

The IASC Emergency Response Preparedness Approach

Frequently Asked Questions | July 2016

What is the Emergency Response Preparedness (ERP) approach?

The ERP approach was adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in 2015 as the agreed method to ensure readiness to respond to potential crises requiring coordinated action from the humanitarian community. The aim is to increase the speed, volume, predictability and effectiveness of aid delivered after the onset of a crisis.

Why do we need the ERP?

Being ready to respond to emergencies quickly, appropriately and effectively is a core responsibility of humanitarian organizations. The ERP provides an internationally agreed framework that allows Country Teams to analyze and monitor risks, take actions to enhance preparedness, and flag gaps in capacity to the regional and global level so that the right support can be mobilized. Heightened readiness will increase the volume and speed of aid in the crucial first weeks of an emergency. It can also increase the value for money of humanitarian action by ensuring that scarce resources are directed towards the most urgent needs, and reach people in time.

How does the ERP work?

The ERP approach is designed to ensure that the humanitarian community in a given country has a shared and updated understanding of risks and a joint plan for enhancing preparedness. The approach has three main components: 1) risk analysis and monitoring; 2) Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPAs); and 3) Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs) and contingency planning. While risk analysis and monitoring and minimum preparedness measures are relevant in all contexts, advanced preparedness and contingency planning only becomes necessary once a specific moderate or high risk has been identified.

Will the ERP be implemented in the same way in every country?

No. The ERP approach was designed to be flexible and practical with a focus on outcomes rather than process. The approach is considered to be implemented when the following is achieved:

- Risk analysis is done and risks identified are monitored regularly;
- Key actions to enhance preparedness are identified, and prioritized actions are implemented; and
- Gaps that cannot be addressed through in-country capacity are communicated to the regional and global levels.

Who is responsible for implementing the ERP?

At the global level, IASC members have endorsed the ERP and are committed to being adequately prepared to respond to emergencies. This accountability covers both their specific agency role and eventual cluster lead roles. At the country-level, implementing the ERP will be the responsibility of the Humanitarian Country Team under the leadership of a Humanitarian Coordinator. In countries where there is no Humanitarian Coordinator, a Resident Coordinator will lead the UN Country Team's inter-agency humanitarian preparedness work.

What is the role of national governments in the ERP?

The responsibility to be ready to respond to humanitarian emergencies rests primarily with national governments. The ERP is intended to complement national preparedness efforts, and guide the work of humanitarian organizations to respond if and when national capacity is not enough. National institutions, local organizations and women's groups should be included in the ERP process as much as possible.

What if there is not enough capacity to implement all the suggested preparedness actions?

A key aim of the ERP is to clearly identify gaps in preparedness. Country Teams with limited capacity are not expected to be able to put in place all the suggested preparedness measures without outside support. Instead, they are asked to prioritize which actions they will implement with their existing resources, and communicate gaps to regional and global levels for their follow-up and support.

What is the link between the ERP and the Humanitarian Programme Cycle?

The ERP approach is part of the Humanitarian Programming Cycle. The approach gives Country Teams the opportunity to analyze and monitor risks and this analysis should be part of the inter-agency Humanitarian Needs Overview and related response plans. However, the ERP approach is first and foremost an operational tool to ensure that Country Teams have concrete systems in place to respond to needs quickly as they arise.

Is the ERP suitable for protracted crises?

Yes. The ERP can be used in protracted crises to foresee and prepare for spikes in need. Such spikes could be due to seasonal factors, patterns of violence, or access to a previously inaccessible areas.

Is the ERP applicable in slow-onset emergencies?

Yes. The ERP can be used to ensure that country teams have the systems in place to be ready to respond when a slow-onset emergency tips over into an acute crisis. However, for foreseeable emergencies such as droughts, it may be more useful to address needs using the regular programming cycle rather than making a contingency plan.

Should the ERP be implemented in low- to medium-risk countries?

In most countries, effective preparedness systems would include the need to consider risks and take necessary actions. However, where inter-agency analysis does not detect specific risks warranting increased readiness, the only elements of the ERP that would be required are risk monitoring and the implementation of relevant minimum preparedness actions.

What are 'minimum preparedness actions' and 'advanced preparedness actions'?

Minimum Preparedness Actions (MPAs) are a set of activities that every Country Team should review and implement where needed to establish a minimum level of emergency preparedness within the country. The MPAs are not risk or scenario-specific and usually do not require significant additional resources to implement. MPAs include monitoring risk and response, establishing coordination and information management systems, preparing for joint needs assessments, and establishing operational capacity to deliver relief assistance and protection.

Advanced Preparedness Actions (APAs) should be applied when a Country Team has identified a specific moderate or high risk. They are designed to take a Country Team from 'preparedness' to 'readiness'. One of these actions is contingency planning, which serves to set out the initial response strategy and operational plan to meet needs during the first three to four weeks of an emergency.

What is the difference between the ERP and contingency planning?

The [IASC guidance on the ERP](#) has replaced earlier guidance on contingency planning as the main toolkit on enhancing emergency preparedness. However, contingency planning remains one of the methods available to Country Teams looking to improve their readiness to respond to a specific risk.

What is the link between the ERP and longer-term risk reduction and resilience programmes?

The term 'preparedness' is often used to mean both prevention, mitigation and response to humanitarian emergencies. Working to reduce the likelihood and impact of disasters and increase communities' resilience to shocks are crucial to reducing the human cost of disasters. For more information on the international community's work on risk reduction and support to national governments on this issue see the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#) and the [Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative \(CADRI\)](#).

However, not all emergencies can be prevented. And when they do occur, national capacity to respond is often overwhelmed. The ERP focusses narrowly on the response side of preparedness, i.e. ensuring that the humanitarian community is ready to respond effectively and appropriately in the immediate aftermath of a crisis.

Does the ERP apply to refugee situations?

No. Preparedness for refugee situations is managed through UNHCR's [Preparedness Package for Refugee Emergencies \(PPRE\)](#). However, the PPRE and ERP were developed in parallel and take a similar approach to preparedness.

Does the ERP apply to public health emergencies?

The ERP approach is applicable to analyzing and preparing for all kinds of risks. However, the response to public health emergencies is managed through the [International Health Regulations](#).

In which countries is the ERP being implemented?

Sixty-five countries have been identified for field-testing of the IASC ERP guidelines by the end of 2016. As of July 2016, the ERP is being implemented in 29 countries and another 28 are about to roll out the approach. An online tool is being developed to track implementation of the ERP globally.

Where can I get more information on the ERP?

Further information and guidance on the ERP and how to implement it is available at <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/preparedness>. For any questions, please contact OCHA's Emergency Preparedness and Environment Section on epes@un.org.

This product has been developed in collaboration with members of the IASC Reference Group on Risk, Early Warning and Preparedness.