

Strategic Planning and Crisis Response Effectiveness: Insights from the Republic of Moldova's Institutional System

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Abstract

Current crises highlight the growing importance of strengthening institutional capacities for effective response, particularly in countries with structural vulnerabilities such as the Republic of Moldova. This paper examines the role of strategic planning in enhancing the effectiveness of crisis response within the national institutional framework, from an integrated European perspective.

The study analyzes the regulatory framework, institutional architecture, and operational mechanisms involved in crisis management, focusing on coordination processes and implementation capacity. Based on the analysis of official documents, international reports, and specialized literature, the findings reveal that despite recent institutional progress, persistent challenges remain, including limited integration of risk assessment processes, insufficient inter-agency coordination, and underdeveloped institutional learning mechanisms. The paper argues that improving crisis response effectiveness requires a transition from reactive to integrated, prevention-focused approaches, supported by continuous assessment and adaptive governance practices.

Keywords: crisis management, strategic planning, risk assessment, Republic of Moldova

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1. Introduction

In today's global environment, characterized by uncertainty, interdependence, and volatility, crises are increasingly frequent and complex. Effective management relies on institutional capacity, inter-agency coordination, and robust mechanisms for continuous learning. Consequently, the ability of states to anticipate, respond to, and recover from crises is a critical measure of institutional resilience and governance performance (OECD, 2025).

The Republic of Moldova faces a diverse array of risks, including health, energy, economic, and geopolitical threats. These risks are exacerbated by

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structural vulnerabilities, such as limited institutional capacity, energy dependence, and constrained financial resources. In this context, effective crisis management relies not only on operational response but also on the presence of a coherent strategic planning framework and the efficient functioning of inter-agency coordination mechanisms (Catanoi et al., 2025).

The literature defines a crisis as a major disruption that threatens the fundamental values and normal functioning of social systems, necessitating rapid decision-making under conditions of uncertainty (European Commission, 2023). Contemporary approaches emphasize the political and organizational nature of crises, highlighting the role of leadership, communication, and institutional adaptability (UNDRR, 2024).

According to Law No. 248 of July 10, 2025, on crisis management, a crisis is defined as an internal or external emergency whose consequences exceed the response capacity of responsible institutions, requiring national-level coordination (Republic of Moldova, 2025). Major crises may arise from natural or human factors, including disasters or threats to national security, and can significantly impact society, public health, or the economy (Catanoi, 2025). Crisis management thus encompasses strategic, institutional, and operational measures coordinated to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies.

In Moldova, the crisis management system follows the subsidiarity principle, spanning strategic to local institutions. Although the framework is relatively well-developed, it remains predominantly reactive, limiting the system's effectiveness during complex crises (DG ECHO, 2023). Strategic planning is central not only to the existence of response plans but also to their integration, inter-institutional coherence, implementation capacity, and post-crisis learning. Modern approaches, such as "Build Back Better," advocate for strengthening systems to handle future crises rather than merely restoring the prior state (UNDRR, 2024).

2. Literature review

Recent literature on strategic planning and crisis response demonstrates a marked shift from traditional, reactive approaches toward integrated models emphasizing prevention, preparedness, and resilience. In this context, crisis management is framed both institutionally and systemically, encompassing decision-making and operational processes designed to mitigate the societal impact of potentially disruptive events (Boin et al., 2020).

Classical studies define a crisis as a major disruption threatening the core values of a system and requiring rapid decision-making under uncertainty and time constraints (NCMC, 2025). Contemporary scholarship broadens this definition, highlighting the complex, interdependent, and transnational character of modern crises, which simultaneously impact economic, social, health, and political sectors. This systemic perspective calls for moving beyond sectoral approaches toward integrated risk management mechanisms (OECD, 2025).

In the European Union, crisis management follows the full disaster risk management cycle, comprising four key phases: prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. This approach is operationalized through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and aligned with the UNDRR Sendai Framework, which underscores the critical role of risk reduction and the enhancement of institutional resilience (European Commission, 2023; UNDRR, 2024).

