

YES Group seminar @ ESNS 2026



**Future-Fit Festivals at
40th YES Group Health & Safety Seminar @ ESNS**
3F Training event E2.6 | January 14 & 15, 2026

Poortershoe, Groningen, The Netherlands

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International seminar on Event Safety 2026

After the accident at Roskilde Festival in the year 2000 that killed nine people, the YOUROPE Event Safety (YES) Group was created to improve safety standards for festivals across Europe

Over the years, the YES Group has become a strong network, led by a team of high-profile experts in event safety and crowd management, representing large and small venues and festivals in Europe.

This year on the 14th and 15th of January, the completely sold-out 40th YES Group seminar took place in Groningen, NL.

55+ participants from 16+ European countries met for two days with the purpose of sharing experiences, exploring lessons, and strengthening the network of Europe's festival safety community.



Henrik Bondo Nielsen giving the opening speech at this year's 40th YES Group seminar. Photo: Aya Freund

Day 1

Festival Season 2025 Review: What Kept Us Awake at Night?

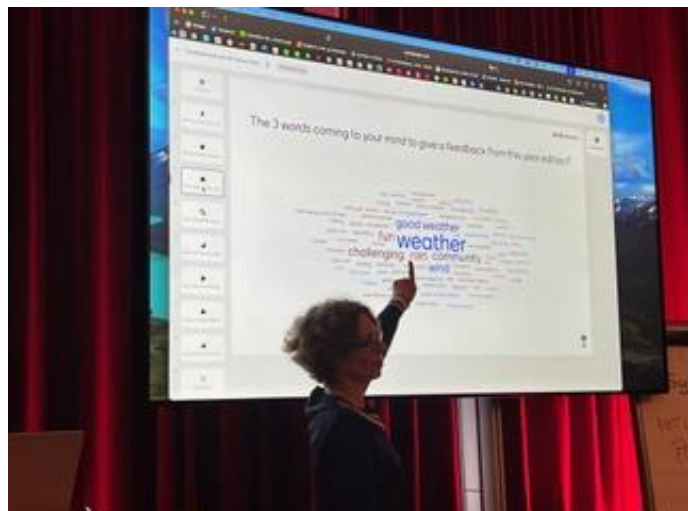
The opening session: *What Kept Us Awake at Night?* moderated by YES Group management member Alexandra von Samson, made the participants at the 40th YES Group seminar look back at the 2025 festival season and consider what kind of year it had been.

The results clearly demonstrated that weather remains the most dominant risk factor for European festivals. From heatwaves to heavy rain and strong winds, organizers faced significant challenges that affected safety, logistics, and audience flow.

These circumstances often created uncertainty around responsibility, especially when authorities and risk assessments were involved.

At the same time, several festivals experienced positive effects of good weather, resulting in calm and cooperative crowds.

A recurring theme was the need for stronger and more operational resilience plans both in terms of weather but also on show stop procedures and clear decision-making structures, crowd profiling and audience behavior, traffic and logistics planning,



Alexandra von Samson highlighting topics from the festival year 2025. Photo: Aya Freund

the use of drones and handling of critical incidents, including conflicts between artists and security teams.

Overall, the insights underline the necessity for more robust systems, clearer communication, and improved cross-stakeholder collaboration to ensure audience safety in an increasingly unpredictable climate.

YES Group Lab: What Went Wrong, When, and Why?

The session moderated by Pascal Viot (Paléo Festival) and Ruud van Buren (Crowd Care) centered on a personal testimony and group discussion about resilience, crisis management and organizational learning following the Tomorrowland mainstage fire in 2025.

The case served as a starting point for exploring how festivals respond to extreme disruption and how they recover operationally, emotionally, and structurally.

The Incident and Immediate Response

After the dramatic fire that destroyed Tomorrowland's mainstage, organizers faced a critical decision: whether to cancel or proceed with the festival for the 200,000 expected attendees. They chose to continue.

