

The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from most European countries, with a total of more than 6 million individual members, most notably across the different fields and levels of public administrations and services. Founded in 1990, CESI is a recognised European sectoral social partner and advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU.

Key messages

1. Public services are the backbone of European resilience

Effective crisis preparedness depends on strong public administrations and well-functioning public services. Health care, civil protection, education, social services and public administration systems ensure societal continuity during crises. Without adequately staffed, trained and equipped public services, EU preparedness strategies risk remaining largely theoretical.

2. Investment in the public sector workforce is essential

Europe faces growing staff shortages in key public services due to ageing workforces, recruitment gaps and rising service demands. Sustainable recruitment, retention, training and knowledge transfer must become a central pillar of Europe's resilience architecture.

3. Preparedness must be streamlined across public policy governance

Crisis preparedness should not be treated as an exceptional response but as a permanent element across public policy governance. Public administrations should integrate risk anticipation, crisis planning and resilience-building into policy design, budgeting and service delivery.

4. Public administrations and services must coordinate whole-of-society preparedness

Crisis preparedness requires cooperation between EU institutions, national governments, regional authorities, emergency services, the private sector and civil society. Public administrations play a central coordinating role in ensuring coherence and effectiveness.

5. Protecting democratic institutions is part of resilience

Preparedness must safeguard democratic institutions, the rule of law and public trust. Public administrations are essential in countering disinformation, hybrid threats and external interference.

6. Strategic public investment must support resilience and autonomy

Public procurement and investment must reinforce resilient supply chains, quality employment and Europe's strategic autonomy while maintaining transparency, labour rights and fair competition.

7. Public administrations and services must help bridging gaps between research and operations

With innovation and knowledge as key enablers of preparedness, public administrations must strengthen cooperation between research, authorities and operational services and ensure that new technologies are effectively implemented in practice.

Policy context

CESI welcomes the EU's Preparedness Union Strategy of March 2025, preceded by the Niinistö Report on Preparedness and Readiness, at a time when Europe has recently been facing or still faces multiple overlapping crises, including migration pressures, terrorism, the Covid-19 pandemic, geopolitical instability, climate change and cyber threats.

Crisis preparedness and resilience must be understood not only as technical risk management, but as a democratic, social and economic stability project. It must be permanent, cross-border and grounded in solidarity rather than based on reactive austerity measures.

At the centre of this effort are public administrations and public services and their staff, which form the operational backbone of preparedness and resilience. They are not only implementers of preparedness policies, but the central actors enabling resilience for people, businesses and societies. Strengthening public services, investing in the workforce, embedding preparedness across governance and ensuring coordinated action must therefore be at the heart of the EU's crisis preparedness agenda.

However, demographic developments – particularly population ageing and the shrinking working-age population – combined with a shortage of skills and qualified professionals are placing increasing pressure on the workforce and service delivery capacity of public services across the EU, notably in health care, long-term care, education and broader welfare systems.

Without capable public institutions and without adequately staffed, properly trained and well-equipped personnel, preparedness strategies risk remaining largely theoretical and declaratory rather than effective.

Priorities for public administrations & services in effective & efficient crisis preparedness & resilience

1. Public administrations and services are the backbone of European resilience

Public administrations and services ensure continuity, stability and protection in times of crisis. From healthcare systems managing pandemics to civil protection responding to disasters and social services supporting vulnerable populations, they provide the infrastructure that sustains society and the economy. Their role goes beyond service delivery. Specifically, public administrations and services:

- ensure continuity of governance and essential services,
- maintain critical infrastructure,
- coordinate crisis response, and
- support economic stability for businesses and workers.

However, increasing pressure from demographic change, rising demand and complex risks is weakening this backbone. Strengthening public administrations and services must therefore be a core pillar of EU resilience policy. This also spans to their HR policies and the employment and working conditions of their personnel.

2. Investment in the public sector workforce is essential

Human capacity is a decisive factor in crisis preparedness. However, across Europe, public administrations and services face ageing workforces, recruitment shortages, skills gaps in critical sectors and increasing service demands¹. Without targeted action, this risks undermining institutional capacity. Investments must therefore focus on:

- strategic workforce planning,
- sustainable recruitment and retention policies,
- continuous professional development and reskilling,
- knowledge transfer between generations, and
- improving working conditions and attractiveness of public service careers.

EU initiatives on crisis preparedness will remain ineffective unless matched by long-term investment in people delivering public services.

3. Preparedness must be streamlined across public policy governance

As a cross-sectional issue, crisis preparedness and resilience must be streamlined and embedded into the core functioning of public administrations and services across sectors rather than treated as a reactive or exceptional policy area. This requires, across sectors:

- integrating risk assessment into policymaking,
- aligning budgeting with resilience objectives,
- embedding crisis scenarios into planning processes, and
- ensuring continuity of essential services.

Public administrations and services must shift from reactive crisis management to anticipatory governance, ensuring that resilience becomes a structural feature of public policy.

4. Public administrations and services must coordinate whole-of-society preparedness

Crisis preparedness and resilience requires coordinated action across all levels of governance and society. Public administrations and services are uniquely positioned to act as central coordinators. They must be enabled to:

- connect EU, national, regional and local levels,
- coordinate emergency, civil protection, defence and regulatory actors,
- facilitate cooperation with the private sector and civil society, and to
- ensure interoperability and shared planning frameworks.

Preparedness must be a whole-of-government and whole-of-society effort, with public administrations and services at its centre. Their capacity is pivotal to build trusted information-sharing systems, coordinate civil-military cooperation where relevant, organise preparedness exercises and support community-level resilience.

¹ Disclaimer – where applicable for military preparedness, while this position reflects a more civilian preparedness perspective: Reservists are vital to European security but should not replace professional armed forces or serve as a low-cost alternative. Their dual status creates risks—such as income loss, weaker social protection, and work-life imbalance—requiring specific safeguards. Greater reliance on reservists must not compensate for understaffing in regular forces. Instead, they should complement professional personnel. Strong protections are needed, including job security, income support, social security coordination, and health and safety measures, ideally through collective agreements. Attention to mental health, proper training, and reintegration is also essential, alongside active involvement of trade unions.

5. Protecting democratic institutions is part of resilience

Resilience must not only be conceived in operational terms but also in institutional and democratic dimensions. Public administrations and services play a key role in:

- safeguarding the rule of law,
- maintaining public trust,
- ensuring continuity of democratic processes,
- countering disinformation and hybrid threats, and
- protecting institutions from external interference.

In times of crisis, trust in public institutions becomes a critical asset. Strong, transparent and accountable public administrations are therefore essential to societal stability and democratic resilience.

6. Strategic public investment must support resilience and autonomy

Public procurement and investment are powerful tools to strengthen resilience and crisis preparedness. With public procurement representing around 15% of EU GDP, public administrations and services use public tendering to effectively reinforce resilient and diversified supply chains and support strategic sectors.

By taking “Made in Europe” approaches in public procurement, they could further should support European industrial resilience and strategic autonomy.

7. Public administrations and services must help bridging gaps between research and operations

Investment in technology, knowledge and innovation are key enablers of resilience and crisis preparedness. Public administrations and services must:

- strengthen cooperation between research, authorities and operational services,
- improve data sharing and risk monitoring,
- invest in forecasting tools and early warning systems,
- ensure technologies are effectively implemented in practice.

Bridging the gap between research and operations is essential to enhance real-world crisis response capacity.