

Shaping values, building trust

Psychological resilience
in Nordic communities

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Executive summary

This report explores the concept of psychological resilience across the Nordic Region. Using the Finnish comprehensive security strategy as a point of departure, the report defines psychological resilience as *citizens' (individuals' or communities') self-initiated and self-organising adaptation to changing circumstances or crises through values-based activities*. The report includes a literature review and policy review of societal security and psychological resilience in the Nordic Region, culminating in a framework for understanding Nordic resilience. Case studies from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden provide insights into how psychological resilience is operationalised through local/regional cultural initiatives, community associations, and voluntary organisations.

Societal security in the Nordic countries is a multi-stakeholder activity, with many shared responsibilities. Therefore, the report can inform Nordic leaders and policymakers—as well as other civil society actors, institutions, and local communities—with regards to building resilience in the Nordic Region. The findings have relevance for preparing for, responding to, and recovering from various kinds of crises which threaten the values and critical functions of Nordic societies.

The research identified the following findings:

- While the term *psychological resilience* is not widespread across the Nordics, the action areas and goals found in Finnish strategic thinking resonate with security strategies, risk assessments, and practical resilience-related work in all Nordic countries.
- Heightened attention on resilience and preparedness has resulted in a plethora of terms used across the Nordic Region, highlighting both the complexity of resilience work and the lack of clarity when working with it across neighbouring countries.

- The major contribution of discussing psychological resilience relates to its emphasis on a community's shared values, identity, and levels of trust.
- Crises do not strike people equally, nor do people face crises from an equal starting point. This means that individual experience of resilience varies greatly and signifies the need for nuanced messaging with regards to individual and local responsibilities and capabilities for crisis preparedness.
- Resilience begins in everyday circumstances and among existing communities, cultural initiatives, and social activities, but local actors perceive that most resilience investments disproportionately focus on tangible infrastructure and aspects of defence over the less-tangible, social and psychological aspects which set the foundations and motivations for a willingness to act.
- Local actors guide resilience work by flexibility and genuine connections, which allow them to address community needs. Their scope of action related to crisis preparedness, response, and recovery could be wider if more resources and guidance are available. On the other hand, stronger mandates from national actors might endanger the benefits of small-scale action, and some local public institutions risk losing trust if they align themselves too closely with national-level political work.
- Local actors and organisations are often able to communicate official messaging from national actors and make it more understandable to the lived realities of their community members, meaning that the actual impact of their work may be larger than the scope of their core activities.
- Developing trust takes time, consistency, and predictability. While it may be more easily achieved in tightly knit communities, absence of some social groups may indicate that resilience work has become exclusive or that its common values are no longer widely shared.
- Resilience requires public attention on all phases of crisis—from long-term anticipatory action to recovery and joy.

This report is part of the project [*Recognising and supporting psychological resilience: Regional approaches across the Nordic countries \(2025-2027\)*](#). The work was conducted by researchers at Nordregio and funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.



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Tiivistelmä

Raportti tarkastelee henkisen kriisinsietokyvyn ('*psychological resilience*') käsitettä Pohjoismaissa lähtökohtanaan Suomen turvallisuusstrategia ja sen määritelmät. Henkinen kriisinsietokyky käsitetään *kansalaisten (yksilöiden tai yhteisöjen) oma-aloitteiseksi ja itseohjautuvaksi sopeutumiseksi muuttuviin olosuhteisiin tai kriiseihin arvoperustaisen toiminnan avulla*. Alun kirjallisuuskatsaus vertailee kokonaisturvallisuuden käsitteitä ja lähestymistapoja ja esittää tältä pohjalta viitekehyksen kriisinsietokyvyn käsitteen hahmottamiseksi Pohjoismaissa. Tanskassa, Suomessa, Islannissa, Norjassa ja Ruotsissa toteutetut tapaustutkimukset täydentävät teoreettista pohjaa ja valottavat sitä, miten henkistä kriisinsietokykyä on mahdollista vahvistaa esimerkiksi paikallisen kulttuurikasvatuksen, kansalaisyhteiskunnan instituutioiden ja monenlaisen järjestö- ja vapaaehtoistoiminnan kautta.

Yhteiskunnan kokonaisturvallisuus rakentuu Pohjoismaissa koko kansalaisyhteiskunnan yhteiselle toiminnalle ja jaetulle vastuulle. Raportin tulokset tarjoavat päättäjille, viranomaisille sekä muille kansalaisyhteiskunnan toimijoille, järjestöille ja paikallisyhteisöille tietoa kriisinsietokyvyn tämänhetkisestä tilasta sekä viitoittavat polkua sen vahvistamiseen, jotta pohjoismaiset yhteiskunnat voisivat paremmin varautua yhteisiä arvoja ja kriittisiä toimintoja uhkaaviin kriiseihin, reagoimaan niihin ja toipumaan niistä.

Tutkimuksen keskeiset havainnot voi tiivistää seuraaviin:

- Vaikka henkinen kriisinsietokyky ei käsitteenä ole Pohjoismaissa laajasti tunnettu, Suomen turvallisuusstrategiassa esitetyt toiminta-alueet ja tavoitteet ovat yhdenmukaisia muiden Pohjoismaiden strategisen ajattelun, riskikartoitusten ja käytännön kriisinkestävyystyön kanssa.

- Kriisinsietokyvyn ja varautumisen poliittinen huomio on kasvaessaan johtanut erilaisten käsitteiden enenevään kirjoon. Tämä viittaa sekä kriisinkestävyystyön monitahoisuuteen että mahdollisiin vaikeuksiin käsitteiden tulkinnassa etenkin rajat ylittävissä yhteistyöissä.
- Henkisen kriisinsietokyvyn käsitteen pääasiallinen panos yhteiskunnalliseen keskusteluun liittyy sen mahdollisuuksiin sanoittaa yhteisöllisten arvojen ja luottamuksen rakentamisen kauaskantoisia vaikutuksia.
- Kriisit eivät koettele ihmisiä tasaveroisesti, eivätkä ihmiset kohtaa kriisejä samoista lähtökohdista. Täten myös kunkin kokemukset omasta kriisinsietokyvystä vaihtelevat suuresti, mikä korostaa yhteiskunnallista tarvetta viestiä varautumistyyöstä yksilölliset ja paikalliset valmiudet ja mahdollisuudet huomioiden.
- Paikalliset yhteisöllisen työn asiantuntijat kokevat että vaikka kriisinsietokyky rakentuu jokapäiväisessä arjessa, yhteisöissä ja sosiaalisessa kanssakäymisessä, sen nimessä tehdyt investoinnit keskittyvät suhteettomissa määrin maanpuolustukseen ja tähän liittyvään infrastruktuuriin ja resursseihin. Tämän tuloksena epäsuoremmat sosiaaliset ja psykologiset tarpeet ja ihmisten toimintahalukkuuden kannalta keskeinen perustyö jää huomiotta.
- Paikallisten toimijoiden kriisinkestävyystyötä ohjaa joustava ote ja välittömät yhteydet kansalaisyhteiskunnan eri ryhmien välillä, mikä mahdollistaa suoran yhteyden ympäröivän yhteisön tarpeisiin. Laajemmat resurssit ja toiminnan vahvempi koordinaatio voisivat laajentaa toimintasädet merkittävästi, mutta toisaalta poliittiset yhteydet voivat myös vaarantaa pienimuotoisen edut ja paikallisella tasolla nautitun luottamuksen.
- Paikalliset toimijat ja järjestöt pystyvät usein välittämään virallisia ohjeita tehokkaammin tekemällä niistä ymmärrettävämpiä ja helpommin lähestyttäviä, mikä entisestään laajentaa järjestö- ja vapaaehtoistoiminnan piirissä tehdyn työn vaikutusta.
- Luottamuksen rakentaminen vaatii aikaa, johdonmukaisuutta ja ennustettavuutta. Luottamus rakentuu helpoiten pienissä ja tiiviisti yhteen hitsautuneissa yhteisöissä, mutta toiminnassa on yleensä mukana vain aktiivisin osa kansalaisista. Tiettyjen sosiaalisten ryhmien puuttuminen voi viitata siihen, että kriisinkestävyystyö koetaan ulossulkevana tai ettei sen taustalla olevia arvoja enää yleisesti tunnusteta.
- Vahva kriisinsietokyky edellyttää laajaa yhteiskunnallista huomiota kriisin kaikissa vaiheissa, pitkän aikavälin ennakkoinnista toipumiseen sekä iloa nostattavaan työhön.

Raportti on osa [*Recognising and supporting psychological resilience: Regional approaches across the Nordic countries \(2025-2027\)*](#) -tutkimushanketta ("Henkisen kriisinkestävyysden tunnistaminen ja vahvistaminen: Alueelliset lähestymistavat Pohjoismaissa") (2025–2027). Työn ovat toteuttaneet Nordregion tutkijat ja sen on rahoittanut Pohjoismaiden ministerineuvosto.



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Sammanfattning

Följande rapport undersöker begreppet psykologisk resiliens i Norden. Med utgångspunkt i Finlands övergripande säkerhetspolitiska strategi definierar författarna psykologisk resiliens som *medborgarnas (enskilda individers eller samhällsgruppers) egeninitierade och självorganiserade anpassning till föränderliga omständigheter eller kriser genom värdebaserade aktiviteter*. Rapporten innehåller en litteraturöversikt och en policyöversikt kring samhällsskydd och psykologisk resiliens i Norden, vilket mynnar ut i ett ramverk för att förstå nordisk resiliens. Fallstudier från Danmark, Finland, Island, Norge och Sverige ger insyn i hur lokala/regionala kulturella initiativ, samhällsföreningar och frivilligorganisationer operationaliserar psykologisk resiliens i praktiken.

Samhällsskydd i de nordiska länderna är en verksamhet som involverar flera aktörer, med många delade ansvarsområden. Rapporten kan därför fungera som underlag för nordiska ledare och beslutsfattare – liksom för andra aktörer inom civilsamhället, institutioner och lokala samfund – när det gäller att bygga upp resiliens och motståndskraft i Norden. Resultaten är relevanta vid förberedelse för, hantering av och återhämtning från olika typer av kriser som hotar nordiska samhällens värderingar och kritiska funktioner.

Forskningen identifierade följande resultat:

- Trots att begreppet *psykologisk resiliens* inte är allmänt utbrett i Norden, stämmer de åtgärdsområden och mål som återfinns i det finska strategiska tänkandet överens med säkerhetsstrategier, riskbedömningar och praktiskt resiliensrelaterat arbete i alla nordiska länder.
- Ökat fokus på resiliens och beredskap har resulterat i en uppsjö av termer som används i hela Norden. Det belyser både komplexiteten i resiliensarbetet och bristen på tydlighet vid arbete med detta i grannländerna.

- Det viktigaste bidraget med att diskutera psykologisk resiliens återfinns i dess betoning på ett samhälles gemensamma värderingar, identitet och förtroendenivåer.
- Kriser drabbar inte människor på samma sätt, och människor möter inte heller kriser från samma utgångspunkt. Detta innebär att den individuella upplevelsen av resiliens varierar kraftigt och pekar på behovet av nyanserade budskap vad gäller individuella och lokala ansvarsområden och förmågor för krisberedskap.
- Resiliens har sin utgångspunkt i vardagliga sammanhang, lokalsamhällen, kulturella initiativ och sociala aktiviteter. Samtidigt upplever lokala aktörer att de flesta investeringarna i resiliens oproportionerligt fokuserar på konkret infrastruktur och försvarsaspekter framför de mindre konkreta, sociala och psykologiska aspekterna som lägger grunden och motiverar handlingsviljan.
- Lokala aktörer styr resiliensarbetet genom flexibilitet och genuina relationer, vilket gör det möjligt för dem att tillgodose samhällets behov. Deras handlingsutrymme när det gäller krisberedskap, krishantering och återuppbyggnad skulle kunna vara större om fler resurser och mer vägledning erbjöds. Å andra sidan kan starkare mandat från nationella aktörer äventyra fördelarna med småskaliga insatser, och vissa lokala offentliga institutioner riskerar att förlora förtroendet om de anpassar sig alltför mycket till det politiska arbetet på nationell nivå.
- Lokala aktörer och organisationer kan ofta förmedla och begripliggöra officiella budskap från nationella aktörer utifrån samhällsmedlemmarnas vardag och verklighet, vilket innebär att den faktiska effekten av deras arbete kan vara större än omfattningen av deras kärnverksamhet.
- Att bygga upp förtroende kräver tid, konsekvens och förutsägbarhet. Även om det kan vara lättare att uppnå i sammansvetsade samhällen kan frånvaron av vissa sociala grupper tyda på att resiliensarbetet har blivit exklusivt eller att dess gemensamma värderingar inte längre delas av en bredare allmänhet.
- Resiliens kräver allmänhetens uppmärksamhet i alla faser av en kris – från långsiktiga förebyggande åtgärder till återhämtning och glädje.

Denna rapport ingår i projektet [*Recognising and supporting psychological resilience: Regional approaches across the Nordic countries \(2025-2027\)*](#) ("Att erkänna och stödja psykologisk resiliens: Regionala tillvägagångssätt i de nordiska länderna") (2025–2027). Arbetet har utförts av forskare vid Nordregio och finansierats av Nordiska ministerrådet.

Introduction



Images: Rommy van de Pol/Unsplash (left), Fredrik Ohlander/Unsplash (right)

The Nordic Region is typically characterised by high quality of life, democratic values, stable and healthy living conditions, and innovation. Despite such accolades, Nordic residents also face risks due to their geographic location, geopolitical history, and other economic and social challenges. In recent decades, natural disasters, terrorist attacks, extremism, and the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed that the Nordic Region is not immune to crisis. This is not to mention other challenges faced by Nordic populations in the form of housing and financial crises, the climate crisis, and social tensions and injustices. Furthermore, recent geopolitical events have brought societal security "top of mind of all Nordic governments" (Nordic Co-operation, n.d.-a). Such ongoing and potential crises threaten the shared Nordic vision towards becoming a sustainable and integrated region (Nordic Co-operation, n.d.-b).

Crises come in many forms. As described in a joint statement from the Nordic Prime Ministers, the Nordic governments are "committed to further intensifying cooperation for increased civil preparedness and resilience in our region," particularly now as we live in an "era marked by an increasing frequency and complexity of crises" (Prime Minister's Office, 2025). This combination of multiple and overlapping disruptions to societies is known as "polycrisis" (Keinänen et al., 2025). Crises can be layered (one building off or exacerbating another) and are often regionally interconnected, resulting in diverse impacts. And it is not always possible to identify a specific point of origin or singular cause. As inherently disruptive phenomena, both recent and anticipated crises have influenced the way in which Nordic governments organise their societal security. And since challenges to societal security are often "transboundary" in nature, greater international collaboration across the Nordics, as well as with the Baltic countries and the rest of Europe, is crucial (Nordic Co-operation, n.d.-a). For the Nordic and Baltic regions specifically, building upon the foundations of a "shared security culture" could enable greater interaction, cooperation, and resilience for these nations (Wrange et al., 2024).

Recently, Finnish security policy has referred to the concept of *psychological resilience* to describe “the ability of individuals, communities, and society to withstand the stress caused by crisis situations and to recover from their impacts” (Finnish Government, 2025). While the Nordic Region has “endorsed a comprehensive security model” to enhance resilience (Prime Minister's Office, 2025), psychological resilience as a term is not directly applied in national policy discourse outside Finland. However, alternative notions of resilience in relation to preparation for, response to, and recovery from crises are found in Nordic national security strategies, risk assessments, and other preparedness documents. The extent and expression of this varies considerably and involves a range of concepts combining resilience with notions of *civil preparedness*, *societal security*, *crisis management*, and even the *will to defend*. These related ideas help us to situate psychological resilience in the wider discourse of societal security. However, as presented in Finnish security policy, the idea of psychological resilience adds nuance and defines a type of resilience rooted in something deeper than the material preparations and actions for managing crises. While the concept has been prevalent in the Finnish context for many years, it is not always clear to grasp in practice as it is related to both national security efforts as well as local and regional community building, social cohesion, and trust. Nevertheless, its unique value is in its emphasis on shared values, identity, and trust, and the concept offers an analytical lens through which similar practices can be identified in the other Nordic countries.

In response to a Finnish initiative of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2025, this report describes and analyses the concept of psychological resilience in the Nordic Region. Through an academic literature review, policy review, and case study interviews across five Nordic countries, the findings shed light on how local and regional actors support psychological resilience, by what means they currently do so (or expect to in the future), and how other public actors may be involved. The report was developed as an output of the project [*Recognising and supporting psychological resilience: Regional approaches across the Nordic countries*](#)^[1], conducted by research institute Nordregio and funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Methods

To learn how local and regional actors support psychological resilience, we first needed to understand the concept of resilience—and specifically psychological resilience—through its use in Nordic-based academic literature and within national level security policy in the Nordic Region. We used the definition of psychological resilience from the Finnish security strategy to determine a set of keywords, including *psychological resilience*, *societal resilience*, *preparedness*, *governance*, *civil society*, *crisis*, *culture*, and *trust*. In autumn 2025, we conducted a literature review using the Scopus database. Due to the range of concepts and explorative nature of the project, this phase followed the methodology of a scoping review (rather than a systematic review), with the aim of “identifying gaps” and “mapping fields of study where it is difficult to visualise the range of material that might

1. See <https://nordregio.org/research/recognizing-and-supporting-psychological-resilience/>

be available" (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The review was limited to open-access articles published between 2015 and 2025, excluding irrelevant subject areas (e.g., medicine, nursing, mathematics). The geographical scope was limited to Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

To complement the literature review, we reviewed the current national security strategies and national risk assessments in the Nordic countries (see Appendix A). Guiding the review were two questions: *Do the national security strategies and national risk assessments discuss psychological resilience (or a related idea), and if so, how? And do the national security strategies and national risk assessments discuss the key components of psychological resilience (as described by the Finnish comprehensive security strategy), and if so, how?*

While we focused on the discourse used in these two policy documents in each country, we also noted if there were aspects of psychological resilience referenced in additional preparedness and security documents (e.g., Norway's 2025 total preparedness publication, *Totalberedskapsmeldigen*, produced by the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, and the 2021 publication *Kraftsamling—för en stärkt civil beredskap*, from Sweden's Civil Contingencies Agency, MSB, which reformulates the national risk assessment for a public readership; see Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2025; MSB, 2021).

The literature review and policy review were followed by interviews with national level agencies in five countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden; Appendix B). The purpose of these interviews was twofold: (1) to gain insights and clarity about how national-level agencies understand and work with the concept of psychological resilience or its various components, and (2) to understand how the national level views the role of civil society organisations, cultural institutions, and other voluntary associations within its wider preparedness efforts. National-level interviews took place between November 2025 and January 2026.

These insights were further tested and explored in the form of a game-based workshop organised in December 2025, the learnings of which are composed in a working paper (Salonen & Rohrer, 2026).

While psychological resilience may be conceptualised by, or else loosely familiar to, national-level actors, it is worked out within the context of local and regional communities. Therefore, the research team identified local/regional case studies in each of the countries to explore the operationalisation of psychological resilience among specific communities. The process of identifying case studies involved first understanding the different components of psychological resilience and the kinds of organisations and communities where it is fostered. We also followed leads from national-level interviews regarding bottom-up civil society initiatives. The case studies—illustrative rather than representative in nature—involved qualitative interviews with a combination of public and civil society organisations (Appendix B). Informed by insights from the academic literature and policy review, the aim of these interviews was to gain insights and clarity about how local/regional actors work with resilience, particularly with regards to building trust among the community, instilling values, and/or supporting the will to prepare for or act in

times of crisis. The interviews used the concept of resilience as the ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from crisis. The primary interest was to understand people's self-organising activities related to resilience. This could include ways in which citizens initiate action and network to help each other, building trust along the way. The interviews took place between February and April 2026 in local languages. After all interviews were complete, the results were summarised into case study chapters within the context of the corresponding policy context of each country. These results were then synthesized with the project's growing scope of research material, organised into overlapping themes, and articulated into key findings.

The research was restricted to a particular time frame and budget. New publications or knowledge may have been produced between the time of interviews and the publication of this report. Furthermore, the five case studies presented in this report do not provide a comprehensive representation of how communities in each country develop psychological resilience. Rather, they illustrate relevant themes while highlighting several different spheres where psychological resilience is at work among various actors and communities. As there are many actors involved in security, resilience, and preparedness efforts, the report is inherently limited by its engagement with only some of these actors and should not be assumed as reflecting all angles or expressions.

