



# **CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES**

**Riga, Latvia**

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# CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

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# **CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES**

## **INTRODUCTION**

These Guidelines about Cross-border cooperation in disaster management have been developed under the Interreg V-A Latvia – Lithuania Programme 2014-2020 in the frame of a project LLI-224 Improving Accessibility of Quality Medical Care While strengthening Institutional Capacity and Cooperation in the Cross-border Region Zarasai-Daugavpils.

In 2011 joint Report on Latvian – Lithuania Co-operation Perspectives was published written by Latvia and Lithuania, and in the report it was written that at present Latvian-Lithuanian relations cannot be assessed solely in the area of bilateral relations. Interstate relations inevitably become part of wider regional, European and even global co-operation. In practical terms, whether it concerns political or economic, security or other issues, in most cases Latvia and Lithuania address or try to address these issues together with other countries through multilateral agreements and commitments.

Thus, as one of the most relevant questions about areas where co-operation between the two countries is relevant and required was raised up, as well as questions about the scale of this co-operation and how efficient this co-operation is, taking into consideration historical, geographic and economic conditions.<sup>1</sup>

Disaster management in cross-border regions is one of these areas, where coordinated and effective cooperation between these two countries is essential.

Guidelines about Cross-border cooperation in disaster management contain information about existing legislation and mechanisms which can be used in case if disaster strikes and international assistance is required, e.g. in cross-border area. Additionally information about advantages and challenges related to cross-border cooperation in disaster is included.

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<sup>1</sup> Germans N., Sarkanis A. Ziņojums par Latvijas un Lietuvas sadarbības perspektīvām. 2011.gads ([http://www.mfa.gov.lv/data/aaa/report\\_latvia\\_lithuania.pdf](http://www.mfa.gov.lv/data/aaa/report_latvia_lithuania.pdf))

# CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES

## 1. CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

More than one third of EU citizens live and work in Europe's border regions. Those borders have a direct and indirect impact on their lives. European Territorial Cooperation (the Interreg programmes<sup>2</sup>) plays an important role in removing border obstacles and fostering cross-border cooperation.

According to Article 2 in European Outline Conventions on Transfrontier Cooperation Between Territorial Communities Or Authorities<sup>3</sup>, **transfrontier co-operation** shall mean any concerted action designed to reinforce and foster neighbourly relations between territorial communities or authorities within the jurisdiction of two or more Contracting Parties and the conclusion of any agreement and arrangement necessary for this purpose.

Simplifying – Within the framework of cross-border cooperation the regional and local authorities of the border region, as well as local authorities and their inhabitants, by being aware of the specific problems at the border region and the opportunities provided by the cross-border cooperation mechanism, can use the opportunities provided by cross-border cooperation to carry out joint activities aimed at improving living conditions in their regions, developing infrastructure, regional development and economic growth.

One of the areas that can be addressed in the framework of cross-border cooperation is health security, for example by creating opportunities for the people of one of the border regions to use the health authorities of neighboring countries.

In the medical and health care sector cross-border cooperation plays a particularly important role in strengthening the capacity of the region as an essential precondition for responding to and managing emergency situations and disasters.

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<sup>2</sup>Interreg: European Territorial Co-operation  
([http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/lv/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/lv/policy/cooperation/european-territorial/))

<sup>3</sup> Eiropas pamatkonvencija par teritoriālo kopienību vai pārvaldes institūciju pārrobežu sadarbību, 1999.gads  
(<https://likumi.lv/ta/lv/starptautiskie-ligumi/id/1157-eiropas-pamatkonvencija-par-teritorialo-kopienu-vai-parvaldes-instituciju-parrobezu-sadarbibu>)

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## 2. DISASTER MANAGEMENT

According to the Civil Protection and Disaster Management Law of the Republic of Latvia <sup>4</sup> **disaster** is defined as an accident which has caused human casualties or endangers human life or health, caused damage or threat to people, the environment or property, and also inflicted or inflicts significant material and financial losses and exceeds the daily capacity of the responsible State and local government authorities to prevent the devastating conditions.

There are several other definitions used in the international community, for example, '**disaster**'<sup>5</sup> means any situation which has or may have a severe impact on people, the environment, or property, including cultural heritage.

