Briefing

European Parliament

Risk and resilience in foreign policy

SUMMARY

The complexity of risks affecting the world is illustrated by the interconnected nature of conflicts, natural hazards, water shortages and state collapse. The current migratory challenge Europe is facing is yet more evidence that distance or the natural borders inherent in seas, mountains and deserts are of little significance when people are confronted with challenges like conflict, fragility, and failure of governance. These risks are further accentuated by a number of global trends including climate change, urbanisation and population ageing. An evolving and complex risk landscape implies a continuous need to confront stresses and uncertainty, and hence requires constant adaptation.

Resilience – understood as the capacity of different layers of society to withstand, to adapt, and to recover quickly from stresses and shocks – has gradually emerged as a concept bridging different policy areas: humanitarian aid, development assistance, disaster-risk reduction, climate-change adaptation, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Stressing the need for breaking the silos between different policy areas and developing holistic approaches to risk, resilience is gradually becoming one of the key concepts of foreign and security policy.

In this briefing:
- Identifying risks and risk trends
- What is resilience?
- Building resilience: actors and tools
- The EU's approach to resilience
- Main references

EN

> **Box 1 – Glossary of basic risk-related terms**
>
> **Disaster**: A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or society, involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.
> **Risk**: The combination of the probability of an event and its negative consequences.
> **Risk assessment**: A methodology to determine the nature and extent of risk by analysing potential hazards and evaluating existing conditions of vulnerability that together could potentially harm exposed people, property, services, and the environment on which they depend.
> **Risk management**: The systematic approach and practice of managing uncertainty to minimise potential harm and loss.
> **Trend analysis**: Analysis of how a potential driver of change has developed over time, and how it is likely to develop in the future.
> **Vulnerability**: The characteristics and circumstances of a community, system or asset that make it susceptible to the damaging effects of a hazard.
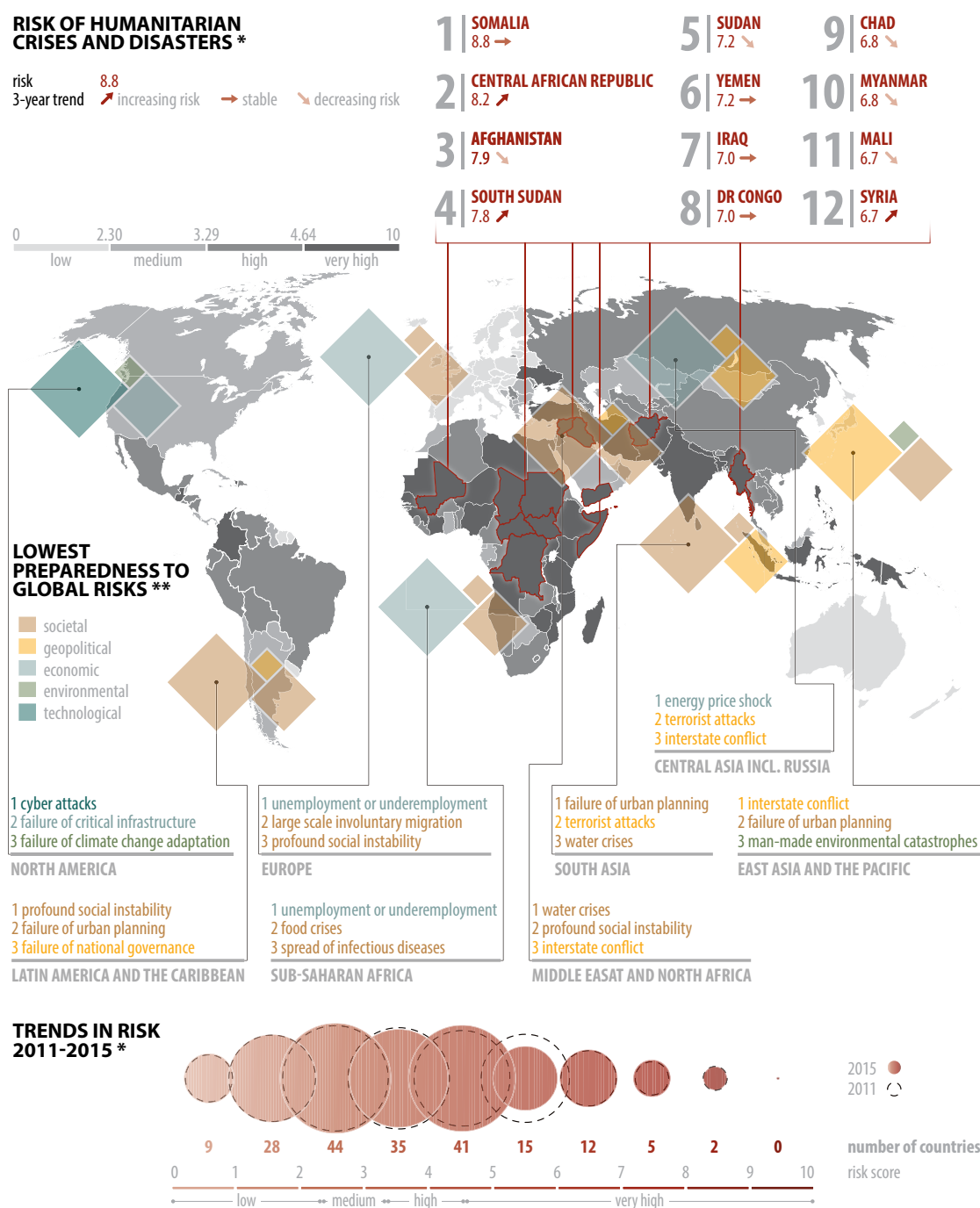>
> *Source:* The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR).

