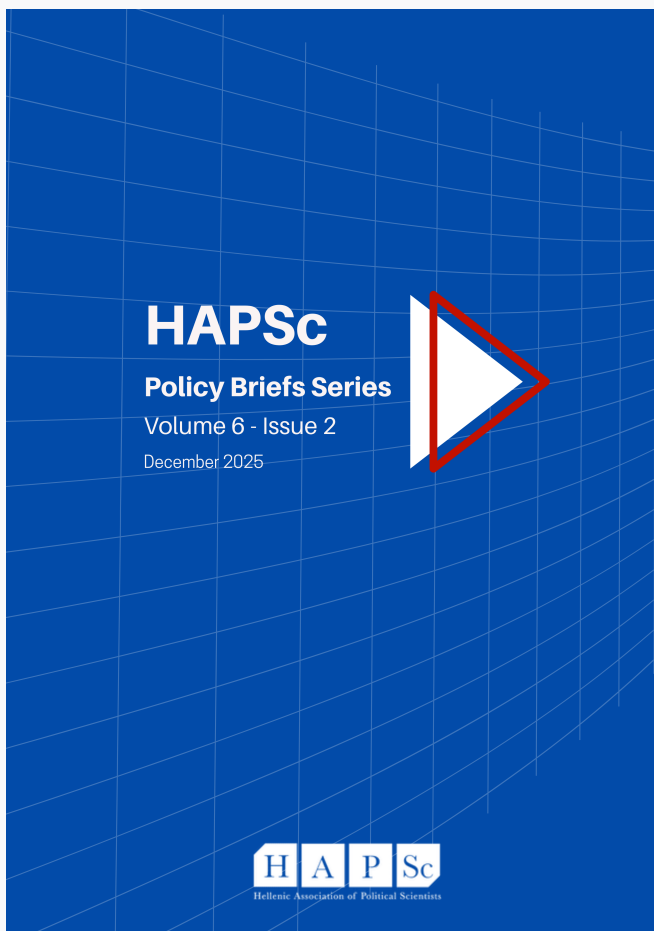


## HAPSc Policy Briefs Series

Vol 6, No 2 (2025)

HAPSc Policy Briefs Series



### Institutional, Legislative and Operational Evolution of Civil Protection in Greece: From the Early Regulations to the Establishment of an Integrated Disaster Management System

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doi: [10.12681/hapscpbs.45355](https://doi.org/10.12681/hapscpbs.45355)

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#### To cite this article:

Kostourou, V. (2025). Institutional, Legislative and Operational Evolution of Civil Protection in Greece: From the Early Regulations to the Establishment of an Integrated Disaster Management System. *HAPSc Policy Briefs Series*, 6(2), 8–17. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hapscpbs.45355>

# Institutional, Legislative and Operational Evolution of Civil Protection in Greece: From the Early Regulations to the Establishment of an Integrated Disaster Management System<sup>1</sup>

Vasiliki Kostourou<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

This paper examines the institutional and legislative evolution of civil protection in Greece, tracing its development from the first fragmented regulatory interventions to the gradual formation of a more comprehensive disaster management framework. Drawing on a historical-institutional approach and qualitative analysis of major legislative and organizational milestones, the study explores how civil protection evolved into a distinct field of public policy, shaped by changing administrative priorities, growing risk complexity, and the need for coordination among multiple levels of governance. Particular emphasis is placed on the establishment of key institutions, the progressive clarification of competences, and the increasing incorporation of prevention, preparedness, response, and citizen protection into the policy framework. The paper argues that the Greek civil protection system has gradually moved from a reactive and sectorally fragmented model towards a more structured and integrated approach to disaster management. At the same time, it highlights persistent challenges related to institutional coherence, operational coordination, and implementation capacity. In this context, the article also briefly discusses the main contemporary civil protection plans, presenting them as the operational expression of the broader institutional and legislative maturation of the system. Overall, the study contributes to a better understanding of the evolution of civil protection in Greece as a dynamic and increasingly strategic domain of public policy.

