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Lead author(s)	Michela Cohen, Deep Blue (DBL), Cristina Casareale, Save the Children Italia (SAVETC)
Contributors	Bjorn Bonello, Regjun Tramuntana (REJGTR), Paul Brown (ISTC)
Reviewers	Salvatore Marchese, Webgenesis (WGS)

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LIST OF PARTNERS

N.	Logo	Name	Short Name	Country
1		DEEP BLUE SRL	DBL	Italy
2		WEBGENESYS SPA	WGS	Italy
3		SINTEF AS	SINTEF	Norway
4		SAFETY INNOVATION CENTER GGMBH	SIC	Germany
5		RESILIENCE ADVISORS NETWORK	RAN	Ireland
6		STICHTING VU	VU	Netherlands
7		ISTITUTO DI SOCIOLOGIA INTERNAZIONALE DI GORIZIA	ISIG	Italy
8		TARTU ULIKOOL	UTARTU	Estonia
9		UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION	UNESCO	France
10		OPENBAAR LICHAAM GEZAMENLIJKE BRANDWEER	GB	Netherlands
11		SAVE THE CHILDREN ITALIA ETS	SAVETC	Italy
12		INTERNATIONAL SAFETY TRAINING COLLEGE LIMITED	ISTC	Malta
13		SCIENCES REUNION - CENTRE DE CULTURE SCIENTIFIQUE TECHNIQUE ET INDUSTRIELLE	SRUN	France
14		REGIONAL COUNCIL NORTHERN REGION	REJGTR	Malta
15		HET NEDERLANDSE RODE KRUIS	RCNL	Netherlands


16		AGENCE OBSERVAT AMENAGE HABITAT REUNION	AGORAH	France
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1. Introduction

Despite its geographic location in a seismically active region neighbouring Greece and Italy, Malta exhibits a notable gap in seismic risk awareness. This discrepancy is underscored by the fact that the Seismic Monitoring and Research Group at the University of Malta recorded over 300 local earthquakes in 2023 alone. Paradoxically, public perception remains skewed towards a sense of safety and the belief in the infrequency and mild nature of seismic events. This disconnection between reality and perception presents a significant challenge for disaster preparedness. To bridge this gap and develop effective response strategies, a comprehensive understanding of the local context, including language barriers, cultural heritage, and the specific needs of vulnerable populations, is essential.

A Stakeholder Mobilization workshop was organised in Malta to initiate this process by gathering expert input and establishing a Local Support Team composed of key local actors. This team will play a pivotal role in co-creating solutions, accessing project results, and ultimately enhancing Malta's disaster preparedness capacity.

1.1 Approach and Methodology

1.1.1 Workshop Organization and Roles

The workshop was preceded by a series of internal meetings dedicated to defining its objectives, methodologies, tools, and target stakeholders. A clear division of roles and responsibilities was established among the partner organisations involved (Deep Blue - DBL, Reġjun Tramuntana - REJGTR, Save The Children - SAVETC, Webgenesis - WGS and INTERNATIONAL SAFETY TRAINING COLLEGE - ISTC).

- REJGTR (Maltese representative) managed participant selection and invitation, administered a preliminary questionnaire to map stakeholders, printed materials (roll up banners and leaflets), managed venue and logistics, and moderated the stakeholders' consultation and Q&A session.
- DBL coordinated the team, produced promotional and dissemination materials, and provided a project overview during the workshop.
- SAVETC defined the workshop topics and questions, acting as a liaison with other project work packages. They also presented the Preparedness Case and the role of the Local Support Team.
- WGS supported the project presentation with one tool demo, as well as supported the stakeholders consultation.
- ISTC supported the stakeholders' consultation during the meeting.

1.1.2 Workshop Structure and Delivery

The workshop combined presentations with interactive elements to foster engagement. The agenda was as follows:



- Welcome and Introduction: by REJGTR
- Project Overview: by DBL
- Preparedness Case and Local Support Team Role and Benefits: by SAVETC
- Project Results and Demo: by WGS
- Stakeholders' Consultation and Open Q&A: moderated by REJGTR

1.1.3 Methodology and Tools

A mixed approach was adopted to gather diverse perspectives. Presentations were followed by interactive sessions using Mentimeter², allowing both in-person and online participants to contribute their insights. This was complemented by open discussions on each topic to delve deeper into the issues raised.