Report structure

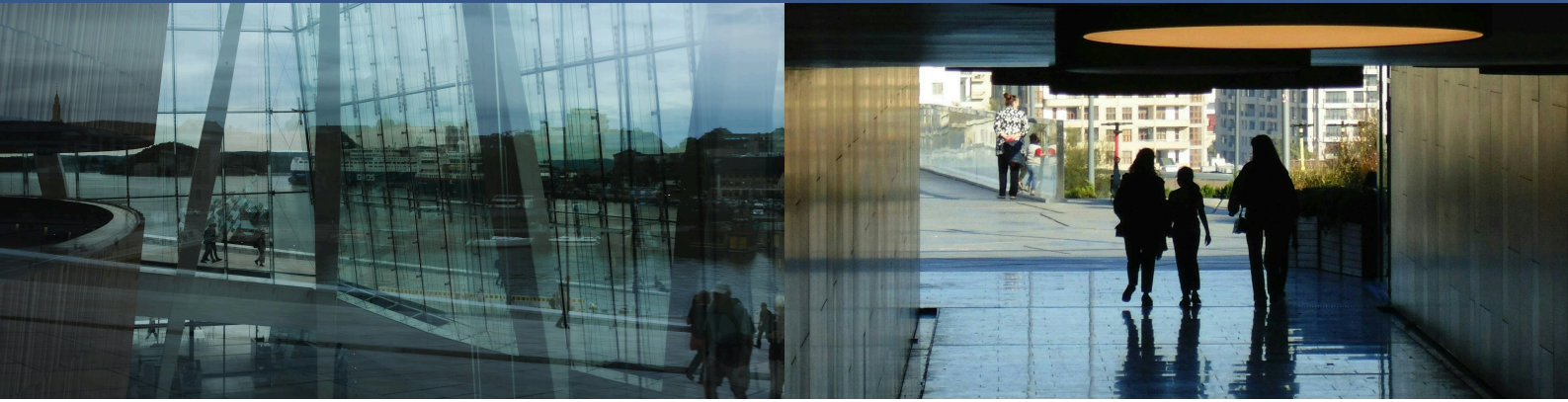
The current state of resilience in general, and psychological resilience in particular, has emerged from a specific set of ideas and in a unique geographic and geopolitical context. Therefore, this report follows the format of the project's research methods, beginning with a review of psychological resilience as a concept within theory and policy in the Nordic Region.

Part I of the report showcases results of the literature review and policy reviews. It develops and applies a descriptive framework for understanding Nordic resilience. Psychological resilience is situated within this framework as something that is developed, supported, and facilitated within communities, organisations, local institutions, and individuals. It is these areas where societal values are operationalised, and trust is established.

Following this, **Part II** provides case studies of how psychological resilience is practiced at the local/regional level. We include one illustrative case study per each Nordic country. The results demonstrate a range of methods, initiatives, successes, and learnings where efforts are made for communities to prepare for, withstand, and recover from crises while also developing trust, maintaining a local identity, and instilling democratic values.

Part III discusses main findings from the case studies with reference to the literature, thereby providing a synthesis of psychological resilience within the Nordic Region. Situating psychological resilience within the broader context of theory and practice can help clarify its relevance for regional policy and the ways in which it may be supported. The report thus concludes with several points of interest and future possibilities for local, regional, and national actors.

Nordic security: Theory and policy



Images: Manuel Keller/Unsplash (left), Orkhan Sweden/Unsplash (right)

Framing Nordic resilience

In this section, we describe the emergence of psychological resilience and discuss some of the complexities related to the application of psychological resilience within the countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden (see Box 1 for a note on Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Åland). Considering the academic discourse alongside our review of national security strategies and risk assessments, we learned that, despite some distinctions, a common resilience framework exists within the Nordic Region. Based on the policy and literature review, we provide a descriptive framework for Nordic resilience (Figure 1), emphasising where psychological resilience is situated within the larger security landscape and how it is operationalised—even within contexts that do not recognise its presence using the same vocabulary.

Within this framework, psychological resilience is, at once, part of a strategy for responding to the threats posed to society as well as a point of origin for developing the values which that society finds worthy of protection in the first place. While the figure acts as a simplification of Nordic resilience thinking, we use it here to understand how psychological resilience functions within the Nordic context and to make sense of the numerous related concepts within crisis preparedness and societal security.

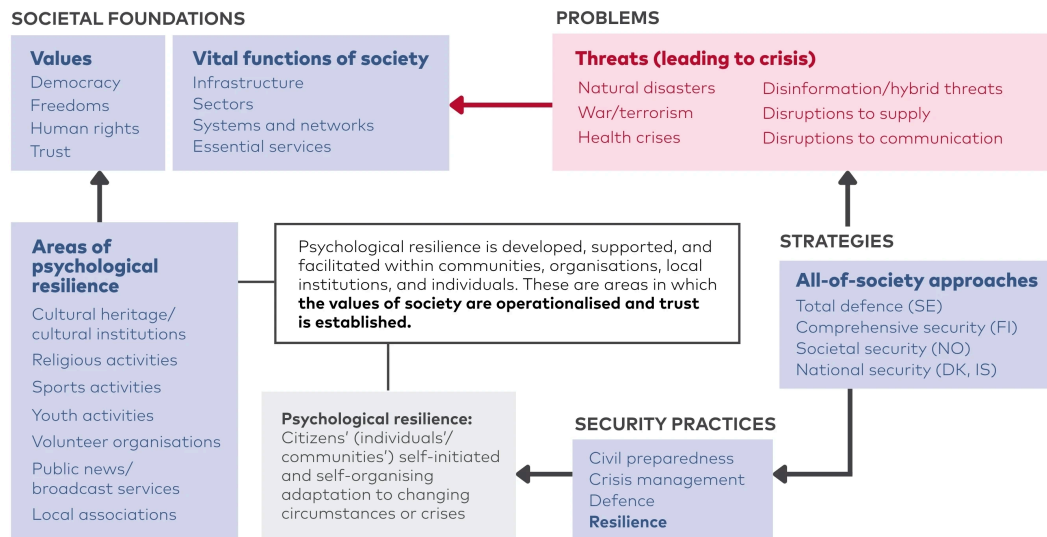


Figure 1. A descriptive framework for Nordic resilience. (Source: Authors' own illustration)

The framework takes certain **values** and **vital functions of society** as its starting point. These have been identified within national-level policy documents as worthy of protection/defence. However, these values and functions are under general and/or acute **threat** due to internal, external, and natural destabilising forces (e.g., disinformation, war, terrorism, environmental disasters, disruptions to supply, and health crises, as described in national risk assessments).

Various **security strategies** have been formulated—and re-formulated—to account for hybrid threats and the potential for polycrisis to emerge. While they have some unique elements (e.g., comprehensive security in the Finnish context compared to societal security in Norway), each of these strategies use **all-of-society approaches** in which the roles and responsibilities for maintaining the vital functions and values of society are protected by both designated security and non-security actors. These approaches also mean that security is ensured at a range of scales—from the national and regional levels down to local municipalities, neighbourhoods, households, and individuals themselves.

In general, **resilience** is conceptualised as one kind of societal measure—a security practice taken up among the nation and within local communities and individuals. Related measures like *crisis management* typically imply the role of specific authorities and agencies tasked with the responsibility of managing or collaborating in response to a particular crisis, while *defence* might refer to the actual armed defence in the case of a physical threat against people and national sovereignty. *Civil preparedness* refers to the prerequisite actions needed to ready an individual or society for crisis response and recovery.

While resilience is a societal measure that encompasses a much broader process of preparation, action, and recovery, **psychological resilience** is a form of security directly linked to total defence as well as the everyday threat environment in that it relies on multiple actors to collaborate, prepare, maintain, and reproduce the will to act during normal (or baseline) conditions so that such latent abilities and willingness can be operationalised when an acute threat strikes.

In the Nordic resilience framework posited here, psychological resilience is a concept for protecting and maintaining not only critical functions but also a specific set of values. While only the Finnish strategy uses the phrase of psychological resilience, similar features of it exist across the Nordic Region. Using the extended descriptions from the 2025 Finnish security strategy, the project defines the concept as follows:

Psychological resilience is citizens' (individuals' or communities') self-initiated and self-organising adaptation to changing circumstances or crises through values-based activities.

Psychological resilience is closely connected to community or social resilience, referring to all forms where citizens self-organise and network to help each other, building trust and social capital as a byproduct. Civic activity takes place everywhere in various forms. For example, it can be supported by engaging in values-based activities such as cultural, religious, or sports activities, education, or through communication channels. With the emphasis on sites in which trust and values are developed, this definition completes the framework. Within the localised case studies (Part II of this report), we explore several of these areas in which psychological resilience is developed.

The remainder of this section of the report is organised according to the key elements of the Nordic resilience framework.

Box 1. Societal security in Greenland, Åland, and the Faroe Islands

Unlike the national security strategies established in the five Nordic countries, the autonomous territories of Greenland, Åland, and the Faroe Islands are uniquely positioned—both politically and geographically—which influences how they perceive and develop regional resilience.

While Greenland's Ministry for Statehood and Foreign Affairs has published a foreign, security, and defence policy (2024), Åland is a neutralised territory whose defence responsibilities ultimately rest with Finland. In the Faroe Islands, the government adopted a resolution on national security policy in 2024, indicating an aim to "take responsibility for their own security and defence policy" and to "withstand complex threats" among other objectives (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Industry, and Trade, 2024).

Åland does not have a security strategy, but they emphasise aspects of civil preparedness within a government programme as a starting point for reviewing the government's work, specifically in response to "the current security policy situation and NATO membership" (Ålands Landskapsregering, 2024).

While Greenland and the Faroe Islands have their own home rules as self-governing territories, when it comes to the most intensive crises of armed conflict, defence responsibilities lie with Denmark. The same is the case for Åland with respect to Finland. Furthermore, all three territories are part of NATO—Greenland and the Faroe Islands are ensured protection through Denmark's membership, defined under the Washington Treaty from 1949, and with Finland's accession to NATO in 2022, Åland is also included (whilst remaining itself a demilitarised territory). However, the Faroe Islands' resolution acknowledges that, despite NATO protection, "international security, safety, and peace cannot be taken for granted," which is one impetus for establishing a security policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Industry, and Trade, 2024).

Greenland's policy expresses developing a "more robust and resilient" society, especially in the wake of environmental threats (like landslides and tsunamis that impact physical and social infrastructure of local communities) as well as economic insecurities, cyber threats, and other geopolitical concerns due to the land's strategic location and resources. Åland's government programme also names climate change and global warming as key threats but further notes that Åland must be "ready to respond to diverse and challenging situations" including "wars and conflicts" (Ålands Landskapsregering, 2024). The Faroe Islands security policy names concerns of warfare and cyberattacks and stresses the need to ensure public safety, cyber security, supply chains, food security, public health, the environment, nature, and property and assets (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Industry, and Trade, 2024).

Security-related documents from Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Åland all emphasise the concern of being included in security measures without full representation in decision-making processes. For example, in response to conflict and destabilisation, Greenland's security and defence policy highlights both its commitment to peace as well as its aim for parliament members to be included in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Their strategy includes the refrain, "nothing about us without us," including in matters of defence, leading to the territory's deliberations around military or civilian national service in Greenland as well as establishing their own "cyber security capabilities, ... civil emergency response capabilities," and other expertise for safeguarding critical infrastructure and strengthening societal security (Ministry for Statehood and Foreign Affairs, 2024, p. 45).

Societal security documents in all three territories mention increased responsibilities running parallel to Denmark or Finland to strengthen the sovereignty of their territory and to develop their own civil preparedness efforts. The aim of such work is to protect both shared security interests as well as the unique interests of their own regions. Thus Greenland, for example, expects to “develop an increasingly detailed security and defence policy” (Government of Greenland, 2024, p. 45), and Åland’s government is reviewing their preparedness work, and they will update their security policy handbook used by provincial authorities (Ålands Landskapsregering, 2024).

Vital functions and values worth protecting

According to a seminal work in the field of security studies, societal security is, at least in part, about enabling a society to “persist in its essential character” (Wæver et al., 1993). If this holds true, then *vital functions* and *values* may be understood as the building blocks of that character. At the same time, a system’s capacity to cope with disruption or adapt to changing circumstances are signs of resilience (Norström et al., 2025). Therefore, in the context of societal security, resilience may be understood as a system’s (e.g., community, region, nation) capacity to, in some instances, maintain vital functions which enable it to cope and adapt to disturbances or, in more intensive shocks, to maintain the essential values which can enable vital functions to re-emerge.

In the Nordic context, vital functions of society include services and activities ranging from economy, social services, and communication to physical infrastructure and access to material needs such as food and water. As exhibited in Table 1, each of the Nordic countries identifies vital functions in their security strategies. These are often described among the national governments as a society’s basic or essential needs and may include services and infrastructure provided through public or commercial means. Some of these functions correspond to the EU regulatory framework for critical infrastructure (EU, 2022), which names several sectors—such as transport, energy, food and water, and digital infrastructure—as the facilitators of critical entities.

Most of the five Nordic countries include things like energy, food, and water supplies, transportation, finance and economy services, health-related services and supplies, defence, and exercise of authority/leadership among their vital functions. Psychological resilience is uniquely named by the Finnish security strategy as a vital function. Other distinctive essentials include nature and the environment (identified by Norway) and education and research (noted in Denmark).

Table 1. Vital functions of society, based on national security strategies

Country	Terminology for vital functions of society	Vital functions of society
Denmark	<i>Samfundsvigtige funktioner</i>	"The activities, goods and services that form the basis for the general functioning of society." (Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed, 2025-a) There are 15 areas where extreme pressure would have negative consequences on vital functions of society. These areas are energy; information and communication technology; transport; emergency response, police and civil protection; health; social affairs; drinking water and food; wastewater and waste management; finance and economy; education and research; meteorology; defence, intelligence and security services; foreign service; general exercise of authority; and cross-cutting crisis management.
Finland	<i>Yhteiskunnan elintärkeät toiminnot/ samhällets vitala funktioner</i>	"Functions that are essential for a functioning society." (Finnish Government, 2025, p. 13) In the Finnish context, these include functional capacity of the population and services; economy, infrastructure, and security of supply; leadership; international/EU activities; internal security; defence capabilities; and psychological resilience.
Iceland	<i>Ómissandi innviðir</i>	"Systems, assets, facilities, equipment, networks, structures, or services that are necessary to ensure the basic needs of society and that society cannot be without for a day or less. Essential infrastructure can be owned or managed by public or private entities." (Dómsmálaráðuneytið, 2025, p. 2)
Norway	<i>Kritiske samfunns-funksjoner</i>	Critical societal functions "comprise functions that are defined as critical if society cannot do without them for seven days or less without jeopardising life, health or other basic needs." (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2024, p. 38) The Norwegian strategy names 14 critical functions: management and crisis management; defence; law and order; health and care services; rescue services; cyber security in the civilian sector; nature and the environment; security of supply; water and sewerage; financial services; power supply; electronic communication services; transport; and satellite-based services.
Sweden	<i>Samhällsviktig verksamhet</i>	"Societally critical activities maintain functions that are essential for society's basic needs, values, and security. This may include critical infrastructure for transport, communication, and energy, or the supply of goods and services such as medicines, food, and water that are fundamental to the functioning of society." (Regeringskansliet, 2024, p. 27) "For some societally important activities, there are delivery or functional requirements, such as the Electricity Preparedness Act on preparedness measures in the electricity sector. For many, these requirements are lacking, which means that services are provided on a commercial basis." (MSB, 2021, p. 34)

Within the all-of-society approaches to which the Nordic countries subscribe, all parts of society—armed forces as well as civilians—are expected to make a joint effort to prepare for and protect against crises. Such efforts thus hinge upon the existence of particular *values* which citizens find worth protecting. From a national perspective, these values are presumably shared among citizens and transcend niche social or political interests, while regional and local values may be unique to a specific context of, for example, a neighbourhood or local group. Nonetheless, such localised shared values may be more defined expressions of national values or may involve instances in which national values are practiced among individuals (e.g., democratic values, an expectation or pursuit of a certain quality of life, or a common interest or goal with one's neighbours in a local sports club or religious association). These practices of social cohesion provide a "shared mentality of togetherness that is needed to face major societal disruptions—disruptions that are generally understood to originate outside the society" (Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021, p. 170). When it comes to facilitating psychological resilience, community relationships based on shared values and social trust form the root of coping capacity, enabling vital services and activities to persist, adapt, or re-emerge in the wake of crises.

Table 2 summarises the societal values expressed in Nordic security strategies. Most of the strategies highlight the importance of protecting democracy and social trust, but economy is explicitly mentioned by three of the five countries as well (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden). Freedom, rule of law, life, and health are also mentioned in multiple strategies. How these values are articulated slightly differs. Neither Denmark nor Finland explicitly names these values as such—in Denmark, they are considered "parameters" measured in relation to possible threats, while in Finland, things like human rights, rule of law, and democracy are referred to as "principles" linked to the Constitution and which the strategy is meant to protect. The closest expression of values in the Swedish security strategy is its list of "national security interests" which are to be safeguarded and upheld (Samfundssikkerhed, 2025-a; Finnish Government, 2025; Regeringskansliet, 2024).

Table 2. Values worth protecting, based on national security strategies^[2]

Values	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Allied solidarity and unity in Europe				x	
Competent authority		x			
Democracy		x	x	x	x
Economy	x			x	x
Environment	x				
Equality/ Inclusion		x			
Freedom				x	x
Human rights			x		x
Independence				x	x
Individual capacities		x			
Life	x				x
Openness		x			
Public health	x				x
Property	x				
Rule of law		x		x	x
Safety/ security				x	x
Social trust		x	x	x	x
Welfare		x			

2. See Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed (2025-a), Finnish Government (2025), Alþingi (2024-a), Statsministerens kontor (2025), Regeringskansliet (2024)

Willingness to act

These values and vital functions are key elements of fostering a willingness to act in times of crisis, which has long been part of Finnish security politics. Valtonen and Branders (2021) suggest that Finnish history plays a key role in their overall national will to defend, particularly because of their ability to unite after the civil war and to respond to Soviet aggression. Finland stands out from its Nordic neighbours by having a more recent history in which their values and vital functions have been put at risk and their resilience thus tested. Interviews made by Raisio and colleagues found that Finnish people emphasised their “exceptionally high level of willingness to defend the country” as an important “underlying spirit” and “immense resource” for national security (Raisio et al., 2025, p. 490). However, similar willingness also exists in other Nordic countries. For example, the World Values Survey from 2022 revealed that 87.6% and 80.5% of Norwegian and Swedish respondents (respectively) indicated a willingness to defend their country against an armed attack—both higher percentages than Finland (74.8%). Denmark reported a similar response to Finland (74.6%), while only 53.7% of Icelanders indicated the same kind of willingness (53.7%; Wrangé et al., 2024).

Referring to a 1953 government report about psychological defence^[3] in Sweden, Ördén (2025) writes that the “impulse [to defend the nation] is grounded in a sense that there is something ‘to defend’”. A key precondition for such a will is that ‘the majority of the Swedish population has positive views of their own nation and societal order’ (SOU, 1953, 49)” (Ördén, 2025, p. 9). Seventy years later, the idea persists in the Swedish Defence Commission’s report on the future direction of total defence:

The population’s sense of belonging to and its participation in society is of great importance for the will to defend the country and the will to participate and invest in total defence. ... Ensuring and maintaining the population’s will to defend itself is at the core of the psychological defence. ... If the population feels that fundamental values are being threatened, that their own contribution is of significance, and that there is a broader societal resilience to the effects of war, there are conditions for a strong will to defend the country. (Secretariat of the Defence Committee, 2023)

The Commission also refers to Ukraine’s resilience against Russia and their “central value of a nation’s citizens’ strong collective will to defend their country.” They link psychological defence to values of democratic society with freedom of opinion and free media (Secretariat of the Defence Committee, 2023). When it comes to psychological resilience, researchers Carlsson and Engström (2025) suggest that the cultural sector—including institutions like public libraries—can play a “significant factor in bolstering the willingness of the Swedish population to defend their country” (p. 2)—a point explored further in the Norwegian and Finnish case studies of this report as well.

3. Note the distinction between psychological defence referred to here, and psychological resilience. For more on this distinction, see “Resilience concepts in the Nordics” in this report.

Threats to society

According to national security strategies and risk assessments, the Nordic countries face a range of *threats* to their values and vital functions—from natural disasters to geopolitical concerns. Global supply chains and the interconnectivity of systems often mean that important functions of everyday life are vulnerable, as a threat to one part of the system threatens the whole. Nordic countries prioritise threats uniquely, in part due to geography, but also due to their distinct histories, economic structures, resource supplies, and political interests. While the countries consider the degree of certain threats differently (e.g., volcanic eruptions in Iceland compared to terrorism mentioned in Sweden and Norway; see Table 3), the Nordic Region has potential to collaborate in its security efforts as a “single strategic area” in the face of major geopolitical aggression (Nordforsk, 2025) and external forces which threaten to dismantle “Nordic values” and “Nordic democracy,” the latter emerging as both “identity marker” and “antidote against both ideological and geopolitical threats” (Græger, 2025; Kurunmäki & Strang, 2010/2016, p. 10). Furthermore, the Russian war on Ukraine has established a common threat among the Nordics (as well as the Baltics), marking a convergence of threat perceptions across the region (Wrange et al., 2024).

Table 3 shows both similarities and distinctions of the threat landscape across the Nordic countries (according to their most recent national risk assessments at time of research). All five countries highlight concerns of terrorism and extremism, and the majority also mention biological threats, social threats (including mass immigration), technological threats, and threats to supply systems. Finland, Norway, and Sweden all explicitly describe military threats and economic threats. Denmark, Iceland, and Sweden all mention concerns of natural disasters and climate change. Norway is the only country to identify threats to dignitaries as a particular concern.

Table 3. Threat landscape of the Nordic Region, according to national risk assessments^[4]

Values	Denmark	Finland	Iceland	Norway	Sweden
Military threats and/or pressure		x		x	x
Hybrid threats from external state actors	x	x		x	x
Biological threats such as epidemics	x	x	x		x
Natural disasters and climate change	x	x	x		x
Internal security threats, such as terrorism, extremism, radicalisation, and sabotage	x	x	x	x	x
Social threats such as mass influx of migration, violent riots, mis- and disinformation	x	x		x	x
Economic threats such as disruptions of the financial system, covert investments		x		x	x
Technological threats such as accidents and failures after disruptions in IT systems as well as cyberattacks	x	x		x	x
Disruptions in supply chains and vital functions	x	x	x		x
Disruptions or major incidences related to transportation systems		x	x		
Threats to dignitaries				x	

4. See Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed (2025-a), Sisäministeriön (2023), Ríkislögreglustjórnin almannavarnadeild (2011), Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste (2025), MSB (2025).