**Keywords:** Civil protection; Disaster management; Public policy; Institutional evolution; Legislative framework

## Introduction

Natural disasters, technological hazards, and complex crisis phenomena now constitute one of the most demanding challenges facing contemporary states, while the extent to which a society is able to remain resilient in the face of natural catastrophic events reflects its capacity to adapt to risk (Lekkas, 2000, p. 25). The frequency and intensity of extreme events, combined with climate change, the growing concentration of residential and productive activities, social inequality and sociodemographic trends, as well as the complexity of administrative systems, have elevated civil protection from a secondary administrative function to a critical field of strategic public policy. Its importance is not confined to addressing the immediate impacts of a disaster, but extends to

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<sup>1</sup> To cite this paper in APA style: Kostourou, V. (2025). Institutional, Legislative and Operational Evolution of Civil Protection in Greece: From the Early Regulations to the Establishment of an Integrated Disaster Management System. *HAPSc Policy Briefs Series*, 6(2), 8-17. <https://doi.org/10.12681/hapscpbs.45355>

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prevention, preparedness, risk management, recovery, and the overall strengthening of the resilience of both the state and society (Tierney, 2012).

Against this background, civil protection is directly linked to the safeguarding of human life, public health, the natural environment, critical infrastructure, social cohesion, and economic stability, since natural disasters do not only result in human losses and material damage, but may also affect the fiscal stability of local authorities, placing considerable strain on their capacity to exercise effective public policy (Stamati, 2025). This further highlights the need for a coherent and functional civil protection system, one capable not only of responding to emergency events, but also of preventing, planning, and coordinating. This need is particularly significant in the Greek case, where natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods, wildfires, and extreme weather events are intensifying and have, over time, placed considerable pressure on the administrative and institutional system, given that the country is especially vulnerable to such hazards, which are largely shaped by its complex geodynamic environment, diverse climate, and intricate geological and geomorphological characteristics (Mavroulis et al., 2025; Papadopoulou et al., 2025).

Within this context, the present article examines the institutional and legislative evolution of civil protection in Greece, from the earliest fragmented regulations to the gradual formation of a more integrated disaster management system, highlighting the main legislative turning points, organisational changes, and shifting administrative priorities that contributed to the emergence of civil protection as a distinct and strategic field of public policy. The analysis focuses both on the course of institutionalisation and the administrative maturation of the field, and on its connection with contemporary operational planning, which constitutes the functional expression of its institutional development. This approach aligns with the broader theoretical debate on the transformation of public policies, public administration, and systems of governance, according to which changes in public institutions and public policies may be interpreted as the outcome of multiple interacting factors, including developments in the external and internal environment, the emergence of new forms of governance and public administration (Kritas, 2025), institutional readjustment, administrative reorganisation, and the dynamics of Europeanisation (Kritas et al., 2025).

### **Civil Protection as a Field of Public Policy**

Civil protection today constitutes a complex and multidimensional field of public policy, one that extends far beyond the narrow understanding of state intervention following the occurrence of a disaster (Tierney, 2012). In its contemporary form, it encompasses an organised framework of institutions, procedures, tools, and mechanisms aimed at risk prevention, the preparedness of the state

apparatus, operational response, the protection of the population, and the recovery of affected areas (Coppola, 2015).

In this sense, civil protection is a field in which public administration, risk management, local governance, social participation, and environmental policy intersect. Its effectiveness depends not only on the legal allocation of responsibilities, but also on the quality of coordination, the clarity of roles, operational preparedness, and the capacity for cooperation across multiple levels of administration (Kalogiannidis et al., 2023). The incorporation of civil protection into the field of public policy is crucial, as it underscores that disasters are not merely emergency events, but issues that require institutional planning, preventive strategy, and sustained administrative capacity.

At the same time, civil protection assumes pivotal importance as a field of public policy precisely because it is called upon to address not only isolated risk events, but also complex, interconnected, and simultaneous crises. In this respect, civil protection plans constitute critical mechanisms of institutional preparedness, operational coordination, and administrative readiness, as they shape the framework within which the competent authorities are able to respond effectively to situations in which natural, biological, and human-induced hazards interact or unfold in parallel. Experience from such multi-hazard situations demonstrates that a single-risk approach is often inadequate, thereby making necessary a more holistic, multi-layered, and flexible understanding of planning and management (Mavroulis et al., 2022).

