

# Local development in Finnish Lapland



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**LAG Northernmost Lapland faces some highly specific challenges when organising local development work. Nevertheless, it is carrying out exemplary works in a very sparsely populated region.**



## Welfare services

Local Action Groups (LAGs) are the mainstay of the implementation of the Leader approach: LAG Northernmost Lapland, comprising six municipalities, is the largest LAG in the European Union when measured by surface area (53290 km<sup>2</sup>). The area is extremely sparsely populated (as low as 0.17 individuals per sq km in some municipalities). Considering also the great distances, this makes it a very challenging area in which to organise services and also for carrying out local development work.

Traditional trades are reindeer husbandry, agriculture, forestry and inland fisheries that are all still important livelihoods. Nowadays, tourism is also an important sector in rural areas. Finland, alongside the rest of Europe, is also hoping to benefit from new business opportunities offered by the exploitation of the North's oil and mineral deposits. In addition, there are growing expectations of new jobs (e.g. subcontracting for mining) offered by the growing economy of neighbouring Russia.

The local development work carried out by LAG Northernmost Lapland is very diverse.

Concerning welfare services, it has created a model, in which people are employed in their home villages for providing services for senior citizens, or families with small children. This activity is organised in the form of a cooperative, which was founded by developers of rural areas, professionals of social and health sector and the municipality of Sodankylä. It is very cost-effective, as the municipality does not need to hire new personnel, or pay the travel costs for reaching remote villages.

## Midnight rowing

LAG has also inspired various associations to start developing tourism and events. One example is the 'Midnight Sun Rowing Event'. This annual event attracts over one hundred participants, who row with large boats or paddle with kayaks 110 km along the River Kemijoki. Rather than a race, the aim is to enjoy a typical Lappish summer. The LAG is now funding a new project to develop this local event into an international tourism attraction.

Finally, to ensure that local towns and villages also benefit from the burgeoning mining sector, LAG has funded projects in which

villages are marketed as homesteads for the mine workers who migrate to the area. The multiplier effect of mining is also supporting local enterprises. Subcontracting for mines, services needed by new inhabitants and increased purchasing power can already be seen in the number of new enterprises and increased turnovers of all businesses.

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