

From Siren to Shelter?

Civil Defence in Riga

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Riga, December 2025

From Siren to Shelter?
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Riga. LaSER Think Tank. 2025.

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Thanks to Tīna Birģele, Maija Tiva Hilla, Rihards Burbickis
and Nathaniel Fagelson for research assistance.

ISBN 978-9934-9374-0-8

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FOREWORD



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Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the new U.S. presidential administration have fundamentally changed the security environment in Europe. These events prompted LaSER Think Tank to expand our research focus to include defence and civil security issues.

Recent events in Ukraine have revealed that civil defence is not just an abstract issue addressed by sectoral professionals or security policy researchers but is becoming something that impacts every citizen in Latvia and the broader Baltic region.

As the largest metropolitan region in the Baltic States, the resilience of the city of Riga to various types of threats – from military risks to natural and technogenic disasters – is not self-evident. It needs to be developed and designed in a targeted way, based on data, community engagement and public awareness.

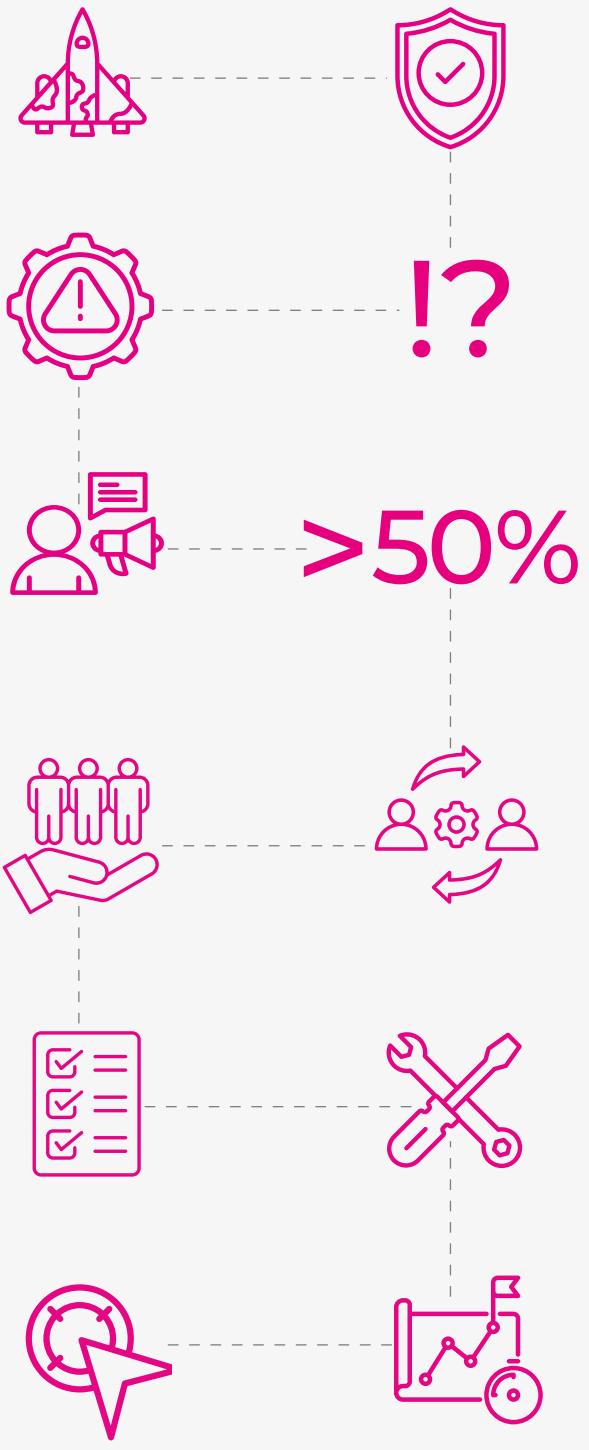
This study was undertaken at a time when the readiness of Latvia's society to act in a crisis situation was critically questioned. Studies show that many Riga residents do not

know the location of their nearest shelter or how to act in the event of an alarm siren. Addressing these issues is a common task for the national institutions, local governments, communities, households and each individual citizen.

LaSER's scenario-based crisis simulation analyses the preparedness of Latvia's residents and models how individuals act in unpredictable conditions. This approach provides a unique insight into the factors that contribute to, or hinder, the ability to respond adequately in times of crisis and highlights areas for policymakers to focus on, including communication, infrastructure, individual preparedness and community cohesion.

This report is a call to action and awareness that crisis preparedness should not be understood as an expression of fear or panic – but as a responsible, sensible and necessary practice. We hope that this research will provide both a deeper understanding of the challenges of civil protection in Riga and inspire policymakers to build a stronger and more resilient community.

SUMMARY



Lessons from Ukraine?

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine continues for the fourth year. However, civil defence efforts across European countries remain insufficient.

Society is not prepared for crises

Data shows critically low levels of preparedness among Latvia's population. The crisis simulation demonstrates that even the relatively more active and better-informed part of society doesn't know how to act in a crisis.

Common Responsibility

Over half of Riga residents expect the state to provide more detailed information on what to do in a crisis. Only 3% of the national population has signed up for alerts and warnings from emergency services or authorities – the lowest indicator in the European Union.

Communities and Social Capital

Communities serve as a bridge between the state and the individual and can contribute to crisis preparedness. However, this potential remains untapped. The importance of communities increases substantially in crisis situations.

Diversity of Hazards

A crisis-ready and resilient society is a key element of deterrence and defence. Individual preparedness is also a critical requirement for overcoming natural or anthropogenic disasters.

Scenario-Based Crisis Simulation

The recommendations for enhancing Riga's civil defence system are grounded in the findings of the scenario-based crisis simulation described in this report.

INTRODUCTION

What would you do if a large-scale crisis broke out in your city right now? Where would you go? Who would you call? Would you be able to find the nearest shelter without relying on online tools? In an emergency, would you be able to help your fellow citizens, or risk becoming an additional burden for the already strained state and municipal services?

The crisis simulation conducted by the LaSER Think Tank reveals that even the most informed and active Riga residents cannot answer these questions with confidence. Meanwhile, less active individuals rarely consider them at all.

Civil defence issues are becoming increasingly important following Ukraine's experience in resisting Russia's war of aggression. Effective institutions, prepared citizens, tried and tested crisis management plans, as well as adequate infrastructure where citizens can protect themselves in case of danger, are just some of the pressing issues on the agenda of European countries.

Capitals are national political, economic, and decision-making centres, which is why they can become attractive targets for actors

seeking to undermine a country's capacity to resist aggression.¹ As a result, sustainable development without strong civil defence systems in capital cities is unthinkable in today's tense security environment.

This report is structured in three parts. The first section examines the growing importance of civil defence in today's security environment and presents data on individual preparedness levels, analysed both within Latvia and in a broader regional context. The second part identifies key challenges facing civil defence development and reviews the main strategies and solutions implemented in five regional capitals: Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, Helsinki, and Kyiv.

The third part analyses the results of the scenario-based crisis simulation, which was conducted for this study. The crisis simulation scenario was developed in cooperation with the Riga City Council Civil Protection and Operational Information Department, and 185 participants took part in it.

Finally, the report presents three key recommendations for improving Riga's civil defence system.

¹ Grum, B. & Kobal Grum, D. 2023. Urban resilience and sustainability in the perspective of global consequences of COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine: A systematic review. *Sustainability*, 15(2), 1459. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15021459>

1. WHY DOES CIVIL DEFENCE MATTER?

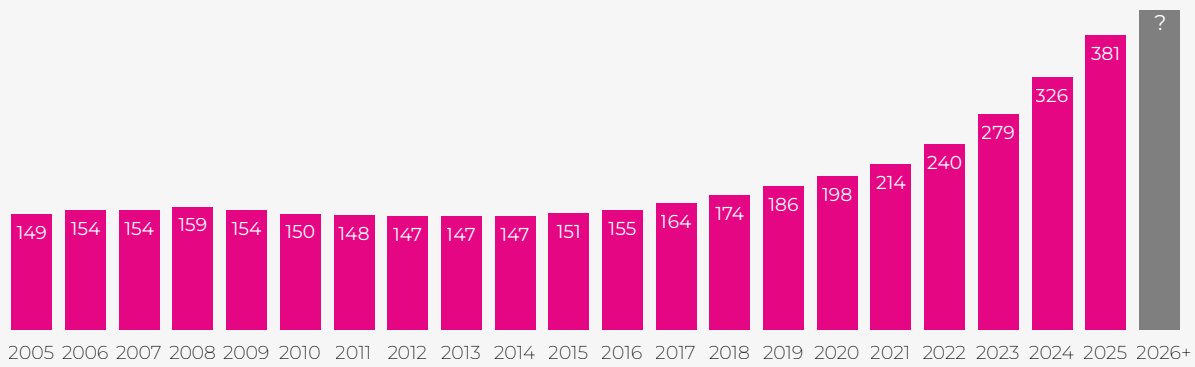
International Context

Ukraine is now in the fourth year of defending itself against Russia's unjustified full-scale war of aggression, which has fundamentally shaken Europe's security landscape. To be

able to effectively defend their territory and citizens, EU Member States are rapidly increasing their defence and security spending.

Figure 1
Defence expenditure of the EU member states in current prices 2005-2025 (billion EUR)

Source: European Defence Agency

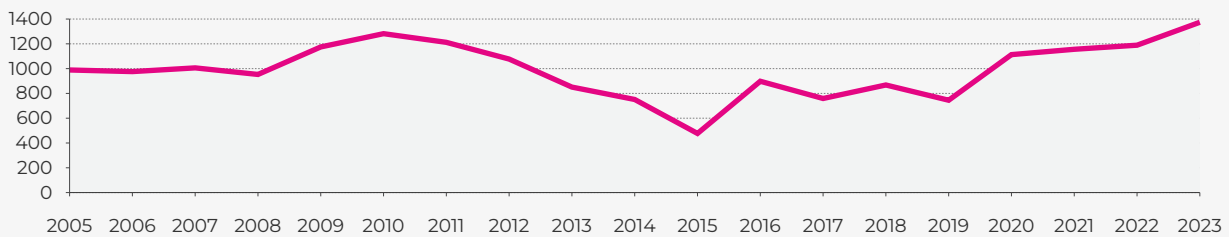


Although data on EU member states' civil defence expenditures are difficult to compare due to differences in methodology,² the total civil defence expenditure in the EU

has increased almost threefold between 2015 and 2023, and this trend is expected to continue.

Figure 2
General government expenditure on civil defence in the EU member states in current prices 2005-2023 (million EUR)

Note: Data for 2023 is an estimate. Data was published in March 2025.
Source: Eurostat



² For example, the expenditure to maintain and develop emergency alarm sirens can be classified as civil defence expenditure (government function classification or COFOG group 02.20), however, if alarm siren system maintenance is integrated into the functions of the fire and rescue services, these expenditures are included in COFOG group 03.20 "Fire Protection Services".

Russia's war against Ukraine extends far beyond conventional clashes between the armed forces of two states. Russia employs a total approach to achieve its military objectives,³ and attacks are directed against both combatants and peaceful civilians. Learning from Ukraine's experience, the Niinistö report published by the European Commission in 2024 calls for **empowering citizens as the backbone of societal resilience and preparedness**.⁴

Civil defence has also become an increasingly prominent issue on NATO's agenda. Although resilience and preparedness are embedded in Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty, and **strong civil defence systems are recognized as a cornerstone of deterrence and defence**,⁵ investments in civil defence have historically not been included in national defence expenditure calculations.

At the 2025 NATO summit in The Hague, Allied heads of state and government decided to increase defence and security spending to 5% of GDP by 2035, of which 3.5% will be direct military spending and 1.5% will be spent on security in a broader sense, inclu-

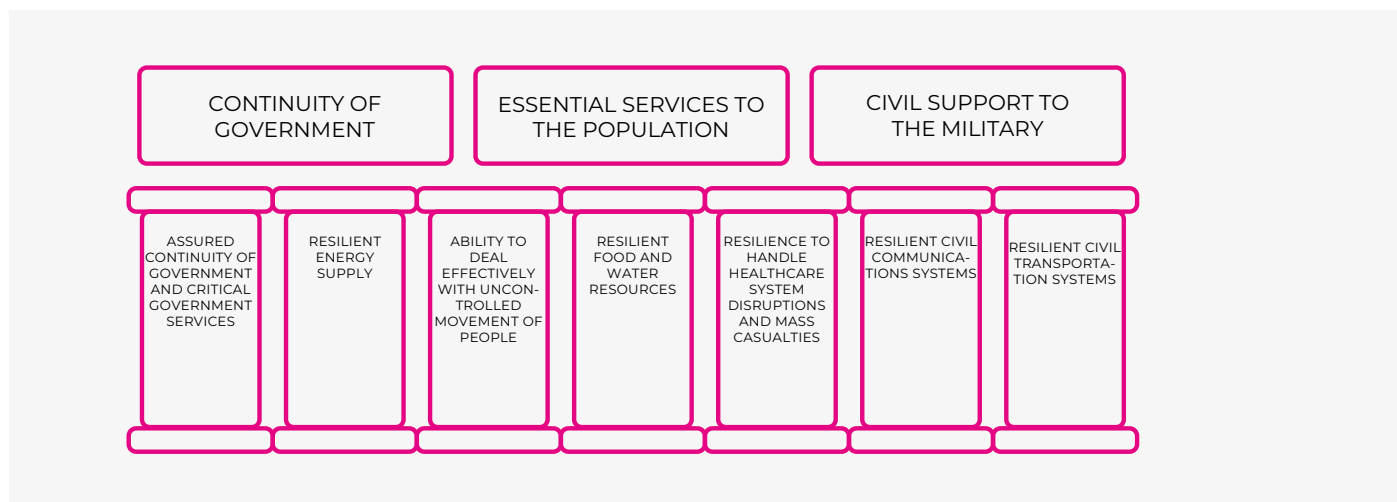
ding infrastructure, the defence industry, and civil defence.

After the Cold War, civil defence issues were no longer included in NATO planning processes. However, since 2016, strengthening resilience has been defined as a national responsibility and a collective commitment.⁶ Since 2022, the resilience planning and review cycle is integrated into NATO's Defence Planning Process (NDPP), which includes specific tasks for member states in the areas of civil defence and societal resilience.⁷

To support the development of civil defence systems in member states, NATO has defined three core functions of civil preparedness, as well as seven baseline requirements for national resilience, which are also integrated into Latvia's regulatory framework for the preparation of civil defence plans.⁸ The preparedness functions and resilience requirements defined by NATO are primarily focused on ensuring that the **civil defence complements and supports the military component of national defence**.

