



National Defence Training Association of Finland and the Volunteer Comprehensive Security Training in North Karelia

National Defence Training Association of Finland (Maanpuolustuskoulutushdistys MPK) is the most versatile volunteer provider of training in the field of comprehensive security and preparedness in Finland. The association was founded in 1993. In 2008 MPK was granted a status under public law, and its duties were defined in the Act on Voluntary National Defence.

More about MPK: <https://mpk.fi/tietoa-meista/>

In February 2026 I interviewed District Chief of MPK's Savo-Karelia District, Colonel (ret.) Marko Turunen. We talked about the role of MPK as a volunteer provider of training for comprehensive security in Northern Karelia and about what kind of special needs, if any, people living in rural and border areas of North Karelia have in the context of preparedness. Here is a short snapshot to some key points of the interview.

Interviewer: Could you tell about the demographics of the people associated with volunteer national defence work of MPK?

District Chief Turunen: Most volunteers have full-time jobs, studies, or other commitments. The activities of the National Defence Training Association are based on the participation of volunteer instructors, course leaders, and other volunteers. These volunteers provide training to other volunteers. Some volunteers are highly active and may participate as staff or instructors on courses on several weekends throughout the year. Others may participate less frequently, depending on their personal circumstances and other commitments.

The organisation also includes highly experienced individuals. The raising of the upper age limit for reservists to 65 has now made it possible for older people to participate more extensively in our course activities. By law, persons over the age of 65 are no longer eligible to

participate in all types of training aimed at developing of military capabilities. There are, however, many other course options available to them. In principle, there is no upper age limit for participation in MPK activities.

The age structure within the Savo-Karelia district is broad, ranging from approximately 20 to 70 years of age. The largest age group consists of people between approximately 30 and 50 years old.

Interviewer: In North Karelia, especially in its rural areas aging of the population can pose problems for volunteer associations' capabilities to recruit new members. Does the aging demography of North Karelia affect operations of MPK in any way?

District Chief Turunen: In North Karelia, the age structure and the size of the population affect MPK's activities more than in, for example, in Southern Finland. Quite simply, in a region with a smaller population, the potential target group is also smaller. There is an increasing need to encourage young people to get involved, first by participating in training and gradually taking on roles as instructors, course leaders, or other volunteer staff.

In activities aimed at developing military capabilities, reservists are the primary target group. The more recently discharged conscripts take part in the activities, the better this is from the perspective of developing the operational capabilities of the reserve.

At the same time, it is important to consider the ability of society as a whole to function during prolonged disruptions. The better equipped each citizen is, regardless of age, to act effectively in different situations, the better society as a whole is able to cope. At the individual level, taking responsibility for one's own ability to function and for the well-being and preparedness of those close to oneself also helps free up public authorities' resources for situations and areas where they are most needed.

In this way, training in comprehensive security at the practical level also provides significant support for comprehensive national defence and, ultimately, national defence as a whole.

Interviewer: How would you describe the North Karelian MPK volunteers' geographical and local knowledge of the North Karelian border area (within 50km of the border zone)?

District Chief Turunen: People who live or have holiday homes in municipalities located near the border, particularly those living close to the national border, tend to have a good knowledge of the border area. Today, however, the population in areas close to the border is declining, and as a result, the strong local knowledge that existed in previous decades has diminished.

People living in population centres farther from the border who have no particular connection to the border area, for example through their place of origin or family background, naturally tend to have less detailed knowledge of the area along the border.

More generally, interest in Finland's eastern border has increased across the country due to the current situation. For local residents, however, the significance of the border has roughly remained largely unchanged. The border has always been nearby, and Russia has likewise always been a neighbouring country. Because of the long distances involved, residents of the border region have become accustomed to managing things independently and to the fact that shops and other services may not be located nearby. By contrast, people living in urban areas close to markets and other services may feel less need to maintain household emergency supplies. Nevertheless, everyone should aim to maintain sufficient emergency supplies at home to cope independently for at least 72 hours.

Interviewer: Has MPK done training programs of preparedness aimed at the people living in the rural areas of North Karelia?

District Chief Turunen: MPK organises various training courses based on identified needs and promotes its activities through a range of different methods. One such method is lecturing, although the majority of MPK's training combines classroom instruction with practical exercises.

MPK organises courses independently as well as in cooperation with other voluntary organisations, public authorities, and other relevant actors. Promoting cooperation in various forms also contributes to the development of joint operational capabilities in preparation for potential prolonged disruptions to society.

People are increasingly interested in how they should prepare for disruptions and, above all, how they should act in different situations. In the current situation, a great deal of useful information is already available, and people can access general guidance online. However, not everyone uses online services, meaning that information available on the internet does not reach the entire population. Even those who obtain information online would benefit from participating in local events where they can learn how to respond to different situations specifically in their local area. There is therefore still a need for locally organised security and preparedness information sessions.