



Lessons Learnt

ENG4VOL

Lessons learnt in engagement civil protection volunteers
KA210-ADU-000250776

Editor(s):	Iliana Korma
Responsible Partner:	Pompiers de l'Urgence Internationale
Status-Version:	Final version
Date:	21/04/2026
NA Distribution:	Internal

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



**Co-funded by
the European Union**



Project Number:	2024-1-FR01-KA210-ADU-000250776
Project Title:	ENG4VOL

Title of Deliverable:	Lessons Learnt in Engagement of Civil Protection Volunteers
Date of Delivery to the Coordinator:	21/04/2026

Workpackage responsible for the Deliverable:	Activity 6 Lessons learnt in engagement volunteers in Civil Protection
Editor(s):	Iliana Korma
Contributor(s):	Marta Burgos González, Christos Christoforidis, Zoi Agathangelidou, H. Georgiou, Anthony Carcel, Philippe Besson
Reviewer(s):	All partners
Approved by:	Pompiers de l'Urgence Internationale

Abstract:	This deliverable synthesizes findings from the ENG4VOL project to provide actionable strategies for managing and retaining civil protection volunteers across Europe. Based on surveys and case studies from Spain, France, Greece, and Hungary, it identifies key motivators while highlighting critical barriers such as financial burdens and lack of institutional recognition. The report concludes with practical recommendations and best practices to help organizations build more inclusive and resilient volunteer frameworks.
Keyword List:	Engagement, civil protection, volunteers, skills, motivations, lessons learnt.

Disclaimer:



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



Document Description

Document Revision History

<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Modifications Introduced</i>	
		<i>Modification Reason</i>	<i>Modified by</i>
v.01	27/11/25	Creation of the Table of Content	Anthony Carcel
v.02	09/04/26	Contribution to specific part by each partner	All partners
v.03	30/04/26	Creation of the Case studies	All partners
v.04	15/05/26	Consolidation of all parts	Iliana Korma
v.1	22/05/26	Final Version	Anthony Carcel

Disclaimer:



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
Introduction	8
1.1. Link with Previous Deliverables and Knowledge Base (Activity 5)	8
1.2. Method of Synthesis and Validation	8
2. Key Findings from the State of the Art and Survey	9
2.1 Purpose and Scope	9
2.2 Overview of Survey Data: Profile of Civil Protection Volunteers	10
2.2.1 Demographic and Organizational Characteristics	10
2.2.2 Roles and Level of Engagement	10
2.3. Motivations, Expectations, and Roles of Volunteers	10
2.3.1 Core Motivations for Engagement	10
2.3.2 Expectations and Fulfilment	11
2.4. Insights from Desk Research: Models of Engagement, Trends, and Barriers	11
2.4.1 Models of Volunteer Engagement	11
2.4.2 Emerging Trends	11
2.4.3 Structural Barriers	11
2.5. Training, Equipment, and Organizational Support	12
2.5.1 Training Quality and Adequacy	12
2.5.2 Equipment Provision	12
2.5.3 Organizational and Institutional Support	12
2.6. Inclusivity and Accessibility Findings	12
2.7. Common Challenges, Barriers, and Retention Risks	13
2.7.1 Key Challenges	13
2.7.2 Retention and Risk of Drop-out	13
2.8. Comparative Insights from Partner Countries	13
2.8.1 Comparative Country Analysis: Motivations, Team Experience, and Satisfaction	13
2.9. Key Messages and Implications for Future Actions	15
3. Lessons Learnt	16

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."





3.1 Volunteer Motivation & Retention	16
3.1.1 Evidence from the ENG4VOL Survey and Comparative Analysis	17
3.1.2 Lessons Learnt on Inclusive and Accessible Volunteering	19
3.1.3 Takeaway – Inclusivity, Accessibility & Diversity	20
3.2 Organisational Practices: Training, Recognition, Communication, Equipment	20
3.2.1 Evidence base from project findings	20
3.2.2 What works	21
3.2.3 Pain points and retention risks	22
3.2.4 Key Takeaway Box	23
3.3 Inclusivity, Accessibility, Diversity	23
3.3.1 Evidence from ENG4VOL Findings	23
3.3.2 Lessons Learnt on Inclusive and Accessible Volunteering	24
3.3.3 Key Takeaway	25
3.4 Comparative European Lessons (Cross-country Analysis)	25
3.4.1 Common themes across France, Greece, Hungary, and Spain	25
3.4.2 Differences by national context	26
3.4.3 Value of transnational exchange	27
3.4.4 Comparative European Lessons	27
4. Recommendations	28
4.1 Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations	28
4.1.1 Invest in Structured Training and Progressive Development	28
4.1.2 Build Recognition Into Everyday Organisational Culture	28
4.1.3 Remove Barriers to Participation	29
4.2 Recommendation for Public Institutions and Policy Makers	29
4.2.1 Strengthen Legal Recognition and Employment Protection for Volunteers	29
4.2.2 Ensure Institutional Support and Resource Stability	30
4.2.3 Promote Cross-Border Cooperation and European Collaboration	30
4.2.4 Top 3 Action Points for Public Institutions and Policy Makers	31
4.3 Recommendations for Volunteer Managers and Coordinators	31
4.3.1 Strengthen Structured Communication	31
4.3.2 Implement Proactive Burnout Prevention	31
4.3.3 Ensure Equal Access to Equipment and Resources	32
4.3.4 Strengthen Recognition and Career Pathways	32

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."





4.3.5 Promote Inclusive Leadership	32
4.3.6 Top 3 Action Points for Volunteer Managers and Coordinators	33
4.4 For Volunteers themselves (practical self-care and engagement tips)	33
5. Best Practices	35
6. Conclusion	57
6.1 Strategic Priorities for Sustainable Volunteer Engagement	58
6.2 Opportunities for EU and International Collaboration	59
6.3 Next Steps for the Consortium and Stakeholders	60
6.4 Three Key Messages	60
Annexes	61
Main tables from the survey	61
Table 2. Profile of Civil Protection Volunteers (Demographics and Experience)	61
Table 3. Main Motivations for Engaging in Civil Protection Volunteering	61
Table 4. Satisfaction, Support, and Perceived Value of Volunteering	62
Table 5. Main Challenges and Retention Risks Identified by Volunteers	62
Figure 1: Daily life of ESDP team (1)	38
Figure 2: Daily life of ESDP team (3)	
Figure 3: Daily life of ESDP team (2)	39
Figure 4: ESDP K9 volunteer team searching for missing persons in the aftermath of the DANA floods in Valencia, 2024.	42
Figure 5: ESDP K9 volunteer civilian help in the aftermath of the DANA floods in Valencia, 2024.	42
Figure 6: ESDP K9 volunteer team collaborating with PUI in the aftermath of the DANA floods in Valencia, 2024.	43
Figure 7: PUI medical visit before deployment	
Figure 8: PUI equipment preparation before deployment	44
Figure 9: PUI team briefing before deployment	
Figure 10: PUI team search and rescue on site in Türkiye, 2023.	44
Figure 11: PUI team search and rescue on site in Türkiye, 2023. (2)	45
Figure 12: PUI team search and rescue on site in Türkiye, 2023. (3)	45
Figure 13: PUI medical assistance during USAR training (2)	46
Figure 14: PUI medical assistance during USAR training	46
Figure 15: PUI internal IER in 2021, Swiss	48
Figure 16: Train crash site in central Greece, a few hours after the event.	49
Figure 17: Train crash site in central Greece, the morning after the event	50
Figure 18: Train crash site, damage assessment teams already working	52
Figure 19: Overview of the train crash site from above, two days after the event.	54
Figure 20: MRSZ fire management ÖTRA app	54

Disclaimer:



Figure 21/ MRSZ KMCS firefighters engaged in fire suppression operations in a mid-rise building.	56
Figure 22/ MRSZ equipment	57

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



**Co-funded by
the European Union**



Introduction

The Lessons Learnt in Engagement of Civil Protection Volunteers deliverable is the main outcome of the Activity 6 of ENG4VOL project (Lessons Learnt in Engagement Civil Protection Volunteers), funded by the Erasmus+ Programme under the Small-Scale Partnerships in Adult Education (KA210-ADU) action. This deliverable is explicitly designed as a practice-oriented output. While grounded in research evidence, its primary objective is to translate analytical findings into accessible, actionable guidance for practitioners working directly with civil protection volunteers. The document therefore prioritises clarity, synthesis, and relevance over exhaustive academic detail.

Each lesson identified responds to concrete challenges faced by volunteer managers, trainers, and coordinators, such as sustaining motivation over time, addressing resource and recognition gaps, fostering inclusive teams, and reducing the risk of volunteer drop-out. In this sense, the deliverable functions as a practical reference tool that can inform everyday organisational practices, training design, and strategic decision-making in civil protection volunteering.

1.1. Link with Previous Deliverables and Knowledge Base (Activity 5)

This deliverable is directly anchored in the results of Activity 5, *Research on the State of the Art of Volunteer Engagement in Civil Protection*, which provided the empirical and analytical foundation for the project. Deliverable A5 combined desk research, comparative case studies, and a transnational survey of civil protection volunteers and coordinators to map existing engagement models, motivations, challenges, and gaps across Europe.

Building on this evidence base, the present Lessons Learnt document does not introduce new data, but rather synthesises and prioritises the most relevant findings from A5. Particular attention is given to cross-cutting patterns emerging from the survey results and comparative analysis across partner countries. In doing so, A6 transforms the descriptive and analytical insights of A5 into consolidated lessons and transferable recommendations that can be applied across diverse organisational and national contexts.

1.2. Method of Synthesis and Validation

The synthesis presented in this deliverable is the result of an iterative and collaborative process involving all ENG4VOL partner organisations. Initial lessons were derived from a comparative review of A5 findings, including quantitative survey results and qualitative feedback from volunteers. These preliminary lessons were then discussed, refined, and validated through consortium meetings and peer-review exchanges, allowing partners from

Disclaimer:



France, Spain, Hungary, and Greece to assess their relevance and applicability across different civil protection systems.

This collective validation process ensured that the lessons presented are not limited to a single national or organisational perspective, but instead reflect shared challenges and good practices identified across contexts. The final set of lessons therefore represents a consensual, transnational synthesis of knowledge generated throughout the ENG4VOL project.

The following chapters present the key findings, distilled lessons, and practical recommendations for enhancing volunteer engagement and retention. By sharing these insights, ENG4VOL aims to strengthen the collective capacity of European civil society organizations to empower their volunteers and promote a resilient, well-prepared community of first responders.

2. Key Findings from the State of the Art and Survey

2.1 Purpose and Scope

This chapter provides a structured synthesis of the main findings emerging from Deliverable State of the Art in the Engagement of Volunteers in Civil Protection. Its objective is not to reproduce the full analysis, but to extract, rephrase, and consolidate the most policy and practice relevant insights in a concise and accessible manner. The document is designed to support trainers, civil protection organizations, public authorities, and project partners by highlighting transversal patterns, comparative insights across partner countries, and key lessons related to volunteer engagement, retention, inclusivity, and organizational support.

The synthesis integrates:

- Quantitative and qualitative survey findings (demographics, motivations, challenges, retention, inclusivity);
- Desk research insights on models of engagement, trends, and barriers;
- Comparative observations across partner countries;
- Key implications for training, equipment provision, and organizational practices.