For a deeper understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon, European literature proposes various crisis typologies based on analytical dimensions such as the nature of the threat, the level of uncertainty, and the degree of systemic impact. These dimensions enable a more rigorous classification and support the development of differentiated response strategies (Joint Research Centre, 2025).

Key Dimensions for an Analytical Typology of European Crises

Table 1

Dimension	Description	Examples
Nature of the Crisis	Economic, financial, energy, health, migration, geopolitical, etc.	Pandemic, energy crisis
Level of Uncertainty	The degree of predictability and the availability of information	COVID-19, regional conflicts.
Systemic Impact	The extent to which multiple sectors are affected.	Global financial crisis
Duration	Short-term or long-term	Natural disasters vs. climate crises
Governance Level	Local, national, or international	Cross-border crises

Source: adapted by the authors from the literature

The analysis of these dimensions highlights that managing modern crises requires flexible tools and institutional adaptability in the context of increasingly complex and interconnected risks. Experiences from other Eastern European countries, such as Estonia and Lithuania, indicate that integrated digital platforms and annual risk assessment mechanisms enhance inter-institutional coherence and reduce local vulnerabilities (World Bank, 2023; Boin et al., 2020).

Identified Gaps and Comparative Case Examples

Table 2

Identified Gap	Critical Analysis	Illustrative Comparative Example
Absence of Integrated Risk Assessment Mechanisms	In the absence of centralized evaluation, risks may be systematically underestimated or disregarded.	In Estonia, the Risk Management Agency conducts annual integrated national assessments, encompassing natural, energy, and cyber risks, and aligns them with sector-specific plans.

Identified Gap	Critical Analysis	Illustrative Comparative Example
Coordination across sectoral plans	Divergences between ministries result in redundancies or lack of action	Lithuania has implemented an inter-ministerial digital platform for emergency plans, ensuring synchronization and resource allocation.
Limited resources at the local level	Initial interventions may be inefficient, impacting the population	Latvia utilizes regional coordination centers with strategic stockpiles and rapid-response mobile teams, compensating for limited local resources.
Absence of lessons learned	Without post-crisis analysis, past experiences fail to inform improvements	Slovakia conducts post-crisis workshops and annually updates procedures, reducing response times and losses.

Source: World Bank, 2023; Boin et al., 2020

The analysis of gaps in the crisis management system highlights the need for a centralized and integrated risk assessment mechanism. In the Republic of Moldova, this function is carried out by the National Crisis Management Center (NCMC), established in 2025, which ensures coordination of the national response, inter-institutional cooperation, and the collection of operational information necessary for strategic decision-making. The NCMC proposes measures to the competent authorities and can be activated during major crises, such as pandemics, natural disasters, or security emergencies (NCMC, 2025).

By centralizing risk assessment and synchronizing sectoral plans, the NCMC establishes the foundations for a coherent system of crisis prevention, preparedness, and response, akin to Estonia's annual integrated risk assessments or Lithuania's inter-ministerial digital platforms. The Moldovan experience suggests that integrating a strategic risk assessment center not only reduces local vulnerabilities but also enhances the efficiency of operational plan implementation, facilitating rapid adaptation to complex and interdependent crises (Catanoi, 2025).

Through the centralization of risk assessment and the integrated coordination of sectoral plans, the NCMC can significantly contribute to reducing local vulnerabilities and enhancing inter-institutional coherence, achieving objectives similar to those realized by digital risk assessment platforms in Estonia and Lithuania.

3. Methodology

Study Design

This study adopts a qualitative comparative policy analysis design aimed at evaluating the crisis management framework of the Republic of Moldova in relation to international standards and best practices in disaster risk governance.

The research focuses on assessing institutional arrangements, strategic planning mechanisms, and operational coordination structures through a comparative lens, using the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) framework as the primary analytical reference model.

The unit of analysis consists of policy documents, institutional frameworks, and international governance reports related to crisis management.

