Policy study on crisis management

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March 2021



British Embassy Skopje

IDSCS | Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis -Skopje

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This publication has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies

Impressum

Title: Policy study on crisis management

Author: Vasko Popovski

Publisher: Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" - Skopje

Translation: Gordan Tanaskov

Design: Matea Shumkovska

The publication can be downloaded from:
https://idscs.org.mk/en/

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација
Национална и универзитетска библиотека „Св. Климент Охридски", Скопје

614.8:35.077.3(497.7)
351:35.075(497.7)
351:35.075(497.7-192.2)

POPOVSKI, Vasko
Study on public policies for crisis management / Vasko Popovski ; [translation Gordan Tanaskov]. - Skopje : Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis", 2021. - 34 стр. : табели ; 30 см

Фусноти кон текстот

ISBN 978-608-266-010-3

а) Центар за справување со кризи -- Оперативни процедури -- Македонија б) Јавна политика -- Управување со кризи -- Македонија в) Управување со кризи -- Соработка -- Соседни земји

COBISS.MK-ID 53541125

Executive summary

The crisis management system is organized and implemented for prevention, early warning and dealing with crises that pose a risk to the well-being, health and life of people and animals. Those crises are caused by natural disasters and epidemics or it can be other risks and dangers that directly threaten the constitutional order and security of the country or part of it, in situations when there are no conditions for declaring martial law or state of emergency. In the course of its existence, this system has established itself as one of the leading institutions in the security segment of the country, while the Center for Crisis Management is a recognized institution in a regional context that successfully implements the defined plans and objectives thus contributing to increased resilience of the country and the local communities. The crisis situations declared as such in the past have been successfully resolved and the current ones are being implemented according to the plans. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic as a new and systemic risk imposes the need for further development and transformation of crisis management to ensure prevention and preparedness for dealing with complex crises and disasters and low probability high consequences events.

In that sense, we have prepared this public policy study which aims to assess the structure of the crisis management system and to provide relevant recommendations for its development by reviewing the legal and institutional set-up of the crisis management system, the competencies of the municipalities, identification of the systemic gaps and challenges, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operation of the municipalities, the delivery of services to the citizens and dealing with the crisis as well as a comparative review of experiences from the Western Balkans region. In that sense, this document provides an overview of the different aspects of functioning of the crisis management system, including the challenges and the so-called 'a new normality' that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Particular gaps and challenges have been identified as well in the existing set-up and operation. These are necessary to be addressed in the upcoming period or through specific or systemic reform of the systems for crisis management and protection and rescue. The crisis management system managed to timely adapt itself in the context of local response to the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on the local level, and continued to operate in these new conditions by organizing expert-operational bodies, delivery of measures and implementation of response activities to the pandemics, communication and informing of the citizens as well as assistance and support to the most vulnerable groups.

On the other hand, the countries in the Western Balkans region were affected similarly and faced the same challenges, thus we can notice many similarities and good practices. Given the fact

that the crises and disasters know no borders, it is necessary to build cross-border and regional mechanisms for better prevention, coping and recovery from this type of crises and disasters.

In the context of the existing situation, lessons learned and potential reforms of the systems for crisis management and protection and rescue, the following paths for the potential development of crisis management have been identified:

- ***Inertia*** - Resume the operations within the existing framework and by including the lessons learned from the pandemic response. This development path is the current one.

- ***Systemic reform 1.0*** - Systemic reform according to the priority of the Government. This development path is expected.

- ***Systemic reform 2.0*** - Systemic reform by including novelties in the operation, inclusion of the pandemic risk, understanding of the complex disasters and the new and systemic risks, non-linear evaluation, etc. This development past is least expected.

Abbreviations

ARM	Army of the Republic of North Macedonia
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
EU	European Union
GIS	Geoinformation system
AG	Assessment Group
GRCUK	Main Regional Crisis Management Center
MH	Main Headquarters
PRD	Protection and Rescue Directorate
LCM	Law on Crisis Management
ICT	Information-Communication Technologies
SEE	Southeastern Europe
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
MKD	Republic of North Macedonia
RCMC	Regional Crisis Management Center
WHO	World Health Organization
CMS	Crisis management system
TFFU	Territorial firefighting units
SC	Steering Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Programs
UN	United Nations
CMC	Crisis Management Centre
WB	World Bank

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1. Introduction

1.1 The need for crisis management

The end of the twentieth and the beginning of twenty-first century brought changes in the security risks and threats arising from the end of the Cold War and bipolarity in the world, the globalization and changed geopolitics, the military conflicts in former Yugoslavia, the rise of radical terrorism and the events of 9/11 in 2001, including the increasing number of non-military threats and the internal ethnic armed conflict in 2001 and the consequences thereof. On the other hand, the number of dangers arising from nature (eg. floods, fires, earthquakes, extreme weather events, etc.) or caused by humans (eg. technical or technological, etc.) increased, the consequences of which were significant due to the increased exposure and vulnerability of the societies and communities.

All this has led to the need to establish a system that will comprehensively and systematically manage the reduction of the crisis risks, their prevention, management and recovery. In that context, and in line with the processes of transformation of the security system that response primarily to military threats towards a system that will cover a wider scope of threats, including the non-military and non-traditional ones, the ***National Security and Defense Concept from 2003*** was the first document (doctrine) that emphasized the multi-risk approach towards the contemporary security and cdefence and established the basis for the crisis management as we know it today. For the first time, natural and technical-technological disasters, including infectious diseases among humans and animals caused by internal or external influences, were recognized as security risks and dangers and were included in the broader understanding of safety and crisis management. It was, necessary to establish a crisis management system "for continuous consultations and decision making at the highest level for maximum coordination, timely response, efficient and adequate use of available resources in case of crisis and crisis situations as well as timely, quality and realistic assessment of the security measures implemented by the Republic of Macedonia and under threat from all risks and dangers"[1]. Besides, it referred to the establishment of an independent Directorate for Crisis Management – Crisis Management Center together with two other vital entities: the Steering Committee and the Assessment Group. This established the initial framework and basis for a modern system of crisis management and risk reduction, enabling a multi-hazard, multi-risk and multi-sectoral approach which was later built based on a new legal and institutional framework, which will be presented in more details further in this document.

[1] National Security and Defense Concept of the Republic of Macedonia – Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia 40/2003, page 19 . <http://www.mod.gov.mk/?attachment_id=39383&lang=mk>

1.2 Risk and hazard profile of the Republic of North Macedonia

The hazards profile of the Republic of North Macedonia is exposed to the impact of various types of natural and human-made hazards, such as floods, forest fires, droughts, earthquakes, landslides, weather events, epidemics of infectious diseases in humans and animals, etc. Floods are the most frequent hazard that has the greatest intensity and damage; the forest fires are increasing in frequency and consequences for nature and biodiversity; while earthquakes have the greatest impact on the country and the citizens in terms of loss of life and long-term damage and losses. Consequently, over the last two decades, floods have dominated the profile of hazards, followed by forest fires, events caused by extreme temperatures and earthquakes. If we take a look at the table of disastrous events in the country in the last two decades, we will see that meteorological hazards (floods, extreme temperatures, storms, etc.) are dominant, followed by forest fires, geophysical hazards (earthquakes, landslides, etc.). However, the COVID-19 pandemic is a crisis with the longest duration, magnitude and consequences for the country, for the social and economic system and the population in general.

#	Year	Disaster type	Date	Total deaths	Total population affected	Total damages ('000 $)	Source
1	2001	Extreme temperatures	1.12.2001	15	/	/	1
2	2003	Flood	8.1.2003	2	4,000	/	1
3	2004	Extreme temperatures	1.7.2004	15	/	/	1
4	2004	Flood	4.6.2004	/	100,000	3,000	1
5	2005	Storms	1.1.2005	1	/	/	1
6	2005	Flood	4.8.2005		2,000	/	1
7	2007	Forest fires	1.7.2007	1	1,000,000	/	1
8	2008	Flood	8.12.2008	2	30,000	/	2
9	2012	Extreme temperatures	1.1.2012	1	5,100	/	1
10	2013	Flood	24.2.2013	1	4,911	/	1
11	2014	Extreme temperatures	28.12.2014	/	8,800	/	1
12	2015	Flood	2.03.2015	/	100,000	35,000	1
13	2015	Flood	3.8.2015	7	2,116	87,000	2
14	2016	Flood	6.8.2016	22	33,582	50,000	2
15	2016	Earthquake	11.9.2016	/	/	10,000	2
16	2017	Extreme temperatures	5.1.2017	5	2,220	/	2
17	2020/21	COVID-19 pandemic	26.2.2020 – 26.2.2021	3,111	101,214	3,700,000[2]	3

Table – Overview of disasters that have happened in North Macedonia during the period 2000 – 2020[3]

[2] The UNDP Report from June 2020 *Social and Economic Evaluation of the COVID-19 impact in the Republic of North Macedonia*, page 8, the cumulative output losses are estimated for 2020 and 2021

[3] The history of disasters we prepared by the author of this document using the following data: 1) Plan for Readiness and Response of the Health System in Dealing with Urgent Crisis Situations and Disasters, Ministry of Health, 2018; 2) International Disaster Database EM-DAT - <https://www.emdat.be/emdat_db/> and 3) <https://tinyurl.com/3zxdaf3s> as on 26 February 2021.

Given the assumed effects of climate change that will result in a warmer and drier climate, an increase in hot extreme events and a decrease in cold extreme events is expected as well as an increase in daily rainfalls that will result in torrential floods. The decrease in summer precipitation will lead to drought and an increased number of forest fires[4]. Because of the deteriorating environmental conditions and the increased air pollution, it is expected that there will be an increase in the frequency, intensity and impact of catastrophic events that will significantly affect the overall resilience of the country and the local communities, especially affecting women and other vulnerable categories of citizens.

