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Government Initiatives to Increase Reading and Interest in Reading Among Children and Young People in the Nordic Countries

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Children's and young people's reading is a prioritised cultural and educational policy issue in the Nordic countries. Through reading promotion initiatives, the aim is to raise literacy levels, enhance the joy of reading, and make literature a natural part of the daily lives of children and young people. These initiatives are also justified by the belief that a strong reading culture provides better opportunities for education and culture, as well as the ability to participate in society as active citizens and in the democratic debate (Prop. 2023/24:1; Ålands Landskapsregering 2024a; Finanslov 2024; Føroyar lesa. 2024; Althingi 2024a). Children and young people are a priority target group in the Nordic cultural policy cooperation programme, for example, through a reinforced effort to enhance reading and language comprehension among children and young people in the Nordic region, which aims to contribute to a sense of coherence, trust, and more viable societies (Nordic Council of ministers 2020, pp. 13, 16).

In this policy brief, Kulturanalys Norden presents a summary of current governmental reading promotion initiatives for children and young people in the Nordic countries and autonomous regions. It varies from country to country whether this is primarily a cultural or educational policy issue, but regardless, there is cooperation between the two policy areas, such as between libraries and schools. Efforts to increase reading can take different forms, but in several countries, there are national strategies for reading promotion. There are also special initiatives in school libraries, for example, in Sweden, Norway, Iceland, and Finland. Several countries also provide project funding to organizations that promote reading, and in a couple of countries, there are initiatives in the form of reading gifts to families with young children.

The field of children's and young people's reading is broad and includes many aspects, such as language development, literacy, accessibility, reading promotion and literacy mediation. This compilation will primarily focus on reading promotion initiatives, i.e., initiatives aimed at increasing the desire to read and strengthening the reading culture among children and young people; it does not include initiatives that are specifically aimed at reading skills, accessibility for people with reading difficulties or initiatives focusing on national minorities, the indigenous Sami people or people with the national majority languages as a second language. The compilation is based on city budgets, national strategies and other government documents on reading promotion. Experts at the responsible authorities in the different countries and autonomous regions have also assisted us with information gathering and quality assurance.

Denmark

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The joy of reading and the reading culture among children and young people is under pressure, and it requires that they encounter literature in new ways. A special national effort is needed to bring the joy of reading back into the lives of children and young people and to foster collaboration between professionals, researchers, parents, and the most knowledgeable experts: The children themselves. Therefore, the goal of this national initiative is to create a strong reading culture in the everyday lives of children and young people.

(own translation, Tænketanken Fremtidens Biblioteker 2024)

A national initiative for children's and young people's enjoyment of reading in Denmark began in 2023 and will continue until 2025. The investment consists of 8.7 million Danish kroner to strengthen cooperation between schools and public libraries in the work on children's and young people's joy of reading. The think tank Libraries of the Future leads the work, and the goal is to create a strong reading culture in children's and young people's everyday life (Tænketanken Fremtidens Biblioteker 2024). In April 2024, the Danish government presented an upcoming investment of 21 million for increased cooperation between libraries and schools around children's joy of reading. The funds go to public libraries and educational learning centres (formerly school libraries) in the country's schools to buy books and pass on literature to children and young people. It is the Strategic Library Committee, a council under the Agency for Culture and Palaces, which will set the framework for the collaboration (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen 2024a).

The Agency for Culture and Palaces is responsible for national initiatives around children and reading. Many of the efforts made, including those above, are supported by the government's "Agency for Culture and Palaces' development fund for public libraries and educational learning centres". The development funds are regulated by law, and an amount is set aside annually in the Danish state budget. Some of the funds are earmarked for national investments, but the funds can also be applied for by public libraries, schools, municipalities and pedagogical learning centres around the country and used for initiatives for children's and young people's

reading (Finanslov 2024, s. 127; Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen 2024a). In 2019–2021, DKK 6.9 million of the development funds were set aside to promote the joy of reading and reading communities for children in after-school care. The initiative aimed to give children better opportunities to encounter literature in their everyday life at the schools' leisure centres (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen 2022). Furthermore, in 2021 funds, DKK 25 million were set aside for the BOGlad initiative to strengthen children's early encounter with literature. The initiative is aimed at children aged 0 to 12 years, and funds could be applied for by libraries and municipalities. This investment also intends to make literature a natural and enjoyable part of children's everyday life (Slots- og Kulturstyrelsen 2023).