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



2.2 Overview of Survey Data: Profile of Civil Protection Volunteers

2.2.1 Demographic and Organizational Characteristics

The ENG4VOL survey reached 123 respondents across ten European countries, with a strong representation from Greece, France, Hungary and Spain. The volunteer population surveyed is predominantly affiliated with non-governmental organizations, reflecting the central role of civil society in civil protection across Europe. Respondents are largely experienced volunteers: more than half report over four years of engagement, and nearly one-third have been active for more than a decade.

Men accounted for a larger share of responses compared to women. The age distribution is skewed towards middle-aged and older volunteers, with the largest group between 40 and 49 years old. This profile points to a mature and highly committed volunteer base, but also raises concerns regarding generational renewal and gender inclusivity.

2.2.2 Roles and Level of Engagement

Most respondents serve as frontline volunteers directly involved in emergency response, training, and logistics. A smaller but relevant share holds coordination or managerial roles. The high proportion of volunteers who have participated in real emergency situations indicates strong operational involvement and reinforces the relevance of their feedback on training quality, equipment, and organizational support.

2.3. Motivations, Expectations, and Roles of Volunteers

2.3.1 Core Motivations for Engagement

Across countries and demographic groups, motivations are strongly anchored in altruistic and community-oriented values. The desire to help the community and contribute to collective safety is the dominant driver, closely followed by personal interest in emergency response activities. Previous personal exposure to disasters also plays a significant role, particularly among long-term volunteers.

Secondary motivations differ by age and experience. Younger and newer volunteers more frequently cite learning opportunities, skill acquisition, and career development, while experienced volunteers emphasize ethical commitment, emotional fulfillment, and long-term identification with their role. Gender differences are also visible: women more often highlight empathy, emotional connection, and support for vulnerable populations, whereas men tend to emphasize operational and technical aspects.

Disclaimer:



2.3.2 Expectations and Fulfilment

Volunteers typically join civil protection organizations with expectations of meaningful contribution, adequate training, team cohesion, and recognition. Approximately three-quarters report that these expectations are met, particularly through hands-on training, real deployments, and strong team spirit. Where expectations are not fully met, the gaps relate mainly to insufficient equipment, limited institutional recognition, and difficulties reconciling volunteering with work and family life.

These findings suggest that while intrinsic motivation is strong, sustained engagement depends heavily on organizational conditions and external support frameworks.

2.4. Insights from Desk Research: Models of Engagement, Trends, and Barriers

2.4.1 Models of Volunteer Engagement

The desk research highlights several coexisting models of volunteer engagement in civil protection:

- Public administration–linked models, where volunteers are formally integrated into municipal or regional emergency systems;
- NGO-led models, in which civil society organizations act as the primary interface between volunteers and public authorities;
- Highly institutionalized and regulated models, characterized by standardized training, certification, and legal recognition.

Across these models, evidence consistently shows that clear role definitions, structured training pathways, and recognition mechanisms are associated with higher satisfaction and retention.

2.4.2 Emerging Trends

Recent literature points to increasing demand for volunteer involvement due to climate-related disasters and complex emergencies. At the same time, organizations face growing challenges in recruitment, availability, and skill matching. There is a clear shift from a narrow focus on volunteer management towards broader concepts of volunteer engagement, emphasizing motivation, well-being, and long-term commitment.

2.4.3 Structural Barriers

Barriers identified in the literature closely mirror survey findings: lack of resources, uneven legal recognition, insufficient psychosocial support, and limited institutional

Disclaimer:



investment. Organizational factors remain under-researched but are critical for understanding volunteer retention and effectiveness.

2.5. Training, Equipment, and Organizational Support

2.5.1 Training Quality and Adequacy

Training emerges as one of the strongest assets of civil protection volunteering. Most respondents rate training as adequate and of high quality, particularly those with longer experience and older age groups. Training is not only perceived as essential for operational readiness, but also as a key motivational and retention factor.

However, newer and younger volunteers report slightly lower satisfaction, suggesting the need for more tailored onboarding processes, mentoring schemes, and progressive learning pathways.

2.5.2 Equipment Provision

Access to appropriate equipment is a critical but unevenly addressed issue. While a majority of volunteers report receiving adequate equipment, a substantial minority lack essential gear or must cover costs themselves. This creates inequalities between volunteers and can negatively affect safety, motivation, and long-term engagement.

2.5.3 Organizational and Institutional Support

Volunteers generally report positive internal support and communication within their organizations. Nevertheless, support from external institutions—particularly legal recognition, justified work leave, and financial backing—remains inconsistent across countries. These gaps represent a major risk for retention and sustainability.

2.6. Inclusivity and Accessibility Findings

Inclusivity is recognized as an important value but is unevenly implemented in practice. Many organizations express general openness and non-discrimination, and some have introduced concrete measures related to gender equality, language support, disability access, and socio-economic inclusion. However, a significant share of volunteers are unsure about existing measures or perceive them as insufficient.

The persistent gender imbalance, limited accessibility adaptations, and financial barriers indicate that inclusivity often relies on informal goodwill rather than structured strategies. Strengthening inclusivity is not only a matter of fairness, but also of expanding the volunteer base and enhancing team diversity and resilience.

Disclaimer:



2.7. Common Challenges, Barriers, and Retention Risks

2.7.1 Key Challenges

The most frequently reported challenges include lack of resources and equipment, time constraints, internal communication issues, and emotional strain linked to emergency response. Financial burdens and bureaucratic obstacles further complicate engagement, particularly for younger volunteers and those with fewer resources.

2.7.2 Retention and Risk of Drop-out

While most volunteers have not considered leaving, nearly one-third have done so at some point. Time constraints, lack of recognition, emotional fatigue, and financial costs are the main drivers of potential disengagement. These risks are not evenly distributed: newer, younger, and female volunteers appear more vulnerable to drop-out due to competing demands and emotional pressure.

2.8. Comparative Insights from Partner Countries

Despite differences in governance models and institutional frameworks, strong convergences emerge across partner countries. Volunteers in Spain, France, Greece, and Hungary share similar motivations, expectations, and challenges. Differences mainly concern the degree of institutionalization, availability of resources, and consistency of legal support.

Highly regulated systems provide clarity and recognition but may limit flexibility, while NGO-led and decentralized models foster strong community ties but often suffer from resource constraints. Across all contexts, effective engagement depends on balancing structure with flexibility, and formal recognition with grassroots motivation.

2.8.1 Comparative Country Analysis: Motivations, Team Experience, and Satisfaction

This section provides a focused comparative synthesis of volunteer motivations, team dynamics, and overall satisfaction across the four core partner countries (Spain, France, Hungary, and Greece). The analysis is based on survey responses disaggregated by country and complemented by qualitative open-ended answers. While sample sizes differ, clear and consistent patterns emerge.

Motivations

Disclaimer:



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



Volunteers in Greece show the strongest altruistic and community-driven motivations, closely linked to repeated exposure to wildfires, floods, and earthquakes. Personal experience with disasters is a particularly strong driver, reinforcing a sense of civic duty and moral responsibility. In Spain, motivations combine community service with institutional belonging, reflecting integration within public-administration-linked civil protection systems. France displays a more balanced motivational profile, where altruism is complemented by interest in structured training, certification, and professionalism. In Hungary, motivations are strongly rooted in local solidarity and mutual aid, with volunteers often emphasizing commitment to their community rather than formal recognition or career-related incentives.

Team experience and organizational climate

Across all four countries, team spirit is a central factor sustaining engagement. France reports the highest levels of perceived clarity of roles and coordination, reflecting its institutionalized and regulated model. Spain shows strong team cohesion at local level, though experiences vary by region depending on resources and municipal support. In Greece, team bonds are described as very strong and emotionally supportive, often compensating for gaps in material and institutional backing. Hungary presents mixed experiences: while local teams are highly cohesive, volunteers report variability in coordination and communication between NGOs and public authorities.

Overall satisfaction

Satisfaction levels are generally high in all countries, but for different reasons. French volunteers link satisfaction to training quality, recognition, and operational preparedness. Spanish volunteers emphasize usefulness, local impact, and collaboration with professional responders. Greek volunteers report high emotional fulfilment and sense of purpose, despite expressing concerns about equipment and institutional support. Hungarian volunteers show strong personal commitment and satisfaction derived from community impact, while also highlighting resource constraints and sustainability concerns. Overall, satisfaction is highest where training, team cohesion, and recognition converge, regardless of the governance model.

Disclaimer:



Country	Dominant Motivations	Team Experience	Overall Satisfaction Drivers
Spain	Community service, civic duty, institutional engagement	Strong local cohesion; variability by region	Local impact, teamwork, cooperation with authorities
France	Altruism + professionalism, training and certification	High role clarity, structured coordination	Training quality, recognition, operational readiness
Greece	Altruism, personal disaster experience, moral commitment	Very strong emotional bonds; peer support	Sense of purpose, solidarity, meaningful missions
Hungary	Local solidarity, mutual aid, community protection	Strong local teams; uneven institutional coordination	Community impact, personal commitment, team belonging

Table 1. Comparative synthesis by country

This comparative analysis shows that, despite different institutional frameworks, volunteer engagement is sustained by a common triad: meaningful motivation, strong team relations, and perceived value of contribution. Differences across countries mainly concern the balance between emotional commitment and institutional support rather than the intensity of engagement itself.

2.9. Key Messages and Implications for Future Actions

The synthesis of A5 highlights several cross-cutting messages:

- Civil protection volunteers are highly motivated, experienced, and committed, but their engagement cannot be sustained by goodwill alone.
- Training and team cohesion are major strengths, while equipment provision, institutional support, and inclusivity remain critical gaps.
- Retention risks are closely linked to organizational and structural factors rather than individual motivation.
- Comparative analysis shows that shared challenges outweigh national differences, creating strong potential for transferable lessons and joint solutions.

Disclaimer:



These findings provide a robust evidence base for the subsequent lessons learnt deliverable and for the development of practical recommendations, training modules, and engagement strategies within the ENG4VOL project.

3. Lessons Learnt

3.1 Volunteer Motivation & Retention

To develop effective strategies for volunteer motivation and retention, we must first identify and understand the underlying reasons that drive them. It is crucial to know what motivates an individual to join and what sustains their commitment to the organization during the uneventful periods between "deployments." The detailed results of the surveys conducted on this topic are presented in Section 2.3. As a reminder: the primary motivating factors are helping the community, contributing to collective safety, and protecting vulnerable groups, followed by learning opportunities and skill development. It is important to note that previously experienced fires and floods significantly deepen the commitment to volunteer service.

Volunteer retention is strongly influenced by how well individuals can achieve the goals they set upon joining and the level of support they receive from the organization. Long-term commitment is achieved through the development of camaraderie and supportive social communities. In short: volunteers stay when they feel supported—and they turn away if they feel taken for granted. The survey makes it clear that the essence of retention is ensuring that people feel prepared, valued, and part of a noble purpose.

Based on the questionnaires completed across several European countries, the most important elements of motivation and retention are the following:

- **Value-Based Commitment:** Volunteers are primarily driven by internal values; at the heart of their commitment are responsibility toward the community and previous emergency experiences.
- **Structured Development Pathways:** For new volunteers, the greatest attractions are structured onboarding, quality training, and clear professional growth opportunities.
- **Community Bonding and Recognition:** A sense of belonging (camaraderie), a shared mission, and continuous, visible recognition play a key role in retaining long-term volunteers.
- **Training as a Satisfaction Factor:** Retention is significantly strengthened when organizations provide regular, practice-oriented, and high-quality training.

