

**PRESS BACKGROUNDER**  
Understanding Risk Europe Conference



**UR** Understanding  
Risk Europe

Bucharest, November 27 – 29, 2019

Across the European Union (EU), climate and disaster risks are on the rise. Over the last four decades, natural disasters in the region caused [economic losses in excess of EUR 511 billion](#) (71% of which were non-insured) and more than 91,000 casualties. From more destructive flood events and worsening wildfire seasons to looming seismic risk from aging housing and infrastructure, disaster impacts are increasingly a policy priority among governments in the European Union, civil society organizations, and affected communities.

Romania, for example, has experienced 13 earthquakes over the last century that have caused 2,630 deaths and affected more than 400,000 people, with damage from the 1977 earthquake alone exceeding [EUR 1.8 billion](#). Moreover, disasters like these also disproportionately impact the poor. An upcoming World Bank regional study found that impacts to well-being – a measurement that accounts for wealth inequality – are nearly three times higher than current estimates that focus exclusively on asset losses, and revealed that up to 7 percent of Bucharest residents could be immediately pushed into poverty if the region was hit by a moderate earthquake today.

With these challenges in mind, over 300 experts and practitioners from Europe and across the world are gathering in Bucharest from November 27-29 for the [2019 Understanding Risk Europe Conference](#) (UR Europe). This unique forum explores how technology and innovation can improve our understanding of climate and disaster risk to better guide policies and investments and create more resilient societies.

The UR Europe event is convened by [Understanding Risk](#) (UR), a global community of 9,000 experts and practitioners active in the creation, communication, and use of disaster risk information. Members representing NGOs, governments, tech companies, academia, and beyond share knowledge and experience, collaborate, and discuss innovations in risk assessment. The community convenes every two years at UR Global Forums to highlight groundbreaking work,

facilitate nontraditional partnerships, and showcase new technical know-how in disaster risk identification, and also holds smaller spinoff events at the municipal, national and regional levels.

Improving the way risk information is gathered, analyzed, and communicated is critical to preparing for disasters. UR Europe will feature best practices from neighboring regions, and explore how disruptive technologies are accelerating disaster risk management.

Some innovations are already enabling new partnerships between governments and civil society organizations, with support from the World Bank and the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery ([GFDRR](#)). In [Romania](#), for example, a software tool developed by [Code for Romania](#), a local civic tech community, is enabling the government to [better direct resources and volunteers](#) in the event of a major earthquake or other disaster. Make Better, another civic organization in Romania, helped identify more than 8,000 residents of Class 1 buildings that are in [severe danger of collapse from earthquakes](#), highlighting the importance of [actionable risk information](#) in creating effective disaster risk management policies.

*“With some of the highest seismic and climate risks in the European Union, Romania is fast becoming a regional leader in disaster risk management,” says **Tatiana Proskuryakova, the World Bank’s Country Manager for Romania and Hungary.** “Through innovative technology and strong partnerships between development organizations, civil society, and government at various levels, Romania is proving that we can effectively reduce climate and disaster risk in the European Union.”*

Throughout the European Union, efforts are underway to harness the power of risk information to strengthen community resilience. In **Romania**, the World Bank is partnering with the City of Bucharest and providing technical assistance to identify sustainable and accelerated methods to improve the performance of the city’s [Seismic Risk Reduction Program](#). In **Bulgaria**, the World Bank is providing advisory services to the government to support its [Flood Risk Management Plans](#) by defining risk areas and identifying measures in line with EU Flood Directives. In **Greece**, Thessaloniki citizens teamed up with the local government and GFDRR to [crowdsource safer routes to and from schools](#), harnessing open data principles to better inform the public about natural hazards. And in **Poland**, the World Bank has mobilized funds for the [Odra-Vistula Flood Management Project](#), which aims to enhance flood protection infrastructure and related measures that will protect 5 million people from the harmful effects of floods.

Ultimately, these and other innovative approaches explored at UR Europe will help provide decision makers with robust information on climate and disaster risks to inform comprehensive disaster risk management policies.

*“With a new national-level risk assessment in place, Romania is taking proactive steps to better understand the hazards it faces in the coming decades, and is sharing this information with all EU member states through digital platforms,” says **Ms. Proskuryakova.** “At UR Europe, we’ll be looking to catalyze and scale up this kind of forward-looking collaboration to help improve Europe’s resilience in the face of growing climate and disaster risk.”*

This conference is hosted by the World Bank, GFDRR, and the Government of Romania, each working at the forefront of understanding and managing growing risks from climate change and natural disasters.

**Media contact: Ana-Maria Catauta**, Communications Officer, The World Bank | [acatauta@worldbank.org](mailto:acatauta@worldbank.org) | +40 21 201 03 11