On the other hand, during the past years, we were increasingly facing new and atypical risks that significantly affect the texture of resilience of the society and the local community and that drain the existing resources and capacities. For example, six years ago we faced an unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants – from the beginning of 2015 until March 2016 more than 800,000 people[5] transited along the Balkan route through our country towards Europe. The current health crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic is an acute stress for all countries and territories in the world, including the Republic of North Macedonia, seriously disrupting the sustainable development of the country, its social and economic system and affecting local communities. All of this further aggravates the vulnerability of the most vulnerable people. For example, the impact of the crisis on global resilience is estimated at $ 8 trillion to $ 16 trillion, including $ 5.8 trillion to $ 8.8 trillion for the first six months of social distancing and travel restrictions, that is, 6.4% - 9.7% of global GDP[6]. As we can see from the table above, the impact in Macedonia is estimated at 3.7 billion $ for the first 20 months of the pandemic. With all this in mind, crisis management is becoming increasingly important at both national and local levels. From a fragmented package of crisis management activities, it is being transformed into a comprehensive and structured system for crisis prevention, preparation, response and resilient management with crises and disasters.

[4] Vladimir Gjurgjevic. Report on climate change projections and changes in the extreme weather events in the Republic of North Macedonia. UNDP, 2020, page 4
[5] MLSP: Experiences from the refugee and migrant crisis to be used to improve the care system for refugees and migrants" Academic, February 23, 2017 <https://tinyurl.com/y9owpkf3>
[6] „Escaping the Era of Pandemics" IPBES, 2020 <https://ipbes.net/pandemics-marquee>

1.3 Policy study

The main objective of the ***Policy study for Crisis Management*** is to assess the structure of the crisis management system and provide relevant recommendations for its development by reviewing the legal and institutional set-up of the crisis management system, the competencies of the municipalities, identification of the systemic gaps and challenges, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operation of the municipalities, the delivery of services to the citizens and dealing with the crisis as well as a comparative review of experiences from the Western Balkans region.

1.4 Framework for preparation of the Study

To achieve this objective, a specific approach and methodological framework were used following the research subject, its objectives and specifics, including relevant parameters of the Policy study which are the basis for this process.

Parameters	Description
Relevance	The degree of relevance of the crisis management system in reducing the risks of crises and disasters, the competencies of the entities.
Response	The role of the entities that make up the system for crises management, especially of the local self-government units, in the crisis management and COVID-19 pandemic response.
Effectiveness	Measure of the degree up to which the crisis management system is meeting its objectives delivers its mandate and monitors whether the expected results are achieved.
Impact	Positive and/ or negative impacts caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on the functioning of the crisis management system entities, especially on the local self-government units, both direct and/ or indirect.
Lessons learned and recommendations	Identification of lessons learned and definition of modus operandi for further development and functioning of the crisis management, including general and specific recommendations.

Table – Parameters of the Policy study

2. General information about the crisis management system

2.1 Introduction

Article 1, Paragraph 2 of the Law on Crisis Management (29/05) says that the system for crisis management is organized and implemented *for prevention, early warning and dealing with crises that pose a risk to the well-being, health and life of people and animals. Those crises are caused by natural disasters and epidemics or they can be other risks and dangers that directly threaten the constitutional order and security of the country or part of it, in situations when there are no conditions for declaring martial law or state of emergency.* The crisis management system also includes information gathering, assessment, and analysis of the situation, setting goals and objectives, development and implementation of the actions necessary for prevention, early warning and crisis management.

Following the modern trends of occurrence of risks and threats, the basic package of risks and hazards covered by the Law on Crisis Management under Article 3, Paragraph 1, item 3 are shown in the table below from which we can see that the crisis management has a comprehensive and integrated approach towards the modern and complex risks and threats, providing multi-sectoral prevention, preparedness, management and recovery.

National security risk and threats	Nationalism and religious intolerance and hatred International and urban terrorism Organized and serious crime (murders, blackmail, etc.) Illicit trafficking in drugs, weapons and humans Consequences of the weapons of mass destruction Possession of large quantities of illegal weapons Corruption Endangering strategic energy sources Activities of foreign intelligence services
Natural and other disasters	Floods, earthquakes, fires, landslides, erosions, snow and drifts, avalanches, droughts, extreme temperatures, frosts, lightning strikes, hail, strong winds and more.
Technical-technological disasters	Cracks, damages and collapse of dams, accidents in mines and industrial plants, RBH-contamination, traffic accidents, explosive demolitions, destruction of NUS, disturbances of the regular situation in the communal area, etc.
Outbreaks of quarantine and other infectious diseases in humans and animals	
Large-scale degradation and destruction of the environment	

Risks and hazards table according to the Law on Crisis Management (Center for Crisis Management 2005)[7]

[7] The table of risks and hazards according to the Law on Crisis Management (29/05) was prepared by the author.

2.2 Legal framework of the crisis management system

In terms of the vertical hierarchy of the legal acts that regulate crisis management, the structure is the following:

- ***Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia (2018)*** – no provision directly pertains to the crisis management but Article 125 establishes that the Parliament can declare a state of emergency through regular procedure in a case of natural disaster or epidemic.

- ***National Concept for Security and Defense (2003)*** – it defines the priorities in the concept of contemporary national security and defence and establishes the bases for crisis management both on normative and institutional level.

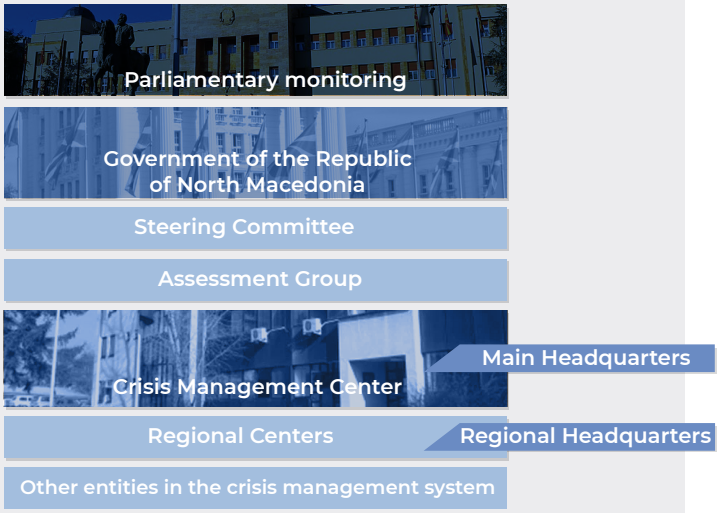
- ***Law on Crisis Management (2005, including changes and amendments in 2014 and 2015)***[8] - arranges the crisis management system in the Republic of North Macedonia, as follows: organization and functioning, decision-making and use of resources, communication, coordination and cooperation, assessment of the threat to the security of the country, planning and financing as well as other issues related to the crisis system management.

- ***Most relevant bylaws – secondary legislation in the area of crisis management[9] , rulebooks and other acts.***[10]

2.3. Institutional set-up of the crisis management system

To propose decisions and for continuous consultations, coordination, rapid response, efficient and accurate use of available resources in eventual crisis situations, provision of timely, qualitative and realistic assessment of the risks and dangers to the country, the following bodies are established within the crisis management system: Steering Committee, Assessment Group and Center for Crisis Management (CMC). According to Article 2 of the Law on Crisis Management (29/05), the crisis management system includes *the state administration bodies and state government bodies (Parliament, President and Government), the armed forces – ARM, the protection and rescue forces and the municipal bodies and the city of Skopje (municipalities and the City of Skopje). Public enterprises, public institutions and services as well as companies can participate in prevention, early warning and crisis management following the law. Citizens, civil society organizations, NGOs and humanitarian organizations, the Red Cross, the media, as well as other organizations* can participate in prevention, early warning and crisis management, voluntarily and contractually, under specific conditions.

[8] Legislation - Laws, Center for Crisis Management <https://tinyurl.com/y72p3q6r>
[9] Legislation - Bylaws, Center for Crisis Management <https://tinyurl.com/6repfm7f>
[10] Legislation - Other acts, Center for Crisis Management <https://tinyurl.com/mry2wf7c>



Graph – Organizational and institutional set-up of the crisis management system in the Republic of North Macedonia [11]

More information about the institutional set-up and the obligations of the entities that make up the crisis management system is provided in **Annex 1.**

2.4 Crisis and crisis situation

According to Article 3, Paragraph 1, item 4 of the Law on Crisis Management **a crisis** *is a phenomenon that endangers the fundamental value, the permanent and vital interests and objectives of the country, that is, the constitutional order and national security are endangered.* There were several times in which crisis situations were declared since the crisis management system was established. The first time was back in 2007 when due to the large number of forest fires that caught half of the territory of the country and the population it was necessary to use the resources of all entities as well as to organize and receive international assistance and support in dealing with fires and in the post-recover period.

Secondly, following the disastrous floods in Skopje and in Tetovo in August 2016, a crisis situation in the area of these two municipalities was declared. Following the influx of thousands of refugees and migrants in summer 2015, a crisis situation was declared in August 2015 on one part of the southern border with Greece and one part of the northern border with Serbia in order to engage part of the army forces to secure and guard the borderline and prevent the illegal influx of migrants and refugees. Continuously, every six months, this crisis situation has been extended and is still in force. To get a better response to the COVID-19 pandemic, at the beginning of the health crisis a 30-day crisis was declared for the area covering the municipalities of Debar and Centar Zhupa in the period 13 March – 14 April. To provide a comprehensive response to

[11] Popovski, Vasko. Review of crisis *management competencies on local level*. UNDP, 2020, page 9.

the prolonged pandemic crisis, the Government declared a crisis situation on the entire territory of the country on 20 November 2020. This decision was extended by the Parliament after the 30 days expired and is valid until 30 June 2021. In response to the crisis situation that has been declared, the mechanisms for response and dealing with the resources of the state administration bodies, the municipalities and the City of Skopje have been activated.

Crisis situation

- It is declared for dealing with situation that poses a risk to the goods, health and lives of people and animals or a danger to the national security of the country as a whole or part thereof.
- It is declared by the Government on the proposal by the Steering Committee for a period of up to 30 days;
- Reports to the Parliament and the President no later than 30 days after the situation is over;
- If necessary to be longer than 30 days, submits request to the Parliament for adoption of such decision.