In the academic literature around security planning and policy, several authors categorise current security threats as “wicked problems,” referring to the work of Rittel & Webber (1973; see also Selle & Wollebæk, 2015; Sandbakken & Karlsson, 2024; Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021). This is because security threats are multiple, complex, and often unclear, making it difficult to respond with a single solution or fixed strategy.

While any crisis—defined as “inconceivable, unscheduled, and unexpected events” (Keinänen et al., 2025)—makes planning a challenge, globalisation and the interconnectedness of various systems and supply chains can also mean that a crisis can have more severe and overlapping ramifications, indicating an era of polycrisis. Furthermore, hybrid threats—which involve disinformation, manipulation, and “coordinated actions designed to create confusion and dilemmas across sectorial lines of responsibility”—undermine democracy and trust (Sandbakken & Karlsson, 2024, p. 165; Borch & Heier, 2024). In critical security studies, threats are not understood as merely problems or objects of study but as “products of social and political practices” (Aradau, 2014).

All-of-society approaches in response to a totalising security environment

While some threats remain acute, several authors note how, since the Cold War, defence and security strategies in the Nordic countries now emphasise “everyday threats” (Örden, 2025). Such potential pressures create an everyday security environment and contribute to the idea of a “grey zone” or “twilight zone” between war and peace (Larsson, 2024; Carlsson & Engström, 2025; Liebetrau, 2021; Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021; Larsson, 2021; Berling & Petersen, 2021). These authors describe how the transition from tackling specific crisis moments to maintaining a general state of crisis preparedness challenges notions of exceptionalism and raises difficult questions around responsibility, governance, and strategic planning.

The literature highlights distinctions across the Nordic countries for when this blurring between war and peace emerged. In her genealogical review, Örden (2025) suggests that the “twilight zone” between war and peace was critically examined already in 1983, shaping Sweden’s concept of psychological defence (*psykologiskt försvar*) as a way to combat the “uncertainty, unpredictability, and perpetual change” of information influence (p. 11). While distinct from psychological resilience as defined in the Finnish context, psychological defence describes an “early resilience approach” established in the 1950s as an alternative to psychological warfare (Örden, 2025, p. 2). As it re-emerged in the 1980s, the concept focused on ensuring all of society was prepared to combat misinformation or communication that undermined the values of democracy.

Alongside the evolution of information influence as an everyday threat, the idea of psychological defence has matured as an everyday posture against that threat. In Sweden, the history of this can also be traced organisationally through the establishment of the Swedish Psychological Defence Board, which was phased out and folded into the work of the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) in 2008, and then re-established in

the form of the Psychological Defence Agency (*Myndigheten för psykologiskt försvar*; MPF) in 2022 (MCF, 2025-a).

A similar study evaluating the security approach of Denmark since the 1980s suggests that it was not until the end of the Cold War that Danish Defence turned towards its managerial security practices as a response to the "increasingly volatile and unpredictable" security threats (Liebetrau, 2021, p. 109). In his research, Liebetrau highlights a 1997 report from the Danish Defence Commission as a turning point towards "indirect security" whereby "defence policy cannot ... be predicted and planned [as easily as before]" (Liebetrau, 2021, pp. 114-115). The security environment was further complicated during the 2000s when conditions seemed favourable, yet at the same time unpredictable, leading to a "moment of simultaneous security and uncertainty" (Liebetrau, 2021, p. 115).

Just as the security environment becomes totalising (with less distinction between stability and uncertainty), so too is there a blurring of defence actors and responsibilities through all-of-society strategies. As a whole-of-society approach, *total defence* is utilised in some form by all the Nordic countries. This includes *national sikkerhed* in Denmark, comprehensive security or *kokonaisturvallisuus* in Finland, *þjóðaröryggi* in Iceland, *totalforsvar* and *samfunnssikkerhet* in Norway, and *totalförsvar* in Sweden. In principle, total defence acts as "a way to prepare and organise for potential threats and crisis that are essentially understood as transboundary in nature" (Berndtsson, 2024, p. 152). The approach combines civil and military efforts to secure a nation and its people against various stressors and includes a range of preparedness and protection efforts (MSB, 2021; Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2025; Dómsmálaráðuneytið, 2021; Finnish Government, 2025).

Since the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces in 2022, the Nordic countries have either revisited or developed anew their security strategies, considering their whole-of-society approaches and seeking to deepen relationships as a unified region (Wrange et al., 2024). Notably, Norway's 2025 national security strategy is the first of its kind, developed due to "serious threats from Russia, a stronger, more assertive China ... [weakened] international cooperation, and [strained] relations between the US and Europe" (Statsministerens kontor, 2025). The strategy states that the priorities for strengthening defence, increasing resilience, and strengthening economic security "require commitment from us all" through a "whole-of-society approach" (2025, p. 5). Additionally, MSB in Sweden has also been renamed as the Swedish Civil Defence and Resilience Agency (*Myndigheten för civilt försvar*, or MSB) to reflect the mission and responsibilities of the agency and of civil society amidst Sweden's "most serious security situation since World War II" (MCF, 2025-b).

Preparedness as a security practice

Total defence is typically divided into the armed forces and civil defence, the latter emphasising how the civilian population can participate in security efforts through acts of preparedness, otherwise known as *civil preparedness*.^[5] All of the Nordic countries discuss some form of preparedness within their security policies, with some using more specific terms related to the individual scale. In the context of today's everyday security environments, preparedness efforts transcend the challenges of an isolated event and highlight the importance of being able, willing, and ready to respond to a range of threats to everyday life.

Finland's security strategy refers to preparedness (*varatuminen/beredskap*) as an "activity that reduces the likelihood of threats realising, promotes readiness to face threats, and creates the prerequisites for response" (Finnish Government, 2025, p. 13). However, they also use concepts like the "will to act," noting that psychological resilience is "manifested in the will to take action to maintain the stability of society, the population's living conditions, security, and ultimately, the state's sovereignty" (Finnish Government, 2025, p. 22). Finnish policy discusses a will to defend as the "cornerstone of our defence capability" (Finnish Government, 2025, p. 22). While the will to defend relates more to armed defence rather than civil defence, it is also about "perceiving Finland and the Finnish way of life as worthy of defence," and "maintaining the will to defend the country also creates a foundation for total defence and comprehensive security, while strengthening the resilience of our society" (Finnish Government, 2025, p. 65).

In Sweden, security policy uses the idea of civil preparedness (*civil beredskap*) to describe the work of maintaining "political decision-making and central leadership functions, essential societal functions, and civil support for military operations" (Regeringskansliet, 2024). MSB also defines civil preparedness as "crisis preparedness and civil defence," noting that "it is often in everyday life that the ability to deal with the entire range of threats exists" (MSB, 2021, p. 34). In addition, Swedish policy refers to individual preparedness (*enskildes beredskap*), which includes both practical readiness at home and ensuring that individuals are mentally prepared (*mentalt förberedda*; MSB, 2021, p. 3). Similarly to Finland, these aspects of preparedness are described as an important cornerstone for society's resilience (*motståndskraft*) and willingness to defend (*försvarsvilja*; MSB, 2021).

Denmark also uses the idea of preparedness (*beredskab*) as the capacity to "withstand complex problems and future crises" (Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed, 2025-a). Denmark's policy discourse has less emphasis on individual preparedness compared to the Swedish context. However, in their national risk assessment, the Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA) reports the collaborative nature of robust national preparedness (*robust national beredskab*), which can be achieved through close

5. The Finnish Institute for International Affairs reports that *civil preparedness* is related to whole-of-society security approaches while *crisis preparedness* is related to disaster/emergency preparedness (Wigell et al., 2022). Both ideas are used or implied by different actors within the Nordic Region, often in overlapping ways.

cooperation between national authorities, regions, municipalities, the private sector, and civil organisations (Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed, 2025-a, p. 2). Outlined in light of Russian aggression towards Europe, Danish security policy describes such work as an effort to “increase our ability to think across the board so that we can deal effectively with the complex threat assessment that we face and make the Danish society more robust in the face of future challenges and crises” (Udenrigsministeriet, 2023).

In the Norwegian context, the policy discourse refers to total preparedness (*totalberedskap*) as the “ability to handle the full range of impacts that undesirable incidents can have for society” (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2025, p. 32). They also distinguish between several forms of preparedness, like self-preparedness (*egenberedskap*) and joint self-preparedness (*felles egenberedskap*) to highlight how individual efforts—such as preparing to manage for one week without electricity, sewage, internet, mobile networks, or payment solutions—contribute to the readiness of society as a whole. Norwegian security policy also refers to basic preparedness (*grunnberedskap*), which is, in part, similar to Finland’s basic resilience—about maintaining critical services and functions, especially at the local level (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2025, p. 32).

Iceland’s national security strategy refers to preparedness (*viðbúnaður*) in the context of promoting “the protection and uninterrupted functionality of critical infrastructure and the strengthening of society’s resilience against all types of threats” (Alþingi, 2024-a, p. 5). The strategy places an emphasis on “effective and coordinated” preparedness; however, unlike the other Nordic strategies, individual responsibilities are not discussed. A draft bill for a new comprehensive law on civil protection in Iceland was placed in Parliament in October 2025. One of the main objectives of the proposed law is to increase the importance of preventative measures to strengthen society’s ability to respond to crisis and to increase society’s resilience to trauma. It also clarifies the duties and responsibilities of the actors involved in civil protection, which are reserved among the state and the municipalities (Dómsmálaráðuneytið, 2025).

The everyday security environment, in which total defence is enacted, produces an alternative way of thinking—so-called “crisis-thinking” or “polycrisis-thinking” (McFarlane, 2026). Meanwhile, “resilience thinking” is another concept which underscores the “uncertain nature of the threat environment in an age of increasing complexity” (Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021, p. 160). In other words, rather than (merely) improving the robustness of critical infrastructure, these ways of thinking are intended to prepare individuals, communities, regions, and nations for crises *when*—not *if*—they come, and reshape individuals’ everyday lifestyles into security practices.

New responsibilities for individuals and civil society

In recent years, the idea of preparedness has led to an emphasis on self-preparedness, meaning the individual bears greater responsibility to ensure his or her own safety. There are at least two sides to this reality. On the one hand, shifting more responsibility on individuals and local communities can empower them and make use of the existing linkages at the local level. And granting individuals agency, or the “capacity to make decisions and act on them” is a key element of resilience (Norström et al., 2025). Yet, what does this

mean for those who, for various reasons, cannot ensure their own safety? As not everyone in society has equal capacity to prepare for or respond to crises, several voices in the academic discourse critique this growing form of so-called "responsibilisation" (Larsson, 2021). Such research questions how security efforts can be distributed in ways that unburden the state without demanding unfair expectations among citizens or excluding certain groups from national imaginaries (see, e.g., Liebetrau, 2021; Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021; Larsson, 2021; Gross, 2023; Berling & Petersen, 2021; Awan et al., 2019).

The idea of sharing responsibility is present across the Nordic countries, both in policy and in the literature, but it remains uncertain how these responsibilities might be divided amongst actors who either already have a mandate to act in times of crisis or who take up new responsibilities in an ad hoc way. Furthermore, responsibility without agency or without capacity can lead to unfair expectations, confusion, and distrust among community and government actors.

Exploring the Swedish context, Larsson (2021) remarks: "The emerging security apparatus for managing peace/war preparedness is arguably more totalizing than previous forms of total defence insofar as the actions—and inactions—of individuals are now regarded as impacting individual, societal, and state security, even in the immediate absence of war and crises" (p. 308). While the totalisation of security may cause a "general 'state of civil anxiety,'" it is not merely an anxiety for individual safety that emerges; rather, the "practice of resilience makes security politics a local and individualised matter" through which citizens are repositioned as a "'voluntary' frontline defence" (Berling & Petersen, 2021, p. 132; Awan et al., 2019). According to Larsson (2021), this produces a "resilient subject" who "accepts the living conditions of insecurity" (p. 307).

During the COVID-19 crisis, Gross (2023) made a critical reading of Norway's political discourse, in which the government frequently evoked the idea of *dugnad* (voluntary collective efforts for the common good). Gross argues that, in doing so, politicians reinforced a normative collective Norwegian identity while simultaneously erasing those social and economic inequalities that otherwise prevented some individuals and population groups from participating in *dugnad*. This resulted in denigrating or removing such groups from the collective imagination of what makes a responsible Norwegian resident.

The concept of *dugnad* or *dugnadsånd* overlaps with the Finnish *talkoot*, and, to some extent, the Danish *arbejdsflællesskab* and/or *samfundssind*^[6], and the Swedish *frivilliganda* and even *folkhemmet*. These terms imply that one's inclusion in society is profoundly intertwined with one's activity as a socially responsible citizen.^[7] If not expressed, taught, or developed with great nuance towards diversity, socioeconomic inequalities, and existing injustices, areas in which societal values are instilled may be at risk of becoming sites of exclusionary forms of nationalism.

6. See, e.g., Kratschmer (2023) and Wiking (2025) for more on these terms related to community-mindedness and how they have been utilised both politically and colloquially.

7. The term *toloka* in Ukrainian is much related to the same enactment of social activities building a material and immaterial network of support and reliability (see Dvulit & Slätmo, 2025).

The changing security environment not only influences the responsibility presumed by individuals but also that of public institutions and civic organisations. Reflecting on the situation in Ukraine, Raisio et al. (2025) note that spontaneous volunteering during crisis situations can emerge with great "flexibility, speed, and innovation"; however, the downsides include lack of clarity and misalignment with formal goals and efforts of the state or other preparedness organisations. Additionally, while civil society organisations may take up responsibilities informally during crises, their sustainability may be limited. Looking at the Finnish context, several researchers conclude that spontaneous volunteering may enhance community resilience but can also produce vulnerabilities, and more consideration is needed to integrate "informal civic action into formal preparedness structures" (Raisio et al., 2025).

Through interviews with key library actors and analyses of library sector materials in Sweden, Carlsson and Engström (2025) show how the library as a public institution plays a role in preparedness efforts. While the preparedness agency in Sweden notes that libraries play a role in civil defence by preserving cultural heritage, the researchers learned that some actors in the library sector believe the library can serve a greater role during crises by, for example, communicating/disseminating information, supporting digital inclusion, upholding and facilitating democracy through access to journalism, and providing physical and staffed citizen services (Carlsson & Engström, 2025). However, the research warns that "enrolling libraries in national security policy ... and envisioning of new obligations in the crisis and war rhetoric tends to renegotiate the balance of responsibilities between the state, the individual, and civil society" and tensions "may present a challenge to libraries' democratic mission" (Carlsson & Engström, 2025, p. 2). There are also some concerns regarding what mandate library actors have to assume such a role or if they require a mandate to do so. This report finds similar results from the Norwegian and Finnish case studies in Part II.

Resilience concepts in the Nordic Region

Within today's security politics, resilience is presented as a strategy for navigating the contemporary threat landscape whereby crises may emerge, or indeed be embedded, in everyday life (Wigell et al., 2022; Larsson, 2024).

The Nordic countries use many resilience-related concepts in security discourse. For example, the Swedish government uses terms such as societal resilience (*samhällets motståndskraft*), civil society resilience (*civila samhällets resilience*), population resilience (*befolkningens motståndskraft*), and collective resilience (*gemensamma motståndskraft*) to describe different aspects of the nation's strength to cooperate among societal actors, willingness to act and to trust one another, and ability to defend in pressure situations (Regeringskansliet, 2024). Though not yet part of the national security strategy, psychological resilience (*psykologisk motståndskraft*) has been referenced briefly by MSB in relation to the willingness to defend in response to crisis and war (MSB, 2021, p. 21).

Norwegian national security policy refers to civil resilience (*sivil motsandskraft*) as well as other specific forms of resilience related to the economy (*økonomisk motstandskraft*) and cyber security (*digital motstandskraft /cyberberedskap*; Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2025). Iceland's Government Policy on Civil Protection and Security Affairs mentions several forms of resilience (*áfallaþol*) including civil resilience (*borgaralegt áfallaþol*) and societal resilience (*áfallaþol samfélaga*), emphasising that resilience "must be considered in a comprehensive manner across all sectors in order to build resilience in each area, to prevent crises, and prepare responses when disasters strike, whether they are man-made threats or natural catastrophes" (Dómsmálaráðuneytið, 2021; Utanríkisráðuneytið, 2025). In addition to these specific forms of resilience, Iceland's security policy also uses a general concept of resilience to describe the "ability of a system or society facing danger to avoid, reduce, or recover from shocks of any kind through preparedness, both through preventive measures and responses" (Dómsmálaráðuneytið, 2021). Furthermore, they discuss resilience in terms of the "resistance, toughness, [and] durability ... and the capacity of a society to cope with, recover from, and overcome disasters" (Dómsmálaráðuneytið, 2021).

Denmark uses the concept of resilience (*modstandsdygtighed*) to describe the idea of "being able to act quickly and decisively together with the EU when crises strike" (Udenrigsministeriet, 2023). Their strategy highlights Denmark's cooperation with the rest of Europe, while their risk assessment relates resilience to the nation's ability to "resist physical and digital sabotage actions" (Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed, 2025-a).

In the Finnish context, the government distinguishes between basic resilience (*perusresilienssi*) and acute resilience (*akuuttiresilienssi*; see Figure 2; Mäenpää et al., 2025). Basic resilience is about participation and democracy, culture, and education. It describes the ability for renewal, which is cultivated in daily life and involves the capacity and willingness for individuals or communities to respond when the time comes. Acute resilience involves readiness for action at the moment of crisis.

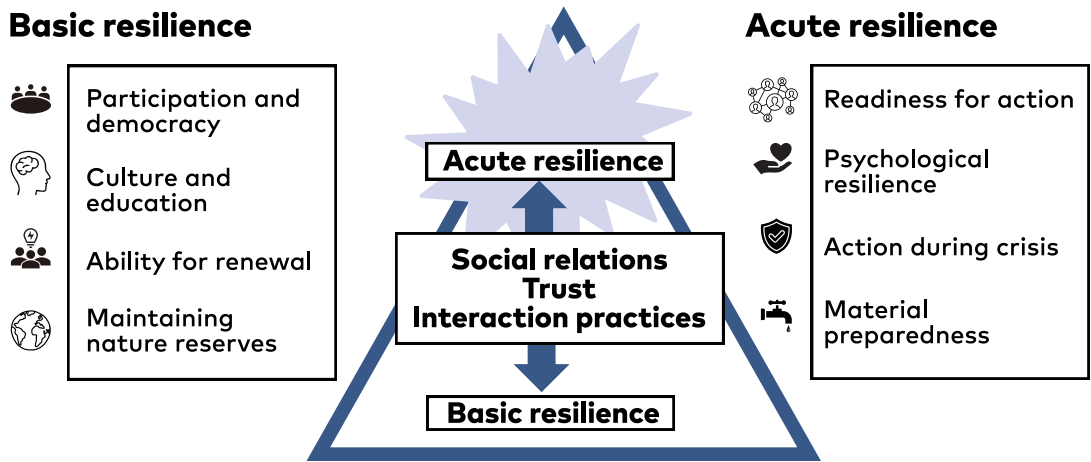


Figure 2. Basic versus acute resilience in the Finnish security context. (Source: Mäenpää et al., 2025)

Finland's national security landscape involves a plethora of resilience concepts beyond basic and acute resilience. In a 2025 report from the Prime Minister's Office, resilience (*resilienssi* or *sietokyky*) is defined as "the ability of a community or society to secure its existence and the things that are important to it when they are threatened by acute situations ... or slow changes" (Mäenpää et al., 2025, p. 19). The report also provides a separate definition for community resilience (*yhteisöllinen resilienssi* or *myös yhteisöresilienssi*) as the "collective readiness and ability of residents and other local actors to face and adapt to sudden crisis situations and to sustainably recover from the situation to normal conditions" (p. 19). Both resilience and community resilience as described here highlight aspects of maintenance and protection of a status quo in the face of threats while also learning from a crisis and "bounc[ing] forward" (Mäenpää et al., 2025, p. 42).

The concept of resilience is not without critique. In addition to lacking a clear definition, it describes a "shift in security thinking from 'grand design' to 'muddling through': it is preparation without grand visions or promises" (Berling & Petersen, 2021, p. 132). The 2025 report from the Finnish government also mentions the critiques raised towards the political nature of resilience, as it can be used to "re-enact the system of power relations without the possibility of progress" (Mäenpää et al., 2025, p. 42; referring to MacKinnon & Derickson, 2012). These nuances are important to keep in mind as resilience, like many other well-intentioned concepts, can also be used to protect and defend dangerous ideologies and to resist progress or transformation.

Psychological resilience in Finland

Amidst these various terms, psychological resilience (*henkinen kriisinkestävyys*)^[8] is one of the key expressions taken up in the Finland's comprehensive strategy. The Finnish government referred to the idea of psychological resilience already in 2017 in a security strategy which linked the concept with citizens' will to defend, as well as with maintaining the livelihood and security of the population in all situations (Security Committee, 2017, p. 22). Both the former and current strategies refer to different stages or dimensions of resilience involving various actors and operations of security. These dimensions—normal conditions, crisis, and recovery—are highlighted in their former security strategy document (Figure 3).