Identifying risks and risk trends

Societal, economic, technological and geopolitical trends point to the growing vulnerability of the world's population to shocks and stresses, including: interstate conflicts, extreme weather events, water crises, state collapse and cyber-attacks. In such a rapidly changing environment, complex and interconnected risks that do not fit within neat categories delineated by geographical borders or legal boundaries challenge traditional approaches to foreign and security policy. The migratory challenge the EU is currently facing is yet another illustration that distance or natural borders outlined by seas, mountains and deserts are little deterrent when people are confronted with challenges such as conflict, fragility, and failure of governance. At the same time, hybrid threats challenge the pre-established legal, institutional and conceptual basis of such fundamental notions as sovereignty, legality or accountability. Consequently, the already identified and emerging trends require flexibility and constant adaptation.

In order to better prepare for an uncertain future, decision-makers and practitioners rely on tools like indexes and models for risk analysis. Humanitarian agencies and crisis respondents use forecasting for early warning, emergency response and contingency planning. For instance, the Index for Risk Management (INFORM) – an international collaborative project by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the European Commission – is a global and open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters that helps different actors to identify potential risks and take evidence-based decisions about ways to reduce them. Given the substantial human and material cost of wars and violence – the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen being only a few recent examples – there has also been increased interest in trying to identify the socio-economic and political factors that increase the probability of conflict occurring. To that end, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre has developed the Global Conflict Risk Index (GCRI) that allows – on the basis of over 20 quantitative indicators from open sources – to assess the statistical risk of violent conflict in the next 1-4 years. In addition, several countries and international players – including the European Union – have committed substantial resources towards the analysis of global trends in order to be able to identify future challenges and to adjust their strategic orientation.

Figure 1 – Global risk landscape and preparedness

RISK OF HUMANITARIAN
CRISES AND DISASTERS *

risk   8.8
3-year trend   ↗ increasing risk   → stable   ↘ decreasing risk

1	SOMALIA 8.8 →	5	SUDAN 7.2 ↘	9	CHAD 6.8 ↘
2	CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC 8.2 ↗	6	YEMEN 7.2 →	10	MYANMAR 6.8 ↘
3	AFGHANISTAN 7.9 ↘	7	IRAQ 7.0 →	11	MALI 6.7 ↘
4	SOUTH SUDAN 7.8 ↗	8	DR CONGO 7.0 →	12	SYRIA 6.7 ↗

0   2.30   3.29   4.64   10
   low   medium   high   very high

LOWEST
PREPAREDNESS TO
GLOBAL RISKS **

- societal
- geopolitical
- economic
- environmental
- technological

1 cyber attacks
2 failure of critical infrastructure
3 failure of climate change adaptation
NORTH AMERICA

1 unemployment or underemployment
2 large scale involuntary migration
3 profound social instability
EUROPE

1 failure of urban planning
2 terrorist attacks
3 water crises
SOUTH ASIA

1 energy price shock
2 terrorist attacks
3 interstate conflict
CENTRAL ASIA INCL. RUSSIA

1 interstate conflict
2 failure of urban planning
3 man-made environmental catastrophes
EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

1 profound social instability
2 failure of urban planning
3 failure of national governance
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

1 unemployment or underemployment
2 food crises
3 spread of infectious diseases
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

1 water crises
2 profound social instability
3 interstate conflict
MIDDLE EASAT AND NORTH AFRICA

TRENDS IN RISK
2011-2015 *

2015 ●
2011 ○

9   28   44   35   41   15   12   5   2   0   number of countries
0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10   risk score
   low   medium   high   very high

* INFORM 2015 Risk Index
** Global Risks Perception Survey 2014, World Economic Forum

What is resilience?

