



## Importance of national platforms in disaster risk governance

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### Abstract

The fundamental purpose of successful disaster risk reduction is to integrate risk-aware decision making in every phase of disaster risk management and all national development programmes. Unsuccessful governments, disparity, lack of trust, and shortages of resources, especially at local level hinder efficient disaster governance in less developed countries. To the contrary, in developed countries, disaster risk governance challenges are linked to an unproductive and inefficient disaster risk governance system caused by a lack of representation, collaboration, coordination or rigidity. Instances of low disaster risk awareness among NGO's and general public hindering the effectiveness of disaster governance can be found equally in rich and developing countries which could be seen both in Kobe earthquake and in Haiti 2010 earthquake.

**Key words:** National Platform, Disaster Risk Governance, Disaster Risk Reduction, Disaster Risk Management, Croatia

## Introduction

The fundamental purpose of successful disaster risk reduction is to integrate risk-aware decision making in every phase of disaster risk management and all national development programmes. Unsuccessful governments, disparity, lack of trust, and shortages of resources, especially at local level hinder efficient disaster governance in less developed countries [1–4]. To the contrary, in developed countries, disaster risk governance challenges are linked to an unproductive and inefficient disaster risk governance system caused by a lack of representation, collaboration, coordination or rigidity [5–7]. Instances of low disaster risk awareness among NGO's and general public hindering the effectiveness of disaster governance can be found equally in rich and developing countries which could be seen both in Kobe earthquake [8] and in Haiti 2010 earthquake [9]. Croatian disaster risk governance is fragmented between sectors and between local and national government. The Civil Protection Act shows that risk governance and emergency management are wrongly viewed as one and the same – emergency management. To be effective, risk-aware decisions must be based on scientific facts which is only sporadically the case in Croatia. Croatian local risk governance, except for the obligation of risk assessment development, is emergency management.

This paper takes these matters and observations to create a proposal on how sustainable Croatian risk governance should be organised, at a national level and define the National Platforms' role.

## Discussion

Article 61. of 1977 Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions and relating to the protection of victims in international armed conflicts [10] defines civil defence (protection) to carry out humanitarian tasks envisioned to protect civilian population from danger and help it to recover it after immediate assistance. If compared with a present-day United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction terminology [11], one can conclude that civil protection is tasked with response and early recovery, but not with every one of the Disaster Risk Management components – 1. Prevention and Mitigation, 2. Preparedness, 3. Response, and 4. Reconstruction and Disaster Risk Reduction.

In contrast, the Civil Protection Act [12] defines civil protection as a system envisaged to protect and rescue human and animal life, resources, and environment. According to the Act, the civil protection system undertakes measures to reduce risk, but there is no mention of vulnerability, capacity, or exposure. The Civil Protection Act [12] only sets the obligation of risk assessment at the local, regional, and national levels and developing the Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy at the national level. Although in Article 48. "prevention activities", which can be understood as disaster risk reduction activities, are exhaustively listed with the absence of listing the responsible institutions, timeframes, and obligations later in the Act. Other than risk assessment, disaster risk reduction does not have a strong legislative basis.

There is no legal document or systematic frame defining Disaster Risk Management in Croatia. The National platform for Disaster Risk Reduction has no basis in the Civil Protection Act. The National platform was established as far back as 2009 by a Croatian Government decision, in the long run, this represents an obstacle. According to the Act on the Government of the Republic of Croatia [13] only temporary bodies can be formed by Government decision, as opposed to, what are intended to be, permanent all year around functioning disaster risk reduction platforms. To assess the validity, usefulness and development of the National platform and perhaps a need for its redesign or re-establishing or improving; current and former members and associates of the National platform were asked a series of questions. 50 % of the respondents expressed their belief that Disaster Risk Management should be coordinated from an above-ministerial authority. 70 % of National platform members said that the National platform's most relevant role is coordination of Disaster Risk Management activities. Stated respondents' opinions are in accordance with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction where a national platform is described as the tool for better risk governance. Furthermore half of the members think that Croatian risk governance is unsystematic, which can be explained with the absence of a Disaster Risk Management Act. Additionally, an absence of a new government decision, recognising new hazards and new obligations of coordination institutions (ministries), consequently leads to the diminishing role of the National platform and to unsystematic risk governance. There is no single or simple, "one-stop", solution for efficient risk governance, it requires many stakeholders to work in unity. Over 90 % of the member think that each ministry should have a permanent representative in the National platform to achieve efficient disaster risk management. 46,7 % of the members strongly agree with establishing a strong coordinating disaster risk management body such as a National platform. Furthermore, 53,3 % of the members strongly agree that sectorial platforms (such as an earthquake platform) should be organised, similarly to the National platform or as satellite organisation within the Platform itself. A good practice example of the Platform having far-reaching effects into all aspects of disaster risk management are activities conducted during 2018 Hrvatska Kostajnica land slide and 2020 Zagreb and 2020 Petrinja earthquakes where scientists, members of the National platform were and still are playing an important role, assessing, advising and coordinating.

## Conclusion

Developing of a Disaster Risk Management Act should provide a basis and improve intersectoral cooperation and set a strong framework for disaster risk management activities. While Disaster Risk Management includes preparedness and response activities, it represents a much broader range of activities designed to boost the resilience of all persons, communities, and the whole state. Building resilience is a complex task that requires coordination on many levels. The National platform as an above-ministerial

and multisectoral body should provide for systematic risk governance at national but consequently on local levels as well. The existence of an intersectoral government body should provide a better opportunity for risk management, whether prospective, corrective, or compensatory, especially if such a body were to have the full support and cooperation of sectorial platforms or expert groups. Systematic risk governance should result in efficient, cost effective and sustainable development activities. Over time it became obvious that Disaster risk management simply outgrew Civil protection.

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