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## First aid should be compulsory for everyone, says Red Cross Red Crescent report

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is concerned that most Europeans do not receive first aid training at a time when the continent faces growing challenges. In a new report called “First Aid for a Safer Future: Focus on Europe” the IFRC and the European Reference Centre for First Aid Education give ten recommendations. Key among them: compulsory first aid training or education for everyone. The report was issued today to mark the occasion of World First Aid Day (September 12).

“The fact that 56 per cent of European countries have decided to make first aid compulsory to get a driving licence is encouraging but this is not enough and we clearly see the need for legislation at the European level both on compulsory quality first aid training and on putting a time limit on first aid certificates”, explains Diane Issard, manager of the Reference Centre based at the French Red Cross in Paris.

### Major differences within Europe

The report contains several key statistics: While 95 per cent of the population in Norway, as well as 80 per cent in Germany and Austria, are trained in first aid, in many other European countries only between 5 and 10 per cent of the population have the necessary skills to take immediate action and apply the appropriate techniques in case of accident. Especially in southern, central and eastern Europe, authorities rely too much on emergency services instead of the lifesaving potential of individual first aiders. “All citizens should be given an active role in disaster prevention and be taught basic first aid skills that can be applied in any kind of emergency, including everyday accidents”, says Diane Issard.

### Without first aid, help often arrives too late

The report demonstrates how immediate first aid can help reduce the severity of injuries and save lives: “A human heart ceases beating within four minutes after breathing stops. Permanent brain damage can occur within four to six minutes after breathing stops”, the report points out, emphasizing that, unless someone trained in first aid has taken immediate action, even the most sophisticated emergency service will frequently arrive on the scene only to certify death.

What is true for Europe is also relevant for many other regions in the world, especially where emergency services are far less developed. “It is crucial to make first aid available to all and not only to those who can afford it. In addition we have to integrate prevention messages in first aid courses so that communities are better prepared to react when necessary, no matter whether it is a road accident or a major earthquake”, says Dominique Praplan, head of the IFRC’s health and care department in Geneva. “This is the cost-effective, integrated approach that we are currently promoting to build communities that are safer and more resilient”, he adds.

### Specific groups of people need specific first aid courses

The report provides several examples of European Red Cross Red Crescent first aid training programmes that have been adapted to the needs of vulnerable groups. Examples of such groups include disabled and elderly people, youth in urban areas and ethnic minorities. In the same way, the report advocates for very specific groups to be targeted for first aid, such as family members of people living with heart diseases or elderly people.

### First aiders need legal protection

The report also advocates for more access to defibrillators in public places, calls for more realistic first aid trainings and is urging European legislators to ensure that first aid providers are not held responsible for possible poor outcomes in the challenging settings of an accident: “This is essential to

avoid people from turning away from accidents because they are afraid of possible legal actions”, concludes Diane Issard.

According to a survey conducted in 2006, out of the 6.2 million people trained in first aid every year in Europe, 56 per cent (3.5 million) are trained by National Red Cross or Red Crescent Societies.

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***The IFRC, the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross together constitute the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. For further information on International Federation activities, please visit our web site: [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)***