By the next morning, the crew began constructing a new mainstage using parts of Metallica's touring rig, and the following day the festival reopened.

The session focuses on preparedness, resilience, and coordination regarding Business Continuity Management (BCM) and Planning, as many festivals lack formal BCM structures, and these are often developed only after major incidents.

A BCM must address not only the immediate event but the organization's ability to continue operations afterwards. Examples from other festivals highlighted how weather, infrastructure failures or transport breakdowns force organizers to rethink crisis actions, communication and logistics, but also how crisis management is not only about "the event" but about the organization's ability to care for people and maintain continuity.


Participants stressed that festivals operate in complex environments and are therefore well positioned to build resilience. Resilience is not only about crisis management but also about the ability to find solutions in exceptional situations. Recovery is both operational and emotional, as festivals create communities that become valuable resources during crises. Exceptional situations generate new knowledge that should inform updated risk assessments and continuity plans. One cannot prepare for everything – but one can prepare to respond.



Pascal Viot and Ruud van Buren introducing the session. Photo: Aya


In the session Kerry Parkin's *Seven Resilience Principles* were highlighted including the importance of transparency: sharing scenarios, challenges, emotions and opportunities in communication, as seen in the picture below.

Business Continuity Management



The show must go on.....

- Resilience principles regarding TML'25 by Kerry Parkin:
 - *Principle 1: Have a Crisis Management Plan and Know How to Use It*
 - *Principle 2: Build Backup Capacity Before You Need It (Supplier Relationships Matter)*
 - *Principle 3: Solutions First, Not a Blame Game (Culture Under Pressure)*
 - *Principle 4: Clear, Consistent, Audience-Segmented Communications*
 - *Principle 5: Staff Up Social Listening & Response*
 - *Principle 6: Activate Your Talent & Partner Network to Amplify Trust*
 - *Principle 7: Don't Let the Applause Distract From the Safety Conversation*



By Kerry Parkin, The Remarkables
for Event Industry News

40th YES Group Seminar, January 2026 - Groningen

Key takeaways included the need for clear BCM frameworks, systematic learning from near-misses, and strong links between crisis management, communication, and continuity. Collaboration with authorities is essential and perhaps festivals outside central Europe may face greater recovery challenges, and roles between emergency management and BCM must be clearly defined. Playbooks should be ready to activate, and BCM team capacity must match production size to avoid gaps. Finally, documentation must reflect real practice, and cancellations require careful handling of people, food, gear, and logistics.

A recurring message was that no plan can foresee everything – resilience requires preparation, adaptability, strong cooperation, and sometimes a bit of luck.

A recommended resource to prepare your BCM was mentioned: jesip.org.uk

Managing Bad Weather – Weather Preparedness & Resilience

The session on *the Growing Importance of Weather for Festivals and Events*, moderated by Sabine Funk (IBIT GmbH) and with guest speaker Sarah van Gorp from Info-plaza, focused on the fact that weather is becoming an increasingly critical factor for festivals and outdoor events.

Productions are growing larger, climate patterns are shifting, and weather phenomena are becoming more unpredictable. This creates a rising need for better preparation, more knowledge, and stronger collaboration between organizers, authorities, and weather experts.



Sabine Funk introducing the new Weather Toolbox. Photo: Aya

To support this development, YES Group and YOUROPE created the *Weather Preparedness & Resilience Toolbox* – a practical and research-based resource designed to help both established festivals and newcomers understand and manage weather-related risks.

The toolbox is developed as a hands-on resource for outdoor events, offering structured guidance on understanding, assessing, and responding to weather risks. It is designed as a living document, continuously updated as new experience and research emerge. Organizers are encouraged to contribute with insights, cases, and research to keep the toolbox relevant (sabine.funk@ibit.eu).

The concise toolbox can be [downloaded here as a PDF](https://yourope.org/weather-toolbox/) and is also available in a more detailed online version at <https://yourope.org/weather-toolbox/>.

