



Nordic Council
of Ministers

Co-operation Programme for the **Environment and Climate** 2025–2030

Together for a Green Future in the Nordic
Region and the World



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Foreword



Romina Pourmokhtari, Swedish Minister for Climate and Environment, and Karen Ellemann, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

In an age of climate change and geopolitical tension, Nordic co-operation is important for the common prosperity and resilience of our countries. We are stronger and more secure when we stand together, and by being a region at the cutting edge, we can contribute to environmental and climate efforts both within our own region and on a global scale.

The Co-operation Programme for 2025–2030 takes its starting point from what the UN has referred to as the triple crisis. By placing focus on the climate, biodiversity loss and pollution, as well as the circular economy, the co-operation programme seeks to bolster Nordic co-operation in areas where the Nordic region can reap benefits. The Nordic Region must continue to occupy a leading position in the green transition and continue to be a competitive and socially sustainable region. At the same time, climate change and the environment are also global concerns, and so the Nordic countries must remain a strong and clear voice that can promote effective solutions in international environment and climate negotiations.

The Co-Operation Programme for 2025–2030 highlights challenges but also the opportunities that can contribute to solving them. Among other things, the challenges consist of climate changes which are occurring at an increasingly accelerated pace, the loss of biodiversity and the negative effects that humankind is having on the environment as a result of harmful chemicals. As a result of ambitious and effective policies in the area of climate and the environment, and of collaborations with central actors such as the business sector and civil society, the Nordic countries are in a good position to handle these challenges and promote a circular economy. At the same time, it is important that co-operation under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers contribute to growth and greater competitiveness. To attain this, we must achieve better co-operation between the various sectors that make up the Nordic Council of

Ministers. In this way, we can create good conditions for the transition we are facing, both within the Nordic Region and globally.

With this co-operation programme, we look ahead towards greater trans-Nordic co-operation on the environment and the climate that can both contribute towards the attainment of our common vision for the Nordic Region to be the world's most integrated and sustainable region by 2030, and to ensuring the Nordic countries can remain a strong and ambitious voice in global climate and environmental efforts.



Romina Pourmokhtari
Swedish Minister for Climate and
Environment



Karen Ellemann
Secretary General of the Nordic Council
of Ministers

Introduction

The co-operation programme takes its starting point from the mission of the Nordic Council of Ministers to help realise the vision of a Nordic Region which is the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030. All sectors within the Nordic Council of Ministers will work to attain this vision by means of the three strategic priorities: a green Nordic Region, a socially sustainable Nordic Region and a competitive Nordic Region. The goals of the environment and climate sector have been placed under the objective of a green Nordic Region in this programme, however we have consciously designed the majority of our goals to ensure that they can also yield positive results for social sustainability and competitiveness as well. It is by broadening the focus of the sectors that we will be able to attain all three components of the vision.

The co-operation programme places focus on the challenges and opportunities associated with what the UN has named the triple planetary crisis, i.e., the triple challenge of climate change, biodiversity loss and air pollution. These three crises are interrelated and affect one another, and so need to be jointly addressed from a systems perspective. The co-operation programme is comprised of both area-specific and interdisciplinary perspectives and solutions and places a focus on both Nordic and international benefits. It builds upon the good co-operation that already exists between the Nordic countries within the area of environment and climate, and it supports our ambition to continue to contribute positively to international processes.

The co-operation programme is the governing document for all work undertaken by the Council in relation to the environment and climate. The co-operation programme was approved by the Council of Ministers for the Environment and Climate on 6 September 2024 and shall apply until 31 December 2030. It has been developed by the Nordic countries and the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers on the basis of participation and input from the Nordic Council, civil society and other relevant actors. This text is to be completed after hearing how the different actors will be involved.

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The triple planetary crises are interrelated and affect one another, and so need to be jointly addressed from a systems perspective.

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.

All activities in the Nordic Council of Ministers will contribute to fulfilling our vision that the Nordic Region will be the world's most sustainable and integrated region in 2030. The co-operation programme describes how the sector will work with the three strategic priority areas.

