

# The Finnish Voluntary Rescue Service



## HELPERS ON HAND

Arsi Veikkolainen, coordinator, Finnish Red Cross  
29.3.2022

# Finnish Voluntary Rescue Service (Vapepa)

- Established in 1964
- Over 50 organisations
- Brings together and trains volunteers of different backgrounds by their willingness to help
- The main task is to support authorities
- Coordinated by Finnish Red Cross
- Other coordinators



Finnish Red Cross



SUOMEN LENTOPELASTUSSEURA  
THE FINNISH AIR RESCUE SOCIETY



MERPELASTUSSEURA  
SJÖRÄDDNINGSSÄLLSKAPET

(Finnish Lifeboat Institution)

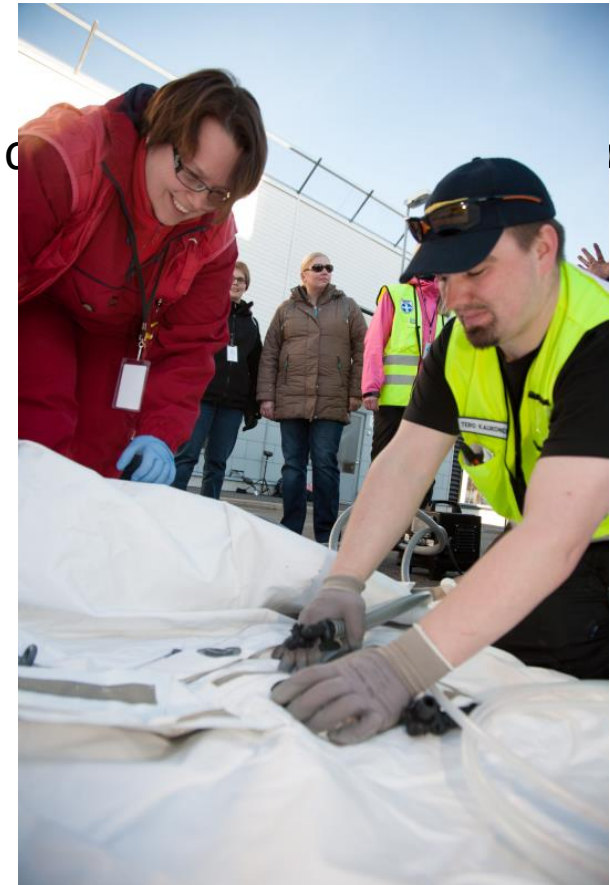


Photo: Finnish Red Cross / Eero Sario



Vapaaehtoinen  
pelastuspalvelu

22.1.2021

# What is Vapepa?

## Vapepa activities are...

- voluntary
- supporting the authorities
- altruistic
- organized
- trained

....NGO activity

**A network** where each organisation offers their skills, people and equipment to support the authorities.



Photo: Finnish Red Cross / Jari Miettinen





# Statistics

- Per annum
  - 350-450 missions
  - 1000-3000 persons helped
  - 300-400 trainings and exercises
- Actively involved 2020
  - **1200** local alarm groups
  - **11 000** volunteers
  - Most alarm groups by
    - Red Cross (3600 volunteers)
    - Rescue Dog Association (600)
    - Hunters' Association (550)
    - Orienteering Federation (550)
  - 17 different NGOs have over 100 volunteers in alarm groups

(Source: Alarm system and database OHTO)



Photo: Finnish Red Cross / Niklas Meltio

# Network organizations



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# How it all begin?

- 24th May 1963 a little girl disappeared in Lappland.
- It started a massive search operation for two weeks.
- There was thousands of volunteers from all over Finland.
- Lesson learned: we need a efficient organisation for massive operations that can channel volunteers to support authorities
- Vapepa was established  
31st March 1964.
- Red Cross chosed to coordinate as "neutral" actor.
- Authorities had strong role during first years and that also funded activities.