As a guest speaker meteorologist Sarah van Gorp – representing Infoplaza, one of Europe's leading weather intelligence companies – presented key weather-related risks for outdoor events.

Thunderstorms pose one of the most significant threats, as these storms can bring heavy rain, hail, strong winds, lightning and lightning strikes. Unfortunately, thunderstorms are very hard to predict as very small atmospheric differences determine whether a storm develops or dissipates and warmer air increases the potential for thunderstorms.

This has increased the importance of nowcasting, which combines real-time observations with radar and satellite data, model forecasts and expert interpretation of subtle atmospheric signals



Sara van Gorp explaining thunderstorm clouds. Photo: Aya Freund

One of the Key Take-Away points of this session is that ongoing monitoring is essential for the safety of events as it protects the safety of visitors, staff, and artists, enables early warnings and timely decisions, helps plan resources, logistics, and operational responses and strengthens resilience and the ability to return to normal operations

The session emphasized that professional weather handling requires preparation, training, reliable data, and clear procedures – and in some cases, having a meteorologist on site can significantly strengthen decision-making.

Walk in My Shoes: Cross Role Conversations

The *Walk in My Shoes* session, moderated by YES Group management member Roxana Luca, explored how operational failures in festivals and events often arise not from incompetence or ill intent, but from siloed roles, unspoken assumptions, and gaps in communication between management, production, and safety teams.

Through role-swap exercises and open dialogue, participants examined how everyday decisions can unintentionally create risk when their impact on other functions is not understood or communicated.

The participants identified that many safety issues occur in the “in-between spaces” – the friction points where roles overlap. Incidents rarely stem from bad intentions. Instead, they occur when “reasonable decisions are made without seeing the full picture.”

A central activity was a role-swap exercise, allowing participants from the YES group to step into unfamiliar roles. This highlighted what information are shared too little or too late, how decision-making chains differ across roles and how actions taken in one department may unintentionally compromise safety, capacity, or crowd flow elsewhere.

The exercise helped understand both operational blind spots and the value of empathy in cross-functional collaboration and encouraged to identify decisions that others rarely see – including decisions *not* to act, financial shortcuts, or small logistical adjustments that can ripple across departments.

The core takeaway was a simple, practical framework to apply before acting as a mindset of “walking in each other’s shoes” to understand how decisions influence others’ work:

1. Who does this affect?
2. When does it affect them?
3. What needs to be communicated?



Roxana Luca introducing the session. Photo: Aya Freund

Peer-to-Peer Review: Improve Our Resilience

The session moderated by Pascal Viot (Paléo Festival) and Morten Therkildsen (Roskilde Festival) was built around the idea that knowledge sharing is a core value within the YES Group.

Participants were encouraged to use the day’s presentations as inspiration to reflect on a central question: *What have you heard today that can strengthen the resilience of your own organization?*

The underlying assumption was clear: *the more openly festivals and event organizations talk about their experiences, crisis handling, and organizational robustness, the better they all become at preventing, responding to, and learning from incidents.*

During the discussion it was emphasized that resilience is not only about formal plans and procedures. It is equally about the people who make these systems work. A resilient organization is built on a strong team with trust and solid working relationships, clear leadership structures during crises and well-defined systems that link different crisis functions together.

It was noted that while crisis management, emergency response, and business continuity are often treated as separate domains, they are inseparable in real-life event operations. The ability to understand and manage the *interconnections* between these areas is essential for effective crisis handling. A recurring point was that organizational culture matters just as much as technical planning.

To build resilience, organizations need clear communication pathways, internally and externally, a culture that encourages early identification and discussion of problems, risk assessment, practical tools, such as checklists, that support consistent decision making and direct communication with those affected by decisions, to ensure understanding and alignment.

Documentation, sharing knowledge and systematic follow-up, planning – both plan A and plan B – and evaluation was also mentioned.

At the end of the session another important point was made, the role of recovery. Often, once a crisis is over, teams feel relieved and move on. But without structured debriefing, emotional processing, and reconstruction and documentation of what happened, both learning and wellbeing may suffer. This can create long-term stress or blind spots within the organization.