In accordance with the IDRL Guidelines<sup>6</sup> a disaster means “a serious disruption of the functioning of society, which poses a significant, widespread threat to human life, health, property or the environment, whether arising from accident, nature or human activity, whether developing suddenly or as the result of long-term processes, but excluding armed conflict”

In the event of a disaster, individuals, the public, governments and international organizations must act very quickly. Well organised disaster management helps to save lives, as well as effective coordination between different donors is crucial for successful crisis response and disaster response and response.

According to the Civil Protection and Disaster Management Law mentioned before **disaster management** is a set of managed and coordinated preventive, preparedness, response, elimination of consequences measures, and also recovery measures conducted to ensure the implementation of civil protection

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<sup>4</sup> Latvijas Republikas Civilās aizsardzības un katastrofas pārvaldīšanas likums, stājies spēkā 2016.gadā

(<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/282333-civilas-aizsardzibas-un-katastrofas-parvaldisanas-likums>)

<sup>5</sup> EIROPAS PARLAMENTA UN PADOMES LĒMUMS Nr. 1313/2013/ES (2013. gada 17. decembris) par Savienības civilās aizsardzības mehānismu

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32013D1313&from=LV>

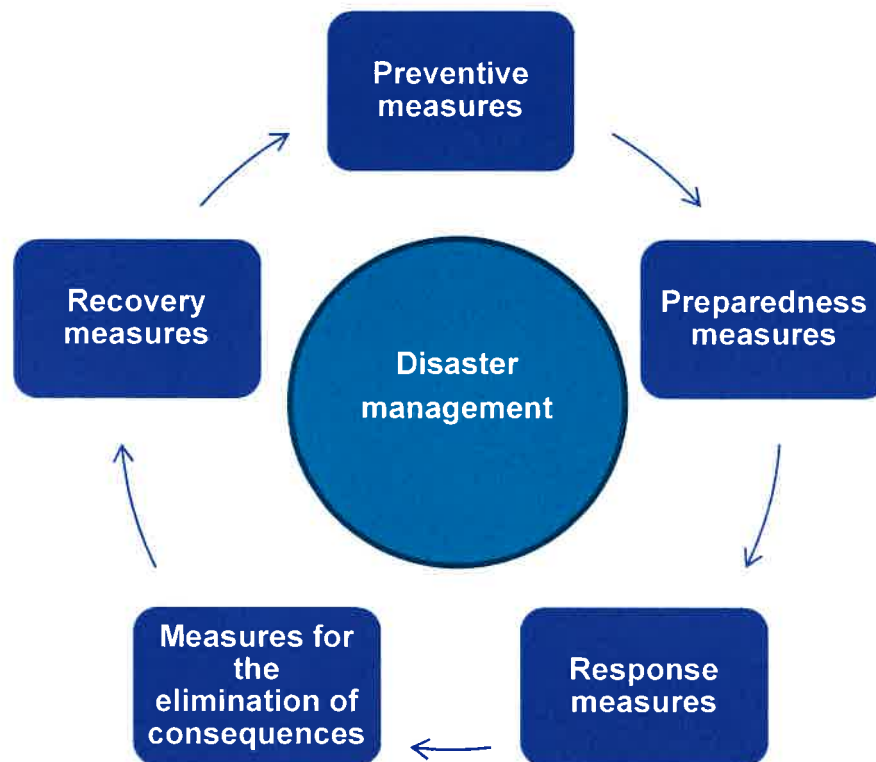
<sup>6</sup> Latvijas Sarkanais Krusts. Tiesiskais regulējums palīdzības saņemšanai katastrofu gadījumos Latvijā. 2014.gads

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tasks with the overall aim to ensure, to the extent possible, the safety and protection of people, the environment and property in case of a disaster or threats thereof.

Disaster management cycle (see Picture No 1).

Picture No 1. Disaster management cycle



**Preventive measures** — a set of measures performed to prevent or reduce the threats of a disaster.

**Preparedness measures** — a set of measures performed to prepare for the required action in case of a disaster.

**Response measures** — a set of the measures which are performed in order to reduce or eliminate devastating conditions and the consequences caused thereby, to prevent or reduce harm to people, the environment and property.

