

UNI Europa – CoESS Joint Statement

Private Security as an Essential Service

for Europe’s Preparedness and Security Architecture

Brussels, 15 April 2026

Introduction

Across Europe, two million private security workers protect citizens, secure major events, guard Critical Infrastructure and support public services and first responders 24/7, including during emergencies and crises¹. Still, the contribution of private security workers and businesses to the functioning and protection of our societies deserves greater recognition. Europe cannot build a credible Preparedness Union while essential security functions are governed by market rules that undermine workforce stability, service quality and ultimately Europe’s security.

CoESS and UNI Europa, the EU Sectoral Social Partners in Private Security Services, commit to actively support the implementation of the EU Preparedness Union Strategy. While private security services are explicitly excluded from the EU Services Directive 2006/123/EC and remain subject to national internal security competence, we call for a recognition of the industry and its workers in the activities of the EU Preparedness Union and concrete action to follow: Initiatives of the EU Preparedness Union Strategy on workforce availability, mobilisation and training must treat private security and its workers as an equal partner in the emergency-response chain.

- The European Commission must translate this recognition in the revised EU Public Procurement Directive 2014/24 and ensure that Europe’s capacity to respond to crises is strengthened through quality jobs, attractive security careers, innovation and fair competition in the private security industry.
- The European Commission must work with sectoral Social Partners to tackle labour shortages and increase the attractiveness of careers in civil protection, emergency services and security. Workers’ rights and security companies’ competitiveness depends on it.
- The private security sector’s specific characteristics as a regulated profession should be reflected in the Commission’s EU-wide preparedness training and skills plan covering security, defence and crisis management.

¹ This includes securing mass events such as the Paris Olympic Games 2024, Critical Infrastructure from nuclear power plants to airports, collaboration with authorities for civil-military preparedness, and assisting first responders in emergency situations such as the terrorist attacks in Paris (2015), Brussels (2016) and Manchester (2017), the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021), the floodings in the Valencia region (2024), and recent mass black-outs in Spain (2025) and Germany (2026).

Background on the role of Private Security in Preparedness

Private security workers and companies are an integral part of Europe's internal security and civil protection architecture. They play an important, complimentary role to public emergency forces in strengthening prevention, detection and response against terrorism, organised crime, sabotage, espionage, large-scale accidents and natural disasters. Without private security services, European Critical Infrastructure would be exposed: transport of cash for banks, but also the protection of airports, ports, energy infrastructure, government buildings and hospitals would be at peril.

At present, dysfunctional market conditions driven by lowest-price public procurement undermine the industry's attractiveness and competitiveness, quality jobs and workers' rights, delivery of quality services and ultimately Europe's preparedness. Although availability of personnel is key in future crisis situations, private security services suffer from labour shortages. Given the sector's role in protecting Critical Infrastructure and supporting crisis response, tackling labour shortages in private security and lowest price public procurement practices are not only a sectoral issue but an imperative for societal preparedness.

Action 1 – Enhancing the attractiveness of jobs in essential services

We urge the European Commission to work with Social Partners to increase the attractiveness of careers in civil protection, emergency services and security.

Since 2021, CoESS and UNI Europa have jointly addressed labour and skills shortages through the EU-funded Social Partner project INTEL (www.securityskills.eu) and offer to share their expertise in this area in upcoming European Commission activities of the EU Preparedness Union.

- Data from the INTEL project shows that 92% of security companies have difficulties finding sufficient workers. 48% can therefore already today not respond to market demand for security services anymore. And 68% fear for their future business development. These are alarming figures for a sector that is part of internal security and crisis response systems.
- The INTEL project also includes perception studies involving more than 2,000 young security workers across Europe, providing concrete evidence on what attracts people to, and deters them from, security careers. National project studies in six EU Member States (Belgium, Croatia, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Romania) and an EU-level study bring concrete advice on how to enhance attractiveness of security careers.

Strategic procurement for quality essential services and preparedness

Tackling labour shortages in essential services - notably through strategic and socially responsible procurement - is a precondition for crisis preparedness: attractive careers in essential services cannot be delivered without fair work and procurement policies that promote quality jobs instead of incentivising a race to the bottom.

The findings of our EU-funded Social Partner projects INTEL and PROCURFAIR² across Europe are clear and consistent: the main structural barrier to job attractiveness in private security is the existence of dysfunctional market conditions driven by lowest-price public procurement. As it stands, Directive 2014/24/EU on Public Procurement does not sufficiently prevent public contracts from being awarded to companies that disregard labour and sectoral law and undercut collective agreements, thus undermining the European Union's Preparedness

The Commission's own Evaluation Report (October 2025) confirms that the Directive has failed to promote quality-based awards and continues to incentivise contracts based solely on lowest price. This fuels a race to the bottom, penalises compliant companies, degrades working conditions and attractiveness of security careers, and ultimately undermines service quality and preparedness.

Persistent labour shortages in private security are directly linked to inadequate working conditions driven by unfair competition. Improving workers' rights, quality jobs, security companies' competitiveness and the sector's recognition is therefore a necessary condition for ensuring workforce availability in times of crisis. To strengthen job attractiveness, ensure workforce availability in crises and enforce quality in security services, we call on the Commission to revise Directive 2014/24/EU in light of the EU Preparedness Union agenda. It must ensure that public contracts for security services can only be awarded to companies complying with labour law, sectoral law and collective agreements, where they exist. Public contracts for security services must be based on the best price-quality ratio, with quality criteria prevailing over price (minimum 60/40). A detailed position paper with concrete policy proposals can be found [here](#).

