectively solve the different challenges they face. The rotating presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Benelux Union, the highest decision-making body of the Benelux Union which includes at least one representative at ministerial level from the three countries, enables us to emphasise on Belgium's priority issues. The composition of the Committee of Ministers can change according to the agenda. These ministers determine the guidelines and priorities of the Benelux cooperation. In the Joint Work Programme 2021-2024, the Benelux Union develops its activities for the coming years. Each year, an annual plan is drafted as well, that identifies the priorities combined with flagship projects, the new challenges and longer-term initiatives on which there is broad consensus among the three member states. Over time, the NCCN has developed a very close relationship with the Secretariat General of the Benelux Union and the other Benelux countries, increasing cooperation on the Benelux external borders, such as the French regions and the South German state North Rhine-Westphalia. Practically, this cooperation results in exercises, visits, coordination on the international position to be taken and to encourage the emergence of common solutions. A good example of this cooperation is the regular communication test between the 24/7 crisis management services of the Benelux countries and North Rhine-Westphalia.

Virtual meetings between the Directors-General of the Crisis Centres of Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and the German Länder of North Rhine-Westphalia have been taking place regularly as well. These virtual meetings are organised by the Benelux General Secretariat and are characterised by their informal nature. All kinds of discussion topics can be put on the agenda. More information on these virtual meetings can be found in the answers below.

- The Network of Directors-General of European Crisis Centres

In 2018, the Network of Directors-General of European Crisis Centres was launched on the initiative of Director-General of the Belgian National Crisis Centre, with the support of the Secretariat of the Benelux Union and the Benelux countries. The aim of this network is to identify and connect the different crisis centres to better understand each other, exchange skills and experiences and address common challenges in a coordinated way. The objectives of the Network are cemented in the Protocol of Cooperation, a document with great symbolic value, showing the states' willingness to strengthen their cooperation, which has already been signed by 26 states.

(With this initiative) We obtained a network of colleagues in different crisis management functions to cooperate actively and coherently prior to and in case of crises with major international and cross-sectoral implications. By bringing these different actors around the



table during formal meetings, we can be mutually aware of the challenges faced by our counterparts, support each other in implementing national solutions and develop a structure capable of relaying the needs of crisis management actors to the decision-making.

- Coordination of the Bullseye project

Bullseye is a project funded by the European Union and executed by a consortium of 8 partners from 5 different European countries: Spain, The Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Belgium. Belgium, and specifically the National Crisis Centre mainly acts as the coordinator of this project.

The main objective of the Bullseye project is to further improve the knowledge and skills of first responders in all EU member states, concerning emergency situations involving the release of chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear substances, possibly in combination with explosives (CBRNe). Consequently, the project aims to provide clear answers to questions such as: How to prevent terrorist attacks using CBRNe agents and explosives? How to properly mitigate and respond to a chemical or biological attack?

To achieve this objective, the Bullseye project consists of two main components: The first component centres around the development of a training curriculum for explosive detection dogs and is mainly led by the Directorate of canine support (DACH) of the Belgian Federal Police, located in Neerhespen, Belgium. The second component concentrates on establishing harmonised procedures for first-, second- and third-line responders in all EU member states.

As a first step in the development of harmonised procedures, the Bullseye consortium organised workshops for each line, in which draft procedures were prepared through the exchange of good practices, real-life experiences and needs. These procedures were tested through the organisation of mono-trainings for each line separately. Following a revision of these procedures and to ascertain whether they are interoperable, a final cross-sectoral exercise was organised. Based on this exercise and ex-post evaluation, adjustments are currently being made to the final set of harmonized procedures.

As a final step in the Bullseye project, a train the trainer toolkit will be developed containing a summary of the best practices and the finalized harmonized procedures that have been established. This toolkit will be presented to all EU Member States, allowing them to implement the developed guidelines as well.

In addition to coordinating role in the Bullseye project, Belgium also participates in several other projects such as the EU-funded Integrating Risk Perception and Action to enhance Civil protection-Citizen interaction (RiskPACC), the UN Global Programme on Security of Major Sporting Events & Promotion of Sport and its Values to Prevent Violent Extremism, UN Climate Change Conference and many others.