Disclaimer:



- **Organizational Rather Than Motivational Gaps:** The main risks for attrition—time constraints, financial burdens, emotional strain, and unequal recognition—reflect structural and organizational problems rather than a lack of motivation on the part of the volunteers.
- **Financial Burdens and Equipment:** It is a critical retention risk if volunteers have to pay for their own equipment out of pocket or sense a lack of resources. The lack of technical tools directly undermines the sense of safety and motivation.
- **Tailored Approach:** Targeted strategies considering demographic factors are needed: structured pathways for newcomers, and leadership or expert opportunities for the experienced. Gender differences (e.g., women's stronger need for psychosocial support) and generational needs must also be taken into account.

Key Lessons

- **Altruism and Growth:** People are most attracted by the selfless desire to help the community and the opportunity for professional development; therefore, these values should be emphasized during recruitment.
- **Quality Training and Team Spirit:** Volunteers remain in the system long-term if they receive regular, practical training and become part of a supportive, fraternal community.
- **Eliminating Organizational Barriers and Costs:** The main cause of dropout is not a lack of enthusiasm, but rather a lack of equipment, financial burdens, and the absence of feedback; therefore, the organization must provide cost-free participation and visible appreciation.

3.1.1 Evidence from the ENG4VOL Survey and Comparative Analysis

The ENG4VOL survey confirms that civil protection volunteering in Europe is built on strong ethical values of openness and solidarity. However, structural inclusivity remains uneven across organizations and countries.

Gender Imbalance and Representation

Survey data show a clear gender imbalance: 82.9% of respondents were male, 14.6% female, and 2.4% non-binary. This reflects broader European trends in first responder communities, as also highlighted in the Pocket Guide.

While women represent a minority in operational roles, qualitative responses indicate that female volunteers often emphasize:

- Emotional support and empathy

Disclaimer:



- Team cohesion
- Community-oriented engagement
- Psychosocial care in emergencies

This demonstrates that diversity does not only concern representation, but also enriches operational capacity through complementary skills.

Age Structure and Generational Sustainability

The volunteer base is predominantly mature, with an average age of 45.2 years. Over 59% of respondents have more than four years of experience, and nearly one-third exceed ten years.

While this reflects strong retention and commitment, it also highlights the need for generational renewal. Younger volunteers were more likely to:

- Emphasize skill acquisition and career development
- Report time constraints
- Consider leaving due to lack of recognition or flexibility

This generational dynamic suggests that inclusivity must also address life-stage needs and expectations.

Accessibility Measures in Practice

According to the Inclusivity and Accessibility findings (A5, p.27; Pocket Guide, p.7), volunteers identified several types of inclusive measures:

Strategy	Estimated Frequency
General openness / non-discrimination	~40%
Gender inclusion measures	~30%
Language support	~25%
Accessibility for persons with disabilities	~20%

Disclaimer:



Co-funded by
the European Union

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



Socio-economic support (free equipment, flexible schedules)	~15%
Limited or unclear measures	10–15%

Table 2. Types of Inclusive Measures

Although many organizations declare openness, structured policies (formal inclusion plans, adapted infrastructure, financial mitigation mechanisms) are not systematically implemented or clearly communicated.

Socio-economic Barriers

A critical accessibility issue concerns financial burden:

- 32.5% of volunteers reported paying for equipment themselves
- 45% identified lack of resources or equipment as a key challenge

These figures demonstrate that volunteering may unintentionally exclude individuals with limited financial means. Equipment costs, unpaid leave, and travel expenses can restrict participation to those with sufficient personal resources.

Communication Gaps

A recurring finding is that some volunteers were unsure whether inclusivity policies even existed. This indicates that communication about inclusion strategies is as important as implementation itself.

3.1.2 Lessons Learnt on Inclusive and Accessible Volunteering

Lesson 1: Ethical Openness Is Not Enough

Most organizations operate with strong humanitarian values, but inclusivity requires structured policies, monitoring, and clear procedures. Informal goodwill must evolve into institutionalized practice.

Lesson 2: Diversity Strengthens Operational Resilience

Gender diversity, age diversity, and professional diversity enhance:

- Communication during crises
- Psychosocial support capacity

Disclaimer:



- Decision-making quality
- Intercultural competence

Inclusive teams are more adaptable and better equipped to respond to complex emergencies.

Lesson 3: Financial Accessibility Is Central to Equity

Equipment gaps and personal financial burdens directly affect safety, motivation, and retention. Equal access to volunteering requires removal of hidden costs.

Lesson 4: Tailored Approaches Improve Retention

Survey findings show demographic differences in motivations and challenges. Younger and less experienced volunteers require structured onboarding and recognition pathways, while long-term volunteers may need leadership roles and institutional recognition.

Lesson 5: Communication Makes Inclusion Visible

Inclusivity policies must be clearly communicated to volunteers. Transparency helps people trust each other and feel included.

3.1.3 Takeaway – Inclusivity, Accessibility & Diversity

ENG4VOL findings show that civil protection volunteering across Europe is value-driven but structurally uneven in inclusivity. To ensure sustainability, organizations must move from informal openness to systematic accessibility — reducing financial, structural, and communicative barriers. Inclusion is not only a social objective; it directly enhances operational effectiveness and long-term resilience.

3.2 Organisational Practices: Training, Recognition, Communication, Equipment

3.2.1 Evidence base from project findings

Volunteer and staff integration practices in organisations shape the motivations and volunteering activities of volunteers. Some of the practices identified in the projects presented in this report that shape the motivations and activities of the volunteers are: training practices aimed at increasing the volunteers' motivation and competence, through the provision of equipment, knowledge and skills, thereby enabling them to act with more confidence in the activity provided by the organization. Physical resource supply practices to protect and facilitate volunteerism. The provision of necessary and relevant physical objects, materials, and information to ensure the volunteers' health

Disclaimer:



and safety and facilitate their activity. Information practices that support the management of activities carried out by organisations and volunteers. Thus, providing information can help reduce barriers and difficulties, making easier the tasks of both organisations and volunteers. Reward and recognition practices that enable organisations to meet volunteers' needs for respect, evaluation, appreciation, a feeling of belonging, and acceptance, while also strengthening their motivation and enthusiasm.

However, volunteers generally keep a constructive attitude, remain motivated, and are happy to work without having to cope with the projects and activities proposed by the organisations. Some of the comments and complaints raised during the fieldwork carried out in the framework of the project reveal that volunteers suffer frequently from dissatisfaction arising from a lack of resources, insufficiency of available funds for realising the objectives of the project and from organisational difficulties in coordinating activities, as well as a lack of adequate evaluation and assessment of their role, functions and contributions. These grievances can damage a feeling of inclusion and participation in activities until it becomes too much for volunteers to manage, and may lead to the alienation of these important workers in the non-profit sector.

According to the ENG4VOL survey, access to resources and recognition of volunteers' engagement are not perceived as different across partner countries, while training remains the main asset for volunteers involved in the programme. Indeed, while 78% of the respondents reported being satisfied with the training provided, 45% reported a lack of resources, and 32.5% reported covering the costs of the materials themselves.

3.2.2 What works

3.2.2.1 Training that is regular, practice-based, and organised as a pathway

The literature on job matching for volunteers suggests that, rather than designating tasks and projects to volunteers, it is more effective and likely to lead to future volunteering if volunteers choose them based on their own knowledge and interests. A recent study suggests that a training program with four stages (onboarding, training by doing, retraining and advanced skills) can increase a worker's understanding of their role and lead to greater role clarity and role security, which are associated with higher levels of workplace engagement.

Training provided to volunteers is generally considered sufficient by most respondents, although newer and younger volunteers viewed it as less sufficient. A formal induction, including specific training where needed, is essential for new or inexperienced volunteers. Additional training opportunities are particularly important for the youngest volunteers.

Disclaimer:



3.2.2.2 Communication routines that make coordination predictable

Good communication enables coordination and predictability of activities. Volunteers should be directed to the most appropriate channel for their needs, whether operations, training or administration, and should know who to contact. Regular briefings, an escalation procedure, and short debriefs after an activity will help minimise confusion and ensure volunteers have the information they need. Good communication is one of the key factors identified in research into volunteer preparedness that enhances the overall volunteer experience.

75% of volunteers report receiving sufficient information, yet communication issues remain among the top five challenges identified in the survey. A recurring concern is that volunteers do not receive adequate feedback after completing operational duties.

3.2.2.3 Recognition that is visible, consistent, and perceived as fair

Employee recognition is about formally and publicly commending the visible hard work, increased workload, skills developed, and the contributions employees are making to the organisation. Higher respect and recognition help to improve retention and well-being. Leaders' behaviours that impact engagement, including job satisfaction and commitment, are central to the art and science of people management and a healthy workplace culture.

Survey results show 76% of volunteers feel appreciated. However, volunteers value ongoing, relational recognition, such as being thanked after tasks or included in decisions, more than formal recognition events.

3.2.3 Pain points and retention risks

3.2.3.1 Equipment and resource gaps that reduce feasibility and increase inequality

A range of barriers results from the variable nature of resources. For example, charging volunteers for expenses is not simply frustrating but can also create disparities in who can participate, decreasing the enjoyment for all and the safety of new participants in particular. Tackling barriers to participation and streamlining procedures also positively affects volunteer retention. Over time, awareness of these additional requirements may create further barriers for both existing and new volunteers. Clear and consistent communication, for example, is able to enhance a sense of organisational affiliation, which has been shown to be a strong determinant of long-term retention.

According to the ENG4VOL survey, 45% of volunteers reported having insufficient materials or resources. Another 32.5% said they personally covered the costs of the

Disclaimer:



materials needed for their work. One in four said they did not have the required materials or resources to accomplish their tasks.

3.2.3.3 Uneven recognition and limited institutional backing

Volunteers may feel inadequately rewarded because the type, level, frequency or volume of work carried out is not adequately reflected in the recognition they receive. This is compounded when resources are insufficient or volunteer coordination is poor. While volunteers may remain devoted to an organisation's ethos, they may discontinue their voluntary work if they feel their efforts are not adequately valued. That overall levels of satisfaction remain high points to the need for an ongoing effort to further enhance recognition and support. The findings show the importance of organisational support and the need for more sustained forms of recognition, extending beyond single celebration or acknowledgement events. Inadequate information about activities or services can also affect the quality of volunteers' contributions.

Survey results show that 24% of volunteers feel insufficiently appreciated, and lack of appreciation is a factor for 28% of those considering leaving their voluntary roles.

3.2.4 Key Takeaway Box

While training can be considered a significant resource in an organisation, it is not the only factor that determines volunteer retention. To carry out sustainable volunteer work in a secure, manageable and well-equipped environment, and in such a way that there are no financial costs for the volunteer, adequate administration, good communication, well-defined and structured tasks and working routines, and adequate recognition are all required. Previous research has highlighted resource constraints, management and recognition as key organisational challenges. Efforts to address these challenges through targeted organisational practices are more effective than those generally considered motivational.

The same message comes through strongly in the ENG4VOL survey: the barriers volunteers face are generally structural, related to resources, time, communication, and recognition, rather than issues with volunteers' motivation.

3.3 Inclusivity, Accessibility, Diversity

3.3.1 Evidence from ENG4VOL Findings

The ENG4VOL project highlights that civil protection volunteering in Europe is strongly grounded in values of solidarity, openness, and civic engagement. However, while inclusivity is widely recognised as an important principle, its practical implementation remains uneven across organisations and countries.