### **The Historical Evolution of the Institutional and Legislative Framework of Civil Protection in Greece**

The historical evolution of civil protection in Greece reflects the gradual transition from a fragmented and predominantly reactive framework for addressing natural disasters to a more organised, multi-level, and institutionally structured system of risk management. This trajectory was neither linear nor free from weaknesses; on the contrary, it was shaped through successive legislative interventions, organisational restructurings, and repeated efforts to improve coordination among the state actors involved. The first substantial step towards a more organised form of state intervention was marked by Law 1349/1983 and the establishment of the Earthquake Planning and Protection Organisation (EPPO/OASP). With the creation of the EPPO, the Greek state introduced for the first time a specialised body responsible for the planning and coordination of anti-seismic policy. This institutional choice was of particular importance, as it shifted the emphasis from ex post management of consequences towards a logic of prevention, scientific substantiation, and planning. In this sense,

the EPPO represented the first structured attempt at organised state prevention against a major natural hazard.

The next important phase in the formation of the institutional framework is associated with Law 2344/1995, by which the General Secretariat for Civil Protection (GSCP) was established. The creation of the GSCP essentially marked the recognition of civil protection as an autonomous field of public policy, with a central governmental body entrusted with coordination. At the same time, civil protection units were provided for within ministries, regions, and local administrative structures, thereby giving the system an initial institutional form of multi-level organisation. This development was critical, as it transformed civil protection from a secondary administrative function into a field of governance with both horizontal and vertical dimensions.

An important addition to this emerging framework was Law 2641/1998 on Popular Civil Defence, through which citizen participation in civil defence and civil protection activities was incorporated more explicitly. The creation of structures at the local level highlighted the social dimension of civil protection and the need to mobilise local communities as a factor of preparedness and resilience. Although this regulation did not in itself establish a new administrative model, it strengthened the logic of social participation and contributed to broadening the field beyond the narrow confines of state administration.

A decisive legislative milestone was Law 3013/2002, which constitutes the principal institutional pillar of the Greek civil protection system. This law sought to organise the field in a more systematic manner, through the expansion of the responsibilities of the General Secretariat for Civil Protection, the formal establishment of prevention and preparedness plans, and the creation of civil protection units at all sub-levels of administration. The significance of Law 3013/2002 lies in the fact that it attempted to impart greater coherence to the system by incorporating not only the response to emergency incidents, but also prevention, planning, and administrative preparedness. In this way, the institutional framework gradually moved away from the logic of fragmented reaction and came closer to a more integrated understanding of civil protection.

The legislative developments of the following years focused primarily on the operational specification of the framework that had already been established. Law 3384/2006 strengthened civil protection operational procedures, placing particular emphasis on the development of large-scale crisis management procedures and operational coordination. This intervention reflects the gradual maturation of the system, as attention shifted from general institutional organisation to effective functioning under crisis conditions. In a similar vein, Law 3613/2007 introduced the organised

evacuation of citizens as an institutionally established measure for prevention and population protection, thereby adding a critical dimension of operational preparedness, particularly in cases of imminent disasters. In this context, Article 18 of Law 3613/2007 refers specifically to the need to define and regulate the policy of early evacuation as part of the overall strategy for wildfire management (Zikeloglou et al., 2024).

The ‘Kallikratis’ administrative reform, introduced through Law 3852/2010, directly affected the field of civil protection, as it reorganised local government and strengthened the role of regions and municipalities in crisis management. Civil protection thus became more closely linked to local and regional governance, reinforcing the logic of proximity, decentralisation, and multi-level responsibility. This development was particularly significant, since natural disasters occur in specific places and require the immediate mobilisation of actors located close to the risk environment. At the same time, however, it also highlighted the longstanding need for better coordination between central government and local authorities.

Subsequently, Law 4249/2014 attempted a further reorganisation of the civil protection system through the establishment of central coordinating bodies and the strengthening of coordination among the actors involved. This legislative intervention reflected the recognition that the effectiveness of state action depends not only on the existence of formal competences, but also on the capacity for interoperability among administrative, operational, and support structures. Accordingly, emphasis shifted once again towards coordination effectiveness as a critical precondition for the system’s overall functionality.

The most substantial recent turning point came with Law 4662/2020, which introduced a modern civil protection system with a clearer orientation towards integrated risk and crisis management. Within this framework, new structures were institutionalised, including the National Mechanism for Crisis Management and Risk Response, the National Operations and Crisis Management Coordination Centre (ESKEDIK), as well as regional coordinating bodies. This law marked the transition to a model that is not confined to post-event response, but instead incorporates risk management, prevention, preparedness, and operational coordination within a single unified framework.