Political Priorities

Nordic co-operation on the environment and climate

The Nordic countries have long since co-operated within the area of environment and climate policy. Nordic co-operation in this area continues to develop and is focused on supporting the green transition of our societies. Initiatives in this area must be strategic and directed towards outcomes that will yield Nordic added value and benefit countries, companies and citizens. Nordic benefit refers to the fact that countries can often generate better results in co-operation with one another than they can on their own. This can apply to co-operation within international efforts or to joint attempts to address specifically Nordic challenges, such as the effects of climate change, or to finding ways to work on bringing about consumption patterns in the Nordic Region that will be more sustainable in the long term. In addition to co-operation at the ministerial level, other actors such as government authorities, academic institutions, businesses and civil society also collaborate actively to issues concerning the environment and climate. Networking with Nordic colleagues is a meaningful and natural component of this for many, and something which generates concrete results. It is important that co-operation also place focus on how climate and environmental challenges are handled in peripheral areas of the Nordic Region and in its small communities. Independent co-operation initiatives also exist within the sector, such as the Nordic Swan EcoLabel, the Nordic Environment Finance Corporation (NEFCO) and the Nordic Council Environment Prize.

Challenges

The Nordic Region is comprised of large areas of both land and sea, from the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions in the north to more temperate areas in the south. It is home to forests, mountains, volcanoes, plains, cultivated fields, islands, small communities and big cities. Its maritime areas include the Baltic Sea in the south-east, the North Sea, the Norwegian Sea, the North-East Atlantic and the Greenland Sea in the west and the Arctic Ocean in the north.

Ecosystems on land and at sea are put under strain by human activities which have a negative impact on the environment. Eutrophication, ocean acidification, environmental pollution, waste including plastic, overfishing and invasive foreign species are all serious problems. The effects of climate change contribute further to the total strain on ecosystems. Climate change is happening at a faster rate north of

the Arctic circle than in the rest of the world, and the average annual temperature in the Arctic has increased by four times as much as it has at more southerly latitudes in recent decades, resulting in thawing permafrost and shrinking ice caps.

The geopolitical situation has also changed in and around the Nordic Region. The security situation has worsened, the world in general is increasingly polarised and climate change threatens our way of life. It is therefore becoming all the more important for us to seek to co-operate with other countries and to bolster our preparedness from several perspectives. Among other things, the environment and climate sector can contribute towards the protection and development of resilient societies from an environmental and climate perspective.

The Nordic countries are in a relatively good position in relation to Agenda 2030 and the 17 SDGs,^[1] but, like many other industrialised nations, they still face challenges relating to the climate, the loss of biodiversity, air pollution and the excessive consumption of resources. The challenges we face include meeting the ambitious goals set for climate neutrality in the period of 2035–2050, implementing the new Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework from the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), as well as the new framework for chemicals, and bringing down our high levels of resource consumption, among others. The ecological footprint of the Nordic countries is amongst the highest in the world and needs to be reduced considerably. This is both in order to reduce strain on the Earth's resources, but also in order to demonstrate that it is possible to live within the limits of our planet and still maintain a high level of prosperity. The overarching and most important challenges within the environment and climate sector thus have both a Nordic/regional dimension as well as an international dimension in relation to the EU and the international community.

The challenges (and thus also the opportunities) facing the Nordic countries align in large part with what the UN calls the Triple Planetary Crisis – i.e. challenges linked to the climate, biodiversity loss and pollution. In a Nordic context, we associate pollution with our high levels of resource consumption, among other things. For example, it pertains to our consumption of products that contain plastic, critical raw-material metals and hazardous chemicals.



Nordic countries, like many industrialised nations, still face challenges relating to the climate, the loss of biodiversity, air pollution and the excessive consumption of resources.

1. <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/rankings>

Opportunities

Conversely, the Nordic countries also have unique conditions and opportunities to contribute towards solving major environmental and climate challenges. We have a highly educated population, and the need to undergo a green transition is well accepted here, especially by the younger generation. Our physical environment, both natural and man-made, contributes towards a sense of identity and belonging, and to our quality of life and health. It is also foundational to several of the most important industries within the Nordic countries. Our natural and man-made environment must be protected so that it can remain robust in the future, and contribute positively to both our social and financial sustainability.