Disclaimer:



Survey data reveal a clear gender imbalance, with approximately 83% of respondents identifying as male, reflecting broader trends in first responder communities. Despite this imbalance, qualitative findings show that diversity—particularly gender diversity—contributes positively to team dynamics, especially in areas such as communication, empathy, and psychosocial support.

The volunteer base is also predominantly mature and experienced, with an average age of over 45 years and a high proportion of long-term engagement. While this indicates strong retention and commitment, it also raises challenges related to generational renewal, as younger volunteers often face barriers such as time constraints, limited flexibility, and lack of recognition.

Regarding inclusivity practices, organisations report a range of measures aimed at supporting diverse participation. These include:

- Gender inclusion initiatives (~30%)
- Accessibility measures for persons with disabilities (~20%)
- Multilingual communication (~25%)
- Financial or logistical support (~15%)

However, a significant proportion of volunteers are uncertain about the existence or effectiveness of these measures, suggesting that inclusivity is often informal rather than structured or clearly communicated.

A key accessibility issue identified is socio-economic barriers. A notable share of volunteers reported covering costs for equipment themselves, while lack of resources remains one of the main challenges affecting participation and retention. These financial constraints can unintentionally exclude individuals with fewer resources, limiting diversity within volunteer groups.

3.3.2 Lessons Learnt on Inclusive and Accessible Volunteering

Lesson 1: Inclusivity requires structured approaches, not only values

While most organisations promote openness and non-discrimination, inclusivity should be supported by clear policies, procedures, and monitoring mechanisms. Informal goodwill alone is not sufficient to ensure equal participation.

Lesson 2: Diversity strengthens operational effectiveness

Gender, age, and background diversity enhance team performance by improving communication, decision-making, and psychosocial support capacities. Inclusive teams are more adaptable and resilient in emergency contexts.

Lesson 3: Financial accessibility is a critical condition for inclusion

Disclaimer:



Co-funded by
the European Union

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



Barriers such as equipment costs, unpaid participation, or travel expenses directly affect who can volunteer. Ensuring cost-free access to essential resources is fundamental to equitable participation.

Lesson 4: Tailored strategies are needed for different volunteer profiles

Different groups have different needs:

- Younger volunteers require flexibility, recognition, and development opportunities
- Experienced volunteers benefit from leadership roles and long-term recognition
- Women and underrepresented groups may require stronger support mechanisms and inclusive environments

Lesson 5: Communication is key to perceived inclusion

Inclusivity measures must not only exist but also be clearly communicated. Transparency increases trust, awareness, and a sense of belonging among volunteers.

3.3.3 Key Takeaway

ENG4VOL findings demonstrate that while civil protection volunteering is inherently inclusive in its values, **structural barriers still limit full participation**. Moving from informal inclusivity to **systematic, well-communicated, and accessible practices** is essential.

Ensuring diversity and accessibility is not only a matter of fairness but also a **strategic factor for improving volunteer retention, operational effectiveness, and long-term resilience** of civil protection systems.

3.4 Comparative European Lessons (Cross-country Analysis)

3.4.1 Common themes across France, Greece, Hungary, and Spain

Despite differences in governance models and institutional arrangements, the comparative analysis of France, Greece, Hungary, and Spain reveals a strong convergence in the core dynamics shaping civil protection volunteering across Europe.

First, **altruistic and community-oriented motivations** consistently emerge as the primary driver of engagement in all four countries. Survey data show that the desire to help the community, protect vulnerable populations, and contribute to collective safety outweighs instrumental or career-related motivations, regardless of national context. This confirms that volunteer engagement in civil protection is fundamentally value-driven rather than incentive-driven.

Disclaimer:



Second, **training quality and team cohesion** are universally identified as key enablers of sustained engagement. Across countries, volunteers report high satisfaction when training is regular, practical, and linked to real operational needs. Team spirit and peer support function as critical retention factors, often compensating for structural shortcomings such as limited equipment or weak institutional backing.

Third, **structural and organizational challenges** are largely shared. Lack of resources and equipment, time constraints linked to work–life balance, emotional strain following emergency deployments, and uneven recognition mechanisms are recurrent issues across all partner countries. These challenges are reflected both in quantitative survey responses and in qualitative open-ended feedback, suggesting that retention risks stem more from systemic conditions than from declining motivation.

Overall, the comparative findings indicate that common challenges clearly outweigh national differences, creating a strong basis for shared European lessons and transferable solutions.

3.4.2 Differences by national context

While common patterns are evident, the analysis also highlights context-specific differences linked to institutional frameworks, levels of regulation, and historical traditions of civil protection volunteering.

In **France**, the highly institutionalised and regulated model provides clear role definitions, structured training pathways, and stronger formal recognition. Volunteers report high satisfaction with professionalism and operational readiness, but also note reduced flexibility and higher administrative demands.

In **Spain**, civil protection volunteering is established at municipal and regional level. This fosters strong local integration and cooperation with professional responders, but results in significant territorial variability in terms of resources, training quality, and institutional support.

In **Greece**, volunteer engagement is strongly shaped by repeated exposure to natural disasters such as wildfires, floods, and earthquakes. Personal experience with emergencies reinforces moral commitment and emotional bonds within teams. However, volunteers consistently report gaps in equipment provision and limited institutional recognition, increasing reliance on peer solidarity and intrinsic motivation.

In **Hungary**, volunteering is deeply rooted in local solidarity and mutual aid traditions. While local teams display strong cohesion and commitment, coordination between NGOs and public authorities is uneven, and long-term sustainability is constrained by limited resources and fragmented institutional frameworks.

Disclaimer:



These differences demonstrate that no single governance model guarantees optimal engagement. Instead, volunteer satisfaction depends on the balance between institutional support, organisational capacity, and community-based motivation.

3.4.3 Value of transnational exchange

The ENG4VOL comparative analysis highlights the **added value of transnational exchange** as a strategic tool for improving volunteer engagement across Europe.

By comparing diverse national models, partners were able to identify **complementary strengths**: the structured training and certification systems of France, the strong community integration observed in Spain, the resilience and emotional commitment of Greek volunteers, and the grassroots solidarity embedded in Hungarian practices. Transnational dialogue allows these strengths to be shared, adapted, and combined rather than replicated mechanically.

Moreover, the exchange process helps **de-naturalise national practices**, enabling organisations to critically reflect on what is context-specific and what is transferable. It also reinforces a shared European understanding of civil protection volunteering as a public good that requires coordinated investment, recognition, and policy support beyond national borders.

Finally, transnational learning supports the development of **common principles**, such as the centrality of training, recognition, and inclusivity, while leaving room for flexible implementation adapted to local realities.

3.4.4 Comparative European Lessons

Key Takeaway Box

- Civil protection volunteers across Europe share strong altruistic motivations and a high level of commitment, regardless of national context.
- Training quality and team cohesion are universal retention drivers, while resource gaps and institutional recognition remain common challenges.
- National differences relate mainly to governance models and levels of institutionalisation, not to volunteer motivation or dedication.
- Transnational exchange adds clear value by enabling the transfer of complementary strengths and fostering shared European principles for sustainable volunteer engagement.

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



Co-funded by
the European Union



4. Recommendations

4.1 Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are fundamental to civil protection volunteering in Europe. For many volunteers, the CSO with which they are involved becomes their team, the place where they receive their training and where they are acknowledged for their work. In addition, CSOs are the social network of the volunteer which helps to sustain their volunteering activity. This is also a reason why the adequate management of a CSO is an essential element for motivating and managing volunteers and therefore for the success of their voluntary activities.

According to ENG4VOL, the main organisational challenges are linked to the work environment, including resource gaps, communication barriers, lack of recognition and work-family conflict. In practice, CSOs are in a position to directly tackle these issues.

4.1.1 Invest in Structured Training and Progressive Development

A percentage of 78% of volunteers rate the quality of training as very good, however new and young volunteers express less satisfaction during the induction and early stage of their involvement.

Establishing a training programme that includes phases of introductory training, practical training, and leadership training could create value. All new volunteers should be assigned a mentor from the start of their training so as to minimise the likelihood of first-time dropout and to give them a feeling of security. The training should make use of realistic emergency scenarios.

4.1.2 Build Recognition Into Everyday Organisational Culture

Although 76% of volunteers say they feel recognised for their work, 28% say that lack of recognition is a reason they have sometimes thought of leaving. While recognition events and awards are occasionally valuable, what is generally required is more regular and everyday forms of acknowledgement. A quick word from an operations manager after a long and hard operation is easily worth more than an awards ceremony at the end of the year. Many volunteers would also like to feel involved in the decision-making process about aspects of the work they are engaged in, from training through to understanding equipment needs or operational targets. Finally, the fact that there are opportunities for progression to new roles, whether mentoring,

Disclaimer:



training others, or taking on more coordinating tasks, is a very important factor for the long-term retention of experienced and committed volunteers.

4.1.3 Remove Barriers to Participation

Provide free-of-charge access to necessary equipment for all volunteers, to eliminate any potential barrier. Ensure that equipment availability is consistent and predictable. Whenever possible, use organisational resources; otherwise, consider applying for donations from third parties through sponsorships or grants.

Making equipment replacement schedules a standard organisational practice ensures clarity around who is responsible for replacing equipment and prevents that burden from falling to volunteers. While it may not be possible for CSOs to meet all their equipment needs from their operational budget, considering new funding avenues such as partnerships, sponsorships, or grant applications may help address the issue. Reducing equipment costs for volunteers improves equity, benefits the broader community, and strengthens operational preparedness — all of which are also reasons why volunteers choose to stay.

4.2 Recommendation for Public Institutions and Policy Makers

Public institutions and policy makers play a key role in creating the structural conditions that enable civil protection volunteering to operate effectively and sustainably. While volunteer organisations manage training, coordination, and operational deployment, public authorities are responsible for establishing legal frameworks, institutional support mechanisms, and cooperation structures that make volunteer engagement viable in the long term.

The findings highlight that several of the challenges reported by volunteers are structural and cannot be solved at organisational level alone. These include limited legal recognition of volunteer activities, difficulties balancing volunteering with professional responsibilities, and uneven institutional support across countries. Addressing these barriers requires coordinated policy action at national and European levels.

4.2.1 Strengthen Legal Recognition and Employment Protection for Volunteers

Survey findings indicate that insufficient institutional recognition and labour protection can discourage participation in emergency deployments. In many cases, volunteers must rely on personal flexibility or use annual leave from their regular employment in order to respond to emergencies.

Recommended actions:

Disclaimer:



- Establish legal frameworks recognising civil protection volunteering as a public service activity
- Introduce justified work leave mechanisms for volunteers during emergency deployments
- Encourage shared responsibility models between employers and public institutions
- Provide legal clarity regarding insurance, liability, and protection during operations
- Legal recognition strengthens both fairness and sustainability of volunteer engagement.

4.2.2 Ensure Institutional Support and Resource Stability

Resource limitations and equipment gaps remain among the most frequently reported operational challenges. While volunteer organisations provide strong internal coordination, their capacity often depends on the level of institutional support provided by public authorities.

Recommended actions:

- Provide dedicated funding mechanisms for volunteer civil protection organisations
- Support access to training infrastructure and capacity-building programmes
- Ensure insurance coverage and operational protection for volunteers
- Facilitate provision and renewal of essential equipment
- Stable institutional support improves operational readiness and volunteer retention.

