



Hellenic
Red Cross

Samaritans, Rescuers and Lifeguards Division



The role of the Samaritans, Rescuers and Lifeguards Division of the Hellenic Red Cross in Civil Protection

The Hellenic Red Cross Volunteer Samaritan, Rescuer and Lifeguard Division (HRC/SRLD) was established in 1932 with a focus on first aid, rescue and disaster services. It is organized on a Local Department basis, with 36 Local Departments nationwide, and it is currently composed of more than 4.500 active Volunteers (First Aiders, Rescuers, Lifeguards, Instructors, Physicians, and Special Associates) with an average age of 23 and a male to female ratio of 2:3. In 2010 alone, Volunteer Samaritans, Lifeguards and Rescuers offered 215,110 hours of voluntary service to the community. By the established role of the Hellenic Red Cross National Society as an auxiliary to the State in terms of health care and disaster services, the HRC/SRLD is actively involved in emergency management in Greece, and is registered as a Civil Protection Voluntary Organization with the General Secretariat for Civil Protection, which is the Greek national authority for civil protection in Greece. Its scope is not limited by hazard type; that is, the HRC/SRLD operates in all types of natural and technological disasters. The following paragraphs present the activities of the HRC/SRLD in disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery in Greece.

The HRC/SRLD recognizes that **mitigation** is a highly cost-effective strategy of disaster risk reduction and that voluntary organizations have a considerable role to play in this area. Therefore, many of its activities are preventive in nature. First of all, the HRC/SRLD has an established role in citizen awareness. It provides public education about first aid, CPR, water safety and citizen disaster preparedness. In addition, the HRC/SRLD Local Departments cover a number of special events on a daily basis, including but not limited to sports events, concerts and carnival events. On average, Volunteer Samaritans and Lifeguards cover 1,4 special events every day. The added value of these operations is that they improve unit cohesion while providing for regular testing of key procedures as well as for practice of core skills and competencies of personnel. This is a very important comparative advantage in disaster preparedness. Notable examples include the Athens 2004 Olympic Games and associated events, the Athens 2006 Eurovision Song Contest, the Patras Carnival etc. Finally, the HRC/SRLD participates in various international bodies and is thus able to follow state of the art guidelines and techniques in disaster services. Besides following the technical know-how of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross, it is represented in the Board of Directors and the Rescue Commission of the International Lifesaving Federation of Europe. In addition, it held the Chair of the Aquatic Disasters Committee of the International Lifesaving Federation. Finally, it is represented in the EU Red Cross Office Disaster Management Working Group.

Given its operational role in disaster response, a considerable part of the workload of the HRC/SRLD is focused on emergency **preparedness**. The aim of preparedness is to build the emergency response system of the Hellenic Red Cross. Volunteer recruitment, selection and training are a very important part of the HRC/SRLD daily activities. A Basic First Aid program is the basic training for all volunteers. The second phase of volunteer training includes the Samaritan School, focused on advanced first aid, rescue and disaster services, and/or the Lifeguard School. An experienced Samaritan or Lifeguard can attend the General Rescuer School, which is the third phase. The fourth and final phase of specialty training includes the Technical Rescue School; Mountain Rescue School and/or Emergency Medical Care School. In addition to the specialty training continuum, a comprehensive 5-level training system prepares unit leaders for civil protection operations. Unit leader training courses include leadership development courses, as well as small unit (team, squad) and platoon size unit tactics. Training programs are planned and

delivered in cooperation with the German Red Cross, while water rescue programs follow established guidelines by the International Lifesaving Federation. In addition, the HRC/SRLD works closely with organizations having specialist experience in various fields, such as the French Red Cross (psychosocial support) and the Norwegian Red Cross (mountain rescue). Hellenic authorities such as local Civil Protection Directorates; the General Secretariat for Civil Protection; the Hellenic Fire Service; National EMS; and the Hellenic Coast Guard are regularly consulted upon or asked to conduct training programs for HRC/SRLD Volunteers. Another part of the HRC/SRLD preparedness activities includes the maintenance of technical resources, including land vehicles (personnel transport; ambulances; rescue; command & control), rescue boats, and rescue equipment. Finally, in order to test skills, plans and procedures, and train key personnel, one national full scale training field exercise is conducted each year, while Local Departments can conduct more frequent drills. This experience allowed the HRC/SRLD to participate in the consortium and the Exercise Planning Team of the EU POSEIDON 2011 Civil Protection Exercise, which was the first exercise of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism with a focus on tsunami hazards.

When a disaster occurs, the HRC/SRLD responds to save lives by providing a vast array of services to the community. Disaster **response** services include disaster impact assessment; urban search and rescue; wilderness search and rescue; mountain rescue; first aid and emergency care; wildland fire suppression; and mass care. In addition, the HRC/SRLD uses an integrated command, control, coordination and communications (C4) system, which allows for mission accomplishment. HRC/SRLD forces operate under the command of the competent authority. A response is usually initiated when a Local Department is mobilized by a State agency, such as the Civil Protection Directorate of the affected Region of the local Fire Department. The Local Department then dispatches a Reconnaissance Team within approximately 30 min. The Reconnaissance Team is then followed by an Emergency Response Platoon, composed of an Emergency Medical Care Squad and a Mass Care & Logistics Squad. Emergency Response Platoons are local or regional units that respond within 1 to 2 hours of initial alert. An Emergency Response Platoon can conduct rescue operations, establish a Triage and Treatment Area for approx. 10 injured persons, and provide mass care for approx. 50 persons. If necessary, reinforcements are sent from other Local Departments to establish special platoons, such as the Emergency Care Platoon; the Mass Care Platoon; and the Urban Search and Rescue Platoon. Response time for special platoons varies from 2 to 6 hours nationwide, depending on incident location. Notable operations include urban search and rescue missions in Turkey (1999), Athens (1999) and Western Greece (2008); wildfire suppression on various fronts all over Greece (2007 and 2009). However, a large number of smaller operations, including wilderness search and rescue; mass casualty incidents; and mountain rescue missions are conducted more often, with an average of one platoon-size mobilization every 6,5 days nationwide.

In the aftermath of major disasters, the HRC/SRLD provides disaster **recovery** services, such as reforestation, medium- and long-term shelter, and continuing public education. In addition, it provides, through the Hellenic Red Cross Central Administration, financial and recovery assistance to the affected population. Finally, by analyzing After Action Reports, the HRC/SRLD is able to draw lessons learned from past events and improve emergency plans and procedures.

Overall, the HRC/SRLD is a voluntary body with 80 years' experience in disaster management. Its comparative advantages include a broad scope of operations; an integrated C4 system; a wide range of skills and competencies in emergency and disaster response; specialized equipment; a nationwide and international network; and a solid yet flexible structure which allows for adaptable operational capabilities. As an auxiliary to the State in terms of health care and disaster management, the HRC/SRLD is a valuable asset of the national civil protection system.