Digitalisation is at the forefront and our societies are characterised by a high level of communication. We are home to prominent universities and knowledge institutions which conduct research and create innovations. The development of artificial intelligence and other ground-breaking applications of digital technologies is constantly being accelerated. We have a tradition of knowledge-based policy development and experience in jointly developing knowledge bases that can contribute to international processes. We also have relatively transparent, short and agile decision-making processes, green think-tanks and, not least, a number of international companies that are leading the way in the green transition.

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Our natural and man-made environment must be protected so that it can remain robust in the future, and contribute positively to both our social and financial sustainability.

Focus in the co-operation programme

The challenges within the areas of climate, biodiversity loss and pollution are interrelated and affect one another. It is for this reason that the co-operation programme also places focus on synergies and interdisciplinary perspectives when developing solutions within the environment and climate sector. This is both between the three areas, but also in relation to other sectors that fall under the scope of the Nordic Council of Ministers' operation. In order to succeed in the necessary transition, all sectors and the different parts of society will need to come together to channel their focus. The links that exist between environmental, social and financial sustainability need to be made more visible. By being forerunners and setting high ambitions for the environment and climate, we can bolster our competitiveness and create new, green jobs.

International and national instruments, such as taxes, contributions, environmental legislation and support for research and innovation, will play a crucial role in solving complex societal challenges and attaining environmental targets. Well-designed instruments can influence the behaviour of both companies and individuals, creating incentives to redirect activities in ways that will reduce environmental impact. These kinds of changes can entail costs for certain actors, and so it is important that instruments be designed in a way that allocates resources in society and compensate those worst affected by our transition to a greener economy. Acceptance of change can be increased through solutions that are cost effective, that contribute to greater competitiveness, that are market based and that are also flexible in terms of their methods of attaining the goals. The Nordic countries will also need to continue to draw benefit from their co-operation and exchanges of information in relation to matters that concern policy implementation and choice of instruments.

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By being forerunners and setting high ambitions for the environment and climate, we can bolster our competitiveness and create new, green jobs.

A fundamental starting point for the co-operation programme is the need for an enhanced level of exchange between politics, industry and business, civil society and academic institutions. It is also important to integrate local, national, regional and global actors and perspectives. In order to solve the complex challenges facing us, all societal groups need to be given the opportunity to exert an influence. Equality and the perspective of indigenous peoples, as well as children and young people, are also

important to Nordic co-operation on the environment and climate. It is also important to consider the unique features of the Nordic societies, for example by co-operating on the management of resources and the exchange of experiences between small Nordic communities. Small Nordic communities often have unique conditions and challenges compared with the Nordic Region at large. This is something that needs to be taken into consideration in connection with Nordic co-operation and the work to achieve the goals.

Exactly what a life within the limits of the planet might look like is something that needs to be discussed, developed and communicated. The definition of a high degree of prosperity also needs to change, and it most likely will. The environment and climate sector needs to get better at communicating what prosperity might look like in terms of access to vibrant nature, clean oceans, clean air, a society free from harmful chemicals and pollution, trust between people and security in relation to the effects of climate change.

Furthermore, high ambitions and leadership must continue to define our co-operation, not least in relation to the EU and other international processes. At the same time, we also need to show how our commitments at a global level can be realised regionally and locally. There must be a considerable level of Nordic benefit in relation to what the countries themselves and other actors do, and for which Nordic networks and competencies already exist or can be built up.

It is against this background that the Council of Ministers for the Environment and Climate has adopted decisions on the goals and sub-goals for the work to be undertaken in the 2025–2030 period. The political priorities are based on the above analysis and an assessment of how the highest possible level of Nordic benefit can be attained; for example by collaborating regionally, within the EU and globally.

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Goals and sub-goals

The environment and climate sector has worked actively to integrate the three aspects of sustainability into this co-operation programme. Our overarching goals and sub-goals are designed to contribute not only to a green Nordic Region, but also to a competitive Nordic Region and a socially sustainable Nordic Region.

