



Conclusions and Outlook

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Abstract

This book examines the evolving architecture of disaster governance, focusing on the institutional, operational, and legal mechanisms that enable effective disaster management across local, national, regional, and global levels. Particular attention is devoted to the legal and institutional frameworks that regulate cooperation among states, international organisations, humanitarian actors, and local authorities throughout the disaster cycle. The analysis highlights the importance of comprehensive risk assessments, contingency planning, early-warning systems, information-sharing mechanisms, and clearly defined responsibilities among stakeholders. It also explores how international and regional legal instruments contribute to strengthening preparedness and response capacities, while promoting accountability, transparency, and coordination. Drawing on experiences from regional mechanisms such as the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism, ASEAN's Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency, the volume illustrates how legal frameworks and institutional innovation can jointly enhance operational readiness and resilience. Particular consideration is given to ongoing efforts to develop a universal legal framework for disaster management and to discussions surrounding the post-2030 successor to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The analysis concludes that effective disaster governance requires a combination of robust

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E. Sommario and P. Billing (eds.), *International Legal and Institutional Frameworks for Disaster Risk Management*, Civil Protection, Disaster Management, and Resilience 4, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-11806-6_6

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legal foundations, capable institutions, and sustained political commitment. While legal norms provide the framework for cooperation and accountability, their effectiveness ultimately depends on the capacity of institutions to coordinate resources, anticipate risks, and deliver timely and needs-based assistance to affected populations.

Keywords

Disaster governance • Disaster law • Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) • International cooperation

The international community currently lacks a comprehensive, legally binding instrument of universal scope that encompasses all phases of the disaster cycle. Resolution 79/128, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2024,¹ establishes a clear mandate to negotiate such an instrument by the end of 2027. Although the negotiation process is likely to encounter contentious issues—such as the obligation to request external assistance when national capacities are exceeded—the current context presents a timely opportunity for the adoption of a treaty that would provide greater clarity regarding the roles and expectations of states and humanitarian organisations in the aftermath of disasters. The need for such a development is particularly pressing, as this volume illustrates, given the fragmented nature of the existing legal framework governing disaster management. Relevant norms are dispersed across a range of legal instruments, including those pertaining to environmental protection, public health, human rights, and disaster-specific regimes. A unified treaty would serve to consolidate these provisions, thereby clarifying the legal obligations of states, humanitarian actors, and international bodies. Such consolidation is increasingly essential in an era marked by the growing frequency and severity of disasters driven by climate change, which exacerbates both human suffering and material losses. However, the added value of any future treaty will ultimately depend on the extent of State engagement throughout the negotiation process, as well as on the breadth of ratification and subsequent implementation.

The need for a firm international legal framework also pertains to disaster prevention and preparedness. This framework must address the root causes of disaster to be effective. It requires tackling a wide range of social, environmental, and economic factors drivers of risk. The Sendai Framework—albeit non-binding in nature—has played a key role in mobilising global attention around DRR and catalysing policy efforts in prevention and preparedness. As its ‘mandate’ draws to a close in 2030, international discussions on its successor have already begun and are expected to intensify in the coming years. The draft negotiating text of the binding legal instrument mentioned above already includes provisions on reducing disaster risk through appropriate measures. Preparedness plays a crucial role in enhancing a society’s capacity to respond effectively when disasters strike.

¹ UNGA, Protection of persons in the event of disasters, UN Doc A/RES/79/128, 12 December 2024.

It relies on well-functioning institutions, trained personnel, informed communities, robust contingency planning, and tailored early warning systems.

Although the extent to which prevention and preparedness will ultimately be incorporated into the treaty remains to be seen, it may offer the first universal legal framework for disaster management, including prevention and preparedness, and thus provide a robust foundation for the post-Sendai agenda. Such cross-sectoral integration helps shape the scope and content of states' duties in the field of prevention and preparedness. Key requirements should include the following:

- Establishing appropriate legal and institutional frameworks for risk reduction and resilience.
- Conducting comprehensive multi-hazard risk assessments.
- Ensuring public access to information and participation opportunities.
- Facilitating cross-border information exchange and international cooperation.

International cooperation remains indispensable to strengthening national and local preparedness efforts. Regional mechanisms such as the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM), ASEAN's AADMER, or the Caribbean's CDEMA demonstrate the added value of tailored, cooperative frameworks. The proliferation of regional disaster law arrangements underscores this trend. The EU's UCPM currently offers the most advanced example in that respect. It illustrates how iterative legal and financial adaptations can yield a versatile, responsive disaster mechanism. Its 2024 evaluation highlights² significant achievements, such as enhanced coordination (ERCC), rapid response capacities (rescEU, ECPP), and robust expert networks. It also identifies areas for further improvement, such as simplifying administrative procedures and shoring up human and financial resources. The evaluation also acknowledges that important adaptations and promising initiatives can be expected to yield future benefits, such as implementation of the Disaster Resilience Goals, the creation of additional reserve capacities, as well as ongoing work on anticipation, analysis and scenario-building. In light of geopolitical developments, civil defence aspects are likely to gain in importance. These issues are addressed in the Commission proposal of 16 July 2025 for a new Regulation on the Union Civil Protection Mechanism aiming—inter alia—at enhancing coordination across sectors, including civil-military cooperation.³

² European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the evaluation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism-Strengthening EU's emergency preparedness, COM (2024) 212 final, 29 May 2024.

³ European Commission, Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Union Civil Protection Mechanism and Union support for health emergency preparedness and response, and repealing Decision No 1313/2013/EU (Union Civil Protection Mechanism), COM (2025) 548 final, 16 July 2025.

At the global level, emergency and crisis management are becoming increasingly complex, with a growing number of actors competing for resources and influence. Ensuring coherence between strategic and operational tiers, and across global, regional, national, and local levels, is the fundamental challenge. Effective coordination must become part of the solution and minimise the risk of overlap or duplication. Maintaining clear accountability to affected populations, domestic and international stakeholders demands agreed standards, transparent evaluation indicators, and rigorous needs assessments. In complex emergencies, civil-military coordination must adhere to the principles of *last resort* and, more generally, *do no harm*, reinforcing humanitarian norms and excluding actors unwilling or unable to respect them.

In terms of outlook, over the next 3 years, states will negotiate the first universal treaty on disaster management. The core issues will include the balance between State sovereignty and mandatory assistance obligations, the treaty's scope across prevention, preparedness, and response, and possible mechanisms for enforcement and dispute resolution. In addition, as the Sendai Framework era ends in 2030, its successor will need to address gaps in risk governance left by a non-binding mandate. Embedding legally binding prevention and preparedness obligations into the new global framework could align incentives and resources towards long-term resilience.

The current disaster trends underscore the urgency of translating normative advances into practice. Political will at all levels will determine whether international commitments are mirrored by national legislation, institutional reforms, and investments in risk reduction. Key actions for the coming decade should thus include the following:

- Finalising the UN-led disaster management treaty by 2027.
- Developing a robust post-Sendai framework with binding targets for prevention and preparedness.
- Harmonising international, regional, and national legal instruments to eliminate regulatory gaps.
- Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems with clear, verifiable indicators.
- Promoting community engagement in line with Grand Bargain commitments to ensure needs-driven responses.

Success will depend not only on the ambition of legal instruments but on genuine solidarity among states, international organisations, and civil society. While important challenges remain, the next decade offers a unique opportunity to transform fragmented norms into an integrated, action-oriented architecture capable of reducing disaster risk and delivering timely relief to vulnerable populations.

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