2. Analysis of participants

2.1 Participants general information

The Stakeholder Mobilisation Workshop brought together 25 participants representing a diverse range of organisations, including government agencies, civil protection, academic institutions, and non-profit groups (listed in the table below).

Of these, 15 participants were external to the organising body, with three joining online.

In the preliminary collection of intents made through preliminary questionnaires, the organisations contacted were 12, and potential external participants were 23. This means that 83,33% of the organisation and 65,22% of participants contacted were engaged for the meeting.

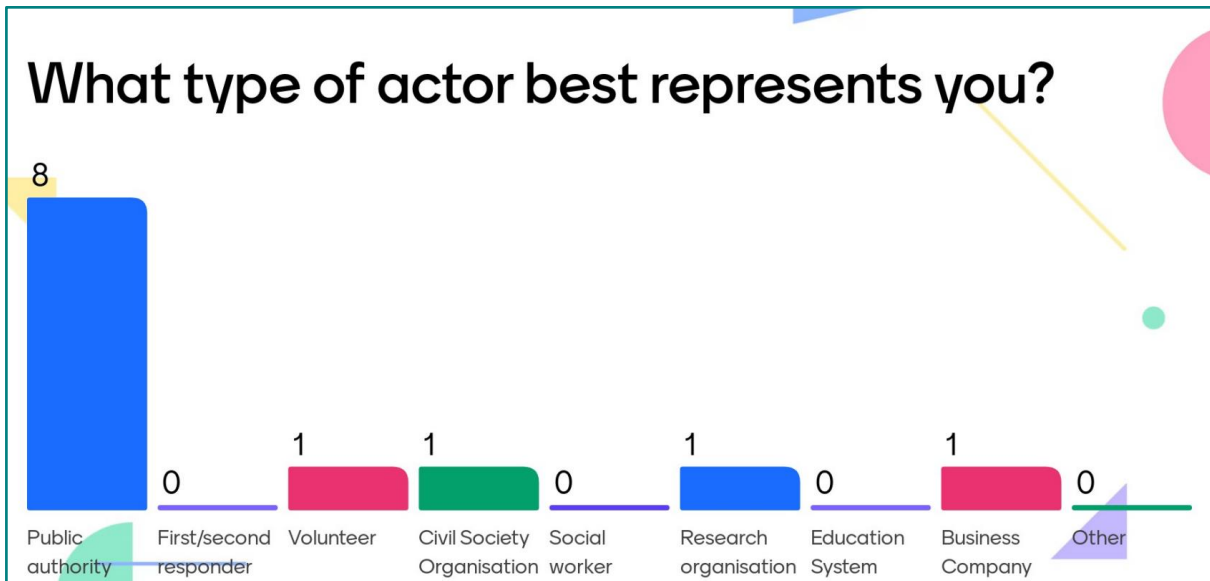
Civil Protection Department	Malta Chamber of Geologists
Research and Planning Unit, Public Works Department	Ministry for Home Affairs, Security and Employment
Public Works Department	TRANSPORT MALTA
Canine SAR Team - Order of Malta	University of Malta
Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation	Government of Malta - Public Works Department

² <https://www.mentimeter.com/>



Emergency Fire & Rescue Unit	St. Paul's Bay Community Police Team
Building and Construction Authority	

Public authorities were the most common actor type at the Stakeholder Mobilisation Workshop (as shown in the figure below), representing 69.2%³ of participants. This suggests that government agencies played a leading role in shaping disaster preparedness efforts in Malta.



