

2021 Flood in Central Europe

68 + 6 + 7 Questions you may like to ask your Government

before, in and after times of Flood and in other natural or technical disasters

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RIMMA CoE Community of Experts in Risk Information Management, Models and Applications

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this note may be of interest internationally to all stakeholders in Disaster Management, especially to

- Parliamentarians
- Governments and Authorities
- Journalists, Media, Broadcasting
- Civil Society
- Women, Children and Youth, Persons with disabilities, Older Persons, Health and Welfare Institutions, Indigenous peoples, Migrants, together with their representatives / organizations
- Academia, scientific and research entities and networks
- Business, professional associations and private sector institutions

in the joint efforts that are needed to improve disaster management and to effectively implement the UN SENDAI Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction on all levels.

<https://www.undrr.org/publication/sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction-2015-2030>

In July 2021 devastating floods caused by an extensive depression of type Vb resulted in hundreds of casualties and severe losses in nearly all states of central Europe.

<https://www.ibarisk.com/flood-services/event-response/summer-floods-in-europe-2021/>

Although everyone appreciated the massive and successful support that operational units of many organizations in first aid disaster assistance provided, many questions about the appropriateness of decisions and measures taken on management level (state government and authorities) arose immediately.

Parliamentarian Committee of Inquirement

Only a few weeks later, the parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia established a committee of inquiry on the flood disaster and the actions of the North Rhine-Westphalia state government and its authorities.

[DE] <https://www.landtag.nrw.de/files/live/sites/landtag-r20/files/Fotos%20aktuell/2021/10/MMD17-14944.pdf>

the following excerpts from the document are non-official translations based on DeepL

“The actions of the authorities before, during and after the flood must be fully reappraised. In particular, the communication, information flow and administrative processes within the state government, vis-à-vis the subordinate authorities, specialized agencies, the public and the press, as well as between the state government and these departments and authorities were of central importance in dealing with the events and must be investigated accordingly.

In addition, the reappraisal is imperative in order to learn lessons from the catastrophe for the actions of the authorities in the future.”

“The committee is charged with investigating possible omissions, failures to act, misjudgments and possible misconduct on the part of the state government, especially, but not exclusively, the State Chancellery, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of the Environment, Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Consumer Protection of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia as well as their authorities, water associations and dam operators in the prevention of dangers to citizens in North Rhine-Westphalia in the run-up to, during and after the high precipitation.”

Since the establishment of parliamentary committees of inquiry on the occasion of disasters can be considered a major exception, this situation is considered of basic importance not only to all those who suffered, lost their lives, property, livelihoods and dreams, but also for all those who are endangered of similar threats, stakeholders in disaster situations of all kind.

The Questions

The phrasing of the investigation assignment and the list of key questions is of essential interest not only to government and authorities but also to all stakeholders and in all phases of disaster (especially in prevention, first aid, and post disaster support phases).

The North Rhine - Westphalian key questions to the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry comprise

- **68 Questions for clarification**
- **6 Questions on Consequences of the flood disaster**

See full list of these questions:

[DE] <https://www.landtag.nrw.de/files/live/sites/landtag-r20/files/Fotos%20aktuell/2021/10/MMD17-14944.pdf> from page 3

[EN] https://rimma.org/2021_flood_disaster_committee_of_inquiry_catalog_of_questions_en

Learning from past Disasters: Hurricane Katrina

I also refer to one of the most detailed and public documentation of a disaster:

Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina (2005/2006) (582 pages)
<https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CRPT-109hrpt377/CRPT-109hrpt377>

in conjunction with

Hurricane Katrina - A nation still unprepared. Special report of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (737 pages)
http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/download/s-rpt-109-322_hurricane-katrina-a-nation-still-unprepared.pdf

The Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee quotes from its setting of tasks:

Investigate aggressively, follow the facts wherever they may lead, and find out what went right and what went wrong. Ask why coordination and information sharing between local, state, and federal governments was so dismal.

7 baseline questions:

- 1** Why situational awareness was so foggy, for so long.
- 2** Why all residents, especially the most helpless, were not evacuated more quickly.
- 3** Why supplies and equipment and support were so slow in arriving.
- 4** Why so much taxpayer money aimed at better preparing and protecting the Gulf coast was left on the table, unspent or, in some cases, misspent.
- 5** Why the adequacy of preparation and response seemed to vary significantly from state to state, county to county, town to town.
- 6** Why unsubstantiated rumors and uncritically repeated press reports – at times fueled by top officials – were able to delay, disrupt, and diminish the response.
- 7** And why government at all levels failed to react more effectively to a storm that was predicted with unprecedented timeliness and accuracy

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CRPT-109hrpt377/pdf/CRPT-109hrpt377.pdf#page=10> report page ix

Risk Information Management

The above questions directly relate to the availability resp. unavailability of complex information details.

Although the examples given are from Flood Disaster situations, they can be adapted easily to other types of disaster <https://council.science/sendai-hazard-review/> . While stakeholders interests (especially in support of all those that suffer from disasters) are on the rise globally, Parliamentarians, Journalists, Media, Broadcasting, Civil Society, Women, Children and Youth, Persons with disabilities, Older Persons, Health and Welfare Institutions, Indigenous peoples, Migrants, together with their representatives / organizations, Academia, scientific and research entities and networks, as well as Business, professional associations and private sector institutions are concerned about adequate implementation of available up-to-date best practice Information Management methods and techniques based on broad interoperability.

UN Sendai Framework formal Requirements

Very recent discussions already show that the role of information management in its broad sense of the Sendai Framework text is considered central to effective disaster management. But the corresponding steps towards transparent cross-organizational information availability, interoperability enabling ontologies and decision-supporting analysis processes are just in the beginning.

Because of the mutual overlap of information use in the fields of Safety and Security, the design, specification and implementation of (national/cross-border/European/global) **Common RISK Information Spaces** are in due need.

Information Governance needed

All facets of Data and Information Science are needed in Disaster Information Management. Though methods and technologies for handling complex tasks of Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics are available, applications in the disaster information management domains are rather based on projects than on broad integration concepts. The overall complexity is in due need of getting its own governance, mainly because of the huge variety of organizations/actors involved and because of the vast demands in all phases of the disaster cycle.

Information governance is the set of multi-disciplinary structures, policies, procedures, processes and controls implemented to manage information at an enterprise level, supporting an organization's immediate and future regulatory, legal, risk, environmental and operational requirements https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talk%3AInformation_governance .

Risk Information Management is broadly embedded in and supporting aspects of other international agreements, programs and strategies like UN HABITAT, UN Sustainable Development Goals, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Int. Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services IPBES and many others.

You may like to stay informed, share experiences, competences, strategies and case studies in our RIMMA CoE – Risk Information Management Methods and Applications Community of Experts <https://RIMMA.org>

Journalists also may consider joining MBJ global, a Media, Broadcasting and Journalists Community of Experts working in the fields of RISK <https://mbj-risk.org/>

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