

PROMEDHE Country Profile: Civil Protection and Cultural Heritage Safeguard in Emergency

AUSTRIA



Civil Protection in Austria

The Austrian administrative system has three main levels: federal, land/province and municipality, including a level of governance between the provinces and the municipalities known as districts.

The responsibility for civil protection and disaster management lies with the Department II/13 of the Ministry of Interior, which is in charge of all operations related to crisis and disaster coordination. The department is organized in three units: the National Crisis and Disaster Management (SKKM) unit, the "International Crisis and Disaster Affairs" unit and the "Civil Protection Training" unit. The Federal Ministry of the Interior manages and coordinates the SKKM unit, which today is chaired - based on the Ministerial Council Decision of 20 January 2004 - by the Director General for Public Security and includes representatives from all the Federal Ministries involved, of the Federal provinces, and the rescue organizations (i.e. Fire Brigades) and the media (the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation and the Austrian Press Agency). In case of major threats, the SKKM unit is responsible for administering the implementation of necessary measures at the federal and provincial level. The SKKM unit is active as a coordinating body not only during disasters but also for emergency planning. In this respect, it includes eight sectoral expert groups in charge of elaborating preparedness measures (legal, technical, and operational) in consultation with the federal provinces. The current regulatory framework for disaster management is provided by the SKKM Strategy 2020.

In the event of complex crises and disaster, the SKKM unit is in charge of ensuring an effective coordination between the federal authorities and the provinces; on the other side, the Federal Alarm Centre and the Operations and Coordination Centre (EKC) of the Federal Ministry of the Interior serve as operational tools of coordination and information. The Federal Alarm Centre operates 24 hours a day: among its tasks, it launches early alert to the population in case of

imminent threat. It also acts as the information hub for the SKKM unit, as the central office for the combined federal and provincial early warning and alarm system, and as a permanent risk monitoring centre.

In general, preventive measures to protect people and assets from disasters fall within the responsibility of both the federal government and the provinces. Most of these measures, such as those to prevent imminent risks, or to remove or mitigate the effects of disasters (emergency assistance and disaster relief), are under the responsibility of the federal provinces. For this purpose, the provinces have adopted specific laws defining the management of interventions at community, district and regional level, leaving the federal authorities with certain related responsibilities. In case of local emergencies, in compliance with regional laws the official responsibility for relief measures and their management generally lies with the district administrations or the mayors, while major disasters fall under the competences of regional administrations.

Cultural Heritage

The Federal Monuments Authority Austria (BDA), 180 employees nationwide, is in charge of protecting, preserving and caring for cultural heritage throughout the Austrian Federal Republic. Its administrative headquarter is located in Vienna. BDA is chaired by a President and two Executive Directors (finance and general questions), and is composed by the legal department, the department for archaeology, architecture, transfer of movable property, listing, craftsmen-postgraduate-training, internal conservation and preservation specialists. Nine departments, one for each of the federal offices, are in charge of preserving, conserving and restoring monuments and architectural assets.

During disasters affecting cultural heritage, cooperation between the President, the General Director, the Heads of the concerned departments, the officers working in the affected area and the internal experts for conservation and preservation is of utmost importance. Groups of specialists are responsible for assessing the cultural heritage damages deriving from disastrous events and are obliged to document all the measures undertaken.

In almost all emergency situations, with or without effects on cultural heritage, the firefighters are the first to arrive, being the leading forces in disaster management. The widespread network of well-equipped firefighter units (337.673 members organized in 4.841 units) allows to rapidly safeguard damaged cultural heritage. The chains of command within BDA and the fire brigades are ready to guarantee efficient disaster response.

BDA is legally bound to publish a national catalogue of the built heritage on its homepage. The list also serves as the basis for a database created and serviced by a WIKI-group, which contains metadata, geographic information data, descriptions and photos.

In case of particularly severe situations, additional national resources aimed at cultural heritage safeguarding are available. In this respect, Austrian museums and libraries are grouped in the Museums and Libraries Disaster Emergency Cooperation Network that guarantees support and

help in protecting cultural heritage in emergency. The goal of the network is to prevent or minimize the loss or damage of Austrian cultural heritage caused by fires, flash floods, extreme climate related events, technical accidents or any other unpredictable circumstances. The association can provide resources, space and personnel, as well as a network of specialists capable of responding to emergencies. There are no obligations for the members of the network to ensure assistance, which is provided on the basis of the actual availability within the individual member institutions. All members must use a password to log into a specific reserved access area of the network website, where information on available resources and contact persons is available. In case of emergency, an affected member can readily rely on an overview of the situation and ask for the necessary tools or expert advisors.