

Finnish Red Cross - Community Based Resilience Approach in Finland a summary

Community based approach is in the core of the Finnish Red Cross (FRC). The organization is present all over the country and our roughly 500 local Branches organized into 12 Districts are covering all geographical area of Finland. The FRC has annually around 40,000 active volunteers and it consists of roughly 80,000 members. Around 100,000 people donate to the organization regularly. The FRC has 132,000 blood donors each year to the blood service.

The backbone of the organization are the volunteers who are present in the local communities every day and who are prepared to act when needed. The volunteers are supported by the roughly 1000 workers of the organization. The FRC does both rapid disaster response and long term influencing and community work.

The long-term activities are reaching to the most vulnerable in the Finnish society, such as: the elderly, immigrants, socially deprived, the youth and other special groups. The activities of the organisation include: First Aid Groups and First Aid Training, Friend Visitor Services and Support to Informal Carers, Health Points and other health promotion, clubs and camps for children and young people, support to immigrants, reception of refugees and maintaining asylum seekers reception centres and running shelters for young people.¹ Preventing people from being driven into a vulnerable position or becoming socially excluded is an essential part of the domestic aid provided by the FRC. The local branches develop different kinds of ways to support people who are in danger of social exclusion.²

In a local Finnish context, the FRC cooperates with other NGO's, the local administration and with the local population.³ Finland has a very active Civil Society, but because of the sparsely populated terrain and the big geographical the authorities have a limited capacity to function. Therefore, CSO's have a big role in building resilience in communities and in Disaster Response. The immediate volunteer response in disasters is organized through the Voluntary Rescue Service (VAPEPA) mechanism, which is coordinated by the FRC.⁴ Its actions are based on contracts with the authorities and the trained volunteers are alarmed through the Vapepa/FRC alarm system.

When it comes to resilience there is an abundance of NGO actors, which are organized in variety of ways depending on the local context. The Security Authorities in Finland hold that a socially bound, healthy and genuinely participatory society is a more resilient one. Activating citizens in wellbeing and health have long-term effects and NGO's in Finland have a strong role in implementing these goals.⁵ The impact of social and healthcare NGO's is significant in this. The civil society activities are tackling the root causes of security risks.

¹ Other activities of the FRC: Restoring Family links, international disaster response and development cooperation, collections, campaigns and other fundraising, advocacy for people who need help most, Blood Service, Kontti recycling department stores, youth shelters and the coordination of the Voluntary Rescue Service.

² Example of the FRC activities: 9000 voluntary friend visitors who support more than 32 000 People a year. 1400 volunteers in health promotion who help 35 000 individuals per annum.

³ At the national level: The FRC has coordinated the Voluntary rescue service since 1964. In 2018 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the FRC and the Ministry of the Interior organizations role for disaster preparedness and everyday security was coined. Authorities under interior ministry's coordination are encouraged to cooperate with FRC. In the 2014 MOU with Ministry of Social Affairs and Health it says in major scale emergencies FRC coordinates other social and healthcare NGO's.

⁴ The Voluntary Rescue Service Vapepa is a network of volunteer helpers made up of 52 different CSO organisations, for more see: <https://vapepa.fi/en/>

⁵ See for example: <https://turvallisuuskomitea.fi/en/frontpage/>

Although well recognized and cherished in Finnish comprehensive security approach, there are challenges for the role of the CSO's and resilience in society. One of the major challenges is that the actors are multiple, they are geographically widespread, have insufficient knowledge of each other activities, role and capacities and that they do not understand how their partners function. This applies to both authorities and to NGO actors. Thus, their cooperation in everyday security and in societal disruption could be more efficient. A lot of potential in the civil society is underutilized in these situations.

One of the responses for the challenges was the "Pärjätään Yhdessä" development project. It builds up resilience of local communities in Finland. Goal is to build up networks for local level NGO's and municipality level governmental actors.⁶⁷ These networks organize activities to increase capacity of local people to cope with various everyday situations and increase their skills on disaster preparedness and first aid. These goals are reached by regular meetings, events and trainings with the local FRC branch, other CSO's and the local authorities.

The results in two pilot FRC Districts have been encouraging and the experiences and models of the 15 pilot networks are currently nationalized to other FRC districts. The local Red Cross branches will continue to work with the models developed by the project. Networks will be linked with disaster preparedness plans of Red Cross branches and municipalities.

Further inquiries:

Janne Leskinen

Project Officer

Domestic Disaster Management Unit

Finnish Red Cross

+35820 701 2139

janne.leskinen@redcross.fi

⁶ Pärjätään yhdessä is coordinated nationally in Helsinki, by the Project officer Janne Leskinen. The pilot areas where the project works are Satakunta and Lappi. Regional work is done carried out in the FRC Pori office by Mia Vettenranta and in Rovaniemi by Veli-Matti Ahtiainen.

⁷ Project is funded by Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organizations (STEA) and is running from 2016 to 2019.