



European
Commission



HOW THE EU HELPS NORTHERN SPARSELY POPULATED AREAS

Europe's northern sparsely populated areas face a common set of challenges linked to their remoteness, limited human capital and at times difficult climatic conditions. EU support can help them overcome these hurdles by facilitating new forms of economic activity and promoting greater use of e-technologies and innovative partnerships – ultimately improving people's lives. The EU-funded Virtu.fi project is one such example.

E-portal boosts access to public services in Finland's far north

An EU-funded project has enhanced access to healthcare and social services in Finland's northernmost region of Lapland via an e-portal that harnesses the power of technology to meet the needs of residents in this remote area.

Finnish Lapland is a sparsely populated area marked by wilderness and is one of the best places in the world to witness the Northern Lights. Bordering onto the Baltic Sea, Norway, Russia and Sweden, it extends into the Arctic Circle and boasts both lush national parks and bays rich with marine life.

Due to the region's expanse and lack of major metropolitan areas, providing local residents with equal access to health and welfare services is a challenge. The EU-funded **Virtu.fi** project has addressed the issue by developing social and health e-services hub that people can use whenever they need to and wherever they live across Lapland.

Users can log into a range of services including a question and answer facility and a video calling function linking them to health and welfare experts. The portal also allows people to store and transmit data and documents in a secure fashion. In addition, a number of Virtu service points have been launched across the region.

Organisations involved in bringing the project to fruition included Lapland's municipalities, regional government authorities, private providers and the Northern Finland Social Expertise Centre, which also maintains the portal.



Regional and
Urban Policy

'The Virtu.fi project has developed a social and health e-services hub that people can use whenever they need to and wherever they live across Lapland.'

Embracing new technology

To develop the Virtu-fi platform, the project created an innovative environment that delivered an operating method, support structure, hardware and applications to implement e-services. The portal allows service providers to create their own original e-services or improve existing services which may also feature on different platforms. Rolling out the virtual environment is also helping welfare service providers embrace new technologies in their own operations.

While the project has been completed, work continues to make the platform available to other service providers, which will give the region's residents access to an even more comprehensive service. In addition, the existing network of Virtu service points will be expanded throughout the Lapland region. In all, the project has laid the foundations for a virtual social and health centre accessible to all residents across the far north of Finland.



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VIRTU.FI

Project full name: Virtu.fi – Social and Health E-service Hub

Sectors: Public services, health

Project website: <http://www.virtu.fi>

Total cost: EUR 573 081

EU CONTRIBUTION: EUR 286 540

Fund: European Regional Development Fund

PROGRAMME: Sustainable growth and jobs 2014-2020. Finland's structural fund programme

Project start/end: 2014 to 2017

