Nordregio

How to support invisible infrastructure

Policy recommendations on psychological resilience

Hilma Salonen & Lisa Rohrer

NORDREGIO POLICY BRIEF 2026:4



Contents

Introduction 3

Recognising psychological resilience 4

Definition of the term 4

Recommendations for supporting psychological resilience 8

Support regular activities and accessible third spaces 9

Acknowledge the potential role of active local groups in national resilience work 9

Work towards genuinely inclusive resilience activities and messaging 10

Expand the scope of resilience work beyond the state of a crisis 11

Use national bodies and platforms to coordinate resilience-related work across regions, municipalities, and sectors 11

Strengthen Nordic dialogue on resilience to continue learning from each other 12

References 13

About this publication 14

This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version at: http://pub.nordregio.org/pb-2026-4-policy-recommendations-on-psychological-resilience

Introduction

This policy brief is written for the consideration of national, regional, and municipal-level politicians, policymakers, and authorities involved in resilience work and planning. It has two aims: firstly, to describe how to recognise psychological resilience in its many manifestations and, secondly, to formulate concrete recommendations for supporting it across the Nordic Region.

This is the third publication of the project *Recognising and supporting psychological resilience: Regional approaches across the Nordic countries (2025-2027)*. The project has also produced the working paper *Building psychological resilience in the Nordic Region: Insights from serious gaming* (Salonen & Rohrer, 2026) and the case study report *Shaping values, building trust: Psychological resilience in Nordic communities* (Rohrer et al., 2026). The work was conducted by researchers at Nordregio and funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.



Image: Joakim Honkasalo/Unsplash.com



Image: Tapio Haaja/Unsplash.com

Recognising psychological resilience

Definition of the term

What is psychological resilience? The Finnish security strategy defines psychological resilience 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). Uniquely used in the Finnish context, Finland's security strategy views psychological resilience as one component of a comprehensive security model where different dimensions of society work towards bolstering the overall security of a country. Importantly, the security strategy considers both basic ("peace-time") and acute ("crisis-time") resilience, thus including various dimensions that are indirectly linked to traditional security networks (Mäenpää et al., 2025).

As a relatively broad concept, the Finnish strategic understanding of psychological resilience bears a significant family resemblance to other discussions across the Nordic Region, such as those related to societal resilience (e.g., *samhällets motståndskraft,sivil motstandskraft*, *áfallaþol samfélaga*), civil preparedness (e.g., *varautuminen, civil beredskap, totalberedskap, viðbúnaður)*, total security (e.g., *kokonaisturvallisuus, national sikkerhed*), and crisis management (*kriisinhallinta, krishantering, sivil krisehåndtering)*. Based on a policy and literature review and analysis, Figure 1 offers a way to describe where psychological resilience is situated as a policy term within current security thinking throughout the Nordic countries (Rohrer et al., 2026).

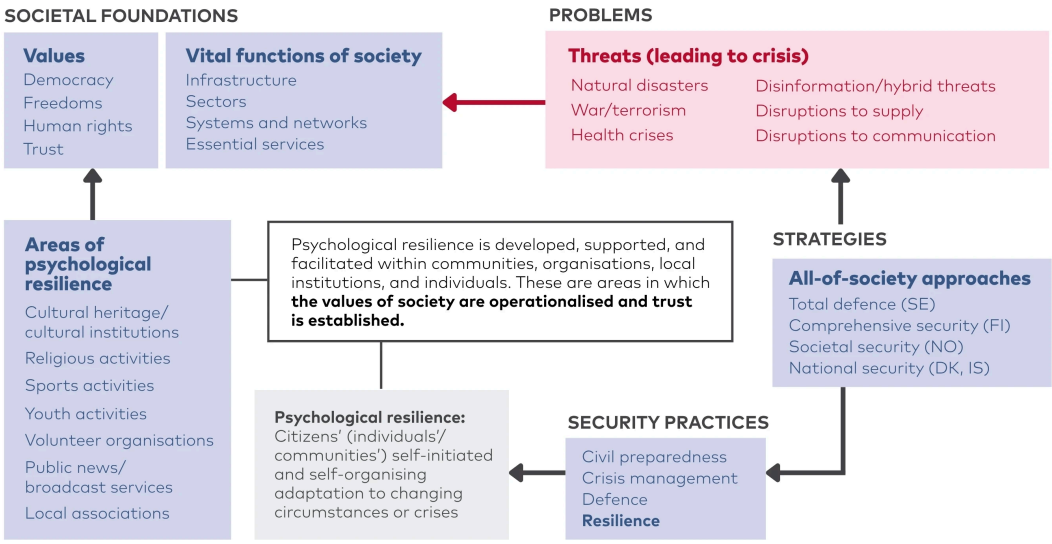


Figure 1. A descriptive framework for Nordic resilience. (Source: Rohrer et al., 2026)

The figure showcases the chain from vital functions and the values upholding them to the threats endangering both. As a descriptive framework, it outlines how Nordic security policies currently present resilience work: with strategies and practices drawn up to manage threats. Here, psychological resilience is one kind of resilience practice, defined only in the Finnish strategy but indirectly present in other Nordic strategies. Finally, the different dimensions of psychological resilience (as articulated by the Finnish strategy) close the loop by describing sites, activities, and communities in which societal values are developed and cultivated.

Following the elaborate descriptions in the 2025 Finnish security strategy, the research project set the following working definition for psychological resilience: *Psychological resilience is citizens' (individuals' or communities') self-initiated and self-organising adaptation to changing circumstances or crises through values-based activities.*

Based on this definition, the different dimensions of psychological resilience can be observed and discussed. While psychological resilience may take many forms within different contexts (as exemplified by the range of related Nordic terms), it is important to make some distinctions of its core features to recognise and better support it. In the following paragraphs, we deconstruct the definition above to discuss its core features.

Psychological

While the word "psychological" implies a link to mental health, the Nordic translations of the term depict a broader understanding. The Finnish term *henkinen kriisinkestävyys* refers more to mental or even spiritual resilience, as opposed to physical resilience, and the terminology used in other Nordic countries also points more to social, civil, and community resilience than to psychological wellbeing. Mental wellbeing should therefore be considered as one factor affecting an individual's capabilities to build and maintain his/her resilience than as the end goal of these activities. Distinct from mental wellbeing, psychological resilience attempts to describe a more profound connection to societal values and a willingness to act (i.e., to prepare for, respond to, and recover from crisis).

Resilience

While resilience entails "bouncing back" from crisis, there is a risk that the concept is interpreted rigidly as a return to the status quo, achieved by following a set of pre-ordained measures. Instead, resilience can take more nuanced and adaptive forms through measures that enable communities to recover from crises in transformative ways, rather than merely managing single events in order to return to business as usual. This difference is essential and distinguishes a resilient society from one that is overly resistant or overly impressionable to change. Previous research (Bourbeau, 2013; Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021) has indicated that a society that views resilience mainly as a tool for maintaining its existing order may be less capable of handling negative consequences of different shocks. Such societies may emphasise external threats with rigid actions of resistance, at the expense of addressing their own internal needs for reform. On the other hand, societies that invite crises to reshape them entirely may lose their core values and vital infrastructure altogether. In short, a resilient society must balance its firm grip on fundamental values and vital functions while also being able and willing to transform how, for example, such functions are provided or maintained.

Citizens (individuals or communities)

The increasing emphasis on self-preparedness practices where individuals rely less on authorities may lead one to question whether psychological resilience is, first and foremost, an individualistic notion. Is psychological resilience about stocking individual preparedness-packs and emergency supplies? While such activities are part of the conversation, it is important to remember that preparing for specific crisis events only covers a small portion of the long-term thinking that encompasses preparation, response, and recovery stages.

In other words, psychological resilience is a systemic approach instead of a one-time exercise. It describes an individual's or a community's trust and willingness to prepare and to act rather than merely the preparatory activities in themselves. The impact of one person or household is always limited; therefore, individual resilience activities should mainly be considered insofar as they link with those of others. As the resilience of a community is linked to how its shared values are reflected in its everyday functions, these values and the critical functions supporting them are ordered and upheld by communities as a whole while also benefitting individuals. As one resilience actor in Gotland explained during the project webinar: "Resilience is infrastructure—it's something that is being built in the relationships between people"(Nordregio videos, 2026).

Self-initiated and self-organised

If communities remain only at the receiving end of security-related expectations and responsibilities, their adaptive capacities may be at risk (Hyvönen & Juntunen, 2021). Resilience efforts should instead build upon existing networks, relationships, and social trust so that they may bolster overall crisis response and recovery. What, then, is the role of government authorities in enabling self-initiated and self-organised psychological resilience?

In self-initiated and self-organised resilience work, a valuable input from the national authorities lies in developing clear guidelines and holding the overall picture for security, ensuring that all relevant sectors are aware of the work of others. National-level actors may also use their authority to share the mandate of resilience work with a wider network of actors—for example, communities, NGOs, and associations, as well as local/regional public institutions. They can also

hold open dialogues among various actors and across sectors to understand how they play a part in shaping resilience (both through physical and social infrastructure) and in ways previously unmandated or unforeseen by national authorities. Complementing this, regional and municipal-level authorities usually have a better picture of the distinct activities and needs of their region or municipality. They play a key role in developing trust with and engaging local actors, thereby supporting and coordinating response and recovery activities in practice.

Finally, it is important to note that national, regional, and local-level authorities are also individuals and community members themselves. Beyond their professional roles as civil servants or policymakers, such individuals have a role to play in the resilience of their own local communities. Resilience is under constant evolution and negotiation through relationships built on shared values and trust. For this reason, it can only be maintained as a self-initiated and self-organised force.

Adaptation to changing circumstances or crises

As mentioned above, the all-encompassing security approach emphasises long-term thinking that goes beyond immediate crises. A well-prepared community (e.g., in terms of food supplies) is not the same as a resilient one, as this type of preparation work can only relate to weathering a certain kind of crisis, without questioning its origins or spillover effects. In addition, one should note that any kind of change can cause pressure on a community, including traditionally positively perceived ones such as an influx of skilled workers and investments (Giacometti & Teräs, 2019). Trust, sense of belonging, and social inclusion are essential during all socioeconomic transitions, and while such elements can grow during transitions themselves, their foundations are laid already in everyday circumstances, before crises arise.

Through values-based activities

According to research by Selle and Wollebæk (2015), the existence of associations and hobby groups may make even people who are not active members in any group feel safer and more trusting in their surrounding community. Psychological resilience largely relies on the extent to which people share an understanding of threats and values in need of preservation. Communities with high levels of trust and strong sense of shared concerns may hold some of the critical foundations of resilience.

However, not all forms of psychological resilience are desirable, particularly when they are misaligned or actively conflict with national goals towards democracy and inclusion. For example, anti-immigrant neighbourhood watch groups may contain, among themselves, high degrees of psychological resilience as communities with shared values, trust, and adaptive capacities, yet they lead to exclusion and decrease of trust in their immediate surroundings. In other words, regular activities that make a group of people feel more united and capable but have an exclusionary purpose may erode the psychological resilience of another group. Therefore, it is important for authorities to facilitate resilience activities that align with core democratic values and support the development of trust across all areas of society.

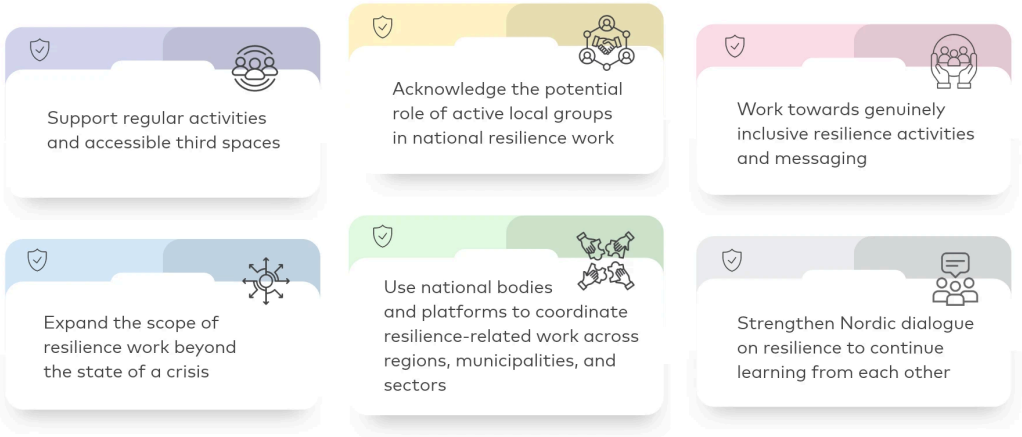


Image: Jaakko Kemppainen/Unsplash.com

Recommendations for supporting psychological resilience

In the following section, we describe possible fields of action for public resilience actors. The actions are based on the empirical findings and research literature explored under the *Recognising and supporting psychological resilience* project: from discussions during the *Building resilience* game sessions (Salonen & Rohrer, 2026), the results of the project's case study report (Rohrer et al., 2026), and discussions during the project's webinar *What makes communities resilient? Insights from Nordic regions* (Nordregio Videos, 2026). To read more on the related research results, see "Part III: Findings" in Rohrer et al. (2026).

Everyday resilience in action



Everyday resilience in action

Support regular activities and accessible third spaces



Consistency and place identity carry more weight than quick impact.

Engaged actors: People who maintain, own, or facilitate accessible third spaces that enable locals to arrange regular meet-ups for clubs, discussions, and shared hobbies. This could also be in the form of digital groups and platforms.

During everyday conditions: Regular activities that are free or very affordable help to decrease anonymity in a community. When people know where to go and with whom to talk when they wish to consider a common societal issue, they have a wider set of potential tools for handling uncertainties without feeling overwhelmed. These kinds of spaces only function when they have a consistent, trusted role in the community.

During a crisis: Third spaces, such as public libraries or community centres, may be able to serve as trusted spaces where people instinctively congregate to share and seek information, while actors who operate such spaces could help guide people to identify their own role in resilience-related activities.

During recovery: Support the long road to recovery by fostering a sense of continuity in the aftermath of a crisis.

Everyday resilience in action

Acknowledge the potential role of active local groups in national resilience work



Self-determination may lead to success but requires balance with wider coordination.

Engaged actors: Sports clubs, volunteer organisations, hobby groups, religious communities, arts/culture collectives, youth groups

During everyday conditions: Groups that are historically or culturally rooted in their communities may have a key role to play in ensuring that local priorities are considered in resilience-related planning, even if such groups have no direct connection to traditional actors within the fields of societal security, resilience, or preparedness. Their involvement may help create bottom-up, organic engagement. Fostering more equal dialogue between national authorities and local actors on a co-creative basis already during normal conditions (for example, by co-creating guidelines) can improve messaging and make local actors aware of their potential capabilities during a crisis.

During a crisis: Local groups possess their own tools which can help translate messages from authorities and adapt them to the local experience by asking the question: "what does this advice mean in our situation?" During a crisis, local groups already active in their communities may serve as a natural platform for people to organise, e.g., neighbourhood help, and monitor the possible gaps between available help and vulnerable groups.

During recovery: Work within local groups can support the long road to recovery by giving a voice to all needs and experiences in the community while providing spaces to discuss issues and experiences that may fall in the margins of official resilience policies.

Everyday resilience in action

Work towards genuinely inclusive resilience activities and messaging



Genuine connection is essential for building trust.

Engaged actors: Minority group advocates and leaders, the general public.

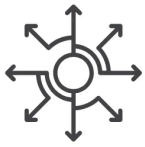
During everyday conditions: While crises and trust-building activities have the power to bring people closer together, uncertain times can also result in more insular and exclusive communities. To avoid this, it is important to pay attention to those who may be missing from resilience-related events or information sharing related to preparedness training and distribution of official guidelines during non-crisis times. Some individuals such as immigrants, young people, people with disabilities, and marginalised groups may, for various reasons, be underrepresented in formal resilience-related work Examining how to enter into a genuine dialogue with these groups can lead the way towards building trust and ensuring that resilience work is meaningful for all.

During a crisis: Continue inclusive actions by ensuring , that official instructions reach all households and match their lived experiences, with consideration towards those who may have been unable to prepare for crisis to the same degree as others.

During recovery: In the long run, more inclusive resilience work may pave the way towards a society that not only "bounces back" to the pre-crisis state but builds a more robust society by transforming previous vulnerabilities.

Everyday resilience in action

Expand the scope of resilience work beyond the state of a crisis



Resilience becomes a burden if it loses its dimension of recovery.

Engaged actors: Art educators and cultural organisers, artists, teachers

During everyday conditions: Resilience as an expectation can become burdensome for a community if they feel like their other experiences and needs go unheard, especially in a situation where the community faces long-term stress. Art, culture, and storytelling are possible ways to amplify local voices and let people express themselves in their own words. This is a way to mitigate resilience-fatigue by expanding messaging beyond singular crisis events.

During a crisis: Art and play can make crisis-related advice feel less daunting (especially for younger residents) and can enable people to play an active part. Those impacted by crises need places and platforms to express and discuss a range of emotions, from grief and anger to frustration and even joy.

During recovery: Crisis-state can take years to lift. Even during crisis, space and time dedicated to recovery, rest, and joy can help ease burdens and motivate communities to persist.

Everyday resilience in action

Use national bodies and platforms to coordinate resilience-related work across regions, municipalities, and sectors



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

Engaged actors: All national, regional, and municipal level politicians, policymakers, and authorities involved in resilience work and planning.

During everyday conditions: As several associations, organisations, municipal actors, and volunteers have taken up tasks related to psychological resilience, they may conduct parallel work. As the project results indicate that both human and budgetary resources for this type of work are often limited, an umbrella organisation or a national office coordinating activities, building bridges, and establishing collaboration venues could work towards comprehensive basic resilience while avoiding overlapping activities.

During a crisis: A strong central hub could facilitate crisis management by passing on information across sectors and levels of government related to crisis management capabilities and capacities in a certain region. They could also divide responsibilities more effectively.

During recovery: Create an overview of what worked well during the crisis time and what parts of the all-of-society resilience need restructuring.

Everyday resilience in action

Strengthen Nordic dialogue on resilience to continue learning from each other



Nordic countries use different concepts but maintain similar approaches.

Engaged actors: National authorities and cross-border organisations.

During everyday conditions: In addition to consulting each other during different crises, Nordic countries could learn more from each other regarding how they interpret resilience-related priorities and which kinds of actions and aims fall under their strategies. As trust is widely acknowledged as the "Nordic gold" (Andreassen, 2017), it is worthwhile to continue examining how to identify, measure, and support it more closely. Engaging in difficult discussions can be the first step: what is the state of social trust in the Nordics? How has it weathered under different challenging conditions?

During a crisis: Keeping cross-governance, cross-sectoral, and cross-border information flows open to discuss not only immediate actions taken but also how more implicit cooperation (such as the actionable points listed above) is utilised in different contexts may work towards maintaining the overall crisis-management capacities.

During recovery: Learn from the examples of neighbouring countries and seek examples of resilience-related work to pave the way towards transformative developments.

References

Andreassen, U. (2017). *Trust—the Nordic Gold*. Nordic Council of Ministers Analysis Report. http://dx.doi.org/10.6027/ANP2017-737

Bourbeau, P. (2013). Resiliencism: Premises and promises in securitisation research. resilience. *International policies, practices and discourses, 1*(1), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2013.765738

Finnish Government. (2025). *Security strategy for society. Government resolution*. Security Committee, Ministry of Defence. https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-817-8

Giacometti, A. & Teräs, J. (2019). Regional Economic and Social Resilience. Nordregio Report 2019:2. https://doi.org/10.30689/R2019:2.1403-2503

Hyvönen, A-E. & Juntunen, T. (2021). From 'spiritual defence' to robust resilience in the Finnish comprehensive security model. In S. Larsson & M. Rhinard (Eds.) *Nordic societal security: Convergence and divergence* (pp. 154-178). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003045533

Mäenpää, P., Faehnle, M., Grönlund, H., Pitkänen, K., Alanko, L., Sarkia, K., & Kuosmanen, S. (2025). *Reaktionopeutta, paikallistietoa ja huolenpitoa: Paikallinen kansalaistoiminta vahvistaa yhteiskunnan pitkäjänteistä resilienssiä ja kriisivalmiutta* [Speed of response, local knowledge and care: Local civic engagement strengthens society's longterm resilience and crisis preparedness]. Valtioneuvoston selvitys- ja tutkimustoiminnan julkaisusarja 2025:2. https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/items/b120f04d-b6a6-4197-ba80 8ff80b798e2

Nordregio Videos. (2026, October 1). *What makes communities resilient? Insights from Nordic regions* [video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFH55YOuxRE

Rohrer, L., Salonen, H., Guðmundsdóttir, H. Kačkus Tybjerg, J., Thomson Ek, H., & Tomren, L. (2026). *Shaping values, building trust: Psychological resilience in Nordic communities.* Nordregio Report 2026:3. http://doi.org/10.6027/R2026:3.1403-2503

Salonen, H. & Rohrer, L. (2026). *Building psychological resilience in the Nordic Region: Insights from serious gaming.* Nordregio Working Paper 2026:2. http://doi.org/10.6027/WP2026.2.1403-2511

Selle, P. & Wollebæk, D. (2015). The complex relationship between civil society and trust. *Italian Sociological Review, 5*(3), 273-289. https://doi.org/10.13136/isr.v5i3.110

About this publication

How to support invisible infrastructure: Policy recommendations on psychological resilience

Hilma Salonen & Lisa Rohrer

Nordregio policy brief 2026:4
ISSN: 2001-3876
DOI: http://doi.org/10.6027/PB2026:4.2001-3876

© Nordregio 2026

Layout: Miia Itänen, Nordregio
Cover Photo: Axel Josefsson/Unsplash.com
Photos: Joakim Hankasalo/Unsplash.com, Tapio Haaja/Unsplash.com, Jaakko Kemppainen/Unsplash.com

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