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**Measures for the elimination of consequences** — a set of measures which are performed in order to ensure at least the minimum basic needs of inhabitants related to the survival of people and to stop or reduce threat to human health, the environment and property.

**Recovery measures** — a set of measures which are performed in order to help victims in a timely and proportional manner and to the extent possible to restore the environment and property to the state it was before the disaster;

In the event of a disaster successful cross-border cooperation requires close cooperation between neighbouring countries during all measures of disaster management.

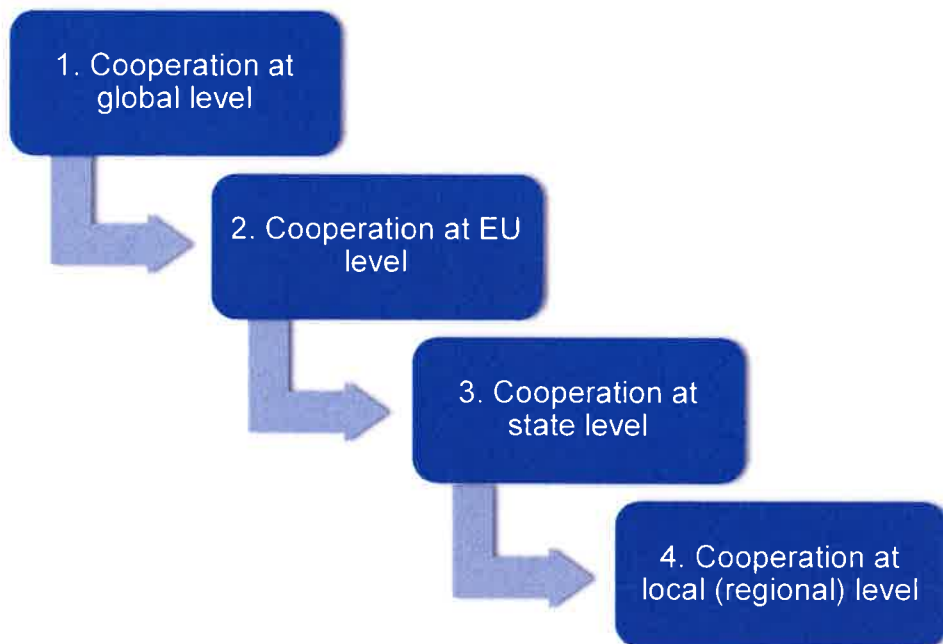
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### **3. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

It is the responsibility and duty of each country to protect their people's life, property and the environment from disasters or their threats, and to ensure that countries are able to respond appropriately to disasters that may happen.

However, in cases where the consequences of a disaster exceed the response capacity of the affected country, the country affected by the disaster has the opportunity, through the various levels of cooperation mechanisms, request for additional resources and assistance from other countries and international agencies (see Picture No 2).

**Picture No 2. Cooperation levels at disaster management**



#### **3.1. Cooperation at Global level**

One of the fastest (at short notice (12-48 hours) international emergency response system for sudden-onset emergencies is The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system. Assessment, coordination and information



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management are UNDAC's core mandates in an emergency response mission. 80 member states takes part in the UNDAC, from which 17 is from EU. The UNDAC system is kept ready and managed by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA)<sup>7</sup>.

Additionally The United Nations agreed on International Strategy for Disaster Reduction in 1999, creating the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) to serve as the secretariat. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030<sup>8</sup> is the latest update. It has seven global targets – to reduce the deaths, human impact, economic losses, and damage caused by natural hazards, and to increase international cooperation, information and the number of national and local disaster risk-reduction strategies. It has four priorities for action: to understand disaster risk, to strengthen governance, to increase investment in resilience, and to enhance disaster preparedness.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the availability of UN mechanisms, for EU Member States it is more likely to turn first to aid based on EU mechanisms or bilateral agreements.

### **3.2. Cooperation at EU level**

When a country is hit by a disaster which overwhelms its response capacity, European countries can provide assistance via the **European Union Civil Protection Mechanism**<sup>10</sup>, which ensure the involvement of civil protection resources of other EU Member States in disaster relief, supporting the affected' s country's response capacities.

