

Discussion Paper – Hybrid Threats and Vulnerabilities in the Drinking Water Supply with a Focus on Surface Water

Background

The Nordic region is highly dependent on surface water (lakes and rivers) for drinking water supply. At the workshop "*Towards a more resilient supply of food and drinking water in the Nordic region*" held in Stockholm in March 2024, participants emphasized that Nordic cooperation is crucial to ensuring the resilience of water supply — for instance, through resource sharing, information exchange, and joint contingency planning.

The issue of drinking water supply also has a clear political dimension. In the *Karlstad Declaration* (2024), signed by the Nordic ministers for fisheries, agriculture, food, and forestry, the ministers expressed a joint ambition to strengthen preparedness for water supply and other critical supplies through coordinated Nordic initiatives and cross-border cooperation. Similarly, the Swedish government report *Ökad VA-beredskap* (SOU 2024:82) highlights Nordic cooperation as a key prerequisite for ensuring water supply resilience.

This project builds on this political momentum and can be extended to include the Baltic countries, contributing to a more coherent Nordic (and optionally Baltic) approach to drinking water supply and preparedness.

Purpose

To strengthen the resilience of Nordic surface-water-based drinking water systems through:

- Mapping risks and interdependencies in surface-water-based drinking water systems, with a particular focus on hybrid threats, and producing a report identifying vulnerabilities and providing concrete recommendations for preparedness.
- Facilitating exchange of experiences and best practices in managing hybrid threats.

Objectives and Expected Results

- Mapping of critical surface-water-based drinking water supplies and hybrid threats in the Nordic region, resulting in a report that identifies vulnerabilities in preparedness and provides concrete recommendations for contingency planning and prioritization of critical users.
- A preparedness exercise focusing on hybrid threats to drinking water.

Main Activities

Initial Analysis: Mapping of surface water resources, critical points, and existing contingency plans, as well as identification of key threats to drinking water supply.



Preparedness Exercise: A physical exercise involving authorities and water utilities to test coordination, preparedness, and information sharing.

Nordic Report: The report will incorporate insights from the initial analysis and the weaknesses identified during the exercise. It will provide recommendations for future initiatives to strengthen the sector.

Budget

The project will be implemented by a suitable research institute with expertise in water supply, hybrid threats, and emergency preparedness. A potential project lead could be the Finnish National Emergency Supply Agency (NESA).

Up to DKK 1.5 million will be allocated from the Nordic Food Hub for the project. This includes communication and publication costs. All reports and publications must be published and designed by the Nordic Council of Ministers' publication unit.

Potential Partners

- National authorities and ministries responsible for drinking water supply
- National authorities and ministries responsible for civil preparedness
- A selection of municipal actors
- Research and academic institutions with expertise in water and climate adaptation.