
Federal Public Service Home Affairs (FPS Home Affairs), Directorate-General for Civil Protection of the Kingdom of Belgium (IBZ, BE)

The Directorate-General for Civil Protection

The Directorate-general for Civil Protection is a department of the Federal Public Service Home Affairs which is directly placed under the authority of the Minister of Home Affairs.

It is competent for the general organisation of the rescue services in Belgium, including training and prevention for major emergencies.

It is the nucleus of non-police emergency services in Belgium and covers 250 municipal fire services (indirectly) and 6 Federal Civil Protection Units (directly), organized within 34 so-called relief zones across the country and encompassing some 18.000 fire fighters and 1.300 civil protection agents (+/- 70 and 60% volunteers respectively).

Approximately 1.045 employees depend directly on the Directorate-General for Civil Protection.

The Directorate-General directly manages and controls the Federal Civil Protection operational Units, which are competent for the whole Belgian territory and organized in intervention specific structured teams, and provide emergency response for all kinds of disasters

It is competent for the national regulation of municipal fire services, their equipment procurement, training (through the Centre of Expertise), inspection and coordination of interventions. In addition, the Directorate-General is charged with the implementation of the single European emergency number 112, legal issues, prevention and public relations, operations and international relations.

Besides its national responsibilities, the Directorate-General is tasked by law to contribute to international cooperation in the field of civil protection (bilateral as well as EU, UN and NATO-frameworks), both on the policy and the operational level. Consequently, the Directorate-General is the national competent authority for European Union cooperation within the Council and within the operational framework of the Mechanism, i.e. acts as National Focal Point vis-à-vis EU-MIC. This entails operational liaison with the MIC during relief operations, but also contributing to and representing the DG in the Civil Protection Committee, ProCiv, expert meetings (e.g. Training Policy Group, Host Nation Support), etc.

International operations stemming from the Directorate-General are coordinated with the actions of other Belgian federal departments (e.g. humanitarian aid, defense, etc.) through the B-FAST framework, the Belgian federal structure for international disaster relief. Typically, these operations range from USAR-activities (Urban Search and Rescue), to High Capacity Pumping, CBRN, water purification and the setting up of IDP-camps.

Belgian capabilities respond to international standards, and in particular EU and INSARAG.

Teams and experts are trained within the Civil Protection Mechanism Training and exercises programme and have participated in numerous EU and other international exercises (EURATECH, EULUX, EUPOLEX, VAR, Nato CODRII, IEC Insarag classification, etc.). Belgian experts are also actively involved in EU projects and exercises.

Several of our civil protection modules and EU Mechanism experts were deployed within the framework of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism during recent years, e.g. China (Earthquake 2008 – IDP Camp), Indonesia (Earthquake – 2009 – water purification), Haiti (Earthquake 2010 – USAR module, Cholera Outbreak 2010 – EUCPT Teamleader and water purification), Romania (Floods 2010 – pumps & water purification), Pakistan (Floods – 2010 – EUCPT deputy teamleader), Turkey (Earthquake – 2011 – IDP camp and EUCPT Coordination expert).

The Federal Centre of Expertise for Civil Protection

The Federal Centre of Expertise for Civil Protection came into being in 2008 as a catalyst for the reform of emergency services in Belgium and aims to provide the necessary training and operational expertise so as to foster integration between all civil protection-related services in the field (i.e. Fire Services and Federal Civil Protection Units).

Collecting, processing, developing and distributing knowhow through training, the establishment of an extensive network of experts (both national and international), the integrated development of SOP's, as well as a permanent evaluation of interventions form the basis for establishing the Centre of Expertise as the centre of reference for operational civil protection-matters in Belgium. As such, the Centre of Expertise is tasked with, inter alia, training policy and organization, statistics, studies and setting up technical directives.

The Centre of Expertise is located in Brussels and has been conceived as an autonomous entity with a separate budget and management committee. It is seated within the Directorate-General for Civil Protection at the Belgian Federal Public Service Home Affairs.