4.2.3 Promote Cross-Border Cooperation and European Collaboration

Civil protection emergencies increasingly have cross-border dimensions, particularly in the context of climate-related disasters such as wildfires, floods, and extreme weather events. Cooperation between national systems and volunteer organisations can significantly strengthen preparedness and response capacity.

Recommended actions:

- Support participation of volunteer organisations in European civil protection networks
- Promote joint exercises and simulation activities
- Facilitate exchange of good practices and operational knowledge
- Encourage interoperability between national volunteer systems
- Transnational cooperation strengthens collective resilience and preparedness.

Disclaimer:



4.2.4 Top 3 Action Points for Public Institutions and Policy Makers

- Establish legal recognition frameworks and employment protection mechanisms for volunteers during emergency deployments.
- Provide stable institutional support through funding, training infrastructure, insurance coverage, and equipment provision.
- Strengthen European and cross-border cooperation through joint training, networks, and coordinated civil protection initiatives.

4.3 Recommendations for Volunteer Managers and Coordinators

Volunteer managers and coordinators act as the bridge between institutional frameworks and daily volunteer experience. Based on A5 findings and the Pocket Guide synthesis, the following recommendations translate lessons into operational practice:

4.3.1 Strengthen Structured Communication

According to the “State of the Art in the Engagement of Volunteers in civil protection” deliverable, although 75% of volunteers rated communication positively, still communication challenges remain among the top five barriers (25%).

Recommended actions:

- Establish structured pre- and post-mission briefings
- Create transparent role descriptions and decision-making pathways
- Introduce regular anonymous feedback mechanisms
- Ensure inclusivity information is visible and accessible
- Use digital tools while preventing information overload

Transparent communication strengthens trust and reduces frustration.

4.3.2 Implement Proactive Burnout Prevention

According to the same deliverable, 20% of volunteers report emotional strain, and 28% have considered leaving their role.

Recommended actions:

- Institutionalize debriefing after operations (already valued by 71%)
- Offer structured psychosocial support pathways
- Rotate responsibilities to prevent overload
- Provide mentoring for younger volunteers

Disclaimer:



- Normalize discussions on stress and well-being

Burnout prevention must be embedded into management culture.

4.3.3 Ensure Equal Access to Equipment and Resources

With 32.5% paying for equipment, addressing financial barriers is urgent.

Recommended actions:

- Guarantee no-cost access to essential gear
- Establish equipment renewal cycles
- Seek partnerships and sponsorships for resource provision
- Advocate for public institutional support

Resource equity enhances both safety and inclusion.

4.3.4 Strengthen Recognition and Career Pathways

While 76% feel recognized, lack of recognition remains a driver for potential dropout.

Recommended actions:

- Formalize certification and skill validation
- Offer progression pathways (mentor, trainer, coordinator roles)
- Highlight volunteer contributions publicly
- Celebrate achievements collectively

Recognition transforms engagement into sustained commitment.

4.3.5 Promote Inclusive Leadership

Volunteer managers should actively address demographic differences identified in the survey:

- Younger volunteers → need growth opportunities and flexibility
- Women → value emotional support and team cohesion
- Long-term volunteers → benefit from leadership roles
- Financially constrained volunteers → require resource support

Disclaimer:



Inclusive leadership adapts management approaches to diverse volunteer profiles.

4.3.6 Top 3 Action Points for Volunteer Managers and Coordinators

- Institutionalize structured communication and psychosocial support systems.
- Guarantee equitable access to equipment and remove financial barriers.
- Create visible recognition and progression pathways tailored to diverse volunteer profiles.

4.4 For Volunteers themselves (practical self-care and engagement tips)

Civil protection volunteers undertake tasks that, by their nature, can involve significant physical and mental strain in dangerous environments. A significant portion of the ENG4VOL survey respondents reported direct emotional distress during interventions. While physical challenges can be prepared for through realistic training, processing the stress of unexpected situations and the tragedies witnessed requires individual and group strategies. The key to sustainable long-term volunteer work is knowing our own limits and applying mental relief techniques.

Self-care:

The most important rule is that you can only help others if you are in the proper physical and mental condition yourself. To avoid becoming someone in need of rescue during or after interventions, it is essential to know your own physical and mental limits. Signs of exhaustion appear gradually. It is important to look for these signs in yourself and your peers:

- **Physical signs:** Unusually slow reaction time, tremors, or fatigue that is not relieved by a short rest.
- **Emotional signs:** Feeling unable to empathize with victims, or feeling anger and irritability toward others even over small things.
- **Cognitive disturbance:** Difficulty making simple decisions or accurately following instructions.

What to do if you reach your limit?

- **Notify your leader:** Acknowledging your limits is not a sign of weakness. Safe intervention is based on honest communication.
- **Peer support:** Talk to your teammates about your problems. Processing the events experienced is very important for maintaining mental balance.
- **Conscious rest:** Ensure real relaxation between interventions to recharge both physically and mentally.

Disclaimer:



Peer Support

This is the process where volunteers—who are going through exactly what you are—help each other process stress. This method is highly effective because your peers are there on-site with you, and they understand best what you are feeling and what you have been through; you don't have to explain yourself to them. Professional rescue organizations use this technique on a daily basis.

How does it work?

1. **Don't suppress your experiences!** After a difficult intervention, the team sits down to discuss what happened. Don't stay silent! Listen to others and share what was most difficult for you.
2. **The essence of peer support is paying attention.** If you see someone unusually quiet or irritable, ask: "How are you?". If someone asks you, be honest. In civil protection, it is not a weakness but a sign of professionalism to admit that a situation has affected you.
3. **As a beginner, many things can be scary.** More experienced volunteers are there to guide you not only technically but also mentally. Feel free to ask them! They have been through this and will help you process the initial shock.
4. **Social programs, shared coffees, and conversations during exercises build the trust** you will need in times of trouble. Participate in the life of the team outside of deployments as well.

Using volunteering for skills & growth

As a civil protection volunteer, you can develop and learn a lot due to the diversity of the tasks. As a volunteer, you can participate in numerous training sessions and courses, and the knowledge gained here and during interventions makes you more confident in everyday life and more attractive in the labor market. A few brief examples of development opportunities:

- Beyond basic medical knowledge, you can learn techniques and procedures that can be used effectively in everyday life and can save lives.
- You learn to operate both everyday and specialized machines, tools, and software used during interventions.
- You learn to work in a team. You must work effectively with people of different temperaments and backgrounds to accurately execute assigned tasks.
- Your crisis management and stress tolerance skills also develop during volunteer training and interventions.

Top 3 Action Points

Disclaimer:



1. **Take training seriously.** Master standard operating procedures and the use of your equipment. Know your own physical and mental limits.
2. **Follow instructions.** Adhere to the rules, follow orders, and do not act on your own. These rules ensure the safety of you and your teammates.
3. **Be part of the team and community.** Participate in joint events and share your thoughts and experiences honestly.

5. Best Practices

5.1 Case Study 1 – ESDP Volunteer Programme for Specialized Search and Rescue (K9)

Context

The Escuela Española de Salvamento y Detección con Perros (ESDP) has been operating since 1999 as a specialised civil protection organisation focused on search and rescue operations using trained dogs (K9 units). Its structure is unique in that it relies almost entirely on volunteers (approximately 99%), who are trained over several years to operate in high-risk emergency environments.

The organisation addresses key challenges common to civil protection volunteering:

- Ensuring long-term volunteer commitment in highly demanding operational roles
- Providing specialised training for complex emergency scenarios (e.g. collapsed structures)
- Maintaining operational readiness while relying on volunteer availability
- Integrating volunteers into multi-agency national and international response systems

The impact and quality of the ESDP volunteer programme have been formally recognised at national and regional levels. The organisation has received the State Volunteer Award granted by the Ministry of Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and Agenda 2030, and individual volunteers have also been recognised by regional authorities such as the Community of Madrid and volunteer platforms, highlighting the social value and effectiveness of this volunteer-based model.

What was done

ESDP implemented a structured, long-term volunteer programme combining recruitment, training, operational deployment, and continuous development.

Disclaimer:



Key components include:

Structured recruitment and selection process

- Application through CV and motivation letter
- Profile evaluation aligned with organisational needs
- Personal interview and placement in specialised teams

Progressive training pathway

- Initial onboarding and basic training (3–6 months)
- Assignment of a supervisor/mentor
- Specialised training lasting 2–3 years depending on role
- Continuous training and periodic refresher courses

Multidisciplinary volunteer integration

Volunteers are organised into four main functional areas:

- Intervention (search and rescue operations)
- Logistics
- Training
- Administration

Operational preparedness and teamwork

- Use of structured coordination methods to organise tasks and projects
- Regular training exercises and simulations
- Participation in national and international deployments

Recognition and external engagement

- Public recognition of volunteers and teams, including the award of the State Volunteer Award granted by the Ministry of Social Rights, Consumer Affairs and Agenda 2030 to the ESDP as a volunteer organisation
- Recognition of individual volunteers by regional authorities, including distinctions awarded by the Community of Madrid and volunteer platforms such as FEVOCAM
- Participation in national events, trainings, and international collaborations
- Contribution to training of professionals and other emergency actors

Why it worked

The effectiveness of the ESDP volunteer programme is based on a combination of structured organisation and strong value-driven engagement.

Disclaimer:



Key success factors include:

Long-term structured training

The multi-year training pathway ensures high levels of competence, confidence, and role clarity, which are critical for retention and operational performance.

Clear integration and role definition

Volunteers are integrated into defined functional areas, which strengthens ownership, accountability, and team cohesion.

Strong value-based culture

The programme promotes core values such as altruism, teamwork, responsibility, and equality, reinforcing intrinsic motivation among volunteers.

Continuous learning and professionalisation

Regular training, collaboration with institutions, and participation in real operations maintain high motivation and skill levels.

Recognition and institutional validation

Formal recognition of both the programme and individual volunteers—through national awards granted by the Ministry of Social Rights and distinctions from regional authorities such as the Community of Madrid and FEVOCAM—reinforces motivation, strengthens organisational identity, and validates the social importance of volunteer contributions.

Operational realism

Training and activities are closely aligned with real emergency scenarios, ensuring that volunteers perceive their contribution as meaningful and impactful.

How to replicate

Organisations aiming to strengthen volunteer engagement in civil protection can replicate the ESDP model through the following steps:

Key steps

Disclaimer:



- Develop a structured and staged volunteer pathway (recruitment → onboarding → specialisation → continuous training)
- Assign mentors or supervisors to support integration and retention
- Define clear functional roles within the organisation
- Combine theoretical training with practical, scenario-based exercises
- Integrate volunteers into real operational contexts when possible
- Promote visibility and recognition of volunteer contributions

Necessary conditions:

- Long-term organisational commitment to volunteer development
- Access to training infrastructure and expertise
- Coordination with public authorities and emergency systems
- Capacity to provide or facilitate access to equipment and resources

Practical advice:

Treat training not only as a technical requirement but as a core engagement tool, and combine it with recognition mechanisms to sustain long-term motivation.

Key takeaway

The ESDP case demonstrates that highly specialised and operationally demanding volunteer programmes can achieve strong retention and performance when structured around long-term training, clear roles, and strong organisational values.

The combination of professionalisation, recognition, and meaningful engagement transforms volunteering from a short-term activity into a sustained commitment, contributing directly to the resilience and effectiveness of civil protection systems.