Figure 3
NATO's three core functions of civil preparedness and seven baseline requirements for national resilience

Source: NATO



³ Murphy, M. 2016. Understanding Russia's Concept for Total War in Europe. <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/understanding-russias-concept-total-war-europe>
⁴ Niinistö, S. 2024. Safer Together: Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness. https://commission.europa.eu/document/5bb2881f-9e29-42f2-8b77-8739b19d047c_en
⁵ NATO. 2024. Resilience, civil preparedness and Article 3. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm
⁶ NATO. 2021. Strengthened Resilience Commitment. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_185340.htm
⁷ Quis, H., Schütz, T. 2025. What's in a Number? Making NATO's 1.5% Spending Goal Work for European Resilience. <https://bst-europe.eu/security-policy/whats-in-a-number-making-natos-1-5-spending-goal-work-for-european-resilience/>
⁸ Helmane, I. 2025. Jābūt skaidram konceptam, kā ikviens iedzīvotājs var piedāvāt izmantot savas zināšanas. <https://lvportals.lv/>

Ukraine's experience shows that **poorly developed civil defence mechanisms place an additional burden on the military administration during wartime**, as they are forced to organize the evacuation of the

population, plan the accommodation of displaced persons, and provide them with basic necessities, which can complicate the performance of direct military tasks.⁹

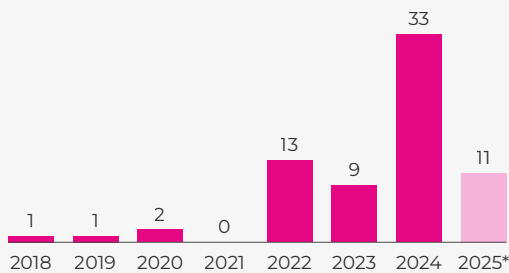
Latvia's perspective

The tense geopolitical situation can cause uncertainty and pessimism about the future among the population. Although most of Russia's conventional military resources have been directed to the war against

Ukraine, Western countries are increasingly facing Russian influence operations — hybrid activities, including acts of sabotage, damage to critical infrastructure and so on.¹⁰

Figure 4
Frequency of hybrid-warfare activity across Europe from January 2018 to June 2025

Note: Only those attacks on critical infrastructure for which a link to Russia has been proven are included. The data for 2025 covers only the first half of the year. Source: IISS

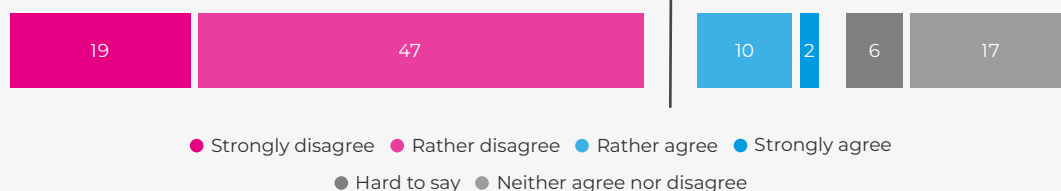


Such **hybrid-warfare activities help the aggressor sow panic and division in Western societies**, aiming to also reduce public support for further assistance to Ukraine. Russia's acts of aggression against Western countries are deliberately carried out within a grey zone. In other words, attacks are usually covert, allowing the aggressor to avoid responsibility for their actions, while the methods used to carry them out are becoming increasingly diverse and creative.¹¹

Successful resistance to Russia's aggressive activities in the region requires society to be prepared to overcome crises and unforeseen events, as well as to be able to adapt and continue to function in various types of emergency situations.

Figure 5
Public opinion on society's preparedness for emergencies in Latvia in 2024 (%)

Note: The question used in the survey was: "Considering the war in Ukraine, to what extent do you agree with the following statement about your local society/community (for example, the Russian-speaking community or any other community) in your place of permanent residence? Our society/community is prepared for emergency situations." Source: State Chancellery, Survey of Latvian residents (n = 2005)



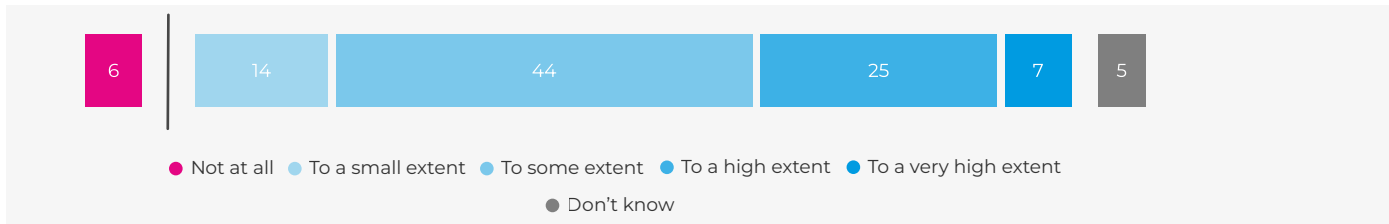
⁹Pomaza-Ponomarenko, A., Taraduda, D., Leonenko, N., Poroka, S., Sukhachov, M. 2024. Ensuring the Safety of Citizens in Times of War: Aspects of the Organization of Civil Defense. AD ALTA: Journal of Interdisciplinary Research. 14(1). <https://doi.org/10.33543/140139216220>

¹⁰ Constitution Protection Bureau. 2025. 2024 Annual Report. https://www.sab.gov.lv/files/uploads/2025/02/SAB-gada-parskats_2024_ENG.pdf

¹¹ Ålander, M., Oksanen, P. (Eds.) 2025. Russia's Hybrid War: The Northern Front. Stockholm Free World Forum (Frivärld) & Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Figure 6
Public opinion on Latvia as a safe place to live in June 2025 (%)

Note: The question used in the survey was “Do you feel that Latvia is a safe place to live?”
Source: Norstat Latvia, Survey of Latvian residents (n = 501)



Latvia's residents report insufficient preparedness for emergencies – only 11.9% agree with the statement that society is prepared for emergencies.¹² At the same time, one-third of residents consider Latvia to be a safe place to live.

The security situation in the region, compounded by insufficient public preparedness for crises, has a negative impact on broader socioeconomic processes. For example, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Latvia saw a decline in both business and consumer confidence. Meanwhile, birth rates continued to decline, exacerbating long-term demographic challenges. Low birth rates in Europe are often linked to political, economic, and social uncertainty about the future.¹³

Figure 7
Confidence indicators in Latvia from September 2021 to September 2025 (seasonally adjusted data, balance %)

Note: Sector confidence indicators describe the overall situation in the sectors. The balance is calculated as the difference between the positive and negative responses of the surveyed entrepreneurs, expressed as a percentage. The consumer confidence indicator is determined by surveying Latvian residents.
Source: CSB

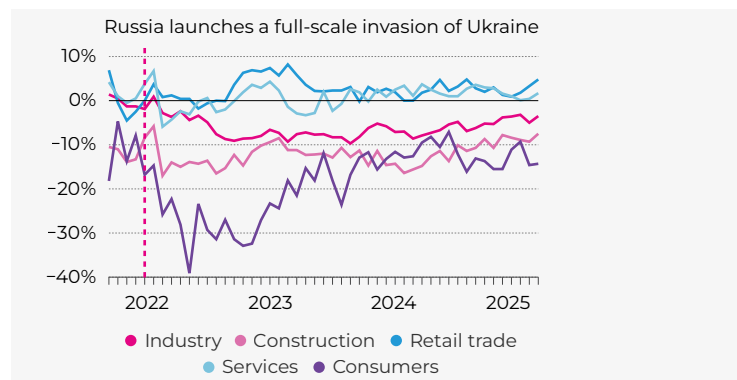
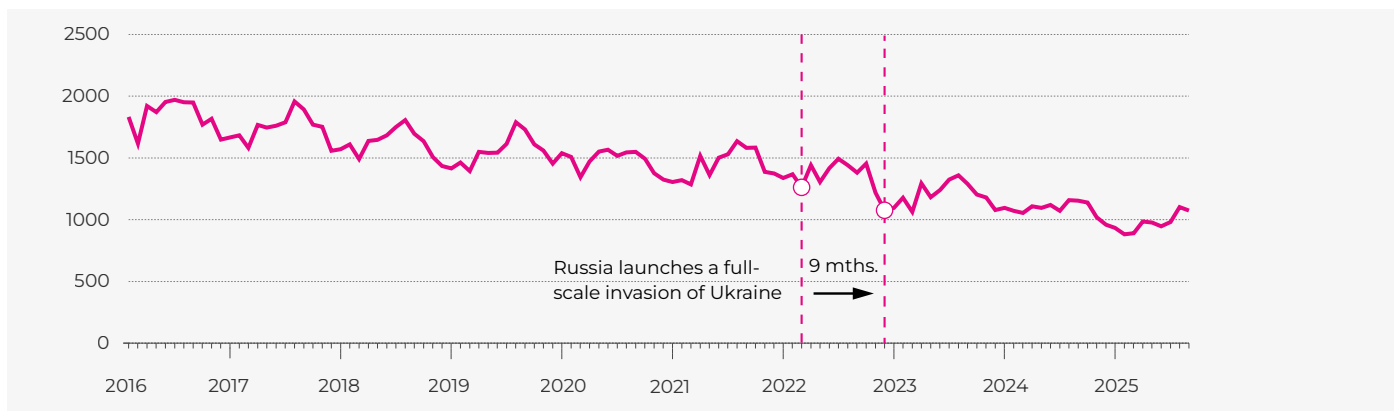


Figure 8
Number of live births in Latvia from January 2016 to August 2025

Source: CSB



¹² Valsts Kanceleja. 2025. Kvantitatīva Latvijas iedzīvotāju aptauja par Latvijas sabiedrības noturību Krievijas kara Ukrainā kontekstā. https://ppdb.mk.gov.lv/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Resilience_LV_24.pdf

¹³ Perelli-Harris, B., Gerber, T., Hilevych, Y. 2024. Uncertainty and fertility in Ukraine on the eve of Russia's full-scale invasion: The impact of armed conflict and economic crisis. European Journal of Population, 40(1), 28. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-024-09713-7>

Preparedness, Readiness, Resilience

When conceptualizing the various elements that contribute to the ability of residents to prepare for, endure, and overcome various types of crisis situations, three key concepts need to be systematically developed, improved, and expanded in their mutual interaction: preparedness, readiness (to act), and resilience.

In order to prepare for crises at the individual, community, and societal levels, the need to strengthen a culture of preparedness is often emphasized. Preparedness primarily focuses on identifying risks and potential emergencies, planning actions in a timely manner, and acquiring the necessary knowledge and skills to mitigate them.¹⁴ **Timely**

preparation lays the foundation for citizens to know how to act in a crisis.

It is important to highlight the distinction between preparedness and readiness, which are often used interchangeably, but are in fact two distinct concepts. While preparedness is primarily associated with timely planning and training before a crisis occurs, readiness is characterized by the ability to respond and act in a crisis situation.¹⁵ **Readiness is identified at the moment when an individual is willing and able to apply the knowledge and skills acquired as a result of preparation** in order to overcome an emergency situation.

Box 1

Preparedness and Readiness

The recent global Covid-19 pandemic tested the crisis preparedness of organizations around the world. One year before the pandemic, the U.S. government organized a large-scale crisis exercise, simulating a scenario in which a new strain of influenza spreads rapidly. The exercises involved dozens of federal and local agencies in 12 states, and the conclusions identified several problems in the management, financing, planning, and coordination of cooperation between organizations in crises of this kind.

The identified risks were not addressed in a timely manner, and a year later, when the Covid-19 virus spread rapidly around the world, the U.S. government's initial response to the crisis was unsuccessful. Although preparedness shortcomings were identified, the level of readiness was not sufficient to address them.¹⁶

This example also applies to the individual level, as timely risk identification may not be sufficient to achieve an optimal level of readiness. An essential component of readiness is a timely action to mitigate identified risks and preparedness shortfalls.

The third element – resilience – is usually defined as the **capacity to withstand and adapt to external and internal shocks while maintaining an adequate ability to function** and regain the capacity to function as soon as possible.¹⁷ It is important to view resilience

as an ability to adapt to a changing environment and transform factors that may limit the ability to adapt to future challenges.¹⁸ This means that resilience can be identified before, during and after a crisis.

¹⁴ Cooper, T. R. 2019. Creating a Culture of Preparedness. Delaware Journal of Public Health, 5(4), 8. <https://djph.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/djph-54-003.pdf>

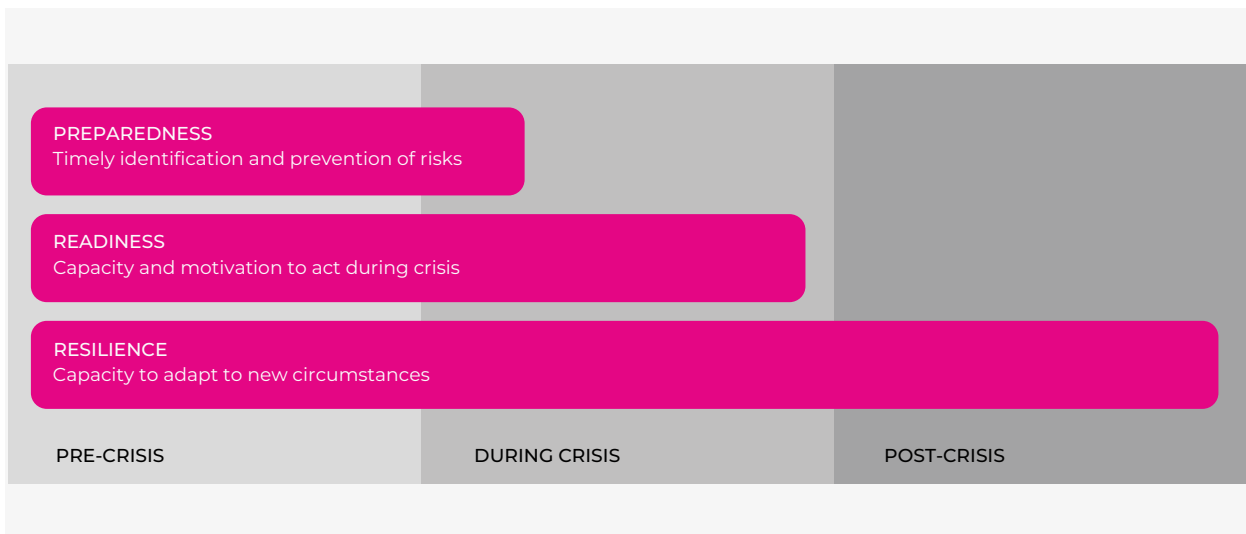
¹⁵ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). 2017. The Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction. "Preparedness". <https://www.undrr.org/terminology/preparedness>

¹⁶ Jin, Y., Coombs, W. T., Wang, Y., van der Meer, T. G., Shivers, B. N. 2024. "READINESS": A keystone concept beyond organizational crisis preparedness and resilience. Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management, 32(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12546>

¹⁷ Barnes, P. Bergin, A. 2020. Risk, Resilience & Crisis Preparedness. In Coyne, J., Jennings, P. (Eds.). After Covid-19: Australia and the world rebuild (Volume 1). <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/after-covid-19-australia-and-world-rebuild-volume-1/>

¹⁸ Meerow, S., Newell, J. P., & Stults, M. 2016. Defining urban resilience: A review. Landscape and Urban Planning, 147. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2015.11.011>

Figure 9
Preparedness, readiness, and resilience: Conceptual model



The interaction between these three elements is important for the development of urban civil defence systems. For example, insufficient knowledge, such as the location of the nearest shelter can negatively affect an individual's ability to cope with a crisis. At

the same time, a high level of readiness and resilience creates the conditions for even inadequately prepared residents to adapt to the situation and, if necessary, find out the location of the nearest shelter.

