European Union
Civil Protection

Union Civil Protection Mechanism -
Peer Review Programme
for disaster risk management

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Guidelines

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Introduction

This document provides the essentials for an effective Peer review, clarifying the principles that drive the process, the roles and responsibilities of the different actors involved, the workflow to be followed and the tools available.

This key reference document is the result of research conducted on the basis of different inputs: 2018-2019 programme cycle documentation and outcomes, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recommendations, the recently updated ISO 22392:2020 Guidelines for conducting peer reviews, the legislative proposal amending the decision 1313/2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), and a series of interviews conducted with key experts experienced in risk management capability assessment and peer reviews.

The Peer Review Guidelines are structured in five chapters. Chapter one defines what a peer review is and the role it plays within the UCPM. Chapter two describes who is involved in and/or contributes to the peer review (actors). Chapter three describes the principles and rules of conduct applied throughout the assessment exercise. Chapter four explains the workflow of the process, aligned with the ISO 22392:2020 standard and extended. Some of the essential components involve:

- an important role of the facilitator in writing the initial desk report and draft peer review report, based on the available knowledge and the continual indications of the peers. The draft report is continually revised and complemented by the peers;
- a systematic use of fact-finding data collection methods prior to the peer review, and formulation of initial hypotheses regarding the best practice examples and strengths/ limitations of the risk management practices - to be addressed during the peer review mission;
- additional supporting material produced to guide the peer reviews;
- addition of a voluntary self-assessment by the host country prior to the peer review mission, and a follow-up assessment on whether and how the recommendations have been taken into account by the host country.

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1 - What a peer review is including its role in the UCPM

A peer review is a well-established assessment instrument, widely used in policy evaluation. A Peer Review of disaster risk management (DRM) provides a country or a region with an opportunity to reflect on its readiness to cope with natural and man-made disasters and to identify ways of improving risk management.

The Decision establishing a Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM, 2013/1313/EU) introduced the peer reviews in order to assess risk management capabilities, defined as "the ability of a Member State or its regions to reduce, adapt to or mitigate risks, identified in its risk assessments to levels that are acceptable". The UCPM regulation specifies that the risk management capability is to be assessed in terms of technical, financial and administrative capacity to carry out:

- risk assessments;
- risk management planning for prevention and preparedness;
- risk prevention and preparedness measures.

The EU peer review programme promotes an integrated approach to DRM. Peer reviews also support a wider policy dialogue across Europe and beyond, to improve policy coherence and facilitate the exchange of good practices on civil protection and DRM. Countries participating in the peer review programme form a network of practitioners across which experiences and lessons learned are shared.

The European Commission's Directorate General for Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) supports the Member States, the Participating States and the European Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy countries to review their DRM policies and practices by taking stock of strengths and weaknesses and putting forward recommendations to increase effectiveness.

What are the benefits of peer reviews:

- Policy coherence: The peer review process checks to what extent the newly adopted or revised strategies are in keeping with sustainable development and climate change policies.
- Catalyst for change: Peer reviews help to identify alternative approaches to policy and operations, and explore actionable solutions to similar challenges successfully implemented elsewhere. Peer reviews result in recommendations for improving disaster DRM policy and operations.
- Collaboration and mutual learning: Peer reviews promote mutual learning and exchange of good practices. Trusted relationships can stimulate transferability of good and innovative practices.
- Risk awareness: Peer reviews encourage awareness-raising through broad involvement of stakeholders in the review process and wide dissemination of results.

Additional benefits include the opportunity for team building across the whole range of the DRM stakeholders as well as closer working relationships between the coordinating authority of the host country and the DRM stakeholders.

What is the purpose of this document?

The guidelines provide a clear picture of what a peer review is in the framework of the UCPM and the roles and principles that drive the process. The responsibilities of the actors involved are described in detail, along with the workflow of the entire process.

The guidelines describe:

- what: the focus areas of DRM review;
- who: the roles of those who conduct the peer review or are involved and contribute to the review;
- workflow: how the peer review is organised and conducted;
- how: the methods and tools for collecting insights and evidence;
- the principles and rules of conduct applied throughout the review exercise.