Source: Law on Crisis Management (29/05), Articles 30-31

2.5. System for crisis management - protection and rescue

In the context of crisis management and comprehensive management for reduction of disaster-related risks in the country, we should also mention the system for protection and rescue that was established back in 2004 for protection of the population, environment, material goods, natural resources, biodiversity and cultural heritage from natural disasters and other disasters in peace, state of emergency and martial law[12]. The protection and rescue forces are part of the entities that make up the crisis management system. The Central relevant institution in this regard is the Directorate for Protection and Rescue located in Skopje and with 35 satellite offices all over the country – its geographic distribution equals the distribution of the regional crisis management centres. Protection and rescue is one of the competencies of the local self-government units which is in the same time shared responsibility and is stipulated as such in Article 22 of the Law on Local Self-government.

Speaking of crisis management and protection and rescue it seems that there is a certain dualism and overlapping of the competencies[13] which could impact the efficiency and effectiveness of the disaster response. In principle, these aspects are present in the risk assessment and crisis management where the Crisis Management Centre is responsible for the national security threats or the complex natural hazards while the Protection and Resuce Directorate is responsible for coordination and management with the prevention and response to natural hazards. [14]

[12] Law on Protection and Rescue (2016 including all changes from 2004 and 2016)
[13] Lembovska et al. *North Macedonia's Crisis Management Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak*. NDI. 2020. Pp.16.
[14] EU Peer Review: North Macedonia. 2018.

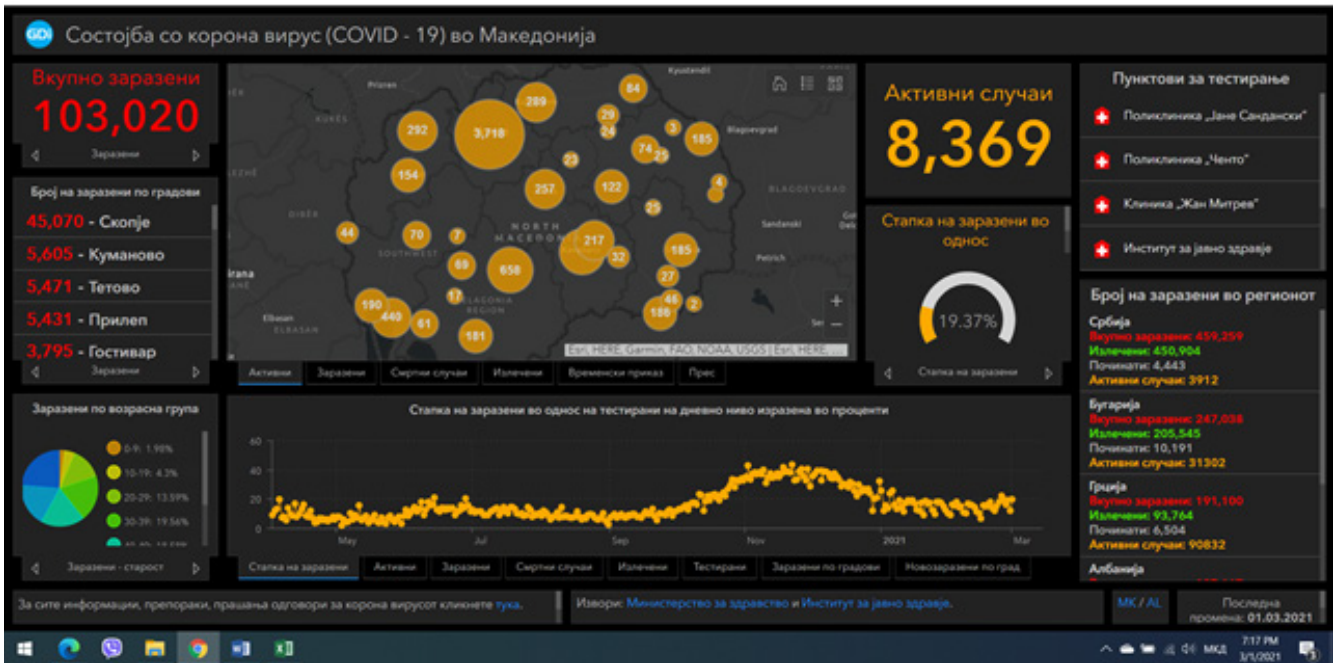
Still, it can be said that crisis management includes the segment of a comprehensive assessment of risks and hazards to the safety of the country, including natural hazards, and the Crisis Management Centre is in charge of providing expert assistance to the entities in the system, their coordination, communication and cooperation. The Center itself does not have operational resources. On the other hand, the main mandate of the Directorate is protection and rescue by implementing relevant protection and rescue measures. The Directorate does have relevant resources – it is a finalized and operational mechanism.

3. Crisis management and the COVID-19 pandemic

3.1. Background

The COVID-19 pandemic spread throughout the country soon after the COVID-19 infectious disease was declared as a health emergency situation on 30 January 2020. The first case was registered in a returnee woman from Italy on 26 February and the first death was registered on 23 March.

Subsequently, in the course of 2020, it has followed the global tendencies and grew from infectious disease with sporadic cases to stage 4 - widespread transmission in the local community. As of 1 March 2021, a total of 103,200 citizens were infected and 3,144 citizens lost the battle with the disease.



Map – Interactive GIS platform for monitoring of the COVID-19 situation in the country[15]

[15] Coronavirus status (COVID - 19) in Macedonia, GDI <http://gdi.mk/corona/>

In line with the global practices and instructions, the pandemic response was introduced at the beginning of 2020 by activating the crisis management system and declaring a crisis situation on one part of the national territory – the municipalities of Debar and Centar Zhupa with the duration of 30 days (13 March – 14 April 2020). Because the situation worsened and the virus spread to other parts of the country, for the first time in the history of the country a state of emergency was declared on 18 May, which was extended until 22 June 2020 due to the early parliamentary elections that took place in July.

In this initial period of the pandemic, decisive steps and measures were taken to suppress the increase of cases, that is, levelling the line so that the health system can organize and absorb the impact of the pandemic as well as to consolidate the response system and to respond appropriately to the pandemic challenges. For example, a full lockdown of the country was introduced, including restriction of movement during the afternoon and night, weekends and holidays, ban on the educational process in schools and faculties, sports and cultural events, public events, etc. Due to the exponential spread of the disease (the so-called second wave) and the huge pressure on the health system and depletion of the finite resources, the Government declared a crisis situation nationwide on 18 November which was extended by a decision of the Parliament until 30 June 2021. In the meantime, the crisis management system has taken over the coordination of dealing with the pandemic.

3.2. The COVID-19 pandemic impact on the operation of the municipalities

When it comes to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the operation of the municipalities and the delivery of their competencies, we primarily refer to the fiscal moment and delivery of services to the citizens. The pandemic had a negative impact on these aspects since it was the biggest crisis that happened today and in this region, including globally.

• ***Financing of the municipalities***[16] - In terms of financing of the municipalities in the country, the pandemic affects both the revenue rate and the expenditure rate of the municipal budgets. For example, in the former, there is a decline in revenues in both the first and second quarters of 2020 compared to the previous year. This goes for local taxes, licenses, approvals, fees, etc. In terms of the expenditure rate for the same period, there is a large increase in the costs of crisis response and a decrease in the costs for ongoing maintenance, capital investments, project costs and the like. On the other hand, during the second quarter, the expenditures decreased and this indicates the fact that the municipalities have started to adapt to the current situation and to plan the funds for responding to the pandemic. However, it should be borne in mind that if the intensity of the crisis continues and all the uncertainties on how it will end, the financial aspects of municipal operations may further deteriorate.

• ***Delivery of services to the citizens***[17] - When it comes to delivery of services to the citizen we primarily refer to services per the mandate defined in Article 22 of the Law on Local Self-government. The delivery of communal services was delivered without interruptions and with the increased scope of activities since the public communal enterprises were the main local-level resources for responding to the pandemics during 2020 such as disinfection of the public areas, institutions, roads, disposal of municipal waste, etc. Since March 2020 the educational process has been entirely moved online and is continuously implemented, with some exceptions, and managed to retain the level necessary for delivery of the educational process. In terms of delivery of social services to the citizens, in addition to the usual services the municipalities deliver in normal times, volunteers were engaged for delivery of humanitarian packages, medicine, etc. to vulnerable groups of people as well as to people in quarantine, isolation or people sick with COVID-19. The protection and rescue was realized within the overall response to the crisis and through the existing structures, while in the health segment the priority was placed on redirecting all available resources and means towards the response to the crisis. The protection of the environment was implemented within the current obligations of the municipalities. The urban planning was ongoing and the local economic development saw a reduction in the number of projects implemented, both due to the

[16] For more information: Popovski, V., Trenovski, B., Popovski, T. Municipal Crisis Management Response to COVID-19 Pandemics, Municipal Financing and Affected Services in the Republic of North Macedonia. UNDP. 2020. pp. 31-33.
[17] Ibid. pp. 31-33.

pandemic and the crisis response priorities and redistribution of funds. However, some services have been put on hold for a longer period due to the intensity of the disease, the need for physical distance and the lack of protocols, such as culture, sports and recreation.

• ***Crisis management on the local level***[18] – The pandemics had an impact on all local level sectors, including crisis management and protection and rescue, that is, reduction of the disaster risks. Although the coordination of the response to the health crisis was centralized since the very beginning, first via the Steering Committee and later by the Main Crisis Coordination Headquarters at the Macedonian Government, the local self-government units had a key role in the implementation of the response on their respective geographic area, both in terms of response measures as well as through implementation of preventive measures that were rarely implemented before. The pressure on the system was enormous but it managed to absorb that pressure in the very beginning and continue to operate uninterruptedly. As the system encountered a new and unknown pandemic at both national and local levels, it applied many of the things through learning by doing, by improvising in the decision making and the delivery of the measures and activities. It was collecting the lessons learned that were replicated and upgraded in other municipalities. For example, the relevant bodies switched to remote teleworking and successfully dealt with the challenges typical for this way of work. Mass-scale activities were implemented with regards to disinfection of public areas and premises, the military was activated as support in keeping the order, the municipalities started to adopt operational plans for response to the pandemic, the inter-municipal cooperation was improved, etc. On the expert-operational level, the municipal and regional headquarters were timely activated and were in session for the entire duration of the response and early recovery from the pandemic, thus ensuring prevention and setting the grounds for resilient recovery. From the aspect of implementation of the current competencies, coordination, communication and cooperation with the entities that make up the crisis management system, we can conclude that the response at the local level was timely, efficient and effective, including the principle of transparency, that is, provision of access to information to all stakeholders and the public.