This development was further reinforced by Presidential Decree 70/2021, through which the Ministry of Climate Crisis and Civil Protection was established. The elevation of civil protection to the level of a distinct ministry was of particular institutional and political significance, as it reflected the increased importance now attributed to the management of natural hazards, crises, and the impacts of

climate change. This new institutional architecture embodies the view that civil protection no longer constitutes a peripheral or secondary state function, but rather a strategic field of public policy.

Finally, the recent interventions introduced by Law 5075/2023 and Law 5214/2025 demonstrate the continuing effort to adapt the civil protection system to the demands of the contemporary era. These provisions move in the direction of updating the institutional framework, emphasising resilience, further improving coordination, and incorporating new risks and challenges. In this way, the institutional edifice of civil protection acquires a more dynamic character, responding not only to the lessons of the past but also to the complex conditions of the present and the future.

Overall, the historical evolution of the institutional and legislative framework of civil protection in Greece reveals a trajectory of progressive institutionalisation, organisational specialisation, and administrative maturation. From the first fragmented regulations of 1959 to the contemporary model of integrated risk management, the Greek state has sought to establish a system capable of meeting the requirements of prevention, preparedness, immediate response, and the protection of citizens. Despite longstanding weaknesses in terms of institutional coherence, operational interoperability, and implementation effectiveness, the overall trajectory of the field demonstrates the transformation of civil protection into an increasingly strengthened and strategically critical area of public policy.

**Table 1. Main Legislation on Civil Protection in Greece**

Year / Legislation	Institutional arrangement	Key characteristics	Significance for civil protection
Law 1349/1983	Establishment of the <b>Earthquake Planning and Protection Organisation (EPPO)</b>	Creation of a specialised body for the planning and coordination of anti-seismic policy. Emphasis on prevention, preparedness and scientific documentation.	Marked the first organised state policy of prevention against natural hazards.
Law 2344/1995	Establishment of the <b>General Secretariat for Civil Protection (GSCP)</b>	Creation of a central governmental body for civil protection coordination. Establishment of civil protection units in ministries, regions and local administrative structures.	Constituted the first institutional basis for the organised structuring of civil protection policy.
Law 2641/1998	<b>Popular Civil Defence</b>	Strengthening of structures involving citizens in civil defence and civil protection activities. Creation of structures at local level.	Reinforced the social dimension of civil protection and the participation of local communities and citizens.
Law 3013/2002	Upgrading of the civil protection system	Expansion of the responsibilities of the GSCP, formal establishment of prevention and preparedness plans, creation of civil protection units at all levels of administration.	Constituted the basic institutional pillar of the Greek civil protection system.

Law 3384/2006	Specialisation of operational civil protection procedures	Development of procedures for the management of large-scale crises and operational coordination.	Strengthened operational coordination.
Law 3613/2007	Organised evacuation of citizens	Determination of procedures and responsibilities for the preventive evacuation of citizens in cases of impending disasters.	Institutionally established a measure for the preventive protection of the population.
Law 3852/2010	Administrative reform “Kallikratis”	Reorganisation of local government and strengthening of the role of regions and municipalities in crisis management.	Reinforced the multi-level dimension of civil protection in disaster management.
Law 4249/2014	Reorganisation of the civil protection system	Creation of central coordinating bodies and strengthening of coordination among the actors involved.	Promoted the improvement of operational coordination and the responsiveness of state intervention.
Law 4662/2020	Modern civil protection system	Establishment of the <b>National Mechanism for Crisis Management and Risk Response</b> . Creation of the <b>National Operations and Crisis Management Coordination Centre (ESKEDIK)</b> and regional coordinating bodies.	Marked the transition towards integrated risk and crisis management.
Presidential Decree 70/2021	Establishment of the <b>Ministry of Climate Crisis and Civil Protection</b>	Upgrading of civil protection to the level of an autonomous ministry.	Reinforced the institutional importance of civil protection in the management of natural hazards and crises.
Law 5075/2023 & Law 5214/2025	Amendments to the institutional framework	Updating of the system, emphasis on resilience, strengthening of coordination, and incorporation of new risks.	Reflect the continuous effort to modernise the framework in response to contemporary crises and new forms of disaster risk.