Among workshop participants, Enforcement was the most common role, accounting for 23.1% of attendees (as shown in the figure below). This suggests that a significant portion of the attendees came from enforcement backgrounds, this strong representation from the enforcement sector is advantageous for advancing compliance with disaster preparedness regulations. Conversely, the absence of social workers and education professionals highlights a gap in stakeholder engagement. Their inclusion is crucial for developing a comprehensive preparedness strategy. Regarding responders, the category may overlap with public authority roles such as police and search and rescue, explaining the zero representation in this specific grouping.

³ All data and percentages in this document were collected partly during the workshop and partly thanks to a questionnaire previously distributed together with the registration forms.

What is your role?

19 responses



2.2 Participants Disaster Preparedness Experience

While many participants had prior experience in disaster preparedness, there was a clear appetite for enhancing knowledge and capabilities in areas such as emergency response planning, community education, search and rescue, and technological innovation. A significant majority expressed concerns about Malta's preparedness for earthquakes, with most participants rating the country's readiness as either somewhat or very unprepared for such events.

Interestingly, only 33.3% of participants reported having prior disaster preparedness experience. This highlights the importance of workshops like this one in raising awareness and building capacity across various stakeholders.

The workshop attendees indicated a strong focus on several key areas of disaster preparedness, including:

- Emergency response planning
- Community education and awareness
- Search and rescue
- Technological innovations
- This well-rounded focus ensures a comprehensive approach to disaster preparedness, encompassing both preventative measures and response capabilities.

A significant concern emerged regarding Malta's current preparedness for earthquakes. Most participants (66.7%) rated the country as somewhat or very unprepared for potential earthquake damage. This suggests a need for further investment and development in earthquake-resilient infrastructure and emergency response protocols.



2.3 Participants' Knowledge of the Area

Based on the identified risk areas, the top concerns seem to be Loss of life, Injuries, Business disruption due to different types of risks, as follows:

- Coastal erosion
- Building collapses
- Flooding
- Construction Accident
- Bush fires
- Cliff collapse
- Overpopulation



Participants expressed significant concerns about Malta's preparedness for large-scale disasters. Key worries included potential building collapses due to structural vulnerabilities, particularly in high-rise structures. The effectiveness of emergency response was questioned, with concerns raised about the speed of mobilisation, coordination, and the availability of specialised search and rescue resources. Additionally, participants highlighted the lack of community preparedness, a general underestimation of disaster risk, and potential strain on healthcare infrastructure in the aftermath of a major event.

The region's diverse geography, encompassing both coastal areas and densely populated urban centres, poses significant challenges in terms of evacuation, resource allocation, and tailored response strategies. The presence of high-rise buildings, hotels, and a large foreign population further complicates disaster planning. Workshop participants identified several unique challenges and opportunities for disaster preparedness in Regjun Tramuntana, as described below:

Challenges for Reġjun Tramuntana:

- Geographic diversity (coastal areas, urban centres, rural landscapes)
- High population density
- Infrastructure vulnerabilities (ageing infrastructure, urban development)
- Limited resources (equipment, trained personnel)
- Traffic congestion
- Complex geology
- Foreign cultures
- Language barriers (government alerts not in Maltese)

Opportunities for Reġjun Tramuntana:

- Community engagement
- Collaboration (neighbouring regions, government agencies, NGOs)
- Technology adoption (early warning systems, data analytics)
- Capacity building (training programs for local emergency response teams)

The workshop participants highlighted these challenges and opportunities as critical factors to consider for improving disaster preparedness in Reġjun Tramuntana. By addressing these issues, the region can become more resilient and capable of effectively responding to various disasters.

The multi-ethnic population in Reġjun Tramuntana faces distinct challenges in disaster preparedness:

- Language barriers: difficulty in communicating emergency information and instructions.
- Cultural differences in risk perception: varying understanding of disaster risks and appropriate responses.
- Community silos: isolated ethnic groups may lack access to disaster preparedness information and resources.
- Socioeconomic disparities: low-income housing with substandard conditions can increase vulnerability.

However, opportunities exist to leverage the diverse community:

- Diverse skills and knowledge: different cultural perspectives can enrich disaster preparedness strategies.
- Bilingual training programs: providing information in multiple languages can enhance understanding.
- Cross-cultural collaboration: building bridges between ethnic groups can improve community resilience.
- Leveraging existing networks: utilising existing ethnic community networks to disseminate information.