[18] Ibid. pp. 14 -15.

Some gaps can be identified in the legislation and norms regarding the establishment and operation of the headquarters, lack of resilient recovery framework, potential overlapping of mandate between the systems for crisis management and protection and rescue as well as the lack of operational procedures for response to crises and catastrophes in a situation of a pandemic. There were some issues with the vertical communication, especially in the case of the municipality of Kumanovo and the headquarters and the failure to declare lockdown measures although the municipality was requesting that measure.

> "In the absence of previous experience, precise frameworks, plans and recommendations for action, the rule was once again confirmed that improvisation and creativity are important factors for successful emergency management."
>
> Source: Kendra, Wachtendorf: 2007 <https://tinyurl.com/yyv8qthx>

4. System gaps, strengths, challenges and lessons learned in crisis management

4.1. Introduction

This section of the Policy study for crisis management shall consider the system gaps that have been identified, the strengths, challenges and lessons learned in crisis management that stem out of the review and analysis of the relevant legislation and documents and especially the practical experiences in the prevention, dealing with and eliminating the crises and crisis situation in the past.

In the context of the structure of the disaster risk management system and towards overcoming the differences and tensions between the crisis management system and the system for protection and rescue, and also towards building an efficient, effective system for prevention, early warning, preparedness, recovery and response to accidents and disasters, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia envisages implementation of systemic reforms in its program for work for the period 2020 – 2024: *"In the first year of the mandate, the Government will provide structural reform of the systems for crisis management and protection and rescue through reorganization, equipping and training of operational teams for rapid intervention. These segments are the foundation in building a society resistant to crises and disasters as has been demonstrated during the crisis and emergency caused by the coronavirus pandemic. In the first half of the mandate, we will implement the call system - 112".*[19]

Given that this reform is not part of the annual plan for work of the Government for 2021, the analysis elaborates further on the existing system and provides recommendations for improvement which can be properly applied even in a case of unification of the two systems.

[19] „Work program of the Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia in the period 2020-20204", Government of RSM<https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/programa-na-vlada-agenda2024-finalno_programa_1.pdf> p.49

4.2 Gaps identified in the crisis management area

• Contemporary strategic and normative framework is one of the pillars of resilience

- The main gap identified in this area is the lack of a single national disaster risk management strategy despite the fact that the country has joined the Sendai DRRDRR Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, where one of the main objectives is the adoption of national and local risk and disaster reduction strategies by 2020, that is, by the end of validity of the framework, which is 2030 (Objective E[20]). In 2012 there was an attempt to develop a comprehensive strategy under the leadership of the Crisis Management Center and with support of the United Nations Development Program, but even though the draft text was prepared through cross-sectoral coordination and submitted to the then Government, it was not adopted. The need to strategically arrange this area is increasingly evident in the context of modern risks and threats and given the complex crises and disasters predicted to be more frequent and more intense. Our country does not have much experience with crises and disasters of this kind and therefore it is necessary to adopt such a document to build a national strategic approach in their prevention, mitigation, response and recovery through multihazard, multi-risk and multi-sectoral approach. After all, as stated in the Sendai DRRDRR Framework, disaster risk reduction is a task for the whole society. In terms of the legal framework, the legal acts date from the time before the adoption of the Sendai Framework in 2015 and other global documents for achieving sustainable development. The adoption of new acts or amendments to existing ones will include modern trends in disaster risk reduction, thus reflecting the objectives and priorities of the Sendai DRRDRR Framework and sustainable development, it will take into account the systemic significance of risk and the complex disasters and will ensure better coverage of the pandemic risk and health crises. This pandemic crisis, together with the best practices and lessons learned, is a great opportunity to start a comprehensive process of updating the legal framework. In fact, one of the features of resilience is the transformation of the system after evaluating the lessons learned from practical events that have occurred and their use towards building a more resilient system.

[20] „ "Sendai Framework Indicators", Prevention Web <https://www.preventionweb.net/sendai-framework/sendai-framework-monitor/indicators>

• ***Should there be ad-hoc crisis headquarter bodies established? Yes or No?*** - The crisis management system has been in place since 2005 and during its existence has successfully dealt with various types of crises and catastrophic events, such as the crisis declared for the first time in the summer of 2007 with a purpose to organize and coordinate the response towards the large number of forest fires that have affected more than half of the territory of the country and the population; the crisis situations declared in one part of the country in 2015 and 2016 in response to the torrential floods in Tetovo and Skopje; the continuously declared crisis situation on the northern and southern border due to the migrant and refugee crisis since 2015 till today; the one-month crisis situation in the municipalities of Debar and Centar Zhupa in the period March – April 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic; and the current crisis situation nationwide for a purpose of coordinated and successful response to COVID-19. During all these events, coordination in dealing with them was ensured through the crisis management system, under the leadership of the Steering Committee and with the participation of all relevant entities included in the crisis management system.

However, as part of the response in the past several disaster events, temporary ad-hoc coordination bodies (headquarters) were established by the Government. These coordinative bodies are not foreseen or identified in the relevant legal framework regulating crisis management, protection and rescue or health (in the case of a pandemic), that is, the comprehensive management to reduce the disaster risk. For example, in January 2015 a coordinative body for the prevention of floods[21], was established; in August 2005 a coordinative body for dealing with the situation and damages from the floods in the Tetovo region was established[22], in August 2016 three Ministerial coordinative groups for coordinating the early recovery from the flood in the village of Stajkovci were established[23], and in March 2020 the *Main Coordinative Crisis Body*[24] was established with an aim to ensure full coordination in relation to prevention, introduction and spreading of the COVID-10 virus. It includes Government members, Ministers and the directors of the Crisis Management Centre and the Protection and Rescue Directorate. In many areas, the competencies overlap with those vested in the Steering Committee of the crisis management system (especially in terms of coordination) and their membership is similar.

[21] Meeting of the Coordinative Body for Prevention of Natural Disasters", A1on, February 21, 2015 <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/sostanok-na-koordinativnoto-telo-za-prevencija-od-prirodni-nepogodi/>
[22] „Coordinative body established to deal with the situation and flood damage in the Tetovo region and the Commission for assessment of damage to real estate and movable property", Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, August 4 2015 <https://tinyurl.com/yygfbxs9>
[23] UN, WB, EU. Post Disaster Needs Assessment August 2016 Floods (draft version). 2016. p. 71
[24] Main Coordinative Crisis Board- Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, Government of RSM <https://koronavirus.gov.mk/glave-koord-shtab>

The attitude to establish temporary ad-hoc crisis coordination bodies has its drawbacks in terms of lack of legal basis for their establishment (except by Government decision), duplication or overlap with the existing competencies of the Steering Committee and the institutions that make up the crisis management system, the insufficient knowledge about crisis management or disaster risk reduction by the majority of members, insufficient use of expert knowledge and skills of the relevant institutions for crisis management and risks, the possible prevalence of politics over expertise, duplication of the communication and coordination channels, etc. In fact, one of the recommendations included in the *Report for Need Assessment Following the Torrential Flood Disaster in August 2016*[25] is to move away from the politicians and Mayors from their leading roles in the operational command/ bodies but also to be available to the operational commander in dealing with the crisis. It is necessary to prepare a functional analysis of the work of these bodies to identify the need for their existence as well as evaluation of the real contribution in the coordination of crises or disasters and the eventual (lack of) improvement of the system and the way it works.

• The strategic and sectoral policies, programs and plans on both national and local level do not sufficiently include assessments of all other risk and hazard types - EOne of the most important mandates of the Crisis Management Centre is making integrated assessments or estimates for all types of risks and hazards for the respective region of the country, the municipalities and the City of Skopje. We can say that the country is a regional leader both in terms of having a methodological framework and assessment approach as well as in the existence of ICT and GIS-based solutions and tools for the support of the process, analysis and visualization of the results – they aim to facilitate the communication, coordination, cooperation and the decision making. However, there are two gaps here: the first one is insufficient inclusion of assessments in the strategic, development, program and planning documents on the national and local level and the second one is that the process of preparation of those assessments is separated from the municipalities as the Crisis Management Centre is the body that makes those assessments and the municipalities only adopt them and these documents can be provided to them in full or partially. With this, the municipalities are likely not to feel full ownership over the document and in most of the cases, the document is not used sufficiently as a tool for inclusion of the disaster-related risks in the strategic and development programs and areas of the municipalities, with an aim to adopt decision-based on information related to the understanding of the risk. Similar is the situation on the national level

[25] UN, WB, EU. Post Disaster Needs Assessment August 2016 Floods (draft version). 2016. p. 74.

where the relevant entities are only provided with parts of the assessment related to their respective responsibility. On the other hand, the risk assessment is exactly one of the key documents that should ensure that the needs and interest of all citizens, including the most vulnerable citizens, are taken into account and properly addressed, and that no one will be left behind.[26]

• ***The expert-operational segment of crisis management is not properly defined and arranged in the legislation and other acts*** *- According to the Law on Crisis management, the municipalities establish regional crisis management headquarters at the regional level while, according to the Law on Protection and Rescue, each municipality establishes protection and rescue headquarters. In case of a pandemic response, many of the municipalities also established municipal crisis headquarters for dealing with COVID-19. On the other hand, the competencies of the headquarters are not comprehensively defined, the importance of the decisions (mandatory or advisory), including the lack of financial and material-technical resources for their work, especially in the smaller municipalities. Consequently, it is necessary to have a normative regulation of this expert-operational segment which manages the operational aspect of the crisis and disaster management, as well as additional education and professional training of the operational staff members in order to ensure timely, efficient and effective response.*

• ***Insufficient funding of the crisis management – reduced resilience*** - The crisis management is underfunded, both from the central budget and the municipal budgets. More than 92% of the Crisis Management Center budget is allocated to staff salaries and minimum operating costs[27]. There are no special items for crisis management in the budgets of the municipalities, although there could be some expenses allocated related to specific activities in the area of prevention, management and revitalization. On the other hand, the allocation of funds is usually ex-post which means after the event, during the response or the early recovery. Because of this, it is necessary to increase the financial resources, especially for measures and activities intended for prevention and mitigation as well as for preparedness and resilient recovery.

