

Training of Trainers as a Preparedness-Building Tool: Evidence from the LOCALIENCE Project

László Balatonyi Ph.D.

General Water Management Directorate/Ludovika University of Public Service, Faculty of Water Science

Email: balatonyi.laszlo@ovf.hu / balatonyi.laszlo@uni-nke.hu

ORCID: 0000-0001-5130-730X

The LOCALIENCE project: background and objectives

The LOCALIENCE project is a transnational cooperation initiative implemented under the Interreg Central Europe Programme, addressing the growing challenges posed by climate change-driven extreme weather events and related disasters. The project focuses on strengthening disaster preparedness, risk awareness, and response capacities at local and regional levels, with particular attention to flood-related and multi-hazard risks.

LOCALIENCE aims to bridge the gap between strategic disaster risk reduction frameworks and operational practice by promoting knowledge exchange, capacity building, and the testing of innovative preparedness approaches. A key emphasis of the project is the integration of scientific knowledge, institutional experience, and community-based action, enabling authorities and practitioners to better anticipate, prepare for, and respond to climate-induced hazards.

Through pilot actions, training activities, and cross-sectoral cooperation, the project seeks to enhance institutional resilience and support the transferability of effective preparedness solutions across Central European regions.

Role of the Hungarian Water Management Directorate (OVF) in the LOCALIENCE project

Within the LOCALIENCE project, the Hungarian Water Management Directorate (OVF) participated as a national-level competent authority responsible for water management, flood protection, and disaster risk reduction. As Project Partner 2, OVF contributed its operational and institutional expertise to the development and testing of practice-oriented preparedness tools, with a particular focus on flood-related and multi-hazard risks.

The involvement of OVF ensured a strong link between strategic project objectives and real-world implementation, allowing project outputs to be aligned with existing national preparedness frameworks and civil protection practices. Through its participation, OVF supported the integration of scientific knowledge, operational experience, and capacity-building activities, thereby strengthening the applicability and transferability of project results beyond the project lifecycle.

Training of Trainers activity as a preparedness-building tool

The Training of Trainers (ToT) activity implemented within the framework of the LOCALIENCE project served as a key capacity-building instrument aimed at strengthening disaster preparedness at local and institutional levels. The ToT programme was designed to enhance both technical knowledge and training competencies, enabling participants to act as multipliers within their respective organisations and professional networks.

The training combined adult education principles with scenario-based and practice-oriented learning, addressing topics such as flood risk management, climate-related hazards, and international disaster response mechanisms. By linking theoretical frameworks with pilot actions and structured peer feedback, the ToT activity contributed to the development of operational preparedness, trainer confidence, and institutional learning capacities.

As such, the ToT approach within LOCALIENCE functioned not only as a training event, but as an applied preparedness-building process supporting the long-term strengthening of disaster risk management and response capabilities.

Training of Trainers Programme within the LOCALIENCE Project

As part of the LOCALIENCE project, a three-day Training of Trainers (ToT) programme was implemented as a core capacity-building activity aimed at strengthening disaster preparedness and local response capabilities. The training supported the development of professional competencies required for effective disaster risk reduction, flood protection, and civil protection activities at local and regional levels. The programme was conceived as a professional continuing education course, combining adult education methodologies with technical disaster risk management content. Its primary objective was to prepare participants to act as competent trainers and facilitators capable of supporting preparedness-oriented actions, stakeholder engagement, and knowledge transfer within their respective institutions and communities. Particular emphasis was placed on the multiplier effect of training, enabling participants to further disseminate knowledge and skills and thereby enhance institutional preparedness.

Structure and methodological approach

The Training of Trainers programme was delivered in an in-person format over three consecutive days and followed a structured progression from training methodology to technical preparedness content and practical application. The curriculum combined theoretical inputs, interactive exercises, scenario-based learning, and structured peer feedback to support experiential and reflective learning processes.

The first day focused on foundational training and facilitation skills. Participants were introduced to adult learning principles, intercultural communication, active listening, feedback techniques, and effective presentation methods. These sessions aimed to strengthen trainer confidence and pedagogical competence, which are essential for delivering preparedness-related training in diverse institutional and cultural contexts.

The second day addressed technical aspects of disaster preparedness, with particular attention to climate change-related risks and flood management. Sessions covered climate risk awareness, flood types and protection measures, and international disaster response frameworks, including mechanisms for cross-border cooperation. Scenario-based exercises were used to connect theoretical concepts with practical coordination challenges, supporting participants' understanding of multi-level disaster response dynamics.

The third day was dedicated to the presentation and evaluation of pilot actions developed within the project framework. Participants presented their pilot initiatives related to flood preparedness, early warning, and emergency response, followed by structured peer feedback. This process facilitated reflective learning, critical assessment, and the identification of transferable elements applicable across different national and institutional contexts.

Contribution to preparedness and capacity building

The Training of Trainers programme functioned as an applied preparedness-building instrument rather than a standalone educational event. By integrating methodological training with technical disaster risk management content and pilot-based learning, the programme supported the development of operational preparedness, institutional learning, and cross-sectoral cooperation.

Participants acquired both subject-matter expertise and facilitation skills, enabling them to support local preparedness initiatives, guide stakeholder engagement, and contribute to the sustainability of preparedness actions beyond the project lifecycle. The Training of Trainers approach thus provided a practical mechanism for translating disaster risk reduction frameworks into locally applicable preparedness measures.

Summary: Preparedness, practice, and lessons from recent local flood events

The relevance of the Training of Trainers programme and practice-oriented preparedness activities was further underscored by recent local flood events experienced in Hungary during the summer of 2020. In July and August of that year, several regions, including parts of Somogy County and Northern Borsod, were affected by intense rainfall events leading to severe local flooding, flash floods, and widespread water damage. These events highlighted the vulnerability of settlements to climate-induced hydrological extremes and the increasing frequency of locally concentrated water damage incidents.

The observed flood events demonstrated that effective disaster risk management must address the full preparedness cycle, encompassing prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. In many cases, the rapid onset of flooding left limited time for ad hoc decision-making, emphasising the importance of prior planning, trained personnel, and clearly defined roles at local level. Where preparedness measures,

training, and coordination mechanisms were in place, response actions proved more efficient and damage mitigation more effective.

The events also revealed the critical role of practice and exercises in strengthening preparedness. Simulated scenarios and pilot-based learning, as applied in the Training of Trainers programme, closely reflect the real challenges encountered during local water damage events, including coordination under time pressure, communication with stakeholders, and mobilisation of available resources. Such exercises contribute directly to operational readiness by allowing participants to test and refine response procedures before real emergencies occur.

Local flood events in Somogy and Northern Borsod further highlighted the importance of volunteer involvement in disaster response. Volunteers often provided essential support during defence and recovery activities, particularly in situations where professional capacities were temporarily overwhelmed. Their effective engagement depends on prior training, integration into response structures, and mutual understanding between professional and volunteer actors. Strengthening these linkages is therefore a key component of resilient local preparedness.

Finally, the recovery phase following the 2020 summer flood events demonstrated that preparedness extends beyond immediate response. Damage assessment, restoration of infrastructure, and long-term resilience building require coordinated institutional action and sustained capacity development. The experiences from these local water damage events confirm that investments in training, practice-oriented preparedness, and community engagement are indispensable for managing increasingly frequent and intense hydrological hazards.

Keywords: disaster preparedness; flood risk management; training of trainers; capacity building; local flood events; volunteer engagement; practice-oriented learning; climate change adaptation; multi-hazard risk; civil protection