



Kaisa Eskelinen & Annika Rinne

Baltic Youth for Resilient Society – BYFORES



Introduction

BYFORES project expects to increase the appeal of volunteering, with a special focus on youth, and promote the culture of volunteerism in the Baltic Sea Region. It looks into the role that children and young people can play in withstanding, managing as well as coping with disaster risk and reducing vulnerability through capacity building, education and awareness. Resilience refers to ability to cope with and overcome crisis and adapt to future challenges (Keck & Sakdapolrak 2013).

The project focuses especially on promoting the recommendations of the previous project “ReSit- Situational Picture of Volunteerism for Societal Resilience in the Baltic Sea Region” from the point of view of young people as volunteers:

- clarifying the role and mission of young volunteers,
- improving their coordination,
- making volunteering more attractive to young people,
- providing sufficient training & development possibilities to young people between disaster assignments,
- learning from youth how to relate and give their contribution in ongoing crisis.

The topics are explored through two scenarios, which are different in scale and by nature, but both have impacts on young people in the BSR: 1) the war in Ukraine (man-made disaster) and 2) floods (climate change, natural disaster). In addition, the project looks at how young people can build resilience in their own neighborhood, community, and family. This document summarizes the findings and recommendations of the workshops held during the project in 2023. In addition, it includes the Volunteer Youth Statement presented by young volunteers to the Directors General for Civil Protection of the Baltic Sea Region at the CBSS meeting of Directors General in Hamburg, June 2023.

Publisher

SPEK – The Finnish National Rescue Association
Helsinki 2024

Cover photo

Pihla Liukkonen

Layout

Aleksi Salokannel / SPEK

In the workshop “Youth resilience and agency in today’s uncertainties” held in Helsinki, three scenarios/events were explored: 1) floods, 2) refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine and 3) building resilience in young people’s own neighbourhood, community, and family. The scenarios were based on future expectations of the participants. The last scenario was chosen to be discussed in more depth in a separate international workshop with the following theme: Youth building resilience in one’s own neighbourhood, community, family as well as the use of social media in promoting the culture of volunteerism among children and youth. In workshops it was lined up how volunteers can be involved in disasters, what are the practical obstacles in involving volunteers, how those obstacles could be eliminated and how the role of volunteers should be formulated in authorities’ strategies.

With young people we mean 16–29-year-old people.

Youth activities in floods

Young volunteers can be involved in evacuation, local information sharing, cleaning risk areas preventively, observation of flood levels, relocating cultural heritage and filling and placing sandbags. They can prevent waterflow on roads, paths etc. and direct water by using water pumps. Young people can share preventive information to public and inform and train other young people. They can serve rescue personnel (for example, catering tasks, lights, easy tasks). Young people can help mapping volunteer organizations, resources and skills needed in case of floods. Best practices concerning floods can be shared to countries and organizations who don’t practice them yet.

There might be obstacles for young people’s involvement, such as legal age restrictions for certain tasks. Lack of training might also form an obstacle, for example license for drones. Similar systems and digital tools between countries would ease cooperation. Joint trainings with neighbouring countries and boot camps involving both young volunteers and authorities are needed. Physical health risks should be noticed; for example, teaching safe lifting techniques. Volunteers need skills such as technical skills using open-source tools for mapping and other digital tools (e.g., sensors and alarming systems).

Youth helping refugees

Clear division of tasks, training and education are needed to involve young volunteers in helping refugees.

Young volunteers can be involved in activities integrating refugees: language learning, guiding to local culture, sport activities, organizing social events for refugees and involving refugees in existing organisations and social networks. Young volunteers can provide informational support to refugees. They can support in reception of refugees by distributing food, playing with children and keeping company for refugees. The Polish example shows that volunteers can organize help for refugees at the border, at stations, and at points of stay. Volunteers can take care of children, the elderly, families, and animals. They can provide food, do grocery shopping, provide medical assistance, help with medicines, accommodation, transport, housing, documents, psychological support and arrange activities for children. Volunteers can also send humanitarian aid to Ukraine or donate and help via volunteer organisations.

There might be obstacles such as cultural differences, language barriers and administrative barriers for youth involvement in helping refugees. Young volunteers need psychological preparation to act with refugees. It's also important to have a designated person responsible for guiding young volunteers to their tasks.

Ways to build resilience in one's own neighborhood, community and family

Creating safe environments by installing batteries to smoke detectors, mapping out and knowing one's own community and neighborhood (tools and infrastructure) are ways to build resilience in one's own community. (See also the list in table 1). First aid courses, emergency and resilience courses for different age groups are also good ways to involve young volunteers as well as public events on safety issues. These events could be arranged in schools and in yearly preparedness weeks arranged by for example state actors (Table 2 and 3).

There are multiple youth organizations in which people can improve themselves both physically and socially. Schools offer Erasmus+ and other similar opportunities for studying and strengthening social skills. Peer to peer interactions (same age) are an efficient way to share information.