2 - Roles and responsibilities

The UCPM peer review of DRM practices involve the following actors:

- **The Coordinator, the European Commission**, Directorate General Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Operations (ECHO) coordinates and oversees the peer review programme and process, and
  - » invites countries to enrol in the peer review process;
  - » agrees with the host country the objectives and expected benefits of the peer review, and the areas of analysis;
  - » choses experienced experts from civil protection authorities and from other key institutions as peers, e.g. relevant ministries to supervise the work of the facilitator;
  - » chairs the meetings and workshops;
  - » delivers the draft and final reports to the host country.

- **The Facilitator** manages and supports the peer review process, and
  - » develops related working/training tools;
  - » conducts a preliminary desk research and fact-finding exercise to support the peers;
  - » manages the peer review mission, including the logistical arrangements;
  - » supports the peer team in drafting the findings from the review mission, including the interviews of staff members and stakeholders in the host country;
  - » drafts the review report and supports the process of its further revisions;
  - » supports ECHO in conducting the ex-post evaluation of the experiences gained and the impact of the peer review exercise.

- **The Peers** are experts selected by ECHO among main authorities and organisations involved in DRM with expertise matching the scope of the respective peer review. The team of peers is chaired by an expert appointed among them with experience in the areas chosen for the review.

- **The Host country** is represented by the civil protection authority or another key organisation involved in the risk management governance.

- **The Stakeholders** are organisations and individuals with an interest in the process and the outcome of the peer review. They are identified by the host country considering the scope of the peer review. Stakeholders include organisations involved in the national civil protection system and/or disaster risk reduction platforms. They may include government officials, responders, private sector staff, academics, citizens and elected officials.

3 - Principles

Peer reviews observe the following principles:

- **Voluntarism and Collegiality**;
  - » peers, host country experts and stakeholders are engaged on a voluntary basis;
  - » the host country provides and explains the facts and evidence requested by the peers and the facilitator in a timely and exhaustive way.

- **Transparency**;
  - » the information, knowledge, and evidence collected throughout the review process are available to the involved parties, except for information provided under confidentiality agreements.

- **Anonymity**;
  - » where the insights gained are based on confidential or personal information, the sources are not disclosed and the outcomes of the review process are anonymised.

- **Evidence based**;
  - » all findings, analyses and recommendations are based on verifiable sources and knowledge available to the peers.

- **Trust and consensus**;
  - » assessments and evaluations are performed without prejudice and in a way that fosters consensus among the peers, and trust building between peers and host country experts and stakeholders.

- **Quality assurance**;
  - » the process and outputs of the peer review are based on a triangulation of information collected, increasing confidence in the feedback.

4 - Workflow

4.1 Main phases

The ISO 22392:2020 divides the peer review process of DRM into four consecutive steps: planning for the review, the review itself, assessment of the impacts, and evaluation of the review process and its outcomes (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Main phases of the peer review process according to ISO22392:2020 (own graphic elaboration).

During the **planning phase,** the coordinator (ECHO) and the host country:

- agree on the objectives, expected benefits and timetable of the peer review;
- identify stakeholders to be involved in the peer review;
- decide whether a self-assessment will be performed prior the peer review;
- select the main and optional analysis areas to be reviewed;
- chose the peers to conduct the peer reviews.

The objectives of the peer review should clearly indicate how the benefits will be delivered and the performance in the areas analysed strengthened, in terms of:

- strategy, vision and leadership;
- collection and use of data;
- management of systems, processes, planning and audits;
- coordination and communication of operations;
- delivery of operations.

Stakeholders are identified by a mapping exercise that shows who is involved in or contributes to risk management processes and operations in the analysed areas, and how important they are for the peer review. A self-assessment performed by the host country (on a voluntary basis) can produce a benchmark for the peer review, gather evidence and enable the host country to establish its own view of the activities.

The **areas of analysis** may be chosen in collaboration with the chosen stakeholders and based on the results of the self-assessment. The ISO 22392:2020 recommends addressing (the governance of) risk management and risk assessment in the peer review, or if they are not addressed, to provide the peers with details on those topics as part of the background information. Other areas of analysis may include financial and institutional capacity, urban development, climate change adaptation and ecosystem protection, community and societal capacity, economic and business continuity, infrastructure, public health, cultural heritage, recovery and rebuilding, etc.

During the **peer review phase**, the host country and the facilitator plan and manage the review process in a smooth way that meets the expectations and agreed objectives. The host country prepares the personnel and provides information to the peers about each analysis area. Supported by the facilitator, the peers prepare questions, record observations and analyse the collected information. The process includes desk research of documentation provided by the host country and a peer review mission during which the peers meet the personnel and the stakeholders from the host country, and receive further information.

