

# TPCL PROJECT CONCEPT PAPER: POST-CRISIS LEARNING

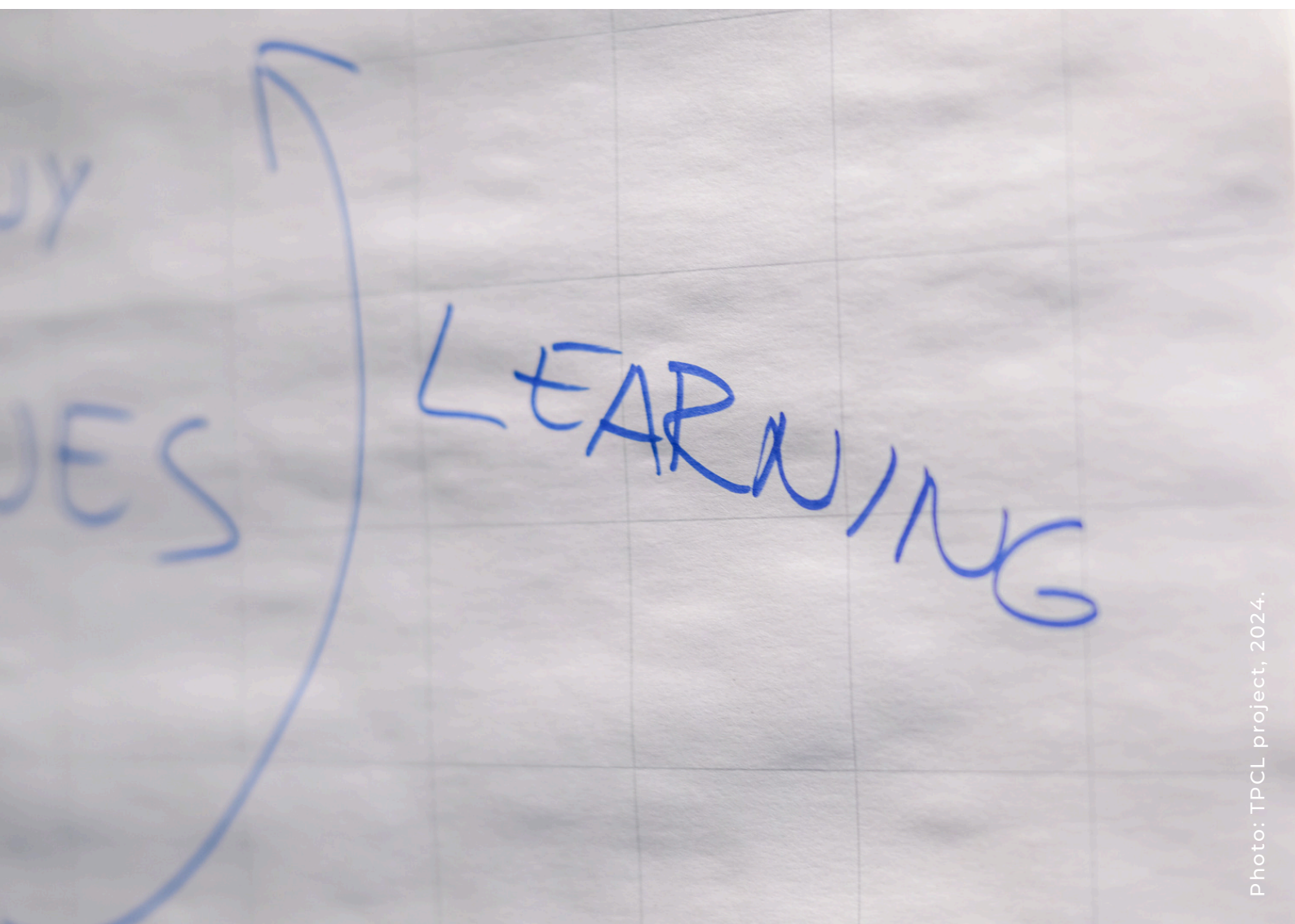


Photo: TPCL project, 2024.

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Authors: Anne-May Nagel (NGO Crisis Research Centre, Estonia)  
Giga Phartenadze (NGO Youth Supreme Council, Georgia)  
Tom Nilsson (Malmö University, Sweden)  
Hannes Nagel (NGO Crisis Research Centre, Estonia)

\* Corresponding author Anne-May Nagel, NGO Crisis Research Centre, [annemay.nagel@kruk.ee](mailto:annemay.nagel@kruk.ee)

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# PROJECT DESCRIPTION: TRIANGLE POST-CRISIS LEARNING



Effective crisis management has become not only a necessity but also a public expectation in recent years, amid a series of crises.

Although crisis preparedness and active response frequently receive the majority of attention in both public discourse and policy, post-crisis management is equally critical. In addition to facilitating recovery, post-crisis initiatives offer a distinctive opportunity for learning, reflection, and evaluation. Organizations and communities can enhance their resilience and preparedness for future crises by evaluating the efficacy of their responses, identifying deficiencies, and implementing enhancements during this phase. In essence, post-crisis management functions as a critical feedback loop, enabling the continuous enhancement of crisis management frameworks.

Building on our previous experience, we have successfully completed a project centered on crisis management, with a particular emphasis on these post-crisis strategies. Representatives from 12 local-level organizations in **Sweden, Georgia, and Estonia** participated in the TPCL project, which enabled the exchange of experiences in crisis and post-crisis management.