- The Disaster Prevention and Risk Management Commission Expert Group

Within the Framework of Decision 1313/2013 on the Civil Protection Mechanism, the Belgian National Crisis Centre participates in a Commission expert group, named the Disaster Prevention and Risk Management Commission Expert Group (often abbreviated to DPEG). Officially, this group is a forum for the exchange of views and information between the European Commission and the members on the application of articles 5 and 6 of Decision N°1 313/2013/EU on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism.

Until recently, this group mainly discussed the guidelines for reporting risk analyses to the European Commission, or the key risks identified by all Member States in their risk analyses. However, since the Slovenian Presidency workshop on Union Disaster Resilience Goals (DRG), which decided that DPEG would coordinate the discussions on the development of these goals, the meetings of this group are exclusively dedicated to this topic. The previous meeting was dedicated to the Union Disaster Resilience Goals, with a special focus on the goals to be set in the areas of Enhanced UCPM response capacity ('coping capacities'), a wrap up of the goals and specific objectives in the other preparedness and prevention areas. The European Commission should adopt the first Recommendation on the Union Disaster Resilience Goals in December 2022.

- Future of horizontal EU Crisis Management: an ad hoc Working Group?

Belgium advocates for the creation of a permanent structure entirely dedicated to crisis preparedness and management, integrating the entire risk cycle into its work. We deem this absolutely necessary because the expiry of the Friends of the Presidency IPCR/SCI's mandate in June 2020 left the Council of the European Union without a dedicated crisis preparedness body. Therefore, a Belgian proposal has been drawn up. It states that the creation of an ad hoc Working Group on Horizontal Crisis Management within the Council and in support of the IPCR, and the integration of the Network of the Directors-General into the EU structures as an informal part of this working group, will strengthen the Council's crisis management capabilities through permanent horizontal coordination on crisis preparedness.

The proposed ad hoc working group will generate an all-hazards approach and ensure the alignment of crisis prevention and preparedness initiatives to guarantee a more crisis-resilient EU. Its actions will cover:

- informing and advising COREPER for fully informed decision-making by this body on crisis prevention, preparedness and management;



- creating a strategy for a comprehensive view of the risk cycle, with a multi-sectoral approach;
- working to strengthen (and subsequently monitor) the IPCR;
- promoting sharing and feedback between member states after crisis management and the implementation of the lessons learned after IPCR activation;
- establishing effective and well-functioning crisis prevention and preparedness systems and procedures by reporting the results of national, bilateral and multilateral exercises and stimulating the organisation of exercises in a European context.

This proposal has been submitted to the members of the Network of Directors-General of European crisis centres in order to create a core group of likeminded States. In the upcoming months, Belgium will keep advocating for the creation of a permanent EU structure dedicated to crisis preparedness, response capacity and resilience to future crises.

#### **11. Have the public and private sectors coordinated and worked together to prevent disasters or related risks? Please give specific examples.**

Public and private sectors have coordinated and worked together in order to draft and implement various plans such as an Emergency plan for gas, the Food Crisis Plan & Task Force Food (RU/UA), the Risk preparedness plan for electricity, etc. In addition, public and private sectors also cooperate intensively in the Critical Infrastructure framework.

- Emergency plan for gas and power shortages

There is an intense cooperation and communication between public and private actors to prevent gas and power shortages. There is a national contingency plan which is co-created, implemented, tested and updated before every fall. The current energy climate has only intensified this.

- Dialogue with the industry of life sciences

There is an ongoing dialogue between a representative body of the heavy industry of life sciences (Essenscia) and the public safety sector. The goal of this dialogue is to jointly create and implement projects on a specific budget for which these enterprises are taxed. These projects all have the aim to prevent or to better mitigate certain risks provided by this sector to the public.



**12. Is the Sendai Framework known in academia, local, business communities or civil society and/or referred to in plannings or reports?**

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**13. How have financial resources been used by your country for disaster risk reduction through international cooperation? How much have they increased since 2015?**

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**14. What partnerships and initiatives have been successful in reducing disaster risk in any category (including, but not limited to food security, health and safety, climate change, environmental management, each and others relevant, related to sustainable development)? Please provide examples.**

Belgium participates in several platforms in which information and best practices are exchanged among participating homologues and therefore, welcomes such initiatives. Please find some examples below.