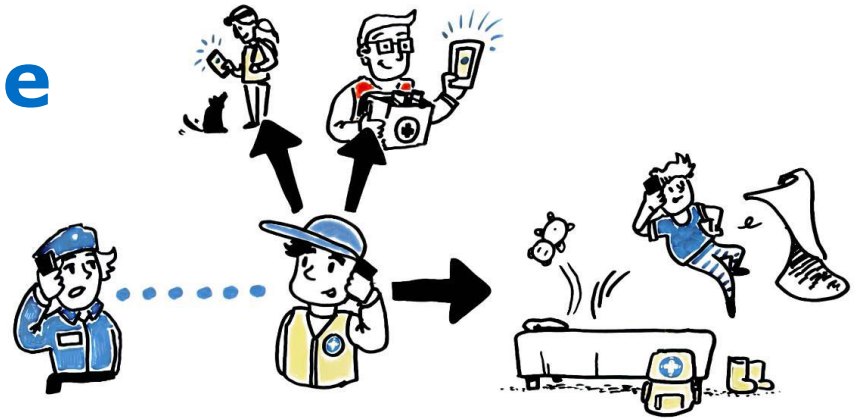


# Vapepa now - background

- There is no straight law or legal regulation that legitimes Vapepa, but Finnish law of Red Cross gives kind of responsibility to coordinate volunteer help in.
- There is some regulation concerning Police and Rescue services, that authorities should use and promote volunteer help.
- With Finnish Red Cross have with Police national contract and guidelines for Vapepa (volunteer help). They defines how and in which situations police can use Vapepa (organised volunteers).
- There is similar regional contracts with many regional Rescue services.
- There is also agreements with the Ministry of the Interior and with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, that gives Red Cross coordination status for organising volunteers to help authorities in various situations.

# Vapepa now - reponse

- Regional coordination is the basis of preparedness.
- Local alarming numbers has been given to the authorities.
- Tasks are received from the Emergency Response Centres or directly from the authority leading the operation.
- Nationwide alarm system (SMS)
- Joint missions run by Vapepa's general guidelines
- Trained volunteers and organisations practice their cooperation regularly.
- Vapepa leads its voluntary response according to the orders of the authorities.
- Vapepa have own trained and experienced voluntary leaders
- Red Cross Disaster Preparedness Coordinators are in charge in every FRC district (12).





# Missions

- **search and rescue**
- **emergency support services**
- first aid
- signalling / radio communication
- transportation
- **psychosocial support**
- traffic control
- childcare
- search and rescue at sea and on the lakes
- search under surface
- air rescue (planes and drones)
- forest fires
- environmental accidents
- **other tasks defined by authorities**