Assessments of coordination between responsible bodies in disaster preparedness and response were generally positive, with approximately 53% of participants rating it as good. Another 26% considered it fair, while the remaining 21% expressed concerns, rating it as poor or very poor. These findings highlight a need for further improvement in inter-agency collaboration to enhance overall disaster preparedness and response capabilities.

Workshop participants emphasised the need for a multifaceted approach to enhancing disaster preparedness and response. Key recommendations included:

- Infrastructure improvement: constructing buildings and structures to withstand seismic and other natural hazards.
- Enhanced collaboration: fostering stronger partnerships between government agencies, civil society, and the private sector.
- Comprehensive planning: developing detailed disaster preparedness plans, including evacuation procedures, resource allocation, and communication strategies.
- Public education and training: implementing widespread awareness campaigns and training programs for the public on disaster risks and response measures.
- Early warning systems: investing in advanced early warning systems to provide timely alerts.
- Risk assessment and mapping: conducting thorough assessments to identify vulnerable areas and prioritise mitigation efforts.
- Regular exercises and simulations: conducting drills to test emergency response plans and identify areas for improvement.
- Building code enforcement: strengthening building codes to ensure structures are resilient to natural hazards.
- Community engagement: involving communities in disaster preparedness efforts to build resilience and foster a culture of safety.

By implementing these actions, Malta can significantly improve its capacity to prevent, mitigate, and respond to disasters.

Workshop participants identified the Civil Protection Department, Government NGOs, Police, and Health Department as key organisations responsible for disaster risk management in Malta.



Which are the organisations responsible for disaster risk management in Malta?

20 responses



While these entities play crucial roles, further investigation may be required to uncover additional organisations involved in disaster preparedness and response activities. A range of potential contributions to the project were identified. These include expertise in areas such as search and rescue, GIS mapping, emergency planning, community outreach, structural engineering, and geological risk assessment. Some organisations highlighted their capacity to provide training, data management, and traffic management services. However, several participants also acknowledged a current lack of specific resources relevant to the project, emphasising the need for further collaboration and resource sharing.

While some organisations, such as the Canine SAR Team, are actively involved in multiple areas including search and rescue, community outreach, and education, others focus on specific risks like coastal erosion or high-rise building safety. Collaboration and coordination are crucial, as evidenced by the mention of synergies and joint exercises. Overall, the participants demonstrated a commitment to enhancing Malta's disaster preparedness through their diverse roles and responsibilities.

If yes, for which risks you have done preparedness actions and what are your specific tasks in these preparedness actions?

No	Synergies - Implementation of it at Regjun Tramuntana	Coastal erosion and cliff collapse. Constant monitoring.	Risk contingencies
Specialised Search Capabilities, Incident Command, Community Outreach, Education on Disaster Preparedness and Response, Support in Rescue Operations	One time with regun tramuntana at golden sands hotel	Part on Synergies- coordination of exercises/ incident command and control	Traffic management flows, support in rescue operations

No	Earthquake monitoring and research.Tsunami risk and simulationPublic awareness for tsunami and earthquake	Coastal erosion monitoring	High rise building familiarisation visits
High riseFamiliarisation visits in highrise buildings, on goingEarthquakeExercise with all stake holders at Selmun April 24TsunamiExercise with M'xlokk community			

3. Data collection activities key findings

3.1 Empowerment of disaster management actors

Involving and empowering community representatives in crisis preparedness requires a multi-faceted approach. This includes establishing effective outreach and training programs, leveraging real-life stories for engagement, providing specialised skill training, and facilitating regular simulations and desk-top exercises. By incorporating community input, sharing knowledge with professionals and the general public, and training volunteers, communities can build resilience and effectively respond to crises.



What are the practices to involve and empower community representatives in building preparedness to act in crises?

