

## 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 the 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.

*This youth statement is based on discussions and ideas presented by young volunteers and representatives of volunteer youth organisations from the Baltic Sea Region in previous events and workshops organized in the framework of the international projects BYFORES and VOALA. It has been shared with and validated by the CBSS Security Working Group and young speakers and participants of the international conference “Volunteering in civil protection and disaster management” which took place on 19-20 June 2023 in Hamburg.*