Figure 1: Daily life of ESDP team (1)

Disclaimer:

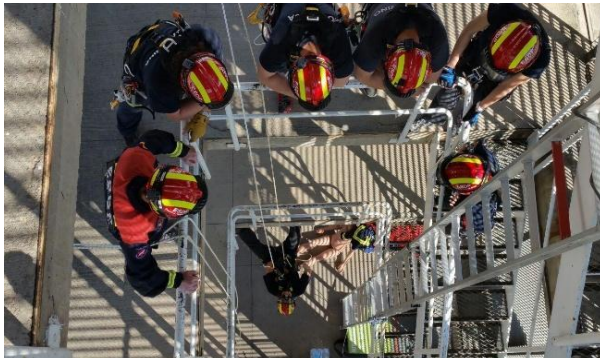


Figure 2: Daily life of ESDP team (3)



Figure 3: Daily life of ESDP team (2)

5.2 Case Study 2: Deployment of ESDP Volunteers in the DANA Floods Response (Valencia, 2024)

Context

At the end of October 2024, severe flooding caused by a DANA (Depresión Aislada en Niveles Altos) affected several municipalities in the Valencia region, generating significant disruption, material damage, and an urgent need for coordinated emergency response.

In this context, the Escuela Española de Salvamento y Detección con Perros (ESDP) was activated through the official civil protection system as part of the ERICAM (Emergency and Immediate Response Team of the Community of Madrid). The organisation was requested by regional authorities to deploy volunteer K9 teams to support search and rescue operations in the affected areas.

The intervention illustrates a typical multi-phase emergency scenario, combining immediate response with subsequent recovery efforts, and highlights the operational role of volunteer-based organisations within structured civil protection systems.

What was done

ESDP deployed specialised volunteer teams integrated within the ERICAM operational structure and coordinated with regional and local emergency authorities.

The initial phase of the intervention focused on search and rescue activities:

- Deployment of K9 teams for the search and localisation of missing persons

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."





- Operations in multiple affected municipalities, including areas severely impacted by flooding
- Continuous fieldwork over several days until the search phase was completed

Following the initial emergency phase, the intervention evolved towards recovery and support activities:

- Clearing of streets and removal of debris
- Assistance in vehicle mobilisation and reopening of blocked access routes
- Water pumping from flooded garages and infrastructures
- Deployment of additional teams to reinforce recovery operations

The response was characterised by strong inter-institutional coordination:

- Integration within the regional emergency coordination system (112)
- Collaboration with local authorities and municipalities
- Cooperation with other emergency response organisations, including international partners
- Direct support to affected populations, including distribution of food and assistance to residents

This multi-dimensional intervention reflects the broad scope of volunteer engagement in complex emergency contexts.

Why it worked

The effectiveness of the intervention can be explained by a combination of structural, organisational, and motivational factors aligned with the lessons identified in the ENG4VOL project.

Integration within formal emergency systems

The inclusion of ESDP within ERICAM ensured clear command structures, coordinated task allocation, and efficient operational deployment.

Pre-existing training and operational preparedness

Volunteers were able to respond effectively due to prior structured training, particularly in K9 search and rescue, enabling safe and efficient operations in complex environments.

Operational flexibility and role adaptability

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



Volunteers demonstrated the capacity to transition from specialised search and rescue tasks to broader recovery and support functions, reflecting a high level of adaptability.

Coordination and multi-actor collaboration

Effective communication and coordination between volunteers, public authorities, and other emergency actors contributed to a coherent and efficient response.

Sustained motivation and commitment

The value-driven engagement of volunteers supported sustained involvement under physically and emotionally demanding conditions.

Community-oriented approach

Direct interaction with affected populations reinforced the perceived usefulness of the intervention and contributed to community recovery and trust.

How to replicate

The ESDP experience provides a set of transferable elements for organisations aiming to strengthen volunteer engagement in emergency response contexts.

Key steps

- Establish formal coordination mechanisms with public emergency and civil protection systems
- Develop specialised volunteer capacities aligned with operational needs (e.g. K9, logistics, technical support)
- Design training programmes that combine technical skills with real-scenario simulations
- Prepare volunteers for multi-phase engagement, including both response and recovery activities
- Promote structured collaboration with local, national, and international stakeholders

Necessary conditions

- Institutional recognition and integration within civil protection frameworks
- Availability of adequate equipment and logistical support
- Continuous training and operational exercises
- Clear communication and coordination protocols

Practical insight

Disclaimer:



Volunteer programmes should be designed not only for specialised intervention, but also for flexible deployment across different phases of an emergency, including recovery and community support.

Key takeaway

The DANA response highlights that volunteer-based civil protection organisations play a critical role across the full emergency cycle, from immediate response to recovery.

When supported by structured training, institutional integration, and strong organisational practices, volunteers provide essential operational flexibility, complement formal emergency systems, and contribute significantly to community resilience.



Figure 4:ESDP K9 volunteer team searching for missing persons in the aftermath of the DANA floods in Valencia, 2024.



Figure 5:ESDP K9 volunteer civilian help in the aftermath of the DANA floods in Valencia, 2024.

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



Figure 6: ESDP K9 volunteer team collaborating with PUI in the aftermath of the DANA floods in Valencia, 2024.

5.3 Case Study 3 – Deployment of PUI Volunteers during February 2023 (Earthquake in Turkey)

Context

On 6th of February 2023, 2 majors earthquakes struck southern Turkey, with the epicenter near Kahramanmaraş and Gaziantep. The disaster caused massive destruction and required immediate international assistance. Within hours of the event, Pompiers de l'Urgence Internationale activated its INSARAG USAR Medium Team to deploy volunteers specialized in Urban Search and Rescue (USAR).

The initial challenges were:

- Rapid mobilization of volunteers across France
- Preparing technical rescue equipment for international transport, by air with one part in the passengers flight and one part in cargo
- Deploying quickly through a flight transport and by road from Ankara.

An operational team composed of 36 rescuers and search dogs was mobilized and deployed the day after the earthquake.

What was done

PUI activated its international deployment protocol.

Concrete actions included:

- Immediate alert sent to volunteers to confirm availability
- Rapid formation of an operational team, conform with the organogram of PUI with different specialties (management, security, rescue, medical, logistics, canine search)
- Medical and veterinarian screening

Disclaimer:



- Briefing of the staff and the team members
- Preparation and transport of specialized equipment by trucks to the airport of Paris to Ankara
- Deployment to the disaster area near the epicenter after a briefing with the LEMA (local emergency management authority)



Figure 7: PUI medical visit before deployment



Figure 8: PUI equipment preparation before deployment



Figure 9: PUI team briefing before deployment



Figure 10: PUI team search and rescue on site in Türkiye, 2023.

Once on site, volunteers:

- Conducted search and rescue operations in collapsed buildings
- Worked in coordination with international teams and Turkish medical teams
- Set up base of operation (BoO)
- Participated in victim search using technical rescue methods and search dogs
- First medical assistance to the victims extricated from the rubble

Disclaimer:

**Co-funded by
the European Union**

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



Figure 11: PUI team search and rescue on site in Türkiye, 2023. (2)

Figure 12: PUI team search and rescue on site in Türkiye, 2023. (3)

The team worked continuously for 7 days 24h/24h in very difficult conditions and succeeded in rescuing 2 survivors trapped under the rubble. The weather conditions was very bad with negative temperature (-15° celsius during the night)

Why it worked

This deployment was effective mainly because the volunteers were already prepared for international missions.

Key success factors included:

- Strong experience of volunteers in disaster response
- Pre-established mobilization procedures
- A multidisciplinary team (rescue, medical, logistics)
- High level of commitment and motivation among volunteers
- Very good replication of the different training

Working in an organized team also helped maintain morale and operational efficiency despite the extreme environment.

How to replicate

Organizations wishing to replicate this model can follow several practical steps.

Key steps:

1. Build a network of trained emergency volunteers.
2. Implement a rapid alert and mobilization system.
3. Prepare ready-to-deploy equipment modules.
4. Train volunteers to work in international disaster coordination systems.
5. Conduct regular large-scale exercises.

Necessary conditions:

Disclaimer:



- Operational leadership
- Logistics capacity for rapid deployment
- Agreement with aerial company
- Continuous training of volunteers.

Practical advice:

Develop small specialized teams first and progressively build a full response capacity.

Key takeaway

The Turkey deployment demonstrates how a well-organized volunteer structure can respond rapidly to a large-scale disaster.

Preparation, training, and strong volunteer commitment are critical to successful international emergency operations.

5.4 Case Study 4 – INSARAG Reclassification of a Medium USAR Team

Context

Pompiers de l'Urgence Internationale has been engaged for many years in international Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) operations. To maintain international operational standards, the organization participated in the reclassification process of a Medium USAR team under the framework of the INSARAG (International Search and Rescue Advisory Group).

The challenge was significant:

- Maintain international operational standards
- Demonstrate the capability of the team in real operational conditions
- Prepare volunteers for a demanding international evaluation process.

This process required several years of preparation and strong involvement from volunteers.



Figure 13: PUI medical assistance during USAR training (2)

Figure 14: PUI medical assistance during USAR training

Disclaimer:



What was done

PUI implemented a structured preparation program involving volunteers across all operational functions.

Concrete actions included:

- Development of a multi-year preparation plan several years before the reclassification
- Organization of large-scale exercises simulating earthquake scenarios, every 2 months
- Training sessions aligned with INSARAG methodology
- Improvement of logistics, command structure, and field coordination with new technologies (robot, drones, satellite, etc...)
- Testing of deployment procedures and base of operations setup

Volunteers played a central role in:

- Participating in training and exercises
- Testing operational procedures
- Managing equipment and logistics modules
- Acting in leadership roles during simulations
- Supporting preparation of the classification exercise

During the reclassification exercise, the team demonstrated its capacity to deploy, establish a Base of Operations, and conduct coordinated rescue operations.

Why it worked

The reclassification was successful mainly because of the strong commitment of volunteers and the structured preparation approach. We have a very strong team members involved in the USAR teams since 2010, the year of the first classification (IEC) and they always in the team for the next reclassification in 2027.

Key success factors included:

- Long-term engagement of experienced volunteers (from 2010 to 2027)
- Regular operational exercises
- Clear organization and leadership
- Progressive improvement of procedures
- Strong team cohesion
- Sharing of methodology and experience from old members to young people

Volunteers remained highly motivated because they were part of a clear and ambitious objective with international recognition.

This also strengthened:

- Team professionalism
- Operational readiness
- International credibility of the organization.

Disclaimer:



Figure 15: PUI internal IER in 2021, Swiss

How to replicate

Organizations aiming to reach or maintain INSARAG classification can replicate this approach through a progressive preparation process.

Key steps:

1. Define a clear roadmap toward classification or reclassification.
2. Involve volunteers early in the preparation process.
3. Organize realistic large-scale exercises.
4. Align procedures with INSARAG guidelines.
5. Conduct regular evaluations and improvements.
6. Share exercise and simulation with other teams in Europe.

Necessary conditions:

- Long-term commitment from the organization
- Strong training structure
- Dedicated coordination team.

Practical advice:

Treat the preparation process itself as a tool to strengthen volunteer engagement and operational capability.

Key takeaway

The INSARAG reclassification process is not only an evaluation but also a powerful driver of volunteer engagement and team development.

A structured and participative preparation significantly improves both operational performance and team cohesion.