• ***Lack of resilient recovery framework*** - The framework for resilient recovery is missing[28] in our national and local context in general, and can only be found as post-crisis revitalization (recovery) or as conducting damage assessment. However, given the complexity of crises and disasters as well as the impact on sustainable development and human needs, it is necessary to create normative and institutional preconditions for the inclusion of the resilient recovery as an opportunity for the country and the communities to recover and transform after these events so that same or similar future events would not endanger them or would have minimal consequences.

• ***Early warning closer to the citizens*** - The legal mandate for early warning is included in the Law on Crisis Management and the

[26] "What does it mean to leave no one behind?", UDNP, August 9, 2018 <https://tinyurl.com/3y7s2bt8>
[27] "Buxhaku - CCM is in a worse condition than 15 years ago", Radio Slobodna Evropa, September 15, 2019 <https://tinyurl.com/ycjy2zxc>
[28] Resilient recovery for the purposes of this Study refers to crisis or disaster recovery that will allow the systems and communities to return to normal operation and they will be better prepared or will be able to respond better in the next event and will suffer less or no damage, or with no consequences at all.

Crisis Management Centre is in charge of managing the system for alarming and informing of the population. However, the early warning system is not established at the local level, closer to the communities, especially hazards that can rapidly lead to a catastrophic event are taken into account. There have been isolated attempts to develop local early flood warning (eg. in the Polog region) but these are individual activities that are not recognized by the system. Therefore, it is necessary to functionally analyze the early warning system and adapt it to the needs of the local communities and citizens, including the people with special needs.

• ***Decentralization of the crisis management – municipalities as first preventers & first responders*** – Crisis management is a centralized competence while the protection and rescue is a shared competence. Further decentralization of the central competencies is therefore necessary as well as the introduction of new competencies in order for the municipalities to have full mechanisms, resources and capacities for prevention, response and resilient recovery. All this should be accompanied by the allocation and transfer of adequate financial and human resources. Only in this way the municipalities will be efficient and effective in the implementation of prevention and will ensure timely response to the risks in their area. This was also proven during the response to the pandemic, where some municipalities effectively and efficiently organized the multi-sectoral response to the pandemic, even before the robust national mechanism was started and initiated. In the context of local competencies and the limited resources and capacities of most of the municipalities, the important segment is the inter-municipal cooperation as well as sustainable financing of measures and activities for strengthening the resilience. In terms of inter-municipal cooperation, in most cases, it is a matter of fulfilling minimum requirements for the implementation of joint competencies or measures and activities. Given the fact that the hazards know no municipal boundaries, it is necessary to expand the segment of the inter-municipal cooperation, both in terms of shared competencies and in terms of resources needed for prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, based on profiled hazards and the risks estimated for the designated municipalities. The existing frameworks for cooperation between the municipalities are not formalized and are not institutionalized.

4.3. Strengths and challenges identified in the crisis management

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Flexibility of the crisis response system on the national and local level; • Technical capacities for support and coordination of the crisis management; • Ability to manage several crisis situations at the same time (eg. the migrant crisis/ COVID-19); • Experienced personnel with previous knowledge; • Risk assessments in place on the national level and for the municipalities for all types of risks and hazards; • Contemporary ICT and GIS-based system; • Introduction of the Single European Emergency Number E-112; • Use of GIS tools for sharing updated information about the pandemic status and recommended advice for protection; • Rapid initial response at the beginning of the crisis; • Communication and dissemination of information using various channels for informing of the public and the citizens; • Cooperation, coordination and communication.	• Overlapping of competencies with the Protection and Rescue Directorate; • Insufficient interaction of the pandemic risk and the health crisis; • No National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction in place; • Insufficient knowledge among the personnel on the pandemic risk from COVID-19; • No knowledge and experience in dealing with complex crises and disasters; • The expert-operational segment is not properly arranged in the legal documents; • Insufficient competencies of the local self-government for crisis management; • Political interference in the crisis management decision making; • Lack of vision and framework for resilient recovery; • Lack of specialized human resources; • Establishment of command system for incidents.

4.4 Lessons learned in the crisis management

• The COVID-19 pandemic imposed the need to think about changes and amendments in the strategic and normative framework by adopting a disaster risk reduction strategy and comprehensive integration of the pandemic risk and health crises.

• The crisis management system has the necessary know-how, expertise and experience for providing professional support to the crisis management bodies and ensures complete communication, coordination and cooperation which are prerequisites for timely, efficient and effective response to crises and disasters.

• Regardless of the lack of prior knowledge and experience in dealing with pandemics and complex health crises, the crisis management system has been continuously adapting to the newly created conditions and ensured full support to the entities in the system as well as timely coordination of those entities.

• The crisis management system needs to consider the complex crises and disasters, especially the prevention, preparedness, response and resilient management.

• The integrated risk and hazard assessment needs to be upgraded with a non-linear approach in understanding the likelihood of events that have a small probability of occurrence but could result in huge consequences towards the resilience of the country and the communities.

• The local self-government units are the first entities that prevent the crises and the first responders to the event. It is, therefore, necessary to provide the legal and institutional framework for full implementation of these obligations by ensuring further decentralization of the crisis management competencies and reduction of the disaster risks.

5. Comparative overview of the crisis management systems and experiences from responding to the COVID-19 crisis in the Western Balkan countries

5.1 Systems for crisis management and disaster risk reduction in the Western Balkan countries

Crisis management and disaster risk reduction has a pronounced regional and cross-border dimension because crises and disasters know no boundaries and hence the focus of this Study are the structural set-ups of the crisis management and disaster risk reduction systems in the Western Balkans region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro). The characteristics of their response to the pandemic crisis are briefly presented further in the document.

There is no unified approach in the establishment of the legal and institutional framework for crisis management and disaster risk reduction in the Western Balkans. Each country has its specific approach and way of regulating this area and in most of them, these are Sectors within the existing Ministries of Interior and Defense, which is not the case in the Republic of North Macedonia. They also differ from the post-communist countries in Central Asia or Eastern Europe, where in most cases the institutions in charge of crisis and disaster risk management stem out of the former Soviet Union matrix and are established as robust Ministries of Emergency/ Urgent Situations with a larger scope of competencies. Another general feature of these systems is that the competencies are predominantly in the area of risk reduction and disasters through civil protection, where the segment of crisis management is not included as a separate system or subsystem, but it is subject competence of the coordinative bodies, interdepartmental working groups or operational centres, unlike in Macedonia where crisis management is one of the bearing pillars of the modern security

The text below shows some basic characteristics of the systems in the Western Balkan countries. More detailed competencies are shown in **Annex 3.**

• ***Republic of Albania*** – The institution in charge of emergency management is the Agency for National Civil Protection which is part of the Ministry of Defense and has structures organized on national (Council of Ministers, Inter-Ministerial Council and Ministry of Defense), regional (recentres for civil protection in 12 prefectures) and local level (competence of the Mayors, local communities and commissions for planning and dealing with emergency situations).

• ***Bosnia and Herzegovina*** – The crisis management and disaster risk reduction system is in line with the national arrangement, the political system and the core competencies of the civil protection which are organized at the level of the three entities of this country: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina through the Federal Civil Protection Administration, the Republic of Srpska (Republic Administration for Civil Protection) and the District of Brchko (Department of Public Safety). On the other hand, the main institution at the national level, which is also a national agency for disaster management, is the Ministry of Security through the Sector for Protection and Rescue. Overall, this Ministry is responsible for coordinating the implementation of emergency management on the territory of the country and has no operational resources (similar to our Center for Crisis Management). The institutions in charge of civil protection in the entities are responsible for the implementation of all phases of the civil protection in their area and they have the main resources and capacities.

• ***Republic of Kosovo*** – The relevant institution for dealing with emergency situations is the Agency for Managing Emergency Situations within the Ministry of Interior. On the national level, the Government is in charge of organizing the system and the response in case of larger disasters, the Security Council implements the interdepartmental coordination and the Sector for Public Security is in charge of the public security and safety. The protection and rescue measures and activities are implemented via the Mayor, the municipal administration and the protection and rescue units.

• ***Republic of Serbia*** – The emergency response system, that is, the protection and rescue system is part of the national security system and organizes the entities at the national, regional and local level in an integrated way when it comes to implementation of the necessary measures and tasks. The Department for Emergency Situations at the Ministry of Interior is the body in charge of the implementation of the measures and tasks in the area of protection and rescue as well as disaster risk reduction. At the national level, the Government generally coordinates the overall system as a whole, the Ministry of Defense and the army provide resource

support for disaster risk reduction tasks, and other state bodies implement appropriate measures and activities within their mandate. At the regional level, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina organizes the civil protection, and at the local level, the municipalities establish their protection and rescue forces and state of emergency management centres.

