



# Maintaining Schools in Rural Areas

## Policy Brief Sweden

Grant Agreement n°. 101084234



**Funded by  
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



Village school. Source: Skanska



Policy Brief SE03, 2025.

# Maintaining Schools in Rural Areas

1

*Nothing is more important for rural viability than a school. Without a school, there will be no families, no population growth, no new businesses, a dwindling labour pool, and ultimately rural decline.*

## Executive Summary

A local school is the most important infrastructure element for rural viability. Without it, families cannot live in rural areas and businesses cannot be started. Lessons from FLIARA underscore the crucial importance of a school – the female-led innovations documented in FLIARA would not have taken place if the interviewed women had not been able to raise a family in their rural locations. The Swedish government is urged to guarantee schools in rural areas even if student numbers are low. It pays off in the end, since rural decline cannot be halted without the existence of good schools for the rural population.

## The Challenge

The interviewed women innovators in the FLIARA project stressed the critical importance of a local school. It was a “make it or break it” deal. They would not have been able to engage in their innovations if there was not a local school for their children. Without a school, rural



families with children, or those planning a family would have to move. Vice versa, without a school, rural areas would not be able to attract families to move there. Without a school, the spiral of rural depopulation and economic decline continues unabated.

## Policy Solutions

In Sweden, the municipal budget pays for the schools. Schools with a small number of students are often closed in order to save money. This may be shortsighted and suboptimal, since tax income from rural families are bound to decline if doing so. The municipalities have many competing demands and may not be able to justify the expenditure for maintaining a rural school.

Some Swedish municipalities have creative solutions for the demands for facilities, such as sharing a kitchen and dining hall with the local home for the elderly, or using the sports clubs' facilities for gym classes, and similar. Such opportunities should be investigated. Similarly, school regulations should allow for creative solutions.

We propose:

-  A state, and state financed, guarantee for rural schools. Rural schools must have the same, regulated standard as any school, which in Sweden includes professionally trained teachers, a school library, suitable facilities for all school subjects, and a free, nutritious cooked lunch.
-  School regulations should allow for creative solutions to enable municipalities to maintain and develop rural schools.

## Supporting Evidence & Best Practices

2

The FLIARA visions for a sustainable future developed in collaboration with local Swedish stakeholders underlined the crucial importance of a local school for rural sustainability.

There are many success stories in Sweden where the local community took action and persuaded the local politicians to save a village school, and where the population and economic activity has since increased. One example is provided in the links below.




Sources:

Kuhmonen, T. and Tembo, B. (2024), "D2.2: Future Vision Manifestations", 6 November, available at: <https://zenodo.org/records/14045244> (accessed 31 March 2025).

Lindholm, M. (2024), "Hon räddade byskolan och blev rektor vid 32", *Östersunds-Posten*, 24 August, available at: <https://www.op.se/2024-08-24/hon-raddade-byskolan-och-blev-rektor-vid-32/> (accessed 31 March 2025).

## Conclusion & Call to Action

Local schools are crucial for rural innovation and economic development and must be safeguarded. We propose:

-  The national government should guarantee local, rural schools, through legislation and funding.
-  Municipalities should look for creative solutions regarding use of facilities.
-  School regulations should allow for creative solutions.



## Further Reading

Information on the Swedish school system: Si. (2024), "The Swedish school system", *Sweden.Se*, 20 November, available at: <https://sweden.se/life/society/the-swedish-school-system> (accessed 31 March 2025).

Kuhmonen, T. and Tembo, B. (2024), "D2.2: Future Vision Manifestations", 6 November, available at: <https://zenodo.org/records/14045244> (accessed 31 March 2025).

Newspaper article on how a saved village school turned the village around (in Swedish): Lindholm, M. (2024), "Hon räddade byskolan och blev rektor vid 32", *Östersunds-Posten*, 24 August, available at: <https://www.op.se/2024-08-24/hon-raddade-byskolan-och-blev-rektor-vid-32/> (accessed 31 March 2025).

## About FLIARA

The project is on a mission to create a more sustainable future by highlighting the role of women in agriculture and rural areas. FLIARA will boost understanding of the needs and challenges facing women leading innovative environmental and rural development practices in EU farming and rural areas.

Contact

Email: [info@fliara.eu](mailto:info@fliara.eu)

2025.

3



# Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

[www.fliara.eu](http://www.fliara.eu)



Funded by  
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



Chengdu University

