

# Legal status of voluntary firefighters in Europe

Vakvereniging Brandweer Vrijwilligers (VBV)  
Dutch Association for Volunteer Firefighters

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Baarn, May 9, 2025

In the pursuit of maintaining maximum room for voluntarism in the Netherlands, three professors—Armin Cuyvers (Professor of European Law at the Europa Institute of Leiden University), Geerten Boogaard (Professor of Local Government [Thorbecke Chair] at Leiden University), and Leonard Verburg (Professor of Labor Law at Radboud University Nijmegen)—have conducted extensive research and found that there are strong legal arguments to defend the current set-up of the volunteer fire brigade.

The Professors claim that the most elegant legal solution lies in recognizing that the non-application of certain EU rules for employees is inherent to the nature of volunteering, in line with judgments such as *Wouters and Deliège*. In this way, both the professional volunteer and EU law are protected: the EU explicitly seeks to leave space for volunteers and civil society, and with the correct interpretation, this is indeed possible.

The results of this research and their resulting recommendations have been compiled into two reports, which have also been submitted to the Minister of Justice and Security, who is responsible for the system, and to the House of Representatives.

## Research on Legal Frameworks

On October 14, 2021, the Minister of Justice and Security sent a letter to the House of Representatives outlining the professors' findings in the report titled "Legal frameworks for the maximum preservation of fire service voluntarism in the Netherlands."

See: <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-29517-209.html>

In this letter, the minister states his intention to raise awareness in Europe of the insights provided by professors Boogaard, Cuyvers, and Verburg, since many EU countries and Brussels are also seeking solutions for preserving voluntarism and protecting workers' rights.

In July 2021, the House of Representatives unanimously adopted a motion calling on the Dutch government to challenge the strict interpretation of EU legislation in the EU that threatens voluntary participation within organizations such as the fire service and, if necessary, to actively plea and work for an exception, so that voluntarism in the fire service can continue to exist in the future. See: <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/kst-29517-204.html>

On February 17, 2022, the VBV (Dutch Association for Volunteer Firefighters) shared its views and the professors' memo with members of the European Parliament.  
(see: <https://bit.ly/4deFq9s>)

On June 27, 2022, the report "Rules for (Fire Service) Volunteering" was published, focusing on the legal position of fire service volunteers. Among other things, the three professors recommend presenting their approach within the European context.

See: <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/blg-1040763.pdf>

On October 30, 2024, the VBV sent a letter to all 31 Dutch Members of the European Parliament, requesting support and attention for the establishment of an Intergroup on resilience, civil protection, and crisis management in the European Parliament.

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See: [https://brandweervrijwilligers.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/20241030\\_Brief\\_Malik\\_Azmani.pdf](https://brandweervrijwilligers.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/20241030_Brief_Malik_Azmani.pdf)

To ensure that the upcoming legislative package in the EU contains specific provisions for the protection of volunteer work, the VBV, together with fire service organizations from 17 other EU member states, sent a letter on March 25 to the European Commissioner for Preparedness and Crisis Management.

See: [https://brandweervrijwilligers.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/20250325\\_Brief\\_VF\\_EU\\_Preparedness\\_Union\\_Strategy.pdf](https://brandweervrijwilligers.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/20250325_Brief_VF_EU_Preparedness_Union_Strategy.pdf)

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## Position of the Dutch Association for Volunteer Firefighters

This coming Tuesday (May 13), a public hearing will take place in the European Parliament on “Volunteers in emergency services and their legal challenges: cross-border fire service issues.” The VBV was invited to contribute but unfortunately cannot attend.

Therefore, we wish to share our presentation (see: <https://bit.ly/4kjefwz>) and this summary of developments in the Netherlands to further motivate our desire for a protective and attractive legal framework in the form of a specific directive. This aims to ensure the long-term sustainability of civic participation and to prevent volunteers from being wrongly classified as employees.

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## New European Association of Fire Services

More than 40 representatives of fire service organizations from across Europe gathered in Paris on April 8–9, 2024, for the first “European Summit of Firefighters” (ESF), with the goal of strengthening the civil protection architecture of the European Union.

See: <https://ctif.org/events/ctif-president-milan-dubravac-speaks-european-summit-firefighters-112-april-8-9-2024>

The second “European Summit of Firefighters” took place in Brussels on November 5–6, 2024, where agreement was reached on the framework conditions.

See: <https://www.feuerwehrverband.de/mit-voller-kraft-fuer-eine-gemeinsame-stimme-der-feuerwehren-der-eu/>

Also: <https://brandweervrijwilligers.nl/oprichting-eu-brandweervereniging-stap-dichterbij/>

The third “European Summit of Firefighters” will be held on May 21 in Berlin, where fire service associations from 23 EU countries will be represented at the founding event.

See: [https://brandweervrijwilligers.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/20250425\\_3rd\\_ESF112-Schedule.pdf](https://brandweervrijwilligers.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/20250425_3rd_ESF112-Schedule.pdf)

And: [https://brandweervrijwilligers.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/20250425\\_DRAFT\\_Statues\\_of\\_Fire\\_Brigades\\_of\\_EU.pdf](https://brandweervrijwilligers.nl/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/20250425_DRAFT_Statues_of_Fire_Brigades_of_EU.pdf)