



REAL Project:

**Resilience, Empowerment,
Active Leadership**

**A comparative
research report**



Resilience
Empowerment
Active Leadership



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1. Introduction

The partner organisations of the REAL project, working within the framework of ERASMUS+, are embarking on a collaborative effort to strengthen community resilience. This report presents an initial summary of national findings based on desk research and surveys conducted in each participating country. It highlights key trends, challenges, and insights into the current state of community resilience.

Beyond disaster management and civil protection, the project aims to develop a broader understanding of resilience by addressing the pressing issues faced by local communities and humanity as a whole. In response to various crises—both local and global—taking action is imperative. This shared commitment defines the mission and objectives of the REAL project.

The purpose of this report is to firstly outline what Community Resilience means to us. This was achieved by considering various academic definitions and arriving at our own conclusion. The report goes on to describe national reports and surveys from each partner country as well as EU policy. These are then compared with trends and challenges identified.

2. Community resilience

• Community

'Community represents a complex, social, economic, and psychological entity reflective of a place, its people, and their various relationships. ... As a field of social interactions, community emerges from the collective actions of its members.' (Larson et al, 2023, 20)

'A community is ... the people inhabiting a particular place, defined by their interpersonal relationships, cultural patterns, economic and governance structures, and shared memories and aspirations.' (Lerch, 2017, 14).

Community... 'is not a given. Instead, it is developed, created, and recreated through the process of social interaction.' (Larson et al, 2023, 21).

'Community action reflects the interaction of local actors and groups that focus on the creation of social relationships, problem solving, and/or the achievement of goals shaped by and found in their locality ... community action is the foundation of the community development process because it includes purposive and positive efforts designed to meet the shared needs of the locality.' (Larson et al 2023, 21)

'As long as people care about each other and the place in which they live, there is potential for agency and development of community.' (Bridger in Larson, 2023, 22).

The community field provides the interactional context that supports individual, social, and ecological well being.' (Bridger in Larson et al, 2023, 23).

'Individual, social, and ecological well being complement, and are dependent upon, one another.' (Wilkinson in Larson et al, 2023, 23).

Community is both a means and an end to social, local, and ecological well being. Community is where the individual and the society meet. The community provides the stage where the field of interactions occurs that allows the self to develop.' (Wilkinson in Larson et al, 2023, 27).

• Resilience

'Resilience has different definitions arising from a range of disciplines that use the concept, including natural hazard management, ecology, psychology, sociology, geography, psychiatry, and public health. These different perspectives mean that resilience is a widely used term that can take on different meanings in different contexts.' (Masterson et al, 2014,25)

• Community Resilience

Community resilience can be understood as the, '...willingness of communities to take responsibility and control of their development through the development of responsive strategies towards change.' (Wilson in Matarrita-Cascante et al, 2023, 35).

Magis defined community resilience as the 'existence, development, and engagement of community resources by community members to thrive in an environment characterized by change, uncertainty, unpredictability, and surprise.' (Magis in Matarrita-Cascante et al, 2023, 36).

Community resilience is therefore linked to concrete stressors, which can take many forms ranging from natural to human-driven events. These stressors are defining the consequences inflicted on a community. (Matarrita-Cascante et al, 2023, 35).

'Community resilience; '...exists within and because of change. It recognizes, accepts, builds capacity for, and engages change. ... Community resilience is about action taken, not simply capacity to act.' (Magis in Matarrita-Cascante et al, 2023, 46-47)

As part of the humanitarian support of the Red Cross, the IFRC (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), has developed excellent working papers for building community resilience – out of their world wide experience in crisis and underdeveloped regions (IFRC 2021).



In the '*Roadmap to Community Resilience*' IFRC has defined **11 dimensions of community resilience**:

1. **Risk management** – a resilient community knows and manages its risks
2. **Health** – a resilient community is healthy
3. **Water and sanitation** – a resilient community can meet its basic water and sanitation needs
4. **Shelter** – a resilient community can meet its basic shelter needs
5. **Food and nutrition security** – a resilient community can meet its basic food needs
6. **Economic opportunities** – a resilient community has diverse economic opportunities
7. **Infrastructure and services** – a resilient community has well-maintained and accessible infrastructure and services
8. **Natural resource management** – a resilient community has access to, manages and uses its natural assets in a sustainable manner
9. **Social cohesion** – a resilient community is socially cohesive
10. **Inclusion** – a resilient community is inclusive
11. **Connectedness** – a resilient community is connected

(IFRC 2021)

It is essential to **view community resilience in a broader context**, extending beyond disaster response and recovery. **Local communities face a wide range of crises**, each driven by different stressors, requiring a more **comprehensive and proactive approach** to resilience.