8. Also translated as *mental resilience* in English. The Finnish Government's Swedish version of the strategy uses the phrase *mental kristållighet* as the translation for *henkinen kriisinkestävyys*.

Three dimensions of psychological resilience

Normal conditions	Operational capability during crisis	Operational capability during recovery
• Creating the basis for psychological crisis resilience during normal conditions • Fair, safe and democratic society • Smoothly functioning system of government and preparedness	• Cooperation between different actors is important • Clear responsibilities of the actors • Maintaining everyday structures • Ensuring that basic needs are met	• Cooperation between actors is important • Organising activities that help in the recovery after crisis

Figure 3. Dimensions for understanding the conditions for psychological resilience and cooperation efforts during crisis and recovery. (Source: Security Committee, 2017)

Within Finland's current security strategy, the concept of psychological resilience is included as one of several vital functions of society. It is defined as "the ability of individuals, communities, and society to withstand the stress caused by crisis situations and to recover from their impacts" (Finnish Government, 2025, p. 22).

The foundation of psychological resilience is created in normal conditions, and it plays a key role in the maintenance of functional capacity during crisis. Good psychological resilience promotes recovery from crises. Psychological resilience is manifested in the will to take action to maintain the stability of society, the population's living conditions, security, and ultimately, the state's sovereignty. Building, strengthening, and maintaining psychological resilience is long-term work that takes place throughout society as a whole. (Finnish Government, 2025, pp. 22-23).

Psychological resilience is thus related to basic resilience and the latent abilities of individuals, communities, and society (see Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021). But what are these latent abilities which are called upon in moments of acute crises? Based on the definition provided by the Finnish government, such latent abilities may be related to individuals' trust—in each other, in authorities, and in society. They may also be related to community identity, shared societal values, and future hopes that motivate people to defend their way of life. These latent abilities may also be about specific skills or capacities—both hard and soft—that people apply during a threatening event or use to withstand sustained crises.

The security strategy identifies seven components of psychological resilience (Box 2). The components describe sites and activities where trust is built, identity is shaped, and skills are developed, as well as where the willingness and ability to act (respond and recover) during crisis is formed. At the same time, it is important to recognise that some relational elements of psychological resilience, such as trust and identity, are dynamic, ever-changing, and never achieved or arrived at in a complete or comprehensive way. Nor are such things shaped through singular, top-down policy; rather, resilience is built through “everyday practices and interaction between people and communities” (Luonila et al., 2023).

Box 2. Seven components of psychological resilience

1. Maintaining cultural services and protecting cultural heritage
2. Ensuring the basis for religious activities
3. Ensuring the continuation of youth work and activities, as well as civic sporting activities
4. Communications (to strengthen trust, inclusion, and faith in the future)
5. Combatting social exclusion and inequality
6. Promoting voluntary activities
7. Recovery

Within this *Recognising and supporting psychological resilience* research project, we reinterpreted these components into seven areas in which psychological resilience is both developed and operationalised (Box 3). These can also be found within the Nordic resilience framework (Figure 1) and are revisited in Part II of this report. Our case studies explore three of the seven areas: cultural and heritage institutions (Finland and Norway), voluntary organisations (Denmark), and local community organisations (Iceland and Sweden).

Box 3. Seven areas where psychological resilience is developed and operationalised

1. Cultural and heritage institutions (e.g., libraries, museums, arts, and cultural centres)
2. Religious institutions and communities (e.g., churches, mosques, spiritual communities, ceremonial events)
3. Youth activities

4. Civic sporting activities
5. Public broadcast services
6. Voluntary organisations and activities (e.g., Red Cross, volunteer emergency services)
7. Local community organisations (e.g., residential associations, neighbourhood organisations)

The Finnish security model is one that emphasises “multi-stakeholder preparedness” by which “informal civil society actors, ranging from individuals and families to local communities and online networks, are seen as having a meaningful role” in preparedness efforts (Raisio et al., 2025, p. 485). The comprehensive strategy purports that this model of preparedness is the foundation of Finnish resilience.

While none of the other national security strategies in the Nordics refer to psychological resilience directly, several components of the term are raised. For example, Sweden’s strategy describes the cross-sectoral work of national security, which involves faith communities and broader civil society (Regeringskansliet, 2024). Volunteer services among various civil society organisations are also mentioned. In a Norwegian brochure on preparedness, voluntary and faith communities are described as significant actors during emergencies, and housing associations are discussed with regards to their potential role in fostering joint-preparedness when it comes to stocking resources (DSB, 2024, p. 16). Similarly, material from Denmark also highlights the role of preparedness plans among neighbourhood groups and residential associations (Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed, 2025-b). Norway also mentions the significance of the cultural sector, but mainly as an area that should function normally in times of crisis and its capacity to help the public “preserve and maintain good mental health and morale” (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2025). Both the Swedish and Danish security publications also discuss the importance of public communication channels for enabling trust among society, ensuring stability, and combatting disinformation (MSB, 2021; Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed, 2025-a).

The spiritual roots of psychological resilience

The concept of psychological resilience evolved out of the 1960s notion of so-called “spiritual defence” (Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021; Larsson & Rhinhard, 2021). Drawing from 1930s Swiss political-cultural movement of *Geistige Landesverteidigung* (spiritual national defence), Finnish security policy popularised the notion of spiritual defence during the Cold War as a way to “instill a new sense of ‘enlightened patriotism’” and solidify national, democratic values in the “everyday consciousness of the citizens’ life” (Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021, p. 162). Indeed, even as the term is translated into the English as psychological or mental resilience, the Finnish security strategies from 2017 and 2025 use the term *henkinen kriisinkestävyys*, where *henkinen* can refer to both mental and spiritual ideas.

When, in the late 1950s, the National Association for Military Psychology appointed a new committee to consider the psychological aspect of defence, it was called the Committee for Spiritual National Defence (*Henkisen maanpuolustuksen komitea*) because "'spiritual' implicated a much broader ideological and societal agenda" (Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021, p. 162):

The committee aimed to bring the wider societal fabric—key societal values, the sense of national unity and purpose as well as the ideological foundations of these values—under the comprehensive agenda of total defence planning and monitoring. From here on, the foundations of the willingness of the citizens to defend the democratic society and its core values was perceived as key ingredient of the Finnish national defence ethos. (Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021, p. 162)

The spiritual aspect of psychological resilience is not unique to Finland. In Sweden, an idea of spiritual preparedness (*andlig beredskap*) has emerged in some media and research and among the Swedish Church, but not yet in policy (Svenska kyrkan, 2025). Though not discussed in the current Danish security strategy nor in the literature, recently published media articles remark upon Danish Prime Minister Mette Fredriksen's call for spiritual rearmament/mobilisation (*åndelig oprustning*) among Danish society, which is connected to increased knowledge and authority of science while also maintaining one's ability to discern between right and wrong (Bjerre, 2025).^[9]

While the concept remains unclear, it is, according to the Prime Minister, about "something deep within ourselves," our "democratic mindset," "the ability to think critically," and the values of the Enlightenment "where science triumphed over myths and God had to give way to democracy" (Bjerre, 2025, quoting Mette Fredriksen). According to another article interviewing democracy spokesperson Ida Auken, the concept "reflects military mobilisation, rearming people with spiritual and intellectual value" (Søderberg, 2026).

While often divorced from institutionalised religion, such ideas are not entirely disconnected from spiritual communities. For example, Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* published an article in the wake of the Norwegian terrorist attack in Utøya back in 2011 which remarked upon the role of the church as a site for people to mourn over the tragedy in the neighbouring country and share in a collective grief that unified around one hopeful, common value: love—and a willingness to participate in love that has the power to withstand and overcome catastrophe (Lagercrantz, 2011).

The "spiritual" element of psychological resilience may persist today, but it is not outright described in the Finnish nor any other Nordic security strategy. Nevertheless, the idea returns us to the question of the shared values which underpin Nordic societies and motivate individuals to prepare for, respond to, and recover from crises. Such motivations are entangled with notions of national and Nordic identity, social cohesion, and a common moral ideology involving, most definitively, democracy and trust.

9. The discussion emerged during a presentation given by the Prime Minister at Aalborg University on 3 April 2025. Since then, further media articles have taken up the topic to better understand the ideas of spiritual rearmament/mobilisation (see, e.g., Søderberg, 2026).

Nordic trust

The idea of trust has often been touted as a unique element of Nordic societies (Andreasson, 2017; Berling & Petersen, 2021; Selle & Wollebæk, 2015; Larsson & Rhinhard, 2021).^[10] Data from the European Social Survey (2023) show that Finland, Norway, Iceland, and Sweden are among the top five countries which respond positively to the statement that most people can be trusted (European Social Survey, 2023-a). Furthermore, they make up the top four countries in Europe whose respondents agreed with the statement "most people try to be fair" (European Social Survey, 2023-b).^[11] When it comes to the potential to develop a shared security culture, Wrangle et al. (2024) argue that the Nordics share common threat perceptions, values, and other overlapping histories, geographies, and political cultures (Wrangle et al., 2024). As mentioned, how trust is developed in these nations has a strong connection to psychological resilience.

The Nordic countries have a high degree of participation in voluntary organisations compared to other European countries (Selle & Wollebæk, 2015). Indeed, much social life often occurs within such organisations and associations in Nordic societies. According to the Civil Society Participation Index, which measures the "extent to which citizens are active in diverse organizations which choose and influence policymakers," the Nordic countries are well above the European average (87-97% in the Nordic countries, compared to 77% in Europe; V-Dem, 2026). In a 2007 study, Wollebæk and Selle showed that people's engagement in voluntary organisations affected levels of social trust, regardless of whether they were active or passive members. Even those who were not members maintained high levels of societal trust compared to active organisational members in other European countries due to their positive view on the effectiveness of voluntary organisations to influence society (Selle & Wollebæk, 2015). Considering the aftermath of the 2011 terrorist attack in Norway, the same authors evaluated community resilience and concluded that trust depends on the strength of organisational society (i.e., voluntary organisations that play an institutional role). "It is more important for the degree of trust that the individual belongs to a community with strong organisation than for the individual him/herself to be greatly involved in organisations" (Selle & Wollebæk, 2015, p. 280).

As described in the components of psychological resilience, other spheres also foster similar forms of trust and democratic values. In their 2023 study, Luonila and colleagues explore two Finnish neighbourhoods to discern how cultural participation can build community resilience. They evaluate culture as "grounded in the everyday lived experiences within communities," and show the "potential of cultural participation as a fostering force" of cultural sustainability and resilience (p. 2). Furthermore, the researchers note that "culture exists as a central binding element that provides the values underlying ... actions in communities" (Luonila et al., 2023, p. 3).

10. For more statistics related to trust and security, see, e.g., Sweden's Community Barometer (*gemenskapsbarometern*) from Almén, D., & Trägårdh, L. (2025); ABDI (2024); European Parliament (2025).

11. Note that data from Denmark was absent from these two surveys.

Trust is a key element of psychological resilience, and social infrastructure (Latham & Layton, 2022) and community-based activities are often where trust and other values are developed or reinforced. However, a high level of trust is not the sole indicator of whether a society is psychologically resilient. The concept also involves individuals' willingness as well as capacity to act/defend in times of threat or crisis, their perceptions of societal values, and their perceptions of threat. It also requires that the social infrastructure through which values and trust are established are organised in meaningful ways so that action can be taken.

PART II.

Psychological resilience in practice: Nordic case studies



Images: Ben Grayland/Unsplash (left), Phil Aicken/Unsplash (right)

To better understand psychological resilience in practice, we conducted case study research in the Nordic countries. These case studies explore several areas where, according to the Finnish conceptualisation, psychological resilience is fostered, including cultural activities (arts initiatives and a library in Finland and a library in Norway), voluntary organisations (the Red Cross in Denmark), and local community associations (a citizens' association in Iceland and a village-based initiative for preparedness activities in Sweden). Figure 4 and Table 4 display the constellation of cases.

Interviews with actors engaged in the different local and regional level initiatives were conducted in local languages during the winter and spring of 2026. While the cases highlight examples of psychological resilience in operation within organisations or institutions, the work of resilience and preparedness in all cases is multi-scalar and cross-sectoral. For example, Gotland's Stark Socken initiative is run by Region Gotland and the County Administrative Board, but the activities are carried out jointly among local parish associations, housing associations, and other local community actors. The case studies are limited in their scope, as only some of the many actors involved were interviewed due to time and budget constraints. Furthermore, there may be additional developments or changes that have emerged from these initiatives since the time of interviews and writing of the report. Finally, the cases do not represent the nature of psychological resilience for each country as a whole; rather, their value is in their expression as illustrative examples for how psychological resilience is operationalised at local and regional levels.

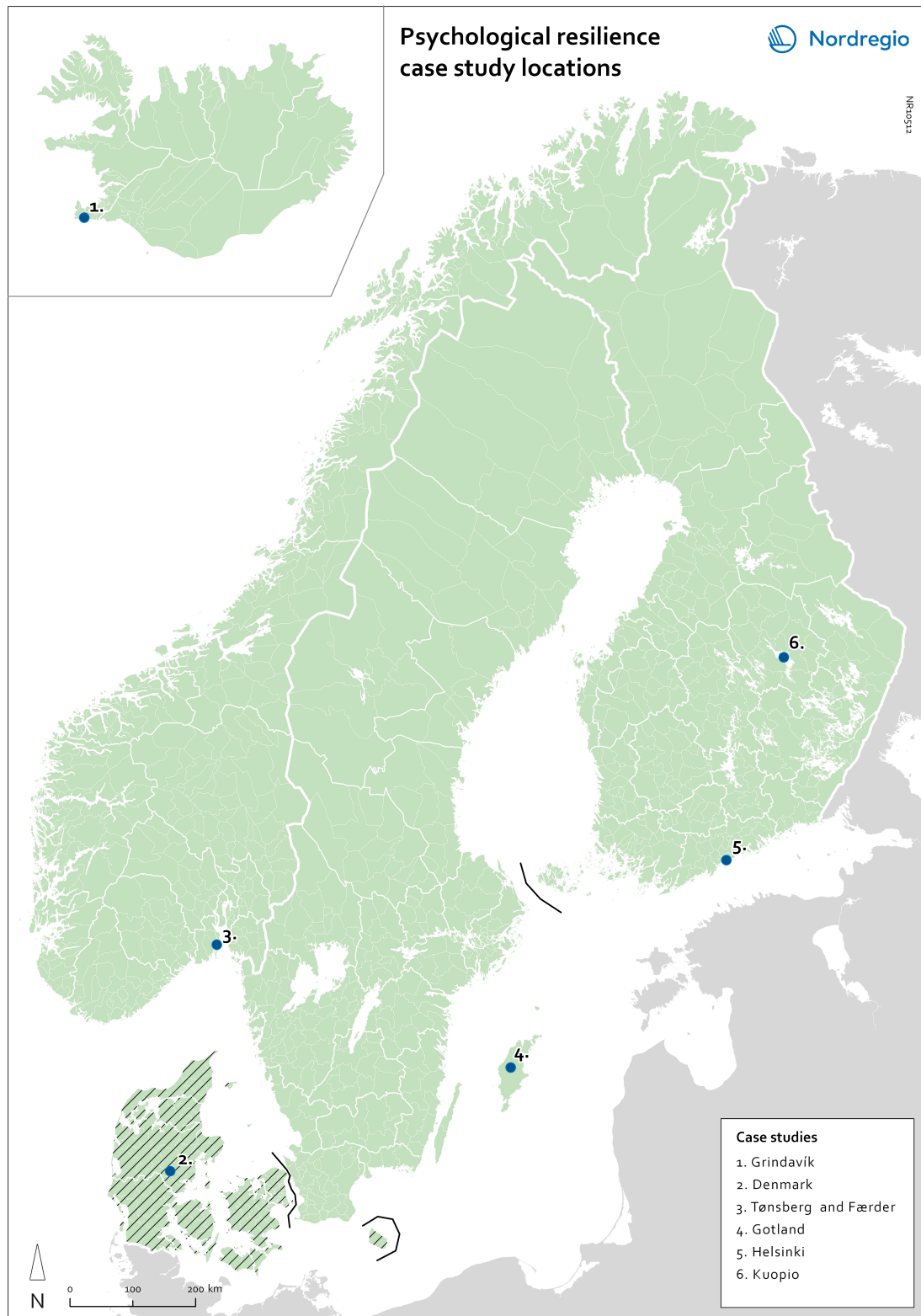
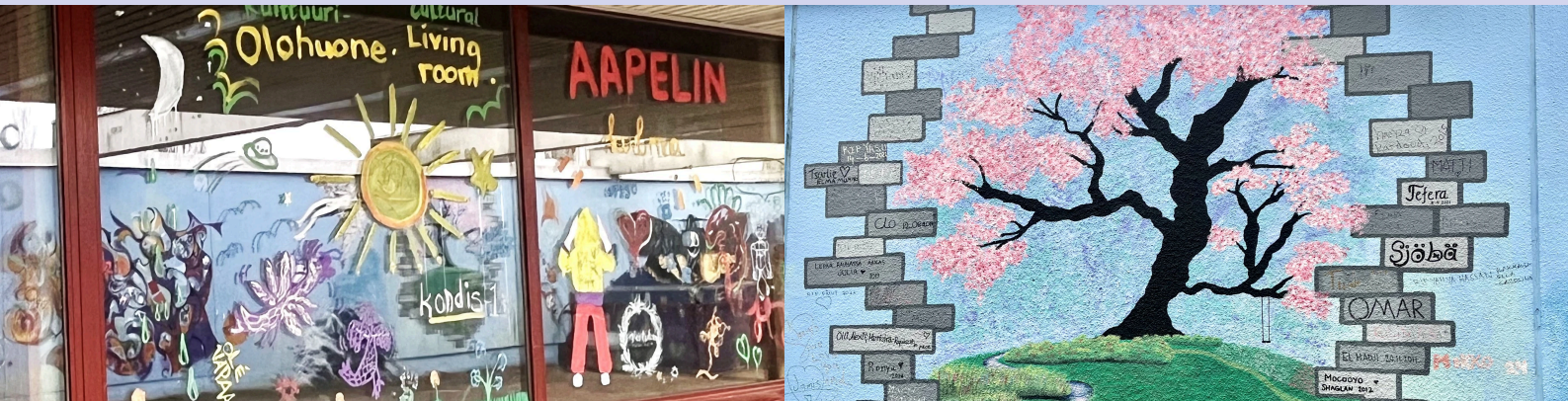


Figure 4. Case study locations. (Source: Nordregio)

Table 4. Case study selections.

Country	Case location	Areas of psychological resilience (see Box 3)
Denmark	The entirety of Denmark	Civil society; voluntary organisations
Finland	Helsinki and Kuopio	Cultural heritage/cultural institutions (art)
Iceland	Grindavík	Voluntary organisations; local associations
Norway	Tønsberg and Færder	Cultural heritage/cultural institutions (library sector)
Sweden	Gotland	Civil society; local associations (villages)

Culture as a means for supporting psychological resilience in Kuopio and Helsinki



Images: Hilma Salonen

While psychological resilience is operationalised in many ways throughout Finnish society, this report considers the role of the arts and cultural education. To do so, we explore two different examples: arts initiatives in Kuopio (which closely follow the institutionalised aims for psychological resilience) and a community art plus local library initiative in Helsinki (which has emerged through self-organised efforts over several years. Examined side by side, they illustrate possibilities related to arts and culture as channels of resilience, as well as the challenges faced by actors in these fields.

In both cases, interviewees discussed resilience in terms of psychological resilience (*henkinen kriisinsietokyky*). As highlighted in the previous section, the term is well-established in Finland following strategic work and public discourse over the past decade. The COVID-19 pandemic heightened the practical implications of the term as well. Since then, discourse around preparedness following the war in Ukraine has brought the concept of polycrisis to the table (Keinänen et al. 2025). Despite this, the Finnish actors interviewed for this report expressed or even emphasised the need to consider (psychological) resilience through everyday actions and intersectional experiences of security, instead of homing in on building resilience towards one particular risk.

Arts initiatives in Kuopio

The City of Kuopio and Savonia University of Applied Sciences have made several initiatives around arts and cultural education. The background for the work in Kuopio can be traced directly to Finland's national strategy and its vital functions (Table 1 of this report). Finland's Centre of Excellence for Comprehensive Security (Kokonais-turvallisuuden Osaamiskeskus) has interpreted these dimensions in a cross-regional and cross-sectoral manner and has already involved around 200 different actors from public, private, and civil society spheres. Currently, activities are happening under the umbrella of comprehensive security thinking; therefore, one of the main aims of the Centre of Excellence is to organise and coordinate this work (Kokonaisturvallisuudenkeskus, n.d.). The Centre of Excellence has strong regional roots as it has been developed together with Savonia University and the City of Kuopio, with funding from the Regional Council of Pohjois-Savo. (Kokonaisturvallisuudenkeskus, n.d.).

Through a committee established by the Centre of Excellence, the City of Kuopio and Savonia University made several arts and cultural initiatives under the presumption that trust and social cohesion can emerge as a byproduct when investments are made in spaces that allow for self-expression, social connection, and exploration of the human condition.

In several instances, the actors worked directly with the concept of psychological resilience. For example, in the Kuopio Dance Festival, the concept was discussed in student workshops where attendees explored the role of music as an empowering force in different life stages. In addition to these discussions, the festival included the production of an art wall for the Kuopio art museum which explored a related theme. The role of art for developing psychological resilience will also be considered in a possible critical shelter-use situation.