Responsibility of the State, Community or the Individual?

When planning the development of civil defence systems, it is essential to consider broader geopolitical trends. As the former Chairman of the NATO Military Committee points out, Russia uses and will continue to use all means at its disposal to achieve its aggressive foreign policy goals, so it is important for Western societies to realize that **security and resilience are the shared responsibility of all members of society**.¹⁹

As emphasized by the head of Finnish Rescue Services, individual preparedness is a useful skill in the current geopolitical situation, as it forms the basis of resilience. If citizens are able to take responsibility and act in crises, this relieves the burden on public services involved in overcoming threats and unable to provide immediate assistance to everyone in a crisis situation.²⁰ In a well-functioning civil defence system,

an **individual is one of the fundamental elements contributing to crisis management, rather than creating an additional burden for the state services**.

It should be noted that officials in Latvia also often emphasize the role of individual responsibility. For example, Riga City Council encourages residents to take on a more active role, like adapting their home base-ments to shelter requirements.²¹

Societal resilience is jointly shaped by formal structures (the state), informal networks (communities), and individuals. Crisis preparedness largely depends on mutual cooperation. While formal resilience is usually based on pre-established plans and formal resilience systems, emergent resilience can be identified in communities when people are able to adapt in emergency situations

¹⁹ Bauer, R., Russell, E. 2025. If You Want Peace, Prepare for War. A Blueprint for Deterrence. Nieuw Amsterdam.

²⁰ Finnish Government. 2024. New guide instructs people how to prepare for incidents and crises in Finland. <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1410869/new-guide-instructs-people-how-to-prepare-for-incidents-and-crisis-in-finland>

²¹ Riga.lv. 2025. Video "Civīlās aizsardzības semināri apkaimēs iedzīvotājiem - Centra punkts." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uKYddZVamU>

and overcome shocks through cooperation, even though such action is not formally planned.²²

Social capital, which is typically characterized by mutual trust (both between individuals and between social groups), cooperation, and joint action in achieving individual and community goals, plays a key role in promoting community resilience.²³ In civil defence systems, communities serve as a bridge between the state and the individual, helping to build a prepared and resilient society.

There are contradictory results between Latvia's residents' self-assessment of indi-

vidual responsibility in various areas of life and their willingness to take responsibility and strengthen individual and community security.

Although the majority (72%) of respondents believe that they are responsible for their own future, a similar proportion of society (74%) believes that the state should take greater responsibility for issues related to defence and public order. At the same time, the level of trust in state institutions remains low – between 2019 and 2025, public trust in the government fluctuates between 26% and 32%. However, trust in municipalities is higher and tends to increase (from 45% in 2019 to 62% in 2025).

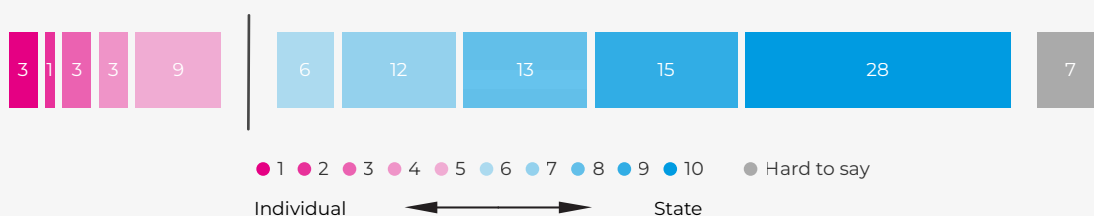
Figure 10
Public opinion on individual responsibility in Latvia in 2024 (%)

Note: The question used in the survey was “To what extent do you agree with the following statement? What I become in the future depends largely on me.”
Source: State Chancellery, Survey of Latvian residents (n = 2005)



Figure 11
Public opinion on individual and state responsibility for ensuring public order and military defence in Latvia in 2024 (%)

Note: The question used in the survey was “Which statement do you agree with more? Each individual should take responsibility for their own safety, or the state should assume greater responsibility and ensure public order and military defence.”
Source: LaSER, Survey of Latvian residents (n = 1005)

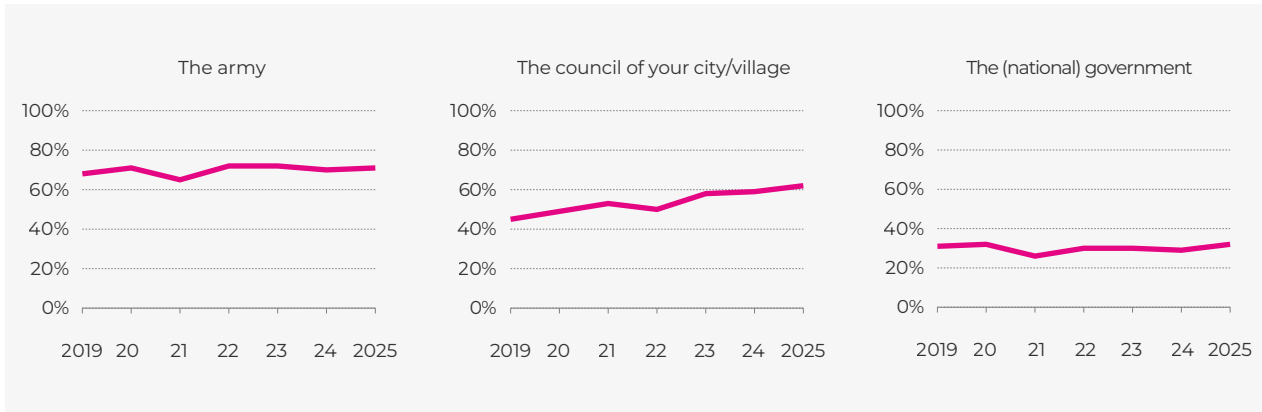


²²Soldak, M., Mezentsev, K., Batunova, E., Haase, A., & Haase, D. (2024). Emergent urban resilience in Ukraine: Adapting to polycrisis in times of war. *Ekonomichna ta Sotsialna Geografiya*, 92. <https://doi.org/10.17721/2413-7154/2024.92.6-13>

²³Meyer, M. A. 2017. Social Capital in Disaster Research. In Rodríguez, H., Donner, W. & Trainor, J. E (Eds.) *Handbook of Disaster Research*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-63254-4_14

Figure 12
Public trust in the government, local municipalities, and the National Armed Forces in Latvia 2019–2025 (%)

Note: The question used in the survey was "How much do you trust certain institutions?". The figure shows the percentage of respondents who answered that they "trust" or "rather trust" the respective institutions.
 Avots: Eurobarometer

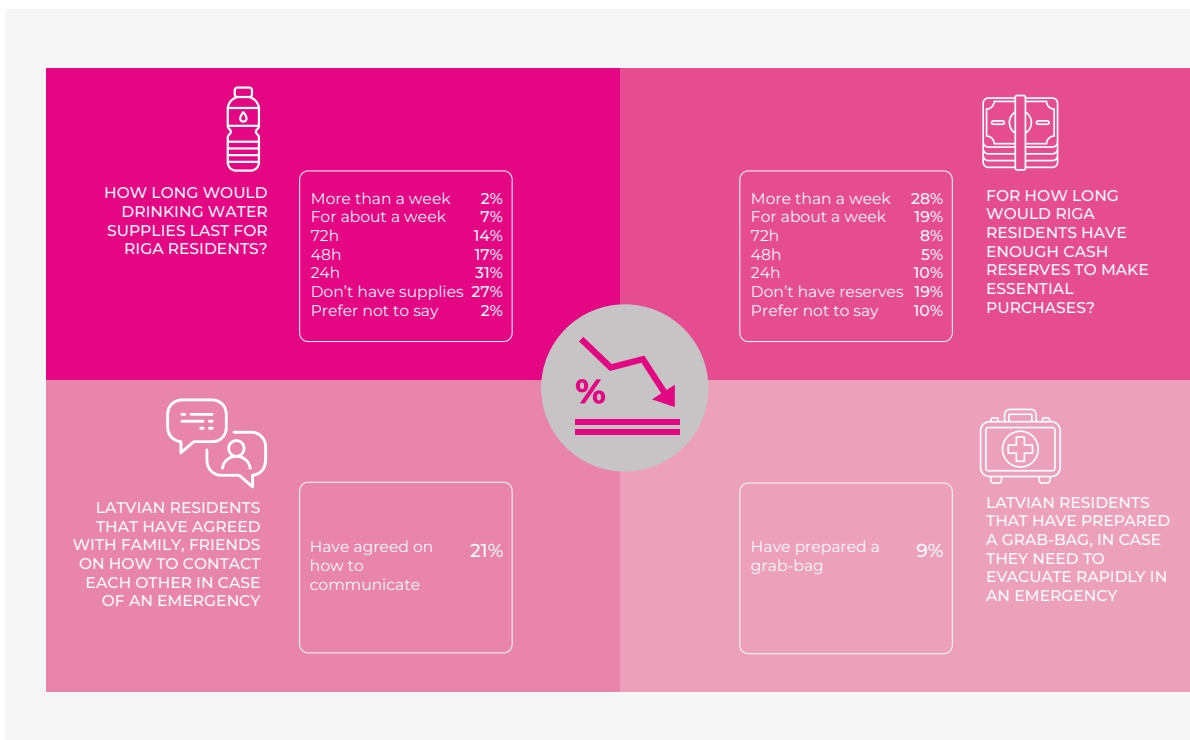


Data on actions that Riga residents have taken to prepare for crises (e.g., stockpiling drinking water or cash, prepared 72-hour emergency kit, and discussions of communication plans with relatives in the event

of telecommunication outages) confirms that, **despite recognising the importance of individual responsibility, residents remain passive and demonstrate low levels of initiative and individual leadership.**

Figure 13
Crisis preparedness of the residents in Riga and Latvia (drinking water, cash, communication among family members, emergency kit)

Sources: Birka, I., Kļaviņš, D. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14228217>, survey of Riga residents (n = 1004); Special Eurobarometer 547. 2024. <https://doi.org/10.2795/1333368>



The dissonance between public awareness of the importance of self-initiative and the low level of actual preparedness illustrates the need to more actively **encourage people to think about their role and responsibility in the civil defence system.**

The current situation shows that the public is neither sufficiently informed nor shows initiative to proactively seek needed information. More than half of Riga’s residents report wanting the government to play a more active role in informing them about what to do in a crisis situation – a relatively larger share of the population than in the other two Baltic capitals.

In a regional comparison, respondents in Latvia show lower levels of awareness about national or local government crisis management plans and have participated less frequently in crisis management training. It should be noted that in 2024, only 3% of respondents in Latvia had signed up to national or local government crisis or emergency notification systems, tied for the lowest result in the European Union with Slovakia.

Figure 14
Public opinion on the need for more active government communication in Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, and Helsinki in 2025 (%)

Note: Proportion of respondents who indicated that they expect more detailed information from the government on what to do in the event of a disaster or emergency.
Source: Birka, I., Kļaviņš, D. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14228217>, resident surveys (Riga n = 1004, Vilnius n = 1004, Tallinn = 1008, Helsinki n = 1000)

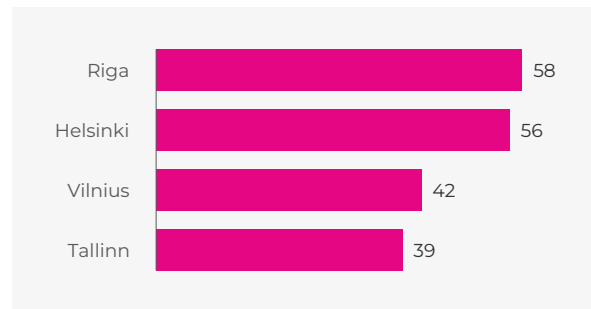
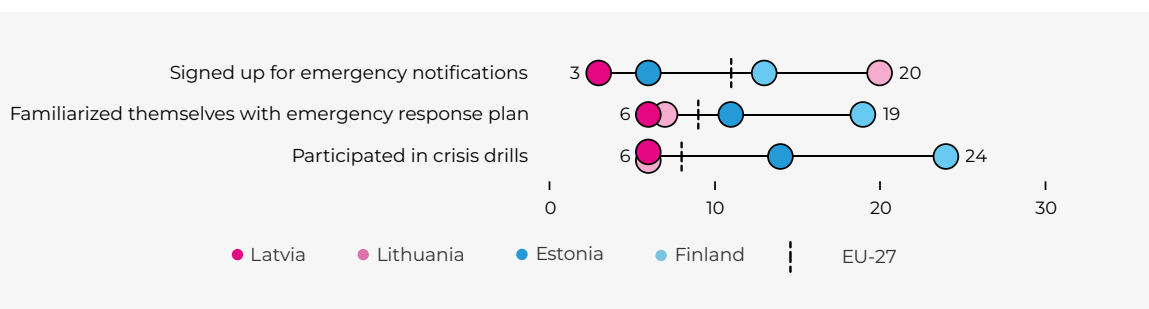


Figure 15
Crisis preparedness of the residents in Latvia and other EU countries (emergency plans, notifications, and drills)

Note: Proportion (%) of respondents who indicated that they have: (1) familiarised themselves with the emergency response plan of their city, region, or country; (2) signed up for national or municipal emergency notifications; (3) participated in drills on the required actions in a crisis situation.
Sources: Special Eurobarometer 547. 2024. <https://doi.org/10.2795/1333368>

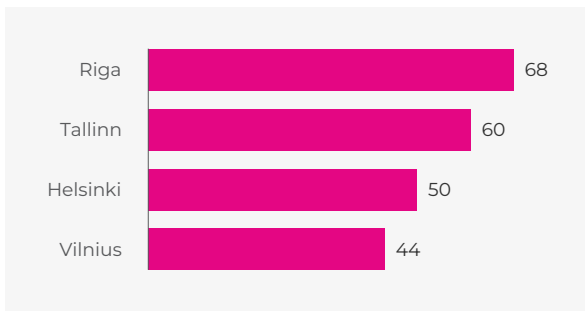


This **data illustrates a critically low level of public activity**, which negatively affects the ability of society and the state to overcome various types of threats. At the same time, compared to Estonia, Lithuania, and Finland,

a larger proportion of the population in Latvia believes that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to overcome various emergency situations.

