

Partners' Segment 2025

Scaling up Disaster Preparedness in Complex Settings - A Collective Effort

Outcome Report

At the 2025 DG ECHO Partners' Segment, **held on May 21 at Albert Borschette Congress Center in Brussels**, the Red Cross EU Office and VOICE co-organised the session “Scaling up Disaster Preparedness in complex settings: a collective effort” to identify solutions to reinforce preparedness in contexts where it remains particularly difficult to scale. Taking place four years after the publication of [DG ECHO's Disaster Preparedness Guidance](#) and in view of its upcoming review, the session offered an opportunity for partners to reflect on how existing tools are being used, and how they could evolve to better meet current and emerging needs, focusing on conflicts and urban settings.

DG ECHO Head of Unit B4, Joanna Darmanin, outlined four key pillars of the EU's approach to disaster preparedness and anticipatory action, stressing that these are not optional add-ons but core, life-saving strategies. She emphasised that every euro invested in preparedness brings high returns by reducing humanitarian losses and reinforcing local ownership. In 2025, DG ECHO will dedicate €81 million specifically to preparedness actions. Furthermore, there is also an effort to mainstream preparedness, with about one-third of DG ECHO's overall funded projects already including preparedness components. Ms. Darmanin also highlighted the need to scale up anticipatory action, support local actors, and address climate-related risks, particularly in fragile settings. She called for better risk analysis, accessible climate finance, and greener humanitarian practices, underscoring that these efforts are crucial to building long-term resilience and reducing pressure on humanitarian budgets.

The Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) presented a compelling account of disaster preparedness in protracted conflict settings, rooted in decades of experience operating under chronic instability. Dr. Younis Al-Khatib, PRCS President, emphasised the critical need to invest in preparedness *before* crises hit. Referring to the Second Intifada, he explained how early warnings were overlooked because of a false separation between development efforts and emergency response. In response, PRCS adopted a model of *continuous preparedness feeding continuous response*, recognising that in Palestine, emergency and recovery efforts are inseparable. Dr. Younis highlighted localisation not as a cost-saving measure, but as a strategic imperative to build trust and ensure access in complex environments.

Rasha Bakeer, Head of Planning, joined virtually to detail operational realities in Gaza and the West Bank. She described Palestine's emergency cycle as continuous and unique, driven by man-made disasters that are politically foreseeable but devastating. In Gaza, mass displacement, infrastructure collapse, and aid obstruction have pushed communities and responders to their limits. In the West Bank, settlement expansion and environmental damage create chronic risks.

To cope, PRCS uses a decentralised, localised preparedness model. PRCS's preparedness approach operates across three interconnected levels: macro-national, meso-institutional, and micro-community, ensuring a comprehensive and decentralised response structure. This model encompasses key elements at each level, such as internal systems, decentralisation, and

support at the institutional level; empowerment and communication at the community level; and access, equity, and advocacy at the national level. This layered approach ensures coordinated preparedness through policies, engagement, and strategic responsiveness.

In practice, each community has its own plan, supported by needs assessments and strong local networks. Despite limited humanitarian access, PRCS sustains operations through community trust and local presence. Both speakers underscored the urgent need to protect humanitarian space and uphold International Humanitarian Law.

The second case study, jointly presented by ACCORD and Humanity & Inclusion, focused on urban preparedness in the Philippines. It emphasised the need to address disaster risks in rapidly urbanising, highly exposed, and socioeconomically vulnerable contexts. Jennifer Furigay, Program Quality Unit Head and MEAL Coordinator at ACCORD, highlighted that over half of the Philippine population (with a total of 112 million) resides in urban areas, and is projected to rise to 84% by 2050, with millions living in informal settlements prone to overlapping, compounding, and evolving risks, including natural hazards, poverty, displacement, and conflict. She presented two flagship initiatives: the ACCESS project, which adopts a nexus approach combining preparedness, humanitarian action, and education in emergencies; and MOVE UP, which emphasises inclusive preparedness and community-led resilience mechanisms. The use of the Nexus Tracker was presented as an innovative tool to visualise displacement trends, multi-stakeholder coordination at river basin levels, inclusive evacuation shelters co-developed with the private sector, and the strengthening of community savings groups. Challenges discussed included the evolving nature of hazards, the exclusion of marginalised groups from planning processes, limited anticipatory action mechanisms, and persistent funding silos.