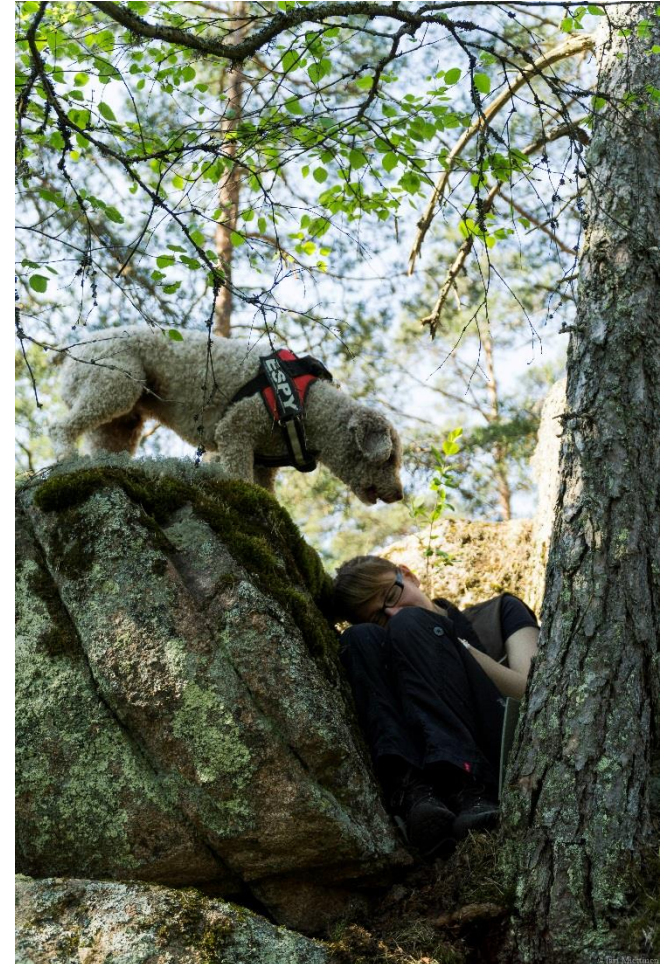
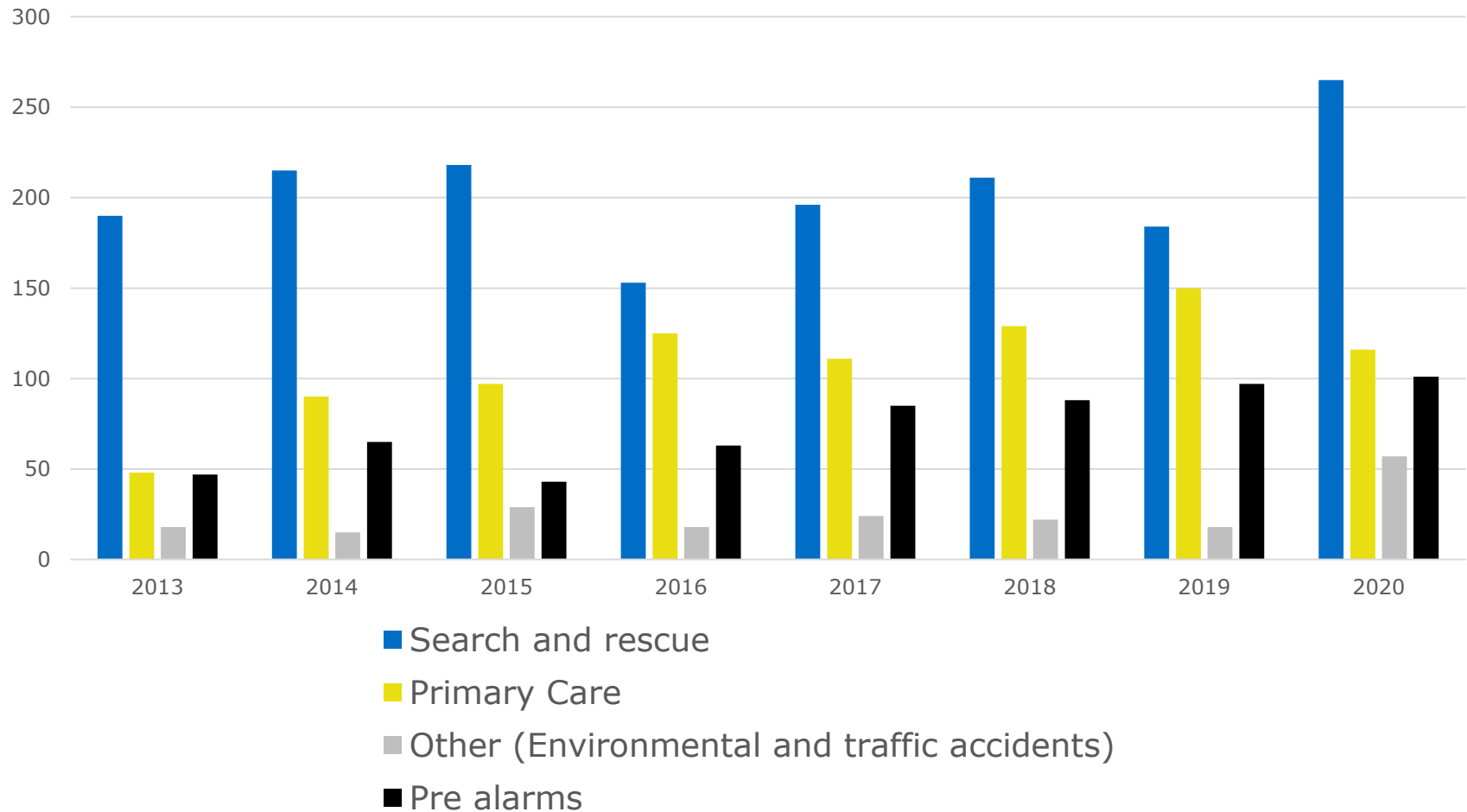


