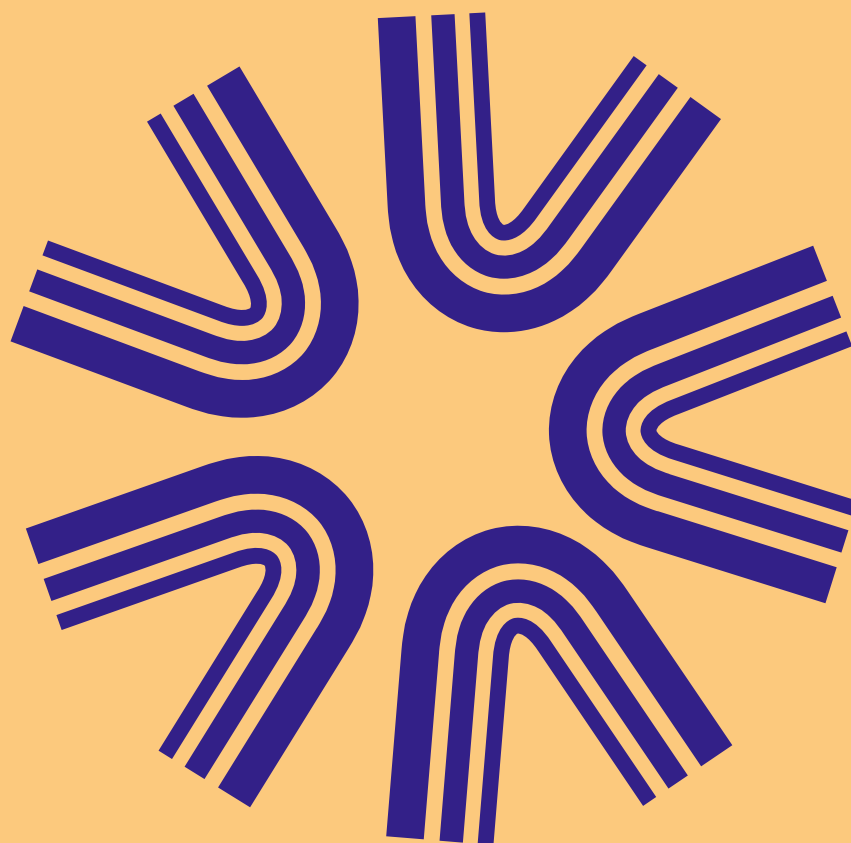


OPINION PAPER

Building community resilience in Latvia



Context

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has affected the need to also review Latvia's resilience to military crisis situations. Similarly, weather-related crises also make it necessary to evaluate how prepared society is for them.

Already in 2013, the association “Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation” (hereinafter – *LAPAS*) created [a manual for work with the concept of human security in communities](#), and integrated it into global education and development cooperation projects. Human security is “freedom from fear” and “freedom from want”. A person cannot grow being anxious about him/herself and his/her future. A person cannot grow if he/she is forced to live in such poverty that cannot meet his/her basic needs. Therefore, if we want to live a valuable life, it is very useful for us to have the skills and willingness to improve our safety (and the safety of others).

Although the word “resilience” is often used these days, the context and process are also important, so there are no easy answers. The concept of community resilience includes both information literacy/media literacy, as well as active action based on cooperation skills, justice and responsibility values. Community resilience is formed as a permanent practice, including by preventing the causes of conflicts through global education. The formation of community resilience will differ in each community.

In the context of crises, one of the elements of resilience is preparedness for civil crises, or civil protection. *LAPAS* implements practical activities – training for role-playing scenarios, capacity building for specific aspects such as personal safety and work with sensitive groups. Besides, specific projects in repressive countries and cooperation in research, development of the methodological framework have been implemented. For the implementation of community resilience, *LAPAS* cooperates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of the Interior, the State Fire and Rescue Service, the National Armed Forces, the National Guard, project “School2030”, Vidzeme University of Applied Sciences and international partners.

This document is a summary of the discussions and consultation processes organised by *LAPAS* to further discuss the community resilience processes with related parties.

This document does not touch on the topics of international humanitarian aid and development cooperation (including restoration and reconstruction), as separate *LAPAS* opinion papers and reports are devoted to them.

Situation and challenges

From a systemic perspective, it is possible to identify different types of crises – environmental (earthquakes, floods, typhoons and others), economic (banking crises, income inequality and others), social (violations of rights, targeting of ethnic groups, etc.). Of course, they are mutually related and can derive from each other.

Crises are examined not only from the point of view of causes and their prevention, but also from the perspective of multiple impacts, such as migration, food security and health challenges.

These are all complex and interrelated and dependent issues, so the cooperation of all parties is important in order to prevent both the causes and consequences of crises as accurately and comprehensively as possible.