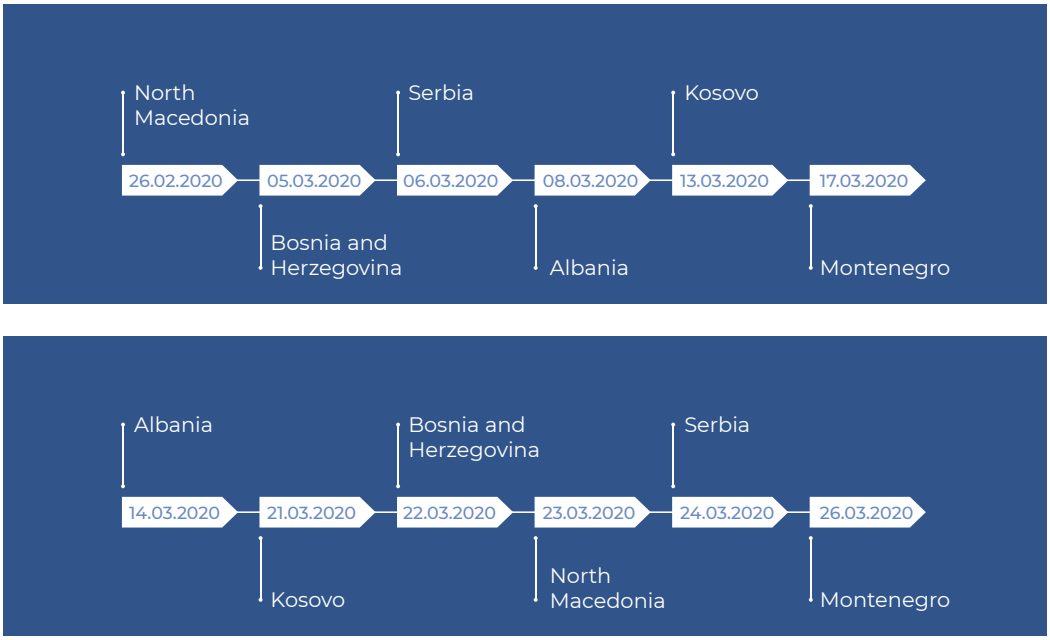
• ***Republic of Montenegro*** – The Directorate for Protection and Rescue in the Ministry of Interior is the relevant institution. This Directorate ensures integration and coordination of the system at the national level when it comes to implementation of the protection and rescue activities and of the operational response through the civil protection units that are established at the regional level. At the local level, the Mayor is in charge of using the available resources in accordance with the relevant planning documentation.

5.2. Regional experiences from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

5.2.1 Background

As a high consequence – low probability event, the COVID-19 pandemic affected all countries in the region thus exercising serious pressure on the health systems, affecting sustainable development, shaking the social and economic pillars of the countries states and increasing the vulnerabilities of the communities and the most vulnerable people. Given the prolonged magnitude of the effects of the pandemic and the fact that the health crisis will have a prolonged duration, crisis management and disaster risk reduction must integrate the pandemic risk and contribute to establishing an effective and efficient response and recovery system from the pandemic.

The occurrence of COVID-19 followed the same pattern in the wider region and the first case in North Macedonia was reported on 26 February while the first death was registered in Albania on 14 March 2020. The table below shows the total number of cases and deaths that have occurred since the pandemic was declared on 11 March 2020 until today.



Timeline of the first case and the first death registered in the Western Balkans region [29]

#	Country	Total cases	Total deaths	New cases in the last 7 days	Deaths in the last 7 days
1	Albania	107 167	1 796	6 921	130
2	Bosnia and Herzegovina	132 138	5 096	3 820	89
3	Kosovo	69 213	1 589	2 876	27
4	North Macedonia	103 200	3 144	3 502	74
5	Serbia	459 259	4 443	22 619	106
6	Montenegro	75 833	999	2 859	42
	Total:	946 630	17 067	42 597	468

Table – Overview of the COVID-19 status in the Western Balkans tas of 1 March 2021. [30]

The total number of cases is 2.43% from the number of COVID-19 cases in the region of Europe and Central Asia (38 854 013 persons) while the death rate is 1.97% of the total number of deceased persons caused by the virus in this region (863 957 deaths).

[29] The timeline was prepared by the author using open data available from WHO.
[30] COVID-19 situation in the WHO European Region, World Health Organization, <https://who.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/ead3c6475654481ca51c248d52ab9c61>

5.2.2 Regional experiences from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

When it comes to regional experiences in the response to the pandemic crises, we emphasize the following:

• The COVID-19 pandemic has a great impact on the GDP, increased unemployment and poverty of increasing number of citizens, results in a decline in the remittances from abroad, increase of domestic violence and women discrimination, etc.

• In terms of the systemic approach in the pandemic response, the primary institution in charge of this response in all countries is the Ministry of Health and the system for responding to the health crisis and emergency situations. Regardless of their portfolio in the area of prevention, response and recovery from crisis and disasters, the national agencies for managing the disaster risks had a limited role in supporting the coordination, communication and cooperation of the main coordinative bodies which are usually established by the national governments. The National agencies have made available their full human and logistical resources for the crisis response

• The pandemic risk is not included in the strategic and operational-planning documents in all countries. Only Kosovo has adopted a National Strategy for Disaster Risks Reduction but it fails to include these risks in a relevant manner. The threat assessments from risks and hazards include only some segments of the contagious diseases in humans and animals and of public health, with no comprehensive analysis. There is also a lack of know-how, experience and readiness for prevention of, and dealing with, complex disasters.

• The main gaps that occurred in the pandemic response were the lack of knowledge about the pandemic crisis and the lack of prior experience and know-how for dealing with these crises, including the lack of procedures and protocols; lack of human, material and technical resources; lack of early warning and models for prognosis of growth and reach of the pandemic; lack of facilities, resources and health workers, etc.

• Although they lacked the know-how and previous experience, the national crisis and disaster risk management agencies not only performed their primary activity but they also provided additional support services on both national and local level. These services were beyond their civil protection portfolio or they were brand new. For example, the disinfection of public spaces and institutions (in all countries); provision of reception camps at the border crossings for accepting returnees (Bosnia and Herzegovina), delivery of tests to difficult-to-reach areas using light aircrafts (Bosnia and Herzegovina), securing and equipping of health facilities for admittance and treatment of sick persons, including their testing and similar (Bosnia and Herzegovina, RN Macedonia, Serbia),

simulation drills for dealing with elemental disasters in a COVID-19 situation (Bosnia and Herzegovina), etc.

• The pandemic crisis had a strong impact on the local self-government in Southeastern Europe – according to a study on the impact the pandemic had in the municipalities in the region of Southeastern Europe, 45% of the respondents said that the consequences are strong or very strong and 38% said that they are moderate. In terms of the territorial dimension of the pandemic impact, the local self-government units from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo suffered larger consequences compared to other countries. The biggest challenges for the municipalities are the securing of sufficient funds, revival and resilient recovery of the communities.[31]

• On the local level, the municipalities would be the first line of pandemic response. Their role in dealing with the pandemics is complex and stretches from provision of municipal services to the citizens, coordination and communication with the people and the public, to implementation of measures and activities that are a response to the challenges. Almost all municipalities in the region moved to telework via the Internet thus adapting, with greater or with less success, the delivery of services in a digital manner. The municipal headquarters for dealing with crisis, for protection and rescue, for civil protection, etc. were activated in all municipalities in the countries. They were the central hubs for vertical and horizontal coordination and communication with the authorities and cooperation with the entities included in the response system.

• They were especially active in the implementation of the COVID-19 preventive measures, such as disinfection of the public spaces and institutions, procurement and distribution of protective equipment and means, dissemination of information about disease prevention adapted to various categories of citizens, continuous and comprehensive crisis communication and informing of the public and the citizens as well as organizing distribution of food, medicine and other means necessary for the vulnerable categories of people, people in quarantine or isolation or people who are sick at home, following the 'no one is left behind' principle.

• Still, this crisis emphasized the need for further decentralization of the responsibilities related to crisis management and disaster risk reduction in the countries of the region, enabling the municipalities to have the necessary resources and capacities to prevent and respond to crises and disasters that occur in their area, as well as to implement the response following the situation on the ground and the needs of the population and not based on decisions made at the national level or based on analysis of the municipalities. An example of this is the case of the Municipality of Kumanovo when, during the first wave, it requested lockdown but the Main Crisis Headquarters did not allow it. Furthermore, the decentralized management makes it possible to adjust the needs of the economic sector in

[31] "SEE local governments remain at the forefront in responding to Covid-19 crisis stated NALAS President at the Danube Governance Conference", Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe <http://www.nalas.eu/News/DGC2801>

the current agreement as well as to adopt local measures and activities for implementation of economic activities and support of the economy. The last area that needs decentralization of competencies is health. This area is centralized in all countries in the region and the municipalities have few competencies, however, in the situation of crisis like this one the municipalities have a great need for implementation of local health policies and measures.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1. Conclusions

The Policy study for crisis management aims to assess the structure of the crisis management system and to provide relevant recommendations for its development by reviewing the legal and institutional set-up of the crisis management system, the competencies of the municipalities, identification of the systemic gaps and challenges, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operation of the municipalities, the delivery of services to the citizens and dealing with the crisis as well as a comparative review of experiences from the Western Balkans region. In that sense, this document provides an overview of the different aspects of functioning of the crisis management system, including the challenges and the so-called 'a new normality' that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

The crisis management system is organized and implemented for prevention, early warning and dealing with crises that pose a risk to the well-being, health and life of people and animals. Those crises are caused by natural disasters and epidemics or they can be other risks and dangers that directly threaten the constitutional order and security of the country or part of it, in situations when there are no conditions for declaring martial law or state of emergency. In the course of its existence, it has established itself as one of the leading institutions in the security segment of the country and as a recognizable institution in a regional context. The crisis situations declared as such in the past have been successfully resolved and the current ones are being implemented according to the plans.

