

PRESS RELEASE

SEARCH AND RESCUE PILOT EXERCISE AT ZAKROS GORGE STRENGTHENS OPERATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

Enhancing response capacity in remote and climate-affected environments

On 26–27 March 2026, a pilot search and rescue exercise took place in Sitia, Crete, at Zakros Gorge, within the framework of the Regions4Climate project, with the participation of volunteer rescue teams and Civil Protection authorities.

The exercise aimed to strengthen operational readiness in difficult-to-access and remote environments, particularly under conditions shaped by extreme weather events and climate change impacts.

Realistic emergency scenario in challenging conditions

The operational scenario focused on locating and rescuing two missing persons in a remote area of Zakros Gorge. Participants operated under realistic constraints, including:

limited available information,

communication challenges,

reduced network coverage.

These conditions simulated real-life emergency situations, requiring effective coordination, rapid decision-making, and adaptability from all involved teams.

Field testing of modern equipment and tools

During the exercise, teams deployed and evaluated modern field equipment to support search and rescue operations, including:



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portable satellite communication systems (e.g. Starlink Mini),
thermal and night-vision cameras,
advanced monitoring and detection tools.

The use of these technologies enhanced situational awareness and significantly improved response efficiency in the field.

Strengthening civil protection and local resilience

The exercise highlighted the importance of preparedness, coordination, and interoperability among response teams when operating in high-risk natural environments.

It also demonstrated the value of integrating innovative tools and practices into civil protection operations, contributing to:

the protection of human life,
the safety of visitors and local communities,
increased resilience to climate-related risks.

Collaboration and next steps

This pilot action forms part of ongoing activities under the Regions4Climate initiative in the Municipality of Sitia and builds on previous efforts to enhance local preparedness.

The insights gained from the exercise will be used to improve operational planning, strengthen coordination mechanisms, and support future emergency response actions in similar environments.

Quote

“Exercises like this are essential for improving coordination and ensuring effective response in complex and remote environments, especially under the growing pressures of climate change.”

Keywords

Search and Rescue

Civil Protection

Climate Resilience

Emergency Preparedness

Remote Areas