Another ongoing initiative in Denmark is "Every word counts", which is an initiative between the central libraries in collaboration with the Danish Broadcasting Corporation and several other organizations to develop products, methods, efforts and tools for good reading experiences and thereby strengthen children's joy of reading and reading culture. The project will run from 2023–2026, and the material produced by the project is aimed at preschools, schools and parents (Danmarks Radio 2024). In Denmark, there is also a national knowledge centre for reading, which is run in collaboration with the country's six colleges for pedagogues and teachers and focuses especially on literacy (Nationalt videncenter for læsning 2024).

Finland

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The goal of the national literacy strategy is a strong, diverse and inclusive reading culture that strengthens a successful Finland and a good life for its citizens.

(own translation, Utbildningsstyrelsen 2021)

In Finland, work promoting reading is a matter of cultural and educational policy. On the initiative of the parliament's culture committee, the Finnish National Agency for Education in 2021 produced the National Literacy Strategy 2030. The goal of the literacy strategy is the development of multiliteracies, which means reading and producing multimodal texts in different environments and with different tools. The program for literacy at the Finnish National Agency for Education is responsible for the implementation of the strategy, and the goal is a long-term development of the work promoting reading (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2021). The national literacy programme specifies the measures and responsible bodies, supporting and inspiring reading and literacy among all ages through sub-programmes aimed at early childhood education, schools as well as municipalities and local actors. The literacy work in Finland is extensive and must apply to the entire society and include children's and young people's schooling as well as leisure time (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2021).

The sub-programme for early childhood education, "A reading early childhood education", disseminates information on the development of early reading skills and offers materials for collaboration between guardians and libraries as well as tips for educational use for the professions. The sub-programme for the school, "The whole school reads!", supports teachers and the entire school staff in creating a language-aware operating culture that inspires reading in the whole school community by creating structures between the school, the home and the library. The sub-programme for municipalities, "A reading municipality", aims to encourage the municipalities to commit to the work promoting reading, both long-term and systematically within their various areas of operation, such as schools, leisure

activities and libraries. The municipalities are encouraged, for example, to implement the programme "A reading school" (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2021).

Some examples of measures are creating structures that support families' literacy and well-being from birth, spreading information about and inspiring early reading in families, encouraging municipalities to cooperate to strengthen the bond between library employees and staff in preschool (young children's pedagogy) and school (education) and engage children and young people in planning and participating in author visits, book circles and literature campaigns (Utbildningsstyrelsen 2021; Utbildningsstyrelsen 2024).

In Finland, there is also the Finnish Reading Centre, which is funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and Finnish foundations (approximately EUR 335,000 annually). It works to strengthen skills between public authorities and municipal structures. The Finnish Reading Centre works for everyone's equal right to reading and promotes interest in reading, reading and literacy. They run and participate in campaigns and projects to promote reading, for example, the project "Read for the child", which provides facts about reading and the importance of reading for children to preschools and schools, child health care staff, librarians and parents as support for reading education. The Finnish Reading Centre is also responsible for the "A reading gift to the child" programme that the government finances, EUR 350,000 in 2024, where the country's child health care clinics can order bookcases to distribute to babies free of charge (Finansministeriet 2024; Läscentrum 2024).

In addition, the Finnish Institute for Children's Literature Institute receives approximately EUR 150 000 annually for its work in promoting and providing information on children's and young people's literature and children's book art, as well as running a specialized library. The Institute, along with some other activities, also receives project funding to maintain the Lukemo portal presenting children's and young people's books (EUR 90,000 for 2022–2024) (Barnboksinstitutet 2024). State funding for libraries also supports literacy work, for example through development aid to promote reading. Development aid is used, for example, to implement the National Literacy Strategy (EUR 610,000 in 2024) and to support the annual activities of the Seinäjako City Library to promote reading among children and young people (EUR 198,000 annually).^[1]

1. Data received by email from the Ministry of Education and Culture on 2024-08-30.

Faroe Islands

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Reading is a tool that we all need, regardless of whether we are children or adults, and what path we take in life.