Psychological resilience has been the theme of several artwork design courses at Savonia University for two years in a row. The presupposition is that art has a unique ability to mirror our own actions back to us, and the deeper understanding of ourselves that emerges from this experience allows us to better withstand crises. Students taking part in the course have designed an array of artworks on the theme, ranging from interactive installations to workshops, paintings, and murals. They include deeply personal themes as well as approaches reaching out to the surrounding community or specific social groups. For example, one student worked with the topical issue of misinformation and organised a session for young people to play with words, create nonsensical content, and then consider it through a critical lens.

Community art and the local library in Helsinki's suburb of Kontula

The case of Helsinki features one of the city's suburbs which faces issues of low-quality urban infrastructure and social problems related to substance abuse. These challenges have led to some negative perceptions of the neighbourhood. At the same time, the area is well-known for its cultural scene, strong local identity, and active entrepreneurs that keep the place vibrant. The stakeholders interviewed worked with two partially interlinked projects: continuous community art activities and a cultural project conducted under the protection of the local library.

The community art activities began in 2019 and focus on the suburb's traditional open-sky mall (*ostari*). Since its commencement, 18 community art pieces have been produced, mainly consisting of large murals. Funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation and the Kone Foundation, the project relies completely on voluntary action and has included both adult and youth groups from the start. During COVID-19, the activities transformed to include more direct engagement in the streets. Following the activist principle of reaching out to people who have the least resources, the project targets those who deal with substance abuse or are vulnerable to it. Because COVID-19 and the related social distancing policies heightened many troubles in individual lives, the support network formed through the community art activities became a lifeline for many. Several community members involved in the activities commemorated the experience with a painting on the wall of the local library. The piece includes a question about how people carry on and survive in the COVID era, with interview fragments from people waiting in a food-aid queue.

In addition to the art activities, the library of Helsinki's Kontula suburb coordinates a project funded from the City's participatory budgeting scheme for cultural work. Building upon a tradition of cultural movements in the area, the goal of the project is to encourage people to create activities and events that reflect themselves and to maintain the unique sense of place cherished by many of the suburb's residents. The library was the only local actor willing to take on the large task of coordinating this project, including hiring one employee specifically for this work. Between October 2024 and February 2026, 120 events took place, involving around 11,000 participants. The project has succeeded in engaging groups and actors whose voices were previously unheard and is working to establish a new, non-commercial community space that provides continuity of different types of activities. These bottom-up activities address relevant local needs when it comes to meeting spaces, points of discussion, and strengthening community resilience. Thus, the activities slowly build trust and allow people to discover ways to withstand and transform the negative reputation of the suburb.

Success factors for developing resilience

The active and committed engagement of a range of actors has been a key factor for success across the arts projects in both Kuopio and Helsinki. The concrete examples illustrate ways in which art brings together people from all walks of life and acts as a catalyst for resilience-supporting actions. As working with art fosters introspection, self-expression, and identity, the interviewees from the coordinating organisations consider it as essential to people of all backgrounds, social positions, and professional sectors.

Another success factor relates to the transparency, continuity, and predictability of using the library as the community's main meeting and organisation point. Libraries offer a unique space for residents because there is a low threshold for taking part in activities. In addition, they are perceived as neutral and trusted actors in the urban space, without a commercial, political, or religious agenda. As one interviewee put it, "a library is the cornerstone of the Finnish democracy." As such, they have significant potential to support psychological resilience.

The arts programmes also contribute to psychological resilience by enabling a community to develop trust—foundational to any society, and especially among people in vulnerable positions. Trust is a necessary condition for the success of any type of action, but it can also be a result of community-led art. Equality among people is the cornerstone of community-led art activities, and nourishing equal artistry creates trust. Another important component for creating trust-based communities is the longevity and predictability of action. This can be achieved by appointing project representatives who have a reputation of being non-judgemental yet are committed to their communities. On the other hand, the interviewees stated that institutions such as libraries often enjoy a high level of trust as a given; therefore, they can take up the role of protector and enabler of art activities while also representing continuity. Trust-building can be considered an important byproduct that emerges organically during arts-related work, leading to a sense of empowerment which helps communities withstand stressful conditions.

While arts and cultural activities seem to have an impact on building trust, measuring their success is difficult to achieve in exact terms. However, people working with community art projects, especially interactive initiatives, notice that approaching questions via creating art can make experiences around a space or a theme visible in a way that quantitative indicators do not. Art is perceived as a safe and non-exploitative medium, which allows people to interact more openly with each other. When it comes to developing indicators to measure the effects of art and culture on psychological resilience, some discussions are already occurring at the Centre of Excellence and at the national level. According to the interviewees, such efforts could demonstrate the integral role of cultural work in developing psychological resilience and thus contributing to societal security. While a single institution could coordinate this type of work, measuring such indicators would require a broad range of actors to include multiple perspectives and different stages of life.

Challenges in developing resilience

While the interviewees from the arts initiatives view their work as part of everyday resilience and understand its role in wider discussions around comprehensive security, this relationship does not materialise when it comes to budget decisions. The trust that cultural actors have towards national resilience work has weakened in recent years due to public funding cuts and generally austere economic policies. This has led to conflicting stances between the political level and local cultural actors, who perceive that culture is valued in public speeches but not prioritised when it comes to, for example, funding.

Decreasing funding on essential community activities leads the cultural actors to question whether national-level leaders understand the essence of communities and the role that continuous community activities play in supporting psychological resilience. There is a risk that the current emphasis on resilience and preparedness stays active only during periods of seeking funding, which corrodes the longevity and constancy essential for resilience-related work. Building active communities and trust can take years.

Interviewees also highlighted the fragmented state of resilience work, which strains the already limited resources available while also restricting possibilities to execute large, cross-regional or cross-organisational projects. On the other hand, when work becomes too centralised, only the largest organisations (e.g., the Red Cross or the Martha Association^[12]) are invited, while smaller ones are excluded. Therefore, coordination and collaboration between different organisations could be more effective—minimising the risk of overlapping work while giving space for less-established organisations and initiatives to play a part.

Finally, a gap remains between the national and local levels regarding risk evaluation. Aspects related to psychological resilience have been included in an indirect manner, but decisions are still not based on a future risk evaluation which could consider resilience from an individual and community perspective and include all relevant municipal actors.

Future opportunities for resilience

While continuity and offering permanent spaces for arts activities are key to trust-building and successful projects, spontaneous and loosely organised actors and action is often taking place. Many involved in these activities do not fall under traditional definitions of voluntary workers or members, and the value of their contributions is not always recognised. Furthermore, existing public spaces such as libraries may have the capacity to take on broader coordinating tasks within the community if they have the necessary staff and monetary resources.

Crises do not affect all social groups equally. Due to existing vulnerabilities or inequalities, some social groups may not have the same capacities to prepare, respond, or recover as

12. *Martat* is a well-known cultural, civic education, and advocacy organisation in Finland.

fellow residents, especially in times of multi-crises. Such distinctions may lead to further polarisation and potentially weaken community resilience. During these times, art is seen as having the potential to include and amplify voices in public discourse that are otherwise quiet or silent. It also makes visible the potential which all social groups (even the most marginalised) have to contribute to the common good. Similarly, places that may seem outdated or even uninviting to the unfamiliar eye (such as the open-sky mall mentioned in the case of Kuopio) may be able to foster cultural activities, community outreach, and small entrepreneurship in a way that a modern shopping centre cannot. Using art as a method may offer ways to explore how different social groups relate to resilience, and which characteristics and conditions they attach to it.

Finally, while preparation and crisis response are key to resilience, an overemphasis on these aspects risks neglecting the role of recovery. The interviewees of the arts initiatives noted that joy and celebration are also vital parts of resilience. In addition to the reflective aspects, arts and cultural activities can also provide refuge from the state of perpetual crisis and everyday crisis thinking.

Public libraries as resilience infrastructure in Tønsberg and Færder



Images: Anette Asbjørnrød

This case is centred on a public library in Norway and its role in building psychological resilience. While the term psychological resilience (*psykologisk motstandskraft*) is in circulation in Norway, it has not yet been institutionalised or formally defined within Norwegian policy. Instead, the concept is anchored in the term *egenberedskap*, which can be translated approximately as "self-preparedness." The term has undergone a gradual expansion in recent years, moving from a relatively narrow association with household supplies and emergency equipment toward a broader understanding that includes social networks, mental preparedness, and mutual support during times of crisis and uncertainty. This conceptual broadening has partly been driven by the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, which made visible the importance of psychological and social dimensions which had previously received less explicit attention.

The conceptual expansion of self-preparedness is also evident in the recent national policy document on the theme, *Totalberedskapsmeldingen* (white paper on total preparedness; Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2025). Using the term civil resilience (*sivil motstandskraft*), the document explicitly names libraries, archives, and cultural institutions as instrumental to supporting "the population's ability to be informed and think critically" (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2025, p. 90). It links cultural participation to democratic values and argues that a well-informed population with a strong sense of cultural identity will make better decisions for themselves and their community in times of crisis. While the policy is not operationally prescriptive for libraries or other cultural institutions, it was quickly taken up by library practitioners after its

publication and prompted engagement with preparedness questions that the library sector had not previously addressed in any systematic way.

This case study focuses on the Tønsberg and Færder library, a public library located in Vestfold County, which initiated contact with the Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection (DSB) following the publication of the total preparedness white paper. What followed was a collaboration that produced a guidance document distributed to every municipal library in the country. The case demonstrates how a bottom-up process, arising from the initiative of a single practitioner, scaled to the national level. It also raises questions about what it means for public libraries to take on a preparedness role, and where the limits of that role are drawn.

Success factors for developing resilience

The collaboration itself was initiated after an employee from the Tønsberg and Færder library contacted DSB. What began as an inquiry about borrowing equipment for the annual preparedness week developed into a formal partnership to explore how public libraries can meet the expectations set forth in *Totalberedskapsmeldingen* in practice. The tangible outcome of the partnership is a practical guidance document^[13] which offers libraries a framework for understanding their potential role in civil preparedness, offering applicable advice on how libraries can spread preparedness knowledge through events, displays, and local partnerships (DSB, 2025). It also outlines how they can serve as trusted information hubs if an emergency occurs. A central recommendation is that the library manager and the municipal emergency coordinator sit down together and ask what the library can do to support local preparedness.

In Tønsberg and Færder, that conversation produced a series of concrete learnings which reoriented how library employees understood their own role. The emergency coordinator attended a staff meeting at the library, giving all employees a common understanding of crisis scenarios most relevant to the local context and of the potential needs of residents in each of them. This shared knowledge changed how staff approached their ordinary work, making them more attentive to the library's informational role under conditions of uncertainty. The meetings also surfaced constraints that the library employees had not previously considered: the building's glass walls make it unsuitable as a gathering place in certain acute scenarios (e.g., an earthquake), and the failure of heating systems in a prolonged power cut would limit how long it could function as a public space.

One significant learning from these conversations was the distinction between an information point (*informasjonspunkt*)—where residents go for verified information—and a safety point (*trygghettpunkt*)—a place of physical refuge. Through their meetings, the library management and the municipal emergency coordinator agreed that the library would serve as the former: a place residents could turn to for reliable information during a crisis, rather than a designated shelter or emergency facility. There is currently no national

13. See https://www.dsb.no/contentassets/4da5d56a45924b13afe37bab51f1524e/dsb-veileder-bibliotekene_uu.pdf (DSB, 2025)

framework that formally designates libraries as information points, and the agreement in Tønsberg and Færder was reached through local conversation. The guidance document encourages other municipalities to have similar conversations and reach their own clarity based on their context and capacity. As a practical expression of the information point role, the library has prepared a folder of printed posters containing information about the municipality's safety and crisis contact points, ready to be placed at the entrance if power and connectivity fail. A further model that emerged from the collaboration is the concept of an open preparedness office (*åpent beredskapskontor*). This is a temporary stand in the library where municipal emergency staff are available for public questions, making the emergency coordinator visible and accessible in a space where residents already feel comfortable raising concerns.

The collaboration also made explicit a resilience function which the library, in many respects, had already been performing. Over the last years, the Tønsberg and Færder library had been working with themes adjacent to preparedness, though not all of this work was framed as such. The library has hosted public events that engage with everyday resilience through indirect means: an evening on traditional food preservation techniques drew participants who came for practical knowledge rather than the crisis rationale and introduced preparedness thinking to an audience that would not have attended an explicitly safety-oriented event. A joint event with the regional Red Cross brought together speakers addressing international security, national defence capacity, and local voluntary response networks, informing people about which measures were being taken to prepare for crises. The library also runs regular programming on source criticism and digital literacy, subjects framed as part of its core democratic mandate rather than as preparedness activities, though the distinction, as one interviewee noted, has become increasingly difficult to maintain.

Less visible but perhaps equally significant is what the library has done without any preparedness framing at all. Reading groups, community craft evenings, cultural events, and children's programming continued through the COVID-19 period and were described as having functioned as anchoring points for people who had lost ordinary social contact. These activities were not designed for crisis conditions, and their value of fostering community during that period was a byproduct rather than an intention. They demonstrate that the library's resilience function is embedded in its everyday practice in ways that are unnecessary to disaggregate from the rest of its operations.

Challenges in developing resilience

A persistent challenge in developing resilience concerns the reach of preparedness communication. According to interviewees, those most in need of support in building critical media skills, accessing verified information, and navigating public services under pressure are also the least likely to attend a source-criticism course or engage with preparedness programming of their own accord. Those with limited digital literacy, limited familiarity with public institutions, or limited language access may be simultaneously more vulnerable in a crisis and harder to reach through existing programme formats.

The library's work with adult education services and multilingual materials represents a step towards addressing some of these challenges, but it is an incomplete one. Reaching those who do not currently use libraries, and who may be among the most vulnerable in a crisis, requires active outreach strategies and institutional partnerships that go beyond the standard service model.

Sustaining awareness among the general population and relationships between formal and informal preparedness actors over time is a difficulty that recurred across the interviews. Preparedness receives more attention during and after crises, and the current geopolitical moment has translated into higher public interest around preparedness efforts than in previous periods. However, momentum from moments of heightened attention tends to dissipate before it becomes a sustained practice—a pattern witnessed in previous cycles of preparedness attention in Norway.

These challenges are partly compounded by the institutional conditions under which the work takes place. DSB operates with a mandate that is deliberately broad, covering the full spectrum of civil protection, from natural disasters to hybrid threats and information operations. The breadth allows for flexibility, and the collaboration with Tønsberg and Færder library was itself a product of that flexibility. But it also means that no single area, including psychological resilience, commands sustained institutional attention. The guidance document has been distributed to all Norwegian public libraries, but there is no mechanism to ensure that it is read, acted upon, or used as a basis for contact with the local emergency coordinator. DSB has limited capacity to follow up at the local level, and the reach of the guidance in practice may be considerably smaller than its physical distribution suggests.

Future opportunities for resilience

Several transferable observations emerge from this case. The library's value in a crisis is an extension of its value every other day, and preparedness policy that understands this will be more durable than policy that treats libraries as emergency infrastructure to be activated when needed. The most significant outcome of the collaboration described here is the shared understanding between the local emergency coordinator and the library staff of the library's potential and limitations. For other libraries (or even other community-based facilities), the guidance document can serve as a useful prompt for a local conversation that might not otherwise happen.

One of the more persistent frustrations expressed in the interviews concerns the difficulty of making the softer dimensions of preparedness legible to decision-makers. Interviewees described a political climate in which investment in military capacity and material infrastructure is easier to justify than the long-term, community-based work that determines whether a population can function under pressure. The absence of metrics that capture social cohesion, mutual trust, or psychological readiness without misrepresenting them means that this work struggles to compete for sustained institutional attention. The white paper on total preparedness makes clear that cultural participation, access to independent information, and a shared sense of civic identity are

components of resilience. This understanding is also present among practitioners and in other parts of the preparedness field, where libraries are increasingly acknowledged for their role in building resilience. Nevertheless, this recognition remains largely rhetorical as it is not accompanied by any dedicated resources, institutional changes, or concrete policy follow-through, leaving the active role in resilience work dependent on the priorities and capacities of each local library.

Underlying these concerns is also a fundamental tension. The library's value as a resource for resilience rests on the perception that it is institutionally neutral, and that it is genuinely open to everyone, regardless of their political orientation or relationship to public authorities. As libraries become more closely associated with official preparedness messaging, that perception may gradually erode. The population most likely to disengage if the library becomes a channel for state communication is also among the most vulnerable in a crisis: those whose trust in public institutions is already low, and who may have few alternative sources of reliable information. How the library's preparedness role develops, and how its independence can be actively protected in that process, is a conversation that has not yet been confronted.

Maintaining resilience during crisis in Grindavík



Images: Járngerður

The Icelandic case looks at psychological resilience in times of crisis and crisis recovery, with a focus on the aftermath of the evacuation of Grindavík, Iceland, due to a series of volcanic activities. The case study covers developments from November 2023 to April 2026.

Background

Grindavík is situated on the Reykjanes peninsula in Southwest Iceland, approximately 25 km by road to Keflavík International Airport and 50 km by road to the capital city of Reykjavík. In the area near Grindavík is the Blue Lagoon, one of the most visited tourist destinations in Iceland, and the Svartsengi power station, providing the entire southern Reykjanes Peninsula with hot water. Furthermore, most of the inhabitants in the southern part of the peninsula receive drinking water from the water extraction area at Lágum. Until 10 November 2023, Grindavík was a flourishing municipality with 3,790 inhabitants, almost 1% of Iceland's total population (Alpingi, 2024-b).

In December 2019, volcano-tectonic unrest began on the peninsula after centuries of dormant behaviour. Between 2021 and 2023, three volcanic eruptions consequently occurred in the Fagradalsfjall volcano system, in uninhabited areas of Reykjanes Peninsula. In October 2023, the Svartsengi system, which is located near Grindavík, began rapidly accumulating magma. On 10 November 2023, the magma intrusion started with extensive crustal movements and ground deformations in and around Grindavík, resulting in a declaration of emergency in Grindavík and a full evacuation and closure of the town. The residents of Grindavík had to leave their homes and belongings and find elsewhere to stay.

Grindavík is located just south of the Sundhnjúksgíggar craters. In December 2023, the first eruption started from the Sundhnjúksgíggar craters, followed by a second one in January 2024. Two fissures opened in the eruption in January 2024—the larger one at Sundhnúkur, and a smaller one inside the lava protection walls that had been built north of Grindavík, less than 100 metres from the settlement. The lava flow from the fissure reached three houses in Grindavík, which were consumed in fire.

Critical infrastructure in the area was also at risk. The repeated eruptions caused major damage to hard infrastructure such as overhead transmission lines and underground cables (World Bank, 2026). In a volcanic eruption that began on 8 February 2024, lava flowed over the main pipeline transporting hot water from the power plant in Svartsengi to Reykjanesbær. As a result, the population in the southern peninsula had no access to heating or hot water for several days.

The development of these eruptions was such that they increased in size. Their initial magma discharge rate rose, and the total volume of lava simultaneously increased. The eruptions posed a greater threat early on due to faster lava flow and increased gas contamination (Alpingi, 2024-b). Between December 2023 and August 2025, the Sundhnjúksgíggar craters near Grindavík erupted nine times (Icelandic Meteorological Office, 2025).

Examples of response efforts taken thus far

Following the evacuation in November 2023, the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police opened a service centre in Reykjavík, operated by the Department of Civil Protection and Emergency Management (*Almannavarnir*) to support the evacuated people from Grindavík. In collaboration with the Icelandic Red Cross and the Town Council of Grindavík, the service centre provided information, education, and advice of all kinds, and served as a place for social gatherings, while the Red Cross offered psychosocial support.

In May 2024, the Icelandic Parliament approved Act No. 40/2024 establishing the Special Executive Committee for Earthquakes in Grindavík (Alpingi, 2024-c). The bill was prepared in collaboration with the Town Council of Grindavík, which requested cooperation given the unusual circumstances. It was proposed that the Executive Committee operate temporarily and that the law be repealed at the next municipal elections in May 2026. Upon enactment of the bill, the Grindavík service centre ceased operations. The town council of Grindavík continued to manage the municipality and staff and maintain full financial management authority over projects not specifically entrusted to the Executive Committee (Innviðaráðuneytið, 2024).

According to the Ministry of Infrastructure (Innviðaráðuneytið, 2024), the main tasks of the committee were to:

- Operate a support team in the field of welfare and school services for the residents of Grindavík—including school and leisure activities, social services, child protection services, services for older people, disabled people, and other vulnerable groups—and to support in the field of housing and labour market issues.
- Supervise necessary repairs to social infrastructure and soil exploration as well as repairs to ensure the functionality and security of supply of critical infrastructure, etc.
- Supervise the protection of valuables and the implementation of access control in the town of Grindavík in cooperation with the police.

The need for a support team derived partly from discussions about how to ensure the wellbeing of children from Grindavík and their continued primary school attendance after the evacuation.

The people of Grindavík have suffered great emotional and financial damages. The objective of the Grindavík support team was to respond to the trauma and attempt to reduce the damage and suffering. They also sought to strengthen individuals and shelter them from further setbacks, resulting in more resilient individuals, in accordance with the disaster management cycle shown in Figure 5. The support team arranged access to basic services, which included assisting with enrolling children into preschools and primary schools, accessing medical centres and organising medical appointments, as well as facilitating financial aid, special housing aid, and psychological support with approved specialists. Creating psychological resilience was not an agenda of the Grindavík support team, rather their aim was to prevent further reduction of resilience.