16 responses



Workshop participants emphasised the importance of direct outreach, education, and empowerment for individuals in vulnerable situations. Key strategies included creating platforms for sharing concerns and developing solutions collaboratively. Participants also highlighted the need for multilingual campaigns, simulated evacuations, and community support systems. By involving these individuals in the decision-making process and providing them with the necessary skills and information, communities can better prepare for and respond to crises.

What are the practices to involve and empower individuals in vulnerable situations?

17 responses



The potential of youth engagement through scouting and guiding programs, coupled with first responder simulations, as effective tools for building preparedness was highlighted. However, challenges such as low social media engagement, complacency, and limited reach through traditional channels like schools and community centres were identified. Participants

emphasised the importance of education, sharing experiences, and tailored outreach to overcome these barriers and foster a more engaged and prepared community.

What are your practical experiences of using some engagement tools or strategies? What has helped or hindered engagement in building preparedness?

Legal policies	Youth engagement through Scouts, Girl Guides and Youth Groups through First Responder Simulation	By education and sharing of experience	Complacency attitudes
Talks at Day Centres and schools Knowledge of the area and it's inhabitants	Educational institutions	Social media. Not shared or viewed enough and small attendance. This causes a lack of representation.	By educating and give informative talk in local council to reach residents in all areas
Regular talks on social media platforms and also schools			

3.2 Key Insight from the first session

Below are the key insights stemming from the discussion started from the above questions:

- Increased awareness of seismic risks: recent seismic activity and research have highlighted the potential for significant earthquakes in Malta, emphasising the need for preparedness.
- Gap in risk perception: while there is growing awareness among experts, the general public and authorities often underestimate the risk of earthquakes and tsunamis.
- Infrastructure vulnerability: the increasing height and density of buildings, especially in coastal areas, exacerbate the potential impact of seismic events.
- Need for comprehensive geological assessment: a detailed understanding of Malta's geology is crucial for identifying high-risk areas and developing targeted mitigation strategies.
- Importance of cross-agency collaboration: effective disaster management requires strong cooperation between different agencies, including civil protection, police, and emergency services.
- Community involvement: engaging the community as first responders and providing them with necessary training to learn how to use the stored equipment can enhance overall preparedness.
- Knowledge sharing and learning from other countries: Malta can benefit from studying the experiences of countries like Italy and Greece in terms of disaster management and mitigation strategies.



3.3 Innovative channels and communication

The use of social media platforms for crisis communication by both participating organisations and local authorities was predominant. While recognizing the reach and immediacy of this tool, participants also emphasised the need for simplifying information dissemination and exploring the potential of targeted advertising to enhance message delivery during crises.

The police, emergency response teams, civil protection and local authorities were identified as key actors responsible for communication during crises in their area. However, the civil protection department is identified as the official national source providing information during emergencies. Civil protection indeed, has the authority to take control of the media (radio, TV, social media) and disseminate useful messages to the population. This indicates a perceived gap in effective information sharing and coordination among these entities, highlighting the need for improved communication strategies to ensure timely and accurate dissemination of critical information during emergencies.



Participants identified several key gaps and challenges hindering effective crisis communication. These include siloed operations limiting information sharing, insufficient public awareness and knowledge of crisis procedures, inadequate data collection for informed decision-making, difficulties in reaching target audiences, and a lack of coordinated education and training across relevant sectors.

What are the gaps and challenges for effective crisis communication?

8 responses

lack of knowledge
 coordination
 reachout
 cpd silos
 awareness
 data collection
 education

The need for a crisis communication tool that is user-friendly, accessible, and informative was emphasised. Key features desired include a clear and attractive interface, support for multiple languages, and simplified communication options. Participants also highlighted the importance of visual aids such as images, sketches, and pictorial illustrations to enhance understanding. Additionally, the tool should be robust, reliable, and easy to use for a wide audience.

What features or functions would you want in a tool designed for crisis communication with citizens?

11 responses

different languages
 drop down menu options
 simple
 robustness
 simplified communication
 compulsory sketches
 images
 pictorial illustrations
 attractive interface
 yes valid contributions

3.4 Key Insight from the second session

Below are the key insights stemming from the discussion started from the above questions:

Additionally, there's a need for comprehensive legislation outlining roles and jurisdictions, effective data sharing, and a robust early warning system. By fostering collaboration,



improving information exchange, and implementing standardised protocols, organisations can significantly enhance their crisis response capabilities.