• Stressors

Numerous lists of stressors and crises that can activate community resilience are available in the literature.

Examples of stressors and main effects caused:

Type of stressor	Stressor	Description	Main effects
Natural stressors	Climate change	A drastic change from the typical weather conditions in an area	Shifts in the ability to engage in typical economic and social practises/behaviours
	Drought	A dry spell brought on by lack of rain	Limits abilities to secure water used for basic life activities
	Tornado	Violently rotating wind vortex	Physical destruction, loss of property and life, and forced mobility
	Flood	A general rise in the intensity of wet weather and water levels	
	Volcanic Eruptions	Sudden eruptions of hot lava and ash	
	Earthquake	A sudden, violent shaking of the ground	
Human driven stressors	Armed conflict	Conflict and violence within a community	Loss of life, forced mobility
	Refugee influx	Shift in demographics of an area due to influx of new residents	Population growth, overcrowding, lack of basic living conditions
	Economic depression	Downturn in economic activity	Reduction of access to economic assets and means of generating income
	Economic restructuring	Shifts in the typical forms of securing income/ subsistence	Reduction or shifting access to economic assets or means of subsistence
	Resource depletion	The process of depleting resources on which a community's economy is highly dependent	



- **E4 Crises as global framework**

The Post Carbon Institute in the USA is working to develop a framework for understanding the world's most pressing challenges, which it refers to as the "E4 crises"—four distinct yet interconnected crises.

1. The ecological crisis

Everything we need to survive – to have life, a society, an economy – ultimately depends on the natural world. But every ecosystem has two important limiting factors: its rate of replenishment and its capacity to deal with waste and stress. Exponential economic and population growth has pushed ecosystems around the world near, or past these limits. The ecological footprint of humanity is now larger than what the planet can sustainably handle.

2. The energy crisis

The era of easy fossil fuels is over. The use of conventional oil, coal and natural gases have come to an end. Sources of renewable energy have to be created but still, many sectors of the economy remain dependent on fossil fuels. Declines in the amount of affordable energy available to society threatens to create major environmental, economic, and social impacts in the near future.

3. The economic crisis

Local, national, and global economies are currently structured to require constant growth. Since the 2008 Great Recession and despite unprecedented interventions on the part of central banks and governments, economic recovery has failed to benefit the majority of citizens. The end of cheap and easy energy, the vast mountains of both private and public debt and the snowballing costs of climate change impacts are all forcing an as-yet-undefined, postgrowth, economic system, whether humanity is ready for it or not.

4. The equity crisis

Inequity has been a problem throughout recorded human history. Although social progress has brought political enfranchisement and legal protections to almost everyone, in practice the failure to fully extend both economic opportunity and a functional social safety net has led to ongoing inequality of economic, social and political power. The ecological, energy, and economic crises are together exacerbating inequality, which has become increasingly visible in the rapid concentration of wealth among the ultra-rich.



• Building Community Resilience

For human beings as social animals, identity is tied to community; our relationships to other people and to a place, our sense of shared experience, history and culture, and the smells, sounds, and even the soil that is associated with “home”. Community members recognize themselves as stakeholders by seeing themselves as part of a larger place-based whole. (Lerch, 2017, 16).

Two requirements for building community resilience can be identified:

1. The responsibility for resilience building and the power to decide how it is done must ultimately rest with community members.
2. The process of resilience building must equitably address both the particular situation of the community and the broader challenges facing society.’ (Lerch, 2017, 16).

Although numerous resilience frameworks and tools are available for building community resilience, no single approach is likely to suit all communities, given their diverse social and economic contexts. Community resilience is influenced by a wide range of factors.