Three online modules were completed by participants, who examined a variety of aspects of post-crisis management and shared invaluable insights from their personal experiences. The exchange of best practices and experiences was crucial, as participants were able to acquire knowledge from both each other and industry experts, thereby fostering a more comprehensive comprehension of post-crisis strategies. Furthermore, representatives from each nation conducted an essential in-person meeting during which local stakeholders worked together to pinpoint the critical factors that either facilitate or impede post-crisis learning.

The comprehensive engagement and the establishment of strong collaborative networks that were facilitated by the combination of both online and in-person interactions were essential, as they enhanced the depth of discussion and the practical application of ideas shared throughout the project. During our project we had three online and one hybrid meeting to take place simultaneously in Tallinn, Malmö, and Batumi.

Malmö University served as the lead partner in the TPCL project, which commenced its activities in spring 2024. The university played a central role in coordinating the project's activities, bringing together expertise from a diverse range of local-level organizations and facilitating knowledge exchange across national borders. Funding for the initiative was provided by the Swedish Institute, underscoring a strong commitment to advancing crisis management practices on a regional scale.

This support enabled the TPCL project to focus on conceptualizing experiences in post-crisis management, encouraging collaboration among the network of stakeholders from Sweden, Georgia, and Estonia. By fostering such regional partnerships, the Swedish Institute and Malmö University aimed to create a foundation for sustainable improvements in crisis management that would benefit not only the participating countries but also serve as a preliminary concept for other local level actors in our region.

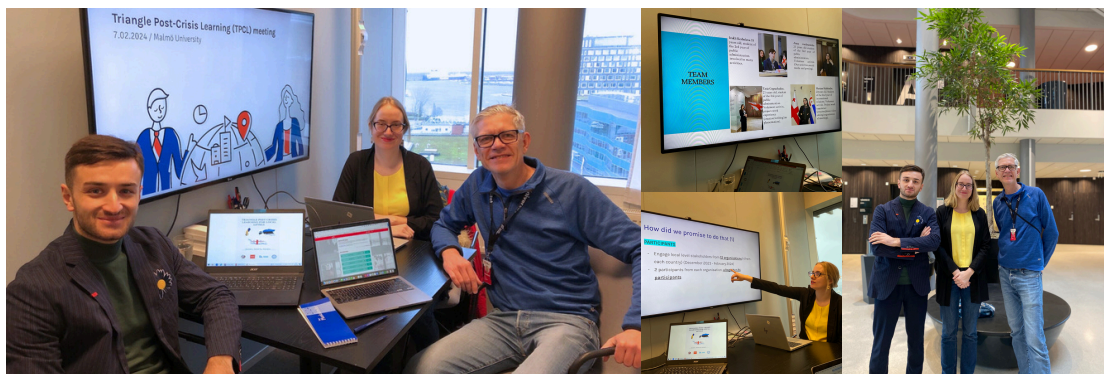
# PROJECT ACTIVITIES



In early February 2024 representatives from Sweden, Georgia, and Estonia convened to finalize the details and schedule of the TPCL project, marking a crucial first step in establishing a cohesive framework for the initiative.

This kickoff meeting allowed project partners to define the specific activities, timelines, and objectives, ensuring alignment across all parties. By setting clear guidelines and goals, the meeting laid the foundation for future project phases, establishing a shared understanding of the project's mission to improve local-level crisis learning and resilience. The meeting also fostered essential connections among us, which helped to create an open communication and collaboration throughout the project.

We believe that establishing this mutual foundation was key, as it ensured that each team understood their roles and the collective purpose, creating a solid base for the complex work of building a post-crisis learning network that can address both common and unique challenges across the three countries.



Photos: TPCL project kickoff meeting in Malmö, Sweden (2024).

The launch of the project also gained regional attention in Georgia when Anne-May Nagel (EE) and Giga Phartenadze (GE) introduced it on the Georgian Ajara TV channel on February 14. This television presentation highlighted the TPCL project's international collaboration and goals, sparking interest among Georgian viewers and local stakeholders. On March 16, Tom Nilsson (SE) presented the project also in Moldova.



Photos: TPCL project representatives at Ajara TV show and in Moldova (2024).

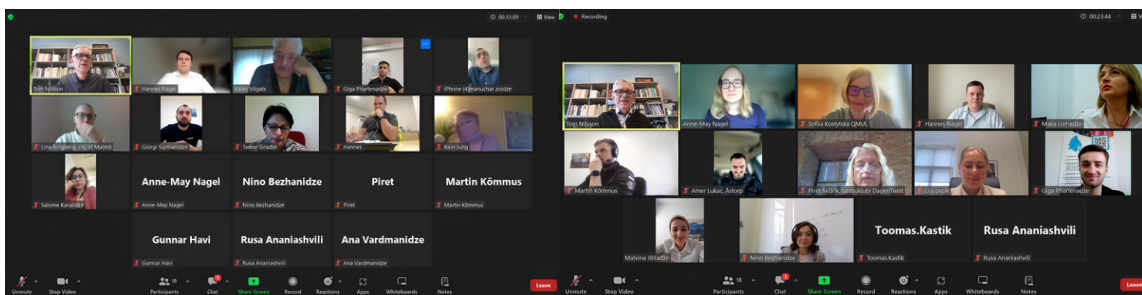


The participants of the project, local level public administrators with various experience and responsibilities in their respective crisis management systems, were engaged in various activities. In April-May 2024, three online meetings and one on-site hybrid meeting was held. This chapter gives a brief overview of the project activities.