Resilience is generally defined as the capacity of different layers of society – an individual, a household, a community, a country or a region – to withstand, to adapt, and to recover quickly from stresses and shocks (i.e. natural hazards, violence and conflict). An evolving and complex risk landscape implies a continuous need to confront stresses and uncertainty, and hence requires constant adaptation. The risks are further accentuated by a number of global trends, including rising mobility, climate change, urbanisation, and population ageing. The concept of resilience brings under the same umbrella different short- and long-term approaches to risk management, which deal not

only with imminent disasters (i.e. flooding, fires) but also with complex crises (i.e. chronic conflicts) and risk trends (i.e. climate change, environmental degradation, demographic changes). The following are some of the existing approaches:

- *Humanitarian aid* deals with the negative impact of crises and conflicts on the lives and conditions of the populations affected, including measures to improve their health, education, food, access to water or shelter.
- *Development assistance* is a set of instruments focusing on a number of specific policy objectives, including reduction of poverty, sustainable economic, social and environmental development and promotion of democracy, the rule of law, good governance and the respect of human rights.
- *Disaster-risk reduction* (DRR) is the concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyse and reduce the causal factors of disasters. Examples of DRR practices include wise management of land and the environment, lessening vulnerability of people and property and improving preparedness and early warning for adverse events.
- *Climate-change adaptation* is the process of anticipating the adverse effects of climate change and taking actions that prevent or minimise potential damage or take advantage of opportunities that may arise.
- *Conflict prevention and peacebuilding* encompass a broad array of processes (i.e. mediation, reconciliation, confidence building) that contribute to peaceful solutions to disputes, and address the root causes of conflicts.
- *Crisis management* in the context of foreign and security policy implies overall planning, organisation and coordination of crisis-related activities, including preparedness, monitoring and response.

Building resilience: actors and tools

As references to resilience become more common, it is essential to ensure that it is not just another buzzword devoid of substance but rather a set of concrete practices and instruments to approaching risks. Addressing risks comprehensively is necessary in order to avoid artificial division of labour that might ultimately compromise a common objective. For instance, food security crises in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel highlighted the need to focus on similar objectives in different policy areas like agriculture or water resource management. Building resilience also requires that different sectors work together in order to ensure complementarity and to avoid conflicting approaches. For instance, investment in the use of new technologies for development programmes (i.e. education, healthcare, agriculture) will not bring the desired results if there is no energy infrastructure that can recharge a mobile phone or power a computer. Finally, risks are distributed differently among layers of society and are dealt with in different ways, which calls for the involvement of stakeholders at global, national, sub-national, community and household levels.

Comprehensive risk and vulnerability analysis is one of the main elements in ensuring that building resilience reaches each layer of society. That implies that the relevant actors across the range of policy areas should be involved in the process in order to ensure a broad understanding of risks related to geopolitical situation, climate change, natural hazards and economic risks. Such a broad engagement helps to ensure that the interconnected nature of risks is taken aboard and reflected in the needs analysis. Joint risk analysis also helps to develop a shared situational awareness and is more likely to result in mainstreaming of the elements of resilience in the existing or future

programmes. Although 'programming through the risk lens' often requires changes in working method or more flexibility in dealing with evolving contexts, it does not necessarily imply a need for additional funding. Given the limited funding and competition for resources, it is also crucial that the impact of resilience is properly measured and documented. Since building resilience requires full commitment across the board in order to yield results, it should also take into account and reflect in the planning process the limited capacities of partners for risk management or have limited absorption capacities. Several lessons from the ongoing or completed projects have already been analysed, offering useful guidance on resilience programming, including methods for engagement with stakeholders and comprehensive risk analysis.