Factors associated with community resilience:

Factor	Desired condition for resilience
Economic development/stability	Robust and diverse state of local economy
Infrastructure/services	Numerous and functioning built physical assets and related services in a community
Social capital/networks	Strong and meaningful social relations and connections
Information/communication/knowledge/skills	Available information and knowledge and efficient mechanism of communicating and sharing them
Community/competence/agency	Existing ability to learn and work together flexibly and creatively towards the overall community good
Active agents/leaders	Presence of numerous, diverse, and responsible individuals/organizations leading efforts
Equality/equal access to resources	Existing ability of all community members to gain access to and utilize community resources
Participation/collective action/	Existing and broad involvement of community members
Values and beliefs/disposition	Existing codes of conduct geared toward the overall community wellbeing
Governance/local institutional arrangements	Robust, responsive, and adaptable governance system/institutional arrangements



In the '**Community Resilience Reader**', Lerch (2017) described **six foundations of resilience building**.

These foundations support building community resilience rather than achieving resilience as a fixed goal, **emphasizing resilience building as an ongoing process** (Post Carbon Institute, 2015, ii):

- **Foundation 1: People**

The power to envision the future of the community and build its resilience resides with community members

- **Foundation 2: Systems thinking**

Systems thinking is essential for understanding the complex, interrelated crises now unfolding and what they mean for our similarly complex communities

- **Foundation 3: Adaptability**

A community that adapts to change is resilient. But because communities and the challenges we face are dynamic, adaptation is an ongoing process.

- **Foundation 4: Transformability**

Some challenges are so big that it's not possible for the community to simply adapt; fundamental, transformative changes may be necessary.

- **Foundation 5: Sustainability**

Community resilience is not sustainable if it serves only us, and only now; it needs to work for other communities, future generations, and the ecosystem on which we all depend.

- **Foundation 6: Courage**

As individuals and as a community, we need courage to confront challenging issues and take responsibility for our collective future.

3. National Reports



Croatia

Legal Framework and National Strategies

Croatia's approach to resilience is supported by a strong legal framework. Key legislation includes the Civil Protection System Act, which outlines crisis preparedness and response, as well as the Fire Protection Act, Water Act, and the Volunteering Act, which formalizes the role of volunteers in crisis situations. The Act on the Reconstruction of Buildings Damaged by Earthquakes is also crucial for disaster recovery.

National strategies further support this framework. The Disaster Risk Management Strategy and the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy focus on risk reduction and climate resilience, while the National Recovery and Resilience Plan aims to strengthen economic and social recovery. The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021–2026) defines resilience as the ability to quickly adapt and recover from crises, but it underrepresents the role of civil society and volunteers, which are essential for effective crisis response. Despite these efforts, there is still a gap in comprehensive reporting on community resilience.

Public Authorities and NGOs

Community resilience in Croatia involves a range of stakeholders, from national authorities like the Civil Protection Directorate to local government units. Key operational forces include the Croatian Red Cross, the Croatian Mountain Rescue Service (HGSS), and firefighting services. These organizations collaborate with civil society groups, which are crucial for mobilizing volunteers and raising public awareness.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the Croatian Red Cross, Caritas Croatia, and volunteer centres play a vital role in crisis response. They provide humanitarian aid, rescue services, and logistical support. Despite their critical contributions, coordination with state institutions continues to be a challenge.

Key Trends and Challenges

Recent trends indicate growing investment in security systems, crisis infrastructure, and technological advancements, such as Croatia's Early Warning and Crisis Management System (SRUUK). There is also an increase in spontaneous volunteerism during crises, highlighting the importance of integrating both formal and informal volunteering models.

However, challenges persist, including limited resources for civil society organizations, low community engagement, social inequalities, and a lack of formal cooperation between NGOs and government institutions. A significant gap is the absence of systematic crisis management training for volunteers and organizations, which diminishes their overall effectiveness.

Outlook

To strengthen community resilience, cross-sector collaboration is essential, along with better integration of volunteers into formal crisis response systems. Increased investment in technology, infrastructure, and training is also crucial. Volunteers and civil society organizations should play a more active role in developing crisis management plans to improve Croatia's overall resilience to future crises.