## First online meeting

The first online meeting provided an opportunity to meet & greet and get to know the other project participants. We also outlined the aims and further activities of the project. In addition, two experts provided valuable perspectives on the lifecycle of systemic crisis management during the initial online joint meeting of the TPCL project.

Hannes Nagel (Tallinn University and NGO Crisis Research Centre), a crisis management researcher from Estonia, introduced the fundamentals of post-crisis management. He used the 2007 crisis management lifecycle model by Tony Jacques as a framework to clarify how organizations can effectively manage the aftermath of crises. Nagel's presentation addressed critical concepts, including the role of reflective practices in learning from past events, stakeholder engagement, and recovery phases.



Photos: TPCL project online meetings in April (2024).

Lina Ringberg, a civil contingency planner from Malmö City, Sweden, provided a local government perspective on crisis management. Her presentation underscored the significance of establishing and sustaining trust, comprehending cultural factors, and customizing crisis response initiatives to the unique context of each location. Ringberg underscored the importance of trust, culture, and context in the context of effective immediate responses and sustainable post-crisis recovery.

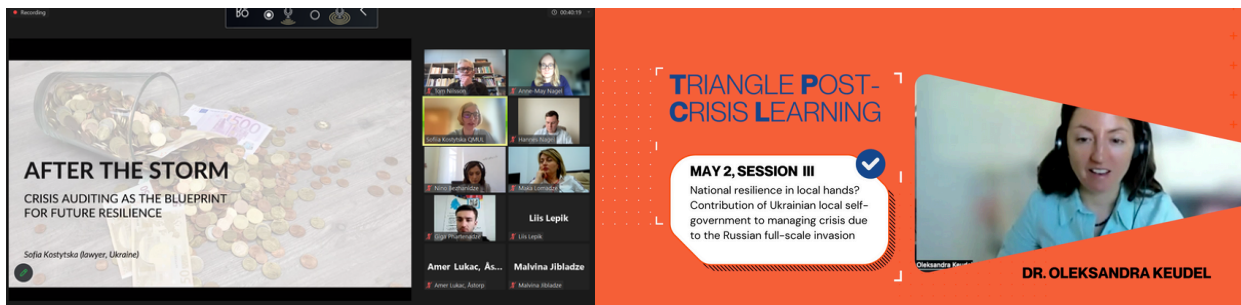
Collectively, these presentations established the foundation for a more in-depth examination of post-crisis management strategies, thereby enhancing participants' comprehension of the ways in which theory and practical, localised approaches can collaborate to improve resilience at multiple levels.

## Second online meeting

The second online meeting of the TPCL project was dedicated to crisis analysis, which delved into the critical role of reflective practices in facilitating post-crisis learning. In Zoom breakout room discussions, participants investigated the diverse obstacles to post-crisis learning and exchanged perspectives on the manner in which these obstacles manifest in various national, local and organizational contexts.

The adaptability of auditing as a crisis management tool, particularly in smaller municipalities with restricted resources, was one of the primary insights that emerged from these discussions.

Participants observed that auditing practices are contingent upon the size and capacity of the municipality, with smaller organisations frequently necessitating modifications to their methodology to accommodate reduced personnel and budgetary constraints.



Photos: TPCL project meetings with experts (2024).

In post-crisis analysis, Sofiia Kostytska, a current MA candidate at Queen Mary University of London and a former lawyer for Ukraine's Supreme Audit Institution, provided a valuable perspective on the value of hindsight. She underscored the necessity of a comprehensive approach to auditing, which involves the examination of all phases of a crisis to identify both areas of resilience and weaknesses. Kostytska emphasised the necessity of customising public sector auditing to the unique requirements and circumstances of each context, contending that a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient for complex crisis situations. "Public sector audits can be more effective in identifying lessons learnt and informing future preparedness and response strategies by focusing on the unique requirements of each situation," she explained. Her insights emphasised the importance of adaptability in auditing and the necessity of ongoing improvement in post-crisis evaluation methods.

## Third online meeting

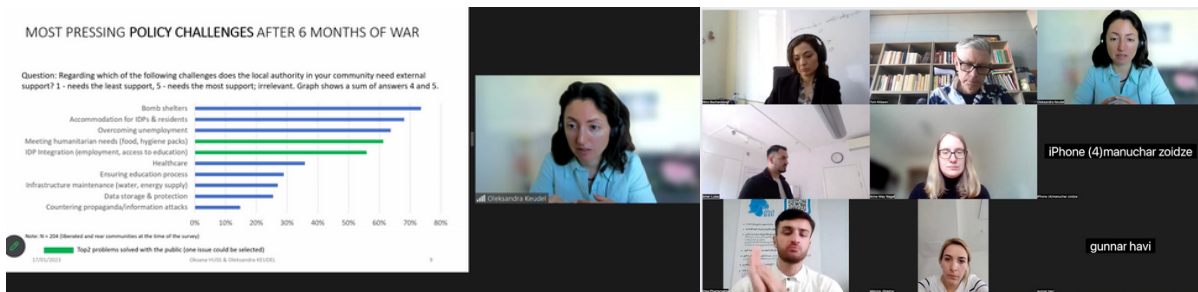
The third online meeting featured a compelling presentation by Dr. Oleksandra Keudel from the Kyiv School of Economics, who shared her research on local crisis management in Ukraine amidst the ongoing Russian invasion. Her presentation, titled "National Resilience in Local Hands? Contribution of Ukrainian Local Self-Government to Managing Crisis Due to the Russian Full-Scale Invasion", offered an in-depth look at the vital role of local self-governance in times of national crisis. Dr. Keudel detailed how Ukrainian municipalities, facing severe constraints and threats, have managed to coordinate crisis responses on a local level, often without sufficient external support.

