



**Qualified, organised volunteers &  
their cross-border collaboration**  
– a cornerstone of prevention,  
preparedness & crisis management.



**Samaritan International (SAM.I.)** is a network of 20 organisations in **19 European countries**. Our member organisations are active in paramedical- and rescue services, civil protection, first aid, humanitarian aid, and various social services. In total **about 150.000 volunteers** support their work.

### **Volunteering: An invaluable civic contribution for good services and disaster resilience**

Many of our member organisations' areas of activities depend on volunteering. This is true for civil protection, but also for other services, including the social sector. Despite their professional-level skills, volunteers are not in competition with the regular labour market. Their added value is in the possibility to offer services sustainably and covering a wide area, where a purely private approach alone would not be viable. Furthermore, volunteering is service of citizens for citizens and therefore a form of active citizenship and a method of civic self-support for communities that could otherwise not reliably entertain a high level of services of general interest. This becomes particularly pronounced when looking at blanket coverage of basic services in rural vs. urban areas. "Active citizenship" in the form of skilled, organised volunteers can be an important component in addressing this challenge.

These added values of volunteer work are generally accepted, including at the European level, as well as the necessity to uphold them by creating favourable framework conditions. This was affirmed as early as the European Year of Volunteering 2011 by the Commission's official

civil society partners in the EYV Alliance. Yet, organised volunteering often remains a footnote in European policy considerations, despite numerous good examples of volunteer-based NGOs working together to improve service provision, emergency preparedness and resilience for European citizens.



### **Good Practices of volunteer NGOs working together**

The Samaritan International member organisations have a long history of fostering low-threshold collaboration across borders to enable better response in crises. The network can look back on 10 years of numerous projects on training and practice as well as direct collaboration in exercises. With this preparation, they could lend unbureaucratic neighbourly support and work together in caring for refugees fleeing from the Ukraine war.



## **"Cross-Border Samaritan Flood Preparedness"**

Prompted by the devastating floods in Central- and Eastern Europe in 2013, eight SAM.I. member organisations formed the FLOOD-project to jointly improve their capacities to fight such disasters in the future and developed a system of quick and low-threshold neighbourly support amongst each other. The work of the project was put into practice in a large field exercise in Burgenland, Austria in 2016, where the Samaritan volunteer teams successfully collaborated and addressed the challenges of a simulated flood disaster in the region.

## **Joint improvement of capacities and competences**

The SAM.I. members have continuously worked on and expanded their knowledge, capacities and competences on various aspects of prevention, preparedness and relief for natural or man-made disasters. From 2012-2016, an important training manual for volunteers in emergency temporary shelters (ETS) was developed – the SAMETS guidelines. These guidelines collect expertise and best practices on how to address the special needs of several target groups in ETS – an important step not only to improve immediate care for an ETS's inhabitants, but also to maintain



community resilience through a crisis. This issue of resilience against ever increasing and frequent disasters in the face of climate change stood at the centre of two additional projects: In ADAPT, SAM.I. organisations collaborated with local authorities to map vulnerability of persons in their municipalities to be able to offer better, and better prioritised, help in emergencies. The project INDRIX took a step back from direct practice to enable a more comprehensive view of vulnerability and resilience, and how volunteering organisations contribute to improving the situation. In collaboration with the University of Rome Tor Vergata and organisations representing the Elderly (AUSER) and People with Disabilities (FISH), SAM.I. members from both civil protection and social services developed an Inclusive Resilience Index. SAMETS, ADAPT and INDRIX were all co-financed by the European Commission's Prevention and Preparedness programme.

## **Regular exercises of volunteer teams**

In two so called "Rescue Camps" in 2017 and 2019, practical exchange and collaboration was kept active within SAM.I., as volunteers from different countries competed to solve different scenarios, but also had to work together and support each other in simulated large-scale emergencies. >>>



## Camp EVO – Joint operation in Slovakia

Most recently, the long-practiced capacities for mutual support among the SAM.I. organisations were put to the test in a man-made crisis, as six organisations from five countries collaborated in running an emergency shelter operation. “Camp EVO”, a transit camp in Eastern Slovakia, served Ukrainian refugees for about three months after the outbreak of the war. While the context was different from what the volunteers had trained for, the acquired skills could nonetheless be applied and provided an extremely valuable complement to public capacities. A special focus of EVO was the care for refugees with disabilities – something that had been addressed in multiple SAM.I. projects, which no other temporary refugee accommodation in the region could provide.



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