Survey Results

The REAL project survey of 30 Croatian organizations highlights community resilience efforts. Most operate nationally (60%), while 27% focus locally. Their main activities include organising events (77%), emergency preparedness training (63%), and mental health initiatives (53%).

Key challenges include resource shortages (77%), volunteer retention (57%), and low community engagement (50%), along with bureaucratic and coordination issues. Organisations were most active in responding to natural disasters (53%) and the COVID-19 pandemic (63%), with 57% coordinating aid and 43% distributing food and water.

To strengthen resilience, they prioritise community engagement (60%), capacity building, and emergency training (50%). Collaboration with authorities (43%), resource access (37%), and volunteer engagement (27%) are also vital. They emphasise the need for best practice sharing, financial support, and structured national training

Germany

Legal framework and national strategies



In Germany, the Federal Civil Defence and Disaster Relief Act (ZSKG) is the key legislation, regulating the tasks, responsibilities, and cooperation between the federal government, the federal states, local authorities, and the military. In 2022, Germany also adopted a strategy to enhance resilience to disasters. The strategy's objectives include improving the integration of existing structures and systems, fostering closer cooperation between state and non-state actors, and enhancing coordination for the collection and dissemination of information, findings, and risk management outcomes.

Public Authorities and NGOs

Several key governmental bodies in Germany are responsible for promoting resilience. The Federal Ministry of the Interior and Home Affairs (BMI) plays a central role in disaster prevention and emergency response. The Federal Office of Civil Protection and Disaster Assistance (BBK) is essential for enhancing crisis management capabilities, while the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety, and Consumer Protection (BMUV) focuses on climate change adaptation. The Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) also contributes by promoting health-related preparedness.

These agencies work in close cooperation with key actors across government, civil society, and scientific sectors. Government bodies like the BMI and BBK coordinate with the Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW), volunteer fire brigades, and local municipalities to strengthen community resilience at the national, state, and local levels.

Civil society organizations, such as the German Red Cross (DRK), other "blue light organizations," and local networks, also play vital roles. Volunteer efforts, particularly during crises, are increasingly recognized as valuable, although the formal inclusion of spontaneous volunteers remains a challenge.

Key trend

Community resilience in Germany has become increasingly important in light of recent crises such as the refugee influx, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine conflict, and climate-related disasters. Strengthening community resilience has now become a critical aspect of ensuring public safety and well-being.

Germany has adopted a multi-stakeholder approach to community resilience, emphasizing decentralized crisis management, civil protection, and citizen engagement. The integration of climate adaptation strategies into urban planning is a key focus, as extreme weather events pose growing risks. However, several challenges remain, including limited resources for planning, inadequate inclusion of volunteer organizations in disaster planning—particularly regarding spontaneous volunteering—and a lack of digital resilience infrastructure in some areas.

Outlook

Overall, while Germany has made significant progress in strengthening community resilience, especially in integrating civil society, much work remains to be done to address the evolving nature of crises and improve preparedness at local, regional, and national levels.

Survey Results

One-third of the German organisations surveyed were local groups, and one-third operated nationally. Most (90%) promoted community resilience through events, workshops, and social platforms. Half supported community engagement, storytelling, and leadership training, while 40% collaborated with local governments.

Key challenges included resource shortages (90%), lack of supportive policies (70%), competition (70%), social inequality (70%), low community engagement (60%), and resistance to change (60%). The most critical crises were COVID-19 (100%), the war in Ukraine (60%), and flooding (40%). Organisations responded with refugee assistance (70%), coordination with authorities (50%), shelter support (50%), fundraising (50%), and awareness campaigns (40%).

To build resilience, 80% focused on community engagement, 70% on training, and 38% on environmental resilience. Mental health and health education were also priorities. Long-term resilience depended on community engagement (71%), volunteer involvement (57%), and collaboration with authorities (43%). Organisations emphasised the need for more training (71%), best-practice sharing (71%), and financial support (43%).

Legal Framework and national strategies

Several national frameworks and initiatives have been introduced in Ireland, to strengthen resilience, including the National Volunteering Strategy, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), and the Community Resilience Programme. These frameworks emphasize sustainability, equity, climate adaptation, and preparedness.