Her presentation prompted thought-provoking questions from participants regarding the varied levels of preparedness and response capabilities among local governments in Eastern versus Western Ukraine. This geographic disparity in readiness underscored the different experiences and resource allocations faced by local governments based on their proximity to conflict zones. Dr. Keudel explained that while some Eastern municipalities in Ukraine were initially overwhelmed by the immediacy of the crisis, their Western counterparts, although farther from the frontlines, still had to adapt quickly to manage an influx of internally displaced persons and humanitarian needs.

A key theme of Dr. Keudel's talk was the significance of collaborative governance, particularly how local communities and volunteers have been essential partners in empowering local governments to respond more effectively. She emphasised that resilience is not solely a top-down endeavour but a dynamic process supported by grassroots initiatives.

Volunteers have been instrumental in mobilizing resources, sharing vital information, and providing support services to affected populations, all of which have contributed to enhancing the resilience of Ukrainian communities.

Dr. Keudel highlighted that these local efforts are not only bolstering Ukraine’s resilience in the present crisis but also setting a precedent for the role of community-driven action in future crises. Her insights underscored the critical intersection of local governance, community engagement, and national resilience in navigating complex and large-scale challenges.



Photos: TPCL project online meeting with Dr. Oleksandra Keudel (2024).

## Final trilateral hybrid meeting

In addition to the initial three meetings, the TPCL project concluded with a fourth hybrid meeting, during which participants from Sweden, Estonia, and Georgia convened with national representatives in their respective cities of Malmö, Tallinn, and Batumi.

The format enabled participants to collaborate closely with local stakeholders and participate in an online session that united all three groups in a shared learning environment. The application of the After Action Review (AAR) template, a tool that is frequently employed in Sweden for post-crisis learning, was a critical component of this session. The participants were able to reflect on specific crisis scenarios, identify what went well, and discuss areas for improvement by utilising this structured framework. This exercise offered valuable insights into the ways in which standardised templates can facilitate consistent and effective post-crisis analysis in a variety of contexts.



Photos: TPCL project final hybrid meeting, project participants in Tallinn joined online from Sweden and Georgia; participants in Georgia in a discussion (2024).



The session also featured a collaborative trilateral online discussion that concentrated on the fundamental concepts of post-crisis learning. In addition to examining strategies for cultivating a culture of continuous improvement in crisis management, participants exchanged perspectives on how to surmount common obstacles, including resource constraints and communication barriers.

This hybrid format not only facilitated in-depth local engagement but also bolstered the collaborative spirit of the project, fostering a shared experience that emphasized the significance of international partnerships in the development of resilience throughout the Baltic Sea region. To acknowledge their dedication to the advancement of post-crisis learning practices, participants were awarded diplomas at the meeting's conclusion.



Photos: TPCL project participants with diplomas in Batumi, Georgia; awarding of the diplomas in Tallinn, Estonia (2024).

# CONCEPTUALIZING: CRISIS MANAGEMENT



**Crisis management** is a proactive, strategic approach that organizations and governments employ to identify, mitigate, recover and learn from crises, with the ultimate goal of minimizing their impact and maintaining resilience. This multi-faceted approach enables entities to anticipate potential threats, address them swiftly when they occur, and recover efficiently in the aftermath.

The **key components of crisis management** include:

- preparation through comprehensive risk assessment
- immediate and well-coordinated response strategies
- meticulous recovery planning
- a thorough evaluation process that drives continuous improvement

**Preparation** is the foundation of effective crisis management. By conducting in-depth risk assessments, organisations can identify potential threats and vulnerabilities before they escalate into full-blown crises. This includes analysing internal and external factors that could potentially disrupt operations, such as natural disasters, cyber attacks, or economic downturns. Through scenario planning, organisations can then develop contingency plans tailored to specific risks, ensuring they have the resources, protocols, and personnel in place to act quickly and efficiently when needed. Training and regular drills are also essential, as they help individuals and teams practice their roles in crisis situations, reducing uncertainty and improving response times.

**Swift response strategies** are vital once a crisis is identified. These strategies should be designed to contain and control the situation, minimising its impact on both the organisation and its stakeholders. Effective communication, both internal and external, is a cornerstone of crisis response, as it allows organisations to maintain transparency and trust with the public, employees, and partners. By delivering clear, accurate, and timely information, organisations can prevent misinformation and reduce anxiety among those affected. Moreover, well-prepared crisis response teams can mobilize quickly, executing predefined or *ad hoc* steps to stabilize the situation and address immediate concerns.

Recovery planning is the next critical phase. This entails evaluating the crisis's effects, putting strategies in place to get things back to normal, and helping the affected people. Recovery efforts may include financial assistance, mental health support, or infrastructure repairs, depending on the nature of the crisis. The recovery phase is also essential for building resilience, as it helps organizations and communities bounce back stronger and better prepared for future challenges.

Finally, post-crisis management and learning are indispensable to the crisis management process. After a crisis has passed, organisations should conduct a thorough review to analyse what worked, what didn't, and how processes can be improved. This feedback loop allows organizations to refine their crisis management strategies, enhancing their capacity to face future crises. By learning from each not-expected situation, organizations can strengthen their resilience, safeguard their reputation, and foster stability and trust, even in the most challenging circumstances.