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<sup>7</sup> UN OCHA mājaslapa  
(<https://www.unocha.org/>)

<sup>8</sup> Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction  
(<https://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework>)

<sup>9</sup> Eiropas Reģionālās Komisijas preses relīze. 2017.gadā  
(<https://cor.europa.eu/lv/news/Pages/natural-disasters-eu-must-invest-locally-today-to-save-lives-tomorrow.aspx>)

<sup>10</sup> EIROPAS PARLAMENTA UN PADOMES LĒMUMS Nr. 1313/2013/ES (2013.gada 17.decembris) par Savienības civilās aizsardzības mehānismu  
(<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/LV/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013D1313>)

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Taking into account previous experience of interventions and disasters, Decision No 1313/2013/EU of The European Parliament And Of The Council Of 17 December 2013 On A Union Civil Protection Mechanism was made, establishing more effective mechanism to support and facilitate the mobilization and coordination of civil protection assistance in the event of major emergencies or disasters occurring within or outside the European Union.

Both Latvia and Lithuania are part of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, which provides the possibility in case if a disaster strikes near the cross-border region and the consequences exceed the local resources, to use the Mechanism to request additional resources.

The Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) was established to ensure 24/7 operational capacity, and to serve the Member States and the Commission in pursuit of the objectives of the Union Mechanism.

When a disaster occurs within the Union, or is imminent, the affected Member State may request assistance through the ERCC. The request shall be as specific as possible. When receiving a request for assistance, the Commission shall, as appropriate and without delay forward the request to the contact points of other Member States.

To enable communication and sharing of information between the ERCC and the Member States' contact points Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS) is used.

Any Member State to which a request for assistance is addressed through the Union Mechanism shall promptly determine whether it is in a position to render the assistance required and inform the requesting Member State of its decision through the CECIS, indicating the scope, terms and, where applicable, costs of the assistance it could render.

The requesting Member State shall be responsible for directing assistance interventions. The authorities of the requesting Member State shall lay down

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guidelines and, if necessary, define the limits of the tasks entrusted to the modules or other response capacities.

### **3.3. Cooperation at State level**

In addition to already existing international cooperation agreements, countries that share either a border or belongs to the same geographical region (e.g. the Baltic Sea countries), usually have signed also some bilateral or multilateral cooperation agreements about cooperation and disaster relief in case of disaster.

Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Latvia, the Government of the Republic of Estonia and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on Mutual Assistance and Cooperation in the Field of Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Response was signed on year 2018.<sup>11</sup>

This Agreement shall apply to cooperation in the field of rescue services in disaster prevention, preparedness and response and to mutual assistance in the event of a disaster or an imminent threat thereof, which may by its nature exceed the capacity of national resources of a Party and its capability to handle the disaster or to respond to it. The primary aim of the Agreement is to protect people, environment and property.

The States have designated Competent Authorities for the purposes of this Agreement. The Competent Authorities shall also appoint Point(s) of Contact for submitting and receiving early warnings and requests for assistance 24-hour/7.

The Competent Authorities are:

- In the Republic of Lithuania: The Ministry of the Interior, Fire and Rescue Department under the Ministry of the Interior;
- In the Republic of Latvia: The Ministry of the Interior, Latvian State Fire and Rescue Service;

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<sup>11</sup> Par Latvijas Republikas valdības, Igaunijas Republikas valdības un Lietuvas Republikas valdības nolīgumu par sadarbību katastrofu novēršanas, gatavības un reaģēšanas jomā. 2018.gads (<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/298094-par-latvijas-republikas-valdibas-igaunijas-republikas-valdibas-un-lietuvas-republikas-valdibas-noligumu-par-sadarbibu-katastrofu>)

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- In the Republic of Estonia: The Ministry of the Interior, Estonian Rescue Board.

Although this Agreement establishes the Point(s) of Contact for receiving and forwarding alerts and requests for assistance, this agreement is, however, can be considered as a framework agreement that provides possibility of concluding further, more detailed agreements with a view to further enhancing mutual cooperation.

