



Nordic Council
of Ministers

Nordic co-operation programme for the justice sector 2023-2024



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1. Foreword

The co-operation in the justice sector shall contribute to achieving the vision set down by the Nordic prime ministers of making the Nordic Region the most sustainable and integrated in the world by 2030 ([Our Vision 2030](#)).

The co-operation on legal affairs in the justice sector shall help to promote the shared basic principles in Nordic legislation that are in accordance with the shared Nordic values. It is also an important element in the European legislative work and for facilitating the national implementation of EU/EEA legal acts and other international obligations.

The co-operation in the sector has a particular focus on promoting democracy and the rule of law, unified legislation in the Nordic region, Nordic benefit and crime prevention. In terms of the goals set out in *Our Vision 2030*, the co-operation mainly contributes to the strategic priority of a socially sustainable Nordic region but it also contributes to the strategic priority of a competitive Nordic region.

The 12 vision goals

A GREEN NORDIC REGION. *Together, we will promote a green transition of our societies and work towards carbon neutrality and a sustainable circular and bio-based economy.*

In 2021-24, the Nordic Council of Ministers will:

1. strengthen research and development and the promotion of solutions that support carbon neutrality and climate adaptation, including in relation to transport, construction, food, and energy;
2. contribute to the safeguarding of biodiversity and the sustainable use of the Nordic Region's nature and seas;
3. promote a circular and bio-based economy, sustainable and competitive production, sustainable food systems, and resource-efficient and non-toxic cycles in the Nordic Region;
4. make it much easier and more attractive for Nordic consumers to prioritise healthy and environmentally and climate-friendly choices, with joint efforts relating to sustainable consumption;

5. contribute to the positive development of international co-operation on the environment and climate, such as by promoting Nordic green solutions in the rest of the world.

A COMPETITIVE NORDIC REGION. *Together, we will promote green growth in the Nordic region based on knowledge, innovation, mobility, and digital integration.*

In 2021-24, the Nordic Council of Ministers will:

6. support knowledge and innovation and make it easier for companies throughout the Nordic Region to take full advantage of the development opportunities created by the green, technological, and digital transformation, and the growing bioeconomy;
7. develop skills and well-functioning labour markets that match the requirements of the green transition and digital developments, and that support freedom of movement in the Nordic Region;
8. leverage digitalisation and education to bind the Nordic countries even closer together.

A SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE NORDIC REGION. *Together, we will promote an inclusive, equal, and interconnected region with shared values and strengthened cultural exchanges and welfare.*

In 2021-24, the Nordic Council of Ministers will:

9. contribute to good, equal, and secure health and welfare for all;
10. work to involve everyone living in the Nordic Region in the green transition and digital developments, utilise the potential of this transition, and counteract the widening of gaps in society as a result of this transition;
11. give Nordic civil society, and especially children and young people, a louder voice and greater participation in Nordic co-operation, as well as increase their knowledge of the languages and cultures of neighbouring countries;
12. maintain trust and cohesion in the Nordic Region, its shared values, and the Nordic community with an emphasis on culture, democracy, equality, inclusion, non-discrimination, and freedom of expression.

Our Vision 2030

A **competitive** Nordic Region

Together, we will promote green growth in the Nordic Region based on knowledge, innovation, mobility, and digital integration.

A **green** Nordic Region

Together, we will promote a green transition of our societies and work towards carbon neutrality and a sustainable, circular, and bio-based economy.



**The Nordic
Region will become
the most
sustainable and
integrated
region in the
world**

A **socially sustainable** Nordic Region

Together, we will promote an inclusive, equal, and interconnected region with shared values and strengthened cultural exchanges and welfare.

2. Introduction

2.1. General information about the co-operation in the justice sector

The co-operation is based on the principles laid down in the Helsinki Treaty and the prime ministers' vision for the Nordic co-operation.

The co-operation on justice affairs prioritises cases in which Nordic benefit can be achieved. This means that it is emphasised whether joint or similar Nordic activities and solutions, for example in research, would achieve better results than would be possible at national level. It also means emphasising the strengthening of Nordic competencies, and improving contacts and relations between the Nordic countries.