# CONCEPTUALIZING: IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION



**Crisis management** as a public service is an ongoing process that demands continuous improvement and adaptation to emerging threats and challenges. Each crisis, if not completely novel, still unique, often introducing unforeseen complexities that necessitate flexible, adaptive strategies. To effectively address these evolving threats, organizations must commit to regularly assessing and refining their crisis management approaches, staying attuned to new risks, and building upon lessons learnt from past experiences. By effectively managing each phase of the crisis management cycle —preparation, response, recovery, and evaluation — organizations can strengthen their resilience, enabling them to handle crises more efficiently and minimize long-term impacts.

A crucial aspect of this adaptive process is **collaboration**. In times of crisis, no single organization or entity can effectively manage the situation alone. Successful crisis management relies on partnerships across sectors and levels, fostering a network of support that amplifies resources, expertise, and information-sharing. Collaboration with external partners, such as local communities, governmental bodies, non-profit organizations, and private sector stakeholders, is essential for a well-rounded response. This shared approach not only broadens the pool of available resources but also encourages the exchange of best practices and innovative solutions, fostering a culture of collective problem-solving. By working together, organizations can create a coordinated response that is greater than the sum of its parts, ultimately leading to a more resilient outcome.

**Multi-level governance** in public administration plays a pivotal role in this collaborative framework, particularly in complex, large-scale crises that affect multiple jurisdictions. Multi-level governance involves coordination between various levels of government —community, local, regional, national, and sometimes international — each bringing its own strengths, knowledge, and resources to the table. Local governments, for instance, are often the first to respond in a crisis, having a deep understanding of community needs and vulnerabilities. Regional and national governments can provide additional resources, technical expertise, and logistical support, while international organizations may offer guidance, specialized aid, or a global perspective on effective crisis management practices.

By effectively integrating these levels of governance, organizations can ensure that crisis management efforts are not only swift but also comprehensive and aligned across jurisdictions. This alignment is especially critical for crises that transcend borders, such as pandemics, natural disasters, or cyber threats. Through a cohesive, multi-level response, different stakeholders can address both immediate needs and long-term recovery efforts more holistically, ultimately reducing the crisis's overall impact.

In essence, **crisis management is not a static process** but an evolving one that benefits greatly from collaboration and multi-level governance. These elements help build a robust framework for crisis management, ensuring that organizations are prepared to respond not only with internal resources but also through a networked approach. By embracing collaboration and continuously adapting their strategies, organizations can enhance their resilience and ability to navigate crises effectively, safeguarding their operations, reputation, and the well-being of those they serve.

# CONCEPTUALIZING: POST-CRISIS LEARNING



**Post-crisis learning** is an essential component of effective crisis management, which involves the systematic analysis and comprehension of the events, decisions, and actions that occurred during a crisis. The goal is to acquire insights that can improve future preparedness, response, and recovery efforts, thereby fostering a more resilient organisation or community. In this learning process, a structured reflection on the crisis is conducted, which includes an examination of critical elements such as the nature and timeline of the events, the response strategies employed, the coordination among stakeholders, and the outcomes achieved. Organisations can evaluate not only what was successful but also identify areas for improvement by examining these components.

The post-crisis learning process typically commences already during the crisis, and could also start in the preparatory phases through agreeing in the crisis management system the suitable framework that would allow for later analysis. After the immediate crisis is over, a thorough examination of the crisis response, which may entail the collection of data from a variety of sources, including stakeholder feedback, incident reports, and performance metrics, ensues. This review process allows organisations to create a **comprehensive and precise account of the events and the response that occurred.**

The process of post-crisis management and learning typically includes:

- **Documentation:** Although post-crisis learning is usually viewed through the lens of what happens after the immediate crisis has subdued, learning starts both in the preparatory phases and in the midst of crisis. For example, agreeing on the reporting system, and self- or system recording the observations, decisions, and outcomes for reference. Starting with these steps already during the crisis is a crucial tool for allowing analysis in the later stages.
- **Evaluation/analysis:** Assessing the effectiveness of the response strategies and actions taken during the crisis. Identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.
- **Recommendations:** Developing actionable suggestions to enhance future crisis preparedness and response.
- **Implementation:** Applying the learnt lessons to update policies, procedures, and training programs. What has been learnt directly contributes to preparing and next ad hoc responses.

An essential element of post-crisis learning is **stakeholder feedback**. Valuable perspectives on the response and recovery efforts are obtained by engaging with those who are directly involved in or affected by the crisis, such as employees, local communities, partners, and even clients. This feedback provides a practical understanding of the practical effects of the crisis management strategies that were implemented, thereby exposing the human and operational aspects of the response. Additionally, by engaging stakeholders in this reflective process, organisations exhibit a dedication to transparency and ongoing improvement, which in turn strengthens relationships and fosters trust.



Organisations can **develop actionable recommendations** and **identify specific lessons learnt** once this information is gathered and analysed. This could entail revamping communication protocols, investing in new training programs, enhancing partnerships with external organisations, or updating crisis management plans. Organisations can enhance their overall resilience and adaptability by integrating these lessons into policy, practice, and planning, thereby ensuring that they are better prepared for future crises.

**Post-crisis learning frequently has broader implications in addition to internal improvements.** Organisations have the option to share their discoveries with other stakeholders and organizations, thereby contributing to a collective knowledge base that influences industry standards and best practices. In this manner, post-crisis learning is transformed into a community-oriented endeavour, in which the knowledge acquired from one crisis can be used to assist others in preventing or responding more effectively to similar situations.

It must be also taken in account that post-crisis learning can be hindered by various factors - for example, time constraints, lack of human resources or financing, or the lack of organizational culture or agreed standards for learning post critical events. Legislative obstacles might arise as well and the search for somebody to blame might also hinder constructive learning.

Ultimately, **post-crisis learning is a continuous process of adaptation and improvement**, rather than a one-time exercise. Organisations can cultivate a proactive culture that prioritises resilience, agility, and continuous improvement by systematically reflecting on their past experiences. This approach transforms each crisis into an opportunity for innovation and growth.

# POST-CRISIS LEARNING EXAMPLES FROM SWEDEN



In Sweden, the **After Action Review (AAR)** template, provided by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (*Myndigheten för Samhällsskydd och Beredskap*, or MSB), is a key tool for structured post-crisis learning. A flexible method, AAR can be applied not only after a crisis or emergency exercise but also during and even before an event, making it a valuable tool for continuous improvement in various contexts.

Typically, **AAR is conducted in a dialogue format**, led by a facilitator who guides participants through a reflective discussion. This process encourages open dialogue and a focus on lessons learned rather than assigning blame. In practice, however, **the AAR process** is sometimes adapted to fit the unique needs of the institution or the specific crisis. In some cases, particularly for minor crises, the AAR template is sent out as a survey, giving participants two weeks to respond. This modified approach allows for greater flexibility and can engage a larger number of people, especially when schedules are tight.

The survey asks participants a series of questions to assess their actions and outcomes. Key questions include:

- What was expected to happen? What actually happened?
- What were the results?
- Why did things turn out this way?

Participants are also asked to reflect on what went well, what could improve, and to focus on elements within their control. From this initial reflection, participants then identify specific actions under three categories:

- What should continue?
- What should stop?
- What should start?

These categories help teams prioritize actionable insights, focusing efforts on practices that enhance crisis management while eliminating those that may have hindered the response.

After gathering individual responses, the **AAR findings are presented in a group meeting**, such as a Teams session, where “lessons drawn” from each department are shared, followed by a set of recommendations.

To ensure these insights lead to tangible improvements, **follow-ups are scheduled at six and twelve months after the initial review**. The six-month follow-up checks whether the crisis management system actors (individual or institutional) have begun implementing the recommended changes, while the twelve-month review assesses whether these changes have been fully embedded within the organization. This systematic follow-up process helps reinforce accountability and drives continuous improvement, supporting Swedish municipalities in building a resilient, adaptable crisis management framework.

# POST-CRISIS LEARNING EXAMPLES FROM ESTONIA



In Estonia, the municipalities of Hiiumaa and Saaremaa have developed **structured approaches to post-crisis learning**, which play a vital role in enhancing their resilience and crisis preparedness. Both municipalities actively engage in documenting, analysing, and reflecting on their crisis management processes, which allows them to continuously refine their strategies and improve future responses. This systematic approach is facilitated by the official Situation Report (SITREP) web system developed by the Estonian Rescue Board, an essential tool for recording the steps and decisions taken during a crisis.

During a crisis situation, Hiiumaa and Saaremaa like all other municipalities or regional/national actors in Estonia **utilise the SITREP system** to document key actions, decisions, and the overall progression of events. This platform provides a centralised online system for crisis management teams to log their responses in real-time, ensuring that all relevant information, decisions taken and tasks given are captured accurately. This documentation process includes recording response steps, resource allocation, decisions on communication with the public, and coordination with external agencies. By carefully documenting these details, the stakeholders added to the crisis situation on the SITREP portal create a comprehensive record of the crisis, which serves as a valuable resource for later analysis.

The SITREP system is also crucial for maintaining transparency and accountability. As the crisis unfolds, stakeholders can access real-time information on the status of the response, enhancing coordination between local government agencies and external partners, such as the Estonian Rescue Board. It is also important that **civilians can be added to the portal, for example, in the case their assistance is needed**. The documented information not only facilitates a better understanding of what actions were taken but also helps identify areas that may require improvement, thereby supporting a thorough post-crisis learning process.

After the immediate crisis has been resolved, Hiiumaa and Saaremaa municipalities **engage in a collaborative post-crisis analysis**, involving key stakeholders such as local government officials, representatives from the Rescue Board, health services, and other emergency responders, depending on the type of crisis experienced. This joint effort is essential for **obtaining a holistic view** of the crisis response, as each stakeholder provides unique insights into the challenges encountered and the effectiveness of the actions taken. In some cases, these municipalities hold shared meetings where all parties involved come together to discuss what transpired, assess the overall response, and share feedback. Whether this is necessary depends on the severity and scale of the crisis encountered.

These post-crisis meetings are particularly useful for understanding interdependencies between different organizations during a crisis. For example, participants might analyze how information was shared, whether resource allocations were sufficient, and how coordination between agencies impacted the overall effectiveness of the response.

The frequency and depth of these shared meetings may vary depending on the severity of the crisis. In cases of major crises with significant impacts on local communities, these meetings may be more formal and comprehensive, involving detailed discussions and the development of targeted action plans. For less severe incidents, a lighter, more informal approach may suffice, focussing on key takeaways that can be integrated into everyday practices.

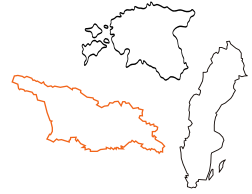
In addition to collective analysis, post-crisis learning in Hiiumaa and Saaremaa also **involves personal reflection** by those directly involved in the crisis response. Individuals are encouraged to review their own actions, consider what they could have done differently, and identify personal areas for improvement. This self-assessment fosters a culture of personal accountability and continuous learning, which is essential for developing resilient crisis management teams.

Equally important, however, is **peer reflection**. Sharing experiences and discussing challenges with colleagues provides an opportunity for responders to gain new perspectives and validate their own insights. This reflective practice supports emotional resilience as well, as sharing personal experiences can alleviate stress.

Through these structured post-crisis learning activities, the municipalities of Hiiumaa and Saaremaa continually enhance their crisis management capabilities. By documenting their responses in the SITREP system, analyzing outcomes with stakeholders, and fostering a culture of individual and peer reflection, they not only improve their readiness for future crises but also contribute to a collective framework of knowledge that other municipalities can draw upon. This integrated approach underscores the importance of adaptability, accountability, and collaboration in effective post-crisis management.



# POST-CRISIS LEARNING EXAMPLES FROM GEORGIA



Input from the Georgian participants is best reflected by specific case examples. In this section, the experiences of the TPCL Georgian project participants are captured:

- **Example of enhanced budget flexibility and data-driven decision-making during COVID-19** (Batumi City Hall – Division of Municipal Policy Planning, Risk Management, and Monitoring, and Budget Department)

During COVID-19, the pandemic put significant stress on public health services and welfare programs. The Budget Department noted that it should adopt more flexible budgeting practices that allow rapid reallocation of funds to essential services, such as healthcare and social assistance, in future crises.

COVID-19 also exposed the importance of real-time data in crisis response. The Risk Management and Monitoring Division noted that it should implement an enhanced data-monitoring system for tracking public health, economic impacts, and municipal services, ensuring quicker, informed decision-making during emergencies.

During the pandemic, clear and timely communication with the public was also essential. The municipality has noted that it strengthen its crisis communication framework, utilizing multiple channels (e.g., social media, mobile apps) to deliver real-time information to residents.

- **Lessons learnt from elections during COVID-19** (Autonomous Republic of Ajara Supreme Election Commission)

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the challenges of in-person voting during health crises. The Supreme Election Commission could invest in secure remote voting options (E-voting) to ensure citizens can exercise their voting rights safely during future crises.

Contingency planning for elections also came to be an important issue, for which establishing a comprehensive contingency plan that can be activated during emergencies is crucial. This could include creating alternative polling locations, staggering voting times, and ensuring safety measures (e.g., PPE distribution, social distancing protocols) to maintain electoral integrity while protecting public health.

- **Digital transformation for legal services and remote working capabilities** (National Bureau of Enforcement Batumi Office)

The pandemic underscored the need for the Bureau to offer digital services to continue operations during a crisis. The Bureau should accelerate the digitization of enforcement services, including online dispute resolution, electronic documentation, and virtual hearings. Crisis Preparedness for Enforcements: Develop emergency protocols for handling enforcement activities during times of economic or health crises. This could include implementing temporary moratoriums on certain types of enforcement actions (e.g., evictions or debt collections) when citizens face extreme financial hardship.

The bureau also noted that it should expand remote work infrastructure for staff, ensuring continuity of operations by equipping employees with the necessary tools and technology to work effectively from home.

- Hybrid learning, mental health support for students and staff and digital resource expansion during COVID-19 pandemic (Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University)

COVID-19 led to widespread adoption of online learning, but also exposed challenges in access to technology and student engagement. The university should develop a permanent hybrid learning model, combining in-person and online classes to ensure flexible, inclusive education during crises.

The pandemic placed a significant strain on mental health. The university has concluded that it should establish robust mental health support services, including online counseling, mental health awareness programs, and stress management resources for both students and staff.

Post-crisis, it has also been noted that it's important to expand access to online academic resources, such as digital libraries, virtual labs, and e-learning platforms, ensuring continuity of education and research activities regardless of physical disruptions.

Identifying the lessons and possible solutions was the first step, as to understand the problem and what should be done next. The organisations of TPCL project participants are now in the phase of implementing the solutions.

# IDENTIFIED FACTORS SUPPORTING & HINDERING POST-CRISIS LEARNING



Throughout the TPCL project, several factors were identified as either supporting or inhibiting effective post-crisis learning across the Baltic Sea region.

Supporting factors include:

- The presence of **structured documentation systems**. These tools not only facilitate accurate record-keeping but also ensure accountability, enabling organisations to analyse and reflect on their actions systematically.
- **Multi-level governance structures that encourage collaboration** across local, regional, and national levels serve as catalysts for learning. By involving diverse stakeholders, from municipal leaders to community organisations, these frameworks allow for comprehensive post-crisis evaluations and foster a culture of shared responsibility.
- **Culture for learning and accepting “mistakes”**. Learning post unwanted incidents is only possible in a supporting organizational culture which is focused on finding what could be done better next time a crisis arrives rather than finding someone to blame. Thus, organizational culture based on both individual and mutual trust, which allows for honesty in difficult situations is a key prerequisite for learning to occur.

However, our discussions also revealed several joint obstacles that inhibit post-crisis learning across the region:

- One significant barrier is the **inconsistent availability of resources — both financial, time and human**. Smaller municipalities, particularly in rural areas, often lack the personnel and sometimes, technical capacity to fully document and analyse crisis responses, which can limit their ability to learn effectively from past experiences.
- Another inhibiting factor is **variation in institutional priorities and crisis management practices**. For example, while some organizations prioritize transparency and stakeholder engagement, others may focus more on rapid response and recovery, which can hinder the post-crisis learning process if proper analysis and reflection are neglected.