The host country shall make available information to the facilitator and peers on each analysis area pertaining to the following analysis systems:

1. Strategy, vision and leadership

- aims, objectives and strategies;
- governing documents and policies;
- long-term financial, environmental and political aspects;
- governance and decision-making structure.

2. Information on the collection and use of intelligence

- information that is collected and made available to the organisation;
- how the information is used;
- information gaps and consequences of these gaps;
- external legislation, framework, reports and research that support performance;
- description of relationships with external entities.

3. Information on the management of processes, systems, planning and audits

- people available to manage the systems, including management structure, roles and responsibilities;
- processes used to manage the systems, including performance management, business continuity, exercising and training;
- resources available and the sustainability of those (e.g. budgets, partnership resources);
- affordability or response and recovery operations;
- gaps that may be addressed.

4. Coordination and communication of operations

- working partnerships and coordination of resources and efforts;
- the process for determining and prioritizing needs;
- the process for determining what proportionate resources are deployed to address those needs;
- communication procedures to ensure the coordination of on-scene resources;
- the role (if any) of civil society in communication, coordination and collaboration.

5. Information on the delivery of operations

- how the approach to delivery is aligned to the strategy;
- capabilities available to deliver operations, including those for prevention, preparedness, response and recovery;
- targets for service delivery;
- processes for understanding the effectiveness of delivery and adapting delivery.

The peers conduct the desk review of the information received and prepare questions to fill the gaps in knowledge about how the host country delivers each analysis area. Peers identify areas of strong performance, areas where performance should be strengthened, whether the expected benefits can be realised, and changes required to this end. The consolidated opinions of all peers are summarised and provided to the host country.

The next phase **assesses the impacts** of the peer reviews, both during and after the peer review. During the review, the peers should monitor aspects that could prevent the peer review from having the expected impact, inform the host country and take corrective actions to minimise negative implications. After the peer review, the host country and the peers should assess whether the objectives and benefits have been met, and what if anything has been learned from participation in the review. The assessment should be completed twice: immediately after the review and after an agreed period of time has elapsed.

The final phase addresses possible **improvements of the peer review process** and identifies both how the peer review process could be improved and what needs to be done to improve the assessment of the impacts.

4.2 Detailed workflow

For the purpose of the 2020-2022 UCPM peer review programme, the ISO peer review process has been further detailed and adapted (Figure 2).