Key national programmes driving resilience efforts include the National Adaptation Framework (NAF), the Be Winter Ready Campaign, and the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP). These initiatives focus on climate change adaptation, community preparedness, and post-crisis recovery, respectively. Additionally, the Resilient Communities Fund supports local projects aimed at enhancing environmental, social, and economic resilience.

Public authorities and NGOs

Public authorities play a crucial role in resilience efforts in Ireland. The Department of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage oversees the Local Authority Climate Action Plans, while the National Directorate for Fire & Emergency Management leads disaster risk management initiatives, such as the "Be Winter Ready" campaign.

The Civil Defence, a volunteer-based organization, provides vital support during emergencies, while the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offers guidance on climate adaptation. Met Éireann, Ireland's meteorological service, issues critical weather alerts, and the Health Service Executive (HSE) manages public health crises. Local authorities contribute by overseeing emergency services, with oversight from the Office of Emergency Planning (OEP).

Several NGOs are actively involved in enhancing resilience, including Community Volunteers, the Irish Red Cross, which focuses on disaster response and emergency preparedness, and An Taisce, which promotes environmental sustainability. Community Work Ireland advocates for social inclusion, while Clann Credo provides social investment funding for community projects. Additionally, The Wheel supports the community and voluntary sectors through capacity-building and advocacy.

Key trends and challenges

Trends identified include a growing focus on climate adaptation, social inclusion, and community engagement. Local authorities are prioritizing climate action, while programs like SICAP work to empower marginalized communities. There is also an increasing emphasis on volunteerism and grassroots initiatives, as seen in the Community Volunteers programme. The use of technology, such as early warning systems and digital services, is becoming a key component of resilience efforts.

However, challenges remain. Funding limitations, insufficient expertise within communities, social inequality, and rural-urban disparities continue to impede resilience-building. Climate change poses a significant threat, with the frequency of extreme weather events on the rise. Additionally, there is a need for improved coordination among stakeholders and greater public engagement in resilience initiatives.

Outlook

Looking ahead, the report from Ireland emphasises the potential to strengthen resilience through robust climate action, digital transformation, capacity building, and inclusive policies. Collaboration between the public, private, and community sectors is crucial for fostering sustainable resilience-building in Ireland.

Survey Results

Over half (50%) of surveyed organisations in Ireland, were local groups, while the rest operated nationally (30%), across Europe (3%), or globally (1.5%). Most (78%) promoted community resilience through events, workshops, and social platforms, with 46% supporting mental health and environmental activities. Local leadership development was a focus for 27%.

Key challenges included resource shortages (70%), sustaining participation (37%), and collaboration issues (32%). Some (29%) faced community conflicts. The biggest crises were COVID-19, the Ukraine war, climate change, and natural disasters, with responses including awareness campaigns, refugee aid, psychological support, and food and water distribution.

To strengthen resilience, 51% used community engagement activities like festivals and volunteering, while 38% prioritised capacity building and environmental efforts. Mental health and health education were also key.

For long-term resilience, organisations emphasised community engagement, strong leadership, volunteer support, and collaboration with authorities. They called for best-practice sharing, training, financial support, infrastructure development, and national forums for learning.



Norway

National Laws and Strategies

Several laws underpin community resilience in Norway. The Civil Protection Act mandates both preparedness and public participation in emergency responses. It requires municipalities to ensure local preparedness and obliges the public to assist during crises. The Civil Protection Instructions outline key principles such as responsibility, equality, proximity, and cooperation, ensuring that crisis management remains as close to normal operations as possible. Additionally, the Planning and Building Act focuses on safety, particularly through risk prevention by regulating infrastructure and zoning.

Norwegian strategy is shaped by key political documents like White Paper 5 (2020–2021), which emphasizes civil-military cooperation, digital security, and localized prevention. It also recognizes the impact of climate change and stresses the need for preventive measures, particularly in northern maritime regions and across the broader national landscape.

Public Authorities and NGOs

The Ministry of Justice and Public Security holds primary responsibility for civil protection in Norway, with supporting roles played by emergency services, the Joint Rescue Coordination Centre, and the Norwegian Security Authority (NSM). The Civil Defence, overseen by the Directorate for Civil Protection (DSB), provides additional manpower during large-scale incidents. Municipalities are crucial in local preparedness, coordinating volunteer efforts and conducting risk analyses.