- The Network of Directors-General of European Crisis Centres

Within its role as functioning permanent secretariat of the Network of Directors-General of European Crisis Centres (also known as the DG Network), Belgium organised multiple meetings of this network and thus, gathering crisis management authorities of participating states around the table in order to discuss pertinent issues in the field of crisis management.

Within the context of the DG Network, two workshops took place in which Belgium participated and supported the organisation. On November 26<sup>th</sup> 2021, 11 states and representatives of the EU Council gathered around the table to discuss the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis. On September 8<sup>th</sup> 2022, another workshop took place during which 17 countries and delegates from the EU Council discussed their experiences, difficulties and how they can work together to better address the conflict in Ukraine. Working group participants looked at different aspects of hosting Ukrainian refugees in the EU, namely humanitarian assistance, border processing, education, housing and job opportunities. The workshop also concluded panel discussions on CBRN, strategic communication and disinformation with future perspectives.

- The Benelux Union

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the decision was made to further strengthen the cooperation with the Dutch Crisis Centre and the Luxembourg Haut-Commissariat à la Protection nationale (HCPN). To this end, virtual meetings between the Directors-General of the Crisis Centres of Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and the German Länder of North Rhine-Westphalia have been taking place regularly to date. These virtual



meetings are organised by the Benelux General Secretariat and are characterised by their informal nature.

During these virtual meetings, the emphasis is on exchanging information and best practices. For example, regarding the COVID-19 crisis, the epidemiological situation, the restrictive measures and the impact of the pandemic on the population in each participating country are discussed so that all participants get a good common picture of the situation in each other's country. These meetings have already produced very positive and concrete results regarding the fine-tuning of certain COVID-19 measures (such as the fireworks ban in the Benelux during the 2020 end-of-year period). The vaccination campaign, both the logistical part and the state of affairs, is also discussed during these meetings. This resulted in a visit by a Belgian delegation to a full-scale vaccination exercise in Luxembourg. This way, the Belgian delegation could personally observe the course of such a large-scale exercise. Moreover, lessons learned from the organisation of this vaccination exercise were shared.

In addition to the COVID-19 crisis, other topics for discussion can be placed on the agenda by participants, such as the Brexit, the future of EU crisis management and the implications of the situation in Ukraine (specifically the influx of refugees).

- The IPCR Crisis Communicators' Network

Representing Belgium, the National Crisis Centre also participates in the IPCR Crisis Communicators' Network (CCN). During meetings of this network, participants exchange information and best practices on communication-related topics, including disinformation, with special attention to increasing resilience. The CCN is also regularly invited to participate in the previously mentioned DG Network.

- The European Programme for Critical Infrastructure Protection (EPCIP)

The EPCIP programme, established in 2006, is the EU's main instrument for the protection of critical infrastructure in the EU. This programme facilitates information-sharing among EU- Member states and other stakeholders via the Critical Infrastructure Protection (CIP) point of contact group. A key pillar of the EPCIP programme, the European Critical Infrastructure Directive, establishes a procedure for identifying and designating European critical infrastructures, and a common approach for assessing the need to improve their protection. Alongside exists the Directive on the security of network and information systems (NIS), which focuses on cybersecurity in the EU. There are proposals to replace both directives with a more comprehensive framework relating to cybersecurity and the security of critical entities (CER and NIS2). The scope of these directives will widen, and include more sectors such as food, public administration, hydrogen, etc. as well as include an all-risk approach with references to for example risks relating to climate change, business continuity and supply chain protection. It is expected that both directives will be replaced by the end of 2022.





- The Belgian pandemic law

On August 14<sup>th</sup> 2021 the ‘pandemic law’ was adopted in Belgium, after being voted in the Parliament on July 15<sup>th</sup> 2021. This new legal instrument entered into force on October 4<sup>th</sup> 2021 and was activated and applied for the first time on October 28<sup>th</sup> 2021 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its purpose is to enable the King, in the event of an epidemic emergency, to take administrative police measures that ensure maximum protection of public health, while preserving individual freedoms. It states that the executive power can declare an epidemic emergency by royal decree (which has to be confirmed by the Parliament within 15 days) and subsequently, adopt administrative police measures by royal decree after deliberation in the Council of Ministers (except in cases of “imminent danger” which allows measures to be taken by ministerial decree after deliberation in the Council of Ministers). Depending on the epidemiological situation, the adopted measures can be strengthened, loosened or lifted.