The session reaffirmed that true resilience emerges when people, systems, culture, and learning interact – and when knowledge is shared openly, as practiced within the YES Group.



Morten Therkildsen talking about resilience. Photo: Aya Freund

EFA's session: The nominees for the Event Safety Award

In this session, the festivals which were nominated for the Event Safety Award at the European Festival Awards 2025 were highlighted for their innovative work in safety management, operational development, and organizational learning.

Pinkpop, Down the Rabbit Hole, North Sea Jazz & Lowlands (NL)

These festivals were nominated for "The Showcase" – a mobile, fully integrated command-and-control workstation. The system combines drones, surveillance, weather data, logging tools and barrier-counting technologies into one portable case. It is easy to deploy, user-friendly, and seamlessly integrated with existing festival systems.

Rocco del Schlacko (DE)

This festival was nominated for developing a central communication and safety center that unites authorities, health and safety teams, and festival operations. The initiative has improved communication flow and strengthened decision-making processes. The festival operates its own radio system and uses a cloud-based logging system for coordination and documentation.

Rock for People (CZ)

Nominated for significant improvements in their safety approach. The festival has shifted from a security mindset to a broader safety perspective, establishing structures and procedures for show stop processes involving both authorities and participants. They also launched a youth engagement project offering crowd-safety training, creating meaningful involvement while improving the overall audience experience.

Roskilde Festival (DK)

Roskilde was nominated for its long-term commitment to knowledge sharing and continuous improvement since the 2000 accident. This includes hosting a major conference to share learning points, building a new Safety Coordination Center, rethinking crowd-density management using dynamic methods, and further developing show stop management approaches.

The YES Group extends its heartfelt congratulations to the winner, which was revealed later that night in a ceremony at ESNS: **Rock For People**.

Day 2

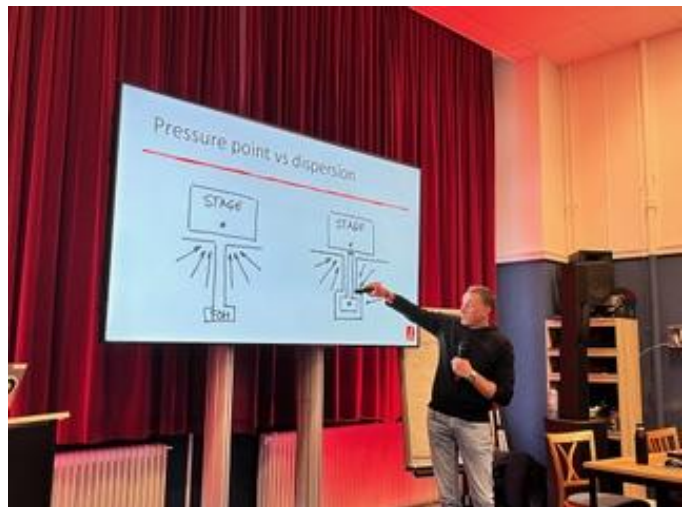
Front of Stage Barrier Design: When Layout Becomes Lifesaving

The session provided a comprehensive walkthrough of barrier functionality, construction principles, testing methods, and layout design in the context of crowd safety at large-scale events.

Cees Muurling from Dutch Barriers Services started the session by highlighting that barriers have been used for more than 40 years, yet they are still often implemented without sufficient understanding of correct design, structural capacity or crowd dynamics. Despite their widespread use, no international standard exists specifically for front-of-stage barriers – neither for construction, testing nor layout. This results in inconsistent practices across the industry and highlights the need for clearer, evidence-based guidelines.

Using historical examples such as Oasis in Manchester, the session highlighted how dense crowds move like fluid. This behavior leads to several key design principles: curved barrier lines help distribute force more effectively, while central spines such as T- or I-shaped layouts break circular crowd movement and improve security access.