Photo: Finnish Red Cross / Jari Miettinen



# Most of the Missions are Search and rescue and Primary support services (primary care)



# Vapepa now - economics



- Vapepa coordination is funded by Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations – STEA (70%) and by Red Cross (30%).
  - Coordination includes: : governing, training, guidelines, alarm system, networking, insurance, publicity
- STEA Funds are not secured, but Vapepa has strong status to get its funds annually according yearly application.
- Annual budget for coordination (national and regional) is ~ 1.1 M€
- Local activities (training, equipment etc..) are funded by money that authorities pays as they use Vapepa (400 euros per alarm).
- Local groups get some funding for their activities from NGOs they belong.
- Some local groups also apply funds straight from local governments.
- In alarm situations authorities pay all straight costs for volunteers (through Vapepa organisation). They also have insurance for volunteers.


# Organization and coordination

Chairperson Hannu Harri


  
Finnish Red Cross

 Central committee (Representatives of member organisations + authorities)

 MERIPELASTUSSEURA  
SJÖRÄDDNINGSSÄLLSKAPET

 District committees (15)(Representatives of regional organisations and authorities)

 SUOMEN LENTOPELASTUSSEURA  
THE FINNISH AIR RESCUE SOCIETY

 Local committees (~100) (Representatives of local organisations and authorities)

 Alarm groups (~1200) – preparedness 24/7



# Vapepa's training system



Photos: Finnish Red Cross / Niklas Meltio, Eero Sario, Taina Keinänen



# Spontaneous volunteers

- Without Vapepa system there would be need for other ways to organise volunteer support (phone app or social media actions...)
- There is also special emergency situations where spontaneous volunteers are needed in large amounts.
- There is also other supporting activities for volunteers than "straight response actions" in emergency situation. Even then some coordination is needed (preferable).



# Spontaneous volunteers vs trained and organised

- Too large amount of (unorganised) volunteers and their self guided actions are problematic for authorities.
- In most situations any volunteer support is better than none.
- In Finland Vapepa offers the necessary support almost in any cases.
- Through Vapepa will authorities receive support easy, predictable, efficient, useful and safe.
- There is *comprehensive* volunteer resources available through Vapepa everywhere in Finland.
- Vapepa uses local habitants and their knowledge. There are procedures for that (registration, quick training..)
- Same procedures makes it possible to include spontaneous/untrained volunteers as part of Vapepa.

# More information: [vapepa.fi/en](https://vapepa.fi/en)



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THIS IS VAPEPA

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TRAINING

EVENT CALENDAR

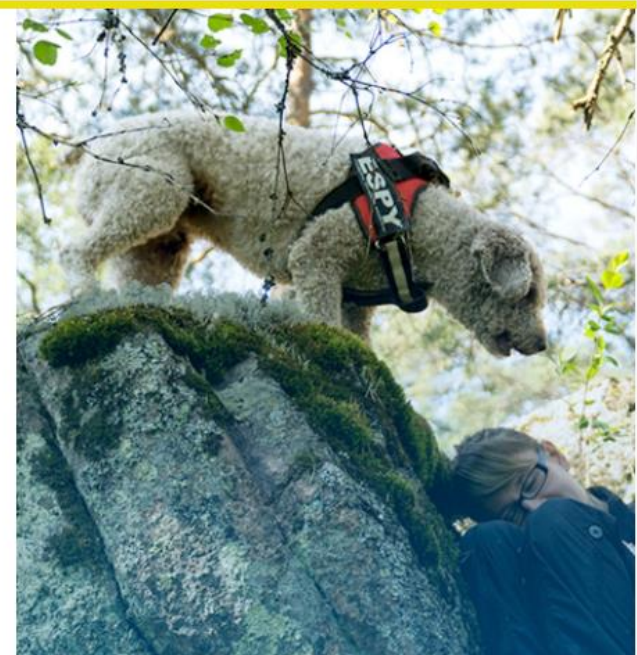
CONTACT INFORMATION

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## The Voluntary Rescue Service is a network of 53 organisations

Our emergency teams support the authorities when accidents or other crises occur.



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**Thank you!**

**Questions?**