The pandemic law can only be activated when an epidemic emergency emerges which implies that the health risk has already materialized. Nonetheless, this law and the administrative police measures that are enumerated in an exhaustive list therein, allow to prevent a further deterioration of the epidemic situation and thus, a further materialization of the health risk and its associated consequences (such as access to health care that could be compromised during an epidemic when the pressure on hospitals exceeds their limits and could result in the suspension of regular health care). These measures range from restrictions on public gatherings to travel restrictions and allow to address and limit the consequences of an epidemic on public health before it becomes uncontrollable and disastrous for the population. For example, the restrictive measures allow to limit the spread of the virus, as well as to reduce the hospitalization and mortality rates which in turn reduces the pressure on hospitals and consequently, preserves access to regular health care. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the restrictive measures that were adopted on the basis of the pandemic law and were recommended by experts to respond to the evolving epidemiological situation, have improved the epidemiological situation significantly and avoided a further deterioration of the health crisis.

## 15. What progress has been made and challenges encountered in achieving the seven global targets of the Sendai Framework?

- a. Number of deaths and missing persons
- b. Number of directly affected people
- c. Direct economic loss
- d. Damage to critical infrastructure
- e. Adoption and implementation of national disaster risk reduction strategy
- f. International support received for disaster reduction purposes
- g. Multi-hazard early warning systems in place



*Unfortunately, we are unable to formulate an answer to this question, as we have not yet been able to identify progress of the implementation of the Sendai Framework and thus, our progress in achieving the seven global targets of the Framework, due to the recent allocation.*

*However, many initiatives with similar objectives as the Framework have been conducted in Belgium and therefore clarified in this report.*

## **Contextual Shifts**

### **16. What have been the major changes to the contexts within which your government has been implementing the Framework since 2015? Including emerging issues and topics of concern.**

#### **a. How have existing risk governance and risk management mechanisms and approaches fared in the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The existing mechanisms have been under high pressure by the political and societal impact during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the administrations that are familiar with the crisis mechanisms used this by default and by doing this, the mechanisms proved to be very resilient. One of the future challenges is to adapt the mechanisms in such a way they provide better answers to extreme political and societal pressure, and to better incorporate administrations and sectors that aren't familiar with crisis management mechanisms.

- Crisis management structures

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the decision-making process for the adoption of restrictive measures evolved. In the beginning of the pandemic, the administrative police measures were discussed and agreed within the National Security Council (NSC) before being adopted by the Minister of Interior in her capacity as federal administrative police authority. The NSC is a body in which only federal ministers and administration representatives sit and whose task is to set intelligence and security policy priorities. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, the ministers presiding over the governments of the federated entities were also invited to the NSC. This broader representation in the decision-making process provided more legitimacy to the adopted decisions and consequently, broader support at all governmental levels for the restrictive measures adopted at the federal level. In addition, the involvement of the federated entities was also intended to ensure the proper coordination of the measures to be taken by the federated entities themselves within the scope of their competences.

Thereafter, restrictive measures were discussed and agreed within the "Concertation Committee" before being adopted by the federal administrative police authority. Initially,



this administrative police authority was the Minister of Interior but after the adoption of the pandemic law, the King adopted the administrative police measures. The Concertation Committee is a body that brings together federal, regional and community ministers and that is normally intended to try to prevent or resolve conflicts of interest and some of the conflicts of competence that can arise between components of the Belgian federal state.

Neither the NSC nor the Concertation Committee are crisis management bodies as defined by the relevant regulations. However, they fulfilled the role normally given to the Management Cell within the framework of the crisis structures as provided for by the regulations.

At the administrative level, the crisis management structures were mobilized within the National Crisis Centre. The Federal Coordination Committee, on which the representatives of the competent administrations sat and which is chaired by the NCCN, met regularly throughout the entire crisis. Its mission was to prepare the decisions of the NSC and then of the Coordination Committee, and to coordinate their implementation in a multidisciplinary, interdepartmental and inter-federal framework. The Federal Coordination Committee is normally assisted by an evaluation cell, responsible for providing scientific expertise. This cell was mobilized in the first months of the crisis, but was later replaced by several groups of experts appointed by the government and responsible for drawing up reports addressed directly to the competent ministers.