Goal 1: The Nordic Region will be a leading player in the transition to climate neutrality and climate resilience, and it will work towards an ambitious implementation of the long-term goals in the Paris Agreement



The Nordic Region is and shall remain a leading player in the climate transition. All actors in society must contribute to and be given the opportunity to participate in the transition, and no-one must be left on the sidelines. The Nordic Region must show that it is possible to live within the limits of the planet and still enjoy a high degree of prosperity. We are a driving force behind the development and better utilisation of synergies in the work being undertaken to reduce climate emissions, to preserve biodiversity and to curb air pollution. We recognise important Nordic industries and address both the challenges and the opportunities. Through Nordic co-operation, we can bolster our possibilities to influence and accelerate efforts to attain climate neutrality, climate resilience and clean air, both within the EU and globally, while also benefiting from positive experiences around the globe. The Nordic countries can contribute a solid scientific foundation relating to air quality and climate, and thus they have a unique opportunity to influence global development.

Sub-goal 1.1: We will be a driving force behind initiatives to bolster global ambitions for air quality and climate, and we will support the development of other countries' work in this area.

Nordic co-operation shall contribute a high level of ambition for the development and implementation of the EU and UN's climate efforts. This goal encompasses collaboration around new knowledge, policy development and the implementation of objectives and provisions. Like other early industrial nations, the Nordic countries have a responsibility to contribute towards the climate efforts of other countries and to facilitate a just transition. This can be achieved through the development of solutions that show it is possible to reduce climate emissions while still retaining a high level of prosperity, and by assisting with knowledge and competencies in negotiations and other contexts. We must both leverage and communicate synergies between air quality and the climate. We must also respect the unequal conditions that the planet's populations have when it comes to leveraging knowledge and solutions from other places around the globe.

Sub-goal 1.2: We will promote the transition towards fossil-free transport through active co-operation on land, at sea and in the air.

The transition to 100% fossil-free transportation will require many different measures and behavioural changes. We need to continue to develop technologies and make it easier for Nordic citizens and companies to choose sustainable means of transportation. In addition to other areas, the Nordic countries need to collaborate within the areas of aviation and maritime transportation, heavy-goods transportation over land, infrastructure for sustainable fuels and the transition of the vehicle fleet. It is important that the Nordic countries share information with each other and work together to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from global aviation and maritime transport. The end goal is a green and sustainable transition of the transport sector that will reduce climate emissions, air pollution and noise pollution.

Sub-goal 1.3: We will bolster our co-operation within emission-intensive sectors to promote transformational and sustainable solutions.

Emission-intensive sectors need to undergo a green transition. Carbon dioxide and methane gas emissions affect both the climate and air quality. Emissions of ammonia and nitrogen can be harmful both to nature and to human health. Nordic co-operation needs to promote the transition of a number of key sectors such as energy, industry, food production, agriculture and forestry, fishing, construction and urban development. The Nordic Region is facing huge challenges, but also considerable opportunities as we seek substantially to increase our production of fossil-free energy so that it can meet the needs of the future. We must support new technologies and the development of infrastructure relating to carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS). Solutions based on natural absorption must also be promoted. Bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS) is one way to attain negative carbon emissions. Raw material resources in the form of metals and minerals that are needed for the green transition also need to be extracted, used and recirculated in a responsible manner. We must work to ensure that Nordic solutions, networks, companies and knowledge institutions are given the right conditions for development such as greater clarity in regards to regulations and reporting requirements.

Sub-goal 1.4: We will bolster our climate resilience for more resilient societies.

Extreme weather conditions, which can lead to flooding, droughts and violent storms, are expected to become more common, even in the Nordic Region. Rising temperatures cause the permafrost to melt and the ice caps to shrink. Moreover, it is also likely that our societies will be affected by the effects of changing climate conditions in other parts of the world. These cross-border effects will include phenomena such as migration, as well as impact on trade and supply chains, financial systems and infrastructure. Nordic co-operation must promote the development of policies and measures for climate adaptation in line with other societal goals and with due consideration to the overall resilience of our societies. We must develop and disseminate knowledge about methods and working models that can improve and boost the efficiency of our efforts in relation to various different aspects of climate adaptation, such as cross-border climate risks and robust monitoring systems. Furthermore, Nordic co-operation on the environment and climate must also raise awareness of the challenges and provide support to solutions that incorporate the climate, biodiversity loss and air pollution. It should also encompass the development of knowledge and the analysis of how water supply systems and other essential utility services can be designed so that they are as robust as possible. It is crucial that there is co-operation not just nationally, but at the regional and local level as well, and this must be supported.