Resilience can be viewed at different levels – the national level, regional level, community level, organisational level and individual level.

If plans, projects and resources for building resilience are available at the national, regional and organisational levels, informal communities that are related to a certain geographical location often have no legal status. Exceptions are possible – neighbourhood associations, management associations and local development associations; however, the activity of communities in Latvia is mostly informal.

At the same time, communities possess diverse resources, know local resources in crisis situations, and are first responders in helping each other. Communities create local safety nets, information flow channels and other mechanisms as per need. Including, when going to help other, for example, neighbouring communities in crises.

The informal nature of communities is also the biggest challenge to their ability to engage in civil defence processes, to attract project resources to build their own resilience.

Necessity and opportunities

LAPAS activities have identified that most crisis situations will have similar effects affecting local communities, therefore *LAPAS* developed mock crisis scenarios when communities respond to four possibly typical functions:

- establishment of accommodation;
- movement of people;
- provision of goods and products;
- safety and order.

These functions would support civil protection processes at the local level, therefore *LAPAS* plans to continue these local scenario simulations to strengthen community awareness and preparedness.

In general, the sector of civil society organisations (hereinafter – CSOs) provides and can further develop the formation of community resilience in the following aspects:

- public education – both by preventively investing in the development of democracy and human rights, and also regarding crisis responses and preparedness;
- integration of society – increasing trust, dialogue circles, reducing the causes of conflicts, polarisation and radicalisation;
- cross-sectoral cooperation – helping to build corporate social responsibility by getting involved in decision-making processes and civil protection commissions in regions;
- cognitive resilience – reducing misinformation, promoting critical thinking, creating safe and reliable sources and channels of information;

Cross-sectoral team tabletop game for community action in crisis scenarios 15.06.2023. Discussions organised by LAPAS “Rural territories: are they ready for the crisis?” within the framework of the Parliament of Latvian Rural Communities in Ērgļi. Photo from LAPAS archive



- comprehensive national defence – giving employees the opportunity to participate in the National Guard, cooperating with security organisations, strengthening the meaningful role of civilians in military crises;
- early warning – reporting to the State Security Service, warning institutions and society, creation of operational reporting channels.

CSOs play an especially important role in building the resilience of the information space, mitigating the threats of hybrid warfare such as manipulation of opinions, weakening of trust, discrediting of opinion leaders, slandering of journalists and increasing general tension.

Associations have material resources and wide communication networks in various groups of society in order to strengthen the culture of preparedness in the country.

In military crisis situations, outside of the above-mentioned crisis response scenarios, for which tabletop games are organised by *LAPAS*, CSOs can make a significant contribution:

- informing the public with fast and reliable information and applying it to different target groups;
- ensuring the continuity of the state by providing various services in which the state is no longer functional, including because it has diverted resources to military operations;
- coordination and attraction of resources, in cooperation with the Civil Defence Commissions, as well as creating cash circulation, distributing resources and quickly responding where it is most needed;
- support of vulnerable groups – ethical and respectful assistance, including physical protection, creation of local safety networks, and reduction of the effect of price increases;
- documenting war crimes;
- resistance support – support to the military for civil defence of the country, delaying and deceiving the enemy, as well as supply of resources to the front line.

In order to build the resilience of society, it is necessary to change the way of thinking – from competition and criticism to cooperation. It is important to understand that resilience is formed from practice on a daily basis. Training in civic duty, responsibility and real support actions increases the readiness of society. Therefore, it is critically important to recognise the contribution of CSOs and provide opportunities as well as support for motivated and mission-driven people, including sustainable funding for these activities.

Cross-sectoral cooperation rather than a narrow division of responsibilities, comprehensive approaches, reduction of “waiting”, and the creation of cooperation structures are critically important components.

Action proposals for *LAPAS* work for the year 2024

1. Information flows/cooperation

- to continue the work in the advisory council of the Ministry of the Interior and cooperation with security institutions;
- together with other CSOs, create a cooperation network on the topic of community resilience.

2. Training

- to continue cross-sectoral tabletop games for community action in crisis scenarios;
- to build the transfer of international experience for crisis response through the field of humanitarian aid.

3. Resource attraction/capacity

- together with member organisations, to attract resources for further work in building the resilience of communities;
- to identify resources of member organisations for crisis response.

4. Informing society

- in cooperation with member organisations, to prepare and distribute good practice examples of how CSOs are already involved in building community resilience;
- to actively engage in the formation of cognitive resilience.

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The association “Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation” is a network of national-level civil society organisations founded in 2004, which unites 39 organisations and operates in the field of sustainable and fair development, development cooperation, global education, community resilience and humanitarian aid.

More detailed information www.lapas.lv