### From the Institutional Framework to Contemporary Operational Planning: The Main Civil Protection Plans in Force Today

The historical evolution of the institutional and legislative framework of civil protection in Greece is reflected not only in the establishment of bodies, the allocation of responsibilities, and the institutionalisation of coordination mechanisms, but also in the gradual development of a more systematic operational planning framework. The maturation of the institutional framework progressively led to the formulation of specialised plans, which function as practical instruments for the implementation of civil protection policy. Through these plans, the general legislative provisions are translated into specific procedures for prevention, preparedness, response, and risk management.

A central position within the current operational system is occupied by the Xenokratis Plan (Ministerial Decision 1299/2003), which constitutes the general framework for the management of emergency situations and defines the main axes for the organisation and coordination of the actors

involved at national, regional, and local level, introducing a general framework for the effective management of disaster events, the protection of the life, health, and property of citizens, as well as the protection of the natural environment. The plan sets out the foundations for the “planning and action” of the state mechanism at all levels of administration for the management of emergencies arising from the occurrence of hazards, while also specifying the services involved, as well as the authorities responsible for coordinating Civil Protection at all levels (Lekkas et al., 2010: 1251)

In the more specific operational plans, the Enceladus Plan elaborates the management of seismic risk, placing emphasis on operational preparedness, the coordination of the competent authorities, and rapid response in the event of an earthquake. The Dardanos Plan concerns floods and structures both the prevention and management of flood-related phenomena, providing for early warning measures and the mobilisation of the co-competent services. Equally important are the Iolaos Plan and the Voreas Plan, which focus respectively on wildfires and extreme winter phenomena. The former strengthens cooperation among civil protection authorities, the fire service, and local government for the prevention and management of wildfires, while the latter provides for preparedness and intervention procedures in cases of snowfall and frost, particularly with regard to ensuring traffic circulation and operational continuity. Overall, these plans constitute the functional expression of the institutional evolution of civil protection in Greece, confirming the transition from a largely fragmented model of reaction to a more coherent and structured system of disaster management (Mavroulis et al., 2022).

**Table 2. Civil Protection Plans in Greece**

Plan	Type of hazard	Objective of the plan	Key characteristics
<b>Xenokratis</b>	General disaster management plan	Organisation of the civil protection system and coordination of the actors involved	Defines roles and responsibilities at national, regional and local level, and establishes procedures for mobilisation and coordination
<b>Enceladus</b>	Earthquakes	Management of the consequences of seismic events	Provides for procedures for information, mobilisation and coordination of the competent bodies for the response to seismic disasters and earthquakes
<b>Dardanos</b>	Floods	Prevention and management of flood risks	Includes measures for early warning, public information and the mobilisation of the competent services for the response to flood events
<b>Iolaos</b>	Wildfires	Coordination of prevention and response actions for wildfires	Defines procedures for cooperation among the Fire Service, local government and other bodies for the management of forest fires
<b>Voreas</b>	Snowfall and frost	Management of severe winter weather phenomena	Provides for procedures for preparedness and intervention in order to ensure accessibility and traffic circulation during severe weather conditions

## Conclusions

The analysis of the institutional and legislative evolution of civil protection in Greece demonstrates that this field has been shaped gradually through a long process of institutionalisation, organisational adaptation, and administrative maturation. Over time, through its legislative interventions, the Greek state sought to move from a predominantly reactive model for addressing natural disasters towards a more structured and integrated system of risk management. This trajectory was associated with the creation of new institutions, the clarification of responsibilities, the strengthening of administrative coordination, and the gradual incorporation of the principles of prevention, preparedness, response, and population protection into the core of public policy.

Civil protection gradually emerged as an autonomous and strategic field of public policy, linked not only to disaster response, but also to administrative resilience, the protection of critical infrastructure, the functioning of local government, and overall social and economic stability. This evolution reaches its clearest expression in the most recent institutional framework, particularly following Law 4662/2020 and the establishment of the Ministry of Climate Crisis and Civil Protection, both of which reflect the transition towards a more holistic model of risk and crisis management. Nevertheless, this historical trajectory does not eliminate the existence of longstanding challenges. Institutional coherence, effective interoperability among the actors involved, operational preparedness at all levels of administration, and the consistent implementation of the framework continue to constitute critical issues. In this respect, the existence of contemporary operational plans, such as Xenokratis, Enceladus, Dardanos, Iolaos, and Voreas, represents the functional manifestation of the institutional evolution of the field and the principal means through which legislative provisions are translated into administrative and operational practice.

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