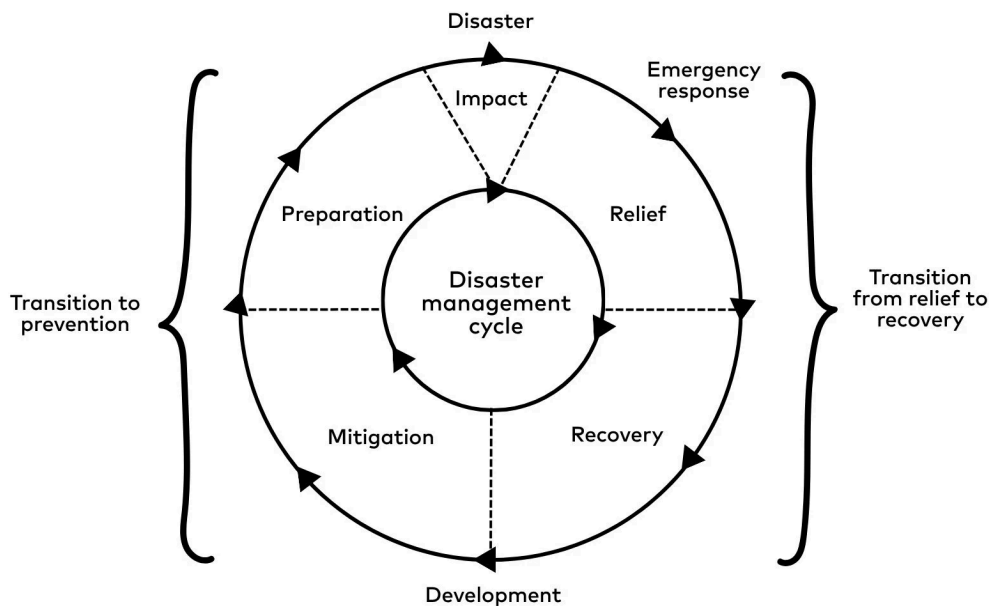


Figure 5. The disaster management cycle. (Source: Bealt & Mansouri, 2018)

According to the case study interviews, most of the evacuees^[14] from Grindavík had never heard of the term resilience prior to the events in November 2023. Over two years after the events, they found the term overused, sometimes aggressive, and even harmful. They felt like they were constantly being described as resilient, yet they did not feel resilient and did not always wish to be resilient.

As the Finnish work on psychological resilience is the point of departure for this project, the Icelandic case study analyses the efforts in Grindavík using the Finnish government's three dimensions of psychological resilience (see Figure 3 in the previous section of the report). The framework outlines how psychological resilience is created under normal conditions, and the conditions necessary to maintain and support resilience during crisis and recovery. Considering these dimensions, the situation in Grindavík sits somewhere between crisis and recovery. The evacuees can be divided into three groups: individuals already living again in Grindavík, individuals living elsewhere but waiting to move back to Grindavík, and individuals who have rehabilitated and do not plan to return to Grindavík in the coming years.

The group of people who have rehabilitated and do not plan to move back to Grindavík are recovering from the crisis of having lost their homes and their community. But the group of individuals and families who have temporarily resettled elsewhere yet hope to return to Grindavík remain in a state of uncertainty and crisis. As of April 2026, this group is waiting for permission to repurchase their home in Grindavík from the real estate company Þórkatla and for vital services, such as primary schools and daycare, to resume operations in Grindavík. For these individuals and families, the events of November 2023 (resulting in the evacuation) were only the first trauma of many. Uncertainty, particularly from the government's decisions and indecisions related to the town's future, is the main cause of current and continuing trauma.

According to the interviewees, housing and financial security is a particular concern for the psychological wellbeing and recovery of the evacuees. The Icelandic Parliament approved a series of Acts to assist the evacuees. These include an act on temporary support for employees in the private sector whose place of work was located in the town of Grindavík (Act No. 87/2023; Alþingi, 2023-a), an act on special housing support to those renting outside of Grindavík (Act No. 94/2023; Alþingi, 2023-b), and an act on purchasing private housing in Grindavík (Act No. 16/2024; Alþingi, 2024-d).

Following the enactment on purchasing private housing in Grindavík, the real estate company Þórkatla was formed to purchase the properties in Grindavík. Þórkatla was financed partly with loans taken over from commercial banks and partly with loan capital and equity contributions from the state. Þórkatla bought 959 of the roughly 1,200 properties in Grindavík (about 74% of the square metres of available housing). The purchase price of the properties amounted to nearly 73 billion ISK (approximately 509 million EUR; Grindavíkurnefnd, 2026). Þórkatla has offered former owners to make

14. Throughout the remainder of the case, we use the term "evacuee" to refer to those individuals who were living in Grindavík up until the November 2023 events that required them to evacuate. Some of these individuals may be residents of other municipalities now while others may still be residents of Grindavík.

so-called friendship agreements, allowing limited use of the property in return for taking care of it. About half of those who have made a friendship agreement have also made a residence agreement with Þórkatla. Officially, the goal of Þórkatla is "to make it possible for residents to buy their properties back when it is clear that conditions have improved, so that a thriving community can take root in Grindavík again" (Þórkatla, n.d.). As of April 2026, it is unclear to the evacuees which measurements will be used to decide when conditions have improved so that the people of Grindavík can return to their homes. The interviewees noted that evacuees feel excluded and unheard in this process. Some of the evacuees already consider the conditions safe enough to move back and experience themselves stuck in the hands of invisible decision-makers for the foreseeable future.

The Council of Grindavík advertised the position of school principal in spring 2026 to prepare for the opening of the primary school and daycare in the autumn 2026. Around the same time, a report on the restoration of Grindavík explicitly recommended against restarting school activities in Grindavík until a risk assessment provided a reason to do so (Grindavíkurnefnd, 2026). This is an example of the conflict between the priorities of the local decision-makers, wishing to promote the return of public services and residents, and the central authorities, emphasising continued caution.

Success factors for maintaining resilience

The strength and cohesion of the community in Grindavík prior to the evacuation has been a cornerstone to the psychological resilience of the evacuees. After the evacuation, efforts were put into continuing social activities for the dispersed people of Grindavík. The effects of sporting events have been particularly pronounced, where the Grindavík teams play, and evacuees meet and bond over a common goal irrelevant to the evacuation. This has especially been the case with basketball, which has been a unifying force for the evacuees (Grindavíkurnefnd, 2026).

The continuation of social gatherings which existed prior to the evacuation has played a vital role in retaining community identity. These include gatherings organised through civil society associations such as the Grindavík Women's Association, the Grindavík choir, the Grindavík Golf Club, the Senior Citizens' Association, and the Grindavík Youth Association. The gatherings do not explicitly aim to build psychological resilience but play a significant role for evacuees to feel a sense of belonging and maintain social connectivity. As one of the interviewees phrased it: "It's important to find someone who feels like you, too." The priest from Grindavík also continues to serve the role of priest for the dispersed people of Grindavík, creating opportunities for the evacuees to find support among each other (Grindavíkurnefnd, 2026).

The evacuees have experienced serious losses, not only of their homes and belonging but also their normal routines and familiar surroundings. Usual coping methods, such as spending time in personal or meaningful places in Grindavík, were not an option. Therefore, peer support has become extremely important, as many residents feel most comfortable with others who share their experience. The report on the restoration of Grindavík from the Grindavík Committee recognises the positive effects of the strong

cohesive community of Grindavík prior to the events on current psychological resilience of the evacuees (Grindavíkurnefnd, 2026).

Járngerður is a Grindavík citizens' association formed after the evacuation and is a prime example of an association where psychological resilience is developed, as citizens self-organize and network to help each other, building trust and social capital as a byproduct. A major contribution of the Járngerður association has been the introduction of weekly informational meetings. These meetings include representatives from local businesses, the town council, the Grindavík Committee, the real estate company Þórkatla, the fire brigade, and other relevant groups. All meetings are recorded and made publicly available, which has helped to reduce uncertainty, increase transparency, and strengthen trust. This has been a great success for resilience of the community; people can depend on receiving updates and information, while also having a designated space and time to discuss issues related to Grindavík. The association has also arranged workshops, educational events, and open discussions. Furthermore, by organising themselves into an association, the evacuees have an official voice. Járngerður is a solidary front that comments on reports and decisions, is interviewed by the media, and has the capability to ensure that the perspectives of the evacuees are heard.

Contributing to the success and easing the transition on the evacuees are the neighbouring municipalities and communities which have welcomed and supported the people of Grindavík. However, there has been limited support and attention from the national government to these municipalities who have, on very short notice, responded to the needs of evacuees with their own public resources. About 70% of Grindavík evacuees currently live in the neighbouring municipalities and communities in Reykjanes. Furthermore, interviewees highlight that little attention has been given to the potential risks faced by these municipalities given the scope of the magma erosion under the peninsula.

Challenges in preserving and supporting resilience

More than two years after the evacuation, the people from Grindavík continued to experience trauma. Geological activity, repeated warnings from the authorities, and unpredictable policy decisions kept residents in a state of constant crisis. Families with children have been under particular pressure. A survey carried out by the Grindavík Executive Committee indicated that children from Grindavík experience lower life satisfaction, weaker connections to school, and more mental and physical ailments than their peers nationwide. It also indicated that over one-third of parents rate their children's mental health as worse after the evacuation (Grindavíkurnefnd & Maskína, 2026). Evacuees are entitled to psychological support for two years following a crisis event, but additional traumatic experiences have continued after the 10 November 2023 base date, making it difficult to claim a single day that applies for every family and situation. The evacuees describe a lack of understanding and empathy for the scope of the trauma and the ongoing decision-making which affects their lives.

Frustrations among evacuees often revolve around inconsistent communication and limited consultation from both the town council and national authorities. Interviewees from the citizens' association expressed that important decisions (e.g., financial decisions) are made about them rather than with them. They also express a concern that the reconstruction process may not reflect the immediate needs of people who are currently displaced. Some policies appear to prioritise long-term plans rather than the urgent needs of families who are still living with uncertainty. Members of the Járngerður Association often feel they must defend their role and continually argue for the perspective of residents. Public opinion has created additional stress. Some people who are not from Grindavík misunderstand the situation or question the support offered to residents. Negative or dramatic news stories are often prioritised, while positive developments receive less attention.

The role of trust is specifically mentioned and recognised in the recent report on the restoration of Grindavík (Grindavíkurnefnd, 2026). A person's sense of security is based on trust, such as trust in the authorities, risk assessments, or response systems. Several institutions and companies have financial interests related to the disaster, for example, risk assessment services and security operations. This sometimes encourages exaggerated descriptions of danger. Concerns were also raised about bureaucracy, social cliques, and occasional corruption, although some of these issues appear to be decreasing over time. There is a clear difference between the willingness to use public funding on the resilience and protection of hard infrastructure, such as fixing and constructing roads, filling cracks and constructing protection walls, and the willingness to financially support activities and organisations which facilitate psychological resilience and sustain the wellbeing of the people from Grindavík.

Future opportunities for resilience

Following the evacuation, cooperation between different actors—including ministries, public institutions, and voluntary organisations—was both essential and ensured by law. Responsibilities of different actors were made clear by enacting a special law on the Executive Committee. The temporary service centre and the more established support team helped to ensure that basic needs were met, including everyday structures like school attendance of children. However, according to the framework, cooperation between actors is as important during recovery as it is in crisis.

According to one interviewee, a holistic plan is needed for reconstruction and recovery at this scale, coordinated across ministries. Such a plan should be transparent and take recent experiences from Grindavík into account in order to better serve people experiencing post-traumatic stress and children with fear and to eliminate long-term effects of PTSD in both adults and children. Interviewees stress that this plan must include stronger national planning, earlier coordination across ministries, greater support for host municipalities, and ongoing psychological care. As shown in the disaster management cycle (Figure 5) and in the dimensions of resilience (Figure 3 in the previous section), resilience is not an individual trait but is rooted in social systems, access to services, and community cohesion built prior to crisis/disasters.

Access to information in a timely and organised manner is a key component to the wellbeing of people during acute crisis and recovery. The success of this for maintaining psychological resilience is illustrated through meetings organised by Járngerður, where trust among the community members is sustained through transparent communication. Fundamental to preserving psychological resilience among the affected individuals is to recognise them as actors in response and recovery plans, keeping them included and, when possible, offering them a seat at the decision-making table.

Strong villages as expressions of psychological resilience on Gotland



Images: Region Gotland

While psychological resilience has gained increasing attention within Finnish security discourse, the concept is rarely used explicitly in Swedish policy. Instead, related ideas are embedded within concepts such as *motståndskraft* (capacity to withstand), *beredskap* (preparedness), and *psykologiskt försvar* (psychological defence). These concepts tend to emphasise system robustness, information resilience, and willingness to defend rather than everyday social and relational capacities.

Against this backdrop, the Stark Socken^[15] initiative on the island of Gotland provides an empirical case of how psychological resilience can be operationalised in practice, without being explicitly labelled as such. By mobilising local communities around preparedness, the initiative connects national security concerns with everyday life and demonstrates how social cohesion, trust, and collective agency contribute to resilience.

Development of Stark Socken

Stark Socken emerged in the early 2020s in a context of heightened geopolitical tension. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, this period marked a significant shift in Swedish preparedness policy, with renewed emphasis on total defence and whole-of-society engagement. Within the Swedish security context, Gotland occupies a unique

15. The name translates to English as "strong village" or "strong parish." For more information on the initiative, visit <https://gotland.se/omsorg-och-stod/trygg-och-saker/stark-socken>

position. As a strategically important island with limited redundancy in infrastructure and supply systems, preparedness concerns are particularly salient. At the same time, the island has strong local identities and historically rooted community structures, known as *socknar* (parishes or villages), which continue to function as important social units.

Stark Socken was developed by Region Gotland in collaboration with the County Administrative Board and civil society actors as a response to both this strategic context and a growing demand from individuals and companies seeking ways to contribute and to reduce feelings of vulnerability among their families and communities. Rather than introducing a top-down programme, the initiative was deliberately designed with flexibility which enabled a locally driven process based on local ownership, volunteer participation, simplicity, and integration into everyday life. From the outset, the initiative brought together a range of actors, including emergency services, voluntary defence organisations, the Red Cross, the Church of Sweden, and other community associations. Public authorities provide coordination, guidance, and methodological support, while civil society organisations contribute local knowledge, networks, training, and meeting spaces. This combination of institutional support and local engagement has been central to fostering trust and shared ownership for the initiative.

Success factors for developing resilience

In practice, Stark Socken typically involves local meetings where residents, associations, and businesses come together to discuss risks that may disrupt everyday rhythms (e.g., power outages, water shortages, and communication failures). Together, the residents map resources and identify how they can support one another in times of need—for example, by creating neighbour groups (*grann-lag*), thereby fostering a stronger social fabric and clearer communication routes in case of emergency. Preparedness activities combine household-level measures with collective organisation. Guidance from public authorities is intentionally light, with minimal bureaucracy and no strict reporting requirements. This low-threshold approach reduces barriers to participation and allows communities to proceed at their own pace. While the guiding principles of the initiative are replicated across the region, the application looks different from parish to parish, with each community discussing and conducting the work according to their individual circumstances and perceived needs.

An important feature of the initiative is that it does not aim to replace or create new preparedness structures. Instead, it connects, strengthens, and makes visible existing local initiatives, allowing communities to build on what is already in place. According to a representative from the County Administrative Board, this bottom-up approach is what makes Stark Socken successful, as the villages build upon the work that already exists and then plug into the broader Stark Socken initiative. This design reflects a broader shift from viewing citizens primarily as recipients of information or appointed responsibilities towards recognising them as active contributors to resilience and responsible agents according to their own agency and capacity.

The Stark Socken project demonstrates how community-based preparedness can strengthen resilience at multiple levels—individual, community, organisational, and cross-sectoral—by transforming concern and uncertainty into collective action:

Individual level: Agency, meaning, and perceived safety

Interviewees highlighted that, while meeting to discuss crisis preparedness can feel uncomfortable or anxiety-provoking, it also generates important positive psychological effects. Stark Socken emerged from public desire to reduce vulnerabilities and contribute to society, and participation was described as fostering agency and a sense of control. Being able to act, however modestly, helped transform anxiety about crises into something tangible and manageable.

Two interviewees reflected on their own experiences (and that of their relatives) in preparing for hardships during war, noting that, despite potential material scarcity and fear, it also created a sense of belonging, empowerment (through their active contributions), social connection, and feelings of purpose. Similar mechanisms can be expected in Stark Socken, where contributing to the community, planning together, and knowing one has a role reduces feelings of helplessness and increases perceived security, while building trust among neighbours and establishing individual meaning and agency. Through the initiative, villages are encouraged to identify local actors, such as religious institutions or trusted organisations, which could offer psychological and emotional support during crises, helping communities collectively address fear and uncertainty, not only practical needs. According to one representative from Region Gotland, these efforts are at the core of resilience:

What resilience is really about is not creating watertight plans or preparations that mean a crisis will never feel difficult. It always will. But when we work with the civic society and residents and create these conditions, people recover much faster and are able to bounce back. And, in the midst of the hardship and strain that crises bring, being able to do something as an individual, even something very small, to help, improve, or contribute in some way already makes things feel much easier. (Representative of Region Gotland)

Community level: Social cohesion, trust, and shared understanding

At the community level, the initiative aims to strengthen social cohesion and renewed connections among residents. While Gotland's villages historically had strong social structures, many of these structures have weakened over time, with increasing anonymity, fewer shared initiatives, and a less rooted and established community. This is due, in part, to high numbers of seasonal homes contributing to a transient atmosphere. A participant in the Stark Socken project recalled earlier forms of village cooperation, such as "village teams" (*bya-lag*) which functioned as informal safety nets during crises, but there has been a trend of weakening interest and meeting places in the village.

In line with this, the coordinating representatives of Stark Socken noted the ongoing anonymisation occurring on Gotland, as in society in general. According to the interviewees, the Stark Socken initiative can work against anonymity in society through building social

cohesion, trust, and belonging, which rebuild resilience and support society both in times of stability and instability. Interviewees described Stark Socken as helping to recreate a shared space where villagers could gather around common issues. Neighbours who had not previously interacted began meeting, talking, and planning together. Preparedness discussions also helped build a shared and realistic understanding of potential risks, such as long power outages or water shortages, reducing uncertainty and improving predictability.

Organisational level: Networks, complementarity, and local knowledge

From an organisational perspective, Stark Socken illustrates a publicly led initiative with shared ownership across multiple actors. Public authorities, emergency services, voluntary defence organisations, and civil society actors contribute according to their mandates and expertise rather than through a fixed hierarchy. Region Gotland and the County Administrative Board primarily act as facilitators and coordinators, while the police and rescue services contribute knowledge on safety, risks, and crisis response. Voluntary defence organisations play a key role in training and strengthening practical preparedness.

Civil society organisations are particularly important for mobilisation and trust-building. In some of the villages, organisations for adult education, the Red Cross, and rural development organisations have supported engagement through meetings and study circles, often acting as intermediaries between authorities and residents. Faith-based organisations and local associations have provided meeting spaces, social legitimacy, and access to networks that might otherwise be difficult to reach. Interviewees stressed that organisational involvement was largely responsive to local needs identified by the villages, reinforcing the locally driven nature of the initiative.

Cross-level effects: Trust between communities and authorities

An important notion from the interviewed coordinators was the increased trust between residents and public authorities. Initial meetings were sometimes characterised by frustration or scepticism, reflecting broader tensions around communication, unmet expectations, and perceived distance between authorities and civil society. By remaining present, listening, and responding transparently, trust has been gradually building over time. Interviewees noted that this trust has since been translated into communities becoming more willing to contact and collaborate with authorities during real crises, such as recent forest fires on Gotland.

Capacities that enable success

Several enabling capacities were identified as central to Stark Socken's effectiveness. These include strong local identity in many parts of rural Gotland, existing associations and meeting places, long-term institutional support from Region Gotland and the County Administrative Board, the involvement of voluntary organisations with preparedness expertise, and committed local coordinators or community champions. Equally important

is the initiative's flexible design, which allows adaptation to local conditions rather than imposing a single model.

Throughout all levels, the Stark Socken initiative demonstrates how resilience is strengthened not only through plans and preparedness measures, but through relationships, participation, and shared responsibility. By mobilising both formal institutions and informal social structures, the initiative supports psychological resilience alongside practical preparedness in both everyday life and during crises. Interviewees also highlighted emotional and relational competence as a critical, though often implicit, capacity. The ability of organisers and public actors to meet people where they are, acknowledge scepticism, manage anxiety, and keep discussions constructive was described as essential for sustaining engagement and building trust over time.

Challenges in developing resilience

While Stark Socken demonstrates potential for building psychological resilience, the initiative faces several challenges. One of the coordinators expressed the recurring risk of overambition at the local level. Some villages may begin to take on responsibilities that exceed their capacity, particularly in relation to complex risks that require regional or national coordination. As one representative from the region stated: "When local communities come together, it's very easy for them to start trying to solve world peace. [...] Here we need to gently steer things back to the fact that you can make a huge difference locally—but not take responsibility for everything."

Closely related is the issue of uneven engagement: villages vary significantly in terms of social cohesion, organisational capacity, and local identity, resulting in different starting points and outcomes across communities. Interviewees also pointed to the challenge of reaching beyond those already engaged. Participation often attracts individuals who are already active in local associations or preparedness work, while involving residents with little prior engagement remains difficult. Although the initiative is built on voluntary engagement, long-term continuity may fluctuate, and volunteer energy alone may not suffice over time. There is also a risk that Stark Socken could become symbolic rather than practical if activities are not sustained and embedded in everyday community life.