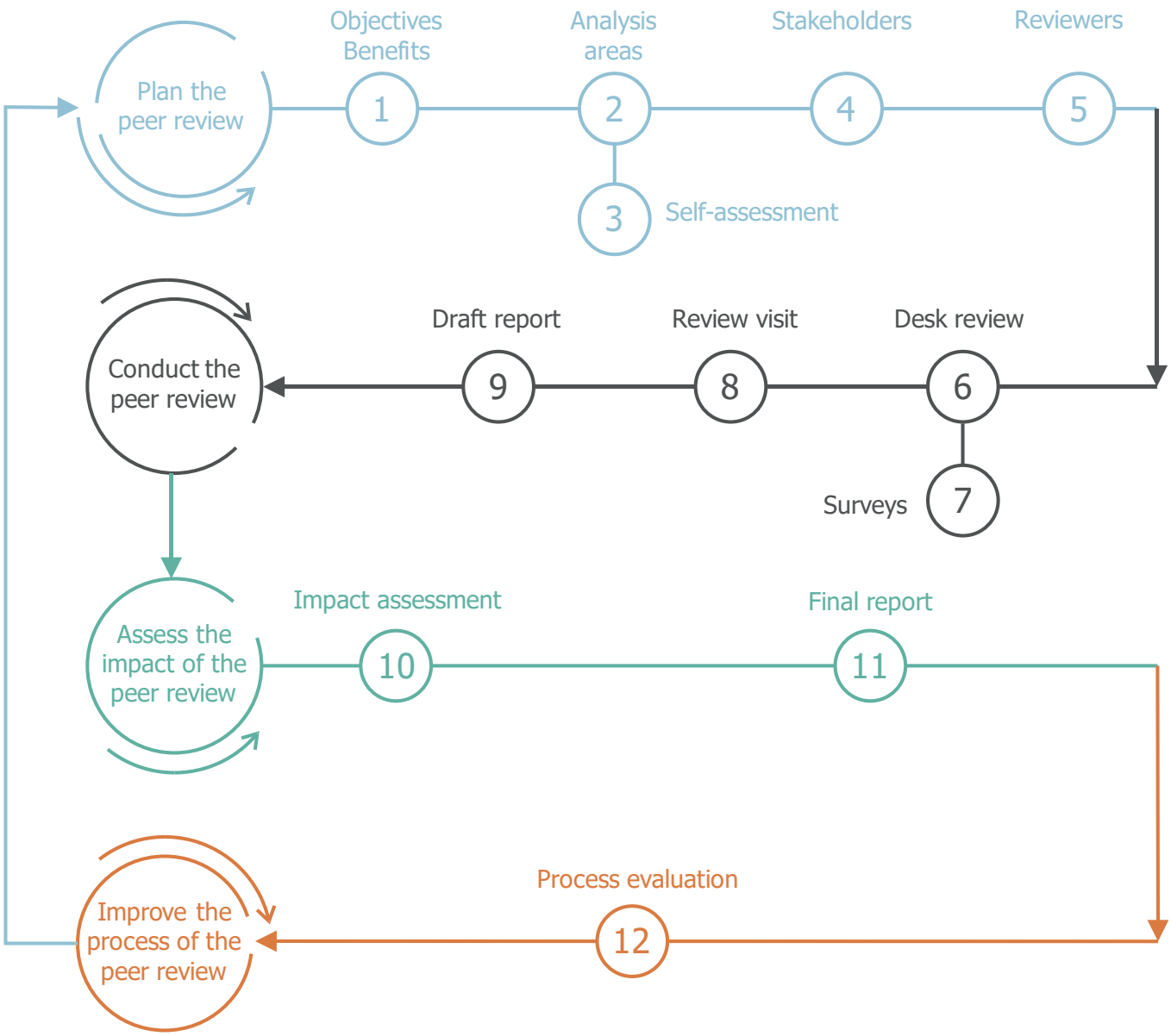

Figure 2 - UCPM peer review workflow.

PLAN THE PEER REVIEW

1. Define objectives and benefits

The host country and DG ECHO jointly explore and define:

- objectives of the peer review, expected outcomes and how these can be used to improve risk management capabilities and to strengthen the level of preparedness of the European Union;
- benefits of the peer review for the host country, the UCPM and the wider community in the host country.

2. Choose the areas of analysis

- the thematic scope of the peer review is specified in detail and laid down in the form of terms of reference;
- the criteria for choosing the best practice examples to be highlighted in the report are agreed on.

3. Self-assessment

- the host country may choose to complete a self-assessment with emphasis on its own strengths and innovative practices (the host country will not be asked to identify weaknesses in its own risk management capabilities);
- the facilitator will provide the host country with a self-assessment questionnaire and guide the host country in the activity through structured interviews and meetings;
- self-assessment, if completed, may inform the choice or framing of the areas of analysis (see point 2).

4. Identify stakeholders to be involved in the review process

- stakeholders are identified by an in-depth social mapping exercise and preliminary analysis of the risk management governance;
- identified stakeholders are informed about the scope and objectives of the peer review and prepared to deliver information sought for this purpose by the peers.

5. Peers

ECHO chooses the peers with expertise and knowledge matching the purpose and scope of the peer review, based on the criteria agreed on with the host country. With the support of the facilitator the selected peers are:

- briefed and trained for the purpose of the peer review;
- including a review of the terms of reference and code of conduct throughout the peer review process.

The outcomes of the planning phase include:

- detailed terms of reference for the peer review;
- a roadmap for implementing the peer review, including a detailed agenda of visits/interviews/events throughout the peer review mission;
- identifying and supplying supporting material for the review.

CONDUCTING THE PEER REVIEW

6. Desk research

- is conducted by the facilitator using the documentation agreed on with and/or provided by the host country, under the guidance of DG ECHO;
- feeds into a preliminary desk report which is structured along the same main themes as the future peer review report, and is used for peers to learn about the risk management practices and capabilities in the host country;
- is used to formulate and highlight hypotheses to be further corroborated by the peers and to prepare them for the peer review mission.

7. Surveys

- are organised and implemented by the facilitator under the guidance of DG ECHO and the peers;
- are implemented as a part of the fact-finding data collection prior to the peer review, and the results are summarised in the preliminary country report.