Data Sources

The study is based on secondary documentary data derived from three main categories:

1. **National policy and regulatory framework**, including Law No. 248/2025 on Crisis Management, institutional regulations, and operational plans of the National Emergency Medical Assistance Center (CNAMUP) at the pre-hospital level. These sources reflect the national governance architecture and operational design of crisis response systems in the Republic of Moldova (Republic of Moldova, 2025; IMSP CNAMUP, 2021).
2. **International and comparative policy frameworks**, including reports and strategic documents issued by the European Commission, DG ECHO, OECD, UNDRR, and the Joint Research Centre (JRC). These sources represent benchmark standards and reference models in crisis management and disaster risk governance within European and global contexts (European Commission, 2023; DG ECHO, 2023; OECD, 2025; UNDRR, 2024; JRC, 2025).
3. **Scientific literature on comparative crisis governance**, focusing on institutional resilience, interagency coordination, and emergency management systems in different international settings.

Comparative Analytical Framework

The analysis is structured around a comparative governance framework based on the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) cycle promoted by UNDRR and the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism. The framework includes four analytical dimensions:

- prevention and risk mitigation;
- preparedness and planning;
- emergency response coordination;
- recovery and system resilience.

Each dimension was used as a benchmark for comparing national crisis management structures with international standards and good practices.

Analytical Approach

The study applies qualitative content analysis combined with comparative policy benchmarking. The analytical process included:

- systematic coding of documentary sources based on predefined governance categories;

- identification of institutional and operational patterns within national frameworks;
- comparative mapping of Moldova's crisis management system against EU and OECD-recommended standards;
- synthesis of gaps, convergences, and structural divergences in crisis governance.

This approach allows for the identification of both functional strengths and systemic limitations within the national crisis management architecture.

The comparative analysis follows a structured framework-based approach, allowing systematic evaluation across predefined governance dimensions.

Selection Criteria

Documents included in the analysis were selected based on the following criteria:

- relevance to crisis management, disaster risk reduction, or emergency governance;
- publication or validity period between 2021 and 2025;
- official status (legal acts, governmental or international institutional reports);
- relevance for comparative policy analysis and benchmarking purposes.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- How does the crisis management system of the Republic of Moldova align with international disaster risk governance standards?
- What institutional similarities and differences can be identified between national and European crisis management frameworks?
- What structural gaps limit the effectiveness of integrated crisis management in the Republic of Moldova?

Ethical Considerations

This study is based exclusively on publicly available documentary sources. No human subjects, clinical data, or confidential institutional records were used. Therefore, ethical approval was not required.

Study Limitations

The study is limited by its reliance on secondary data sources and does not include empirical validation through fieldwork, interviews, or operational performance measurements.

Additionally, while the comparative framework allows for structural assessment, it does not fully capture informal practices or real-time decision-making dynamics within crisis situations.

4. Results

The analysis of international literature and European policy documents identifies that crisis management frameworks at the European and global level are structured around integrated disaster risk management approaches. These approaches are operationalized through policy instruments that define crisis management as a process organized across prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery phases.

At the European Union level, the Union Civil Protection Mechanism is structured as a coordination system that involves preparedness, response, and recovery activities implemented across member and partner states. The mechanism includes provisions related to operational coordination, information exchange, and resource mobilization among participating institutions.

The UNDRR Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction defines a disaster risk management cycle composed of four phases: prevention and mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. The framework includes provisions related to risk assessment integration, institutional coordination, and interoperability among stakeholders at multiple governance levels.

At the national level, the institutional framework of the Republic of Moldova includes the establishment of the National Crisis Management Center (NCMC) in 2025. According to national policy documents, the NCMC is assigned functions related to risk assessment coordination, aggregation of information, and inter-institutional coordination during crisis situations.

The crisis management system of the Republic of Moldova is structured across four governance levels: strategic, coordination, operational, and local. Each level is associated with specific institutional actors and functional responsibilities within the national emergency management system (Table 3).