The co-operation pays particular attention to the fundamental prerequisites for maintaining democracy, trust and solidarity in the Nordic Region.

Crime knows no boundaries, both in the physical and digital worlds. Cross-border crime is a challenge for all of the Nordic countries. Closer co-operation between Nordic police forces to prevent and combat cross-border crime is a priority for the co-operation in the justice sector.

Radicalisation and violent extremism are also challenges shared by all of the Nordic countries and which can pose a threat to democracy and social cohesion in the Nordic Region. The countries work together in the justice sector to develop knowledge that will help prevent and combat these phenomena.

Digitalisation can make public administration and the courts more accessible and efficient. This transformation was brought to the fore by the restrictions introduced by the Nordic countries during the COVID-19 pandemic. The digitalisation of the public sector does, however, present challenges that affect the legal rights of individuals and companies. This is an area in which knowledge sharing between the Nordic countries and looking outward to places like the Baltic countries are of considerable importance and value.

Differences in the individual Nordic countries' legislation that affect families and businesses affect freedom of movement within the Nordic Region. The work done to promote unified legislation in the Nordic region plays a crucial role in breaking down obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement, e.g. when implementing EU/EEA legislation in the Nordic countries.

Co-operation on justice affairs also helps to strengthen the work to tackle discrimination and protect fundamental rights, including equality between men and

women and the rights of children and young people, disabled people and the LGBTQI+ community.

2.2. Areas of co-operation

Co-operation in the justice sector covers areas that in most Nordic countries fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Justice.

These include public law, for example criminal law, procedural law, the judiciary, prevention of crime and terrorism, victim protection, police co-operation, asylum, immigration, discrimination, fundamental and human rights. Other areas within public law such as administrative law, freedom of information and legislation concerning protection of personal data are included in the co-operation.

The co-operation in the justice sector also covers areas within private law, such as family law, property and contract law and consumer law.

2.3. Period covered by the programme

This co-operation programme was first adopted by the Nordic Council of Ministers for Justice Affairs (MR-JUST) on 10 January 2019 to cover the period 2019–2022. It has now been extended to cover the period 2023–2024. After 2024, the programme will be based on [the action plan for Our Vision 2030](#) that will apply at that point.

3. Priorities

The co-operation on justice affairs focuses on the three strategic priorities: "Guaranteeing the rule of law", "Unified Nordic legislation and Nordic benefit" and "Crime prevention". Within the framework of these priorities, the justice sector seeks to achieve the strategic priorities of a "Competitive Nordic Region" and a "Socially sustainable Nordic Region" that form part of *Our Vision 2030*.

3.1. A competitive Nordic Region

3.1.1. Unified Nordic Legislation and Nordic benefit

The work in the justice sector to promote unified legislation and Nordic benefit seeks to maintain freedom of movement and counteract and avoid barriers as a result of differences in national legislation. This work falls under objective 7 in the action plan for *Our Vision 2030*.

The Helsinki Treaty strives for the mutual co-ordination of justice affairs. However, this does not necessarily mean that the Nordic countries must have identical legislation. The unified Nordic legislation also involves working toward a joint legal structure and joint principles for legislation. The need for, scope and nature of co-operation on justice affairs varies in different areas of the law.

Regarding legal co-operation, the Helsinki Treaty contains the following articles:

Article 4

The High Contracting Parties shall continue their co-operation in the field of law with the aim of attaining the greatest possible uniformity in the field of private law.

Article 5

The High Contracting Parties should seek to establish uniform rules relating to criminal offences and the penalties for such offences.

With regard to criminal offences committed in one of the Nordic countries, it shall, as far as circumstances allow, be possible to investigate and prosecute the offence in another Nordic country.

It is a key objective of the co-operation on legislative affairs that the content and structure of legislation and other regulations are accessible to people and that people and companies enjoy freedom of movement throughout the Nordic Region without unnecessary cross-border obstacles. It is a national responsibility to ensure, to as high a degree as possible, that new legislation does not impose new barriers

to cross-border mobility. In order to avoid such barriers, a unified approach is particularly desirable when implementing, e.g. EU/EEA law and other international obligations.

