Union Civil Protection Mechanism 2021-2027

In June 2020, the European Commission presented a proposal to reinforce the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), the main instrument to coordinate the EU's response to disasters. At its April 2021 plenary session, Parliament is expected to debate and vote on the compromise text resulting from interinstitutional negotiations.

Background
The EU has a supporting competence in the area of civil protection, meaning that it supports, coordinates or supplements the actions of its Member States to prevent, prepare for and respond to natural and manmade disasters within and outside the Union. The UCPM, established in 2001, is the main instrument for coordinating civil protection at EU level. It relies on a voluntary system of mutual assistance, and on pre-committed capacity offered by EU Member States, plus six other participating states (Iceland, Norway, Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Turkey). Aid can take the form of in-kind assistance, deployment of specially equipped teams, or assessment and coordination by experts sent to the field. In 2019, a dedicated reserve of response capacities at EU level, the ‘rescEU reserve’, was created to respond to overwhelming situations as a last resort where existing capacities at national level and those pre-committed by Member States to the pool of collective resources are not sufficient. RescEU capacities are acquired, rented or leased by Member States, which host them, while the EU co-finances their development. As part of the response to Covid-19, the rescEU reserve, which then consisted of firefighting planes and helicopters, medical evacuation capacities, and emergency medical team capacities, was extended to include a medical stockpile.

European Commission proposal
The coronavirus pandemic showed the limitations of the current UCPM framework, heavily reliant on Member States’ capacities in case of large-scale emergencies affecting several countries at the same time, and the need for better EU preparedness. On 2 June 2020, the Commission put forward a proposal amending the rules governing the UCPM and increasing its budget. Under the proposal, the Commission would be able to directly procure rescEU capacities, to assist Member States overwhelmed by disasters. The development and operational costs of rescEU capacities would be fully financed by the EU.

European Parliament position
On 3 September 2020, Parliament’s Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) adopted its report on the proposal. Parliament then adopted its position on 16 September. Negotiators for Parliament and Council reached a provisional agreement on 8 February 2021. Under the agreement, the total budget allocated to the UCPM for the 2021-2027 period will amount to €3.319 billion in current prices (of which €2.056 billion from the EU recovery instrument). The Commission would be able to directly acquire, under specific conditions, the necessary resources under rescEU. Parliament ensured that sufficient financial resources be allocated to the UCPM’s three pillars (prevention, preparedness and response to disasters), ring-fencing the funds to be spent on prevention. It ensured increased visibility requirements for EU-funded actions. It also supported the definition, by the Commission and Member States, of disaster-resilience goals to support prevention and preparedness actions to improve the overall capacity to withstand the effects of large cross-border disasters. The agreement was endorsed by Coreper, for the Council, on 17 February, and approved by the ENVI committee on 25 February 2021. The text, which now needs to be formally adopted by Parliament, is scheduled for a vote during the April session.

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