Institutions responsible for crisis management in the Republic of Moldova

Table 3

Level	Key Institutions	Role
Strategic	Presidency, Parliament, Government	Policy Development, Strategic Decision-Making
Coordination	National Security Council, National Crisis Management Center (NCMC)	Analysis, Coordination, Decision-Making.
Operational	Ministries, General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (GIES), Emergency Services	Response implementation
Local	Local Public Authorities.	Initial response

Source: Author's elaboration based on the national institutional framework

Table 3 presents the distribution of responsibilities across governance levels as follows: the strategic level includes the Presidency, Parliament, and Government; the coordination level includes the National Security Council and the

National Crisis Management Center; the operational level includes ministries, the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, and emergency service structures; the local level includes local public authorities responsible for initial response activities (Capone et al., 2022).

Within the operational framework, pre-hospital emergency medical response is organized through the National Pre-Hospital Emergency Medical Assistance Center (NPEMAC). This structure operates in coordination with national emergency management institutions.

The National Security Council is documented as a strategic coordination body responsible for decision-making, risk analysis, and monitoring processes. The National Crisis Management Center is documented as an institution responsible for information integration and coordination of national-level response activities (Catanoi et al., 2025).

Documents analyzed within the PPRD East 3 European program describe the existence of a command and control structure based on the subsidiarity principle, including mechanisms for resource mobilization and coordination among institutions involved in emergency management. The National Commission for Exceptional Situations is described as part of the national coordination framework.

The operational planning framework of the National Pre-Hospital Emergency Medical Assistance Center includes procedural provisions regulating actions during emergency situations. These provisions define sequences of activities including notification, initial assessment, resource identification, allocation processes, and deployment of operational teams.

Summary of operational procedures

Table 4

Measures	Execution Time	Responsible Parties
A. In the event of a potential onset of an exceptional situation		
1. Notification:		
a) Chair of the Exceptional Situations Committee of NPEMAC	Immediately	Operational Service of the Emergency Medical Assistance of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Operational Service of the Ministry of Health
b) Members of the Exceptional Situations Committee of NPEMAC	Within 30 minutes	NPEMAC Operational Steering Group
2. Preparation:	Within 2 hours	Members of the Exceptional Situations Committee and the Operational Steering Group

Measures	Execution Time	Responsible Parties
Operationalization of NPEMAC's activity plan in exceptional situations	Within 3 hours	Exceptional Situations Committee
Formation of operational teams and their deployment to the field	Within 5 hours	Exceptional Situations Committee
Assessment of the risk of triggering an exceptional situation, including forecasting the event progression and potential medical and health consequences	Within 6 hours	NPEMAC Operational Steering Group
Determination of the required forces and resources for the prevention or mitigation of potential consequences of the exceptional situation	Within 6 hours	Exceptional Situations Committee
Establishment of operational cooperation with institutions and services of other ministries and departments, as well as with fire and rescue teams and units;	Within 5 hours	Exceptional Situations Committee
B. In the event of the onset of exceptional situations		
1. Notification:		
a) Chair of the Exceptional Situations Committee of the Ministry of Health	Immediate	Medical dispatch and statistics department
b) Members of the Commission for Exceptional Situations of the Ministry of Health	Up to 30 minutes.	Medical dispatch and statistics department
c) Head of the Department of Dispatching and Medical Statistics	Immediate	Senior Physician Joint Emergency Dispatcher
d) Heads of Regional Emergency Medical Assistance Departments	Up to 30 minutes	Medical dispatch and statistics department
e) Personnel of territorial Emergency Medical Assistance substations	Up to 30 minutes	Heads of substations Emergency Medical Assistance
2. Assembly and preparation of the governing bodies:		
Commission for exceptional situations of the National Center for Pre-Hospital Emergency Medical Assistance, steering working group	Up to 2 hours	Members of the Exceptional Situations Committee and the Steering Task Force
3. The basic activities of the governing bodies:		
Planning and organization of preparedness and response activities in emergency situations.	By time	Emergency Situations Commission of the National Center for Prehospital Emergency Medical Care