Where relevant during preparatory work on new legislation, the countries ought, therefore, to obtain information about similar legislation in the other Nordic countries. In order to contribute to the sum of knowledge about Nordic legislation, which is a prerequisite for a unified system, proposed legislation should, where relevant, also contain an account of similar legislation in the other Nordic countries.

3.2. A socially sustainable Nordic Region

3.2.1. Guaranteeing the rule of law

Nordic co-operation on justice affairs helps to safeguard democratic decision-making processes in the Nordic countries and to ensure the legal rights of people and companies. This will maintain confidence in and the cohesion of the Nordic Region and its shared values. This work falls under objective 12 of the action plan for Our Vision 2030.

Within the framework of these strategic priorities, the justice sector prioritises the legal rights of people and companies, e.g. in relation to the digitalisation of the public sector.

In the period 2021–2024, the justice sector is implementing an inter-sectoral project on co-operation with MR-Digital with the aim of examining the issue of the legal rights of people and companies in connection with the digitalisation of the public sector.

3.2.2. Crime prevention

Crime and terrorism cause insecurity and division in society. Work on crime prevention is, therefore, an important part of Nordic co-operation that aims to maintain confidence in and the cohesion of the Nordic Region and its shared values. This falls under objective 12 of the action plan for Our Vision 2030.

The Nordic countries face many of the same challenges in terms of crime and terrorism – challenges that are often cross-border in nature. The same applies to efforts to combat human trafficking, online sexual abuse and other sex crimes.

Close co-operation is therefore of great importance to the Nordic countries' ability to deal with these challenges in the future.

This includes Nordic police co-operation, but also exchanges of knowledge on legislative initiatives, as well as funding and studies in the areas covered by the sector.

The co-operation must seek to improve contact and relations between the Nordic

countries and help to enhance the countries' competencies in topical areas. One concrete example of this is the sector's efforts over many years to combat child sex abuse.

3.2.3. Uniform legislation and Nordic benefit

The work to promote unified legislation in the Nordic countries and Nordic benefit (as described in item 3.1 above) also helps to achieve a socially sustainable Nordic Region and meet objective 12 of the action plan for Our Vision 2030, e.g. within family law.

4. Co-operation on EU/EEA issues and with other international actors

4.1 Co-operation on EU/EEA issues

Nordic co-operation on justice affairs evaluates the consequences of EU/EEA legal acts as early as possible in the EU decision-making process. The Committee of Senior Officials reviews the most important proposals as required and determines whether there are grounds for Nordic discussions during either the drafting stage of the EU legislation or its implementation into national legislation.

When implementing EU/EEA legal acts, the Nordic countries can take advantage of the opportunities to exchange experiences and avoid duplication of work, for example by conducting joint studies. Informal co-operation between officials and agencies should be maintained and developed.

It is not necessary for every Nordic country to choose the same legislative solutions, but it is important that there is agreement at regional level on the understanding and interpretation of the relevant community legislation in the Nordic countries.

4.2 Co-operation with other international forums

Nordic co-operation on justice affairs promotes contact within the Region, as well as discussion and, when necessary, co-ordination at senior official and political level in relation to other international forums, e.g. the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

Nordic co-operation on justice affairs also includes appointing representatives to international bodies when it is not possible for all of the Nordic countries to be represented.

5. Organisation of the co-operation

5.1. The Council of Ministers for Justice Affairs and the Committee of Senior Officials

The Nordic Council of Ministers for Justice Affairs (MR-JUST) has overall responsibility for the co-operation. At their annual meeting, the ministers discuss topical political matters of Nordic interest and decide whether to initiate co-operation in new areas of the law or otherwise pursue Nordic solutions.

The Committee of Senior Officials for Justice Affairs (EK-JUST) comprises the senior officials responsible for legislative and justice issues from the Nordic justice ministries. The Committee prepares and follows up on the annual meeting of the justice ministers. The Committee also initiates new projects. At meetings of the Committee of Senior Officials, the countries also exchange information on new legislation, case law and other topical legal issues.