8. The Peer Review mission

- is logistically organised and prepared by the facilitator under the guidance of DG ECHO and in close collaboration with the host country;
- is preceded by a briefing: a physical or virtual meeting/ workshop with DG ECHO, the facilitator, and the host country;
- lasts for up to 10-14 consecutive days, for which the agenda is prepared and agreed on well in advance with the host country;
- serves for collecting deeper insights into the risk management capabilities of the host country and entails workshops, interviews, debriefing sessions and field trips;
- is concluded with a series of minutes, registrations and other audio-visual material which the facilitator collects in a central repository, to be further analysed for finalising a draft report.

9. The Draft Report

- is completed by the peers and the facilitator within the predefined time after the peer review and shared with the host country, initially without the recommendations;
- is further revised according to the comments received from the host country and the stakeholders;
- is completed with the recommendations and shared with the host country for further comments;
- is finalised together with the assessment of the preliminary impacts of the peer review process, if any.

ASSESS THE IMPACT OF THE PEER REVIEW

10. Impact assessment

- addresses the assessment of the impacts and benefits of the peer review;
- is completed twice, a first time shortly after the review visit focusing on the potential impacts of the peer review process, and a second time later on (e.g. after a year) to assess to what extent the recommendations have been taken into account and implemented.

11. The Final Report

- is produced by the facilitator, based on the version agreed on with the peers and the host country;
- when possible, the final report is handed over to the host country by ECHO during a dedicated event logistically prepared by the facilitator and the host country;
- includes measurable and pragmatic recommendations divided into specific objectives and associated with a defined timeline. If appropriate, depending on the specific review, includes examples of good/best practices coming from the peers' home countries.

IMPROVE THE PROCESS OF THE PEER REVIEW

12. The process evaluation

- includes representatives of the host country, the stakeholders and the peers, and addresses perceived strengths and weaknesses of the peer review process just completed;
- suggests improvements to be taken into account for the next review process/programme cycle.

4.3 Methods and tools

The UCPM peer review programme uses different fact-finding and verification methods and tools:

- Desk reviews are based on published/unpublished documentation provided by the host country and/or available from other trusted sources, such as the country reports mandated by the UCPM or other EU legislation and regulation. Examples of these sources include:
  - » Multi-hazard risk assessment and management plans mandated by the UCPM;
  - » Reportnet and Central Data Repository of the European Environment Information and Observation Network for the sectoral risk assessment and management reports (e.g. Floods Directive);
  - » European Environment Agency's periodic reports including state of climate adaptation and evolution of the key indicators (hazards, impacts);
  - » UNDRR country profiles and SENDAI Monitor reporting status.
- Surveys and questionnaires are instruments for collecting information from or about people to describe, compare or explain their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour[a]. Surveys include setting objectives, designing the study, preparing a reliable and valid survey instrument, administering the survey, managing and analysing the survey data, and reporting the results[a].
  - » Fact-finding surveys are designed to collect factual information.
  - » Evaluation and perception surveys are designed to collect subjective views and judgements.
- Interviews are instruments for finding, verifying or clarifying facts, as well as gathering opinions. Interviews may be unstructured or (semi)structured, by using open or closed sets of questions. Interviewing is time consuming and costly, and its success depends on the communication skills of the interviewer. Preferably, the interviews are recorded, transcribed and summarised, preserving when needed the anonymity of the interviewees.
- Workshops are organised by the facilitator in collaboration with the host country, peers and stakeholders, and may take different forms: plenary briefing and discussion, focus groups, briefing/debriefing, consensus building or self-assessment.
- Field/on-site visits are planned with the host country and logistically supported by the facilitator. Visits offer personal experience from the risk management operations and in-depth exploration of the areas of analysis.

a - Fink, A. G. *How to Manage Analyse, and Interpret Survey Data*. (2002).

Annex: List of interviewed experts

Vittorio Bosi, Italian Civil Protection Department

Andrew Bower, United Nation Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)

Erika Conti, Italian Civil Protection Department

Sofia Gonzalez Lopez, Spanish Civil Protection

Siegfried Jachs, Austrian Interior Ministry

Jens Kampelmann, Consultant/Disaster Response Team member, Germany

Markus Leitner, Umweltbundesamt - Environment Agency Austria

Montserrat Marin-Ferrer, European Commission - Joint Research Centre

Kathy Oldham, Greater Manchester, Chief Resilience Officer

Sebastien Penzini, United Nation Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)

Jack Radisch, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Regis Thepot, RTeau