(own translation, Føroyar lesa 2024)

In the Faroe Islands there is an ongoing reading campaign, the "Faroe Islands reads" ("Føroyar lesa"). The purpose of the campaign is to promote the joy of reading, especially in the mother tongue, and to create a good reading culture throughout the Faroese society. The campaign covers all ages, but the idea for the campaign came from recommendations made by those responsible for a large reading habit survey in 2017–2018 with three grades in primary school, which confirmed that students' reading is limited. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Culture appointed a working group responsible for the reading campaign to bring together all parties involved in book publishing, book sales and the distribution of books as well as authorities, schools, libraries, municipalities, associations and other organizations that can contribute to the development of interest in and knowledge of reading. The campaign was launched in 2020 and runs for 3–5 years. It includes a website that is intended as a centre for inspiration and information about reading so that adults and children, private individuals and employees in various fields can find relevant material to promote reading (Føroyar lesa 2024).

Greenland



In Greenland, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and the Church is responsible for state efforts to promote reading. The Act on Culture and Leisure regulates how culture and leisure activities are promoted throughout the country (Inatsisartutlov nr. 5 af 6. juni 2016 om kultur- og fritidsvirksomhed). Greenland has developed a new education strategy for 2024–2030, which has a strong focus on promoting the Greenlandic language and supporting children with reading and writing difficulties (Departement for Uddannelse, Kultur, Idræt og Kirke 2024). In 2010, a Language Act was adopted, which sets the framework for the country's language policy (Inatsisartutlov nr. 7 af 19. maj 2010 om sprogpolitik).

Iceland

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People of all ages should have easy access to a variety of reading materials and reading becomes a natural part of everyday life, as increased literacy contributes to improved understanding of social issues, freedom of expression and critical thinking.

(own translation, Althingi 2024)

In Iceland, a new literary policy for 2025–2030 is in the making. According to a parliamentary decision, one of three main goals in the new literary policy is to promote reading as widely as possible in society with a special emphasis on young readers. Several of the upcoming initiatives that have been proposed are aimed at children's and young people's reading. Extra funds will be directed to various projects that encourage reading and creativity, including for children and young people whose first language is not Icelandic. Additional funding will be temporarily provided from the Ministry of Culture and Business Affairs to the Children's Culture Fund to support projects that build on and promote increased communication of Icelandic folklore heritage to children and young people. Furthermore, initiatives aimed at school libraries are planned, and their collaboration with public libraries will be defined; the Ministry of Education and Children is the responsible party. The ministry will also establish a centre to assist school libraries with support and professional development (Althingi 2024a).

In May 2024, the Icelandic parliament also decided on an action plan concerning the Icelandic language for 2024–2026, where strengthening school libraries is one of the 22 points. The holdings and operations of school libraries will be mapped in relation to the primary school act and the upper secondary school act in order to achieve a higher quality of school libraries and better meet a broad student group (Althingi 2024b).

The Centre for Icelandic Literature will be responsible for many of the upcoming initiatives and has already been responsible for promoting literature in Iceland and promoting Icelandic literature abroad. The Centre is a government agency under the Ministry of Culture and Economy and maintains ongoing efforts to promote reading among children and young people. For example, since 2020, they organize

author visits to secondary schools with the aim of raising students' awareness and interest in literature and reading and deepening their reading comprehension. The project is implemented in collaboration with the Icelandic Writers' Association and the Icelandic School Teachers' Association with funding from the Ministry of Education and Children (Centrum för isländsk litteratur 2024).

In 2020, the Icelandic government developed an education policy that highlights literacy as the most important skill for the future, and education policy will place particular emphasis on language comprehension, reading comprehension, expression, writing and listening, as well as measures aimed at meeting the needs of those struggling with reading difficulties. Efforts will be made to ensure that the whole of society works to improve literacy (Utbildnings- och barndepartementet 2024).