Disclaimer:



5.5 Case Study 5 – Train crash in central Greece

Context

On February 28th, 2023, a head-on collision took place in a rural area between the Greek towns of Tempi and Evangelismos, in the Thessaly region of central Greece. The incident involved a passenger train (IC62) carrying 342 passengers and 10 railway employees, and a freight train staffed by 2 railway personnel, bringing the total number of individuals on both trains to 354. The death toll reached 57, including the 2 crew members of the freight train and 55 passengers and staff from the passenger train, the majority of whom were located in the first wagon, closest to the point of impact.

All preliminary findings indicate that the accident occurred after the passenger train was directed onto the wrong track and passed stop signals, continuing along the same line as the oncoming freight train. This was attributed to insufficient network monitoring and the absence of automated emergency management systems.



Figure 16: Train crash site in central Greece, a few hours after the event.

What was done

Our team was deployed without delay to the disaster area, located near the high-speed highway linking northern and southern Greece through Thessaly. As a result, reaching the general area was relatively quick and straightforward; however, access to the

Disclaimer:



exact crash site was significantly impeded by intense high-temperature fires, a widespread debris field, dense smoke and reduced visibility due to night time conditions. Additional hazards included the potential for secondary explosions from flammable materials present on both trains, such as fuel, freight cargo and gas tanks in the passenger train's canteen wagon.

Following an initial large-scale assessment and rapid search and rescue (SAR) operations conducted overnight, our team remained on-site for several days. During this period, we supported secondary searches for victims and contributed to forensic operations, particularly as confirmed and accurate information regarding passengers and missing persons was considerably delayed due to the intensity of the crash. Although the incident itself was spatially and temporally limited, field operations extended over multiple days until completion.



Figure 17: Train crash site in central Greece, the morning after the event.

Why it worked

There are two categories of challenges identified in developing and deploying new SAR-related technologies. Specifically, the operational aspect, dealing with the mission-specific issues, related to real-world deployment in the context of SAR, and the non-operational aspect, associated to the planning and development phases of the mission.

In summary, these are:

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



- Lack of Coordination and Perimeter Monitoring:
 - Due to the type and extent of the accident area, it was difficult to ensure proper coordination and perimeter safety at all times. Our team employed standard operating protocol for such cases, establishing zoning (red, orange, yellow, green) and making sure neither team members or bystanders crossed into zones of higher risk without reason or task.
- Operational Shifts in Focus and Use of Assets:
 - Immediate tasking and rapid SAR right after the arrival at the scene, as well as the pressure of time to make sure all survivors are extricated away from the hazard zone and to the hospitals, management of team shifts and use of assets was of vital importance.
- Citizens as Sensing Resources:
 - Even though citizens without a specific First Responder task or proper training were kept away from hazardous areas (zones red, orange, yellow), they were still used as first-account witnesses and “sensors”, providing vital information about the details of the event, detected victims and possible dangers not identified yet by the First Responder teams (e.g. smelling flammable gases somewhere).
- Spontaneous Volunteers:
 - Similarly to the previous item, some of the locals that were adequately equipped (at least Personal Protection Equipment – PPE, e.g. sturdy shoes, gloves, etc), were used at the very early stages as First Responders, primarily for escorting walking victims out of the crash site and taking care of them until the ambulances picked them up. Some of them had their own transportation means and decided, with the responsibility of the victims themselves, to get to a nearby hospital on their own.
- Changes in First Aid Operations:
 - Rapid escalation of such disaster events means that the area of accident may not be safe to enter or may become dangerous later in case of secondary explosions, fire spreading, etc. In addition, every detected victim requires immediate attention and triage, in order to prioritize the (initially limited) First Aid resources to those who need it immediately. Our team was able to perform such rapid SAR and First Aid assessment on-site where needed, according to protocols.
- The “Last Mile Gap”:
 - Although the crash site was not extended (less than 1 x 1 km), there were some networking and connectivity issues right after the event, due to the saturation of the local mobile network antennas by the rapid increase in outgoing calls. Upon arrival, our team made sure every identified victim was registered and communicated to the authorities,

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



primarily the EMT call center (“EKAB”), in order to arrange evacuation by ambulances.

- Process Improvement via Post-Mission Assessment:
 - One of the most important aspects of such deployments is always the debriefing and the After Action Report (AAR). Our team performed the necessary internal discussions and evaluations regarding the mission, challenges we faced and issues to consider for next missions.



Figure 18: Train crash site, damage assessment teams already working.

How to replicate

While it is next to impossible to replicate such large-scale accidents in a realistic way, there are ways to design and test specific aspects of such SAR deployments, in a much safer and controlled environment.

One aspect is the First Aid dimension: The team needs to be able to provide medical assistance, mostly in the primary assessment phase (life-threatening / severe trauma), while inside a hazardous zone (accident) and with the additional pressure of performing triage. This is something that all First Responder teams should train for and perform self-evaluation exercises regularly, specifically focused on their primary area of work (e.g. fire fighting, mountain rescue, scuba diving, etc).

Another important aspect is the ability for the team to organize rapidly on-site and reshape the way the operational assets are used. In the case of this train crash some “standard” tools and equipment were very inefficient and were only marginally used

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



during the first few hours. For example, the specific conditions of night time, intense heat from active fires and the dense smoke made the use of sensing / mapping drones above the accident area almost useless, even with multi-spectral cameras (thermal/IR, NV, etc). The way to replicate such conditions is to conduct appropriate training and exercises, testing the technical limitations of the tools, as well as the team's ability to adapt and perform as expected in the field, with and without these assets.

Finally, the issues of spontaneous volunteers and the “last mile gap” can also be simulated to some extent by conducting such targeted exercises with non-members of the team, acting as bystanders and “normal” citizens. This means having little to no information or training about the First Responder team protocols, no corresponding equipment to use (e.g. mobile R/F devices) and no detailed briefing about the scenario of the exercise. Moreover, such exercises can be tailored in a way that is appropriate for younger ages, minors and school children, so that they simulate events that may happen in their environment.

Key takeaway

The overarching idea that can be distilled as a lesson from this case study is that First Responder teams must be properly trained in realistic conditions, be very proficient with standard protocols and equipment, as well as be familiar with the stress and urgency of real-life disaster events in the field. At the same time, they have to be adaptive to rapidly changing environments, maintain very high situational awareness and focus on safety (their own and of victims') and speed. Exploitation of every available asset in the field means that they should be able to include spontaneous volunteers and bystanders if they need to, collect every bit of information from them about the situation and cross-check for verification, as well as maintain a clear view of what is going on, who does what and what are the priorities at any given time.

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."

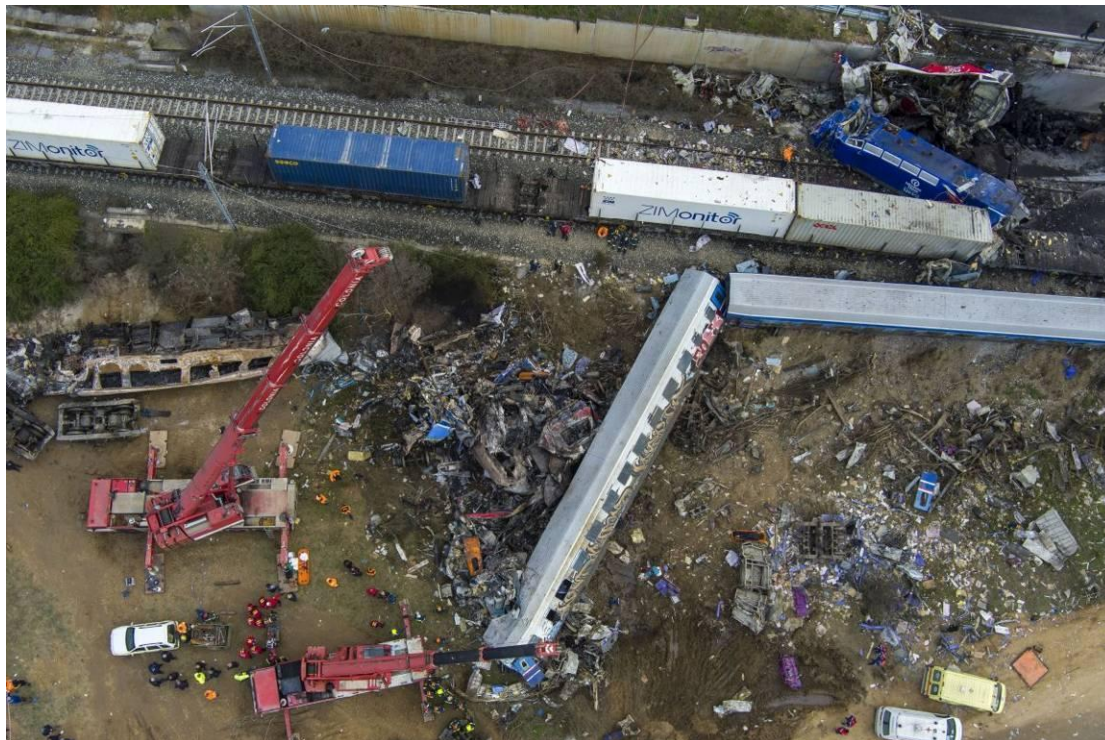


Figure 19: Overview of the train crash site from above, two days after the event.

5.6 Case Study 6 – MRSZ KMCS firefighters respond to a fire in a mid-rise building

Context

In the summer of 2025, a fire broke out on the fourth floor of an apartment building in Debrecen. In the city of Debrecen, a professional fire department ensures the protection of the population on a 24/48-hour duty schedule. Three fire trucks and several specialized firefighting vehicles, such as ladder trucks, water tankers, and technical rescue vehicles, are on standby with a crew of 28.

At the time the fire was reported, the city's professional fire department was responding to two other incidents—a fire and a technical rescue—so only one of the three fire trucks was immediately available to extinguish the fire that had broken out in the mid-rise building.

The Hungarian Reformed Church Aid search and Rescue Team also operates as a volunteer firefighter

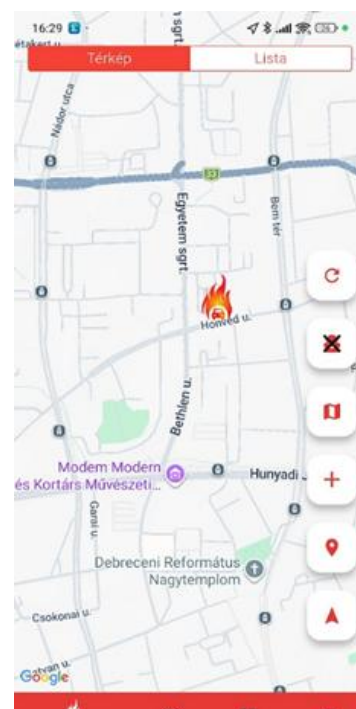


Figure 20: MRSZ fire management ÖTRA app

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



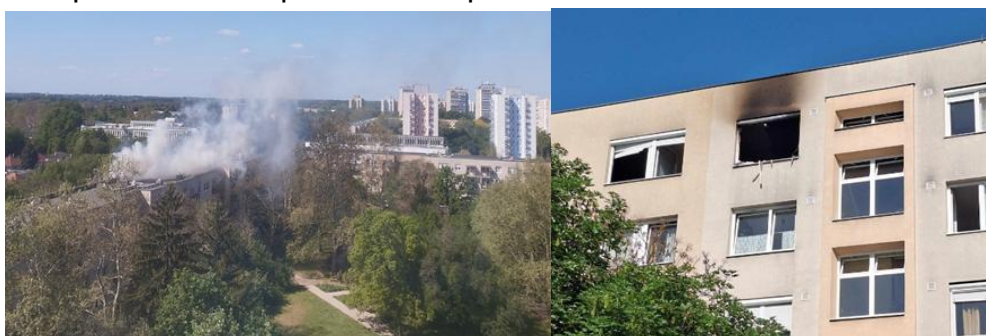
association in Debrecen and its surrounding area. The volunteers are certified firefighters and primarily live in Debrecen, allowing them to respond quickly to fires or technical rescue situations as needed. Notifications of incidents are received via the ÖTRA app, simultaneously with the alerting of professional firefighters.