Several NGOs contribute significantly to community resilience, including the Norwegian Red Cross, which is involved in rescue operations and medical services, and the Norwegian Women's Health Association, which provides crisis support. Volunteer organizations such as the Norwegian Volunteer Centres and the Norwegian Society for Sea Rescue play key roles in both response efforts and community building.

Key Trends and Challenges

Key trends include a growing focus on emergency response following the 2011 terror attack and heightened geopolitical tensions, such as the invasion of Ukraine. There is also an increasing emphasis on self-preparedness, with public campaigns encouraging households to be equipped for crises. Digital alert systems have been implemented to improve communication during emergencies.

Despite these advancements, several challenges remain. Limited resources, insufficient inclusion in planning, and unpredictable volunteer availability continue to complicate resilience efforts. Additionally, there is a lack of local expertise and limited community awareness regarding solidarity and preparedness.

Outlook

Norway aims to strengthen community resilience by expanding participation across all levels of society and supporting smaller organizations. Efforts will focus on enhancing cooperation between the public sector and NGOs, building local competence, and ensuring that preparedness is deeply integrated into daily life.

While Norway's legal and organizational framework for community resilience is strong, ongoing efforts are required to overcome existing challenges and ensure that communities are fully prepared for future crises.

Survey Results

The report from Norway identifies key challenges in building community resilience, including poor coordination, unclear crisis roles, limited funding, and lack of crisis management training. Organisations also struggle with access to essential equipment and infrastructure.

National initiatives like aid hubs, volunteer groups, and government grants offer some support, but gaps remain. Coordination is weak, and national alert systems are underused.

To improve resilience, organisations call for more public awareness, training, stable funding, better communication, and stronger political support. They also emphasise the need for clearer roles, collaboration, and improved resource access. Respondents highlighted the importance of learning more about resilience, stressing the need for better educational tools and national support.

Romania

Legal framework and national strategies

The Romanian government has implemented several laws and strategic plans aimed at enhancing community resilience, particularly in response to socio-economic and environmental challenges. Key frameworks include the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) (2021–2026), the National Strategy on Preventing the Institutionalization of Adults with Disabilities, the National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (2024–2035), and the Sustainable Development Strategy 2030. These strategies emphasize disaster preparedness, social inclusion, risk communication, and sustainability.

Public Authorities and NGOs

Public authorities, including the General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations (IGSU) and the National Committee for Special Emergency Situations (CNSU), coordinate national efforts to enhance resilience. NGOs such as the Romanian Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity Romania, and the Civitas Foundation for Civil Society play a significant role in strengthening community-level resilience.

Key trends and challenges

Key trend in Romania's community resilience efforts has been the increased adaptability of NGOs in response to crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Many NGOs have demonstrated flexibility by shifting to digital platforms, organizing volunteer efforts, and forming partnerships with government and private-sector actors. These initiatives focus on providing tailored services to vulnerable populations, including the elderly, refugees, and marginalized groups such as the Roma community.

However, challenges persist in areas such as funding, stakeholder coordination, and reaching marginalized communities. Many initiatives face resource constraints, capacity limitations, and difficulties in sustaining long-term efforts. NGOs have also encountered political resistance and bureaucratic barriers, which hinder the implementation of reforms aimed at strengthening community resilience.

Outlook

To address these challenges, it is suggested to enhance collaboration between NGOs, local authorities, and the private sector to improve disaster preparedness and early warning systems, while also focusing on long-term recovery efforts. Further leveraging technology for outreach, fostering social cohesion, and emphasizing mental health support are crucial for building more resilient communities in the future. NGOs should invest in capacity building for themselves and prioritize inclusive, community-led approaches to ensure sustained impact.

Survey Results

Over 45% of surveyed organisations in Romania were local, 41% national, and smaller numbers operated across Europe and globally. Their main resilience activities included organising events (74%), environmental conservation (63%), and promoting healthy lifestyles and education (47%).