Lack of community in urban environments and traditional education not offering practical skills are obstacles for building resilience in one's own neighborhood as well as prejudices of adults concerning young people's skills. There might also be language barriers between adults and young people.

Trust-building events where good examples of youth roles are presented are therefore needed as well as making more events where young people can learn and be involved. Adults should show respect and support to youth. Authorities should know organisations they work with. Solutions are certification and identification. There is a risk of misuse of young people, and therefore they should be taught how to reject unrelated tasks. Misuse can be related to situations where young people are asked to do household tasks that are not related to safety. Networking at the international level is very important, enabling adaptation of ideas from other countries and scaling local questions up to international level. Sharing information, ideas, and similarities between countries in joint forums is crucial.

Table 1. Youth building safe environments
<p>Examples of activities that skilled youth can implement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skilled youth teaching students in schools and kindergartens about fire safety, firefighting and first aid • Young leaders in youth projects • Young people creating content for social media • Young adults as part of instructor team teaching young people • "Preparedness knocks": youth installing batteries to fire detectors in neighborhoods • Youth educating first aid and first extinguishing at events • Teaching families how to pack an emergency bag • Youth spreading knowledge about different abnormal situations • Youth helping in accidents: using heart runners, piling sandbags, serving food, psychosocial support (according to age)
<p>Young people as representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seats for young people in councils and organisations • Advice board to kids at school
<p>Improvement/educational needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth to be educated to keep shelters updated • Weekend camps for young people: going through different scenarios to be more skilled • Young people in drills: getting stronger mentally, taking instructions, showing their ability to participate

Table 2. Active role of schools
<p>A person from the rescue services to teach on the topics and organise exercises at schools Teachers can teach about rules, the reasoning behind emergency preparedness, resilience etc.</p>
<p>School subjects and practical exercises for crisis preparedness:</p>
<p>Survival skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camps • Cooking without electrical appliances • Outdoor life • Swimming • How to survive without digital tools
<p>First aid/medical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A course should be taught every year • First aid • Wounds • Unconscious persons • Poisoned or choking person • Teddy hospital. Children can bring their soft toys to "doctor", and first aid is taught to them simultaneously • Mental health awareness and help line (according to age)

<p>Fire/emergency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety drills at school • Extinguishing exercises • Situational awareness exercises • Simulation of a real-life emergency situation e.g. smoke-filled room, staircase, etc. – how to act? • Schools encouraging pupils to help in an actual emergency situation, e.g. flood
<p>Evacuation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency number and when to dial • Emergency box preparations for home • Emergency exits • Evacuation plans hung on the wall and made public to the pupils
<p>Eliminating prejudice at schools to make society more resilient, inclusive communities = resilient communities</p>
<p>Design campaigns for safety equipment to make the students familiar with them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smoke detectors, reflectors, etc.

Table 3. Active role of state: a yearly emergency preparedness week
<p>Each year should have a specific theme for the emergency preparedness week</p>
<p>Emergency preparedness week at the same time in other countries with a similar theme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it an international event • Inspires competition between states • Translating materials from other countries (synergy benefit)
<p>Authorities should pay attention to the communication channels and means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • Using right language to reach the youth • Schools and organisations that target youth audience • Using well known people to spread the message and campaign for the preparedness week • Young people teaching the youth • Involving businesses
<p>Practical exercises and showcasing how people should act in an emergency situation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire prevention • First aid • Swimming lessons • Game-based learning: escape rooms (e.g. find mistakes -> no smoke detector, blocked exits etc.), choosing items to take with you for 72 hours or evacuation • Survival skills and navigation in the forest • Cooking skills: cooking without heat, growing your own food, picking berries and mushrooms
<p>Discussions in schools and workplaces</p>
<p>Locations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fire stations • Schools • Parks • Shopping centres • Interactive spaces • Workplace

Recommendations on how to involve youth in civil protection activities

Volunteer organisations have human resources that authorities can utilize. Mapping existing volunteer actors, their resources and competencies, and making agreements with volunteer organizations are next steps to be followed. What volunteers need from authorities is communication, coordination, financial resources, and tasking. “Who, what, and where” are the questions that need to be addressed considering volunteers’ role in prevention, response, and recovery phase. Creating strategy for including volunteers is needed: how to train volunteers, creating common language between volunteers and authorities, and defining the concept of a volunteer. There is also a need to diminish bureaucracy when including volunteers. It’s important to make access to volunteer organizations easy. Volunteers need to feel that they are an important part of organizations, they need to be thanked and appreciated for their input.

1. Young people can and are willing to participate in different kinds of civil protection activities. Let young volunteers first do simple tasks in order to enable participation, later on this can be enhanced. Provide sufficient training and support for young volunteers: Name a designated person for supervision of young volunteers.
2. Teach young volunteers skills related to organizational skills, knowledge of crisis procedures, first aid, communication and teamwork, resilience, flexibility, language skills and psychological strength.
3. Especially, building resilience in young people’s own community is an area where young people have a lot of possibilities to act. However, learning practical skills for example at schools; raising awareness through, for example, a campaign week of emergency preparedness; having basic first aid courses for different age groups as

well as practical emergency and resilience courses are needed to improve resilience. In addition, knowing one’s own neighborhood is very important.

