

Robust civil preparedness in the Nordic Region

A STUDY OF HOW
NORDIC REGIONAL POLICY
CAN CONTRIBUTE TO
CIVIL PREPAREDNESS

Elin Slätmo, Anna Berlina, Ágúst Bogason, Tinna K. Halldórsdóttir,
Miia Itänen, Lumi Tomren, and Jonas Kačkus Tybjerg

NORDREGIO POLICY BRIEF 2025:2



Contents

Introduction	3
Nordic civil preparedness – shared responsibility and partnership	5
Comparison of regional policies in the Nordic countries	6
Addressing civil preparedness in national regional policy	17
Lessons learnt and recommendations	18
Conclusion	23
References	25
About this publication	29

This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version at:
<https://nordregio.org/publications/robust-civil-preparedness-in-the-Nordic-Region>



Photo: Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap (MSB)

Introduction

Extreme weather events and natural disasters, such as heavy rainfall, floods, volcanic eruptions, snowstorms and landslides, can disrupt supply chains and cause significant damage to infrastructure, homes and livelihoods. Such phenomena are exacerbated by the effects of climate change, increased political instability and the rise in hybrid threats, heightening the risks of blockages to energy, gas and trade flows. Additionally, tensions within the Nordic Region arise from competing political goals, such as the push for a green transition and greater self-sufficiency, which can lead to conflicts over land, water and other resources.

In this evolving risk landscape, a resilient society capable of withstanding and managing both environmental disasters and human-made crises is essential. Regions and municipalities play a key role in building resilience and supporting civil preparedness by fostering cooperative capacities, developing innovative solutions for sustainable transitions and ensuring access to food, raw materials, energy and essential services in both times of peace and during crises.

This report forms part of a Nordic project aimed at exploring how regional policy can contribute to enhancing civil preparedness and resilience in Nordic rural areas during times of crisis. For the purposes of this study, civil preparedness is defined through the following key aspects:

- Prevention and community safety measures
- Emergency services and crisis preparedness
- Food security, including food supply, agriculture and food production

- Energy supply
- Access to raw materials, particularly minerals and metals
- Availability of and access to (public) services

In addition to this policy brief, a digital collection of local and regional examples of civil preparedness has been developed within the scope of this project. For further details on EU regional policy, the common Nordic regional policy and the individual regional policies of the Nordic countries – along with an examination of how civil preparedness is addressed within regional policies of the Nordic countries and regional outlooks for each country – a set of digital fact sheets has also been produced during the project.

Methodology

The *Robust Regional Civil Preparedness* project was conducted by Nordregio between March and October 2024. The study is based on document reviews, semi-structured interviews, digital information searches and text analysis.

A working group with broad-ranging linguistic skills was a key in interpreting concepts such as "regional policy", "civil preparedness" and "crisis preparedness", as the definitions and use of the terms vary across the Nordic countries and autonomous territories.

Case studies were conducted in eight rural regions, municipalities and autonomous territories: North Jutland Region (Denmark), Kymenlaakso (Finland), Faroe Islands, Greenland, Múlaþing Municipality (Iceland), Rogaland County (Norway), Jämtland Härjedalen Region (Sweden), and Åland.

Textual analysis was applied to the findings from national regional policy documents and the case studies, including document reviews and interviews with key informants. The aim was to identify strengths and weaknesses from current examples of crisis preparedness at the sub-national level, as well as to determine how state, regional and municipal policies can support civil preparedness and resilience.



Photo: Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap (MSB)

Nordic civil preparedness – shared responsibility and partnership

The Nordic preparedness systems are built according to a holistic perspective. Responsibility for safety and security is diversified and shared between public, community-based and market-based actors (Sandberg, 2023; Wigell et al., 2022).

Across all Nordic countries, the broad concept of security underpins a modern approach to preparedness that integrates military and civil dimensions. It requires collaboration among a range of societal actors, including the state, regions, municipalities, businesses and civil society, to build resilient capacities and ensure the continuity of vital societal functions (FIIA, 2022). The holistic model leverages public-private partnerships, as private actors frequently own and operate critical infrastructure and functions such as energy systems, data cables, railways, banking and finance, healthcare and food supply.

Responsibilities are typically divided so that each actor manages its designated area, whether under normal circumstances or during crises. The Nordic holistic view of society is an inclusive co-operative model that seeks to integrate all relevant actors into a comprehensive preparedness system (Wigell et al., 2022).



Photo: Samuli Hellman

Comparison of regional policies in the Nordic countries

A comparative analysis of the Nordic countries' national regional policies highlights similarities in focus, roles and funding mechanisms. The comparison also explores whether and how civil preparedness is addressed in regional policies and identifies opportunities for improvement.

Focus of the Nordic countries' regional policies

An examination of regional policies within each Nordic country's administrative framework reveals shared priorities, including growth, sustainability, cohesion and development, across their territories.

As outlined in Table 1, Denmark prioritises geographical balance with a particular emphasis on rural areas, while Finland, Sweden and Åland emphasise increased regional sustainability and competitiveness. The Faroe Islands and Greenland focus on achieving balanced development and enhancing living conditions within their territories. Norway's regional policy is designed to promote good living conditions nationwide while supporting community development and population growth. Iceland, which does not have a specific definition of regional policy, implements a strategic regional development plan aimed at fostering growth and enhancing cooperation across institutional levels.

Country	Focus of regional policy
Denmark	The government envisions a Denmark in geographical balance, with a special focus on strengthening and supporting rural areas (By-, Land- og Kirkeministeriet, 2024).
Finland	Promoting sustainable and inclusive growth, competitiveness, citizen well-being and reducing regional disparities (Arbets- och näringsministeriet, 2024).
Faroe Islands	Ensuring balanced development and improving living conditions across all regions through specific objectives and initiatives (Samgonguskjal, 2022).
Greenland	Adopting a holistic approach to regional development, with the aim of enhancing economic, social and environmental well-being across all regions (Departementet for Sociale Anliggender og Arbejdsmarked, 2022).
Iceland	While lacking a specific definition of regional policy, Iceland employs a strategic regional development plan to promote growth, sustainable development and improved intergovernmental cooperation (Althingi, 2022).
Norway	The aim is to enable all citizens to live good lives nationwide, foster local community development and support population growth in district municipalities (Regjeringen, 2023a; 2023b).
Sweden	Strengthening local and regional competitiveness to achieve sustainable development across the country (Näringsdepartementet, 2022; Regeringens skrivelse, 2020).
Åland	Future-proofing healthcare and social care, investing in safe and sustainable transport, maintaining high Nordic welfare standards and achieving the goals of the sustainability agenda (Bärkraft, 2023; Ålands landskapsregering, 2023).

(Authors' summary)

Table 1: Focus of regional policy in the Nordic countries

Roles and responsibilities in Nordic regional policy

The five Nordic countries and the three autonomous regions differ in their approaches to the roles and responsibilities associated with developing and implementing regional policy (Slätmo & Bogason, 2024; Slätmo et al., 2022; Tillväxtanalys, 2021). In Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, the responsibility for formulating and executing regional development strategies rests with regional entities^[1]. The institutional units responsible for regional policy are referred to as "regioner" (regions) in Denmark and Sweden, "landskapsförbund/ maakuntien liitot" (regional councils) in Finland and "fylkeskommuner" (county councils) in Norway. In both Denmark and Sweden, the regions manage healthcare and public transport. However, the responsibility for business development, which lies with the regions and municipalities in Sweden, is centralised at the national and municipal levels in Denmark. In several Nordic countries, government agencies also maintain regional offices that play a significant role in implementing and monitoring regional policy. For example, in Sweden, the County Administrative Boards (Länsstyrelserna) are entrusted with that task, while in Norway that role is performed by the State Governor (Statsforvalteren). The division of responsibilities in Iceland and the autonomous regions of Åland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland follows a different model, with growth and cohesion policies shared between national authorities and municipalities (Slätmo et al., 2022).

The responsibilities of regional public administration units in the Nordic countries are continuously evolving (Dølvik et al., 2015; Slätmo et al., 2022; Tillväxtanalys, 2021). In addition to the regional policy units mentioned above, other regional actors and institutional structures also play a role in the governance framework. For instance, in Finland, welfare areas are tasked with managing social and health services, as well as rescue services (Social- och hälsovårdsministeriet, 2024). In Sweden, civil defence areas were introduced in 2022, with the County Administrative Boards divided into six civil areas aimed at strengthening national resilience during peacetime crises, heightened preparedness and war. Each area is led by a designated county administrative board, with the county governor serving as the head of the civil area (Asp, 2023; Länsstyrelsen Stockholm, 2024).

The role of the state in policy design and implementation of regional development in the Nordic Region

In an analysis of state-led regional and rural policies in the Nordic countries, particularly regarding access to basic services, Slätmo and Bogason (2024) identified two distinct approaches to the division of roles and responsibilities within

1. Discussions regarding regional policy in Denmark, which form part of the background to this project, reveal some reluctance to assign responsibility for regional policy to the regional level of administration. Among certain actors, what is referred to as "regional policy" in Denmark is instead perceived as state-level business policy targeted at municipalities.

public administration. The first model assigns regional and municipal actors the responsibility for developing place-based growth strategies, drawing on national frameworks for cohesion, growth and sustainable development. The second model treats regional policy and development as state or national responsibilities, with a stronger delegation of implementation to municipalities, where central decisions are executed locally (Slätmo & Bogason, 2024) (See Table 2).

	DK	FO	FI	GL	IS	NO	SE	AX
Government delegates a great deal of responsibility for the development and implementation of regional policy	x		x			x	x	
Government is responsible for policy development and delegates part of the implementation	x	x		x	x			x

Table 2: Two general approaches to regional policy development and implementation in the Nordic countries

The two approaches to regional policy have both advantages and disadvantages. From a governmental perspective, devolution is advantageous, as it enables place-based regional development, where the specific needs and drivers of growth in different areas can be incorporated into the design of strategic interventions. That approach is beneficial in terms of policy relevance and fosters regional and local ownership. Such strategies have long been advocated in regional and rural development research. However, delegated responsibility can present challenges for the state when it comes to ensuring the quality of regional policy direction and implementation. Quality is often assessed using general templates and indicators, such as access to services, population size, types of employment and skills enhancement programmes.

Furthermore, also from the national governmental perspective, an approach that involves centralisation of responsibility for policy development, while implementation is delegated, can streamline policy interventions and ensure that

taxpayers' money is spent on areas deemed most relevant by the government. The key challenge here is to account for regional diversity, i.e. to recognise that different areas within a country have varying needs and therefore require tailored interventions (Slätmo & Bogason, 2024).

Municipalities and regions in regional development policy

Even in the Nordic countries that have a formal regional level of government – Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway – the responsibilities of municipalities tend to be broader than those of regional authorities. According to the Local Autonomy Index (LAI), Nordic municipalities have extensive statutory tasks and autonomy, such as local taxation rights and significant freedom in shaping their organisational structures (Sandberg, 2023). In the comparison of 57 countries, Finland, Denmark, Iceland and Sweden rank among those with the strongest municipal autonomy, with index values above 70 on a scale of 0-100 (Sandberg, 2023, p.6). Norway, with an index value of 69, is not in the same category, but differs only minimally from the other Nordic countries. However, Norway stands apart from the rest in that the economic ties between the state and municipalities are stronger. That is because taxation rights in Norway are nominal, meaning they are governed by state frameworks and legislated tax levels (Sandberg, 2023, p. 6). Iceland's municipalities enjoy relatively more independence from state intervention, but they have fewer tasks than municipalities in the other Nordic countries.

'Smart specialisation' is one of the tools used today to address local and regional growth challenges. Other current regional policy approaches include supporting and facilitating industrial symbiosis, business clusters and circular energy and material flows.

Another important tool is strategic spatial planning, in which policy objectives are concretised and prioritised using maps and geographical structural images produced through inclusive participatory processes. Municipalities are responsible for spatial land use planning in all Nordic countries (Lidmo et al., 2020), though other tasks and mandates vary between the countries (Sandberg, 2023). Although their roles are not always clearly defined, municipalities are expected to contribute to regional initiatives for sustainability and growth. For example, inter-municipal cooperation for spatial planning can be leveraged in areas that are sensitive to changes, and for societal and industrial establishments that will have large impacts, such as the location of mines, energy supplies and hospitals, and the management of water resources.

Financing of Nordic regional policy

The government funding allocated to regional development in the Nordic countries is fairly limited compared to other expenditure areas. This segment of policy is often referred to as 'small regional policy' or 'targeted regional policy'. Regional development policy does, however, require a broad range of interventions across multiple policy and spending areas. The part of national level policy that addresses sectoral areas is sometimes called "major regional policy" (Tillväxtanalys, 2021), which suggests that most of a country's political decisions, directives and laws have a regional and municipal impact. National policy, in this context, sets the framework for territorial – or regional – development. That includes national policies and budgets for labour markets, education, industry, transport, the environment and digitalisation. For the Nordic countries that are members of the EU, the EU is also a significant source of funding for regional policy. Furthermore, regions and municipalities contribute through their own tax revenues.

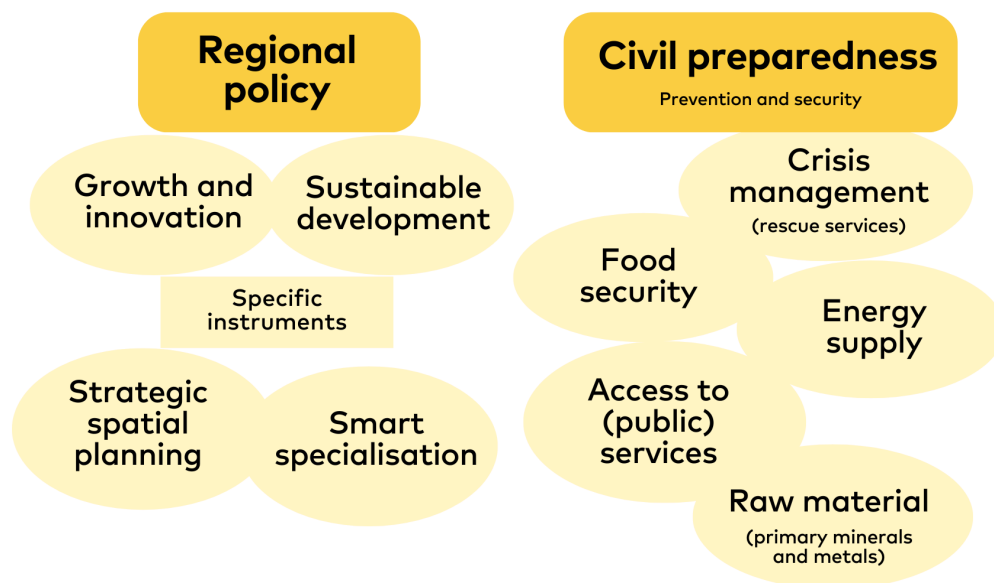


Figure 1: Some of the components of regional policy and civil preparedness

Civil preparedness in Nordic regional policy

As part of this project, the regional policies of each Nordic country (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) and of the autonomous regions (the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland) were examined to assess whether civil preparedness is integrated into current regional policy documents. Table 3 provides an overview based on those documents, supplemented by insights from regional stakeholders and lessons learnt from the assessment.

To clarify the focus, the regional policy documents were searched for aspects that we define as civil preparedness within the scope of this project. Those aspects entail prevention and security measures, emergency services, crisis preparedness, food security (including food supply, agriculture and food production), energy supply, raw materials (particularly minerals and metals) and access to (public) services. Since the primary policies in these areas are sectoral policies, it is not surprising that they were not always explicitly mentioned in the regional policies reviewed.

Given the dynamic nature of society and the environment, along with the ongoing pursuit of a green transition, it is increasingly important for civil preparedness to also address the impacts of that transition. By identifying potential strengths and weaknesses, the study highlights opportunities to further strengthen civil preparedness within Nordic regional policies.

Strengths to build on		Weaknesses to improve
Civil protection (societal measures for prevention and safety)	Included in regional policy in Finland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Åland, primarily as an overall horizontal issue.	In all five countries and three self-autonomous regions, there is a need for greater clarity regarding objectives and division of roles to allocate time and resources for high-quality implementation. In particular, there is scope to focus further on civil preparedness in governmental regional development policy in Denmark and to some extent in Sweden. In Denmark, regional actors note that regional and municipal actors should be able to integrate a civil preparedness perspective more effectively into their work. Coherent strategies, the possibility to implement actions and adequate allocated resources are necessary. In Sweden, clearer guidelines, standardised expectations and requirements set out by the government would facilitate preparedness-related work at the regional levels. In Norway, the role of counties in preparedness work is considered unclear from the regional level representatives, and it is important that this role be clarified in the relevant legislation.
Crisis management (Rescue services such as fire brigades, ambulance and medics, and police)	Included in regional policy in Finland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Åland. There are several good examples to learn from, such as cooperation concerning the fire brigade in Åland and Nordic cross-border rescue service cooperation (Nordred).	Not included in current state level regional policy documents in Sweden and Denmark.

Table 3: Assessment of whether and how civil preparedness is included in national regional policies in the Nordic countries, including brief lessons learnt (authors' weighted assessment of regional policy documents in Denmark, Finland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Åland) (1/2)

	Strengths to build on	Weaknesses to improve
Food security (food supply, agriculture and food production)	Included in regional policy in Denmark, Finland, the Faroe Islands, Norway, Sweden and Åland. The Nordic ministers for fisheries, agriculture, food and forestry agreed in June 2024 to strengthen cooperation on preparedness and resilience in the field of food security and forests (Nordiskt samarbete, 2024a).	Greenland and Iceland can strengthen these aspects. National levels may need to conclude agreements on parameters to remove or bypass tariffs between Finland, Sweden (on the one hand) and Norway (on the other hand) during crises or war.
Energy supply	Included in regional policy in Denmark, Finland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Sweden and Åland. In October 2024, the Nordic energy ministers agreed on enhanced cooperation on energy, offering opportunities to find common solutions and learn from each other's strategies for electricity and energy (Nordiskt samarbete, 2024b).	The role of the regions, and especially the use of spatial planning to ensure regional energy supply could be enhanced in all five countries and three self-autonomous regions. Moreover, in Norway, the energy supply in regional policy could be clarified and defined in more detail.

Table 3: Assessment of whether and how civil preparedness is included in national regional policies in the Nordic countries, including brief lessons learnt (authors' weighted assessment of regional policy documents in Denmark, Finland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Åland) (2/3)

	Strengths to build on	Weaknesses to improve
Supply of raw materials (primarily minerals and metals)	Included in the national regional policies of Norway, the Faroe Islands and Greenland. In October 2024, Nordic ministers for economic affairs agreed on a new partnership for critical minerals and metals. That agreement can serve as an opportunity to find common solutions or learn from each other's strategies. (Nordiskt samarbete, 2024c)	Regional policies in Sweden, Finland and Åland address the need to close material flows, recycle and reuse, which can indirectly reduce the need for raw materials. Improvements are needed, as raw materials are not taken into account in regional policy in Denmark or Iceland. The role of the regions, and especially the use of spatial planning to integrate a perspective of raw materials in development could be enhanced in all five countries and three self-autonomous regions.
Access to (public) services (school, health care, transport)	Included in the regional policies of all countries and regions.	Transport is highlighted as particularly important for the Border Committees, which manage flows between countries. It is also emphasised as critical for the Faroe Islands and Åland. As noted by Enestam (2021), political governance of digital and physical infrastructure at the Nordic level may need to be strengthened.

Table 3: Assessment of whether and how civil preparedness is included in national regional policies in the Nordic countries, including brief lessons learnt (authors' weighted assessment of regional policy documents in Denmark, Finland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Åland) (3/3)

Civil preparedness has received some attention in regional policy within the Nordic countries, although it does not feature prominently (Table 3). The core of regional policy has been largely focused on growth-promoting measures and support mechanisms aimed at levelling out regional differences. Variations in physical conditions and resources, demographics, lifestyles and economies shape how civil preparedness can and should be developed. That highlights the need for geographical, regional and local customisation in civil preparedness. Research on sustainable and equitable risk management suggests that such contextual adaptation is necessary (Bourdin et al., 2023; de Goër de Herve et al., 2023). The regional and municipal levels play a crucial role in facilitating that adaptation.

Previous studies also indicate that rescue services, such as police presence, is to a certain degree incorporated into rural and regional policy in Denmark, Finland, the Faroe Islands, Norway and Åland. However, Greenland, Iceland and Sweden do not address that issue specifically from a regional or rural perspective (Slätmo et al., 2022). Those findings, when combined with the results presented in Table 3, suggest opportunities for learning and the exchange of best practices across countries.

According to Tillväxtanalys (2021), economic resilience is managed differently across the Nordic countries. Denmark and Sweden incorporate economic resilience into their existing governance structures through regular meetings involving key stakeholders with the necessary mandates, whereas Finland and Norway use specific governance tools for economic crisis preparedness, such as financial support measures and expert committees. Together, those governance models provide a framework through which increased financial resilience can be achieved by leveraging existing governance structures for both regular meetings and the provision of financial crisis tools when necessary.



Photo: Oddleiv Apneseth / norden.org

Addressing civil preparedness in national regional policy

While civil preparedness is acknowledged in regional policy, its inclusion in national regional policy frameworks could be made more explicit. Structured cooperation among national authorities, regions, municipalities, businesses and civil society is vital for creating resilient Nordic regions. Coordination across local, regional and, in some cases, national borders is essential for ensuring safe and sustainable living conditions in Nordic cities, villages and sparsely populated areas. A deeper understanding of how the Nordic countries integrate civil preparedness into sub-national policies can foster Nordic learning and the sharing of expertise.

Based on the assessment presented in Table 3, the good practices studied and the key stakeholders interviewed across the countries and regions, five key recommendations have been formulated. These recommendations were drawn from a text-based analysis of the collected material.



Photo: Silje Bergum Kinsten / norden.org

Lessons learnt and recommendations

1. Regionally adapted development for sustainability and preparedness

The regional growth paradigm could be leveraged more explicitly to foster the development of civil preparedness. If the political willingness exists, **national and Nordic regional policies** could communicate more explicitly to regional and municipal levels the need to integrate civil preparedness into regional development efforts. That integration could specify concrete actions, focusing on regionally adapted development where sustainability and preparedness are enabled through regional policy tools like regional development strategies, smart specialisation, industrial symbiosis and spatial planning.

In countries with a delegated management model (Finland, Norway and Sweden), civil preparedness should be embedded within the national regional policy framework, with concrete actions developed in local and regional strategies. In more centralised models (the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland and Åland), civil preparedness could be incorporated into the national agenda and centrally set guidelines. The national levels could set uniform standards for civil preparedness. However, coordination and monitoring are crucial to ensure that resources are directed towards the most critical areas.

There is significant potential to integrate a more mission-oriented approach into both Nordic and national regional policies. That approach would be particularly effective if missions, defined as specific targets for investments and innovations, are aligned with the risks and needs at both national and sub-national levels. Such missions could be spatially targeted, as suggested by Cappellano et al. (2023) and Jessen and Giacometti (2024). For instance, a mission aimed at enhancing food and energy self-sufficiency in a particular region could directly address regional energy and food security concerns while also contributing to broader national and international sustainable development goals.

To further develop and strengthen civil preparedness within regional policy, it is crucial to implement robust monitoring systems and allocate additional resources. That would increase the capacity of regions to carry out preparedness actions effectively. Practical steps could include the introduction of specific implementation guidelines and the tracking of investments designated for civil preparedness within a region. Such measures would ensure that preparedness efforts are systematically planned, resourced and evaluated, helping to increase the resilience of communities across the Nordic Region.

2. Focus on hybrid threats and disinformation to increase civil preparedness

In interviews with key stakeholders, disinformation and hybrid threats have emerged as some of the most significant risks facing the **Nordic Region**. It is crucial for public administration to engage in discussions on how those threats should be managed, both between different levels of government and in collaboration with civil society and business actors. Although this conversation does not necessarily need to be embedded within regional development policy, it is essential to raise awareness of how hybrid threats and disinformation can potentially undermine all policy areas and their ability to influence society.

Rather than becoming immobilised by such challenges, this should be viewed as an opportunity to plan strategically and identify the most effective communication channels and methods for managing and addressing disinformation. Clear roles and mandates should be established to ensure that threats and fabricated allegations are dealt with calmly and systematically.

Concrete actions to enhance the resilience of digital infrastructure include measures such as the installation of additional fibre cables and the appointment of individuals responsible for overseeing the management of digital systems. In line with **the Nordic Vision** of becoming the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030, one stakeholder highlighted the potential benefits of greater digital integration between Nordic countries. However, that also introduces risks if one system fails, it could compromise the entire network. Therefore, it may be

prudent to avoid over-centralising digital infrastructure and instead adopt a more diversified approach to ensure greater system resilience.

3. Strengthened regional spatial planning with a risk focus

To mitigate and resolve spatial conflicts related to land use – such as those concerning the production of food, energy and raw materials – it is essential to balance the interests of different sectors. For policy objectives to be realised, implemented and prioritised, strategic spatial planning must be employed. This process should be inclusive and participatory, using geographic mapping tools to guide decisions on what should be located where and when. Through discussions supported by mapping tools, territorial prioritisation work can be undertaken, fostering greater clarity with respect to spatial policy directions and trade-offs.

In all Nordic countries, municipalities are the key decision-makers when it comes to land and water use. While landowners hold significant influence over the land itself, municipalities, as public institutions, are tasked with making decisions that reflect longevity and the public good. That is a positive aspect of social sustainability, as decisions are made close to the affected residents. However, there are clear advantages to planning beyond the municipal level as well.

Regional spatial planning, under which the geographies of multiple municipalities are considered together, can provide a broader and more coherent vision. It helps to clarify the desired policy direction, identify conflicts and uncover synergies between different interests at an inter-municipal level. Moreover, inter-municipal cooperation in spatial planning is also beneficial for fostering shared access to expertise and the financial resources necessary for planning processes. Municipalities collaborating to address challenges such as natural disaster risks and ensuring the provision of essential services like energy, food, healthcare, education and transport can foster a more resilient and sustainable environment for residents across the Nordic Region.

At the national and Nordic levels, it is important to set clear expectations for regional and municipal planning, and ensure that sufficient geographic data are available. Additionally, ongoing support should be provided in terms of methodologies and processes so that proactive land and water use planning at the subnational level is feasible. The continuous updating of mapping data can be resource-intensive for individual municipalities, so a more coordinated effort at the national level would help ensure that accurate, up-to-date data are readily available for effective spatial planning.

4. Coordination of actors and approaches to crisis management and preparedness

The extensive collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders, coupled with the decentralisation of decision-making to the local level is a notable strength in the Nordic Region. Such decentralisation ensures that decisions are made close to citizens, enhancing the sense of agency and trust in the ability to influence outcomes in daily life. However, there are areas where further geographically tailored coordination and collaboration are needed, particularly with respect to the ability of municipalities and regions to supply essential services such as water, electricity, heating, fuel and spare parts. Equally important is the obligation of municipalities and regions to provide timely and accurate information to both authorities and the public. Special centres that offer information, heat and assistance during crises also play a crucial role in ensuring community resilience (cf. SOU, 2024:65).

Interviews with key stakeholders from selected regions across **Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden** reveal a clear need for improved national coordination of crisis preparedness structures and civil responsibilities. It has become evident that some regions are better equipped to handle emergencies than others, highlighting disparities in preparedness capabilities. Those differences may be due to varying regional conditions, which consequently affect the roles regions may take during crises or wars.

Moreover, the regions surveyed have identified an increasing need for a more robust regulatory framework to support the effective management of rising risks, such as wildfires, landslides and floods. To address those growing challenges, more comprehensive risk assessments are required, alongside strengthened safety protocols. The development of a more cohesive, coordinated framework at the **national level** could help to ensure that all regions are better prepared to respond to emergencies, thereby reducing vulnerabilities and improving overall crisis resilience across the Nordic Region.

5. Investment in fundamental strategic infrastructure

Basic and strategic infrastructure is fundamental to ensuring a high quality of life in both peacetime and during crises. That encompasses the maintenance and development of essential physical infrastructure, including roads, railways, electricity grids, water and sewage systems, as well as digital infrastructure such as broadband networks, fibre-optic cables and mobile masts to ensure reliable mobile phone and internet connectivity.

While the Nordic Region is focusing on cutting-edge technologies like 5G and 6G in its collaborative efforts, aiming to stay at the forefront of global innovation, there

is also a pressing need to prioritise investment in the foundational digital and physical infrastructure that ensures regional cohesion and robust development. Such infrastructure is not only crucial for everyday life but is also indispensable in times of crisis when transport, mobility and connectivity are key.

To maintain and expand that infrastructure, sustained investment through **national public funds** is necessary. That investment will ensure that regions, particularly those in more remote areas, are not left behind in terms of access to essential services and digital connectivity. Additionally, ongoing research projects focusing on the balance between surveillance and openness in relation to digital infrastructure in Denmark, Sweden and Norway (Digital Nordic Borders, 2024) may offer valuable insights into managing infrastructure growth while protecting privacy and ensuring transparency.

Furthermore, a **Nordic financial fund dedicated to natural disasters** could be established. Such a fund could provide critical assistance in the event of significant accidents or emergencies. The Icelandic government's establishment of a fund to buy out houses affected by the 2024 volcanic eruption in Gríndavík serves as a pertinent example of how such a fund can provide timely and effective support to affected communities. That proposal aligns with recommendations by the High-Level Group on the future of EU Cohesion Policy (EC, 2024), as well as the Nordic report by Wigell et al. (2022, p.16-18) regarding a Nordic resilience fund. By investing in such initiatives, the Nordic countries can strengthen their collective resilience to natural disasters and ensure that regional infrastructure can support the needs of citizens during both everyday challenges and extraordinary events.



Photo: Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap (MSB)

Conclusion

The creation of resilient and robust societies capable of recovering from shocks is essential in a world increasingly affected by economic, political, environmental, climate and health crises or, in the worst case, war. Society and the environment are constantly evolving and we are currently navigating the challenges posed by the green transition in order to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Civil preparedness must evolve to address both the desired and unintended consequences of that ongoing change.

A well-thought-out approach to crisis management, regular practice of crisis responses and a common framework for information dissemination and communication are crucial for ensuring robust regional development. Having a clear plan and structure for how various actors should respond during a crisis enables the flexibility needed for a region to be considered robust and resilient. Robustness, therefore, refers to a society where access to essential resources such as food, heating, electricity, infrastructure, services and materials is maintained, even during periods of turbulence or unexpected events.

The regions interviewed in this study recognise the value of strategic civil preparedness efforts within the context of regional policy, provided there are clear governmental directives and allocated resources. The study demonstrates that strengthening the territorial dimension of civil protection through tools like smart specialisation and spatial planning can add value. National regional development strategies should promote and support the implementation of such tools at the

regional (or sub-national) and local level to optimise effectiveness and ensure appropriate risk management based on local contexts.

Nordic cooperation presents an opportunity to enhance the functionality of interactions between institutional actors across public administrations. Promoting open dialogue between Nordic countries' representatives is essential. This study's researchers recommend constructively addressing doubts, risks and shortcomings, particularly as more societal tasks are shared between municipalities, contracted to private companies or carried out by civil society organisations. Under such a collaborative model with shared responsibilities, unclear power dynamics and ambiguities may arise, potentially obscuring accountability.

Regional development tools, such as smart specialisation and spatial planning, can be effectively used to further incorporate civil preparedness into regional policy. Those tools facilitate proactive, long-term planning and decision-making tailored to the specific conditions of each region. Their increased use can also contribute to a more just green transition, as one of their primary functions is to integrate diverse spatial, temporal and stakeholder perspectives. Moreover, employing smart specialisation and spatial planning to implement government policies at regional (or municipal) levels can further strengthen the territorial dimension of civil preparedness.

References

Althingi (2022). Tillaga til þingsályktunar um stefnumótandi byggðaaætlun fyrir árin 2022–2036. Available at: <https://www.althingi.is/altext/152/s/0799.html>, 2024/08/23

Arbets- och näringsministeriet (2024). Förnyelse och välmående i regionerna. Statsrådets regionutvecklingsbeslut 2024–2027. Arbets- och näringsministeriets publikationer 2024:13. <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-327-969-8>

Asp, V. (2023). Förutsättningar för krisberedskap och totalförsvar i Sverige. Försvarshögskolan. Centrum för totalförsvar och samhällets säkerhet. <https://fhs.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1805339&dswid=691>

Bourdin, S., Moodie, J., Gassen, N. S., Evers, D., Adobati, F., Amdaoud, M., Arcuri, G., Casti, E., Cottureau, V., Eva, M., Lócsei, H., Iașu, C., Bogdan-Constantin, I., Philippe, J-P., Hermet, F., Levratto, N., Löfving, L., Coll-Martinez, E., Psycharis, Y., Salenius, V. & Remete, Z. (2023). COVID-19 as a systemic shock: curb or catalyst for proactive policies towards territorial cohesion?. *Regional Studies*: 1-14.

By-, Land- og Kirkeministeriet (2024). Sammenhæng og balance. Frihed, fremtid og muligheder i hele Danmark. Regeringens landdistriktsudspil.

Bärkraft (2023). Utvecklings- och hållbarhetsagenda för Åland. Published 23 September 2016 / Second edition 22 September 2023. <https://www.regeringen.ax/aland-utvecklings-hallbarhetsagenda> eller <https://www.barkraft.ax/utvecklings-och-hallbarhetsagenda-aland>

Cappellano, F., Molica, F. & Makkonen, T. (2023). Missions and Cohesion Policy: Living separate or dancing together? (No. 2023-02). JRC Working Papers on Territorial Modelling and Analysis, No 02/2023.

de Goër de Herve, M., Schinko, T. & Handmer, J. (2023). Risk justice: Boosting the contribution of risk management to sustainable development. *Risk Analysis*, 00, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/risa.14157>

Departementet for Sociale Anliggender og Arbejdsmarked (2022). Naalakkersuisuts Beskæftigelsesstrategi 2022-2024, Grønlands Selvstyre <https://naalakkersuisut.gl/-/media/filer/formandens-departement/2023/forelbigt-resultater-dk-2.pdf>

Digital Nordic Borders (2024). Unpacking the Contention Between Openness and Security in the Nordic Region: Digital Public Surveillance Practices at Three State Borders. Available at: <https://dinobord.eu/>

Dølvik, J.-E., Fløtten, T., Hippe J.M., Jordfald, B. (2015). The Nordic model towards 2030 A new chapter? Fafo report 2015:07.

<https://www.fafo.no/images/pub/2015/20412.pdf>

EC - European Commission (2024). European Commission, Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy. Forging a sustainable future together: cohesion for a competitive and inclusive Europe: report of the High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy, February 2024, Publications Office of the European Union.

<https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2776/974536>

Enestam, J.E. (2021). Strategisk genomlysning: Nordisk civil krisberedskap. Nordiska ministerrådets sekretariat Nordiska ministerrådet. Publikation 2021:063.

<https://www.norden.org/sv/publication/nordisk-civil-krisberedskap>

FIIA (2022). Nordic resilience: Strengthening cooperation on security of supply and crisis preparedness. FIIA Report 70. <https://www.fiaa.fi/en/publication/nordic-resilience>

Jessen, S. & Giacometti, A. (2024). Making Innovation a Mission? Overview of the Implementation of Mission-Oriented Innovation Policies in Denmark, Finland and Sweden. Nordregio Report 2024:17. <http://doi.org/10.6027/R2024:17.1403-2503>

Lidmo, J., Huynh, D. & Stjernberg, M. (2020). Nationellt inflytande i den fysiska planeringen: Nordisk utblick till Finland, Norge och Danmark. Slutrapport framtagen på uppdrag av Boverket, 30 september, 2020, Stockholm. Available at: <https://www.boverket.se/sv/om-boverket/publicerat-avboverket/publikationer/2020/internationell-forstudie-avnationella-ansprak-i-fysiskplanering/>

Nordiska ministerrådet (2024). Gränshinderrådets årsrapport 2023. PolitikNord 2024:701. Available at: <https://www.norden.org/sv/publication/granshinderradets-arsrapport-2023>

Nordiskt samarbete (2024a). Karlstadsdeklarationen – nordiskt samarbete för beredskap och robusthet inom livsmedelsförsörjning och skog. 18.06.24.

Deklaration. Available at:

<https://www.norden.org/sv/declaration/karlstadsdeklarationen-nordiskt-samarbete-beredskap-och-robusthet-inom>

Nordiskt samarbete (2024b). Norden i front på energiomställningen. Erklæring fra energiministrene. 03.10.2024. Available at: <https://www.norden.org/sv/node/89302>

Nordiskt samarbete (2024c). Norden skal sikre sig kritiske metaller og mineraler. 04.10.2024. Available at: <https://www.norden.org/sv/node/89378>

Näringsdepartementet (2022). Handlingsplan för det statliga genomförandet 2022–2024 av Nationell strategi för hållbar regional utveckling i hela landet 2021–2030. Available at: <https://forum.regionjh.se/welcome-sv/namnder-styrelser/regionala-utvecklingsnamnden/mote-2022-06-14/agenda/handlingsplan-for-det-statliga-genomforandet-2022-2024-av-nationell-strategi-for-hallbar-regional-utveckling-i-hela-landet-2021-2030-n202102993pdf?downloadMode=open>

Regeringens skrivelse (2020/21:133). Nationell strategi för hållbar regional utveckling i hela landet 2021–2030. Available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/skrivelse/2021/03/skr.-202021133>

Regjeringen (2023a). Om regionalpolitikken. Available at: <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/kommuner-og-regioner/regional--og-distriktspolitik/om-regionalpolitikken/id2345452/>

Regjeringen (2023b). Meld. St. 27 (2022–2023) Eit godt liv i heile Noreg – distriktspolitik for framtida. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-27-20222023/id2985545/>

Samgonguskjal (2022). Saman eru vit sterk – Samgonguskjal millum Javnaðarflokkinn, Tjóðveldi og Framsókn. https://www.logting.fo/media/cbgakpsu/saman-eru-vit-sterk_samgonguskjal-cef-22.pdf

Sandberg, S. (2023). Statlig styrning av kommuner och regioner: Nordiska trender 2020–2023. Bilaga 5 till Statskontorets rapport 2023:7 Att styra de självstyrande – En analys av statens styrning av kommuner och regioner. Statskontoret (Sverige). <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2023052245663>

SOU (2024:65). Kommuners och regioners grundläggande beredskap inför kris och krig SOU 2024:65. Försvarsdepartementet. Available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2024/09/sou-202465/>

Slätmo, E., Bogason, A., Vasilevskaya, A. & Salonen, H. (2022). Essential Rural Services in the Nordic Region – challenges and opportunities. Nordregio Report 2022:1. <https://nordregio.org/publications/essential-rural-services-in-the-nordic-region-challenges-and-opportunities/>

Slätmo, E. & Bogason, A. (2024). Nordic rural policies for future service needs. Nordisk Administrativt Tidsskrift, 101(1). <https://doi.org/10.7577/nat.5800>

Tillväxtanalys (2021). Nordisk studie om regionalpolitik och omställningsförmåga. Rapport 2021:05. <https://www.tillvaxtanalys.se/publikationer/pm/pm/2021-09-20-nordisk-studie-om-regionalpolitik-och-omstallningsformaga.html>

Wigell, M., Hägglund, M., Fjäder, C., Hakala, E., Ketola, J. & Mikkola, H. (2022). *Strengthening cooperation on security of supply and crisis preparedness*. FIIA Report 70. Finnish Institute of International Affairs. https://www.fiaa.fi/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/report70_nordic-resilience_strengthening-cooperation-on-security-of-supply-and-crisis-preparedness.pdf

Ålands landskapsregering (2023). Regeringsprogram: Ett tryggt, öppet och framtidssäkert Åland. MEDDELANDE nr 1/2023-2024. <https://www.regeringen.ax/styrdokument-rapporter-publikationer/regeringsprogram-tryggt-oppet-framtidssakrat-aland-0>

About this publication

Robust civil preparedness in the Nordic Region - A study of how Nordic regional policy can contribute to civil preparedness

Elin Slätmo, Anna Berlina, Ágúst Bogason, Tinna K. Halldórsdóttir, Miia Itänen, Lumi Tomren, and Jonas Kačkus Tybjerg

Nordregio Policy Brief 2025:2

ISSN: 2001-3876

<http://doi.org/10.6027/PB2025:2.2001-3876>

© Nordregio 2025

Layout: Miia Itänen

Cover photo: Yadid Levy/norden.org

Photos: Myndigheten för samhällsskydd och beredskap (MSB), Samuli Hellman, Oddleiv Apneseth/norden.org, Silje Bergum Kinsten/norden.org

Nordregio

Nordregio is a leading Nordic and European research centre for regional development and planning, established by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1997. We conduct solution-oriented and applied research, addressing current issues from both a research perspective and the viewpoint of policymakers and practitioners. Operating at the international, national, regional and local levels, Nordregio's research covers a wide geographic scope, emphasising the Nordic and Baltic Sea Regions, Europe and the Arctic.

Nordregio

Holmamiralens Väg 10

Skeppsholmen

Stockholm, Sweden

www.nordregio.org