Several gaps and challenges have been also identified in the existing set-up and operation which are necessary to be addressed in the upcoming period or through specific or systemic reform. In this context, it is necessary to adopt a National Strategy for Disaster Risks Reduction and improve the legal framework by introducing contemporary concepts, as well as to include the pandemic risks and health crises. Temporary ad-hoc coordinative bodies were established during the last couple of disasters at different levels of the central government with often overlapping activities, lack of knowledge in the professional aspects of the area and political influence. It is, necessary to analyze this practice from a professional perspective and identify what is better or what is worse. In terms of an expert aspect of crisis management, it is necessary to include the threat assessment from risks and hazards in the strategic and planning documents on the national and local level as well as in the relevant sectors to be able to adapt informed policies and decisions towards risks. The early warning should be brought closer to the communities and citizens and to provide timely information. All of this needs to be accompanied by stable and sustainable funding at all levels. One euro prevention saves seven euros in coping with disasters. In the end, it is necessary to introduce full decentralization in this area and enable the municipalities to implement sustainable policies, implement timely measures and build the capacities necessary for prevention, response and recovery from crises and disasters.

As a new systemic risk, the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed from an acute shock into a chronic stress for the countries and communities globally.

Being the largest crisis since the Great Depression from the 1930s it seriously affected all social sectors and aspects of everyday life. This goes into the context of local-level impacts, the resilience of the municipalities and the communities that found themselves at the first line of impact and dealing with the pandemic. The COVID-19 consequences were strong in terms of local finances and resulted in increased expenditures and reduced revenues, new costs for dealing with the crisis and depletion of the current reserves. The delivery of services to the citizens was also seriously affected – the delivery scope of some of these services increased, some were delivered digitally and some were reduced. In terms of crisis management at the local level, the system managed timely adapt itself and continued to operate in these new conditions by organizing expert-operational bodies, delivery of measures and response activities to the pandemics, communication and public informing of the citizens as well as assistance and support to the most vulnerable groups.

On the other hand, the countries in the Western Balkans region were affected y similarly and faced the same challenges, thus we can notice many similarities and good practices. Given the fact that the crises and disasters know no borders, it is necessary to build cross-border and regional mechanisms for better prevention, coping and recovery from this type of crises and disasters.

6.2. Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the system for crises management and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at both the national and local level, this document provides the following recommendations package:

• Strengthening of the strategic framework for disaster risk reduction by adopting national strategy as well as local strategies that will set the preconditions for strengthening the resilience in the 'new normal' situation and will set the main directions for modernization of the system.

• Reform in the crisis management – either as systemic reform that would unite the two core systems for disaster risk reduction or by improving the existing legal framework and transformation of the crisis management for successful prevention, dealing and recovery from complex crisis, events with large consequences but with small likelihood of occurrence as well as introduction of bases for non-linear assessment and understanding of the future.

• Functional analysis about the temporary ad-hoc crisis coordinative bodies

• Improvement of the expert-operational aspects of the crises management by training the staff of the headquarters at both national and regional level, provision of sufficient resources and support and implementation of modern technology to be able to adopt timely and efficient decisions.

• Defining the framework for resilient recover by including the "Build-Back-Better" principle and meeting the needs of the citizens, especially of individuals who are disproportionately affected from crises and disasters as added value in the crisis management and as an opportunity for the municipalities to transform themselves and develop following actual crises and disasters.

• It is necessary to resume the process of decentralization of competencies to the municipalities accompanied by resources for their implementation. The new Program for Sustainable Local Development and Decentralization by 2026 is an excellent opportunity for progress in this sense. Only with truly decentralized competencies, the municipalities will be able to be the forerunners who will prevent the disaster and be the first to respond.

• Better inclusion of the pandemic risk and biohazards in the strategic plans and documents at both national and local level and development of operational procedures and protocols.

• Increase of the financial resources, especially in terms of implementation of measures and activities for prevention and mitigation, preparedness and resilient recovery.

• The municipalities need to be fully involved in the early warning and risk and hazard assessment, with clearly defined obligations and responsibilities to create strategies and policies for resilient local development.

6.3. Crisis management - the way ahead

The COVID-19 pandemic and the cascade effect through all sectors in the society and the communicates and through all aspects of the daily life of the citizens imposes the need to rethink the crisis management and the disaster risk reduction, which means non-linear analyzing of the past, understanding of the present and interpretation of the future. It is, therefore, necessary to transform the system to be ready for the 'new normal' and the challenges related to complex crises and disasters. In the context of the lessons learned, the current situation and the potential systemic reforms of the systems for crisis management and protection and rescue, the following possible development paths for crisis management are identified.

• ***Inertia*** – The crisis management system shall resume the operation within the existing legal and institutional framework by including the experience and lessons learned from the pandemic crisis. The changes in the legal framework pertaining to integration of the single European emergency telephone number E-112. This development path is the current one and easiest to achieve, it does not disrupt the functioning of the system and has a timeframe of up to 12 months.

• ***Systemic reform 1.0*** – This development path starts with the implementation of the announced systemic reform of the crisis management and protection and rescue systems by reorganizing and equipping and training the rapid response teams, setting the grounds for a society that is resilient to crises and disasters. The transformation of the system will unite the competencies of the two institutions and it is expected to incorporate the experiences from the pandemic crisis and to integrate the pandemic risk and the health crises. This development path is expected, it will cause some disruption in the functioning of the institutions given the transformation of the system and is more complex than simple. The timeframe for implementation is between 12 and 24 months.

• ***Systemic reform 2.0*** – This development path is a more complex version of the systemic reform, which takes into account the needs for full integration of the pandemic risk and biohazards, defining a framework for better understanding of the complex disasters and improvement of the risk assessment process through the inclusion of nonlinear approach, events with high consequences and low probability of occurrence, as well as foresight tools for understanding the possible future. These

are characteristics of the next generation of national crisis and disaster management agencies. Additional changes to the legal and institutional framework, education and training of staff and adequate equipping with the necessary resources are needed.

This development path is the least expected, it will cause the greatest disruption in the functioning of the system given the planned novelties and new technologies, and the timeframe is from 24 to 48 months.

DEVELOPMENT PATH	INERTIA	SYSTEMIC REFORM 1.0	SYSTEMIC REFORM 2.0
Frame	Resume operations within the existing framework	Systemic reform according to the Government priority	Systemic reform with inclusion of novelties in the operations
Timeframe	0 – 12 months	12 - 24 months	24 - 48 months
Prognosis	Current one	Expected	Least expected
Financial resources	$	$ $	$ $ $

ANNEX 1. INSTITUTIONAL SET-UP OF THE CRISIS MANAGEMENT AT NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL

Bodies and institutions of the crisis management system:

• ***Steering Committee (SC)***[32] is the highest body within the crisis management system and is in charge of coordinating and managing that system. The Steering Committee is headed by a person appointed by the Government and is composed of the highest representatives of the key institutions of the system. These are the Ministers of Interior, Health, Transport and Communications, Defense, and Foreign Affairs; the head of the Assessment Group, representatives of the Parliamentary Committee on Defense and Security and the President of the country, as well as other officials who manage state administration bodies or external experts. The competencies of the Steering Committee are proposals for declaring a crisis situation on the territory of the country or its part, activating and managing the mechanisms for responding and resolving a crisis situation, as well as making decisions and adopting key recommendations and other measures and activities

• ***Assessment Group (AG)***[33] has a task to do "continuous assessments of risks and hazards to national security and propose measures and activities for their prevention, early warning and dealing with the crisis situation" (Law on Crisis Management, Article 17, 29/05). The Assessment Group includes the directors of the Bureau for Public Security, the Directorate for Security and Counterintelligence, the Intelligence Agency, the directors and deputy directors of the Crisis Management Centre and the Protection and Rescue Directorate, the Deputy Chief of Staff, and the Chief of Staff, the head of the Security and Intelligence Service in the Ministry of Defense. If necessary, representatives of the state administration bodies, the municipalities and the City of Skopje and experts in the specific area are also invited. The analysis, recommendations and conclusions are submitted by the Assessment Group to the Steering Committee, the Prime Minister, the President and the President of the Parliament.

• ***Center for Crisis Management (CUK)***[34] is an independent state body at the level of directorate. Pursuant to Article 21, Paragraph 1, it ensures continuity in interdepartmental and international cooperation, consultation and coordination in crisis management; it is the carrier of the overall support (expertise, organizational, administrative, etc.) to the Steering Committee and the Assessment Group; prepares and updates the single

[31] The Steering Committee is regulated by the Law on Crisis Management (29/05), Articles 13 – 16.
[32] The Assessment Group is regulated by the Law on Crisis Management (29/05), Articles 17 – 19.
[33] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia – Center for Crisis Management <www.cuk.gov.mk>

assessment of all risks and hazards for the security of the country; proposes measures and activities for resolving the crisis situation; and performs other activities determined by law. A **Main Headquarters (MH)** is established within the Center as an operational-professional body that manages the activities for prevention and management of crisis situations (Law on Crisis Management 29/05, Article 24). These Headquarters include representatives of the institutions involved in the SC, the head of the emergency medical service in Skopje, the director of the Protection and Rescue Directorate, representatives of the Army, the Intelligence Agency and the Directorate for Security of Classified Information. The General Headquarters is managed by the Director of the Center. At the regional level, **Regional Headquarters for Crisis Management** are established as operational-professional bodies for management of activities for prevention and management of crisis situations (Law on Crisis Management, 29/05, Article 25). According to Article 23 of the Law on Crisis Management (29/05), regional crisis management recentres are established for the purpose of informing and monitoring the situation, exchange of data and information, giving proposals for crisis management and making a single assessment. A total of 27 regional recentres for crisis management and the 8 major regional crisis management centres are established, as elaborated in **Annex 2**

Mandate of the entities included in the crisis management system

Each of the entities of the crisis management system has a clearly defined mandate where the state administration bodies have most of the competencies and obligations because crisis management is a centralized responsibility.

• ***The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia*** among other competencies, decides on declaring a crisis situation by determining the area and the measures and activities for its resolution; makes decisions on the use of the necessary resources by the entities involved in the crisis management system; submits a proposal to the President for engaging of the army for dealing with a crisis; decides on acceptance and sending of humanitarian aid and cooperation for crisis management; decides on the amount of funds from the Macedonian budget for prevention, early warning and crisis management; informs the relevant state bodies and does other activities determined by law. The use of resources should be proportionate to the nature and intensity of the crisis, reasonable according to the nature of the crisis and serious according to the severity and extent of the crisis

• ***The Ministries and other state administration bodies*** act per the Law on Crisis Management and other laws that arrange their respective area. They have similar competencies which are about the implementation of measures for uninterrupted operations during a crisis situation, planning and securing funds from their budgets for prevention, response and recovery as well as securing resources, and also do other activities determined by law.