Key challenges:

- Ineffective communication: existing channels, such as social media, do not reach all segments of the population, particularly the elderly and disadvantaged.
- Disinformation: the spread of inaccurate information through second-hand sources is a significant concern.
- Silo mentality: lack of coordination and collaboration among agencies hinders effective communication and response.

To enhance coordination and communication among entities during crises, several key improvements are suggested:

- Diversify communication channels: explore alternative methods to reach a wider audience, including traditional media, community outreach programs, and targeted messaging.
- Develop early warning systems: implement robust early warning systems, similar to those in Singapore, to provide timely information to the public.
- Enhance public education: conduct ongoing education campaigns to increase awareness of risks and promote preparedness.
- Strengthen interagency collaboration: foster better coordination and information sharing among agencies to improve response efficiency.
- Focus on mitigation: prioritise measures to reduce the impact of disasters, such as improving building codes and conducting geological assessments.
- Increased frequency of joint drills and clear role definitions.
- Standardised communication channels and operating procedures.
- Advanced technology integration.

3.5 Managing spontaneous volunteers

The participants expressed significant interest in spontaneous volunteers. They highlighted the potential for volunteers to contribute positively, especially when trained and equipped. However, concerns were raised about the risks of untrained individuals potentially hindering emergency response efforts. Participants emphasised the importance of harnessing the enthusiasm of volunteers while ensuring their actions align with professional guidance to maximise their impact.



Is spontaneous volunteers a topic of interest for your organization? If yes, why?

Yes, for community first responder training
Bystanders could be problematic without training

Yes, since one can educate the respective employees

It is an added value of human resources, but they need to be trained and supplied with PPE.

Yes. People would contact us directly about hazards seen (to be further monitored) or possible hazards (to start checking). Knowledge of previous hazards provides future insight.

Yes. Some can be helpful but others cause more panic by sharing events on social media while others, just for the sake of being there block ways to emergency sites

Helpers without any knowledge might jeopardise situations

Yes, to encourage the engagement of volunteers

Yes, volunteers offer extremely valid contributions in an incident subject they follow instructions from professionals

Financial constraints, including insufficient funding, were frequently mentioned. Additionally, participants highlighted the need for improved training, concerns about volunteer commitment and discipline, and a lack of recognition for the valuable work volunteers contribute to the community. These insights provide a foundation for developing targeted support strategies for local volunteers.

Are you aware of the challenges faced by volunteers in your locality?