Goal 2: The Nordic Region will reverse biodiversity loss by bolstering and developing its co-operation with actors within the business and industry sector, civil society and academia



Nordic citizens enjoy broad access to nature and a unique relationship with outdoor recreation and heritage environments. In order to protect both Nordic and global biodiversity, we need to boost the intensity of our work and prioritise this issue more highly. All actors, from countries and citizens to indigenous peoples, academic institutions and companies, need to collaborate in order to find and develop solutions that will reverse the loss of biodiversity.

Sub-goal 2.1: We will contribute towards an ambitious implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and support the development of other countries' efforts, in part by demonstrating how biodiversity can be protected in tandem with social and financial development.

Through Nordic co-operation, we can bolster our possibilities to influence and accelerate our work towards reversing biodiversity loss within the EU and globally. Among other things, we will work to achieve viable ecosystems and communicate how this can be done in tandem with both social and financial development. Particular focus shall be placed on the protection of ecosystems, the restoration of habitats and on combating invasive species.

Sub-goal 2.2: We will step up our efforts to ensure that the Nordic Region's maritime areas are protected, managed and utilised in a manner that is environmentally, biologically and financially sustainable.

The Nordic Region shall continue to develop its co-operation around in relation to maritime environments. Important matters requiring Nordic co-operation include, among other things, international negotiations and processes, the preservation and restoration of marine life in the face of changing marine climates, the development of knowledge, environmental and climate monitoring, a sustainable blue economy and an ecosystem-based approach to planning and management. Eutrophication, ocean acidification, environmental pollution, waste including plastic, overfishing and invasive foreign species are all challenges which will require collaboration and the exchange of information if we are to attain a positive development. Sustainable fishing is also a prerequisite not just in terms of retaining the diversity of existing ecosystems, but also in terms of making sure that future generations will be able to continue to use fish stocks as a source of income.

Sub-goal 2.3: We shall protect and develop Nordic natural and heritage environments through the use of sustainable land use, ecosystem-based land planning and collaboration with the business sector, civil society and academic institutions.

The importance of biodiversity is becoming ever clearer both in the Nordic Region and globally, and yet the rate of loss is increasing at the same time. Nature, heritage environments and outdoor recreation all contribute towards social sustainability and quality of life. We need to develop our ways of planning, how we use our land and water and how we manage and develop our unique heritage environments. In order to succeed in this, we need to develop our co-operation with the business sector and industry, the finance sector, civil society, indigenous populations, academic institutions and Nordic municipalities and regions.

Sub-goal 2.4: We will promote nature-based and other innovative solutions to address the challenges within biodiversity loss, climate and air pollution.

The challenges faced by the world relating to the climate, biodiversity loss and air pollution are interrelated and all affect one another, and so for this reason they need to be jointly addressed. Nordic co-operation has contributed towards greater levels of knowledge and experience around the opportunities that lie in using nature-based solutions. We need to support and promote nature-based and other innovative solutions that can address these challenges. We must also leverage the knowledge and experience that we have and convert it into praxis.

Goal 3: The Nordic countries will reduce their ecological footprint through a circular economy and by contributing towards the reduction of harmful chemicals and pollutants both globally and locally



The Nordic countries still do not live within the limits of the planet and need to reduce their negative impact on the environment through the efficient and circular use of resources. Nordic countries generally enjoy a high level of competitiveness within the EU and globally, in part because of our high environmental requirements, active companies and engaged citizens. It is important that the Nordic Region continue to work to promote the ambitions of the business sector in relation to the environment and climate. In this way, we can promote prosperity, welfare and the environment. We shall continue to co-operate around the development of a circular economy by preventing the presence of harmful substances, proposing waste-prevention measures, influencing product policies and by participating actively in the development of new financing solutions and circular business models.