Figure 16
Public opinion on preparedness for emergencies in Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, and Helsinki in 2025 (%)

Note: Respondents who agree with the statement 'I have the necessary knowledge and skills to respond effectively to a disaster/emergency.'
Sources: Birka, I., Kļaviņš, D. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14228217>, resident surveys (Riga n = 1004, Vilnius n = 1004, Tallinn = 1008, Helsinki n = 1000)



The government and municipalities must continue informing the public about how to prepare for and overcome crisis situations and encourage residents to take personal initiative to prepare for possible crises.

2. CIVIL DEFENCE OF CAPITALS IN THE BALTIC REGION

In response to the changing security landscape, civil defence systems are being reinforced across the Baltic region's capital cities. To develop evidence-based recommendations for strengthening Riga's civil defence system, this report examines the approaches and experiences of other regional capitals











prepared countries in the world.²⁴ The best practices, challenges, and solutions of the three Baltic capitals – Riga, Vilnius, and Tallinn – are examined. Finally, Kyiv's lessons will be identified, considering that its civil defence system is being reshaped and strengthened through four years of resistance to Russian aggression.

The approach of Helsinki is analysed as Finland is considered to be one of the best-

Table 1
Comparison of Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, Helsinki, and Kyiv

Note: In the Ukrainian state budget, 'National expenditures on security and public order' includes both civil functions (courts, prosecutor's office, police, etc.) and a portion of military expenditures, including spending on the National Guard.

Sources: Official statistical portals and municipality websites, Eurostat, Centre for Economic Strategy

Indicator	Riga	Vilnius	Tallinn	Helsinki	Kyiv
Territory (km ²)	 307 km ²	 401 km ²	 159 km ²	 217 km ²	 827 km ²
Population (2025)	 591 882	 607 667	 456 518	 684 018	 2 950 702* (2022)
City Budget (billion EUR) (2025)	1.7	1.6	1.3	4.4	1.9
National expenditure on security and public order (% of GDP) (2025)	2.6%	1.2%	1.9%	1.2%	9.0%* (2023)

Shelter – One of Many or the Most Important Element of Civil Defence System?

Regular Russian missile and drone attacks on Ukraine's civilian infrastructure have brought the issue of shelter availability in European countries to the forefront. Funds are being allocated for the construction of new shelters, and existing infrastructure is

being inspected and adapted.²⁵ Countries with historically developed total defence systems, such as Finland, have established an extensive network of shelters (mainly in large cities) with an optimal number of places for both residents and visitors.²⁶

²⁴ Surwillo, I., Slakaityte, V. 2025. Northern horizon: Strengthening security in the Baltic Sea region. <https://hdl.handle.net/10419/322176>

²⁵ Keller, M, Gerrard, N. 2025. Gimme shelters: Europe civil defence infrastructure projects surge. <https://www.constructionbriefing.com/news/wartime-construction-europe-civil-defence-infrastructure-projects-surge/8062744.article>

²⁶ Ministry of Interior of Finland. 2023. Finland has civil defence shelters for about 4.8 million people. <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1410869/finland-has-civil-defence-shelters-for-about-4.8-million-people>

Other countries are catching up, publishing shelter maps and urging residents to prepare for crisis situations. In several European countries, shelter capacity is insufficient, and short-term solutions are not always feasible. The development of shelters in Latvia has been largely neglected since 2008. At that time, there were 311 civil defence shelters available, but because of their poor technical condition, they were not fit for use. Consequently, the Cabinet of Ministers supported a proposal to abandon their maintenance.²⁷

The 2008 decision was largely influenced by the global financial crisis. However, the issue resurfaced after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Like the other Baltic states, Latvia is currently taking targeted action to promote the availability of shelters – legislation requires new buildings to have shelters, funds are being allocated to adapt infrastructure for shelter needs, residents are encouraged to take the initiative in renovating the basements of their homes, with co-financing support provided for this purpose.

The development of shelters is hampered by a fragmented division of responsibilities.

At the national level, civil defence policy is implemented by the State Fire and Rescue Service, but municipalities too have several civil defence functions. As a result, the identification, inspection, and adaptation of potential shelters are carried out by different institutions with different budgets and timeframes, but mutual coordination is often insufficient.

For example, in October 2025, the Riga City Council announced the allocation of funding for the improvement of 141 shelters, while emphasizing that the municipality is not responsible for the adaptation of state-owned properties.²⁸ The process of emergency shelter development must be harmonized, given that the main objective is to provide citizens with places to take

refuge, regardless of who formally owns the infrastructure.

Such an approach would allow for the **coordinated development of shelter availability throughout the Riga metropolitan area**, which is home to nearly half of Latvia's population (860 000), of whom 156 000-200 000 commute daily between the city and surrounding municipalities.²⁹

Similarly in Tallinn, the development of shelters is a shared responsibility between the national government and local authorities. For example, The Estonian Rescue Board, in cooperation with local governments, inspects and marks public shelters. Tallinn had 48 such shelters at the time of this study (August 2025).³⁰ There is an understanding of the need to increase the number of shelters, and Estonia lags behind not only Finland but also the other two Baltic countries in terms of shelter availability.³¹

At the same time, Tallinn's positive example should also be noted – apartment owners' associations can apply for city co-financing for up to 70% of the total costs for adapting shelters, which is a relatively higher co-financing proportion than elsewhere in the region.³²

Helsinki can be considered the regional leader in civil defence.

In the Finnish capital, most shelters are located on private property, such as in the basements of apartment buildings. All buildings where people live or work and which exceed 1 200 m² in area, and all industrial buildings exceeding 1 500 m² in area, must have a shelter.³³ Residents can find out the location of the shelter in the building evacuation plan, which is the responsibility of the building owner or manager. Building owners are also responsible for maintaining the shelter and providing the necessary material and technical resources.

²⁷ Ministru kabineta 2008. gada 28. oktobra protokols Nr. 76 "Latvijas Republikas Ministru kabineta sēdes protokols". <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/216256>

²⁸ Straume, A., Demidovs, V. 2025. Rīgā divu gadu laikā taisās labiekārtot 141 no 223 patvertņēm; par pārējām – nav zināms. <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/06.10.2025-riga-divu-gadu-laika-taisas-labiekartot-141-no-223-patvertnem-par-parejam-nav-zinams.a617248/>

²⁹ Celmiņš, V., Spuriņš, U. (Red.) 2024. Rīgas metropole 2040: pārvaldāma, dzīvojama, inovatīva. Domnica LaSER. <https://domnicalasr.lv/rigas-metropole-2040/>

³⁰ Estonian Rescue Service Agency. Civil Protection. Sheltering. <https://www.rescue.ee/en/instruction/civil-protection/sheltering>

³¹ Uibo, V. 2025. Estonia lagging behind other countries in the region on bomb shelter facilities. <https://news.err.ee/1609705983/estonia-lagging-behind-other-countries-in-the-region-on-bomb-shelter-facilities>

³² Tallinn. 2025. Applications for apartment associations to boost crisis preparedness open today. <https://www.tallinn.ee/en/news/applications-apartment-associations-boost-crisis-preparedness-open-today>

³³ Ministry of the Interior. 2025. Civil defence shelters. <https://intermin.fi/en/rescue-services/preparedness/civil-defence-shelters>

There is also a network of public and shared shelters in Helsinki, which are maintained by the City Council. These are large shelters built on bedrock foundations, with an area of up to 4 500 m². Public shelters are accessible to everyone, while shared shelters are intended for several specific buildings.

Many underground shelters serve other purposes in peacetime, such as parking lots or

sports facilities. Metro stations are also intended to serve as shelters in a crisis. Both the Helsinki City Council and the national government have published a map of public shelters, which is available in Finnish, Swedish, and English. It is planned that hundreds of trained volunteers will be employed in public shelters during a crisis.³⁴

Figure 17
Dual-use shelters



Although the current shelter capacity in Helsinki already exceeds the size of the city's population, in 2024, the Helsinki City Council announced a EUR 25 million support program to provide investments for the development and improvement of shelters over the next 10 years. In addition, the Helsinki City Council allocated EUR 500 000 in its 2024 budget for the improvement of civil defence material and technical support. The large capacity of the shelters makes it possible to provide support in crisis situations to tourists and visitors to the city, as well as to residents of the country who would be evacuated to Helsinki if necessary.

Understanding what constitutes a shelter and what does not varies significantly. This makes it difficult to compare data on shelter availability in these five cities. For example, in the case of Tallinn and Riga, data has been collected only on public shelters, but the exact capacity of privately established shelters is unknown. In Finland, on the other hand, most shelters are located on private property, and their capacity is reflected in the total estimate of shelter capacity in the city.

Estonia has started collecting information on shelters located on private property, so

³⁴ Pelastustoimi. 2025. Civil defence shelters in Helsinki. <https://pelastustoimi.fi/en/helsinki/services/civil-defence-in-helsinki/civil-defence-shelters-in-helsinki>

the total shelter capacity in Tallinn will be known once the information gathering process is complete. **When creating a map of shelters in the Riga metropolitan area,**

it would be beneficial to include privately established shelters, which would allow real shelter capacity to be quantified.

Table 2
Estimated shelter capacity in Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, Helsinki, and Kyiv in 2025

Note: Due to differing definitions of shelters, a direct comparison may be misleading.
 Source: Compilation by the authors











	Riga	Vilnius	Tallinn	Helsinki	Kyiv
Shelter capacity (Number of people that can be accommodated)	205 000 	300 000 	82 353 	900 000 	2 800 000 
Population	 591 882	 607 667	 456 518	 684 018	 2 950 702

Figure 18
Shelter classification in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, and Ukraine

Source: Compilation by the authors

Latvia

The definition of shelters established in Latvian legislation specifies that a shelter is a “structure or part of a structure intended for the protection of people from hazardous factors arising in the event of a disaster, military invasion, or war.” In Latvia, too, shelters are intended for short-term use to overcome an immediate threat to personal safety. Three categories of shelters are distinguished in Latvia:

- Category I** shelters for protection against blast waves, chemical warfare agents, ionizing radiation and radioactive dust, and debris, built in critical infrastructure facilities.
- Category II** shelters for protection against blast waves and debris, which must be built in new public buildings or apartment buildings.
- Category III** shelters, which are created by adapting buildings or parts thereof to reduce

the impact of blast waves and debris, and which can be created by building owners on their own initiative.³⁵

However, in situations where a shelter is full and no further space is available, the national Fire and Rescue Service recommends that residents follow the ‘two-wall principle’, that is, to take cover in a room without windows to protect themselves from immediate danger.³⁶ This effectively creates a fourth category of shelter, similar to the ‘safe room’ category in Estonia’s civilian shelter classification.

It is important to note that shelters in all three categories are focused on short-term protection from threats, but there are no plans to develop long-term shelters where residents could stay for an extended period of time in the event of a sustained threat.

³⁵2016. gada 5. maija Civilās aizsardzības un katastrofas pārvaldīšanas likums. Publicēts oficiālajā izdevumā “Latvijas Vēstnesis”, 25.05.2016., Nr. 100 <https://www.vestnesis.lv/op/2016/100.1>

³⁶Valsts ugunsdzēsības un glābšanas dienests. 2025. Biežāk uzdotie jautājumi par patvertnēm. <https://www.vugd.gov.lv/lv/biezak-uzdotie-jautajumi-par-patvertnem>

Lithuania

In Lithuania, three categories of shelters are distinguished, which differ according to their intended purpose and the length of time they are designed for occupants to remain inside:

-Bunker – specially adapted buildings or parts of buildings intended for the protection of state and municipal employees to ensure the continuity of critical functions. Their locations are not disclosed to the general public.

-Collective protection structure – a building or space intended to provide temporary shelter for evacuated residents during a crisis or wartime, ensuring protection against environmental hazards.

-Shelter – a building, room, or engineering structure intended for the short-term protection of the health and lives of residents in the event of a military threat.³⁷

Since 2024, residential buildings with more than five floors are subject to a mandatory requirement to install a shelter.

At the same time, Lithuanian residents are encouraged to adapt and equip individual shelters in basements, within the limits of their capabilities, in accordance with the minimum technical requirements guidelines.³⁸

The Lithuanian government has published two separate maps of civil defence infrastructure facilities - one showing the locations of shelters, and the other showing the locations of collective protection structures in the country. Some buildings are marked both as collective protection structures and as shelters. Although collective protection structures and shelters have different functions, maintaining two parallel maps may create confusion among residents if there is an urgent need to locate the nearest shelter.

Estonia

The Estonian Rescue Service emphasizes that shelters are focused on the short-term relocation of endangered residents indoors to protect their health and lives. Three types of civilian shelters are distinguished:

-Public shelter – publicly accessible infrastructure intended to provide short-term shelter in public spaces.

-Shelter at home – a room intended for the residents of a specific building or building complex to take shelter in the event of a threat, for example, a basement.

-Safe room – a windowless room, for example a bathroom, in which residents can protect themselves as far as possible if neither a public nor a home shelter is available.³⁹

At the same time, the Estonia-based Crisis Research Centre criticises the practice of designating all such locations as shelters and emphasizes that a shelter is a specially adapted, hermetic underground facility designed to protect residents from a direct hit, which cannot be provided by just any room below ground level.⁴⁰

³⁷ Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas. 1998. Lietuvos Respublikos krizių valdymo ir civilinės saugos įstatymas. Valstybės žinios, 1998-12-31, Nr. 115-3230. <https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.69957/kazJnhiBUP?jfwid=f4nne65oa>

³⁸ LT72. 2025. Taking Shelter. <https://lt72.lt/kolektyvines-apsaugos-statiniai-priedangos-ir-rusiai/?lang=en>

³⁹ Estonian Rescue Services Agency. Civil Protection, Sheltering. <https://www.rescue.ee/en/instruction/civil-protection/sheltering>

⁴⁰ Crisis Research Centre. 2023. Why even talk about shelters in Estonia? <https://www.kruk.ee/en/why-even-talk-about-shelters/>

Finland

Finland's shelter system has been developed over decades, and its current capacity is sufficient to provide shelter for almost the entire population of the country. Most shelters are dual-use facilities, meaning that in peacetime they serve as warehouses, sports halls, and similar spaces.

Given that the vast majority of shelters in Finland are located on private property, their classification is primarily based on capacity and technical blast-resistance specifications:

-S1-class reinforced concrete shelter – area up to 135 m², pressure resistance up to 100 kPa.

-S2-class reinforced concrete shelter – area up to 900 m², pressure resistance up to 200 kPa.

-Bedrock-embedded shelter – area up to 4 500 m², pressure resistance up to 300 kPa.⁴¹

Finland's highly developed shelter system operates under an effective governance model, characterised by high-quality regulatory framework, public understanding of the need for shelters, and a financing mechanism whereby infrastructure owners are responsible for installing them.⁴²

Ukraine

In the face of Russia's mass attacks on civilians, the availability of shelters has become a particularly urgent issue on Ukraine's political agenda. Since 2022, efforts have been made to systematically expand shelter availability, but the current number of accessible shelters has not yet reached an adequate level.⁴³

According to the Civil Protection Act, two categories of shelters are distinguished:

-Civil protection infrastructure – includes **shelters** (for protecting the population from weapons of mass destruction for up to 48 hours), **radiation shelters** (shelters with additional functions to protect against radioactive contamination), and **mobile shelters** (inten-

ded for short-term protection from munitions and shrapnel when fixed infrastructure is not available).