According to the Article 6 from the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Latvia, the Government of the Republic of Estonia and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on Mutual Assistance and Cooperation in the Field of Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Response the Parties should jointly take measures, such as elaborate mutual procedures and plans for cross-border rescue operations, to facilitate the rendering and transit of assistance, cooperation during an operation, and host nation support.

On the basis of the above-mentioned it would be possible to draw up an agreement between the countries mentioned in the agreement about mutual assistance in the areas of health care and emergency medical assistance in border regions both in everyday life and in disasters.

For example, on year 2006 Operational cooperation agreement between Lithuanian Fire and Rescue Department and Latvian State Fire and Rescue Service was signed.<sup>12</sup>

### **3.4. Cooperation at local (regional) level**

With the aim of promoting regional cooperation in solving specific problems of border areas and identifying areas of co-operation, a Latvian-Lithuanian

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<sup>12</sup> Latvijas Republikas Valsts ugunsdzēsības un glābšanas dienesta mājaslapa ([http://www.vugd.gov.lv/lat/par\\_vugd/starptautiska\\_sadarbiba/divpuseja\\_sadarbiba](http://www.vugd.gov.lv/lat/par_vugd/starptautiska_sadarbiba/divpuseja_sadarbiba))

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Intergovernmental Commission for Cross-Border Cooperation has been established.<sup>13</sup>

In the latest meeting of the Latvian-Lithuanian Intergovernmental Commission for Cross-Border Cooperation, in 2017, one of the issues discussed was the progress on how far have the of the agreement between the Government of the Republic of Latvia and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania on cross-border cooperation in provision of pre-hospital EMS services in border areas developed.

The conclusion of such a contract on cross-border co-operation in provision of emergency medical care in the border area would be an important step to improve the availability of high-quality medical care for residents living in the border area, as well to strengthen co-operation and response capabilities of both countries in case of emergency or disaster, when the amount of medical resources available to the affected country does not meet to the current or projected number of victims or sick people and additional resources are needed.

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<sup>13</sup> Latvijas Republikas Vides aizsardzības un reģionālās attīstības ministrijas mājaslapa ([http://www.varam.gov.lv/lat/starptautiska\\_sadarbiba/starpv\\_kom/](http://www.varam.gov.lv/lat/starptautiska_sadarbiba/starpv_kom/))

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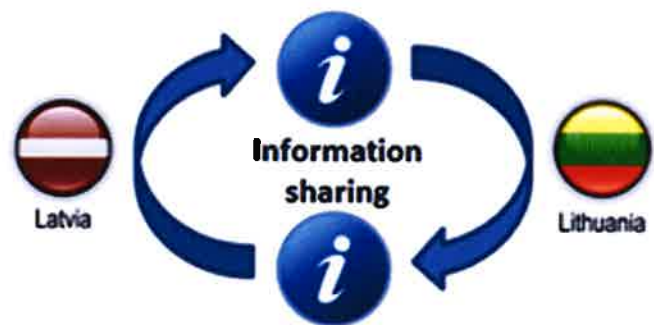
### 4. KEY ELEMENTS OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Key elements of disaster risk management which are important also when planning effective cross-border cooperation.

#### 4.1. Information sharing

Picture No 3. Information sharing

Ensuring information exchange between disaster management authorities at national and regional level is an essential prerequisite for minimizing unwanted and unforeseen disturbances and maximizing the effectiveness of the response during disaster management.



At national level as the Competent Authorities that perform 24/7 Point(s) of Contact functions for submitting and receiving early warnings and requests for assistance in the Republic of Lithuania is Fire and Rescue Department under the Ministry of the Interior; and in the Republic of Latvia: Latvian State Fire and Rescue Service.

However, in order to strengthen the co-operation and response capacities of the responsible services of the health care sector and medical institutions in case of an emergency or disaster, when the amount of immediate medical resources available to the affected country is not in line with the current or anticipated number of victims or illnesses and additional resources are needed, it would be necessary to:

- Appoint the responsible contact points from the healthcare sector in Latvia and Lithuania for cross-border co-operation planning and coordination in the field of disaster management;
- Develop standard operational procedures for the exchange of information between these contact points both for routine info sharing and for info sharing during emergencies, indicating:

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- Frequency of information exchange;
- Communication channels for the exchange of information (early warning systems, fixed telephones, e-mails, etc.);
- Message format (use of templates).
- Organize a meeting of responsible institutions and services involved in the management of disasters with many victims, with the aim of sharing information among countries about the medical resources and capacities available in the border region that could be involved in response efforts in the event of major casualties.