Norway

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Being able to read is necessary for most things in our lives. That's why a population of good readers is important for society and democracy.

(own translation, Kultur- och likestillingsdepartementet and Kunnskapsdepartementet 2019, s.7)

In spring 2024, a new strategy was launched in Norway to enhance the joy of reading among children and young people: 'Sammen om lesing - Leselyststrategien 2024–2030'. The strategy was developed in collaboration between the Ministry of Culture and Equality, and the Ministry of Education and Research, and aims to create a stronger reading culture among children and young people through several different initiatives. An important element is to ensure that children and young people have good access to a variety of literature, to invest in school libraries, to strengthen the distribution of literature and to prioritise printed books in schools. The strategy should be seen in the context of the national library strategy, which also contributes to strengthening reading promotion (Kultur- och likestillingsdepartementet och Kunnskapsdepartementet 2024; Kultur- och likestillingsdepartementet 2023). The Ministry of Culture and Equality will allocate approximately NOK 30 million annually to follow up the measures in the strategy during the period 2024–2030. A new national initiative, 'Tid for lesing' (Time for reading), is also being established to strengthen reading instruction in schools and contribute to good literature provision in preschools, schools and leisure centres. To implement the initiative, the Norwegian government has allocated NOK 27.5 million over the past two years to the Norwegian Reading Center. Additional funds, NOK 115 million in 2023 and NOK 300 million in 2024, have been allocated to give teachers more room for manoeuvre when choosing learning materials, and a better balance between screen and book, print and digital learning materials in schools.^[2]

To support municipalities in developing school libraries, the Government has increased the grant scheme for school libraries from NOK 14.5 million in 2021 to NOK 50 million in 2024. The funds will be used to increase human resources and competence development to strengthen reading promotion and ensure that school libraries are an arena for the joy of reading and better reading skills for all groups of

2. Data received by email from the Ministry of Culture and Equality on 2024-09-03.

pupils and in all subjects (Kultur- og likestillingsdepartementet och Kunnskapsdepartementet 2019, p. 19). The increased funding will also be targeted at socio-economically disadvantaged areas (Proposisjon 2022–2023:1; Proposisjon 2023-2024:1). Since 2020, the Arts Council has had a special 'purchasing scheme' ("innkjøpsordninger") for the purchase and distribution of books to school libraries with funding from the Norwegian Cultural Fund. The funds were increased by NOK 5 million in 2023.^[3] In 2024, the scheme was changed from a pilot programme to a permanent scheme. 380 school libraries in primary and lower secondary schools participate in the scheme during the period 2024–2026. The books purchased and sent to school libraries are titles purchased through the Arts Council's purchasing scheme for children's and young people's literature. The aim is to broaden the range and increase the joy to read (Kulturdirektoratet 2024).

To further contribute to the interest in reading among children and young people, the government has increased grant schemes and project funding for organisations and the voluntary sector by NOK 2.5 million to a total of NOK 10 million. The funds can be used for reading projects, author visits or reading competitions, for example.^[4] In 2023, the government increased project grants to organisations that can contribute in various ways to achieving the ministry's goal for reading promotion. Foreningen !les, Leser søker bok and Norsk barnebokinstitutt each received NOK 1 million (Proposition 2022–2023:1). For 2024, the grants are further expanded, with the three organisations receiving around NOK 34 million in 2024. Foreningen !les, Leser søker bok also receives funding from the Ministry of Education and Research (Proposisjon 2023–2024:1).