• As for other entities that are part of the crisis management system, ***the armed forces*** are involved in case of crisis situation, under conditions and in a manner determined by the Law on Crisis Management; and ***the public enterprises, the public institutions and services as well as companies that are of special relevance for operation during crisis situation***, provide protection and rescue to the employees, participation in trainings, drills and other activities for prevention and dealing with crisis situation, make available their own resources, implementation of activities in a case of sudden accident or crisis, planning and implementation of the necessary preventive measures and capacity building for dealing with larger-scale crises and disasters, funding of the activities from own sources and implementation of other obligations.

Crisis management at the local level

Pursuant to Article 5 of the Law on Crisis Management, the municipalities and the City of Skopje is required, in the frames of their legal competencies and for the purpose of efficient prevention and early warning from a potential crisis situation, to assess the risks and hazards at a local level, to identify the needs and plan the resources as well as to implement the Government decision in relation to crisis management in their respective geographic area. The threat assessment of the municipality of the City of Skopje is prepared by the relevant crisis management regional centers.

The Mayor of the municipality or the City of Skopje ensures the coordination of all stakeholders involved in the crisis management system at a local level. Regional headquarters for crisis management are established at the professional-operational level that manages the activities for prevention and managing crisis situations on the territory of the municipalities and the city of Skopje. They are managed by the heads of the regional crisis management centres that include representatives from the municipalities (mayors or appointed representatives) and of the entities included in the crisis management system at a local level. They meet at least twice a year and adopt conclusions, decisions, recommendations, guidelines and other measures and activities

In dealing with crises, the municipalities and the city of Skopje:

- Monitor the situations, actions and phenomena that could result in crisis in the municipality;
- Make assessment of the threat from risks and hazards for eventual occurrence of crisis situation on the territory of the municipality;
- Adopt program for revitalization of the municipalities and the City of Skopje after the crisis has been eliminated;
- Decide about the amount of budget funds for crisis management

Source: Law on Crisis Management (29/05), Article 5, Paragraph 1

Crisis situation and implementation at a local level

As a response to a declared crisis situation, the mechanisms for response and dealing are activated using resources of the state administration bodies, the municipalities and the city of Skopje. Regional headquarters for crisis management operates on a regional/ local level and they are the hubs through the activities for dealing with the crisis situation are managed and implemented. Depending on the need, the municipalities can be also involved in the operation of the Main Headquarters for crisis management through their external representatives. The municipalities and the City of Skopje, together with the spatial forces for protection and rescue, the public enterprises and the territorial firefighting units have the following obligations in a crisis situation officially declared as such[35]: jevaluate the crisis situation, active the operational plans and internal procedures and the spatial protection and rescue units, including all available resources; prepare the communal needs at the sites foreseen for evacuation purposes; engage and coordinate the citizens; support the state institutions with the forces and capacities of the public enterprises and the territorial firefighting units and organize the work of the committees for assessment of damages that have occurred concerning the crisis situation. The municipalities and the City of Skopje also have specific tasks for dealing (reaction and support) with individual risks/ hazards and they are included in the *Standard operational guidelines for communication, coordination and support between the entities involved in the crisis management system in a crisis situation officially declared as such.*[36]

[35] Center for Crisis Management. Standard operational guidelines for communication, coordination and support between the entities involved in the crisis management system in a crisis situation officially declared as such. 2016. pages 16-17. <https://cuk.gov.mk/files/Standardni%20operativni%20proceduri%20B5%20mkd.pdf>
[36] Ibid.

ANNEX 2 – GEOGRAPHICAL ALLOCATION OF THE MAIN REGIONAL CENTERS FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND THE REGIONAL CENTERS FOR CRISIS MANAGEMENT

	REGION	GRCUK	RCMC	Municipality
1	SKOPJE	SKOPJE	SKOPJE	The City of Skopje
			GAZI BABA	Gazi Baba
				Arachinovo
				Ilinden
				Petrovec
			KARPOS	Karposh
				Gorche Petrov
				Saraj
			KISELA VODA	Kisela Voda
				Aerodrom
				Sopiste
				Studenichani
				Zelenikovo
			CENTAR	Centar
			CHAIR	Chair
				Butel
				Cucer Sandevo
				Shuto Orizari
2	PELAGONIA	BITOLA	BITOLA	Bitola
				Mogila
				Novaci
			PRILEP	Prilep
				Krivogashtani
				Dolneni
			KRUSEVO	Krushevo
			DEMIR HISAR	Demir Hisar
			RESEN	Resen
3	VARDAR	VELES	VELES	Veles
				Gradsko
				Caska
			NEGOTINO	Negotino
				Demir Kapija
			KAVADARCI	Kavadarci
				Rosoman
4	NORTHEAST	KUMANOVO	KUMANOVO	Kumanovo
				Lipkovo
				Staro Nagoricane
			KRIVA PALANKA	Kriva Palanka
				Rankovce
			KRATOVO	Kratovo
5	SOUTHWEST	OHRID	OHRID	Ohrid
				Debarca
			STRUGA	Struga
				Vevcani
			DEBAR	Debar
				Centar Zhupa
			KICHEVO	Kichevo
				Zajas
				Oslomej
				Vranestica
			MAKEDONSKI BROD	Makedonski Brod
				Plasnica
6	SOUTHEAST	STRUMICA	STRUMICA	Strumica
				Bosilovo
				Vasilevo
				Novo Selo
			VALANDOVO	Valandovo
			GEVGELIJA	Gevgelija
				Bogdanci
				Dojran
			RADOVISH	Radovish
				Konche
7	POLOSKI	TETOVO	TETOVO	Tetovo
				Brvenica
				Bogovinje
				Jegunovce
				Zhelino
				Tearce
			GOSTIVAR	Gostivar
				Vrapchishte
				Mavrovo Rostuse
8	EAST	STIP	STIP	Stip
				Karbinci
			BEROVO	Berovo
				Pehchevo
			DELCEVO	Delchevo
				Makedonska Kamenica
			VINICA	Vinica
			KOCHANI	Kochani
				Zrnovci
				Cheshinovo Obleshevo
			PROBISHTIP	Probistip
			SVETI NIKOLE	Sveti Nikole

Overview of the geographic mandate and coverage of the local self-government units of the Main Regional Centers for Crisis Management and the Regional Centers for Crisis Management

ANNEX 3 - Overview of agencies in charge of disaster reduction management in the Western Balkans

	COUNTRY	INSTITUTION
1	**Republic of Albania**	**Ministry of Defense** General Department for Civil Emergencies
2	**Bosnia and Herzegovina**	**Ministry of Security** Sectorfor Protection and Rescue
3	**Republic of Kosovo**	**Ministry of Interior** Agency for Management of Emergencies
4	**Republic of Serbia**	**Ministry of Interior** Sector for Emergency Management
5	**Republic of Montenegro**	**Ministry of Interior** Directorate for Managing Emergencies

MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES	NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR DRR
• Managing civil emergencies through planning and direct support to the Ministry of Interior with regards to obligations related to civil emergencies at national, prefecture and local level; • National coordination in the civil emergency management via national operative and command centre 24/7; • Introducing and maintaining interdepartmental relations; • Coordination of the overall disaster response activities.	Not established
• Implementation of the international obligations and cooperation in the delivery of the civil protection; • Coordination of the civil protection activities in the entities in Bosnia and Herzegovina; • Coordination of the plans of the entities in case of elemental or other types of disaster that affect the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. • Adoption of protection and rescue programs and plans.	23.3.2013. • Contributes towards systemic reduction of the various risks via social and economic activities.
• Preparation, protection, response and recovery from elemental and man-made disasters; • Managing the disaster cycle; • Coordination of the disaster response; • Training for the professionals and the citizens; • Support for the firefighting services.	Not established
• Protection of the citizen lives and property in case of elemental and man-made disasters; • Prevention of emergencies and timely urgent response in a case of emergencies; • Coordination of activities of all institutions that are involved in the management of emergencies and disasters.	24.1.2013. • Coordination of the emergency management activities and implementation of concepts for DRR in the strategic and policy documents.
• Coordination of the protection and rescue system; • Preparation and implementation of measures and activities for DRR; • Professional development and training of the protection and rescue units; • Informing and alarming of citizens in case of elemental and other disasters; • Coordination and communication via 112 – Operations and command system; • International and regional cooperation.	July 2019. • Monitoring, investigating and assessment of the benefits contributing towards DRR; • Sharing of the know-how and experience. .

Information about the project

The project **"Improved capacity for crisis response in municipalities in North Macedonia"** aims to strengthen the strategic response to crises for eight selected municipalities in North Macedonia, and showcase a process of development of the local strategic plans for disaster risk reduction for the rest of the municipalities. The project analyses the legal and institutional setup of the crisis management system, the role of municipalities in the system, and identifies its gaps and challenges. The project is implemented with the support of the United Kingdom, through the British Embassy in North Macedonia.

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Information about IDSCS

IDSCS is a think-tank organization researching the development of good governance, rule of law and Macedonia's European integration. IDSCS has the mission to support citizens' involvement in the decision-making process and strengthen the participatory political culture. Through strengthening of liberal values, IDSCS contributes to coexistence of diversity

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Vasko Popovski, MA is an independent consultant and practitioner with many years of experience in the areas of disaster risk management, crisis management, innovations for resilience. His expertise in these professional fields extends to the countries of the region of Europe and Central and Southeast Asia. He has a law degree, completed postgraduate studies in political science and is a doctoral candidate in security sciences. During 2018/2019, as a Fulbright Fellow and guest researcher, he was part of the team of the Disaster Research Center at the University of Delaware, USA, where he realized part of his PhD research on the topic of resilience and the model of a resilient society and participated in the realization of the teaching curriculum.



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