Valentina Evangelisti, Disaster Risk Reduction & Climate Change Adaptation Unit Manager at Humanity & Inclusion, reinforced the importance of disability-inclusive preparedness, underlining that while 16% of the global population lives with a disability, many are excluded from disaster planning and communication. She cited the need for accessible and actionable early warning systems, developed in local languages with visual and sign language support, and stressed that persons with disabilities must be included throughout the preparedness cycle.

To close the session, speakers and participants converged around a shared understanding: disaster preparedness in complex settings is not only about technical fixes, but about long-term, inclusive, and locally driven strategies. The recommendations below reflect the collective insights and operational lessons shared throughout the discussion.

Recommendations

- **Scale up disaster preparedness and anticipatory action as a life-saving, cost-effective priority:** Preparedness enables faster, more effective responses, reduces humanitarian needs, and strengthens local resilience in increasingly complex and fragile contexts.
- **Strengthen coordination and governance for scaling up preparedness:** Effective preparedness requires stronger coordination between humanitarian, development, and local governance actors, as well as within the international community. A more

coordinated approach ensures resources are used efficiently, avoids duplication, and fosters accountability for collective preparedness outcomes.

- **Invest in continuous, inclusive multi-level preparedness:** Preparedness must be treated as an ongoing process, not a one-off intervention. It should occur simultaneously at national, landscape, institutional, and community levels, with each layer reinforcing the others.
- **Promote a dual approach: institutional and community-based preparedness:** Scale up institutional capacities while sustaining and adapting community-based approaches, especially in urban settings. This ensures agility in responding to evolving hazards and inclusive governance involving local actors, private sector services, youth groups, and informal networks.
- **Embed preparedness within development frameworks:** In fragile and conflict-prone environments, preparedness is part of resilience-building and development. It should be integrated into broader long-term strategies and funding streams (e.g., between DG ECHO, DG INTPA and partners) to overcome humanitarian-development silos.
- **Provide funding flexibility to enable rapid response:** Preparedness and anticipatory action require financing models that allow timely resource mobilisation. Flexible, pre-arranged, and risk-informed funding mechanisms ensure that responders can act quickly before hazards escalate into crises, supporting broader local and national uptake of anticipatory and preparedness approaches.
- **Prioritise localisation and decentralisation:** empower local actors, who are often first responders, by decentralising response capabilities down to the community level. Decentralisation must go hand-in-hand with sustained capacity strengthening, including technical skills development and organisational and financial support. Context-sensitive planning must be resourced and driven by those closest to the risks.
- **Invest in inclusive community preparedness:** community preparedness is essential for building resilience and saving lives during emergencies and response. Attention must be given to marginalised groups, including women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities, to ensure inclusion and equity in preparedness and response, including in urban settings. This means recognising differentiated needs, addressing urban inequality dynamics in built environments, and ensuring that no one is left behind.
- **Ensure protection for humanitarian professionals and volunteers:** In crisis preparedness, it is essential to acknowledge that local humanitarians and first responders remain the backbone of humanitarian operations, while also bearing the brunt of violence and loss. Therefore, decision makers must prioritise investment in the safety and capacity building of local humanitarian actors including volunteers.
- **Strengthen urban inclusion and accessibility:** preparedness must account for the complex vulnerabilities of urban populations, including migrants, women, and persons with disabilities. Urban planning and infrastructure must be inclusive and accessible to all.
- **Support locally developed innovations and data systems:** promote locally owned technologies and community-informed data platforms to drive evidence-based decision-making tailored to the local context.

- **Advance digital transformation and institutional readiness:** equip institutions with contingency planning, digital tools, and adaptable response protocols to enhance accountability and responsiveness.