Figure 2 – From risk analysis to resilience
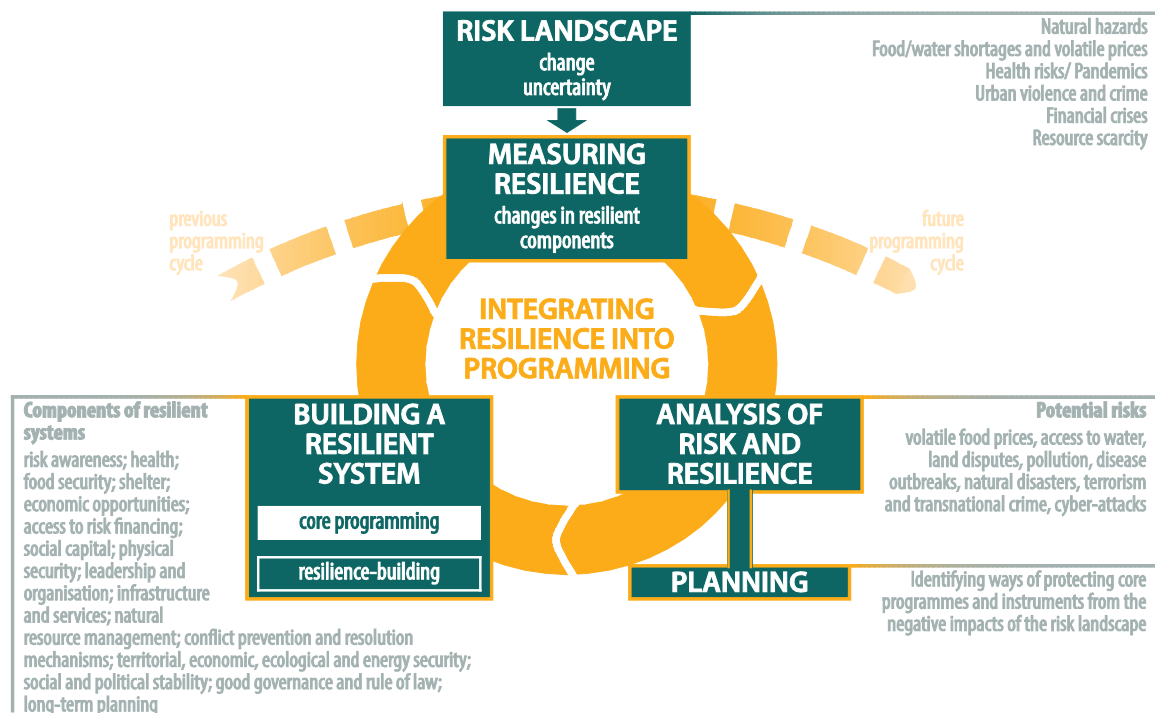
Source: Adapted from A. Mitchell (2013).

The EU's approach to resilience

The European Union has embraced the concept of resilience in its foreign policy by consistently highlighting the need to address development, conflict, and security in a holistic way. Council Conclusions on Security and Development (2007) acknowledged that 'there cannot be sustainable development without peace and security' as there will be no sustainable peace without development and poverty eradication. The EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises (2011) established a guiding framework for the joined-up deployment of EU instruments and resources when dealing with complex security challenges. The Council Conclusions on an EU Approach to Resilience (2012) and the Action Plan for Resilience in Crisis Prone Countries for 2013-20 (2013) have further recognised the need to address the root causes of crises and to incorporate a number of key elements, including: risk assessment; risk reduction, prevention, mitigation and preparedness; swift response to and recovery from crises. The EU Resilience Compendium (2014) illustrates with concrete examples – including flagship projects like Supporting the Horn of Africa's Resilience (SHARE) and the Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative (AGIR) – how the resilience approach is being translated into reality by governments, donors, civil society organisations and vulnerable communities themselves.

While resilience is gradually becoming one of the guiding concepts in the EU's foreign policy, conducting a resilient foreign policy still poses a challenge. The so-called Arab Spring and ensuing events have demonstrated a clear need for more flexibility and better use of the existing instruments. To that end, in April 2015 the European Commission presented a communication on capacity-building in support of security and development. The European Commission and the EEAS have also taken steps to improve their operational capacities by issuing guidance notes on the use of conflict analysis in support of EU external action and on addressing conflict prevention, peacebuilding and security under EU cooperation instruments. The latter note also highlights the role of parliaments as venues for formal political process and dialogue, which ultimately contributes to conflict prevention, reduction and recovery. At the same time, a number of significant political frameworks relevant for the discussion about resilience are or will be under review – including the EU's security strategy and the EU's comprehensive approach – providing a good opportunity to reflect on more effective ways to integrate it better into EU's foreign policy.

The European Parliament's May 2015 resolution on Implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy stresses 'as a matter of the utmost urgency' the need for the EU and its Member States to 'adapt to the new security challenges, in particular by making effective use of the existing CSDP tools, including by linking these better to the EU's foreign affairs tools, humanitarian assistance, and development policy'. Furthermore, a parallel resolution on financing the Common Security and Defence Policy calls on the VP/HR and the Member States 'to unleash the full potential of the Lisbon Treaty ... with regard to a faster and more flexible use of the CSDP missions and operations'. With regard to the post-2015 global development agenda, a third resolution, on financing for development, calls on the EU to ensure that financing for development and climate change contributes to building resilience and preparedness while achieving the global goal of leaving no one behind.

Main references

A. Mitchell (2013) *Risk and resilience: from good idea to good practice*, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

A new climate for peace. Taking action on climate and fragility risks (2014) An independent report commissioned by the G7 countries.

The World Bank (2013) *Risk and opportunity. Managing risk for development*, World Development Report.

The World Bank (2011) *Conflict, security and development*, World Development Report.

Disclaimer and Copyright

eprs@ep.europa.eu
http://www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu (intranet)
http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (internet)
http://epthinktank.eu (blog)