-Dual-use and simple structures – include **dual-use structures** (buildings or parts of buildings that are used for public or business purposes in daily life but can provide temporary protection in a crisis) and **simple structures** (basements, fortifications, and other types of basic protective structures that, unlike dual-use structures, are not used for other purposes in daily life).⁴⁴

Since April 2024, all employers are required to provide their employees with access to dual-use or simple-structure shelters.

⁴¹ Finnish Government. 2011. Government Decree on Civil Defence Shelters (408/2011).

⁴² Kyrenius, P. 2025. The Finnish Civil Defence shelter system Evolution of the regulation and technical specification 1954-2011. Aalto University publication series. Doctoral Theses 121/2025.

⁴³ Melkozerova, V. 2025. Reporter's notebook: My deadly routine in Kyiv. <https://www.politico.eu/article/reporters-notebook-deadly-routine-kyiv-ukraine-russia-donald-trump-vladimir-putin/>

⁴⁴ Code of Civil Protection of Ukraine. Bulletin of the Verkhovna Rada (VVR), 2013, No. 34-35, p. 458. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/5403-17#Text>

The experience of Ukraine shows that in situations where a large number of people need shelter at short notice, but the infrastructure intended for this purpose is not available, unsuitable basements, underground car parks, metro stations, and other infrastructure that was not originally intended for this purpose can act as temporary shelters. **When the immediate threat is over, residents return to their daily routines.** Shelters have emotional and symbolic significance in that society has not given up and continues to resist aggression.⁴⁵

However, **not all residents follow instructions to seek shelter or evacuate** in a crisis, and this may depend on a number of considerations. Researchers estimate that approximately 60-70% of residents follow instructions to go to a shelter when they are at home. These figures can be increased or decreased by approximately 10% depending on supportive or dismissive media narratives.⁴⁶

When analysing Ukraine's resistance to Russia's invasion, three main reasons are

put forward that increase the number of civilian casualties in the war: first, there are not enough shelters of adequate quality; secondly, people do not follow instructions to go to shelters when alarm sirens sound; thirdly, residents do not follow instructions to evacuate from endangered areas, which limits their ability to receive medical assistance or essential supplies.⁴⁷

Therefore, **to protect the city residents, it is essential to develop adequate infrastructure and inform residents in a timely manner to help them prepare for crisis situations.** Data shows that the current level of public awareness and knowledge is not optimal. For example, less than half of Riga's residents say they know what to do when alarm sirens sound, and only 14% know the location of the nearest shelter, which is less than among residents of the capitals of Lithuania, Estonia, and Finland.⁴⁸ Researchers also identify differences in threat perception and individual preparedness across gender lines.⁴⁹

Figure 19
Knowledge on location of closest emergency shelter in Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, and Helsinki in 2025 (%)

Note: Proportion of respondents who indicated that they know the location of the nearest shelter.
Source: Birka, I., Kļaviņš, D. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14228217>, resident surveys (Riga n = 1004, Vilnius n = 1004, Tallinn = 1008, Helsinki n = 1000)

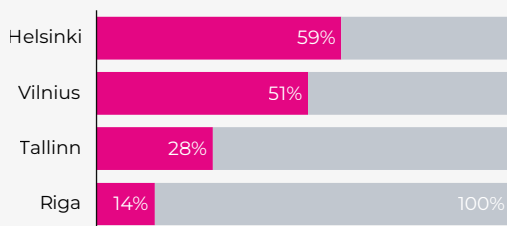
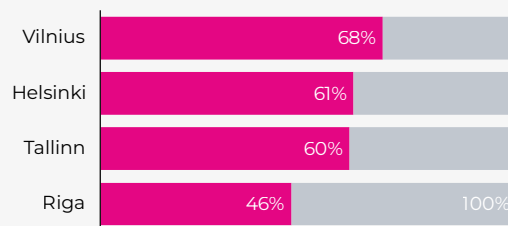


Figure 20
Knowledge on action if hearing public sirens in Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, and Helsinki in 2025 (%)

Note: Proportion of respondents who indicated that they know how to act when an alarm siren sounds.
Source: Birka, I., Kļaviņš, D. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14228217>, resident surveys (Riga n = 1004, Vilnius n = 1004, Tallinn = 1008, Helsinki n = 1000)



⁴⁵ Howlett, M., Parry, C., Nicholson, S., Lambe, S., Aldridge, A. 2025. Sheltering the Nation: The Politicisation of Ukraine's Civilian Shelters Amidst Russia's Aggression Geopolitics, 30(5). <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2025.2465672>

⁴⁶ Dombroski, M., Fischhoff, B., & Fischbeck, P. 2006. Predicting emergency evacuation and sheltering behavior: A structured analytical approach. Risk Analysis, 26(6). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1539-6924.2006.00833.x>

⁴⁷ Pomaza-Ponomarenko, A., et. al. 2024. *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁸ Birka, I., Kļaviņš, D. 2025. Urban Preparedness for Emerging Risks in the Baltic Sea Region. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14228217>

⁴⁹ Birka, I. n.d. Gender and Security in the Baltic Sea Region: A comparative study of northern and central European cities. In: Rethinking National Security: Gender, Theory, and Practice (Forthcoming Publication).

Although a key part of the comprehensive national defence system is to regularly disseminate information on how citizens should act in the event of a crisis or war,⁵⁰

social structures – communities and social groups – play a key role in reaching a wider range of people.

Communities and Civil Defence

Ukraine's experience illustrates the role of communities in society's ability to overcome threats. For example, in February 2022, two weeks before Russia's full-scale invasion, an interactive map of shelters in Lviv was published. In a statement released by the local government, residents were encouraged to check access to their basements and discuss this with their neighbours.⁵¹

Communities play a vital role in society's ability to organize itself in crisis situations. They can serve both for timely action planning and for building local trust networks, which

are essential for mutual assistance, information exchange, and emotional support in crisis situations.⁵²

It should be noted that Baltic societies are capable of organizing themselves and cooperating to achieve common goals. One of the most visible and symbolically significant examples is the *Baltic Way*, in which the citizens of the three countries formed a human chain connecting the three capitals. At the same time, social capital tends to gradually decline once the crisis has ended.

Box 2

What does the Siege of Sarajevo teach us about the role of community in crisis situations?

Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was under siege during the Bosnian War from 1992 to 1996, within artillery range of the enemy. Fighting for survival every day, the city's residents were able to overcome the challenges only by working together at the community level.

By working together to adapt the existing infrastructure, shelters were created where school and kindergarten classes were held. Given that humanitarian aid shipments were blocked, residents created small gardens on their balconies to grow their own food. Meanwhile, to ease psychological tension, cul-

tural events continued in many parts of the city, often reflecting on the situation in the city.⁵³

These events illustrated the role of informal structures—communities—in strengthening resilience, especially emergent resilience. Crises can take many forms, and it is not always possible to prepare for all types of threats, so it is important for people to be able to adapt and act independently of formal preparedness mechanisms. It is more difficult to overcome crises individually, so the community plays an essential role – both in preparing for crises and overcoming them.

An analysis of how Latvia's population views mutual trust and community belonging, indicates that there is plenty of room for improvement. For example, only one-third of the population believes that they can

rely on their community in crisis situations, while just 35% agree with the statement that Latvian residents help each other when necessary.

⁵⁰ Sargs.lv. 72 stundas. <https://www.sargs.lv/lv/72stundas->

⁵¹ Koval, O. 2022. An interactive map of emergency shelters was created in Lviv. https://tvomisto.tv/en/news/an_interactive_map_of_emergency_shelters_was_created_in_lviv_127592.html

⁵² Panagiotou, N., & Nikezis, I. 2024. D 7.3: Assessment of the role of community preparedness and engagement in risk and crisis communication. <https://www.jaterror.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/7.3-Role-of-community-preparedness-and-engagement-in-risk-and-crisis-communication.pdf>

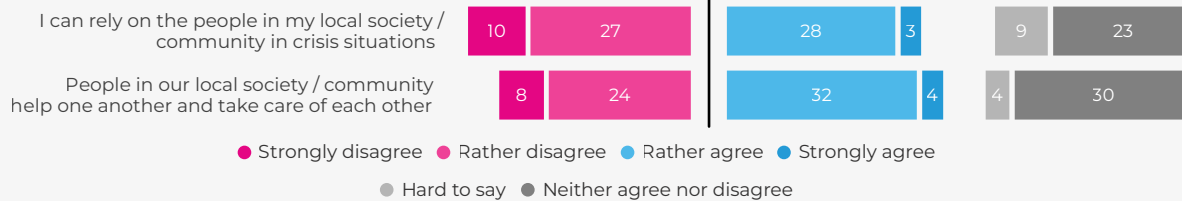
⁵³ Pilav, A. 2012. Before the war, war, after the war: Urban imageries for urban resilience. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Science*, 3(1), 23-37.

Figure 21

Public opinion on trust and mutual assistance within the community in Latvia in 2024 (%)

Note: The question used in the survey was: "Considering the war in Ukraine, to what extent do you agree with the following statement about your local society/community (for example, the Russian-speaking community or any other community) in your place of permanent residence? (1) I can rely on the people in my local society/community in crisis situations; (2) People in our local society/community help one another and take care of each other."

Source: State Chancellery, Survey of Latvian residents (n = 2005)



Communities can vary in size, purpose, or methods of achieving their goals. Even when comparing different neighbourhoods within the same city, they will differ in terms of population size, population density, or financial security.

Therefore, an approach that involves civil society in decision-making is important in the development of civil defence systems – socially active groups of citizens who can ensure a two-way link between the public sector and individuals. These can be various types of collectives (sports, cultural), residential associations, and various public benefit organizations.

The intensity of civil society involvement in civil defence systems tends to vary. In Latvia, its role in crisis situations would primarily be related to providing support in performing specific tasks, such as organizing evacuations. In peacetime, however, it mainly identifies the needs of the community and participates in meeting them.⁵⁴

The current **cooperation between state and local government institutions with local communities in the field of preparedness and crisis management in Latvia is generally considered to be fragmented**, at the same time, there is optimism about the Crisis Management Centre established in 2025, which will play a coordinating role in addressing this issue.⁵⁵

Civil society can be more actively involved in the development of civil defence systems. For example, in Finland,⁵⁶ Estonia,⁵⁷ and Ukraine⁵⁸ NGOs cooperate with municipalities and civil defence authorities in organizing crisis preparedness training for residents.

Representatives of Ukraine's non-governmental sector emphasize that the state and local government institutions, civil society, and non-governmental organizations that make up the civil defence system are working toward a common goal, so it is important they do not compete but coordinate their activities to achieve it. Particular emphasis is placed on the cluster approach, where representatives from international organizations, government, municipalities, private, and non-governmental sector are brought together to achieve specific goals (such as water supply during crises or child protection in emergency situations). This ensures efficiency and mutual coordination.⁵⁹

Community leaders play an especially important role in the creation of a resilient civil defence system. Civic activists who take on leadership roles pass on the knowledge and skills they have acquired to their families, friends, and neighbours. Trust and cooperation between neighbours in preparing for and responding to crises is particularly important, as residents of the same

⁵⁴ Iekšlietu ministrija. 2025. Vadlīnijas pašvaldībām sabiedrības līdzdalības pilnveidošanai civilās aizsardzības sistēmā. <https://www.iem.gov.lv/lv/vadlinijas-pasvaldibam-sabiedribas-lidzdalibas-pilnveidosanai-civilas-aizsardzibas-sistema>

⁵⁵ Rollis, I. 2024. Krīzes vadības centra izveide: izaicinājumi un iespējas ceļā uz efektīvāku krīžu pārvaldību Latvijā. <https://lvportals.lv/viedokli/370703-krizes-vadibas-centra-izveide-izaicinajumi-un-iespejas-cela-uz-efektivaku-krizu-parvaldibu-latvija-2024>

⁵⁶ Maanpuolustuskoulutus. n.d. What is the MPK? <https://mpk.fi/en/>

⁵⁷ Crisis Research Centre. 2025. Urban Survival Training in harsh weather conditions in Kohtla-Järve. <https://www.kruk.ee/en/urban-survival-training-in-harsh-weather-conditions-in-kohtla-jarve/>

⁵⁸ NGO "Poruch". 2025. Annual Report of the NGO "Poruch". <https://poruch.ua/en/annual-report-of-the-ngo-poruch>

⁵⁹ Crisis Research Centre. 2025. Video "Presentation | Power of community in crisis: cooperation between NGOs & LGs | 28.05.2025" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0l4acZLjK&t=1303s>

building are likely to face the same challenges, but overcoming them will be more effective through joint action.

Before a crisis hits, community leaders need to engage with people to help them prepare for unexpected situations. A study by the University of Latvia identified three main reasons why Riga residents have not adequately prepared for crises: (1) because they do not feel the threat and do not see the need to prepare; (2) because they lack information on how to prepare; and (3) because it is an emotionally difficult issue.⁶⁰

Community leaders who are trusted by their fellow citizens play an important role

Figure 22
Latvian residents' trust in their neighbours in 2024 (%)

Note: The question used in the survey was: "To what extent do you trust your neighbours?"
Source: State Chancellery, Survey of Latvian residents (n = 2005)

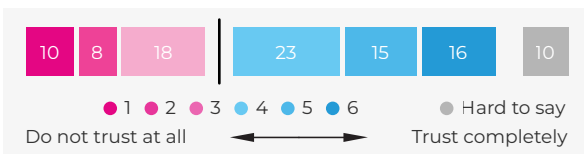
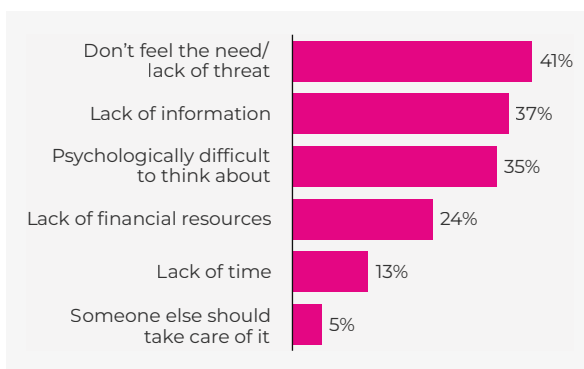


Figure 23
Obstacles for individual crisis preparedness among Riga residents in 2025 (%)

Note: Proportion of respondents who indicated that the respective factors hinder their preparedness for crisis situations.
Source: Birka, I., Kļaviņš, D. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14228217>, survey of Riga residents (n = 740).



in addressing all three of the identified causes. They can act as civil defence heralds who regularly communicate with the public about current civil defence issues, explain the importance of crisis preparedness, and engage broader segments of society.