Open secondary barriers can function well but require close monitoring and clear crowd-flow guidance. Enclosed or controlled areas, like “golden circles,” can be effective but add challenges related to access control and communication. Overall, avoiding funnels, choke points, and narrow openings remains essential to prevent dangerous pressure build-up



Cees Muurling showing pressure points and barrier layout.
Photo: Aya Freund

The discussion reiterated that even common layouts may be unsafe if not aligned with crowd profile, stage design, artist movement, entry routes, or the site's physical conditions.

A set of practical guidelines was highlighted for safe barrier use: installations should always be handled by professional suppliers, 90-degree corners and narrow access points should be avoided, and emergency exits should not be placed in barrier lines unless necessary, as they weaken structural integrity.

Surfaces must provide sufficient friction, foundations must not be slippery, and all work should be carried out and signed off by trained personnel.

Overall, barriers are only one part of a broader safety system. Effective crowd safety depends on the right technical equipment, well-designed layouts, competent staff, active monitoring, clear audience communication and a holistic risk assessment.

Coordinating Decision Making in a Show Stop

The presentation outlines how structured decision-making, clear command frameworks, and shared understanding across stakeholders are essential for safely managing a show stop situation. Morten Therkildsen (Roskilde Festival) and Mark Hamilton (crowdsafety.org) moderated the session, highlighting experience and knowledge about managing show stops. The starting point was the work of The Pink Bows Foundation, created after the 2021 Astroworld tragedy to improve crowd safety and prevent similar accidents.



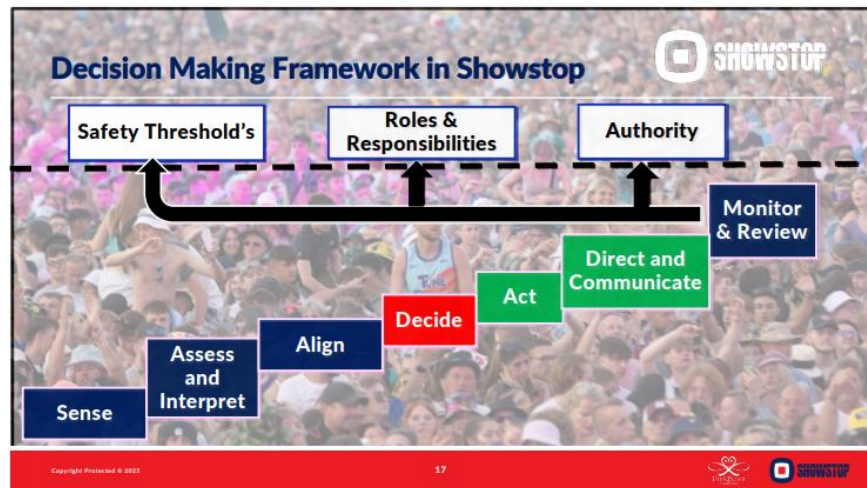
Mark Hamilton introducing the session and the relevance of show stop procedures. Photo: Morten Therkildsen

It was highlighted that effective show stop management requires a pre-defined decision architecture that clarifies who holds authority at each level, how information flows between agencies, when and how decisions are escalated and how actions are aligned to avoid conflicting responses.

The aim is for all organizations to act as one coordinated system rather than fragmented units. To do so, Mark Hamilton took the participants through *The Tactical Decision-Making Process*, as a show stop decision-making follows a structured chain as shown on the picture on the next page.

Weaknesses in any step can result in delay, confusion, or operational failure, thus there needs to be an awareness of the four components underpinning a successful crisis management: *command, control, communication and coordination (C4)*.

Failures in any C4 element can lead to escalation even when individual teams perform well, thus there must be a certain focus on roles, responsibilities and competence. Documented roles and responsibilities are fundamental, particularly in high-pressure situations where uncertainty can hinder action. While accountability can be delegated, legal liability cannot – it can only be mitigated by appointing competent personnel.