The biggest challenges were resource shortages (79%), resistance to change, and lack of data on community vulnerabilities (52%). Other issues included coordination difficulties, low participation, social inequality, and conflicting interests (47%–42%).

Most organisations responded to COVID-19 and the Ukraine war (both 68%), focusing on fundraising (73%), coordination with authorities (68%), and refugee aid (47%).

To strengthen resilience, they prioritised community engagement (58%), social networks (53%), and capacity building (37%). Long-term resilience relied on collaboration with authorities (76%), community engagement, and NGO partnerships (46%).

Nationally, organisations called for financial support (85%), training (77%), and best-practice exchanges (62%), with all interested in learning more about resilience.



4. EU Policy

EU Documents

At the EU level, resilience has become a key principle guiding policymaking, particularly in response to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Key documents, like the European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) and Council Conclusions on preparedness and response capabilities, emphasize the importance of resilience in managing and recovering from crises.

The EU defines resilience as the capacity of individuals, communities, and states to withstand and recover from shocks. This concept is applied across various policy areas, including foreign and security policy, health, and climate change.

Strategies in the EU

Several EU mechanisms focus on crisis coordination and civil protection, including the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR), the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, and the Solidarity and Emergency Aid Reserve. These tools are designed to coordinate responses to emergencies, allocate resources efficiently, and ensure rapid assistance when needed. Additionally, the EU Cohesion Policy and the EU Adaptation Strategy provide further support for recovery and resilience, particularly in the context of climate change.

Role of Volunteering

Volunteering plays a crucial role in building community resilience, as demonstrated by the case of Valencia, where thousands of volunteers mobilized to assist in the aftermath of devastating floods. Volunteers provide critical support during crises, offering medical aid, food distribution, and emotional care. However, this report highlights challenges faced by volunteers, such as safety risks and coordination issues, and stresses the need for proper training and support to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of volunteer efforts.

Key trends and challenges

In conclusion, the importance of community and EU-level resilience in addressing unforeseen crises is emphasized. While the EU has made significant progress in establishing frameworks for crisis response, further improvements are needed, particularly in supporting volunteers and enhancing cross-border cooperation. These efforts will strengthen the EU's ability to withstand future challenges and ensure that communities can recover and thrive after disasters.



5. Comparison

5.1 Survey overview (148 Organizations across project countries)

Key activities in Community Resilience:

- 60% fostered connections through events and workshops.
- 31% encouraged community participation
- 30% ran educational programmes. Other efforts included mental health support (28%), promoting healthy lifestyles (25%), emergency preparedness training (21%), and collaboration with local governments (20%)

Major crises addressed:

- COVID-19 (51%)
- Ukraine War (32%)
- Flooding (22%)
- Natural disasters (21%)
- Health crises (20%), humanitarian crises (18%), climate change (14%)

Resilience Strategies Used:

- Community engagement initiatives (42%)
- Building social networks (37%)
- Capacity building & training (30%)
- First aid & CPR training (24%)
- Health & well-being programmes (22%)
- Emergency preparedness workshops (19%)

Most Important Factors for Long-Term Resilience:

- Collaboration with authorities (36%)
- Community engagement (26%)
- Access to resources (24%)
- Volunteer involvement (22%)
- NGO partnerships (20%)
- Strong leadership (17%)
- Emergency preparation plans (12%)
- Business partnerships (7%)

Key Needs for Better Resilience:

- Financial support (39%)
- Training in community resilience (36%)
- Best practice sharing (32%)
- Information exchange with peers (31%)
- Community resilience handbook (18%)



5.2. Legal Foundation – National plans and programs

The legal foundations and national programmes vary in all the REAL partner countries. However, most have national laws that serve as the foundation for tasks and responsibilities related to civil protection, crisis management, and the participation of NGOs and volunteers.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, several countries reflected on their experiences, published reports, and developed new national strategies. Each crisis, or more generally, every stressor at the regional or national level, has prompted revisions of existing strategies or the creation of new ones. Cooperation between government authorities and non-governmental organizations remains a key issue in all countries.