- Mechanisms for the adoption of crisis management measures

The legal framework for addressing current and future epidemic emergencies evolved during the pandemic with the adoption of the previously mentioned pandemic law that complemented the existing legal framework. This law made three significant improvements from an institutional and rule of law perspective.

Firstly, the pandemic law created a legal basis specifically for epidemic emergencies. Initially, the administrative police measures were adopted through ministerial decrees on the basis of the law of May 15<sup>th</sup> 2007 on civil security, the law of December 31<sup>th</sup> 1963 on civil protection and the law of August 5<sup>th</sup> 1992 on the police function. Although the Council of State and multiple civil and criminal courts (including the Court of Cassation and the Constitutional Court) confirmed that these laws constituted an adequate legal basis for the adopted measures, some criticized this legal basis and called for a more specific legal foundation. This resulted in the pandemic law as a specific legal framework for the adoption of restrictive measures in case of epidemic emergencies.



Secondly, the pandemic law increased the role of the Parliament in terms of participation and control which provided greater parliamentary legitimacy to the measures adopted in the context of the epidemic emergency. For example, the royal decree declaring the epidemic emergency needs to be ratified by the Parliament within the timeframe specified in the law (15 days). If the Parliament does not ratify this decree within this timeframe, the administrative police measures that were already adopted cease to have any effect for the future. This parliamentary 'confirmation' makes it possible to initiate a democratic debate about the government's decision on the epidemic emergency, which provides an additional guarantee and helps to strengthen adherence to the measures adopted on the basis of this decision.

Thirdly, and related to the above mentioned, the law established transparency as a guiding principle in order to gain maximum support from the population for the various measures.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the government could act during the COVID-19 health crisis without declaring a state of emergency. After all, the Belgian Constitution does not contain a provision on the state of emergency and hence, does not allow any suspension of its provisions. This implies that the administrative police measures that were adopted during the pandemic did not constitute a derogation from the Constitution or human rights but merely restricted the individual rights and freedoms to protect public health. Consequently, the legal framework has proven to be sufficient without raising the need for including a state of emergency in the Constitution to respond to future health crises.

**b. What impact is the deepening climate crisis having on the implementation of the Sendai Framework?**

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**c. How has the implementation of the Sendai Framework been affected by shifts in biological diversity and the ecosystem's health?**

In response to climate change and in order to be more resilient for its future consequences, Belgium provides a national climate adaptation program to identify the impact of climate change on the energy sector and to identify the policies/measures to address these. Consequently, the various shifts that occur due to climate change (and require adaptation) are identified within this framework and result in an accordingly adjusted climate policy in Belgium.



- National Adaptation Strategy and Plan

The National Climate Commission (NCC) is responsible for a number of tasks related to the national implementation of climate policy. Its central responsibilities are implementing and monitoring the National Climate Plan, monitoring and adapting the Plan's policies and measures, collecting and exchanging data and preparing mandatory reports. The National Climate Commission can also advise the Coordination Committee for International Environmental Policy regarding international policy on climate change and greenhouse gas emissions.

Within the NCC the Adaptation Working Group was created, which brings together adaptation operators from the regional and federal governments. Its competences include drafting the National Adaptation Plan to provide clear and concise information about Belgian adaptation policies (at regional and federal level) and their implementation; and to identify national adaptation measures that will strengthen cooperation and develop synergies between the various governments (federal, regions).

The National Adaptation Strategy describes the main climate change impacts, the existing adaptation responses, a roadmap to a future National Adaptation Plan and several policy guidelines for the further development of adaptation policy. The Strategy has 3 objectives: 1) to improve consistency between existing adaptation activities in Belgium (evaluation of the impacts of climate change, vulnerability to climate change and adaptation measures already implemented); 2) to improve communication at national, European and international level; and 3) to initiate a process for the preparation of a national action plan.

Additionally, more specific initiatives have been set up in response to the consequences of climate change. A few examples given:

- National ozone and heat plan (since 2005)

A National ozone and heat plan was adopted in Belgium in 2005. The decision to create a national plan dates back to 2003, when an exceptionally severe heat wave occurred across Europe in August, resulting in a sharp rise in morbidity and mortality among vulnerable people. Within this framework, authorities have drawn up a plan with both temperature and ozone thresholds. The aim of this plan is to anticipate the emergence of heat and ozone peaks and proactively define measures to prevent and mitigate the health effects of ozone and heat, especially for the most vulnerable people. The follow-up of the national plan is ensured by an "Ozone and Heat" working group in which representatives of all relevant authorities (federal, regional and community) in Belgium participate through the national Environment-Health cell, with the Ministry of Public Health.