Hamilton also highlighted the concept of foreseeability and how it plays a central role. Historical incidents demonstrate that crowd-related tragedies are not unpredictable – they are foreseeable and must be planned for. Foreseeability thus establishes duty of care, drives proactive risk assessment, influences decisions by highlighting potential liability, encourages consistent standards of behavior and helps shape safety policy and regulation.

The show stop procedure is therefore the only operationally robust method for halting a performance in a controlled, safe and reassuring way. It is pre-planned and rapidly deployable, built on clearly defined roles and responsibilities, grounded in command-and-control principles, supported by restart protocols and designed to reduce chaos, panic and physical risk.

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After this part of the session, Mark Hamilton introduced Morten Therkildsen of Roskilde Festival, to talk about how they have implemented and evolved the show stop procedure over the past 25 years.

After the accident in 2000, Roskilde Festival implemented a very strict and centralized show stop procedure to ensure quick and clear decision-making. Each stage at the festival was assigned one responsible person who was equipped with a single switch that could cut the sound immediately.

Since then, the system has been further developed. Today, the show-stop responsibility follows the risk assessment of each concert, not the stage itself. On the Orange Stage – the festival's main stage – a dedicated show stop manager is present at every single concert. This person is physically on stage throughout the performance, acts as the band's single point of contact, has the authority to stop – or not stop – the show and is part of a clearly defined decision-making structure within the festival.

Roskilde Festival also provides an Artist Safety Information Pack to all productions before arrival. The festival does not accept full riders but instead supplies the necessary safety information directly.

The show stop procedure includes a pre-agreed process with the touring production regarding how and when a concert can be restarted after a stop.

The session ended with the key takeaway that showstopping is not only about *when* to stop a show – it is equally about recognizing when *not* to stop, and balancing safety, flow, and proportionality in the decision.

Drones & Event Safety: Surveillance, Regulation, Detection

This session, moderated by Marvin Schuchert (Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund Karlsruhe) focused on how drones represent a rapidly evolving technology that spans multiple domains and have become a central tool in modern event safety, providing real-time situational awareness, faster response, better planning, and significantly improved crowd monitoring.

Drones offer significant value across all phases of an event. Their applications include pre-event mapping, producing highly accurate top-down maps and spatial models of the event area through systematic flight patterns.

They can assist search and assistance or enable rapid location of individuals in distress and medical support, where drones can identify and relay information about incidents to medical teams, improving response times. Drones can enhance monitoring, acting as a mobile extension of CCTV systems and providing real-time situational awareness across large or complex sites. With thermal cameras mounted they can be especially advantageous during nighttime operations.

Certain systems, such as FotoKite, can remain airborne for extended periods via a tethered power cable, offering continuity of surveillance without the need for battery changes; others require periodic battery replacement depending on model and operational load.



Marvin Schuchert on the advantages of drones at events.
Photo: Aya Freund

While drones provide numerous operational benefits, several limitations and potential disadvantages must also be considered. These include the risk of public concern or misunderstanding, technical vulnerabilities such as interference or weather restrictions, and the overarching challenge of preventing unauthorized flights. These factors must be incorporated into planning procedures to ensure that drones add value without introducing new vulnerabilities.

Another growing area of concern relates to the detection of unauthorized drone flights over event areas. The European Union (EU) has established a comprehensive regulatory foundation governing drone operation, including pilot requirements and operational restrictions, ensuring that drone activities can be carried out safely and in compliance with aviation standards. Still, it is not known how many unauthorized drones enter the airspace. Several technologies can support detection for effective risk management: Electronic Identification (E-ID) provides a digital “license plate,” and advanced detection

systems, such as Aeroscope. Despite these tools, detection remains challenging particularly when un-registered or modified drones are involved.

Event organizers may establish temporary restricted airspace around their event sites to protect attendees and support proactive drone management. These zones must be sufficiently large to ensure early detection and timely response to unauthorized flights. However, such restrictions can also affect residents, businesses, and aviation stakeholders in the surrounding urban areas, requiring careful coordination with authorities.