4. Mapping existing youth volunteer actors is needed to understand competencies, skills, and resources that the actors have in order to link them with authorities’ needs. What volunteers need from authorities is communication, coordination and reimbursement.
5. Joint international trainings, networking and common platform for young volunteers and authorities is needed to coordinate the cooperation. Policy Area Secure Kids implementation would be a good example of this. It refers to a subgroup of youth organisations meeting under the auspices of the Council of the Baltic Sea States.
6. Peer to peer communication is an efficient way to advertise safety activities to young people. The use of social media and digital solutions are crucial here.
7. Young people should have seats in councils to communicate on regular basis with decision makers.

BYFORES project is funded by the Council of the Baltic Sea States Project Support Facility (CBSS PSF). The project was implemented by the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB), State Fire and Rescue Service of Latvia, Union of the Baltic Cities (UBC), The Ministry of the Interior of Finland, Hamburg Fire and Rescue Service, The Danish Civil Protection League and The Nordic Council of Ministers Office in Lithuania.

Project activities were implemented in cooperation with the project VOALA – Baltic Sea Region Network of Volunteers and Local Actors, coordinated by the CBSS and funded by the Swedish Institute.

References

Markus Keck & Patrik Sakdapolrak (2013) What is social resilience? Lessons learned and ways forward. *Erkunde* 67 (1), 5-19.

Annex

Volunteer Youth Statement

Strengthening the role of young volunteers in civil protection

Increasing involvement of local authorities and civil society organizations is declared as a goal in the *Joint Position on Enhancing Cooperation in Civil Protection Area* endorsed by the Directors General for Civil Protection in the Baltic Sea Region. This youth volunteer statement highlights the critical role of youth volunteers and organisations and points out ways to strengthen the role that young people can play in managing and coping with disaster risk. This statement is a call for action directed at Directors General for Civil Protection and civil protection authorities in the Baltic Sea Region.

We young volunteers and future experts acting in the field of civil protection,

Ask for the **increased integration** of young people in all areas of civil protection. While young people contribute meaningfully to civil protection and the safety of society across the Baltic Sea Region already today, their voices and experience often are overheard and not included in civil protection policies, strategies and activities. Increased integration requires action to be taken at all levels of governance. Possible actions include the mapping of existing skills and resources of volunteer organisations by local authorities for emergency preparedness and addressing existing legal obstacles to volunteer participation and harmonizing legislation at different levels, including at EU level.

Ask to **enable young people to learn and develop their skills** in civil protection-related issues. Providing the infrastructure and opportunities for young people to gain knowledge and skills is of critical importance to enable their meaningful participation in and contribution to civil protection.

Awareness-raising events, theme weeks at schools and the inclusion of emergency preparedness in school curricula are possible actions to take. Young volunteers today will be the cornerstone of civil protection in the future. Preparing them for future challenges and enabling them to gain relevant experience and skills is critical.

Encourage the creation of **more opportunities for young volunteers active in civil protection to meet each other, exchange knowledge and skills and hold joint training**. This can be achieved, for example, by conducting international exchange and networking formats, international competitions or by setting up an international coordination office to coordinate international exchange. Such activities enable young volunteers to get to know different approaches and ways of working in civil protection, acquire new skills and knowledge, meet peers from different contexts and learn international cooperation in practice. This contributes to the development of strong and resilient collaborative relationships and international networks and the facilitation of cross-border cooperation in civil protection and among tomorrow's leaders in civil protection. Taking into consideration that many of today's societal threats in the Baltic Sea Region cross borders and require coordinated and cross-regional approaches to civil protection, this is of critical importance.

Highlight the need for and importance of **peer-to-peer communication** in such exchange activities. For young people to meet and exchange with peers of a similar age is important, allowing spaces where concerns and perspectives particularly important to young people can be shared and discussed. Peer-to-peer exchange is important for young volunteers in civil protection and when volunteers interact with the broader public to raise awareness for issues of civil protection or when recruiting young people for volunteering.

Encourage the increased **use of widely used digital communication tools** (for example, TikTok, Snapchat, etc.) by civil protection authorities to ensure that relevant information reaches young people on the communication channels they use and to be able to gain from the advantages of these communication tools. Young people should be involved as audience and as content creators and experts supporting authorities on these platforms. In addition, a focus on the responsible and safe use of social media and other digital tools is of critical importance in this context and should be part of related activities.

Highlight the need to work towards **reducing cultural norms and prejudices** that are obstacles to meaningful and equal participation of young

people in civil protection activities. To fully empower young people and to fully use their potential for civil protection and societal security, these obstacles need to be removed. For example, by mapping existing youth volunteer organisations and their skills to be able to activate these resources if needed, raising awareness for the important roles of young volunteers in civil protection, and ensuring active youth participation in decision-making processes.