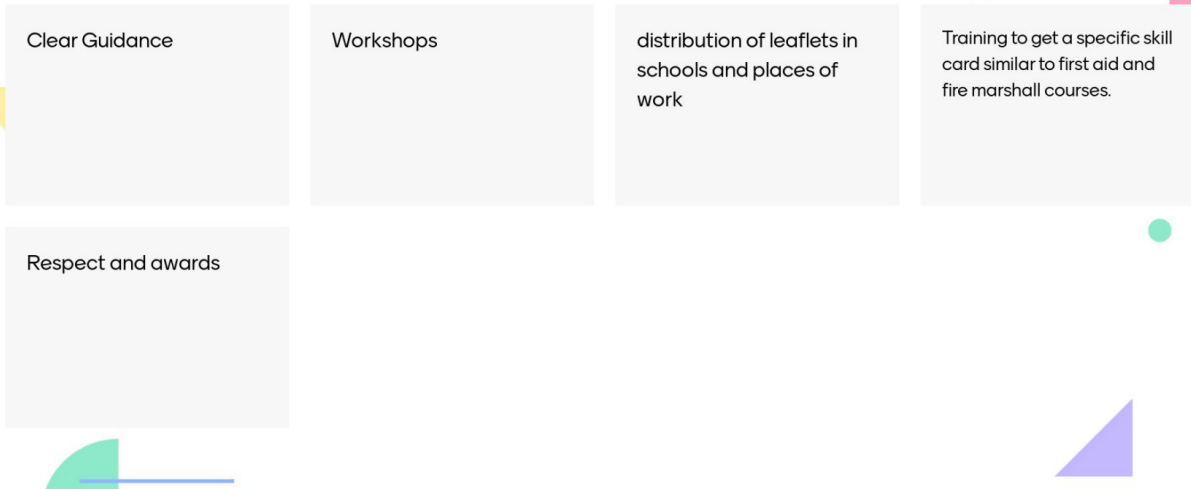
8 responses

lack of respect
lack of funding
untrained funds
lack of discipline
time lack of training

Several strategies to enhance volunteer integration in disaster management were proposed. These include providing clear guidelines, structured training leading to certifications similar to first aid or fire marshal qualifications, and regular workshops. Participants also emphasised the importance of recognising volunteer contributions through awards and public campaigns, such as spreading the word through social media and distributing leaflets in schools and workplaces to foster a culture of volunteerism.



Are you aware of any procedures to better integrate volunteers into disaster management efforts or to manage volunteers during/after an event?



Participants expressed a strong preference for assigning spontaneous volunteers to practical tasks such as logistics, manual labour, and distribution of essential items like food and supplies. They also emphasised the importance of support services, including comfort and cleaning efforts, as well as the need for volunteers to gather information and transport goods. These preferences indicate a clear understanding of the immediate needs during a crisis and the potential contributions of spontaneous volunteers.

What types of tasks would you be more willing to assign to spontaneous volunteers?

11 responses



Stakeholders emphasised the need for a structured approach to managing spontaneous volunteers in disaster response. Key recommendations include registering volunteers, providing standardised training in first aid, search and rescue, and disaster response protocols, and integrating them into existing emergency response structures. Participants highlighted the importance of public awareness campaigns to encourage volunteerism and

the role of government agencies in spearheading these initiatives. There was a strong consensus on the need for rigorous training to ensure volunteer safety and effectiveness in supporting professional responders.

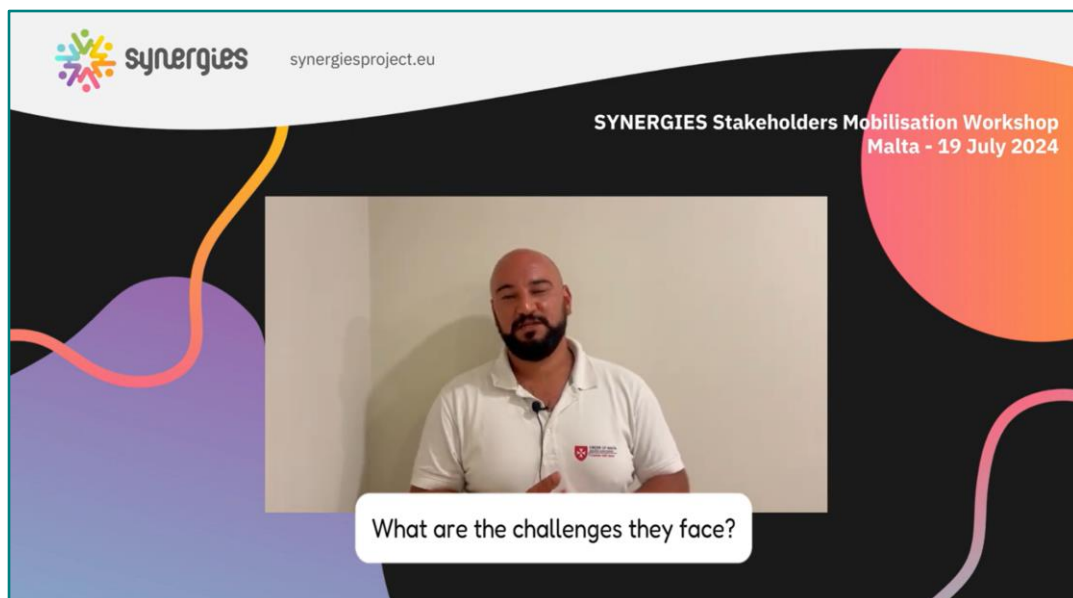
3.6 Key Insight from the third session

Below are the key insights stemming from the discussion started from the above questions:

- The primary challenge in managing spontaneous volunteers is a cultural issue rather than a lack of procedures. While there are existing standard operating procedures (SOPs) for coordinating emergency responses, the reality is that there is a silo mentality among different agencies and a fear of stepping outside of one's defined role. This leads to hesitancy to help and a potential waste of resources.
- To effectively manage spontaneous volunteers, it is crucial to foster a culture of collaboration and empowerment. This involves breaking down silos, encouraging inter-agency cooperation, and creating a supportive environment where individuals feel confident in offering assistance without fear of repercussions.
- Additionally, community-based training can be instrumental in preparing citizens to respond effectively during emergencies, transforming them into valuable assets rather than a potential burden.

More insights are reported in the next paragraph “Interview with Joseph Sammut (Order of Malta)”.

4. Interview with Joseph Sammut (Order of Malta)



In this interview, we asked Joseph Sammut about his experience with spontaneous volunteers management, the main takeaways can be summarised as follows:



Integrating and Managing Volunteers in Disaster Management

- Training is key: Providing training to both professional first responders and spontaneous volunteers (community first responders) is crucial for effective disaster management.
- INSARAG model: The INSARAG open-source course offers a valuable framework for training volunteers.
- Task assignment: Spontaneous volunteers can be effectively utilised in various roles depending on their training level. Untrained volunteers can assist with manual labour under the guidance of trained personnel, while trained volunteers can contribute to tasks like food aid, first aid, triage, and logistics.
- Logistics focus: The majority of work during a disaster involves logistics, rather than high-profile rescue operations.

Challenges Faced by Volunteers

- Lack of spontaneous volunteer culture: In some regions, like Malta, the concept of spontaneous volunteering in disaster response is not well established.
- Funding constraints: Volunteer organisations often face financial difficulties.
- Lack of respect: Volunteers may not receive adequate recognition for their work.
- Insufficient government support: While improving, government support for volunteer efforts is still lacking in many areas.

The video interview is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HQI2Yn64Dj4>.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Stakeholders Mobilisation Workshop represented a first initiative that has successfully brought together a diverse array of local stakeholders, ranging from disaster responders and emergency services to community engagement leaders, academics, ministries, and spontaneous volunteers. The achievement of such a pivotal goal has been the result of a strong collaboration among the PC partner and the central role of Regjun Tramuntana.

Overall, there is a clear recognition of the need to strengthen disaster management capabilities in Malta through enhanced risk assessment, improved coordination among agencies, and increased community involvement, as well as a need for improved communication strategies, early warning systems, and interagency cooperation to enhance disaster preparedness and response in Malta.

Effective integration of volunteers into disaster management hinges on comprehensive training. This includes both professional first responders and spontaneous volunteers. Standardised training programs, such as those offered by INSARAG, can equip individuals with essential skills to contribute meaningfully to relief efforts.



Spontaneous volunteers can be a valuable resource when their skills and capabilities are matched with appropriate tasks. By carefully assigning roles based on training levels, disaster management organisations can optimise volunteer contributions. A clear division of labour between trained professionals and volunteers can enhance efficiency and effectiveness. To ensure a consistent supply of volunteers and optimise their impact, it's crucial to address challenges such as funding, recognition, and government support. Cultivating a supportive environment for volunteers can foster a strong volunteer culture, leading to increased participation and effectiveness in disaster response.

The multi-ethnic population in Regjun Tramuntana faces unique challenges in disaster preparedness, primarily due to language barriers and cultural differences in risk perception. These factors can hinder effective communication, understanding of emergency procedures, and access to vital information. However, the region also presents opportunities to leverage the diverse skills, knowledge, and experiences of its multicultural community. Implementing bilingual training programs and fostering cross-cultural collaboration can enhance disaster preparedness efforts and ensure that all residents are equipped to respond to emergencies.