Additionally, there is a shared challenge of ensuring follow-through on identified improvements. While organisations often identify areas for enhancement, the implementation of these changes may be delayed or deprioritized due to competing demands or resource constraints. The lack of follow-up inhibits the effectiveness of post-crisis learning, as identified lessons do not always translate into practice.

- Furthermore, **communication barriers — whether due to language differences, technological limitations, or bureaucratic silos — can impede collaborative learning efforts**. Effective crisis management requires open, consistent communication across organizations, and the absence of streamlined communication channels can obstruct the sharing of best practices and valuable insights.

Addressing these obstacles is essential for fostering a resilient, adaptable crisis management culture in the Baltic Sea region. By recognizing these shared challenges, the TPCL project highlights areas where targeted improvements can support more effective learning and enhance crisis management outcomes across Sweden, Estonia, and Georgia.

# CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS



In summarising the progress, results, participant input, and practical cases of the TPCL project, it is evident that a **single, universal, one-size-fits-all approach to crisis and post-crisis management is not feasible**. Each country and organization operates within unique management systems, shaped by distinct characteristics, histories, cultures, and hierarchical responsibilities that necessitate tailored approaches. **However, through our trilateral collaboration between Georgia, Sweden, and Estonia, we identified conceptual similarities in post-crisis learning processes that can serve as guiding steps for the region.**

The basic assumption for **effective post-crisis learning can occur is the existence of an organizational (also multi-level) culture based on trust and honesty**. Thus, enhancing the organizational culture is a prerequisite of the following steps.

The first key step identified is **recording the actions taken during a crisis**. While the systems for documentation vary across countries—Sweden, Estonia, and Georgia each utilize distinct platforms and protocols—each emphasizes the importance of maintaining transparency and accountability. By carefully documenting response steps, resources used, and decisions made, these systems provide a comprehensive record that is invaluable for later analysis and learning.

Following this, **post-crisis analysis emerged as a fundamental component of the learning process**. This analysis is twofold, involving both individual reflection and collaborative review. Individual analysis allows responders to consider their personal actions and areas for improvement, while collaborative analysis with peers and stakeholders enhances shared learning and provides a sense of closure. Engaging with colleagues and key stakeholders fosters a more comprehensive understanding of the crisis response, as it brings multiple perspectives to light and facilitates the identification of systemic strengths and weaknesses.

The third step involves **implementing the findings from these analyses**. Whether the insights highlight the need for improved multi-level collaboration, more effective communication systems, or enhanced resource allocation, identifying issues is only the beginning.

For meaningful progress to occur, there must be active discussions on how these changes can be integrated into existing protocols and practices. This step underscores the **need for actionable solutions rather than passive acknowledgment of challenges**.

Finally, **monitoring the implementation of changes** is one of the most critical aspects of post-crisis learning. Effective crisis management and improvement can only be realized if there is accountability in following through on planned changes. This phase involves regularly checking whether the identified modifications have been successfully implemented and assessing their impact on subsequent crisis responses. This **commitment to ongoing evaluation** ensures that post-crisis learning translates into tangible, lasting improvements, reinforcing a culture of continuous enhancement in crisis management.

The TPCL project has established fundamental potential and appropriate strategies for post-crisis management, as detailed above. This guideline can be adapted to individual contexts by incorporating or omitting specific elements.



## Next steps

The project brought together participants from 12 organizations, from Estonia, Sweden and Georgia. All of the participant' organizations had experience with managing a variety of crises, enabling us to collectively build upon the vast knowledge. As the creation of such network was as important as conceptualizing post-crisis learning, **helping the participants to keep in touch** is one of the most important next steps. For this, we have since the beginning of the meetings, encouraged sharing experiences and thoughts on the topic.

It is also important for us to **find next possible financing opportunities** to carry on with advancing the culture of post-crisis learning, jointly with the participant organizations. Furthermore, since the lessons learnt from the project are also important from the point of view of advancing the scientific understanding of post-crisis learning, we are also **considering gathering more data**, perhaps in the form of qualitative research, to be able to publish our findings in a scientific journal.

Lastly, we will openly communicate our findings in designated blog and social media posts, and in meetings with relevant stakeholders. Since the project allowed us to take the first steps in conceptualizing together with the network, there are many opportunities for further collaboration.



Photos: TPCL project meetings (2024)  
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This concept paper describes the activities of the “Triangle Post-Crisis Learning” project, with activities occurring throughout 2024. The paper is also a preliminary conceptualization of the experiences with local level post-crisis learning in Sweden, Estonia and Georgia.

The “Triangle Post-Crisis Learning” project and the concept paper have been funded by Swedish Institute. The project partners were Malmö University (Sweden, lead partner), NGO Crisis Research Centre (Estonia) and NGO Youth Supreme Council (Georgia).

The project focused on bringing together a network of representatives of local level organisations from the three countries, with emphasis on personell responsible for some aspects of crisis management.

The following local level actors took part of the project activities, whilst creating a specialized network:

#### Sweden / Sverige

- Malmö City
- Municipality of Åstorp

#### Estonia / Eesti

- Municipality of Saaremaa
- Municipality of Hiiumaa
- Pärnu City
- Rescue Depot of Kärđla (Rescue Board)
- Tallinn City (Northern Tallinn Administration)

#### Georgia / საქართველო

- Batumi City Hall
- Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University
- Bureau of Enforcement
- Council of Khelvachauri Municipality
- Supreme Election Commission of Autonomous Republic of Ajara