



The heaviest rains and floods in 120 years have hit Serbia and Bosnia i Herzegovina (BiH). Many towns and villages are completely cut off from the outside world. Thousands of people had to be evacuated, while others did not make it to safety in time or cannot leave their homes. They currently have no clean drinking water and are without electricity. The governments of the two countries called a state of emergency for the whole country or several regions.

On 26 May 2014 the CONCORD Enlargement, Pre-accession and Neighbourhood (EPAN) Working Group and TRIALOG, in cooperation with the Balkan Civil Society Development Network, held an update meeting in Brussels on the current situation in Serbia and Bosnia i Herzegovina. The approximately 10 participants represented various European civil society organisations active in these two countries. The representatives discussed further immediate support needed in the affected regions as well as potential support for long-term (psycho-)social support, reconstruction, rehabilitation and socio-economic development.

Participants identified some **key recommendations** to decision makers at local, national and European levels to anticipate (better) the needs of people affected by the floods. The overarching recommendation is to focus on the most vulnerable people such as **children, women, Roma and the elderly**.

The following recommendations were defined related to the cooperation between relevant authorities and civil society:

- The relevant authorities of Serbia and Bosnia i Herzegovina should **ensure full transparency and accountability** while delivering humanitarian assistance to the people hit by the floods, setting aside political consideration, as well as during the governments-run process of reconstruction and rebuilding from damage to infrastructure and private property, especially when funds from donations and bilateral assistance are used.
- Better **CSO coordination** should be set up and civil protection services should **work better together with civil society** to identify and support the short and long-term needs and in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating adequate assistance.
- As a basis for EU assistance, authorities should provide (and update) official information and data on evacuated and missing people, damages etc.
- The EU Delegations should, following the new IPA regulation, **monitor the cooperation between authorities and civil society** and address governments to provide information on the cooperation between civil protection services and civil society in a transparent and accountable manner.

- The EU should increase its support (the setup or) **reform of civil protection services** in the Western Balkans to be able to assure better local coordination due to be able to respond better to any future (environmental or man-made) disaster, including **support to sustainable urban planning** that takes the threat of environmental disasters better into consideration.
- As the floods have brought to surface many landmines deployed in BiH during the 1990s, (cross-border) **de-mining becomes an urgent priority** and calls for better intra-governmental cooperation.

The following recommendations were defined related to the short and long terms needs of people hit by the floods:

SHORT TERM

- The following aspects are important to tackle in the short run:
 - a. Hygiene of the environment and houses to avoid the spreading of infections and diseases, immediate waste management, disposal of harmful remaining materials and basic cleaning actions are needed.
 - b. Official information and data on evacuated and missing people is needed, especially regarding to the most vulnerable such as children and the elderly should be addressed immediately. Here the issue of unregistered inhabitants (in most case Roma) should be a special priority.
 - c. Priority is financial support following an assessment of needs at local level and immediate humanitarian and epidemic-preventive actions with special focus on support to local CSOs, especially children, Roma, elderly and women.
 - d. Providing psycho-social support to the most vulnerable groups who have been affected by losing everything, just couple of years after the devastating war.
 - e. Assuring coordination and cooperation of neighbouring countries at all levels of cooperation.

LONG TERM

- For the long term there is a strong need to focus on sustainable planning and **reconstruction, energy provision, agriculture, nature-close or modern water management, rebuilding** infrastructure and promoting socio-economic development to provide new living and working opportunities to the people hit by the floods. In some cases the building of infrastructure has brought devastating force of water to the lowlands of BiH and Serbia. Focus should thus be on maintenance of embankment and habitat restoration. The EU and its Member State should provide **more and long-term financial support**.
- During the reconstruction, rehabilitation and development phases, the authorities and international community should **endeavour to employ the local affected population** as much as possible.
- The Western Balkans Investment Framework could be used to **promote socio-economic development**, whilst the Regional Housing Programme in the Western Balkans could be used to promote the **reconstruction of adequate housing** etc.

- The European Commission should consider refocussing remaining IPA CSF Multi-beneficiary and IPA CBC programmes in the cross-border area Croatia-BiH-Serbia for the period 2007-2013 to **re-granting schemes supporting various** concrete sustainable planning and reconstruction, rehabilitation, development initiatives and monitoring of transparency and accountability of these efforts by CSOs in BiH and Serbia.
- The reduction of negative impacts of disasters would need to be mitigated. Commitment from national and international communities is needed to **raise the awareness about mitigation** (human and nature related) and to promote scientific-based solutions for prevention – in parallel with the social dimension.