The National ozone and heat plan consists of 3 phases:

Phase 1: the vigilance phase, starting from the 15<sup>th</sup> of May each year until the 30<sup>th</sup> of September.

Phase 2: the warning phase, which is declared when a temperature threshold is exceeded. The states each have a heat action plan and are responsible for its implementation.

Phase 3: the alert phase. When critical temperature and ozone values are measured, the Risk Management Group (chaired by the FPS Public Health) may decide to proceed to the alert phase. During this phase, the FPS Public Health, in close cooperation with the National Crisis Centre and the crisis centres of the states, is responsible for coordinating and implementing the appropriate measures to control the effects of heat and ozone on the health of the population.

- The Blue Deal initiative

The Blue Deal initiative was created by the Flemish Government to tackle water scarcity and drought. It is an ambitious programme that tackles water scarcity and drought on the ground through numerous actions. Rather than focusing on the causes, the Blue Deal initiative wants to work on structural solutions by implementing numerous actions through legislation, research, monitoring, communication and awareness-raising. It encourages and supports companies, associations, farmers, knowledge institutions and citizens to work together to infiltrate more water, to retain water longer upstream or to use water more economically, resulting in more available water for people and the environment.

## 17. Which emerging risk issues – other than health and climate - are anticipated for the period to 2030 and beyond?

The Belgian National Risk Assessment pays particular attention to emerging risks and the influence they may have on each risk scenario analysed. More specifically, during the Belgian National Risk Assessment 2023-2026, the following societal or technological developments, which may influence the occurrence of certain risks, will be assessed by the experts:

- 5G
- Artificial intelligence
- Energy transition
- Systemic interdependence
- Blockchain technology and cryptocurrency
- Internet of Things related hazards
- Quantum computing
- Biohacking
- Polarisation of society
- Erosion of privacy



Furthermore, the following risks are identified at EU level:

- Extreme weather events
- Flooding
- Drought
- Wildfires
- Geophysical risk
- Epidemics/pandemics
- Animal and plant diseases
- Nuclear and radiological accidents
- Disruption of critical infrastructure
- Industrial accidents
- Terrorism
- Cyber threats

With the extreme floods in Belgium last year, increasing wild fires all over Europe and extreme droughts this summer, the risks related to climate change are clearly manifesting itself.

### **Prospective Review**

#### **18. What are the key measures that must be taken to build resilience in health, food security, water management, energy provision and financial systems?**

In order to build resilience in these systems, a more risk based approach needs to be implemented, as well as the introduction of a more holistic view towards crises, building on the increased awareness of cross sectoral dependencies. Subsequently, a new legal framework for public (mandatory) and private (commercial) stocks needs to be created as well. In order to optimise the operationalisation of crisis management policies, the existing legal framework is being reviewed continuously, to adapt to changes in the EU legislation and new developments.

#### **19. What measures can be taken to ensure that all decision-making integrates resilience building in each sector?**

In order to integrate resilience building in a structured, integrated and coordinated way, there is a need for a clear strategy as well as the need to link this strategy to operationalised implementation plans within the different policy levels and areas of competence. Moreover, an integrated sectoral approach to increase resilience should be a continuous process starting from a national responsibility, based on a pan-community and an all-risk approach, bearing cultural changes and the international framework in mind. Additionally, an increase of awareness of the identified risk scenario's in other policy domains, could have a conducive effect on the awareness in your own sector.

#### **20. What adjustments are required in policy, regulatory and legislative frameworks, organization and investment to mitigate emerging threats at national and international levels?**

In response to this question, we refer to question 2.



**21. What is required to promote women's and youth's empowerment and leadership in disaster risk reduction?**

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**22. How can local authorities and local partnerships be more empowered? Give specific suggestions.**

To enhance the capability of exercising their competences, they need extra support from the national level at certain times. This can come in many forms and needs to be low tier and readily available. This could be extra skilled manpower, legal advice, a direct link to the entire network of the national level with other authority levels.

A good way to point out the importance and relevance of the role of local authorities is to actively involve them in exercises at a national level – this way there is a realistic bottom-up feed of local problems and challenges.