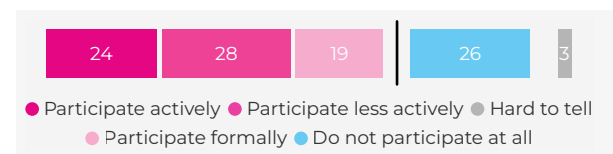
The role of leaders in preparing for crises is also essential in smaller groups of people, such as apartment buildings. One practical way to strengthen the preparedness of residents is to adapt the basement to the needs of a shelter. Data shows that a large proportion of people tend to be quite passively involved in planning the management of the house. For example, in a survey conducted in 2023, 26% of Latvian residents living in apartment buildings indicated that they do not participate in the management of their house at all, while 19% do so only minimally.⁶¹

In crisis situations, leadership and mutual trust among residents are important, as they can help overcome the crisis at the community level. For example, when it is necessary to evacuate a building due to some threat, trust between the better-prepared group leaders and the rest of evacuees is a key to successful execution of the evacuation.⁶²

To promote communities' ability to prepare for and overcome crises, it is necessary to develop and test civil defence plans in a timely manner, specifying the responsibilities and actions to be taken by the national and municipal authorities as well as residents.

Figure 24
Involvement of Latvian apartment-building residents in building management in 2023 (%)

Note: The question used in the survey was "How actively do you participate in housing management (take part in meetings, express your opinion, initiate or organize activities, engage neighbours, etc.)?"
Source: Blumberga, A. et. al. 2023. Survey of Latvian residents (n = 699)



⁶⁰ Birka, I., Kļaviņš, D. 2025. *Op. Cit.*

⁶¹ Blumberga, A., Vanaga, R., Kamenders, A., Celmiņš, V., Spuriņš, U., Klāsons, G. 2023. Bridging the Carbon Neutrality Gap in Energy Communities: Social Sciences and Humanities Meet Energy Studies. Report on Practices and Opinions Regarding Energy Efficiency in Latvia. RTU Institute of Energy Systems and Environment.

⁶² Bakhshian, E., & Martinez-Pastor, B. 2023. Evaluating human behaviour during a disaster evacuation process: A literature review. *Journal of traffic and transportation engineering*, 10(4). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtte.2023.04.002>

Civil Defence Plans

Although national civil defence regulations in the Baltic States, Finland, and Ukraine existed before 2022, Russia's war on Ukraine has highlighted the need to regularly review and improve these plans, as well as to develop specific plans at the municipal level.

In the case of Ukraine, prior to February 2022, neither national nor local authorities provided adequate public communication on how citizens should act in crisis situations. Although the Civil Protection Law had been adopted, it was mainly intended for natural and industrial disasters, rather than military threats. By 2022, the Kyiv municipality had not developed a civil defence plan, nor had it organized crisis training on the role of municipalities, non-governmental organizations, or individuals in the event of a military invasion, so many shortcomings were identified too late.

On February 11, 2022, Kyiv mayor Vitali Klitschko announced that evacuation plans for the city had been prepared at the neighbourhood level, but these were not made

publicly available, and when Russia launched a full-scale invasion, this created challenges in separating the movement routes of civilians and armed forces.⁶³ Kyiv's civil defence plan is not publicly available, but the local government and city residents have gradually adapted to the conditions of war and continue to function amid the armed conflict.

It should also be noted that in the case of Helsinki, neither civil defence nor specific evacuation plans have been made public for security reasons. The evacuation of Helsinki residents would only be carried out as a last resort, if there were no other way to protect the population. Much greater emphasis is placed on the availability of civil defence shelters. If evacuations were necessary, residents would first be evacuated to other parts of Helsinki, nearby regions, or other parts of Finland, with priority given to the most vulnerable groups. The evacuation may be ordered by the government upon the proposal of the Ministry of the Interior or, in exceptional cases, by the Armed Forces.⁶⁴

Box 3

The Importance of Civil Defence Plans During Military Conflict

On the eve of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Ukrainian strategists believed that the main direction of invasion would be from the east, so no immediate threat to Kyiv was expected. As a result, the 72nd Mechanized Brigade, which was tasked with defending the city, was deployed more than 85 kilometres south of Kyiv.

When the occupying forces entered Ukraine through Belarusian territory, the battle for Kyiv began on February 24, 2022. In an attempt to reach the invading Russian column, the 72nd Mechanized Brigade encountered massive traffic jams on its way to Kyiv, encountering city residents trying to flee the city. This inci-

dent illustrates the need to clearly separate infrastructure intended for the evacuation of civilians and the movement of armed forces in crisis situations, as well as the need to familiarize civilians with evacuation plans and inform them of the necessary actions.

At the beginning of the war, in order to supplement the limited number of defenders in Kyiv, the armed forces and police began distributing AK-47 assault rifles and combat ammunition to volunteers, issuing a total of approximately 25 000 rifles, grenade launchers, and approximately 10 million rounds of small arms ammunition.⁶⁵

⁶³Tarasova, D., Braithwaite, S., Fox, K. Krebs, K., Lister, T. 2022. Russia accuses the West of spreading disinformation on Ukraine as Kyiv fortifies evacuation plans. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/02/11/politics/ukraine-russia-latest-news-friday-intl>

⁶⁴Pelastustoimi. 2025. Evacuation. <https://pelastustoimi.fi/en/helsinki/services/civil-defence-in-helsinki/evacuation>

⁶⁵Collins, L., Spencer, J. 2025. Case Study # 12 – Kyiv. Urban Warfare Project Case Study Series. Modern War Institute at West Point. <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/urban-warfare-project-case-study-12-battle-of-kyiv/>

Poorly controlled distribution of weapons to civilians is of course a last resort when the civil defence system is no longer functioning. It cannot be ruled out that weapons will fall into the hands of disloyal citizens, and there is a significantly increased risk of blue-on-blue situations. Although such action made it possible to repel the occupying forces in

one of the most important battles in the early phases of the Russo-Ukrainian war, timely preparation of civil defence and evacuation plans would probably have ensured a more effective movement of Ukrainian defenders, and such an extreme solution would not have been necessary.

In response to the lessons learned from Ukraine's defence against Russian aggression, other capitals in the region have also reviewed existing or developed new urban civil defence plans, as well as specific evacuation plans. For example, Riga's civil defence plan was approved in 2024 and is publicly available. Although the plan also includes practical advice for residents on how to prepare for and cope with various crisis scenarios, **it is unlikely that a large part of the public will read the plan in its entirety and acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to overcome crises**, given its length of 213 pages.

However, specific evacuation plans for Riga are not available, as evacuations would be organized on a case-by-case basis if necessary. The civil defence plan contains the following recommendation for residents in the event of evacuation: "Listen carefully to the evacuation announcement, memorize and write down the evacuation route, destination, and assembly points." As of August 2025, the Riga's interactive civil defence map shows 59 evacuation assembly points.

The example of Vilnius is noteworthy in the field of population evacuation planning. The city council has developed a detailed evacuation plan for the city, which includes three main threat scenarios and three evacuation directions (including a military invasion and nuclear threat scenario). Depending on the threat scenario, the plan is to organize the relocation of people from all districts of Vilnius. The evacuation is planned towards the north of the country – in the direction of Šiauliai and Panevėžys.⁶⁶

It is essential that civil defence plans, including evacuation plans, are regularly

reviewed and updated in line with changes in the security situation. For example, both the Latvian national civil defence plan approved in 2020, and the Riga City Civil Defence Plan approved in 2024 classify the level of terrorist threat in Latvia as low. However, unlike the fixed formulations used in these documents, the likelihood of different threats is not static and may shift as circumstances evolve. For this reason, it is not advisable for civil defence plans to include rigid or fixed statements about threat levels.

The need to regularly update plans is also illustrated by the bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements in the field of civil defence and crisis management, which are summarized in Latvia's National Civil Defence Plan which Latvia has concluded with other countries in the region since 2001. **Of the 10 countries with which such agreements have been concluded, only four are EU and NATO member states.** Agreements have been concluded with countries such as Russia and Belarus (most recently in 2018), but no bilateral cooperation agreements have been concluded with countries such as Finland or Poland.

Given the shared understanding among the Baltic States of the main security threats, **the cooperation between the three Baltic States in the field of civil defence at various levels can be highlighted as a positive example.** In May 2025, the municipalities of Riga, Tallinn, and Vilnius signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in the development of civil defence systems, promoting the exchange of experience and the coordinated use of resources.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Vilnius Municipality. 2025. Evacuation plan. <https://vilnius.lt/savivaldybe/evakuacijos-planas?lang=en>

⁶⁷ Gnadenteich, U. 2025. Baltic Capitals to Cooperate in Developing Civil Defense. <https://balticsentinel.eu/8252984/baltic-capitals-to->

In June 2025, a similar cooperation agreement was signed between the ministers of interior of the three Baltic states, to facilitate the planning and organisation of cross-border evacuations through regional cooperation.⁶⁸

However, **approving plans and signing cooperation agreements is only the first step in strengthening preparedness.** More importantly, these plans must be tested through crisis simulations.

Figure 25

Bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements concluded by Latvia on disaster prevention, preparedness, and crisis response

Source: Cabinet of Ministers Order No. 476 of 26 August 2020

Cooperation agreements have been signed with the following countries:

- Azerbaijan (AZ)
- Belarus (BY)
- Georgia (GE)
- Estonia (EE)
- Russia (RU)
- Lithuania (L)
- Ukraine (UA)
- Hungary (HU)
- Uzbekistan (UZ)
- Sweden (SE)



Training, Drills, and Simulations

Simulated crisis exercises are widely regarded as a way of strengthening resilience at the individual and organizational levels, and it is particularly important to organize them as close to reality as possible, by including unforeseen incidents.⁶⁹ Given the tense security situation, various crisis exercises are held regularly in the region.

In accordance with the principles of comprehensive or total defence, crisis exercises in Finland, and the three Baltic states often focus not only on military defence, but also on civil resilience and preparedness aspects, including training in institutional continuity and interagency coordination.

⁶⁸ Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Lithuania. 2025. Baltic Interior Ministers Strengthen Cooperation in the Field of Civil Protection. <https://vrm.lrv.lt/en/news/baltic-interior-ministers-strengthen-cooperation-in-the-field-of-civil-protection/>

⁶⁹ Ketelaars, E., Flandin, S., Poizat, G. 2025. From 'normal exercises' to 'resilience training exercises'. A phenomenological study on participants' engagement with unforeseen situations. *Cognition, Technology & Work*, 27. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10111-025-00801-0>

Civil defence elements are increasingly involved in Latvia's exercises at both the national and municipal levels. For example, a civilian evacuation was simulated – two buses with pre-selected civilians were evacuated from two different locations as part of the annual comprehensive national defence training exercise *Namejs*.⁷⁰ **The primary objective of such exercises is to train national and local government institutions to manage crisis situations, rather than the individual preparedness of residents.**

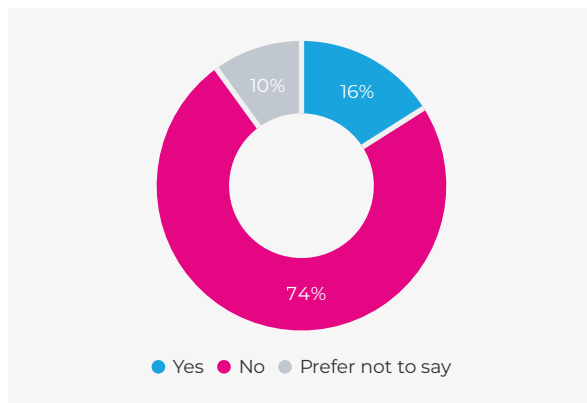
Other civil defence exercises are also carried out, namely, RADEX, which simulates scenarios for dealing with the consequences of natural and technological disasters, or Kristaps which is a civil defence commission exercise in various Latvian municipalities, simulating various scenarios for inter-institutional cooperation in a table-top exercise format. These exercises also focus primarily on the institutional level, with relatively little attention paid to individual preparedness.

In order to strengthen individual preparedness and capacity to act, the Riga City Council organizes civil defence information seminars, each time adapting the content of the seminar to the specific characteristics of the respective neighbourhood. The main challenge of such seminars is related to the one-way dissemination of information, which does not always provide practical training elements. As a result, both **the self-assessment of Riga residents and their actual knowledge and skills regarding how to act in a crisis or emergency situation remain at an insufficient level.**

In contrast, Helsinki places great emphasis on training individuals to be prepared, including specific skills required for the civil defence system, such as maintaining shelters.⁷¹

Figure 26
Riga residents' self-assessment of individual crisis preparedness in 2025 (%)

Note: The question used in the survey was: 'Do you feel adequately prepared for crisis/emergency situations?'
 Source: Birka, I., Kļaviņš, D. 2025. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14228217>, survey of Riga residents (n = 1004).



⁷⁰ Zvirbulis, G. 2024. Reportāža: Militārajās mācībās "Namejs" izspēlēja iedzīvotāju evakuāciju. <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/latvija/20.09.2024-reportaza-militarajas-macibas-namejs-izspele-iedzivotaju-evakuaciju.a569652/>

⁷¹ Helsinki City Rescue Department. 2023. Instructions for the structural sheltering of the population Helsinki 2023 public section. https://pelastustoimi.fi/documents/25266713/168997673/Helsingin+v%C3%A4est%C3%B6n+rakenteellisen+suojaamisen+ohje2023_EN.pdf/

3. SCENARIO-BASED CRISIS SIMULATION

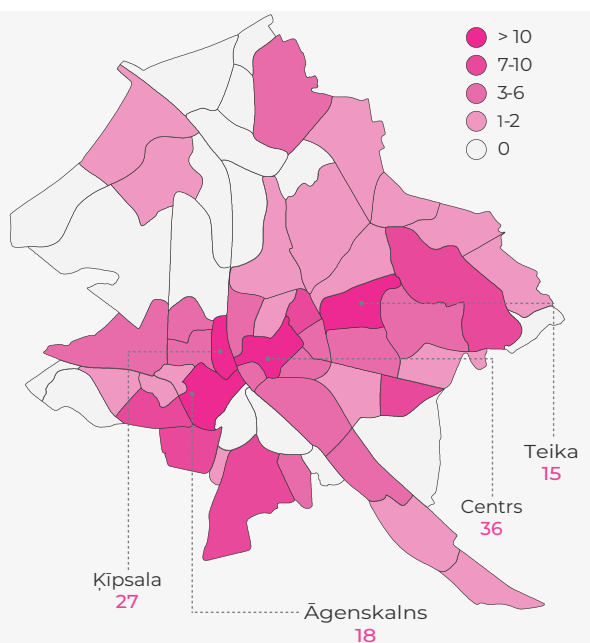
Considering the low level of individual preparedness in Riga and the region as a whole, the LaSER Think Tank organized a scenario-based crisis simulation to test the assumption that individuals will act independently of their formal knowledge, skills, or other preparedness indicators in crisis situations.

