



Educational Tour on Training Fire Protection Volunteers in German Rural Communities

Note by Irene Raab-Marancos, Member of CEI and ÇADER, March 2024

The Cyprus Environmental Initiative, partnered with the "From Flames to the Future Project," focusing on raising social awareness about the escalating threat of wildfires and advocating for proactive measures to prevent, respond to, and recover from such disasters. The island has witnessed several severe wildfires in recent years, resulting in the destruction of vast hectares of forests and vegetation.

Reforestation is imperative in the battle against climate change and to mitigate erosion, which can devastate habitats and landscapes post-fire. It is crucial to combine tree planting with effective protection measures. Long-term success hinges on educating and empowering people of all ages to take responsibility for their environment.

Alarmingly, 99% of wildfires on the island are human caused, with residential areas encroaching into forest zones. We advocate for prioritizing education and establishing a robust organizational structure to address this issue. We believe that fostering a sense of community belonging and responsibility is essential in promoting preventative measures against fires.

In light of increasing population and construction in the Kyrenia district, our initiative, in collaboration with the association ÇADER, has explored the model of trained local village volunteers, inspired by European countries like Germany, where over 90% of firefighters are volunteers. Germany was chosen because it boasts one of the largest volunteer firefighting systems in Europe. These volunteers play a crucial role in the country's fire and disaster services. During our research, we encountered numerous articles and images that led us to the conclusion that these volunteers, children, youth and adults take great pride in their work and seem genuinely happy in their roles, driven by responsibility for their community. Nearly every German village has its own volunteer firefighting association. We have engaged with relevant organizations in the Kyrenia Region to assess the feasibility of implementing this model within existing institutional frameworks.

Recognizing the potentially catastrophic consequences of wildfires and the eagerness of villagers to assist, we emphasize comprehensive training and organization of villagers into regional units for safe firefighting interventions. A visit to firefighting units in Germany provided valuable insights into establishing volunteer groups and fostering collaboration between professionals to train and encourage volunteers.

The trip, supported and funded by Grow Civic/EU, aimed to understand a system maintained by professionally trained responsible volunteers, including methods for recruiting volunteers for fire associations and implementing youth programs. It laid the groundwork for long-term collaboration and ongoing exchange between relevant organizations in Cyprus and Germany, with hopes of expanding to bi-communal cooperation.



The trip, supported and funded by Grow Civic/EU, aimed to understand a system been taken care of by responsible professionally trained volunteers, volunteer fire association recruitment methods and youth programs, laying the groundwork for long-term collaboration and ongoing exchange between relevant organizations in Cyprus and Germany, and hopefully expanding to bi-communal cooperation.

This visit was a direct outcome of the Alevlerden Gelecege project which inspired the development of the "From Flames to Future" project, underscoring the importance of delving into the topic and comparing strategies with other European countries.

