



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EUROPEAN CIVIL PROTECTION AND HUMANITARIAN AID  
OPERATIONS (ECHO)

## **Background paper to Item 1**

### **Future of the ERCC – Outcomes of the Technical Workshop**

#### **1. Introduction – the role of the ERCC**

Over the last years, the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) has proved its capability to provide early warning, analysis and response coordination to an increasingly wider range of scenarios both within Europe and globally. During the most complex UCPM operation of the last years – caused by Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine - the ERCC significantly upscaled its cross-sectoral operational emergency coordination with enhanced anticipatory and analytical capabilities, coordinating amongst Commission Services, and managing a broad variety of different requests for assistance as well as corresponding offers from Member States and private sector.

In view of this evolving ERCC capabilities, during the extraordinary meeting of the Directors-General for civil protection that DG ECHO organised in February 2024, delegates discussed the future of the ERCC. This meeting illustrated a general convergence of views on a strengthened role of the ERCC, providing that some principles were respected, notably that further developments should not come at the expense of the UCPM but rather serve to strengthen European civil protection support to national systems. The extraordinary meeting furthermore highlighted that the ERCC is to remain operational in its scope and at the core of the UCPM (no ‘decoupling’). Its further developments are to represent a functional evolution and not a new structure.

In consideration of these points, DG ECHO is committed to further develop the ERCC as the Commission’s operational crisis hub and first entry point for joint cross-sectoral situational awareness, early warning, anticipation, and operational coordination, including between civilian and military stakeholders. In this role, the ERCC should facilitate a better coordinated information exchange and use of expertise across the Commission’s different policy areas. This should serve the purpose to increase flexibility and effectiveness in providing national authorities with more coherent and efficient situational awareness and response coordination in increasingly complex emergency and crisis scenarios requiring the involvement of an increasing number of actors and sectors.

#### **2. Analysis at the technical workshop and its outcomes**

The extraordinary meeting of the Directors-General for civil protection was followed by a dedicated technical workshop on the future role of the ERCC, which took place on 9 April 2024. During the workshop DG ECHO reiterated the need to further develop the ERCC’s capabilities with the aim to ensure a coordinated overview of all sectoral dimensions of the same emergency. This would require the ERCC to be informed of such sectoral emergencies

and to enable it to provide, in addition to response, support as a coordinating structure for information sharing and needs identification. The ERCC would be the single operational entry point for the Commission. At the same time, it should continue to support the UCPM at all times. During the workshop, the impact of a strengthened ERCC was examined on the basis of two examples.

#### **a) Blueprint on critical infrastructure disruptions (CI Blueprint)**

The first example covered a scenario that examined the role of the ERCC as the designated 24/7 point of contact of the Commission under the proposed Council Recommendation on a Blueprint to coordinate a Union-level response to disruptions of critical infrastructure with significant cross-border relevance.

DG ECHO's legal analysis showed that the role of the ERCC as foreseen under the proposed Council Recommendation conforms with the existing ERCC mandate as established by the UCPM legal framework. The nature of the tasks foreseen for the ERCC in the proposal for the CI Blueprint is similar to the tasks the ERCC is already carrying out under Decision No 1313/2013/EU. For example, the ERCC already serves as the 24/7 contact point for the European Community Urgent Radiological Information Exchange (ECURIE) system. Furthermore, Article 14 of Decision No 1313/2013/EU requires Member States to notify the ERCC of a disaster with potentially significant transboundary effects, such as the events covered by the CI Blueprint, thus requiring the ERCC to monitor and analyse incidents, as defined under the CI Blueprint also under the UCPM legal framework. Consequently, the new task would have no significant additional impact on the ERCC's resources.

The workshop also identified the need to further clarify certain aspects regarding the communication exchange and communication tools to be used for this new task. DG ECHO explained that the use of the Common Emergency Communication and Information System (CECIS) remains optional and limited to scenarios where appropriate. For the potential need to exchange classified information, it was clarified that the ERCC can handle all levels of EU Classified Information (EUCI) via the ECHO EUCI Registry and/or the Central EUCI Registry of the Commission. Furthermore, new information systems to exchange classified information electronically are being tested in a pilot phase. Specific procedures will still need to be discussed and developed to identify the most effective information exchange between (and among) contact points in national authorities and the ERCC. DG ECHO offered its availability to provide additional clarifications and support for this purpose where needed.

#### **b) Hybrid Rapid Response Teams (HRRTs)**

The second example covered the envisaged role of the ERCC in providing administrative and logistical support to the future deployment of HRRTs, which are developed under the EU Hybrid Toolbox to respond to a broad range of hybrid threats.

DG ECHO clarified that a new clearer legal basis would need to be established in the mid- and long-term for this additional task. The Commission may propose a Council Decision to establish the HRRTs, possibly based on the solidarity clause (Article 222 TFEU) and Council

Decision 2014/415/EU on the arrangements for the implementation by the Union of the solidarity clause.

Regarding national contact points, the ERCC would not communicate with national civil protection contact points, as the selection of the HRRTs would be the responsibility of the Joint Steering Group (EEAS, Commission services in coordination with Member States). Therefore, the impact of this workload on the ERCC's resources would be limited to arranging travel, accommodation, team briefing concerning organisational arrangements prior to deployment and 24/7 monitoring and administrative and logistical support to HRRTs on the ground. It was also clarified that resources for the organisation and logistical support of such deployments would not be financed from the UCPM budget.

As concerns the handling of classified information, the ERCC has already experience with deployments requiring classified information exchange, including to Ukraine. It was furthermore clarified that CECIS would not be used for such deployments. Member State delegates highlighted the need to clarify the administrative and logistical tasks of the ERCC, and to ensure that its role is clearly separated from the role of the Joint Steering Group to select teams. Lastly, in response to some concerns expressed during the exchange, the workshop also served to clarify that the ERCC would have no role in public communication about the deployment of hybrid experts.

### **3. Potential way forward**

The workshop has highlighted the sense of urgency in tackling the challenges related to climate change and security context. The two examined examples for additional ERCC tasks illustrated that the ERCC already fulfils many of the required capabilities. It represents therefore the best suited structure within the Commission to provide a cost-efficient solution with limited impact on existing resources to address urgent operational needs in the area of critical infrastructure disruptions and hybrid threats. While other options and alternatives to address these new tasks might exist, they would be more costly and take longer to be fully operational, in a politically sensitive and urgent geopolitical security context.

At the same time, the ERCC will continue investing in the further development of its early warning and situational awareness capabilities. This will serve the common objective to better anticipate, monitor, and respond to cross-sectoral and complex emergencies in the future and provide the best possible information and coordination support to national civil protection authorities in such scenarios.

#### **Directors-General are invited to reflect on and discuss the following questions:**

1. Do you agree with the findings of the workshop concerning the impact of an enhanced mandate on the ERCC?
2. From your perspective, what impacts of these two examples on national administration systems should be further considered?