This crisis simulation not only **provides data** for analysing factors that help or hinder Riga's residents in overcoming crisis situations but also **encourages residents to think about their ability to act in a crisis** and prepare in a timely manner.

To reduce the risk that pre-prepared answer options would influence respondents' answers (i.e., that respondents would select the "desired" answer options), seven questions in the crisis simulation questionnaire were formulated in such a way that respondents could provide open-ended responses.

Figure 27
Number of crisis simulation participants in Riga neighbourhoods

Note: Respondents could indicate several answers, as their workplace and place of residence could be in different neighbourhoods of Riga.
 Source: LaSER (n = 185)

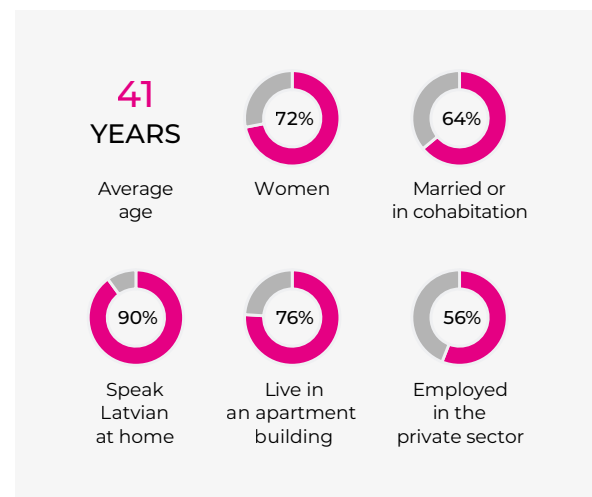


Crisis simulation participants were approached through neighbourhood associations in Riga, as well as through a call for participation posted on the Riga City Council website, so it can be assumed that **the simulation involved a relatively more active and better-informed segment of society**. Since the respondents were not selected at random, the results of this simulation cannot be considered representative of all Riga residents.

A total of 185 participants took part in the scenario, of whom 169 completed the questionnaire in full. The simulation participants represented 41 of Riga's 58 neighbourhoods. Most of the crisis simulation participants were from the city Centre, as well as Kipsala, Āgenskalns, and Teika neighbourhoods.

Figure 28
Demographic profile of crisis simulation participants

Source: LaSER (n = 185)



The demographic data of respondents makes it possible to identify the profile of the average active Riga resident – a woman aged 34 to 48 with higher education, employed in the private sector, married or in cohabitation, speaking Latvian at home. It is advisable to consider the demographic profile of active and less active city residents

when implementing **targeted information campaigns**. Communication strategies for active and inactive residents are likely to differ.

Special attention should be paid to communication with the inactive part of society,

which has not been reached by the current approach, while remembering that the active part of society are potential community leaders who engage the inactive part of society or function as messengers.

Scenario

The crisis scenario was developed in cooperation with the Riga City Council Civil Protection and Operational Information Department. It did not include real events or threat assessments. These were theoretical incidents designed to encourage Riga residents to think about their ability to act in a crisis, including practical elements such as finding the location of the nearest shelter.

The scenario covered events over five days, with the situation gradually deteriorating and involving various incidents indicating a growing threat. At the same time, the scenario included several unclear and contradictory indications of the existing threat.

On day 4 of the scenario, the "X" hour arrives, when tensions culminate in widespread acts of sabotage and terrorism. On day 5, however, the threat gradually diminishes, and the situation returns to normal.

The crisis simulation took the form of a remote online survey. In response to the incidents in the scenario, participants were asked to record not their desired actions, but the most likely actions they would be able to take at that particular moment. Participants were also asked to indicate the considerations that help or hinder their ability to respond to the events described in the scenario (e.g., being at work or at home, the need to take care of family members, etc.).

Box 4

Crisis Simulation Scenario

8:00 AM, Day 1 The regional security situation has deteriorated, and increased military activity has been observed near Latvia's borders. Although public statements indicate that there is no immediate military threat, stress levels in society are rising. There is a noticeable increase in the number of people living in the



Eastern border region now moving to Riga, while residents of Riga are beginning to move elsewhere. Employees are not showing up for work at supermarkets, but store operations are not disrupted. Similarly, employees are not showing up for work at municipal institutions, but municipal operations are not disrupted.

4:00 PM, Day 2 The official information shared by the media is that there is no danger to the public, that the situation in the region is under control, and that there is no immediate threat to the residents of Latvia. It has been observed that residents of Riga are moving



to the West of the country or to other countries. No mass evacuation has been observed. Demand for food products with a long shelf life is beginning to increase in supermarkets. Residents are concerned about the situation in the country.

8:00 PM, Day 2 Rumours spread throughout the country about potential military threats in the coming weeks. A state of emergency is declared in the border region. Face-to-face schooling is partially suspended. TV and radio continue to inform the public about what is happening in the country. Informative prog-



rams dominate the media. The number of people from the Eastern border heading west, including to Riga, keeps growing, but there's no sign of a mass evacuation. Some makeshift camps start popping up in Riga. There's a noticeable concentration of refugees in the neighbourhoods of Riga.

8:00 AM, Day 3 The Riga municipality announces a mobilization of its employees to ensure basic functions and needs on a 24/7 basis. Partial mobilization begins. Government representatives provide information about the situation in the country on TV and radio. Phar-



macies begin to see increased demand for essential medical supplies. Irregular mobile communications and internet disruptions are observed. There are difficulties in contacting emergency services.

10:00 AM, Day 3 There is intense movement of emergency services in the city. Alarm sirens sound all over Riga. You receive information



that an emergency has occurred in the city, and you need to go to the nearest shelter.

6:00 PM, Day 3 The government reports that the security situation is tense but under control. Today's emergency was a reaction to sabotage. Regular power outages are beginning to occur. Streetlights are being damaged in some neighbourhoods (vandalism), and the damage is increasing. There are problems



with repairing the damage due to lack of manpower. Improvised refugee settlements continue to appear in the city. Conflict situations continue to arise in certain neighbourhoods. The Riga municipal police are having trouble monitoring and resolving all conflict situations.

4:00 AM, Day 4 Alarm sirens are sounding repeatedly throughout Riga. Mobile communications are down; electricity has not been restored. You receive information that there



is an emergency in the city, and you need to go to the nearest shelter, taking your 72-hour emergency kit with you.

8:00 AM, Day 4 Electricity and mobile communications have been partially restored, but they are still intermittent. A state of emergency is declared in half of the country (Latgale, Vidzeme, part of Zemgale, and Riga).



Radio continues to inform residents about what's going on in the country, although with interruptions. Refugees are concentrated in many neighbourhoods. Conflict situations continue to develop in some neighbourhoods.

9:00 AM, Day 4 The government is urging residents to stock up on essential items, a



small cash reserve, and make sure they have a 72-hour emergency kit in place.

10:00 AM, Day 4 Residents find suspicious objects in various neighbourhoods. Emergency services are only able to inspect one-third of the objects; in 25% of cases, improvised explosive devices are found. There are



power and gas outages in the city. In some neighbourhoods, streetlights are being damaged (sabotage), and the damage is increasing. There are problems with repairing the damage due to lack of manpower.

4:00 PM, Day 4 Explosive devices detonate simultaneously in ten Riga neighbourhoods (Bolderāja, Čiekurkalns, Zolitūde, Centrs, Buļļi, Dārziņi, Bieriņi, Voleļi, Salas, Dreiliņi), causing massive damage to infrastructure. TV and radio stations experience cyber-attacks. Mobile communications and power supply disruptions continue. The government has difficulty reaching the population. Supermarket and pharmacy employees arbitrarily leave their workplaces and evacuate. Mass individual evacuations are observed, and the number of refugees begins to grow rapidly.



As the situation worsens, a humanitarian crisis may arise. There is intense movement of emergency services in the city. The alarm siren sounds again in the city and residents must go to the nearest shelter. After the alarm signal ends, you return to your home. Upon returning, you conclude that the building has been damaged by an explosion, and it is dangerous to remain there. You notice that your neighbour, who did not seek shelter, has been injured. Telephone communications are not working.

8:00 PM, Day 4 Electricity and mobile communications have been restored. Representatives of the national government and local authorities have issued a statement that a terrorist attack and several cyber-attacks have taken



place in Riga. Investigation is being carried out. Information is disseminated on where the residents can obtain essential goods and medical assistance. The responsible services are monitoring the situation.

12:00 PM, Day 5 The terrorists have been apprehended. There are no longer any power outages or mobile communication disruptions in the country. Local and national gover-



ment representatives are issuing a statement in the media calling on citizens to help deal with the aftermath of the crisis. The involvement of every citizen is important.

Analysis

Data obtained from crisis simulation reconfirms previous observations,⁷² that **the level of individual preparedness is insufficient. It is important to note that this also applies to the relatively more active part of society.** Despite greater involvement in public processes, including issues related to civil defence and crisis preparedness, the responses of simulation participants in several cases do not indicate a high level of preparedness.

For example, on day 3 of the scenario, when the alarm sirens go off for the first time, when electricity is still available and mobile communications are not disrupted, less than half of respondents (41%) first try to find out the reason for the alarm, while 14% go straight to a shelter without finding out the reason for the alarm. In addition, 28% of respondents are ready to take immediate action (e.g., turn on the radio to find out the reason for the alarm), while half of the simulation participants would need 3-5 minutes to react after the alarm sirens are activated.

Figure 29
Actions of crisis simulation participants upon hearing the alarm siren (%)

Note: Crisis simulation participants provided open-ended responses based on the prompt: "There is intense movement of emergency services across the city. Alarm sirens are sounding throughout Riga. Please describe your actions in response to these events." Source: LaSER (n = 185)

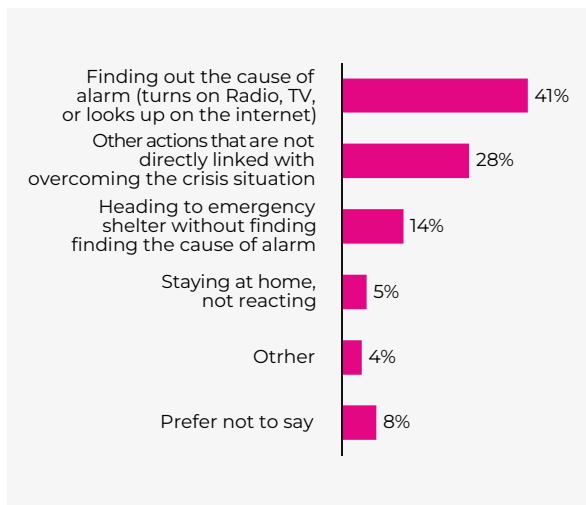


Figure 30
Response time of crisis simulation participants after the alarm siren sounded

Note: Crisis simulation participants responded to the question: "How much time would your planned action require?" Source: LaSER (n = 185)

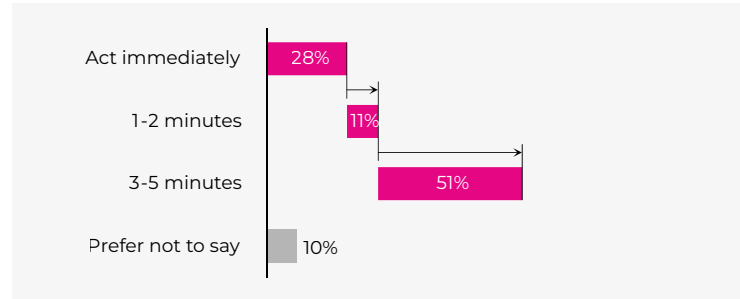
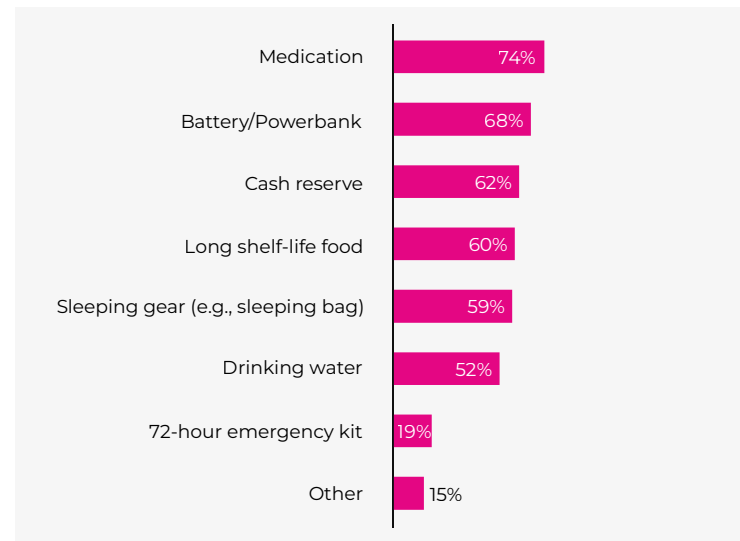


Figure 31
Preparedness indicators of crisis simulation participants (%)

Note: Crisis simulation participants responded to the question: "Please indicate which essential items you currently have available (multiple answers possible)." Source: LaSER (n = 176)



Results confirm that in crisis situations when residents are forced to act regardless of their level of preparedness, efforts are made to reduce the knowledge gap. For example, after the alarm sirens have gone off and residents have been instructed to immediately go to the nearest shelter, 31% of respondents try to find the location of the nearest shelter on the Internet.

⁷² Birka, I., Kļaviņš, D. 2025. *Op. Cit.*

Figure 32
Actions of crisis simulation participants when the alarm siren sounds and they receive an instruction to immediately seek shelter (%)

Note: Crisis simulation participants responded to the question: "You receive information that an emergency situation has arisen in the city, and you must seek the nearest shelter. What is your course of action?"
 Source: LaSER (n = 182)

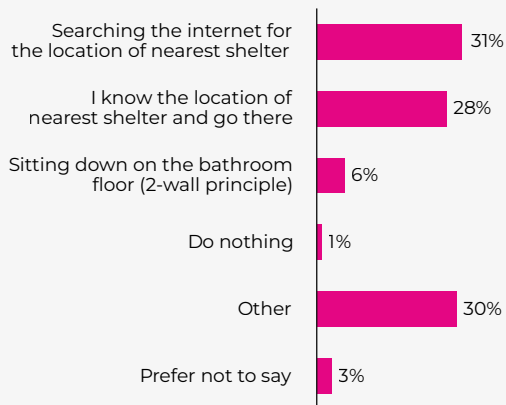
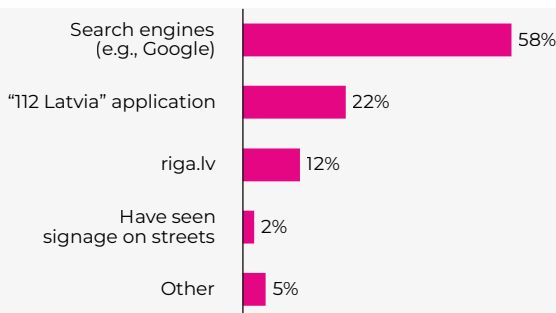


Figure 33
Methods used by crisis simulation participants to determine the location of the nearest shelter (%)

Note: Crisis simulation participants responded to the question: "What steps did you take to find information about the nearest shelter?" Only those respondents who had indicated in the previous question that they know the location of the nearest shelter or that they would attempt to find out its location answered this question.
 Source: LaSER (n = 107)



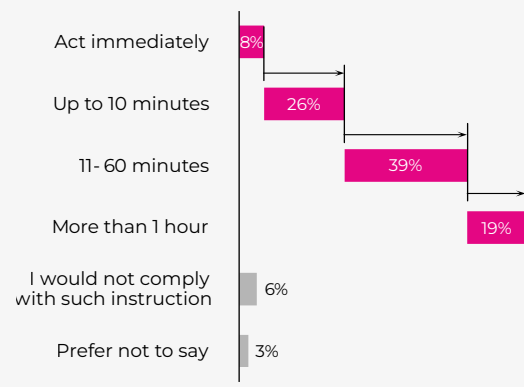
It is important to constantly keep the information of shelter locations up-to-date and easily accessible to the public because **some residents will only try to find out the location of the nearest shelter once a crisis or emergency has already begun.**

Similar observations can be made in the question about how long it would take for

respondents to evacuate, taking a 72-hour emergency kit with them. Respondents indicate that in a crisis, they would first try to pack a 72-hour emergency kit and then evacuate. Consequently, 58% of respondents would take more than 10 minutes to respond to an instruction to evacuate and take an emergency kit with them. Eurobarometer data show that only 9% of Latvian residents have prepared an emergency 72-hour emergency kit (see Figure 13).