The model is currently being explored for adaptation to a more urban context, with the possibility of testing it in Gotland's largest town, Visby. However, coordinators emphasise that urban areas differ significantly from villages in both social and physical conditions. These differences would require adjustments to the approach, including alternative facilitation methods, to ensure it functions effectively in more urban, dense, or socially fragmented settings.

Beyond these operational issues, Stark Socken reflects broader tensions common to resilience-oriented approaches. These include balancing the bottom-up initiative with external support without undermining local ownership; building trust in contexts where there may be historical mistrust between communities and authorities; making preparedness motivating without amplifying fear; valuing social and psychological

outcomes that are harder to measure; sustaining momentum after initial enthusiasm; and avoiding an unintended shift of responsibility onto local communities without adequate institutional support. As such, interviewees noted a need to maintain clear boundaries around what can reasonably be expected at the local level.

Where additional support is needed

Several forms of additional support could strengthen the initiative. From the regional and national level, needs include long-term coordination funding, continued facilitation and communication support, platforms for peer-learning between villages, clearer structures for sustaining initiatives over time, and explicit recognition of psychosocial and relational work as a core component of preparedness. From public institutions, interviewees emphasised the importance of continued presence and dialogue beyond project launches, targeted support for reaching groups outside traditional association life, and clearer communication about which responsibilities lie locally and which must remain institutional. Finally, at the level of broader policy and funding systems, there is a need for resources that support maintenance and continuity rather than only start-up phases, tools for evaluating social and psychological outcomes, and adaptation support for applying similar approaches in urban or less cohesive contexts.

Future opportunities for resilience

The Stark Socken case highlights several opportunities for strengthening resilience policy and practice. First, there is a need for more explicit recognition and support of social and psychological dimensions of resilience within national frameworks. This includes investing in local networks, meeting places, and community engagement. Second, tools for evaluating psychological resilience might be further developed. While difficult to measure, aspects such as trust, participation, and perceived safety are critical indicators of resilience. Third, the model could be adapted to other contexts, including urban areas. However, this would require identifying alternative social units and adapting methods to different conditions. Finally, interviewees emphasised the importance of long-term support, continued dialogue, and maintaining the initiative's core principles of flexibility and local ownership.

Stark Socken demonstrates how psychological resilience can be built through everyday practices that strengthen trust, social cohesion, and collective agency. While not explicitly framed under the concept, the initiative operationalises key dimensions of psychological resilience in a way that complements Sweden's existing preparedness system. By translating national security concerns into locally meaningful action, Stark Socken bridges the gap between policy and practice. It shows that resilience is not only about infrastructure and systems, but also about relationships, participation, and the capacity of communities to act together. As such, it offers valuable insights for developing more holistic and socially grounded approaches to resilience in Sweden and beyond.

DENMARK

The role of civil society organisations in fostering psychological resilience



Images: Tindra Ekholm/Unsplash (left), Seppo Samuli/norden.org (right)

The Danish case examines how psychological resilience is emerging through civil society organisations in a country characterised by a strong welfare system and the absence of comprehensive resilience strategies on the national level. Since the Cold War, the structure of Danish preparedness has been divided into silos, decentralising the responsibilities among authorities. While the country has a dedicated Danish Resilience Agency (Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed, or SAMSIK) under the Ministry of Resilience and Preparedness to address resilience-related issues, it does not currently possess national and structured resilience strategies focusing on psychological resilience, such as those visible in Finland. Despite this, Denmark's strong welfare system, characterised by high levels of trust in society and the state apparatus, allows civil society to potentially replicate the resilience concept locally (OECD, 2024; Ortiz-Ospina et al., 2024).

Danish civil society actors and volunteer organisations have, it seems, stepped in to address the gap and engage local communities through various measures while seeking to strengthen their resilience. Although these initiatives are not explicitly framed in Denmark as psychological resilience, by description they bear some resemblance to the approaches outlined in the Finnish national security strategy. In this regard, social cohesion (*social sammenhængskraft*) in the Danish context—where strong welfare institutions, social systems, and a shared national identity shape the functioning of society—may be the closest approximation to what is referred to as psychological resilience in Finland. However, the term does not fully capture the resilience dimension and, therefore, cannot be used interchangeably (Jensen et al., 2019).

The interviews conducted as part of this case study revealed that the Danish government has begun considering ways of building the psychological and overarching resilience of its citizens. However, interviewees noted that Denmark is behind other Nordic countries by five to ten years in terms of resilience strategies, largely due to formerly differing perceptions on security. A first indication of nationally initiated psychological resilience practices is the creation of the Council of Cultural Resilience (Rådet for Kulturel Modstandskraft). Though not yet in operation, the aim of the council is to strengthen cultural resilience in the wake of higher security threats to Danish society (Kulturministeriet, 2026). New discussions on the concept of total preparedness in Denmark and a recent political agreement on preparedness have indicated greater focus on citizens' resilience, especially through education, communication, and mutual support during crises (Danmarks Radio, 2026; Ministeriet for Samfundssikkerhed og Beredskab, 2025). These changes were argued in light of the changing security environment in Europe, most notably increased Russian aggression towards the continent, as highlighted in the most recent Danish security strategy (Udenrigsministeriet, 2023).

Civil society and volunteer approaches to psychological resilience

There are several organisations in Denmark that support civilians in preparing for crises. Most notable examples include the Red Cross and the Preparedness Association (*Beredskabsforbundet*). Although both organisations engage in a range of activities beyond psychological resilience, they nevertheless represent different components of the Finnish psychological resilience concept. The Red Cross seeks to address recovery, promote voluntary activities, combat social exclusion, and clearly communicate to vulnerable groups, while the Preparedness Association works with practically engaging local communities by building their own resilience.

The Red Cross works with the concept of psychosocial preparedness and recovery (*psykosociale sundhedsberedskab*), which includes psychological support but is more related to crisis events where social support is provided to local communities by non-psychologists (e.g., through food provision, housing, and other necessities). Beyond recovery, the Red Cross aims to ensure disadvantaged residents (who may be more disproportionately affected by global threats) develop capabilities to mentally prepare for potential crises by managing their worries. The organisation seeks to mobilise citizens to become volunteers, strengthening their mental willingness to help others in need. Currently, there are around 170 crisis support volunteers working with psychosocial preparedness who are engaged in various activities. But the organisation has around 30,000 registered volunteers that can be activated when needed, and an additional 10,000 volunteers on active standby.

The Red Cross aims to continuously engage volunteers, addressing frustrations seen in other organisations where trained volunteers become marginally involved. Ensuring that volunteers are continuously called upon to assist fellow citizens (even for minor check-ups) is one of the organisation's goals. By doing so, the Red Cross ensures that nobody is left alone in a crisis. The organisation enables individuals to take initiative while also

supporting municipalities, who have the legal mandate to address such issues. These initiatives are based on the new national risk assessment (*Nationalt Risikobillede*) and recently announced plan for total preparedness in Denmark, which requires a “society as a whole” mindset, rather than an authority-based approach within resilience (Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed, 2025-a). The Red Cross has also developed teaching materials, which are used for early education in schools.

The Preparedness Association is another civil society organisation whose operations rely heavily on voluntary participation. While the organisation has several branches (e.g., voluntary firefighters), it also conducts a range of courses aimed at strengthening psychological resilience among individuals and communities (though these initiatives are not explicitly framed in such terms). They currently have around 100 volunteer educators who carry out free courses for individuals on crisis readiness and environmental and fire dangers. The most popular weekend-long course is called *Crisis ready—Take care of yourself for 3 days* (*Kriseparat - klar dig selv i 3 døgn*) which teaches people to first take care of themselves, then their family, and finally, their neighbours. Seminars for people with disabilities are organised based on a train-the-trainer model, where municipal workers who take care of disabled individuals become key figures and carry over relevant information to patients on how to become more resilient. These courses are used for calming fears, letting reason prevail, and enabling self-sufficiency (without a caregiver) for three days.

Since February 2026, the Preparedness Association has launched free crisis-readiness workshops for communities called *Community, Neighbourhood, Preparedness* (*Fællesskab, Naboskab, Beredskab*). These workshops are based on the Danish Resilience Agency's guidelines for resilient communities, which focus on developing local preparedness plans (Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed, 2025-b). The workshops encourage building local communities and gathering preparedness groups consisting of 5-8 community representatives who hold responsibility for preparing these plans. The courses gamify the aforementioned guidelines for communities and teach the selected representatives how to mentally and physically help other community members prepare for unexpected events. At time of writing, approximately 20 communities have participated in these workshops.

Beyond developing preparedness plans, the aim of the workshops is to foster a community mindset that supports vulnerable neighbours or community members during crises. As one expert noted, flexibility is essential, as it is impossible to predict who will need help the most. Members of developed social circles—such as football, knitting, and cooking clubs—are more inclined to help each other in crises due to a shared community feeling. However, whether a social circle (or community) can extend beyond its boundaries to support non-members remains unclear, underscoring the importance of belonging to a community.

Box 4 describes how the workshop is conducted, including three distinct stages and various roles of a resilient community. To further upskill key roles, community point persons, and crisis coordinators, the Preparedness Association is developing an e-learning course. When a community orders a workshop, the association also provides the members with various materials, such as an example of a detailed community preparedness plan, advice booklets, toolboxes, and templates which can be filled out for easier plan development.

Box 4. Workshop game: *Community, Neighbourhood, Preparedness*

Game material:

- Gameboard
- 22 action cards
- 10 consequence cards
- 10 role cards

Game setting:

The local community experienced a long-term electricity outage.

Game sequence:

Each card has an explanation on the back side. The workshop consists of four stages:

1. During the first stage, participants discuss and select three cards representing the most critical consequences of long-term electricity outage.
2. During the second stage, participants discuss and select which actions would best address the selected consequences.
3. During the third stage, participants discuss and select which roles are the most important to delegate in a community to carry out the actions (e.g. point person, crisis coordinator, communicator, first aider, etc.).
4. The game is then repeated with different consequences, actions, and roles.

These two examples of volunteer civil society organisations and their activities illustrate some initiatives that support the development of psychological resilience in Denmark. The organisations are highly place-based with offices dispersed in every region of the country. Being well-established locally, they are easily accessible to locals and act effectively when needs arise. Other examples of such organisations in the Danish context may include People and Security (Folk og Sikkerhed), Save the Children (Red Barnet), the Senior Citizens' Association (Ældre Sagen), and Children's Welfare (Børns Vilkår).

Successes in developing resilience

Trust is a key element for a well-functioning and prosperous state. In Denmark, societal trust is generally high, which can have both positive and negative impacts in terms of psychological resilience. A central strength of organisations such as the Red Cross and the Preparedness Association is their reliance on local volunteer participation and their approachability, which can result in high levels of trust among communities. For instance, the Red Cross heavily focuses on external communication, which seeks to be simple and understandable for their target groups. When peers and civil society groups convey messages, people can better relate and become more receptive to the information, as it is shared on equal footing rather than imposed from above. In contrast, interviewees stated that people oftentimes feel alienated when the national system instructs them how to behave, and such demands are perceived too literally or become ignored. One interviewee provided an illustrative example:

They [the government] have sent out brochures about surviving on your own for three days. It's essentially just a piece of paper with things to have at home ... and I actually met one [resident] who said, "why do I need to buy canned tuna if I don't like fish?" And I responded that it actually says, "for example, tuna." People are used to listening to the system literally, but when we [civil society] have discussions with them, they understand that you can have spaghetti bolognese instead of tuna as long as it lasts for a long time.

A combination of national guidelines with engagement from more approachable organisations can potentially have a more effective outcome for the local communities. Since resilience topics can be perceived as frightening, civil society can succeed in demystifying the discussions on preparedness, presenting them as serious yet manageable.

Additionally, volunteer organisations enable highly motivated individuals to engage local communities at minimal cost. They often undergo training and can develop skills at a semi-professional or professional level. In Denmark, where there is limited national coordination of resilience efforts, volunteers are prepared to be integrated into a broader resilience system once such is in place. By being frontrunners of tasks related to resilience, civil society can leverage their inherent flexibility to effectively address challenges and react quickly to crises, avoiding bureaucratic procedures. The Red Cross already has some cooperation agreements with municipalities, but the long-term expectation is to be formally included in local preparedness and total defence structures.

Measuring the success of resilience work helps identify areas where further action is needed. While setting indicators for such ideas around trust and preparedness is challenging, the University College Copenhagen received funding for a research project which will conduct evaluations of, among other things, the educational work that the Preparedness Association has been carrying out. The Red Cross does not measure resilience as such but runs a range of initiatives and systematically evaluates them to improve its knowledge and preparedness for future events. In terms of teaching materials

for schools, the organisation has collected data about how the materials were used to assess the usability of the teaching notes. The Red Cross also conducts surveys of economically vulnerable people's ability to develop their own resilience and measures their levels of worry to evaluate how the organisation can help them develop further.

Challenges in developing resilience

Despite the success of civil society organisations with strengthening local communities' psychological resilience, some challenges persist. These range from national policy absence to the general cultural environment, as characterised by the welfare state.

One of the main challenges identified in relation to resilience in Denmark is the absence of a national strategy or framework to engage and integrate relevant organisations and authorities. Some interviewees noted that organisations lack clear guidelines and a better understanding of the type of support expected from them at the national level. A more structured system and improved dialogue between civil society organisations and public authorities could help overcome existing coordination barriers. Municipalities, having a formal mandate for the issue, are likewise in need of more guidance from national leadership, especially smaller municipalities which may not possess the capacity to effectively work with resilience-related matters. As noted above, the Ministry of Resilience and Preparedness as well as SAMSIK are rather new authorities after restructuring, showing the novelty of these themes in Denmark.

A recent survey by TrygFonden found that Danes feel increasingly unsafe: perceptions of safety have reached their lowest recorded level, while household preparedness has increased marginally (Hovgaard, 2026). On the other hand, interviewees noted that some Danes do not perceive preparedness and security issues as urgent and that these issues are often not taken seriously by the general population. Whether or not this will change as national authorities engage more actively with resilience concepts remains unclear, but the country currently lacks structured strategies with clear guidelines for communities and individuals as well as a broader societal recognition of emerging threats, which affects its resilience.

As one interviewee highlighted: "I think that if you have never experienced it [crisis], or if it is happening elsewhere, it is difficult to relate to it. People tend to assume that we will deal with it once something happens." While people tend to consider threats only when they affect them personally, high levels of trust in public authorities and the belief that national authorities hold responsibility for addressing crises may also reduce individuals' sense of personal responsibility to become (psychologically) resilient. This may lead to misconceptions that responsible services will be available to assist during crises when, in reality, some degree of self-preparedness may be required. Trust is thus not a unidimensional concept as it can also potentially reduce levels of personal preparedness. Civil society organisations, such as the Preparedness Association, thus play an important role in knowledge-sharing and capacity-building among citizens, helping to counteract such misconceptions.

The Preparedness Association noted that, despite making preparedness workshops with around 25,000 people, they still must cancel at times due to insufficient registrations or cancellations. Furthermore, people often avoid thinking about crises because it is an uncomfortable topic and can become psychologically burdensome. At the same time, being resilient involves actively thinking about crises, which creates a self-reinforcing challenge.

Future opportunities for resilience

Active discussions on total preparedness concepts show that the theme of resilience has gained a foothold in Denmark. However, Denmark is in relatively early stages of creating an environment that structurally addresses psychological resilience. In lieu of formal resilience initiatives, various NGOs and civil society organisations are currently the driving force of local preparedness. To some degree, such structure is beneficial for early psychological resilience development, as it cannot be projected onto the population from national authorities without a strong foundational basis among local actors and the general population. However, interviewees agree that the national authorities have an important role to play, especially in managing citizens' worries and feelings of safety, achieved through public discourse.

Due to minimal coordination and limited cross-organisational structure, the work conducted in this field remains scattered. Only when organisations such as the Red Cross enter into agreements with municipalities is their cooperation formalised. As one interviewee noted, civil society organisations are actively seeking formal inclusion in the total preparedness framework. A formalised structure would also allow for more effective synergy-building between various forms of civil society to cooperate around resilience. Better guidance would allow such organisations to understand what is expected of them, as well as how they can better align their activities on a national level and among civil society organisations. Despite organisations like the Red Cross expecting a more formal mandate within national security architecture, it remains unclear how much a voluntary organisation can formally commit to the cause while retaining independence. When developing future strategies, it is crucial that national authorities account for differing levels of capacities and capabilities of civil society organisations.

Findings



Images: Dorota Trzaska/Unsplash (left), Pim de Boer/Unsplash (right)

This section synthesises the reviews of literature and policy alongside learnings of the case studies. The findings are organised across six key topics: (1) concepts related to psychological resilience at local and regional levels, (2) self-determination as a success factor, (3) building and nurturing trust, (4) consistency and place-based activities, (5) local-national disconnects, and (6) experiences within the current resilience discussion.

Nordic countries use different concepts but maintain similar approaches

As suggested by the multitude of terms under the framework for Nordic resilience (Figure 1), the concept of psychological resilience is but one term, far from encompassing all Nordic approaches to resilience thinking. Therefore, it is not surprising that this specific language is not used consistently among the local and regional level actors interviewed outside of Finland. However, regional and local actors in each Nordic country were able to identify with the definition we extracted from the Finnish security strategy and relate this approach to their work. The research confirms that all Nordic countries work with psychological resilience in ways that are context-specific yet implicitly aligned. Whether or not the different countries have a term that encompasses the development of these social and cultural components during everyday circumstances—or a term that describes how these social and cultural ideas motivate and support crisis preparedness, response, and recovery—communities throughout the Nordics exemplify psychological resilience in various sites, activities, and organisations.

Similar concepts in use by Nordic actors include terms related to preparedness, cohesion, recovery, and defence. In Denmark as well as Iceland, the Red Cross puts an emphasis on psychosocial preparedness and recovery, while social cohesion (*sammenhængskraft*) can be found under Denmark's national preparedness work. However, the concept of psychosocial support in the Grindavík crisis has greater emphasis on individual mental health than on the community-based capacity to build values of trust. Some local experts, however, had heard of psychological resilience and used this term in their work, but in various ways.

Norway has two main concepts closely related to the Finnish concept—self-preparedness (*egenberedskap*) and civil resilience (*sivil motstandskraft*)—with libraries as one institution instrumental in supporting the latter. Psychological resilience (*psykologisk motstandskraft*) is circulating in Norway, but not in an institutionalised or formally defined form. Finally, Sweden puts an emphasis on several concepts in its national policy, including capacity to withstand (*motståndskraft*), preparedness (*beredskap*), and psychological defence (*psykologiskt försvar*), focusing on individuals' capacity to sort out misinformation.

The line between the two major terms related to handling crises at the moment—*resilience* and *preparedness*—is as blurry in practice as in official documentation. As several Nordic countries are discussing their simultaneous crisis responses while also re-evaluating their long-term security strategies, it seems likely that these concepts will continue to broaden rather than narrow in the future. And while psychological resilience may be applied in a general sense, one of its contributions may be in the unique emphasis it places on a community's shared values, identity, and levels of trust.

Self-determination equips for success but comes with a price

The case studies revealed that local level actors often need to navigate between self-determination and external (often national) guidance. This emerges in different ways across the cases. In Denmark, interviewees expressed the potential need for more organised resilience structures from the national level to guide future work, whereas in Iceland, the acute crisis of a natural disaster has meant that new actors emerge (such as the local citizens' association) in order to navigate prolonged trauma and organise evacuees in a way that only local individuals can achieve. In the cases of Sweden, Norway, and Finland, local actors approached regional or national actors with a sense of responsibility to contribute to preparedness efforts (as in the Tønsberg and Færder library case and the Stark Socken initiative in Gotland) or to build new safety nets (as was the case in Finland).

These findings echo the academic literature—for example, the findings from Carlsson and Engström (2025) describing how the library sector in Sweden expressed a willingness to take on more responsibility within crisis preparedness. The combination of ambition and limitation of local and regional actors to take up such responsibilities is also found in the literature, though with more critique related to the redistribution of responsibilities

among individuals, and less attention towards either the benefits or challenges this presents for individuals within established associations, civil society organisations, or local public institutions (Larsson, 2021; Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021; Gross, 2023).

Largely self-organising actors and communities could benefit from higher-level support especially when resources are limited and when it comes to coordinating and collaborating among organisations to reduce redundancy. Some case studies, such as in the Grindavík case and the Danish civil society case, also called for better coordination across ministries and stronger national planning, potentially involving national-level resilience structures. Combinations of strategic national guidelines alongside local organisations could help combine the best of both worlds, including stronger links across these levels. More effective long-term coordination could help support actions such as funding, facilitation, and communication.

While self-determination has proven to be a major enabling factor for various kinds of community action, it also comes with certain constraints which may underscore the need for a more dynamic relationship across governance levels and sectors. For example, people working with libraries in both Finland and Norway remarked that these institutions could take on greater responsibility in crisis preparedness or social cohesion-related work, as they already achieve some aspects of this in their routine activities. A similar observation emerges from the local chapters of civil society organisations such as the Red Cross in Denmark, where networks and structures for coordinating volunteers are already in place. In addition to constraints faced by local level actors (i.e., limited capacity and resources, or no clear mandate to act), recurring risks also include overambition by community members to achieve more than is realistically feasible (as noted in the Swedish case). This also highlights the importance of having skilled facilitators or coordinators who help frame preparedness efforts, fostering community engagement while setting realistic ambitions in relation to resources.