What was done

At the same time as the professional firefighters were alerted, the volunteers received the notification via the ÖTRA application, and two volunteers deployed to the scene in full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The MRSZ KMCS volunteers were the first to arrive at the scene; although they did not possess the specific equipment required for fire suppression, they were able to initiate primary reconnaissance (size-up) and life-saving operations.

- They conducted a situational assessment before entering the building and reported their findings via the TETRA radio system used by the professionals. This provided the responding professional crews with an accurate operational picture of the situation. From that point on, they continuously reported their observations within the building and the measures taken.
- Upon entering the stairwell, they began preparing the operational intervention for the arriving professional firefighters:
 - They isolated the electrical utilities in the building.
 - They initiated the evacuation of the building.
 - They pinpointed the exact seat of the fire.
 - They performed a primary search to ensure no one remained in the burning apartment.
 - They established the deployment route for the hose lines to be used for suppression.

The arriving professional firefighters extinguished the fully developed fire in the kitchen and hallway of the apartment using a hose lines. Thanks to the rapid intervention, the fire did not spread to other parts of the apartment or to other units within the building.



Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



Co-funded by
the European Union



Figure 21/ MRSZ KMCS firefighters engaged in fire suppression operations in a mid-rise building.

Why it worked

The effectiveness of the joint intervention was based on the following key success factors:

- The volunteers received the fire alarm notification via the ÖTRA application at the same time as the professional units.
- The volunteers possessed the required firefighting qualifications and certifications.
- The team was equipped with appropriate Personal Protective Equipment, ensuring their safety during the intervention.
- Their familiarity with established fire emergency protocols allowed them to:
 - Efficiently execute the evacuation of residents.
 - Prepare the technical conditions for the fire suppression operations.
- The volunteers utilized the same communication channels and devices (TETRA) as the professional emergency services, ensuring seamless coordination.

How to replicate

The effectiveness of the cooperation between professional and volunteer firefighters can be enhanced through the following measures:

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



- Volunteer firefighters must be familiar with the Standard Operating Procedures utilized by professional organizations.
- They must have access to the communication channels, such as the TETRA system, that allow for direct coordination with professional units.
- Volunteers must be provided with high-quality equipment and certified Personal Protective Equipment to ensure operational safety.
- Regular joint training exercises and large-scale simulations should be conducted to improve mutual trust and field coordination.

Key takeaway

Well-trained and properly equipped volunteers can effectively assist in emergency response operations, even in situations where a sufficient number of professional firefighters is not immediately available.



Figure 22/ MRSZ equipment

6. Conclusion

The whole ENG4VOL project is set out to deepen understanding of how civil protection volunteers across Europe engage with their roles, what motivates them to participate, and what challenges affect their long-term involvement. The desk research, the comparative case studies in 4 EU countries along with the direct feedback received from volunteers through the survey, made the project generate a comprehensive picture of the current landscape of volunteer engagement in civil protection systems.

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."





The findings presented throughout this deliverable confirm that civil protection volunteers represent a highly committed and experienced community driven primarily by altruistic values, civic responsibility, and a strong desire to support their communities during emergencies. At the same time, the research highlights that volunteer engagement cannot rely on motivation alone. Sustainable participation requires supportive organizational environments, adequate resources, inclusive practices, and coherent institutional frameworks.

Across the four partner countries that were involved in the ENG4VOL project, the volunteers consistently identified several key elements that sustain engagement: meaningful training, strong team cohesion, opportunities to contribute to real missions, and visible recognition of their work. Conversely, the most common challenges relate to structural conditions, including limited access to equipment, financial burdens associated with volunteering, emotional strain during emergency deployments, and uneven institutional recognition.

The central conclusion pointed by the lessons learnt of the project is that sustaining volunteer engagement in civil protection requires coordinated action across multiple levels — organizations, volunteer managers, public authorities, and European cooperation frameworks. Addressing these challenges is essential not only for retaining existing volunteers but also for attracting new generations of participants and strengthening the resilience of communities facing increasingly complex disasters.

6.1 Strategic Priorities for Sustainable Volunteer Engagement

Based on the evidence gathered during the ENG4VOL project, the following strategic priorities emerge for strengthening volunteer engagement in civil protection:

- 1) Strengthening organizational support structures is essential. Volunteers remain motivated when they feel adequately prepared, supported, and valued within their organizations. Continuous training, access to appropriate equipment, and clear operational roles significantly improve both effectiveness and satisfaction. Organizations should therefore invest in structured training pathways, mentoring systems, and transparent communication processes that reinforce trust and teamwork.
- 2) Recognition and visibility of volunteer contributions must be improved. While volunteers often express intrinsic motivations, formal recognition plays an important role in sustaining long-term engagement. Certificates, public acknowledgement, and opportunities for leadership or specialization contribute to reinforcing volunteers' sense of belonging and professional value.
- 3) Inclusivity and accessibility must become more systematic. The ENG4VOL findings reveal persistent gender imbalances, limited accessibility adaptations,

Disclaimer:



and financial barriers that can restrict participation. Ensuring equal access to volunteering opportunities requires targeted measures such as removing participation costs, improving accessibility for people with disabilities, and promoting diversity in recruitment strategies.

- 4) Volunteer well-being and resilience must be addressed proactively. Civil protection volunteering frequently involves exposure to high-stress situations. Psychological support mechanisms, structured debriefings after missions, and supportive peer networks are essential to reduce burnout and ensure volunteers remain engaged over time.

The above-mentioned priorities underline that sustainable volunteer engagement depends on combining strong community motivation with supportive organizational and institutional environments.

6.2 Opportunities for EU and International Collaboration

The ENG4VOL project also demonstrates the significant added value of transnational cooperation in strengthening civil protection volunteering across Europe.

Despite differences in governance structures and institutional frameworks, volunteers in France, Spain, Greece, and Hungary share remarkably similar motivations, challenges, and expectations. This convergence highlights the potential for shared European solutions and collaborative learning.

At the European level, several opportunities emerge:

- Knowledge exchange and peer learning. Transnational projects provide valuable spaces for organizations to compare practices, identify effective engagement strategies, and adapt successful models to their own contexts.
- Joint training initiatives. Collaborative training programs, simulation exercises, and exchange activities can help harmonize competencies, strengthen operational interoperability, and improve preparedness for cross-border emergencies.
- Strengthening volunteer networks. European cooperation can support the development of networks connecting volunteer organizations, trainers, and coordinators across countries, facilitating the sharing of resources, expertise, and experiences.
- Alignment with European civil protection policies. Integrating volunteer engagement more strongly into European civil protection initiatives and funding programs can enhance both recognition and operational capacity.

Disclaimer:



Co-funded by
the European Union

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



As climate change and complex emergencies increasingly affect multiple regions simultaneously, international collaboration will become even more critical. Strengthening links between volunteer organizations across Europe can significantly enhance collective resilience and response capabilities.

6.3 Next Steps for the Consortium and Stakeholders

Valuable insights and practical recommendations have been produced with the implementation of the ENG4VOL project informing future initiatives aimed at improving volunteer engagement in civil protection.

For the project consortium, the next steps include disseminating the results of this deliverable widely among civil protection organizations, training institutions, policy forums, and volunteer networks. Sharing these findings can contribute to raising awareness about the importance of volunteer engagement and encourage the adoption of improved practices across Europe.

The project partners also aim to continue promoting dialogue between civil society organizations, public institutions, and volunteer coordinators. Strengthening these connections can help ensure that volunteers' perspectives are considered in future policy discussions and program design.

For stakeholders beyond the consortium — including NGOs, public authorities, training providers, and volunteer managers — the lessons learned from ENG4VOL offer a practical framework for improving engagement strategies. Applying these insights can help organizations strengthen recruitment, improve retention, and create more inclusive and supportive volunteer environments.

In the longer term, continued research and evaluation will be important to monitor how volunteer engagement evolves in response to new challenges, including climate-related disasters, digital transformation, and changing patterns of civic participation.

6.4 Three Key Messages

To conclude, three essential messages are highlighted by ENG4VOL for anyone working with civil protection volunteers:

1. Volunteers are the backbone of civil protection systems. Their commitment, experience, and local knowledge significantly strengthen community resilience and emergency response capacity.

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



2. Motivation alone is not enough to sustain engagement. Training, recognition, supportive leadership, and access to resources are critical factors for retaining volunteers and ensuring their effectiveness.

3. Collaboration strengthens resilience. The sharing of knowledge, experiences, and practices across organizations and countries, Europe can build stronger, more inclusive, and more sustainable volunteer civil protection systems.

Annexes

Main tables from the survey

Table 2. Profile of Civil Protection Volunteers (Demographics and Experience)

Indicator	Main Results
Gender	Predominantly male respondents; women and non-binary volunteers represent a clear minority
Age	Majority between 40–59 years; average age approx. mid-40s
Organizational affiliation	Mainly NGOs; limited representation from public administrations
Role	Mostly frontline volunteers; smaller share of coordinators/managers
Experience	High level of experience: over half with more than 4 years; nearly one-third over 10 years

Table 2 provides an overview of the demographic and organizational profile of surveyed civil protection volunteers. The data reveal a highly experienced and operationally engaged volunteer base, but also highlight structural imbalances, particularly in terms of gender representation and generational renewal.

Table 3. Main Motivations for Engaging in Civil Protection Volunteering

Motivation Category	Relative Importance
Desire to help the community	Very high

Disclaimer:

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them."



Personal interest in emergency response	Very high
Previous personal experience with emergencies	High
Learning and personal development	Moderate
Career-related motivations	Low
Social influence (family, friends, peers)	Low to moderate

Table 3 summarizes the dominant motivations driving engagement in civil protection volunteering. Altruistic and community-oriented motivations clearly prevail across countries, complemented by experiential and learning-related factors. Instrumental or career-driven motivations play a secondary role.

Table 4. Satisfaction, Support, and Perceived Value of Volunteering

Dimension Assessed	Overall Assessment
Satisfaction with volunteer role	High
Feeling valued and recognized	Generally high, with some variability
Organizational support	High at team level; weaker at institutional level
Training adequacy and quality	Very high
Willingness to recommend volunteering	Very high

Table 4 presents key indicators of volunteer satisfaction and perceived support. Overall satisfaction levels are high, particularly regarding training quality and team dynamics. However, perceptions of recognition and institutional backing remain uneven.

Table 5. Main Challenges and Retention Risks Identified by Volunteers

Challenge Area	Frequency / Relevance
----------------	-----------------------

Disclaimer:



Lack of resources and equipment	Very frequent
Time constraints (work–life balance)	Very frequent
Emotional and psychological strain	Moderate to high
Communication and coordination issues	Moderate
Financial burden (out-of-pocket costs)	Moderate
Lack of formal recognition or support	Moderate

Table 5 synthesizes the main challenges reported by volunteers. The findings indicate that retention risks are driven primarily by organizational and structural factors rather than by a lack of motivation or commitment.

Disclaimer: