

Communities getting ready for crises building local resilience through LEADER networks in rural Sweden

SUMMARY

In rural Småland, Sweden, LEADER networks are enhancing local crisis preparedness by actively involving villages, municipalities, emergency services and civil society actors in participatory planning and practical exercises. Villages take part in workshops, local risk mapping, hands-on training and educational activities. Each village develops tailored preparedness plans, identifies resources, assigns roles and establishes communication channels, creating a robust framework for local response.



© Leader Västra Småland, Leader Linné Småland



CONTEXT

Historically, there has been little need for structured crisis preparedness, both locally within the regions of Jönköping and Kronoberg, and across western Europe. In these rural areas of southern Sweden, much responsibility for everyday organisation falls on residents and villages themselves, while municipalities focus primarily on schools and care for the elderly. As a result, there is a notable lack of planning and organisation around crises, which this project aims to address through its activities.



OBJECTIVES

- > Strengthen the capacity of rural communities to prepare for and respond to emergencies and crises;
- > Engage villages, civil society, municipalities and emergency services in participatory planning and risk assessment;
- > Develop tailored local preparedness plans that map resources, define roles and establish communication channels;
- > Increase practical knowledge and skills related to crisis management through workshops, exercises and educational activities;
- > Foster trust, collaboration and social cohesion within and between rural communities;
- > Promote long-term sustainability and continuity of preparedness activities through follow-up support, networking and micro-funding mechanisms.

Themes: Energy, climate, nature and environment, soil health, land use

Country: Sweden

Organisations:

- > Leader Västra Småland, Local Action Group
- > Leader Linné Småland, Local Action Group

Start & end date: 06/2025 - 03/2028

Budget: EUR 269 341

Funding sources: European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development, EU Rural Development Programme 2023-2027 – LEADER measure

Website: www.leadervastrasmaland.se
www.leaderlinnesmaland.se

Contact:

Sofia Skörde, Leader West Smaland, +46 370 331030, sofia@leadervastrasmaland.se

Åsa Westström, Leader Linné Smaland, asa@leaderlinne.se



ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The project uses a structured, participatory approach. Key actors include the Leader Linné Småland office (coordination and facilitation), municipal authorities, local rescue services, the association Coompanion (which provides support for civil society engagement) and non-profit organisations working in civil preparedness. The primary beneficiaries are village residents, including families, farmers, older adults and voluntary organisations, while the wider community benefits from strengthened local networks, preparedness capacity and social cohesion.

Work begins with meetings to inform villagers about civil preparedness, raise awareness and generate interest. These are run by the Leader office together with municipal rescue services and relevant professionals. Following this, the Leader office and Coompanion support each village in developing their preparedness plans through 2-3 workshops per village, including guidance on risk mapping, identifying resources and assigning roles. Parallel activities focus on food security and cultural continuity, including educational activities, study visits and participatory exercises open to all interested parties.

A final networking meeting and practical activities on civil preparedness bring together all participants to share experiences and lessons learnt. This structured approach builds local capacity, strengthens cross-sector collaboration and fosters long-term community resilience by combining hands-on training, participatory planning and inclusive engagement of rural residents in emergency preparedness.



RESULTS

The project has strengthened relationships and networks within villages, as well as between villages and municipal authorities, fostering greater collaboration and trust. Residents report increased knowledge and confidence in their ability to respond to both minor and major crises. Practical outcomes include improved awareness of local resources, identification of gaps, and the ability to plan for specific emergency situations. These results enhance the overall capacity of communities to act effectively during crises, while promoting long-term social cohesion and resilience across the region.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

Many people initially focused on personal or household-level preparedness. The project has showed that dedicated facilitation is needed to shift the perspective towards community-based preparedness. Structured group methods, practical exercises and clear examples help widen this understanding.

Participating villages started from very different levels of organisation. Some had active associations and existing crisis groups, while others had no structures at all. This made it essential to customise the process and begin with interviews or a situational analysis to understand each village's needs. A one-size-fits-all approach would not have worked.

The project has demonstrated the importance of physical presence. In-person workshops, field visits and hands-on activities are critical for building trust, fostering dialogue and identifying local resources. Digital tools cannot replace the personal connections needed for effective mobilisation.

The topic of preparedness was unexpectedly inclusive, attracting a wide mix of participants from families and farmers to older residents and voluntary organisations. This strengthened social cohesion and broadened the local support base.

The project has also showed that cross-sector collaboration is essential. Working jointly with municipalities, rescue services, civil defence and local NGOs created a more complete understanding of risks and strengthened the villages' capacity to act.

Finally, it is important to ensure continuity. A final networking day and the project's micro-funding mechanism enable long-term engagement. Several villages have continued developing their plans or launched new preparedness activities, proving that the model is both transferable and sustainable.



Funded by
the European Union



info@rural-pact.eu



www.ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/index_en