The Council of Ministers for Justice Affairs and the Committee of Senior Officials have the power to establish permanent or ad hoc working groups in special areas. In such cases, the Committee drafts mandates and draws up budgets for the working groups.

The Committee also works with the Nordic Council of Ministers' other committees of senior officials.

5.2. The Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers

At the Committee of Senior Officials' third meeting of the year, the next country to hold the annual Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers presents its provisional plans for activities in the coming year, for discussion by the Committee.

The incoming Presidency also presents planned projects, seminars, reports, etc., including their financial parameters.

5.3. Budget

At its first meeting of the year, the Committee of Senior Officials discusses the budget for the subsequent calendar year, sets targets and prioritises activities.

The Committee of Senior Officials' budget discussions must be completed in sufficient time for them to be taken into account in the preparation of the overall budget for the Nordic Council of Ministers.

5.4. Project funding

Within the framework of the annual budget, the Council of Ministers of Justice or the Committee of Senior Officials can fund conferences, seminars, research, studies etc., that are of particular relevance to justice affairs.

The Committee of Senior Officials complies with the overall guidelines for the use of funds from the Nordic Council of Ministers' project budget.

Funds can be granted to external projects that, following a successful application and evaluation process, are deemed to meet the criteria for "Nordic benefit".

In addition, the Committee of Senior Officials has earmarked funds for activities within the framework of co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania (see in item 5.6 below).

The Nordic Council of Ministers' standard terms and conditions for project funding are used for the allocation of project funds by the justice co-operation.

The results and outcomes of projects are reported on the Council of Ministers' form for status reports. Recipients of funding for projects and other initiatives are also requested to submit a brief description of the results and outcomes.

When relevant, results are presented at the annual meeting of the justice ministers.

5.5. Dialogue with the Nordic Council

The Nordic justice ministers seek dialogue with the Nordic Council on matters of common interest, including drafting and revising the programme for co-operation.

5.6. Co-operation with the Baltic States

The Nordic justice ministers meet with their colleagues from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania at least once every two years. A contact group has been established (The Nordic Baltic Contact Group) consisting of civil servants that meets as and when necessary (but at least once a year) and has its own mandate. The chair rotates between the countries. The Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers provides the secretariat function.

This co-operation is based on the perception that close regional co-operation is important, both in the EU and in relation to third countries.

5.7. Other Nordic co-operation on legal matters

The sector has three working groups comprising officials from the Nordic countries and dealing with family law, criminal matters and trafficking of human beings.

The working groups can apply to EK-JUST for funding to hold meetings and submit follow-up reports from meetings where this is relevant.

In addition to the co-operation in the Nordic Council of Ministers, there is an ongoing practical co-operation within the whole of the justice sector.

5.8. Implementing inter-sectoral strategies

The Nordic Council of Ministers has decided that a gender-equality perspective, a children and young people's rights perspective and a sustainability perspective must be integrated into all of its work. These perspectives must be applied when evaluating funding applications.

5.8.1. The UN Agenda 2030 and the sustainability perspective

All projects or initiatives that are supported by the sector, where relevant and when doing so will generate added value, should contribute to achieving the UN's Agenda 2030 goals, including Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions, with access to the rule of law for all.

5.8.2. The gender-equality perspective

Many of the areas prioritised within the framework of the co-operation programme have a clear gender-equality perspective. One concrete example of this is the sector's work to combat sex crimes and human trafficking. The gender-equality perspective is also an important aspect of the work on family law, which is also covered by the sector.

5.8.3. Children and young people's rights

The children and young people's perspective relates to issues concerned with preventing and fighting crime, e.g. online sexual abuse. Family law is also included in this work, in cases where the interests of the child are of crucial importance.

6. Evaluating the co-operation programme

This programme must be evaluated by 2024 at the latest. The evaluation will be conducted in relation to the next *Our Vision 2030* action plan for the period after 2024.

About this publication

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Nordic co-operation

Nordic co-operation is one of the world's most extensive forms of regional collaboration, involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland.

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Shared Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

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