Key takeaways are that drones can contribute to shared operational intelligence, ensuring that multiple project stakeholders—such as command personnel, security teams, and emergency services—have access to the same real-time visual data.

Building the Future of Crowd Management

The presentation moderated by Pascal Viot (Paléo Festival) and Ruud van Buren (Crowd Care) and with guest speakers G r me Vanherf (ikii), Daniel Fletcher (live-entertainment discovery platform Fever) and Yvan Boudillet (Music Tech Europe) introduced how AI can be strategically used to elevate event safety from a restrictive function to an experience-enabling discipline.

The main question is how AI can play a larger role in the live events sector as it is undergoing rapid transformation. We are seeing that the global live music/event market is expanding significantly, the event density is increasing, and audiences expect both safety and high-quality experiences. The result is that safety teams must manage growing volumes of data, more flows, and rising complexity – often at the limits of human cognitive capacity. AI is therefore a necessary tool to process real-time information and free up human decision-making capacity.



G r me Vanherf and Daniel Fletcher talking about the advantages of AI. Photo: Aya Freund

As for now, AI already has some concrete capabilities, as the technology enables sophisticated analysis of crowd behavior through video, allowing systems to identify movement patterns, detect signs of agitation, and recognize specific objects in real time.

At the same time, continuously updated Digital Twins integrate live data to simulate and evaluate evacuation strategies and crowd-flow dynamics with high precision. Within control rooms, AI-supported systems consolidate extensive information streams and autonomously prioritize critical alerts, thereby providing safety teams with a structured and more efficient decision-making foundation. Finally, AI offers valuable support by enabling more accurate, hyper-local weather forecasting, which can strengthen preparedness and response in dynamic event environments.

Several significant risks and challenges must be addressed when integrating AI into event safety practices. One central concern is the inherent *blackbox* nature of many AI systems, which makes their

decision-making processes unclear; for this reason, AI can support but must never replace human judgement.

Another challenge arises from data fragmentation across organizations and technology platforms, underscoring the need for interoperability and the development of shared data standards and protocols. Regulatory considerations also play a critical role, particularly regarding the EU AI Act, restrictions surrounding biometric technologies, and broader ethical obligations.

At the end of the session, the participants were invited to take part in a collaboration regarding the use of AI in Event Safety, through a four-phase innovation journey toward a shared pilot. If wanting to be a Pilot partner, the requirements are as following: safety lead + tech lead, data access, one defined use case, GDPR-compliant governance, willingness to test live and share results.

To sum up, the key point is that AI is not the destination – it is the enabler. We need to understand that the core objective is to empower safety teams, enhance experience design, and ensure decisions become both faster and better under pressure. Thus, AI should augment humans, not replace them.

Closing session

The final session gathered participants' reflections on what they are taking home from the seminar and which future HOT topics the YES Group should focus on for 2026–2027.

A recurring theme was how valuable it is to share experiences openly – including mistakes and near-misses – and that this trust is one of the group's greatest strengths.

Several topics stood out as particularly inspiring and relevant:

- **Roles and responsibilities:** Renewed interest in understanding organizational roles, decision-making structures, and how responsibilities should be clarified.
- **Use of drones:** Curiosity about whether and how drone technology could be applied at festivals.
- **Show stop discussions:** Insights into professional and proportionate approaches to stopping – or not stopping – a show.
- **Barrier session:** Considered both fascinating and highly informative.
- **Trust and openness:** Appreciation for the group's willingness to share failures and learnings honestly.
- **Weather focus:** Practical advice and discussions about weather preparedness were highlighted as especially useful.
- **Weather Toolbox:** A shared commitment to keep the toolbox active and continuously add learnings.

Participants were also encouraged to send ideas for the next year's program to the YES Group Management, helping shape the themes and focus areas for 2026–2027.

Thank you!

A heartfelt thank you to all participants, speakers, and organizers for their dedication and engagement. Let's stay connected and keep driving positive change in our industry. See you next year!

– The YES Group Management