

## Case Study // Round Table SDG 11: Promoting resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements: intersectoral cooperation and evidence-based policies

### From response to resilience: Disaster Risk Management in Serbia

#### *The Republic of Serbia*

*Levels: local, subnational and national*

#### Summary

The objective of the case study is to highlight the importance of developing local and national strategies and policies focused on preventive activities and risk-informed planning and investments.

In 2014, Serbia suffered the most severe flood in 120 years, with unprecedented human, financial and environmental losses. Serbia reacted by establishing the Office for Assistance and Recovery of Flooded Areas, initially entrusted with the recovery of flood affected areas. It then adopted the “Lex Specialis” Law on the Post-Flood Rehabilitation in the Republic of Serbia. In 2015, it signed an agreement for participation in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Going forward, the Disaster Risk and Crisis Management Law is under preparation.

These actions reflect the country’s will to move from a strategy of responding to emergencies, to one of fostering resilience and preparedness, as a condition for sustainability, with the full involvement of all stakeholders at , especially at community and municipal levels.

#### Situation

The territory of Serbia is highly vulnerable to various types of natural hazards, most notably floods. In May 2014, Serbia suffered the most severe flooding in 120 years. The disaster affected 22% of the total population and was estimated to have cost 4.8% of Serbia’s GDP. By way of illustration of the impact of the floods, it caused the Serbian economy to contract by 1.8% in 2014, in contrast with a projected growth of 0.5%. Additionally, 30% of the country’s is at risk from landslides. The Average Annual Loss (AAL) from droughts alone is estimated at 1.4% of the country’s GDP.

#### Strategy

With two disasters in different seasons of the same year, 2014, and obvious signs of climate change over a period of years, it was clear that changes were necessary in Serbian institutional, strategic and legal framework regarding disaster risk management. Serbia needs to shift focus from being reactive, responding when disaster occurs, to being proactive, focused on preventive activities and risk-informed planning and investments.

The National Strategy for Protection and Rescue had been adopted in 2012, however it was not followed by an Action plan that would secure its implementation. Based on Strategy goals, lessons learned in 2014 floods and based on the Sendai 2015-2030 Framework, the Government adopted the National Disaster Risk Management Program in December 2014, as a comprehensive program for disaster resilience. This program aims to be an umbrella framework to coordinate and implement activities and channel funds related to reducing and managing risks in Serbia.

One of the main specific purposes of the Program is to build a national disaster risk management system with the necessary capacity and clear responsibilities to reduce the existing risks, to avoid the creation of future risks, and respond more efficiently to disasters. “Strike while the iron is hot” had been in mind of the decision makers, as the disaster events provided the opportunity to improve and systematize disaster risk management in Serbia. Thanks to the Program, Serbia will advance the Disaster Risk Management agenda in the country by revisiting existing practices and introducing new approaches. The Program will support the government’s efforts to better comply with the EU Acquis, notably the Water Framework Directive and the Flood Directive, Climate Change Directive related to adaptation to changing weather conditions, and the Civil Protection Directive. It will not only aim to foster solutions at local and/or national scale, but will also help strengthen the regional platforms for cooperation and river basin management necessary to manage water and floods in the trans-boundary river basins, of which Serbia controls only parts (Danube river, Sava, Drina, Tisza, etc.).

At the end of 2015, the National Assembly has passed the Law on Recovery Following Natural and Other Disasters that became a standard for any disasters that can strike the country. At the same time, the Office for Reconstruction and Flood Relief was transformed into The Public Investment Management Office. Having completed the reconstruction after the 2014 floods, the Flood Relief Office was transformed from an ad hoc body into a permanent one with broader competences.

The Action plan for implementation of National DRM Program for period 2017-2020 was adopted by the Government in March 2017. The preparation of the Action plan was coordinated by the Public Investment Management Office (PIMO) with participation of all line ministries, special organisations, local self-governments, NGO’s, and other stakeholders in the country. Along with the Action plan, Disaster Risk Financing Program has also been adopted.

Two years after the disaster, Serbia has a consensus-based plan detailing measures, expected results and activities to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters resulting from natural and man-made hazards.

Serbia plans to have a comprehensive disaster risk management system in place by 2020, meaning that a solid inter-institutional coordination system is established, resilient to disasters caused by natural and man-made hazards. The action plan will be inclusive, gendered, and will address the needs, people with disabilities and vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly. The components are set in line with the four priorities of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

Going forward, a Draft Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Crisis Management has been developed, based on international standards, the Sendai Framework and the experience that Serbian institutions had gained in severe disasters of 2014. After a comprehensive discussion among all stakeholders and public hearings completed in December 2017, the Law on DRR is expected to be entered into the agenda of the 2018 National Assembly spring session.

### Results and impacts

- Recovery process incorporated the “Build back better” component.
- New strategic, legal and institutional framework
- Stronger cooperation among government institutions
- Stronger cooperation among different levels of governance (national, subnational and local)
- All new investments to be risk informed, based on 2014 floods indicators.



### **Challenges and lessons learned**

Efficient disaster risk management is based on partnership. Partnership among national institutions, agencies, local self-governments, NGOs, private sector, academic institutions and communities. Disaster risk management cannot be the job for government only. For the system to be efficient, the whole society needs to be involved and have a role of its own. Coordination and collaboration is a challenge not only in Serbia but world-wide. Investing in resilience stays at the top of development agenda for the years to come.

### **Potential for replication**

This experience, lessons learned and changes made in Serbian system could be replicable in other locations similar hazards.

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