Measures	Execution Time	Responsible Parties
Determination of the nature, extent, risk level, and possible evolution of the emergency situation	within 2 hours”	the Emergency Situations Commission, the Operational Duty Group, and the heads of regional EMS substations”
Deployment of the necessary forces and resources to the disaster area for the organization and provision of prehospital emergency medical care to the population affected by the emergency situation.	--/--	Emergency Situations Commission
Monitoring and record-keeping of the measures implemented.	--/--	Duty Operations Group
Gathering information from areas with medical losses, analyzing it, assessing the effectiveness of the measures taken, and planning and organizing concrete actions to promptly mitigate the situation	--/--	The Emergency Situations Commission (ESC) and the Duty Operations Group (DOG) coordinated the response measures.

Source: NPEMAC

Table 4 summarizes the operational procedures of the National Pre-Hospital Emergency Medical Assistance Center for exceptional situations. The table includes two main sections: (A) procedures applied in the case of a potential onset of an exceptional situation, and (B) procedures applied in the case of an ongoing exceptional situation.

Section A includes notification procedures addressed to responsible authorities and internal structures, with defined time intervals ranging from immediate notification to 30 minutes. It also includes preparatory activities such as operationalization of activity plans, formation of operational teams, risk assessment procedures, resource identification, and inter-institutional coordination activities, with time intervals ranging from 2 to 6 hours.

Section B includes notification procedures within the Ministry of Health emergency structures, coordination actions of dispatch and medical statistics units, and activation of regional emergency medical assistance departments. It also includes assembly of governing bodies and operational working groups within specified time intervals.

The operational procedures further include planning and organization activities, determination of the nature and extent of emergency situations, deployment of operational resources to affected areas, monitoring of implemented measures, and collection of operational information from intervention areas. These activities are assigned to designated operational structures, including emergency commissions and duty operations groups.

The analysis of operational response documentation indicates that communication processes are organized in a structured format. Communication flows are documented in two directions: vertical communication between operational units and decision-making authorities, and horizontal communication between operational units and partner institutions.

Operational procedures are structured in sequential phases, including alert and notification, situation assessment, resource mobilization, deployment of operational teams, and monitoring of intervention activities. The review of policy and operational documents identifies the presence of several structural elements within the national crisis management framework. These include the distribution of responsibilities across multiple governance levels, the existence of coordination structures, and the presence of procedural frameworks regulating emergency response activities.

Table 4 provides the detailed procedural sequence for emergency preparedness and response within the National Pre-Hospital Emergency Medical Assistance Center, including time-bound actions, responsible units, and coordination mechanisms.

5. Discussion

From a Disaster Risk Management (DRM) cycle perspective, the findings suggest that crisis governance in the Republic of Moldova is characterized by a transitional institutional configuration situated between reactive administrative practices and emerging integrated risk governance models. While recent institutional reforms, particularly the establishment of the National Crisis Management Center (NCMC), have strengthened coordination and risk governance capacities, the system continues to exhibit uneven development across the prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery dimensions, as also reflected in the institutional structures and operational arrangements presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Structural and Institutional Maturity Gap

The comparative analysis indicates a governance maturity gap between the Republic of Moldova and consolidated European crisis management systems operating under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and the UNDRR Sendai Framework. In advanced systems, crisis governance is characterized by the systematic integration of risk assessment into strategic planning processes, high levels of inter-agency interoperability, and institutionalized mechanisms for organizational learning.

In contrast, the Moldovan system appears to remain predominantly response-oriented, with partial and uneven integration of preventive and anticipatory capacities. Although the NCMC represents a significant institutional advancement in centralizing risk assessment and coordination functions, its operational consolidation is still evolving. This limits the full transition toward a

proactive governance model based on anticipatory risk management and evidence-informed decision-making.

Political, Economic, and Administrative Constraints

The analysis suggests that the identified implementation gaps are shaped by multidimensional structural constraints.

From a political perspective, institutional discontinuity and periodic reconfiguration of governance arrangements may reduce long-term policy coherence and affect the accumulation of institutional memory. Crisis governance systems, particularly those undergoing transformation, require sustained strategic continuity to ensure effective implementation of reforms.

