

4th B&H
WATER
CONGRESS

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→ **Conclusions and
recommendations**

November 19-20th
Hotel Holiday, Sarajevo
Bosnia and Herzegovina

2024

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 4th B&H Water Congress was held on 19 and 20 November 2024 in Sarajevo. The Congress gathered 124 water experts from BiH and the region, who presented their papers in the course of six sessions over two days. Also held was a panel discussion entitled **“Disaster Risk Reduction”**, motivated by the recent flash floods and landslides.

The largest share of the 46 papers concerns the areas of water supply and wastewater disposal. This shows that in the past couple of years, the professionals were mainly involved in the waterworks area, from sensitivity and protection of water sources, through reduction of non-revenue water, to wastewater and sludge treatment. Also presented were the recently completed master plan for treatment of urban wastewater in BiH in compliance with EU standards, the solution that has been installed in Zagreb, and the approach to addressing wastewater treatment in Banja Luka.

The group of papers on flood and drought risks covers aspects from hydrologic and other data, through flood hazard and risk mapping and forecasting in real time, to specifically designed buildings.

Covered in several papers were environmental and monitoring aspects, including pressures identified on the condition of surface water and groundwater, under BiH’s water management plans aligned with EU directives that were adopted a long time ago.

A number of papers discuss water as a resource and climate change, including overviews of work methodologies of several international organizations, as well as the ongoing projects to upgrade education in BiH and the region.

Finally, hydropower was covered in only three papers, along with the question being raised whether the construction of hydropower plants has truly come to an end in BiH. It is up to the professionals to conduct objective analyses, research, and assessments, then to explain and to make proposals, while it is up to the people and the authorities to decide. Blocking is not an option.

The attention of the media and the public has increased greatly due to the recent extreme weather events and the authorities’ response to them, as well as the weaknesses and inefficiencies in water supply, collection and treatment of wastewater, treatment of protected zones of drinking water sources and associated risks, legislative-economic and institutional relations in all aspects of water management, and rising activism and impact of the civil society and the international nongovernmental sector on protection of nature and general environmental condition in BiH.

Eleven prominent experts took part in the panel discussion about **reducing disaster risks**.

The conclusions of the panel stress the need for improving coordination and enhancing capacities of the domestic institutions, along with the use of EU civil protection mechanisms as an important resource.

It is crucial to develop a domestic knowledge database for the preparation and implementation of future projects. Also stressed was the need to improve early warning systems and communications, with priority attached to educating local communities about the risks and preventative measures.

Although significant results have been achieved in river flood protection, flash floods continue to pose a challenge that requires long term adaptation and intersectoral cooperation aimed at sustainable solutions.

Already in the earliest stages of preparing spatial planning documentation, it is necessary to conduct detailed analyses of potential risks at certain locations. Based on these analyses, what needs to be defined are optimal ways to utilize space, with a view to minimizing potential risks, especially in the context of the increasingly pronounced climate change. Legislative amendments will also be inevitable.

The communities’ health resilience is crucial, along with stressing the need for mental health support to be provided to the affected population and for education on health risks.

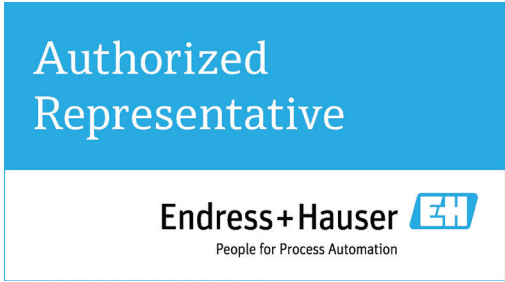
It was stressed that the integration of geospatial information systems in the health care sector could improve the response to crisis situations.

Emphasized was the possibility of accelerating infrastructural projects through access to EU funds and through legislative reform. This builds up the society’s resilience and reduces disaster risk.

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