Local partnerships should be allowed by regulation to spontaneously form (or dissolve) and have local authorities pool their resources when they deem necessary/advantageous. It can strengthen resilience, as in this way will be a permanent local base of support for cooperation available.

For other additional measures to get local authorities and local partnerships more involved, we refer to question 25. Some measures that benefit the resilience of business and industry also apply to civil society, including local authorities and partnerships, and hence, empower those actors as well. This is explicitly indicated in the answer.

**23. What measures must be taken so that disaster risk considerations were part in each sector's development plans?**

Stronger coordination and information exchange between all relevant parties *in tempore non suspecto* should be established. For the measures establishing this closer coordination and information exchange between sectors and governmental authorities, we refer to question 25. The measures that can enhance the resilience of business and industry also include better coordination and information exchange which in turn enables each sector to take disaster risk considerations into account when drafting their development plan. In addition to these measures, partnership formats could also be pre-established for regular meetings and communication between representatives from the private sector and civil society, and representatives of authorities (central, regional, municipal), as well as providing comprehensive and regular information, education and training regarding disaster risks. This would not only make each sector more aware of these risks but could also encourage them to incorporate them in their development plans.

**24. How can future disaster risks be assessed with price-tags, so that they could be featured and spread out in budget plannings?**

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## 25. How can the resilience of business and industry be strengthened to disaster risk?

The resilience of business and industry to disaster risk can be strengthened through several measures. For example, administrative agreements could be established to provide for cooperation and communication among civil and military authorities, civil society and citizens to ensure cooperation on societal resilience between central and local (regional, provincial and municipal) entities. This cooperation and communication could be beneficial for the resilience of many actors, including business and industry. In this regard, a legal framework could be provided to involve and engage the private sector (and civil society) in preparation for and response to crisis and emergencies/security planning. The private sector (and civil society) could also be included in the drafting of emergency or crisis plans, trainings and exercises. Moreover, concerted/joint risk assessment, communication, situation awareness and planning with the private sector (and civil society) could be facilitated. In addition, the private sector (and civil society) should also be able to actively participate in the activities concerning the preparation for and response to crises and emergencies, such as through funding, by providing specialists for courses, providing know-how for writing plans, etc.

In addition, cooperation and communication structures between the public and private sector (as well as between civil and military authorities, including at local and regional level) could be established in the field of national defence efforts. This comprises, amongst other things, adopting a legal/institutional framework for the regular involvement of different stakeholders (such as the private sector, municipalities, regional and local communities, NGO's) in defence/security planning, civil defence planning, concerted risk assessment and situational awareness.

## 26. How can development partners and the international community provide better support?

Initiatives and projects dedicated to the creation of networks (locally, regionally, nationally and internationally) can enhance resilience of all partners and enable a better cooperation in the occurrence of a crisis or emergency situation. With regards to the latter, making own emergency systems compatible and interoperable with those of neighbouring countries would contribute significantly to an aligned response in the case of cross-border crises or emergency situations.

For example, as part of the Benelux consultation, the possibilities for information exchange during emergencies between the digital systems ICMS (BE) and LCMS (NL) are currently being examined. Belgium sees two possible scenarios for information exchange: giving access to each other's platform or automatic exchange to other systems.

However, the use of ICMS will eventually diminish as there will be a transition to the new platform Paragon, in which international interest has already been shown. In light of compatibility and interoperability purposes, Belgium is open to and already having discussions with other states in this regard.



## End note

As presented in this report, Belgium is very actively engaged in disaster risk reduction and numerous actions are already been undertaken, such as working on a national strategy concerning resilience, including local partners in its approach and establishment of these strategies as well as the enhancement of international cooperation.

All these initiatives with similar objectives to the framework ensure that Belgium is equipped with a solid foundation for further development.

The opportunity to reflect on current procedures and projects that can be situated within the context of the Framework as well as the opportunity to contribute to the Midterm Review, has been gratefully received. Additionally, the request for information regarding the Belgian implementation of the Framework was very well received by the different stakeholders as well, complemented by the articulation of their willingness to cooperate more closely within this context in the future.

Therefore, we are looking towards the next year in a hopeful manner, during which more discussions with relevant stakeholders can be held, more information can be gathered and a national consultation workshop for the establishment of the midterm review can be organised.

