

ECA report 2018/25: [Floods Directive: progress in assessing risks, while planning and implementation need to improve](#)

Background information:

Floods can cause injury and loss of life, considerable economic costs, and damage to the environment and cultural heritage. Serious floods have become more frequent in Europe. In recent years, more than twice as many flash floods of medium to large magnitude have been registered as in the late eighties. Climate change is an aggravating factor, triggering changes in precipitation and weather patterns, sea level rises and, consequently, more frequent and severe floods. Several phenomena, such as coastal erosion, storms at sea, and high tides and winds pushing tides into the land, heighten the risk of flooding in coastal areas. In response to the rising incidence of flooding, the EU adopted in 2007 the Floods Directive.

Audit approach and methodology:

We sought to determine whether flood prevention, protection and preparedness under the Floods Directive were based on sound analysis and whether the approach employed was likely to be effective. We examined whether the Floods Directive had positive overall effects in establishing a framework for flood-related action and whether Member States managed appropriately the financial resources used and implemented their Flood Risk Management Plans well; and if they adequately considered some of the major future challenges. Between October and December 2017, we conducted audit visits in selected river basins in the following eight Member States: Slovenia, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Romania, Bulgaria, Austria and the Czech Republic. In those river basins, we also inspected 31 co-financed flood-related projects on site to assess their compliance with the Floods Directive and the Flood Risk Management Plans.

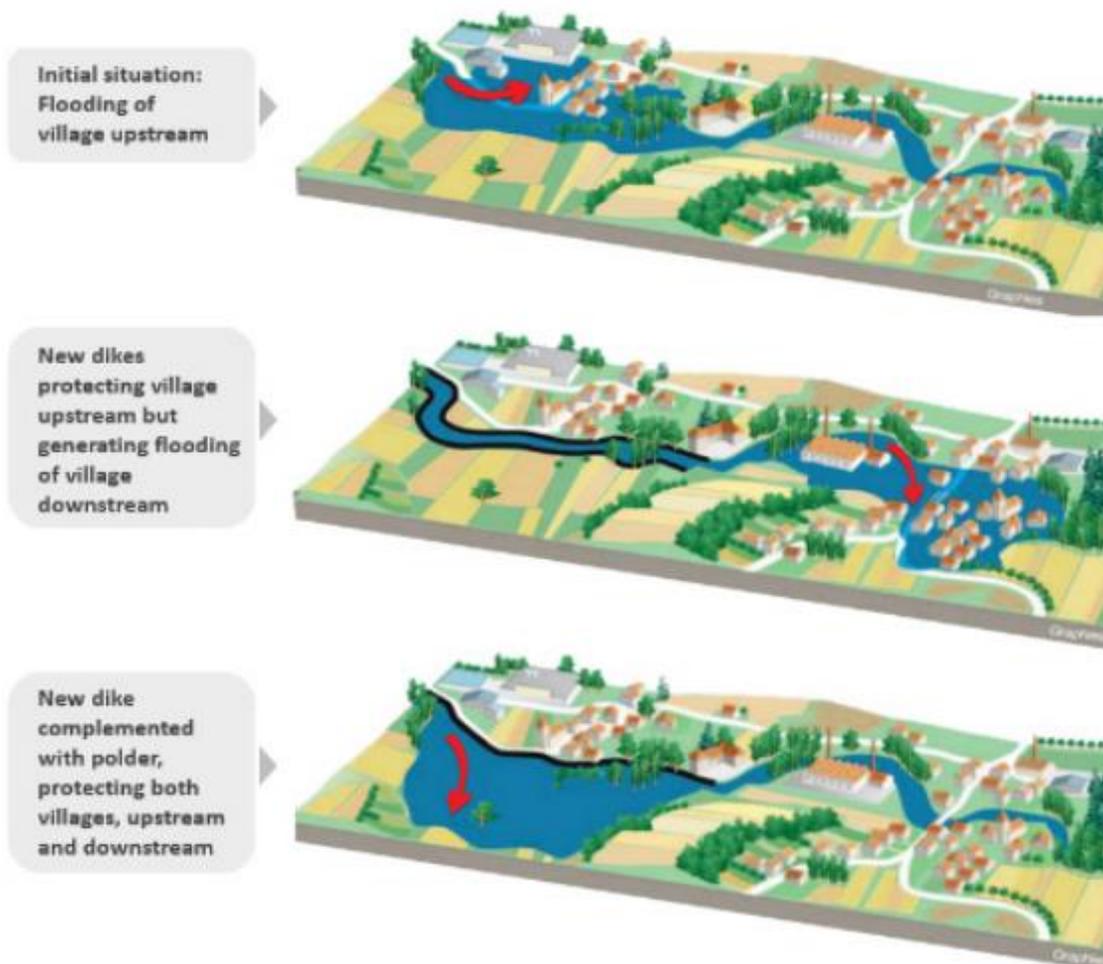
Our findings:

We found that the Floods Directive had positive effects overall, but that the implementation of flood-related action suffers from weaknesses in allocating funding. We observed that major future challenges remain concerning the much fuller integration of climate change, flood insurance and spatial planning into flood risk management. Green infrastructure projects are a cost-efficient means of reducing flood risk, but the plans of two thirds of the Member States visited did not focus on green infrastructure. Looking to the challenges for the future, we found that the Member States visited could not factor in the impact of climate change on the magnitude, frequency and location of floods.

Good practice identified:

Green¹ and grey² infrastructure can be used in combination to solve flood issues at river basin scale.

The figure below is an illustration of an approach to avoid downstream flooding.



Source: Agence française pour la biodiversité – Graphies.

¹ Green infrastructure: A planned network of natural or semi-natural spaces, in an urban or rural setting, designed to tackle climatic challenges while supporting or restoring natural and ecological processes. An example of green infrastructure, in the context of this report, is the restoration of a floodplain to prevent flooding of vulnerable areas.

² Traditional flood protection solutions include dams, dikes, channels, storm surge defences and barriers in general.