3. Data received by email from the Ministry of Culture and Equality on 2024-09-03.

4. Data received by email from the Ministry of Culture and Equality on 2024-09-03.

Sweden

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Everyone in Sweden, regardless of background and based on their particular circumstances, shall be given the opportunity to develop good reading skills and have access to high-quality literature

(own translation, Prop. 2022/23:1)

Strengthening reading promotion is a priority for the government in 2024, and initiatives for children and young people are presented in both cultural and education policy. In Sweden, the parliament has set specific national objectives for the policy of promoting literature and reading following the bill Reading for Life (Bill 2013/14:3). The role of libraries in promoting reading and access to literature is highlighted in this year's budget, and the Government proposes a special investment in public libraries' reading promotion, with children and young people as a priority. The Government is also presenting measures to both strengthen and staff school libraries (SEK 216 million in 2025, SEK 432 million in 2026) and suggests further measures to strengthen children's and pupils' language, literacy and mathematical skills, including reading lists to support preschools and schools in purchasing books and an extension of initiatives to develop the skills of teaching staff (previously Läslyftet 2015–2023) (Prop. 2023/24:1; Kulturdepartementet, Utbildningsdepartementet 2024). The National Agency for Education is tasked with running the National Centre for Language, Reading and Writing Development and works to stimulate active work on language, reading and writing development in preschools, schools and school libraries (Skolverket 2024). In addition, the Swedish Institute for Children's Books, which is tasked by the Government with supporting and promoting research into children's and young people's literature, has received additional funding (prop. 2023/24:1).

The Swedish Arts Council has a national reading promotion mission, which includes distributing grants, disseminating knowledge, developing reading promotion methods and research on children's and young people's reading habits, as well as identifying development needs in reading promotion work. In 2021, the Government established the Reading Council (Läsrådet) as an advisory body within the Swedish Arts Council. The Council's task is to drive and coordinate reading promotion

efforts in Sweden and to contribute to collaboration between actors in culture, schools, civil society, popular education, bookshops, publishers and other parts of the business community (prop. 2022/23:1). This year, the Reading Council has also been tasked with submitting proposals for a reading ambassador with the task of promoting reading among children and young people (SFS 2012:515). During the same year, the Swedish Arts Council was commissioned by the Government to launch "Bokstart", a long-term initiative to promote young children's reading and language development. The aim of "Bokstart" is to reach more children and families in an effective way by clarifying collaboration between and within government levels. Within the framework of the cultural cooperation model, which distributes government funding for cultural activities in the regions, government support will also be given to literature and reading promotion initiatives (Prop. 2022/23:1).

Municipal public libraries also promote reading, and a government-funded reading promotion boost for public librarians ran from 2021 to 2023, with a particular focus on children and young people (prop. 2022/23:1, Kulturrådet 2024). Furthermore, the "Strengthened libraries" initiative, which ran between 2018 and 2024, also included reading promotion initiatives. It consisted of grants to public libraries to increase access to library activities throughout the country. From the fall of 2024, a new grant, "More reading", entails distributing approximately SEK 40 million to public libraries and their reading promotion work. Part of the grants will go to the Swedish Arts Council's work to promote reading in areas facing socio-economic challenges (Kulturrådet 2024), and the Swedish Arts Council also distributes grants for literature, cultural journals, libraries and reading promotion, SEK 353 million in total, of which just over SEK 23 million will be allocated to reading and literature promotion work in 2022 (Prop. 2022/23:1).

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Promoting a greater interest in and enjoyment of reading, including at older ages, creates better opportunities to participate in democratic discourse. Reading can bring joy and comfort and strengthen empathy and understanding of the world around us.

(own translation, Government of Åland 2024a, p. 8)

In May this year, Åland published a new cultural policy strategy with associated annual action plans, "Åland's way forward 2024–2030". In the new strategy, children's and young people's access to and participation in cultural life is prioritized. The promotion of increased interest in and enjoyment of reading is highlighted as particularly important in order to create better opportunities for children and young people to participate in the democratic debate, but also as a source of joy and comfort. The work to support access to literature and strengthen the work to promote reading will be described in more detail in a future library policy strategy (Ålands landskapsregering 2024a).

Mariehamn City Library is the central library for the whole of Åland. The library carries out many initiatives, but most are part of its regular activities. The largest reading promotion initiative in Åland is that all three primary schools in Mariehamn are staffed with services specifically focused on media and information literacy and reading promotion. Furthermore, municipalities and associations can apply for funds for cultural and sports activities for children and young people in connection with the school day; for example, a book circle at Mariehamn library is financed by such funds (Ålands landskapsregering 2024b).

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