5.3. Responsible authorities and actors

Governmental institutions

The type and responsibility of state authorities are fundamentally dependent on whether a country follows a federal or centralized structure. As a result, there are national authorities, as well as authorities at the state, regional, or local municipality level, depending on the size and governance model of the country. In addition, digital warning systems are being developed and utilized by the relevant government authorities to enhance crisis management and communication.

Civil Society organizations and networks

Important non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Red Cross with its local volunteers, and other associations, play a significant role in crisis management and civil defence. In Germany, these organizations are often referred to as "blue light organizations" and are well-structured, forming part of the state-controlled protection measures.

In addition, there are other NGOs dedicated to specific issues and tasks, as well as numerous local initiatives committed to strengthening community resilience. These organizations cover a broad spectrum of areas such as ecology, economy, justice, and energy—aligned with the concept of the E4 crises.

Although spontaneous volunteers emerge in all crises and disasters, they are often perceived as a hindrance in the strictly structured and hierarchical procedures of authorities and blue light organizations. As a result, these volunteers are frequently underutilized in formal response efforts.

5.4. Role of Volunteering

Volunteers play a crucial role in all countries, particularly when they are trained and integrated into blue light organizations, working in close coordination with the authorities. These volunteers form the essential backbone of activities, especially within these organizations, and are typically highly trained, skilled, and prepared for disaster response.

However, spontaneous volunteers who appear at disaster locations or emerge from local communities are not always seen as meaningful support. Recognizing them as citizens with valuable knowledge and skills of their local areas—and as the first to assist on-site—has not been sufficiently acknowledged. Volunteers, both in direct crisis response and during preparedness and recovery efforts, are of immense importance for community resilience. They are often the first responders during a crisis and play a key role in "last-mile delivery," ensuring that assistance reaches those in need.

6. Key trends and insights

From the reports of the respective partner organizations, several important trends for further development can be summarized. These trends provide an initial insight into the various tasks that lie ahead in the respective countries:

- **Increasing investment in security systems, crisis infrastructure, and technological advancements, e.g. digital alert systems and digital services as integral to resilience efforts**
- **Integration of spontaneous volunteering into formal volunteering models**
- **Preparedness of safety risks and burnout/trauma prevention**
- **Multi stakeholder approach to crisis management and community resilience**
- **Multifaceted planning of community resilience according to E4 crises**
- **Emphasis on self-preparedness with public campaigns**
- **Empowerment of marginalized communities and support of volunteerism and grassroots initiatives**

On the EU level, resilience—defined as the ability to withstand and cope with challenges, as well as to undergo transitions in a sustainable, fair, and democratic manner—has been at the heart of the transformation of EU policies over the past decades.

7. Challenges

While challenges vary across different countries, there are many common critical points reported by the partners, including:

- **Limited resources for planning and civil society organizations, particularly for sustainable, long-term support**
- **Rural-urban disparities that hinder resilience-building, compounded by social inequalities in both areas**
- **Lack of formal cooperation between NGOs and government institutions, with restricted or insufficient inclusion in planning processes**
- **Absence of preparedness for spontaneous volunteers**
- **Insufficient digital resilience infrastructure in certain areas**
- **Lack of volunteer management for spontaneous volunteers**
- **Insufficient community awareness of solidarity and preparedness, as well as inadequate expertise within communities**
- **Lack of public engagement in resilience initiatives**
- **Absence of systematic crisis management training for volunteers and organizations involving volunteers**

The EU should prioritize cross-sectoral and cross-border crisis management, improve crisis communication, and combat disinformation to address these challenges effectively.



8. Summary

The reports and experiences from the project partners across various countries, along with insights into EU policies, have provided an initial overview of the structure of legal frameworks, responsible authorities, and the involved NGOs. Additionally, initial trends and challenges have been identified.

These reports offer a comprehensive look at the understanding of community resilience and the current situation in the partner countries. They are intended to serve as a foundational step for further pursuing, planning, and implementing the project's goals.

Community resilience is a vast and multifaceted field, but it is central to addressing the widespread issues facing humanity and the planet. The described E4 crises create a framework that particularly impacts local communities. It is at the local level where solutions must be developed with citizens, strengthening community resilience.

The local level often serves as an experimental space where solutions can be tested and refined, with the potential for these models to be scaled up to regional, national, and even European levels.

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