Figure 34
Time required by crisis simulation participants to comply with the evacuation instruction while taking along an emergency (72-hour) kit (%)

Note: Crisis simulation participants responded to the question: "You receive information that an emergency has occurred in the city, and you must seek the nearest shelter, taking an emergency (72-hour) kit with you. How quickly would you be ready to comply with this instruction?"
 Source: LaSER (n = 178)



The data obtained in the simulation point to two considerations that may significantly influence the expected behaviour of residents in crisis and emergency situations. First, 68% of respondents indicate the **need to primarily take care of others during a crisis.** Most often these are family members (children and elderly family members) as well as pets.

Meanwhile, 57% of respondents note that **their actions in a crisis would be influenced by whether they were at home or at work.** Being at work would most likely prolong the response time, as it would be necessary to first return home or reach the educational institution where their children are at that moment. Respondents also emphasize that the 72-hour emergency kit is not stationed at the workplace but at home, so the response time would be longer when at work.

Figure 35
Need to take care of others during a crisis (%)

Note: Crisis simulation participants responded to the question: "You receive information that an emergency has occurred in the city, and you must seek the nearest shelter. Will you act individually, or will you first take care of others?"
 Source: LaSER (n = 184)

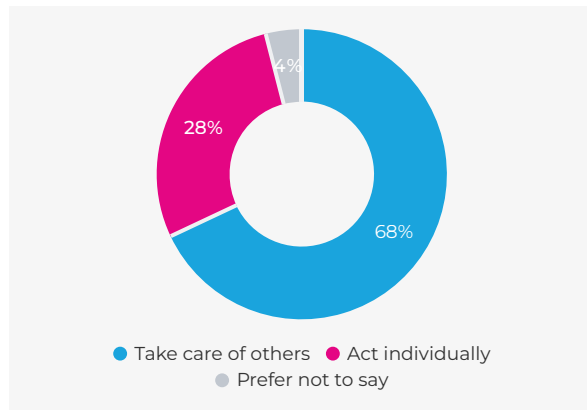
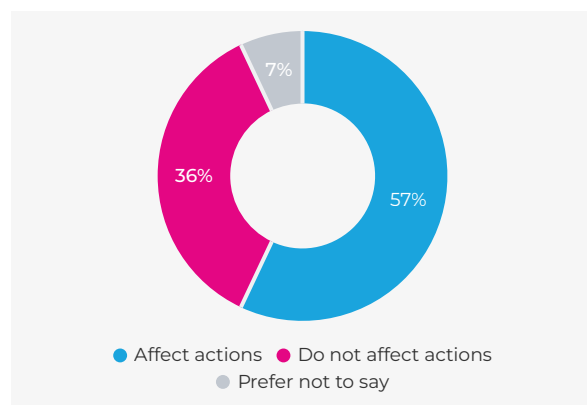


Figure 36
How location affects the actions taken during a crisis (%)

Note: Crisis simulation participants responded to the question: "You receive information that an emergency has occurred in the city, and you must seek the nearest shelter. Would your actions be influenced by whether you are at home or at your workplace?"
 Source: LaSER (n = 182)



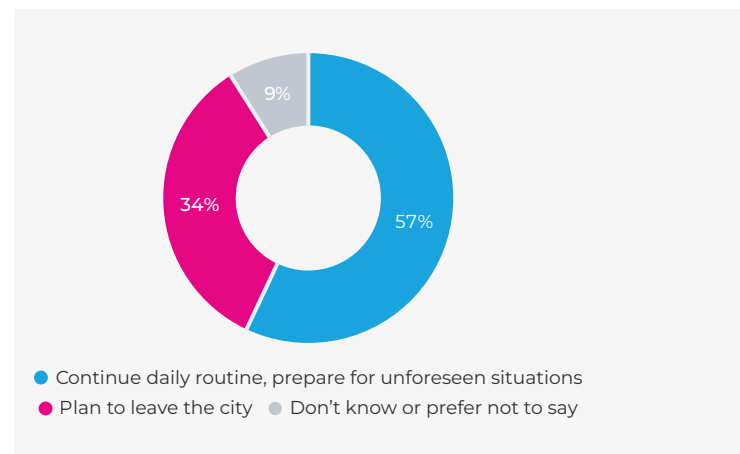
The data obtained in the simulation show that **the level of anxiety in society negatively affects the ability to make informed decisions**. This is exacerbated by the public's low level of trust in the government (see Figure 12). The crisis scenario included incidents that seemingly create the impression of an increased military threat, contributing to confusion and anxiety among the public. According to the scenario, rumours of a military attack on the Baltic states in the com-

ing weeks have spread among the public, but the government has repeatedly stated that there is no immediate military threat.

Even though there is no immediate military threat, after the first indications of a possible crisis situation on day 3 of the scenario, 34% of respondents considered leaving the city or had already left. This figure includes both respondents who would leave Riga for another location in Latvia (mainly to Kurzeme) as well as those who would cross the national border, but it does not include respondents who indicated that they would ensure that their family members were taken to a safe place outside the city, while they themselves would remain in the city and continue to perform their duties.

Figure 37
Planned actions of crisis simulation participants upon the first indications of elevated threat (%)

Source: LaSER (n = 185)



The uncertainty about the development of the situation and the severity of the threat included in the simulation scenario coincides with existing regional security trends – Russia is increasingly using covert means of influence, or hybrid activities in the grey zone, and spotlighting them is often difficult.

Therefore, **instead of preparing for a static type of threat, it is important to learn the principles of how to dynamically adapt to current security challenges**. It is necessary to strengthen both individual preparedness (knowledge and skills on how to act in crisis situations) and resilience, for example, against disinformation.

Finally, **data shows that as the level of threat increases, the role of community in overcoming unforeseen situations also rises.** Previous studies show low levels of trust at the community level, including among neighbours (See Figure 22). This hinders effective crisis preparedness; for example, it is difficult for apartment building owners to agree on adapting basements to shelter requirements.

In a crisis simulation, however, when the threat level rises and it becomes more difficult for residents to overcome the threat on their own, they increasingly hope to rely on their neighbours. For example, in a scenario where an alarm siren sounds but there are problems determining the cause of the alarm due to power outages, 6% indicate that their first reaction is to ask for help from fellow citizens, including neighbours.

Training is necessary to improve individual and community-level capacity to act. It is important to **view such crisis simulations as an opportunity to identify risks and mit-**

igate them in a timely manner. It is impossible to avoid all risks, but identifying deficiencies is the first step in addressing them. For this reason, crisis simulations need to be conducted regularly.

It is particularly important to make crisis scenarios as realistic as possible and to include as many practical activities as possible in the simulation, such as a real evacuation and seeking the nearest shelter. For simulations to be effective, they must also include non-standard or unforeseen incidents, which help to avoid excessive focus on predictable actions.⁷³

A possible solution is to organize regular crisis simulations, including adding other types of threats to the scenario, such as natural or technological disasters, while keeping the focus of the simulation on individual preparedness and ability to act. **Regular crisis scenario simulations would also provide an opportunity to assess and analyse temporal trends in the individual preparedness of the population.**

⁷³ Ketelaars, et. al. 2025. *Op. cit.*

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Civil Defence Training Involving the Population

Preparatory measures taken by Riga residents indicate widespread passivity and low level of individual preparedness, but the reliability of assessing actual readiness is limited. To improve the reliability of measurements, it would be necessary to organize civil defence drills that are as close to reality as possible, with the practical involvement of residents as the main training audience.

Although the National Audit Office has already proposed implementing regular and comprehensive civil defence training at the national, regional, and local levels in 2022, this recommendation primarily focuses on training the responsible institutions and cooperation with businesses and non-governmental organizations. The crisis simulation organized by the LaSER Think Tank illustrates the need to also train the individual response capabilities of residents within the framework of broader civil defence scenarios.

For this reason, it is recommended that comprehensive defence training in Latvia be supplemented with large-scale civil defence training, which is primarily aimed at the general public and focuses on practical training in individual preparedness and resilience.

Such training would have two benefits: it would strengthen the individual preparedness of residents and provide data on existing shortcomings, which would enable evidence-based improvements to the civil defence system. Furthermore, if such training were organized regularly, for example once a year, it would allow for the identifica-

tion of trends in the development of individual preparedness.

To ensure a comprehensive approach, it would be desirable to integrate such civil defence drills into national-level exercises, such as *Namejs 2026*. This would provide an opportunity to test not only military procedures and the ability of state and local government institutions to overcome crises within a single training scenario, but also to practically involve citizens and communities, while giving them the opportunity to train their knowledge and skills necessary to overcome crisis situations.

The crisis simulation organized by the LaSER Think Tank can be considered a pilot project for such civil defence training. As the simulation took place remotely, it did not provide an opportunity to measure several important aspects, such as the ability of residents to find the location of the nearest shelter in real-world conditions, so it is recommended that future crisis simulations be carried out in a practical manner and as close to reality as possible.

However, even though the simulation was organized remotely, participants concluded that they need to strengthen their individual preparedness. Respondents indicated in their answers that it is necessary to purchase battery-powered radios, prepare 72-hour emergency kits, and discuss with relatives how to communicate in situations where telecommunications are unavailable. As part of the crisis simulation, respondents also found out the location of the nearest shelter.

Civil Defence of the Riga Metropolitan Area

The Riga metropolitan area is the largest growing urban area in the Baltic region.⁷⁴ However, the current governance model does not create the conditions for effective cooperation between Riga and the surrounding municipalities, which weakens decision making effectiveness and ultimately limits the competitiveness of the metropolitan area.

Although the Riga Civil Defence Plan approved in 2025 covers the cooperation area of the city of Riga, the implementation of civil defence measures such as the establishment of shelters is planned in a fragmented manner. Centralized civil defence management across the entire Riga Metropolitan Area is important because some of those working in Riga live in nearby municipalities. In addition, the crisis simulation organized by the LaSER Think Tank reveals that one of the two main factors influencing the speed of residents' reactions in emergency situa-

tions is the location they are present – home or work.

This also illustrates the need to promote public-private partnerships. Workplaces and educational institutions, where people spend most of their day, play a particularly important role in improving the civil defence system. Preparedness for crisis situations requires the ability to act while at work.

Since the centralized management of the Riga Metropolitan Area forms part of broader reform efforts, the development of the civil defence system must be planned through coordinated action between Riga and its neighbouring municipalities. The expected benefits extend beyond more effective civil defence management and improved public safety and resilience; such coordination would also enhance the overall competitiveness of the Riga Metropolitan Area.

Targeted Communication Campaigns

Although several communication measures are already being implemented in Latvia with the aim of encouraging residents to prepare for unforeseen situations, residents expect even more active communication from the public sector and a clearer vision of the role of individuals in overcoming emergencies and crises (see Figure 14). This is also indicated by crisis simulation data – 94% of respondents are not aware of the possibility of receiving municipal support in emergency situations if they are unable to return to their homes.

One of the reasons why communication has not always achieved its goal is its scattered management. For example, the Ministry of Defence has published a booklet on what to do in the first 72 hours of an emergency

and in the event of war, and the State Fire and Rescue Service website features a section entitled "Frequently asked questions about what to do in emergencies and civil defence," which includes practical advice on how to strengthen one's ability to act in unforeseen circumstances. The Riga City Council also actively informs the public, for example by organizing civil defence information seminars.

To promote public awareness and individual preparedness more effectively, the current mass information campaigns, which are targeted at the general public, should be replaced by targeted civil defence information campaigns, combining two complementary approaches. On the one hand, part of the population does not perceive a direct threat

⁷⁴ Celmiņš, V., Spuriņš, U. (Red.) 2024. *Op. Cit.*

and therefore sees little need to prepare for crises and emergencies. When communicating with this group, it is crucial to explain the risks associated with low preparedness. It is important to draw on practical experience, including the lessons learned by the Ukrainian population in defending themselves against the Russian invasion. It is important to draw on practical experience, including the lessons learned by the Ukrainian population in defending themselves against the Russian invasion.

On the other hand, a different segment of society already perceives the security situation in the region as highly sensitive, making it psychologically difficult to take practical steps to improve individual preparedness. When communicating with this group, it is important to emphasize that knowledge and skills to act in a crisis situation does not increase the likelihood of a crisis occurring, and that crises can take many forms – not only military conflict, but also natural and man-made disasters. The experience of

other countries in the region in organizing such information campaigns should also be taken into account – for example, in 2024, following statements by NATO officials on the need to prepare for all kinds of threats, including military ones, there was a significant increase in anxiety in Sweden, especially among children.⁷⁵ Similarly, when planning targeted information campaigns, it is advisable to take into account the gender-based differences in threat perception.⁷⁶

Finally, communication with the public should make greater use of existing networks – neighbourhood associations, hobby collectives, and public benefit organizations that are able to reach a broader segment of the population and better understand individual needs. The involvement of such organizations in the civil defence system can not only help citizens prepare for crises but can also form a cornerstone of emergent resilience, as the role of communities increases significantly during crisis.

⁷⁵ Adamson, E., Moyer, J. 2024. In from the Cold: Rebuilding Sweden's Civil Defense for the NATO Era. <https://warontherocks.com/2024/04/in-from-the-cold-rebuilding-swedens-civil-defense-for-the-nato-era/>

⁷⁶ Birka, I. n.d. *Op. Cit.*

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Latvijas Stratēģijas un Ekonomikas Risinājumu Institūts

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