### **4.2. Risk assessment**

**Picture No 4.  
Risk assessment**

Risk assessment shall be a process involving risk identification, risk analysis and risk evaluation:<sup>14</sup>

- Risk identification is the process of finding, recognizing and describing risks.
- Risk analysis is the process to comprehend the nature of risk and to determine the level of risk.
- Risk assessment is the overall process of risk identification, risk analysis, and risk evaluation.

Risk assessment										
				1	2	3				
Likelihood							1			
							2			
							3			
				Severity						

In order to objectively identify and plan the necessary resources for the management of hazards / disasters in border areas, the civil protection committees of local governments of the border regions of both Latvia and Lithuania should cooperate and jointly carry out risks assessment of the threats that pose cross-border threat to the inhabitants of the border areas of

<sup>14</sup> KOMISIJAS DIENESTU DARBA DOKUMENTS. Riska novērtēšanas un kartēšanas vadlīnijas katastrofu pārvaldībai. 2010.gads

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the two countries. Based on the risk assessment, resources should be identified and planned for risk / disaster management.

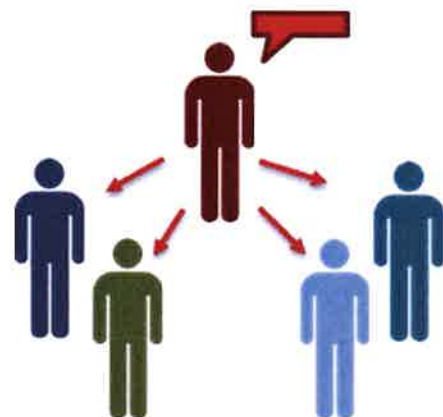
The introduction of such practices would facilitate a coordinated approach to risk assessment, and would enable identification of resources for each of the municipalities / border areas to manage specific risks, identify missing / inadequate resources, capacities and rationalize planning of the purchase of missing resources and management of future hazards.

The services and institutions responsible for planning the preparedness of the health sector in Latvia and Lithuania, as well as medical institutions providing services in the border region, should also be involved in the process of assessing risks present in the border area.

### **4.3. Control and coordination on site**

#### **Control**

Equally important as the exchange of information and a common understanding of the risks in the border area, for disaster management is a unified and clear understanding of which institution or service in the event of a disaster is responsible for incident command and control (in other words who is responsible for the lead of the rescue works on scene).



**Picture No 5. Control**

At least one representative from all services involved in the disaster management, who performs the command function of their service, should be wearing a different colour vest (or helmet) with an indication of the role they are performing (for example, Rescue Work Leader, Chief Doctor, Chief Ambulance Command, etc.) at the place of the event.



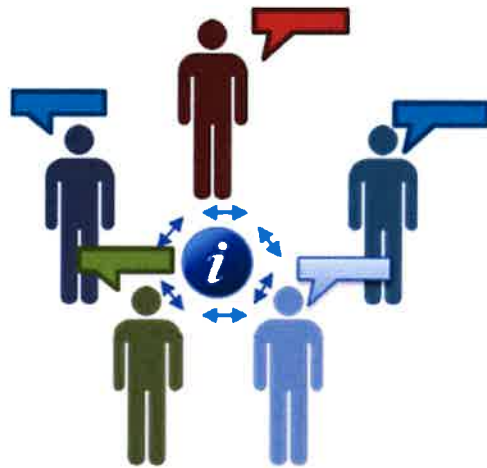
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Such recognition marks are essential to quickly identify those responsible at the scene, especially for the incoming assistance teams from other countries, for whom it is very important to be able easily recognise the chief commanders from all sectors to be able to inform them about their arrival and also to receive from them commands and tasks for future action.