From an economic perspective, the development of integrated risk assessment systems, digital coordination infrastructures, and operational preparedness capacities requires sustained financial investment. In resource-constrained environments, crisis management priorities often compete with other pressing public policy demands, which may slow down modernization processes and affect overall system resilience.

From an administrative perspective, fragmentation of responsibilities and incomplete alignment between sectoral contingency plans appear to limit coordination efficiency. Although formal coordination mechanisms exist, operational integration across institutions remains partially developed, particularly in ensuring real-time synchronization of decision-making processes.

Institutional Learning and the “Lessons Learned” Gap

A key differentiating factor between mature and emerging crisis governance systems lies in the institutionalization of post-crisis learning mechanisms. International evidence from consolidated systems, including Estonia and Finland, suggests that structured after-action reviews and systematic risk reassessments are embedded within governance cycles, thereby enabling continuous institutional adaptation.

As reflected in comparative practices, Estonia integrates annual risk assessment cycles directly into strategic planning, while Finland applies structured post-incident evaluation mechanisms that inform both regulatory adjustments and operational improvements. These practices enhance adaptive governance capacity and strengthen systemic resilience.

In the Republic of Moldova, however, the “lessons learned” function appears to remain fragmented and inconsistently institutionalized. Post-event evaluations are not yet systematically integrated into strategic planning cycles, which may limit feedback loops between operational experience and institutional reform processes. This reduces the system’s adaptive capacity and constrains its transition toward a fully learning-oriented governance model consistent with EU standards.

Integrated Roadmap for Institutional Development

Based on the comparative analysis, strengthening crisis governance in the Republic of Moldova may require a phased and prioritised reform trajectory aligned with the DRM cycle.

In the short term, the institutionalization of mandatory after-action reviews for major emergency events, coordinated by the NCMC, could enhance systematic documentation and structured evaluation of operational performance.

In the medium term, the development of a standardized national “lessons learned” framework, alongside annual inter-institutional simulation exercises and the implementation of an integrated digital platform for risk information exchange, may contribute to improved interoperability and coordination efficiency.

In the long term, embedding lessons learned into strategic planning cycles and developing predictive risk assessment capabilities could support the transition toward a proactive, prevention-oriented governance model aligned with EU and UNDRR frameworks.

Cost-Effectiveness of Strategic Planning

From a public policy efficiency perspective, strategic crisis planning should be understood as a long-term investment in risk reduction and institutional resilience rather than as a purely administrative cost (Malacinschi-Codreanu, 2022). International evidence indicates that investments in prevention, preparedness, and coordination generate substantially lower societal and economic costs compared to response and recovery phases (OECD, 2025; UNDRR, 2024).

This “prevention paradox” highlights that insufficient investment in preparedness may lead to disproportionately higher costs during crisis events. Strengthening early warning systems, improving inter-agency coordination, and enhancing institutional preparedness capacities may contribute to reduced response times, lower economic losses, and improved recovery trajectories.

In this context, the consolidation of the National Crisis Management Center can be interpreted not only as an institutional reform (Malacinschi-Codreanu, 2021), but also as a cost-efficiency mechanism supporting the long-term sustainability of public expenditure in crisis governance.

6. Conclusions

The analysis indicates that crisis management in the Republic of Moldova is characterized by a governance model in transition, where formal institutional and regulatory frameworks are in place but remain predominantly oriented toward response rather than prevention and preparedness.

Operational arrangements demonstrate structured procedures based on hierarchical communication, defined responsibilities, and sequential activation mechanisms, which support coordinated emergency response across institutional levels.

The establishment of the National Crisis Management Center in 2025 represents a key institutional development aimed at improving coordination and risk governance. However, full operational effectiveness depends on further strengthening inter-institutional integration, improving coordination across sectoral planning frameworks, and enhancing institutional learning mechanisms.

Overall, the findings suggest that alignment with integrated disaster risk management principles requires continued development of coordination capacity, preparedness systems, and adaptive governance mechanisms across all levels of the crisis management architecture.

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