



VOLunteers in ACTION: Raising Awareness For Volunteer Fire Fighters”

2020-1-EL01-KA204-078872

Good Practice from Ovar Forma

1. Title of the activity or event

“Safe Villages, Safe People” (Aldeias Seguras, Pessoas Seguras)

2. Objectives/aims expected by this action

The programme aims to protect people located in the urban-forest interface, through the implementation and management of protection zones and places of refuge in settlements, as well as raising awareness among the population to prevent risky behaviour and to adopt self-protection and preparedness measures against rural fires, in order to strengthen their safety.

3. Target group (or groups)

People living in the urban-forest interface in Portugal.

4. Description of the activity (methods, materials, human and physical resources, timing, etc.)

The extensive rural fires that occurred in mainland Portugal in the summer of 2017 led to the carrying out of studies containing recommendations that the Government took on board and acted on, in the form of resolutions by the Council of Ministers (Resolution No. 157-A/2017, October 27) in which the government established a set of measures aimed at introducing "a systemic reform in preventing and fighting forest

fires, extending to other areas of protection and relief.". This meant that the solutions proposed could be materialised, allowing action to be taken to prevent rural fires and mitigate their effects with immediate results. At the same time, it was intended that citizens should be encouraged to become more involved, fostering public participation and reinforcing the collective conscience that everyone is responsible for their own and everybody else's protection and safety. This goal can only be achieved if it is supported by the adoption of measures designed to effectively reduce the risks faced by built-up areas and the people who live there.

The "Safe Village" programme is defined as a "Population Clusters and Forest Protection Programme" and is intended to establish "structural measures for the protection of people and property, and buildings at the urban-forest interface, with the implementation and management of protection zones for settlements and strategic infrastructure, identifying critical points and places of refuge". In turn, the "Safe People" programme aims to promote "awareness-raising actions for the prevention of risk behaviours, self-protection measures and conducting drills of evacuation plans, in conjunction with local governments. This initiative consists in the prevention and mitigation of the effects of rural fires, through awareness-raising campaigns for the prevention of risky behaviour, dissemination of self-protection measures, preparation of an evacuation plan, and a drill.

The aim is to provide these local government bodies with the technical knowledge, teaching resources and support instruments needed to support them in promoting the resilience of the population, especially in respect of the following five aspects:

1. Protection of built-up areas and population clusters – actions aimed at the management of buffer zones for such areas located on the urban-forest interface, in an effort to reduce the likelihood of rural fires affecting the buildings;
2. Prevention of risky behaviour – awareness-raising campaigns aimed at reducing the number of fires caused by risky behaviour associated with the use of fire;
3. Awareness-raising and notification systems – actions aimed at raising people's awareness and keeping them informed about the risk status of rural fires and what they should do to protect themselves if a rural fire approach;
5. Evacuation of built-up areas – actions aimed at preparing and conducting a spontaneous or planned evacuation of a built-up area in response to an approaching rural fire;

6. Shelters and places of refuge – actions aimed at selecting and preparing spaces or buildings in a particular built-up area for use as shelters (in enclosed spaces) or places of refuge (in open spaces) when a rural fire is passing through, in cases where this is either the most viable or the only possible option.

To this end, the municipal and civil councils, as the governmental bodies in closest proximity to the population, mobilise the local communities, identifying and preparing collective and individual players. A particularly important role may be that of the Local Safety Officer in each built-up area, who should be sufficiently familiar with the existing geographical, human and structural realities at local level and who is in charge of transmitting warnings to the population, organizing the evacuation of the village in case of need, and raising awareness among the population.

7. Steps for the implementation (operative steps to implement the good practice)

The implementation of the "Safe Villages" and "Safe People" programmes takes place under a protocol between the National Authority for Emergency and Civil Protection (ANEPC), the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities (ANMP) and the National Association of Parishes (ANAFRE). Under the terms of this protocol, its implementation is carried out at two levels:

1. Strategic level (the responsibility of the Central Administration, through ANEPC): elaboration of cross referential for the entire national territory, complemented with awareness campaigns and warning systems of national scope;
2. Operational level (under the responsibility of Municipalities and Parishes): implementation on a local scale of concrete measures for protection and awareness, taking advantage of the greater proximity to citizens and the ability of local agents to mobilize their communities, strengthening relationships of trust and stimulating the participation of the population.

In this scope, actions are developed at the following levels:

- a) Village protection - actions aimed at managing village protection zones located at the urban-forest interface, in order to reduce the possibility of buildings being affected by rural fires;
- b) Prevention of risky behaviour - awareness-raising actions aimed at reducing the number of ignitions caused by risky behaviour associated with the use of fire

- c) Raising awareness and warning the population - actions aimed at raising awareness and informing the population about the rural fire risk in force and the self-protection measures to be adopted in case of the possibility of an approaching rural fire;
- d) Evacuation of settlements - actions aimed at preparing and implementing a spontaneous or deliberate evacuation of a settlement in case of an approaching wildfire;
- e) Places of shelter and refuge - actions aimed at selecting and preparing spaces or buildings of a given settlement to serve as shelter (enclosed space) or refuge (open space) during the passage of a wildfire, in cases where this is the most feasible option or the only one possible.

The municipal councils adopt methods to identify critical points and prioritise population clusters (e.g. located in risk areas, close to areas of forest/scrubland, etc.). Once the municipal councils have selected it, they should work in conjunction with the civil parishes, residents, forest producer organisations, forestry fire brigades and common land commissions, among others, to promote the implementation of the “Safe Village” programme. The first step in implementing the programme is to ensure the existence of defensible spaces around hamlets and buildings. The implementation of defensible spaces should be preceded by awareness raising and question-and-answer sessions for the population to facilitate compliance with the existing legislation governing the clearing of forest spaces. In order to help the population be better prepared and more involved in addressing the risk of rural fires, municipal councils should encourage communities to progressively adopt a concept of community-led prevention and self-protection of their villages. This concept puts into practice the idea that citizens should be the primary agents in civil defence (creating a first line of defence), which will help make people safer. To this end, it is important to conduct a preliminary analysis of the existing self-protection capabilities such as the existence of water sources, operational self-protection/first-responder kits, and residents able to operate these resources and familiar with the terrain. If these capabilities exist, a training programme should be implemented and it should be adapted to the population in question and to the residents who are capable of intervening. The programme should be taught by the Municipal Civil Protection Division, the Fire Brigade and the forest firefighter teams, and should include annual refreshers.

Within the scope of these programmes, about 1 million leaflets with self-protection measures have been distributed by various public entities. The leaflet was also delivered to 640 thousand households in priority parishes. An information campaign on television, radio and social networks was also developed. The programmes also aim to signalize evacuation routes in populated settlements, define places of refuge in villages, make people aware of what to do in case of fire and how to avoid risky behaviour. In order to help the municipalities adopting these measures and practices, an implementation guide was made available online through the programme's webpage.

8. Impact of the good practice and evaluation of the results achieved

Official data attest that, to the present date, 1988 clusters have already implemented the programmes, 1849 of which have a security officer, 242 simulacres were made, 1284 shelter locations and 1205 places of refuge were created, and 768 evacuation plans were designed. More than 10000 people were also involved in awareness-raising actions.

9. Conclusions

The programmes were designed to transfer knowledge to the local populations, giving them the necessary means to develop strategies to protect their villages through prevention and preparedness to act in case of a forest fire. Implemented in 2018 and corresponding to the priorities of action that are defined in similar programmes in other countries, the implementation in Portugal is still working in progress. The Programme is very ambitious and comprehensive, but it still needs more support structure from the governmental institutions.