While the lack of a formal mandate to prepare for and respond to crises enables flexibility, it can also contribute to unclear and uneven responsibilities, as not every organisation, community, or individual engages with preparedness efforts to the same degree. While it is impossible to develop the appropriate trust and motivation if it is forced from above, relying solely on voluntary participation leads to uneven engagement. This raises a concern not only for the sake of contribution but also for ensuring that those who do not engage or contribute are not overlooked or excluded from crisis recovery. Such challenges point to the continued need for coordination and support across all levels of government.

According to the case studies, the greatest success in this area tends to emerge out of cross-collaboration among various organisations at different levels and scales—though, precisely which organisations are included may depend on the existing social and cultural dynamics of the local context. This point is also supported in the literature related to regional resilience, where researchers suggest that “a region’s ability to respond effectively during crisis depends on the capacity of local institutions to establish network governance for the region and the willingness of organisations and individuals to collaborate within and beyond their own expertise and regions” (Keinänen et al., 2025).

When it comes to fostering local identity and fortifying social cohesion during prolonged stress, self-determination (actions developed by and for local inhabitants themselves) is key. The Finnish case highlights how community-led art activities provide a mirror for reflecting humanity, expressing individual and community identity, building trust, connecting with others, expressing uncertainty and confusion, and amplifying unheard voices. The genuine connection between community-led resilience action and the people tapping into them proves, however, that even seemingly mundane or ordinary efforts may evoke strong emotions related to local identity, such as in the case of maintaining the Grindavík basketball team for evacuees to rally around. Some cases exemplify the possibility to build resilience on the basis of pre-existing place-based divisions, such as in Sweden, where Gotland's parishes take on a new role as neighbourhood-based preparedness units. The trusted position of the Norwegian library branch or the ability of the Helsinki suburb in Finland to draw upon its complex identity (and historical reputation) also emphasise this. Here, it appears that communities at a more intimate scale than the municipality are especially well-suited for resilience practices.

Genuine connection is essential for building trust

Trust was a central theme in the case study interviews. While it is often described as essential to Nordic social conduct, it remains somewhat abstract and unquantifiable. However, the case studies illuminate the multifaceted nature of trust and what it means as part of psychological resilience. For example, the Icelandic case illustrates how a citizen-level sense of security is heavily based on trust in institutions such as authorities, risk assessments, and response systems. On the other hand, the Danish case challenges this recipe to success by pointing out that trust can also lead to an over-reliance on national actors to support citizens during a crisis. This may lead to a situation where needs that lie beyond national capacity or knowledge—and must be secured at the local, community, or even individual level—fall between the cracks. To combat this, identifying potential pathways for shared responsibility is key.

Some of the interviewees representing public institutions inherently enjoy a trusted reputation in their communities. This is exemplified with the libraries in the Finnish and Norwegian cases, which are generally viewed as politically, commercially, and religiously neutral spaces. However, their position as such is not an immutable fact. As noted in the Norwegian case, if such institutions align themselves with national preparedness messaging, they risk becoming more political as vehicles for specific messaging over others, putting their neutral and safe reputation at risk. Civil society organisations could face a similar risk, as described by the Red Cross in Denmark. Interviewees from the organisation expressed a desire for better coordination and guidelines from national actors, while also acknowledging the need to remain independent and apolitical to remain trusted community actors. This is also the case with the civil society organisations that are involved in the Swedish Stark Socken initiative, including the Red Cross but also faith-based organisations like local churches and other civil society organisations.

The Swedish interviewees noted that it takes continuous presence over time to build trust between residents and regional public authorities and to form realistic expectations of how both sides can contribute to preparing for and responding to crisis. Similarly in Denmark, interviewees noted that civil society organisations benefited from being more localised and accessible, and they were able to engage with residents as more trusted actors with regards to resilience-related actions compared to the national government. Citizen associations also serve an important role during a crisis by helping members find a joint voice when discussing common hardships or by highlighting their identity as active members within their communities (exemplified in Grindavík). Understanding that trust and genuine community building takes years, Nordic actors can identify and appreciate existing organisations and the everyday activities they do to build it, even—and perhaps especially—when these activities are not initially designed for resilience purposes (i.e., resilience as a “byproduct” rather than a primary aim).

Therefore, national-level actors seeking to bolster trust in their resilience approaches may consider building on existing networks and actions. Actors that are already rooted and active in their communities not only enjoy a trusted position and knowledge of local needs, but they also often possess the emotional and relational capacity that is key for this work. Engaged community actors can build social cohesion by reducing anonymity and developing shared understandings of risks which is essential groundwork for more strategic plans.

Trust is also commonly referred to in the academic discourse, with research highlighting how, in general, Nordic countries have high levels of trust in state institutions (Berling & Petersen, 2021; Larsson & Rhinhard, 2021). The case study findings, however, suggest that one cannot take for granted that ideas of crisis preparedness always resonate among local actors. The academic literature also raises the point of trust not only among individuals and public authorities, but also trust in societal security ideas—for example, total defence (Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021). The case study findings support earlier research from Selle & Wollebæk (2015), who argue that institutional trust is important and is achieved through strong civil society. “Both the legitimacy of public institutions and their ability to deliver over time depend on a vibrant organisational society in which the organisations have independent institutional significance in their own right. Similar to other key social institutions, their functions include shaping sets of values and reducing vulnerability and uncertainty” (Selle & Wollebæk, 2015, p. 273). We see this at play in the cases of public libraries in Norway and Finland, as well as in the case of the Red Cross in Denmark. Furthermore, Luonila et al. (2023) point out the significance of cultural activities in everyday life for building social cohesion, generating sense of belonging, and stimulating action. However, precisely how and to what extent notions of trust are mobilised into a will to act in times of crisis remains somewhat unclear.

According to one Norwegian researcher, total defence is about “protecting the civilian population and requisite Norwegian values, and ... preventing societal functions from collapsing” (Morsut, 2021, pp. 69-70). However, while defending societal values is significant for fostering a will to act (whether to defend or, e.g., to engage in preparedness activities), such efforts could become nationalistic in a way that promotes an “us v. them” narrative, even within a single nation. This was not raised in the case

studies but in the academic literature. For example, in her research of pandemic experiences in Norway, Gross (2023) sheds light on how the Norwegian state reproduced a “national myth” about Norwegian identity that vilified some residents who, for various reasons, lacked capacity to respond to the crisis in a socially acceptable, “Norwegian” way. It is thus important for policymakers to consider how values can be shared among national inhabitants while also recognising the complexity of maintaining such values and preventing such values from becoming part of a national myth that leads to exclusionary or discriminatory practices, ethnocentricity, or other harmful practices.

Consistency and place identity carry more weight than quick impact

As mentioned above, trust and engaged communities only build over time. For this reason, several interviewees across the different cases pointed out that consistent, continuous, and predictable action is important for developing and maintaining resilience—even if that constitutes small action, such as a weekly meeting at the same time and place. This may be another reason why several interviewees pointed to the value of libraries as a consistent presence in Nordic democracy. While libraries matter as trusted institutions, the building itself also offers a safe, transparent, and neutral meeting space, a fact that becomes especially important when interacting with children or vulnerable social groups in the Finnish case. In the Norwegian case, we gain an example of a library that more firmly established itself as an information point where people can turn to for reliable details, thus expanding its role from a physical place to a metaphysical one. Swedish experts also mentioned the role of physical meeting spaces such as churches as important for enabling communities to congregate to discuss plans and organise among different actors. The physical place of a town and its community spaces are also highlighted in the Icelandic case, soberly illustrated when individuals were required to abandon their homes and evacuate. The desires expressed by evacuees to return to Grindavík and buy back their homes further exemplifies the significance of place as an anchor for community identity.

Spontaneous events and gatherings organised via social media, however, can also be valuable for assembling actors that have not taken part in more traditional platforms of community action. Nevertheless, many experienced community activists fear that resilience work is increasingly organised—and, notably, funded—via short-term projects which often fail to address structural problems or build relations based on trust. Therefore, regularity and transparency (e.g., when it comes to meeting agendas) remain core elements for enabling psychological resilience.

National priorities may neglect more quiet crises and efforts observed by local actors

As in many other fields, the expectations for achievements at the local level and the resources budgeted for these tasks are not well-aligned when it comes to psychological resilience efforts. This is especially true when it comes to the role played by arts and

cultural centres in relation to comprehensive security thinking, which interviewees state is often acknowledged in official strategies but less so in budget decisions. This sentiment was especially vocalised in the Finnish case yet also mimicked in the Norwegian one, which contemplated a lack of recognition of the everyday goings-on in public spaces such as artistic expression and communal cultural activities like reading groups. While these factors are key elements of building civic identity, mutual trust, and social cohesion, several interviewees perceived the main national focus to be on visible efforts for resilience such as military capacity and material infrastructure. Financial resources are also needed to maintain and continue existing work, not only begin resilience initiatives.

People engaged with resilience work in the Nordic communities, such as those interviewed for this report, take note of these disconnects between the local/regional and national levels. This is especially visible when national-level politicians and other decision-makers pay lip service to art and culture, or to social dimensions of resilience, but reduce or cut the funding that supports it.

Including a wider variety of smaller, less established actors could be one way to begin healing this disconnect. Some communities and civil society organisations beyond, e.g., the Red Cross, can also take up responsibilities within resilience work (e.g., library personnel, individuals creating their own volunteer roles, citizens associations, faith communities, neighbourhood groups, etc.). Notably, collaboration with these types of actors should happen in a longer time span than that of a singular project. On the other hand, in Denmark, the role of civil society organisations like the Red Cross, along with their in-place structures for organising volunteers, plays a significant role in the wake of limited national guidelines and structures around preparedness, and in translating the communication around these into a more approachable language. In addition, communities affected by an acute crisis (such as in Iceland) or another kind of deep transition also experience a disconnect between their needs and decision-making tables. Interviewees noted the essential work of enabling actors to have agency over their own crisis (including the planning the recovery process). Furthermore, crisis recovery can have a very broad effect, impacting neighbouring municipalities and regions, as experienced by the neighbouring municipalities hosting Grindavík evacuees.

Resilience becomes a burden if it loses its dimension of recovery

Most of the experts interviewed were aware of the heightened importance of psychological resilience or preparedness (in their own national terminology) and acknowledged how their work relates. However, finding oneself at the epicentre of the national resilience discourse can quickly prove to be burden, as the residents of Grindavík experienced. While resilience is often a desirable trait for a country or a community (like in the case of Stark Socken), at an individual level, being labelled as "resilient" during the aftermath of a crisis can be viewed as a form of oppressive praise, meaning that it may reinforce a belief that people going through a traumatic event do not need any additional support. The term becomes especially loaded in a situation where provided psychological

and social care is viewed as insufficient or too linear compared to the often blurry and non-linear nature of crisis recovery. And while some literature indicates that "higher trust in government and denser personal networks predict better and faster recovery," crises involve personal and often sustained trauma that complicates this general description, as illustrated in the case of Iceland.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Danish case study notes the difficulty of making resilience work important to people in a concrete sense in a situation where the relative safety of the country and lack of local experience with crisis situations compared to, for example, Iceland's experience with natural disasters, Finland's need to consider domestic implications to Russia's continued aggressive actions, or even Sweden's and Norway's experiences of more recent terrorist attacks.

Lastly, overfocus on the crisis preparedness part of (psychological) resilience can lead public actors to neglect the importance of recovery, joy, and celebration. If the goal is to build long-term resilience efforts, public actors should not expect people to remain in a constant state of crisis thinking—firstly because momentum among individuals naturally fades with other life concerns during times outside of immediate crisis, and secondly because it is burdensome for the human psyche to consider potential crises as the status quo. As such, this discourse poses challenges for trying to infuse psychological resilience as a key aim of community-based activities, but may emphasise instead the importance of psychological resilience as an organic byproduct of such activities.

Conclusion



Images: Charly Nguyen/Unsplash (left), Eirik Skarstein/Unsplash (right)

In the context of the Nordic Region, psychological resilience refers to an individual's or community's self-initiated and self-organising adaptation to changing circumstances or crises. The concept is shaped within everyday circumstances, but it has emerged in an era of crisis-thinking in the region in which the everyday becomes a site for security thinking. While related to other resilience terminology, psychological resilience emphasises relational networks oriented around various purposes or interests (e.g., civic, cultural, religious, educational, communicative, sports) and where qualities such as social capital, trust, and societal values are developed and practiced as a result. While established in the Finnish security context, the concept exists—either implicitly or through alternative terminology—within and beyond the Nordic countries. However, its expression in the Nordic countries may be unique due to the geopolitical history, culture, governance structures, and social organisation of these communities.

Situated within all-of-society security strategies, the idea of building a resilient society is important to both state and private actors within the Nordic countries, as well as for the Nordic Region as a whole, especially as the region faces shared threats such as geopolitical tension, climate change, and deepening social divisions. The research points to several scales of resilience—that of specific individuals and communities within Nordic countries, that of the individual Nordic states, and finally, the resilience of the Nordic Region (or even Nordic-Baltic Region) as a whole—with psychological resilience as a building block at the community level.

But how do Nordic countries determine if they are psychologically resilient, and to what degree? The ability to measure psychological resilience could aid public actors in learning how psychological resilience is developed in practice, determining priorities for intervention, identifying blind spots in social cohesion, and enabling the work to remain institutionally relevant. However, identifying potential indicators for measuring resilience

work is difficult, partly because many of its essential qualities are not visible. According to Raisio et al. (2025), some aspects of resilience only emerge in a moment of crisis, when "capability, enthusiasm, and willingness to help and defend" surface among individuals and communities. Some interviewees among the case studies considered things like trust, participation, readiness, social cohesion, and perceived safety as key elements for measuring resilience, but they also note the challenges—both of capturing such metrics through representative indicators as well as making an accurate interpretation of them, especially at larger scales. Our research suggests that, if such a concept is to be measured, the work of selecting indicators that point to successes or limitations of psychological resilience would best be developed across sectors and levels of governance as well as alongside other public and non-government actors.

Among the case studies, interviewees highlighted that resilience-related activities often reach only part of the community and tap into members who were already active or interested in community participation, volunteer work, or preparedness efforts. However, understanding how psychological resilience plays out across different communities and associations reveals the potential for local actors to help make resilience and preparedness more accessible to a greater portion of the population. Local-level actors can act as important mediators in organic and strategic ways. They may also aid in raising awareness of resilience and preparedness efforts among people outside of the specific activities.

As seen from the case studies, local and regional-level communities play a crucial role for enabling social cohesion. Nevertheless, support in the form of guidance and clarity from national and other public actors is important. At the same time, too much prescription from state authorities can hamper the development of trust and a natural sense of participation, particularly if actions are forced upon citizens from above without clarity or understanding of a community's unique needs and capacities. There are both benefits and constraints of centralised guidance and delegation of responsibility, and grassroots efforts are also essential for establishing community networks as well as initiating resilience and preparedness responsibilities according to their own capabilities.

While enabling psychological, as well as other forms of, resilience is strategically important in the Nordic Region, it also poses some concerns. For example, while stability is necessary for thriving societies, it can also introduce or produce rigidity. When crises loom or strike, resilient societies may be at risk of responding with defiance, or adapting in ways that maintain systems which, in reality, require comprehensive transformation. It is important to achieve some balance of stability without rigidity when developing psychological resilience (Norström et al., 2025).

Threats and vulnerabilities also help societies understand their shared values and build up social unity that sustains such values. However, it is worth mentioning the fine line between social cohesion and its sour twin of ideological nationalism, which can lead to exclusion, fragmentation, or unjust racial or ethnic pride. It is more straightforward to identify the critical functions of society such as supplies or infrastructure, for example, while values often remain less explicit. In some cases, these may be values of democracy, but resilience is not an inherent good, and communities with harmful or dangerous

underlying motives can also have high degrees of psychological resilience bent towards alternative visions which run counter to one another or to democratically defined goals. Actors at all levels may need to consider: Which values are referred to in national societal security discourse? What is it, specifically, that citizens, communities, civil society organisations, and government agencies are building trust towards or a shared identity around? Are there specific “Nordic” values, common to all communities, which are worth protecting? These questions, among others related to measuring psychological resilience and the willingness to prepare for crises, remain for future exploration. Nevertheless, our research highlights the significance of civil society organisations, volunteer organisations, and cultural initiatives in strengthening resilience alongside public actors through practices of everyday activities—before, during, and after crises.

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Appendix A

National security strategies and risk assessments analysed for policy review

Country	Publication	Reference
Denmark	National security strategy	Udenrigsministeriet. (2023). <i>Udenrigs- og sikkerhedspolitisk strategi 2023</i> [Foreign and security policy strategy]. https://um.dk/udenrigspolitik/aktuelle-emner/udenrigs-og-sikkerhedspolitisk-strategi-2023
	National risk assessment	Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed. (2025-a). <i>National risikobillede</i> [National risk assessment]. https://samsik.dk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/NATIONALT-RISIKOBILLEDE-2025.pdf
Finland	National security strategy	Finnish Government. (2025). <i>Security strategy for society. Government resolution, Security Committee</i> . Ministry of Defence. https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-817-8
	National risk assessment	Sisäministeriön. (2023). <i>Kansallinen riskiarvio 2023</i> [National risk assessment 2023]. Kansallisen riskiarvion tarkistamiseen asetettu työryhmä (VN/23326/2021). https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/items/851f2abf-6c31-473e-8845-086a7425eed9
Iceland	National security strategy	Alþingi. (2024-a). <i>Skýrsla frá forsætisráðherra um framkvæmd þjóðaröryggisstefnu fyrir Ísland á árinu 2024</i> [Report from the Prime Minister on the implementation of the National Security Strategy for Iceland in 2024]. 218/193. https://www.althingi.is/altext/157/s/0218.html
	National risk assessment	Ríkislögreglustjórnin almannavarnadeild. (2011). <i>Áhættuskoðun almannavarna</i> [Civil Protection Risk Assessment]. https://www.almannavarnir.is/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Inngangur-%C3%81h%C3%A6ttusko%C3%B0un-og-umd%C3%A6min.pdf

Norway	National security strategy	Statsministerens kontor. (2025). <i>Nasjonal sikkerhetsstrategi</i> [National security strategy]. https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/nasjonal-sikkerhetsstrategi/id3099304/
	National risk assessment	Politiets Sikkerhetstjeneste. (2025). <i>Nasjonal trusselvurdering 2025</i> [National risk assessment 2025]. https://www.pst.no/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Nasjonal-trusselvurdering-2025.pdf
Sweden	National security strategy	Regeringskansliet. (2024). <i>Nationell säkerhetsstrategi</i> [National security strategy]. Regeringens skrivelse 2023/24:163. https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/skrivelse/2024/07/skr.-202324163
	National risk assessment	MSB. (2025). <i>Nationell risk- och sårbarhetsbedömning (NRSB)</i> [National risk and vulnerability assessment]. https://www.mcf.se/sv/publikationer/nationell-risk--och-sarbarhetsbedomning-nrsb-2025/
Faroe Islands	Parliamentary resolution on national security	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Industry, and Trade. (2024). <i>Proposal for a parliamentary resolution on national security policy</i> . https://www.government.fo/en/foreign-relations/national-security-policy
Greenland	National security strategy	Ministry for Statehood and Foreign Affairs. (2024). <i>Nothing about us without us: Greenland's foreign, security, and defence policy 2024-2033—An Arctic strategy</i> . https://paartoq.gl/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Greenlands_Foreign_-Security_and_Defense_Policy_2024_2033.pdf
Åland	Government programme on national security	Ålands Landskapsregering. (2024). <i>Regeringsprogram: För ett tryggt, öppet och framtidssäkert Åland</i> [Government programme: For a safe, open, and future-proof Åland]. https://www.regeringen.ax/styrdokument-rapporter-publikationer/regeringsprogram-tryggt-oppet-framtidssakrat-aland-0

Appendix B

Record of national and local level interviews

Location	Interview level	Organisation	Date of interview
Denmark	National	Styrelsen for Samfundssikkerhed	11 December 2025
Denmark	National	Københavns Professionshøjskole	10 February 2026
Denmark	Local/regional	Red Cross	6 March 2026
Denmark	Local/regional	Beredskabsforbundet	20 March 2026
Denmark	Local/regional	Beredskabsforbundet	21 April 2026
Finland	National	Turvallisuuskomitean sihteeristö (Finnish Security Committee)	19 November 2025
Finland (Kuopio)	Regional/national	Finnish Centre of Excellence for Comprehensive Security	16 March 2026
Finland (Kuopio)	Local/regional	Savonia University of Applied Sciences	16 February 2026
Finland (Helsinki)	Local/regional	Helsinki suburban community art action	24 February 2026
Finland (Helsinki)	Local/regional	Helsinki library urban art project	24 February 2026

Iceland	National	Allmanavarnir Ríkislögreglustjóri (Department of Icelandic Civil Protection and Emergency Management)	21 January 2026
Iceland (Grindavík)	Local/regional	Grindavík Support Team	18 March 2026
Iceland (Grindavík)	Local/regional	Járngerður: Association of Grindavík inhabitants	7 April 2026
Norway	National	DSB (Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Preparedness)	20 January 2026
Norway	National	DSB (Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Preparedness)	13 February 2026
Norway (Tønsberg and Færder)	Local/regional	Tønsberg and Færder library	5 March 2026
Sweden	National	MSB (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency)	10 December 2025
Sweden	Local/regional	Region Gotland	11-12 February 2026

About this publication

Shaping values, building trust: Psychological resilience in Nordic communities

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