Action 2 – Ensuring availability and mobilisation of skilled personnel during emergencies

We fully support the objective of ensuring the availability and rapid mobilisation of skilled and qualified personnel during emergencies. To make this objective operational, we propose three strategic principles:

1. Workforce availability starts long before a crisis

Available research shows that labour shortages in private security are not primarily driven by a lack of interest in the profession, but by structural market conditions that suppress wages and career prospects. Rapid deployment in emergencies is impossible without a stable, skilled, qualified and certified workforce in normal times.

2. Security tasks require trained and vetted professionals

In the vast majority of EU Member States, only licensed, trained and vetted security workers are legally permitted to perform private security tasks. Just as in other sectors, these tasks cannot be substituted by volunteers. Any preparedness framework must clearly distinguish between professional security functions and voluntary support roles. Substituting professionals with volunteers is in our profession not only illegal, but can exacerbate crises and deepen existing inequalities, thus undermining societal resilience.

² The EU-funded PROCURFAIR project investigated socially responsible public procurement in Private Security services in six countries across Europe. For all reports: <https://www.uni-europa.org/procurfair/>

To integrate possible additional preparedness aspects in existing training frameworks for these tasks while respecting national competence, we recommend:

- equal access to lifelong learning and training,
- developing EU-level training blueprints and guidance, not harmonised curricula,
- using these tools to help national authorities and sectoral social partners benchmark and update training frameworks against preparedness requirements,
- ensuring that any EU initiative supports - rather than replaces - national regulation and training systems often based in bi- and tripartite settings.

3. Preparedness requires private security to be an equal partner in emergency-response chains

Crisis deployment cannot be improvised. It depends on a stable, trained and licensed workforce in normal times. Experience from recent crises shows that private security is often called upon at the last minute, without sufficient formal public-private emergency protocols. Despite repeatedly safeguarding public order during terrorist attacks, the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and mass blackouts, our members report that many EU Member States must do better in treating private security as an equal partner in the emergency-response chain.

Cross-border deployment: a necessary clarification

Private security services are explicitly excluded from the EU Services Directive 2006/123/EC and remain subject to national internal security competence. Security personnel can therefore not be deployed cross-border, except where bilateral agreements between Member States exist.

We therefore strongly recommend excluding private security from any EU initiative on cross-border deployment of workers. Any temporary cross-border arrangements must remain a Member State prerogative, based on national labour law, mutual recognition of licences, training content, language skills and background checks.

Action 3 – An EU-wide plan for preparedness training, skills development and professionalisation

We welcome the Commission's intention to develop an EU-wide preparedness training and skills plan covering security, defence and crisis management. Private security should not only be included but centred in this initiative, provided that sectoral specificities and national competencies are fully respected, and that sectoral Social Partners are closely involved given our experience in professionalising the sector.

Sectoral realities

Private security is a regulated profession across the EU. Training content, duration and organisation differ however widely between Member States, reflecting legally defined competencies, risk environments, security culture and internal security frameworks. These national systems are essential safeguards, ensuring that security tasks are performed by qualified and vetted professionals, and that services correspond to local needs. Crisis management already forms part of basic training in most Member States, often complemented by specialised modules and micro-credentials.

Our recommendations

Private security workers regularly operate in high-risk and diverse emergency environments, including fires, floods, terrorist attacks and infrastructure failures. Their tasks may include alarm reception, response and coordination with emergency services; evacuation of citizens, including vulnerable persons; access control and perimeter protection for Critical Infrastructure, hospitals and military sites; ensuring business and service continuity in economy and society.

Europe cannot build a credible Preparedness Union while essential security functions are governed by market rules that undermine workforce stability, service quality and ultimately Europe's security.

Private security must be integrated into EU preparedness policies through strategic procurement, structured public-private cooperation and being treated as an equal partner in the emergency-response chain. This approach must be aligned with the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, including fair wages, secure employment and safe working conditions.

- **Recognise private security as an essential pillar of EU preparedness**
The European Commission and Member States should formally recognise private security as a strategic and equal partner in the emergency response chain, ensuring its systematic inclusion in Preparedness Union policies, planning, and exercises.
- **Reform public procurement to support preparedness and quality jobs**
Revise Directive 2014/24/EU on Public Procurement to require socially responsible and strategic procurement, ensuring contracts are awarded based on the best price-quality ratio (minimum 60/40) and only to companies complying with labour law, sectoral regulation, and collective agreements, where they exist.
- **Address labour shortages through improved working conditions and career attractiveness**
Build on our knowledge acquired through the EU-funded Social Partner Project INTEL (www.securityskills.eu) on security career attractiveness and work with sectoral Social Partners on strategies to strengthen the attractiveness of private security careers, e.g. by promoting fair wages, secure employment, and safe working conditions, as a prerequisite for ensuring workforce availability in crisis situations.
- **Ensure a skilled, licensed, and professional workforce through targeted support**
Work with sectoral Social Partners on how national training frameworks should reflect the needs of the EU Preparedness Union and elaborate how the EU can provide targeted support, e.g. on preparedness skills frameworks and lifelong learning in private security, while fully respecting national regulatory systems and desisting from harmonisation of training standards.
- **Establish structured public-private partnerships for crisis preparedness**
Create formalised public-private cooperation mechanisms at national and EU level to ensure timely mobilisation, clear roles, and effective coordination of private security in emergencies, while respecting national competences and legal frameworks.

About CoESS

The Confederation of European Security Services (CoESS) is recognised by the European Commission as the EU employers' organisation representative in the private security services, covering 23 national associations in Europe and representing 45,000 companies with 2 million security officers.

About UNI Europa

UNI Europa is the voice of 7 million service workers in 13 sectors that constitute the backbone of economic and social life across Europe – including private security. We coordinate the European Works Councils in the sector and European sectoral Social Dialogue committees.