Picture No 6. Coordination

### Coordination

Coordination between the command / management bodies of all services involved in the disaster management plays an important role in ensuring effective co-operation and the rational use of the resources and services that are involved in all disaster management.



Most often, the head of the rescue works at the scene is the one who determines the place where the coordination group is assembled. Within the framework of cross-border co-operation, the task of this group leader would also be to establish a single working language.

Coordination between all involved services and institutions provides an opportunity to create a more complete description of the situation (situational picture), and more precisely allows us to determine the scale of the disaster, assessing whether the resources of the affected region are sufficient to prevent the consequences.

When it comes to involvement of multi-national resources, mutual knowledge and understanding of the overall organisation, the roles and responsibilities of the involved institutions and services facilitates the command and coordination during disaster management. Because the functions and rules for similar organisations can be organised differently by different countries, for example, the organization of

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emergency medical care at the pre-hospital stage or the amount of medical aid that can be provided by firefighters and rescue workers in different countries can vary.

In order to improve the capacity of state and local government services and institutions involved in cross-border cooperation to cooperate in disaster situations and knowledge of disaster management systems, it would be necessary to organize regular meetings and workshops and seminars as well as joint training of the responsible institutions, services.

### **4.4. Exercise and training**

**Picture No 7. Checklist**





To provide practice and knowledge for the staff working in border areas about cross-border disaster management, incl. cooperation with other state institutions and services and to improve the readiness of these institutions and services, it would be necessary to organize regular theoretical and practical trainings at different levels (institutional, municipal and state level) with the participation of institutions and services involved in the management of disasters in Latvia and Lithuania.



In order to strengthen cooperation and emergency response capacities of the Latvian and Lithuanian health services and medical institutions to be ready to respond to disaster with a large number of victims and where the engagement of medical resources of both countries would be needed, it would be necessary to organize at least once a year a joint disaster simulation exercises with this type of scenario.

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### **5. CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT: ADVANTAGES**

-  The key benefits of cross-border co-operation in disaster management are the ability to improve and strengthen the readiness of institutions and services in the border regions to respond to and manage disasters, when the immediate availability of affected country's resources may be inadequate to cope with the consequences.
-  The inclusion of the key disaster management elements (described in chapter 4) in the cross-border cooperation agreements, plans provides the basis to create a coordinated and effective system of cross-border cooperation that is ready to provide assistance at times when it is most needed.
-  Successful cross-border co-operation in disaster management will enable for the authorities in the border towns and municipalities to carry out their civil protection tasks more effectively, which in turn will contribute to the security, progress and development of border regions.
-  Exchange of information about the preparedness of the state, regions and institutions to deal with large scale emergencies and disasters, their capacities and available resources between the responsible authorities of Latvia and Lithuania, would allow a more accurate assessment of the readiness and ability of border areas to respond to disasters caused by different threats, and, in the event of disasters, to make a timely decision on whether and what additional resource involvement would be needed.

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### 6. CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT: CHALLENGES



European Committee of the Regions in their report - Strengthening cross-border cooperation: the need for a better regulatory framework? (2015/C 423/02)<sup>15</sup> as one of the barriers to strengthening cross-border cooperation acknowledges that border regions' healthcare systems are not compatible, and this includes the regulation of healthcare provided by emergency services — which, in the case of workers in areas covered by different legal jurisdictions, raises the question of which one they are covered by. They also mentions problems of mismatching between healthcare providers and public authorities on the two sides of the border: prior authorisation is required in order to obtain reimbursement of costs, for example, which means that the local population finds it difficult to access health services quickly and in close proximity.



These barriers can significantly impede and cause delays for the creation of a new cross-border cooperation initiative on disaster management agreement.



However, the fact that these barriers have been identified provides the opportunity for Latvian and Lithuanian authorities responsible for disaster management to continue their work to address these barriers with the aim of strengthening the readiness and capacity of disaster management capacity in the border region of Latvia and Lithuania, with particular attention being paid directly to promoting and improving cross-border sectoral cooperation in health.

<sup>15</sup> Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Strengthening cross-border cooperation: the need for a better regulatory framework? (2015/C 423/02)  
<https://eurlex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52015IR4286&from=LV>

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