Voluntary initiatives such as officially recognised eco-labels are important and can help guide consumers and companies that want to be at the forefront of change. The Swan EcoLabel is a powerful, well-known and established tool that can help to drive forward the green transition in the Nordic Region.

We must continue to work together and build further upon what has already been done to reduce the harmful effects that chemicals and pollutants can have on humans and the environment. In collaboration with citizens and businesses, we must continue our work in relation to behavioural changes, legislation, standardisation, knowledge-based facts, innovation and communication. Combating plastic pollution in the Nordic Region, globally and locally must continue to be a priority for Nordic co-operation.

Environmental criminality, such as the illegal handling of waste, is another area in which co-operation will likely need to be reinforced going forward.

Sub-goal 3.1: We will contribute a high level of ambition for negotiations and actively implement international agreements concerning chemicals, waste, pollutants, plastic and similar.

Nordic co-operation must be a strong driving force in international processes. We shall continue down the work already begun in regards to the Global Framework on Chemicals, marine littering and negotiations around a global agreement against plastic pollution. The co-operation shall continue to contribute actively towards the development and implementation of EU initiatives within areas such as product legislation and the prevention of waste. Our co-operation around pollutants and resource efficiency must be made more visible and used to contribute towards the implementation of international agreements and processes.

Sub-goal 3.2: We shall promote circular solutions that encourage citizens to consume sustainably and companies to design and produce in a resource-efficient manner.

Circular economies help to limit the use of natural resources and thus they have a positive impact on nature. The transition to a circular economy will require changes in both design and production, as well as our choice of production methods and consumption patterns. It will also require incentives to promote business models that contribute towards longer product lifespans, reuse and recycling and the effective communication and dissemination of information. Financial and regulatory obstacles need to be curtailed so that circular business models can compete on the same terms/playing field as traditional, linear business models.

Nordic co-operation must promote the development of innovative solutions and cross-border collaboration whereby a common Nordic market can enable the development of reuse and recycling practices, not least within the construction sector. Important instruments here will include public procurement, eco-labels, financial incentives, training, eco-design and manufacturer responsibility. Construction and demolition waste, plastic, textiles, critical raw materials and hazardous waste are all particularly prioritised areas.

Sub-goal 3.3: We will reduce the risks to humans and the environment of chemical substances and products by phasing out harmful chemicals, developing new knowledge and informing key target groups.

Achieving a circular economy requires cycles to be free of toxins. The Nordic Region has a long tradition of successful collaboration around the issue of chemicals. Nordic co-operation must therefore continue its work to prevent the presence of harmful substances in products and to ensure that problematic substances do not occur in the circular economy. We shall promote the manufacture of products and goods that are safe and sustainable by design. We shall continue to develop our co-operation by placing focus on minimising the use of harmful substances, collaborating around the implementation of EU legislation, oversight, risk assessments and by sharing experiences of methods and data from screening and monitoring activities, such as those which look at human health. Issues relating to chemicals which are regulated in relevant legislation, such as chemical legislation but also legislation related to air and water quality, the presence of chemicals in food products and antibiotic resistance, should also be taken into consideration as part of this work.

Sub-goal 3.4: We will contribute towards the greater visualisation of how Nordic citizens can live ecologically, socially and financially sustainable lives within the limits of our planet.

Nordic citizens are keen to contribute towards sustainable development. The environment and climate sector needs to highlight and communicate values such as access to vibrant nature and heritage environments, clean oceans, a society free of harmful chemicals and pollutants, and security despite the effects of climate change. We must also show how individual citizens and companies can make sustainable decisions with regards to the climate and environment.

Evaluating the Co-operation Programme

The co-operation programme applies for the 2025–2030 period which is divided into two three-year periods: 2025–2027 and 2028–2030.

An evaluation will be performed in the middle of the period, on the basis of which, the Council of Ministers may choose to make adjustments to the programme. This will also give them an opportunity to receive feedback on how the work plan for the final period should be formulated.

Regular evaluations can also be made at the discretion of the Secretary General and the Council of Ministers.

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