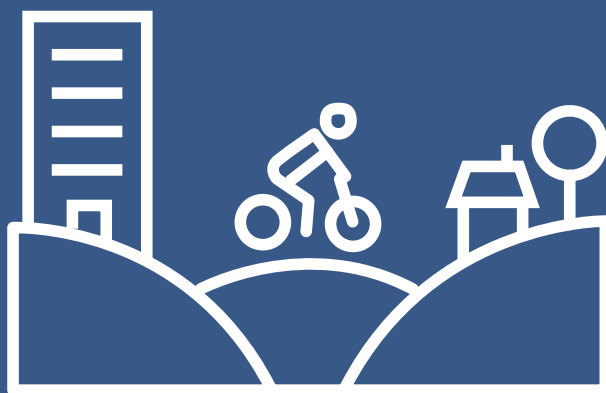


Co-operation Programme for **Regional Development and Planning** 2025–2030

For a Green, Competitive and Socially
Sustainable Development across the Entire
Nordic Region



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This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version at:
<https://pub.norden.org/politiknord2024-753>

Foreword



Peter Kullgren, Swedish Minister for Rural Affairs, and Karen Ellemann, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

It should be an attractive prospect to live, study, work and run a business across the entire Nordic Region. However, the new geopolitical situation we find ourselves in is placing greater demands on security, supply and preparedness. Co-operation across borders and a joint approach between the Nordic countries is crucial to ensuring a Green, Competitive and Socially Sustainable Nordic Region, with a high level of resilience and adaptability, that will allow us to attain our shared vision for the Nordic Region as one of the most sustainable and integrated regions in the world by 2030.

The regions, cities and rural areas which make up the wider Nordic Region all have different preconditions and capacities for development. It is crucial that the solutions put forward to resolve the major and complex societal challenges facing the Nordic Region take their starting point from this baseline. Among other things, this applies to the green and digital transitions, and to the demographic changes that are affecting the regions, cities and rural areas in different ways.

The Nordic Region is one of the most innovative and competitive regions in the world, where innovative companies are able to generate the economic growth that is important to our prosperity and well-being. This creates the necessary framework for good and secure lives – both in cities and in rural areas.

However, the worsening geopolitical situation and greater levels of global uncertainty have sharpened focus on the need to boost the Nordic Region's resilience and adaptability, as well as our ability to resist and address different strains, disturbances and crises. A strong civil society, access to work, education, transport and access to both public and private services – in times of peace and times of crisis – are important components in ensuring that regions, cities and rural areas can remain secure and stable across the entire Nordic Region.

The Nordic Council of Ministers for Sustainable Growth (Regional) constitutes the framework for Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning. This co-operation programme for 2025–2030 establishes the political objectives and priorities for Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning. Focus is placed on areas within which the Nordic countries can jointly through collaboration, common efforts and the exchange of experience and learning contribute towards a greener, more competitive and more socially sustainable Nordic Region.



Peter Kullgren
Swedish Minister for Rural Affairs



Karen Ellemann
Secretary General of the Nordic Council
of Ministers

Introduction

The co-operation programme for regional development and planning describes the political priorities and objectives for the 2025–2030 period. The co-operation programme takes its starting point from the Nordic Council of Ministers' mission to work towards realising the vision for a Nordic Region which is the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by the year 2030. All of the Councils of Ministers work to attain this vision by pursuing the three strategic priorities that have been established.

In the period between now and 2030, Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning will focus on promoting a green transition which will generate development and opportunities for people and businesses in all parts of the Nordic Region. At the same time, the regional sector will place focus on boosting the competitiveness and resilience of the Nordic regions, and on promoting border-region co-operation. Finally, the regional sector will also place focus on its work to promote secure and positive living conditions across the Nordic Region, both in times of peace and times of crisis.

It is anticipated that a considerable part of the implementation of the co-operation programme for regional development and planning shall take the form of support for common Nordic initiatives and projects (both within the regional sector and in cross-sectorial forms with other sectors) and via knowledge development and the exchange of experiences between relevant Nordic actors.

The Nordic Council, civil society and other relevant actors have been involved in the drafting of the co-operation programme. The Nordic Council has provided input on the goals and objectives of the co-operation programme and dialogue has been conducted with the Nordic Council's Committee for Growth and Development, most recently in connection with the Nordic Council's thematic session in April 2024. In addition, NORA, the Nordic Cross-border Co-operation Committees, Nordregio and other Nordic actors have had the opportunity to comment on the draft for the co-operation programme.

The co-operation programme is the governing document for all activity under the Council of Ministers for Sustainable Growth (Regional). The co-operation programme was approved by the Council of Ministers for Sustainable Growth (Regional) on 18 June 2024 in Karlstad, Sweden, and is valid until 31 December 2030.

Nordic added value is a central criterion when it comes to assessing the relevance and efficiency of Nordic co-operation. Nordic added value is defined as the value generated beyond the value attained by initiatives at the national level. For example, Nordic added value can be said to arise from initiatives that generate Nordic co-operation and contacts, reduce obstacles and fragmentation, bring together Nordic resources and competencies, leverage hitherto unused potential and/or create synergies. The idea is that Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning should generate clear added value for the Nordic countries at the national, regional and local levels.

The co-operation programme shall be implemented in conformity with the Nordic Council of Ministers' policy for the integration of sustainable development, for equality, and for a children's rights and youth perspective in the Nordic Council of Ministers.

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 within regional development and planning should contribute towards greater knowledge and solutions to important common and cross-sectoral societal challenges in the Nordic countries. To attain the goal of a Green, Competitive and Socially Sustainable Nordic Region, there is a need for solutions that build on regional strengths and local capacities for adaptation, and which bolster trust and co-operation between all parts of the Nordic Region. Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning therefore needs to promote a sustainable approach to regional development which bolsters financial, environmental and social development, increases the region's resilience and adaptability and promotes Nordic integration and cohesion – both across borders within the Nordic Region and in the North Atlantic Region.

Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning should contribute towards making it yet an even more attractive prospect to live, study, work and run a business in the Nordic Region as a whole. The challenges facing Nordic regions, cities and rural areas have grown more complex and transnational in nature, and they require coordination across several administrative and functional boundaries, as well as a clear territorial perspective. For this reason, the coordinated planning of regional economic, social, climate-related and environmental matters concerning the physical structures that create the conditions for sustainable growth, greater competitiveness and an effective transition of the Nordic economy is therefore of considerable importance.

However, the new geopolitical situation places greater demands on security, supply and preparedness across all parts of the Nordic Region. Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning should contribute towards promoting the ability of the Nordic Region to address different disturbances and crises. The development, proximity and stable access to private and public services, both in times of peace and in times of crisis, are of considerable importance to resilient and adaptable regions, cities and rural areas.



Focus is placed on areas within which the Nordic countries can jointly – through collaboration, common efforts and the exchange of experience and learning – contribute towards a greener, more competitive and more socially sustainable Nordic Region.

A green Nordic Region

The green transition is crucial to meeting the environmental and climate goals of the Nordic countries, and the goal of a Green Nordic Region. This transition presents both opportunities and challenges, and the regional and local conditions for generating development and benefiting from the positive effects of the transition differ across the different parts of the Nordic Region. The urgency of the green transition and the need to ensure balanced use of land for different purposes – such as food and energy production, industry, housing and nature – places more stringent requirements on oversight, prioritising and the balancing of interests in the physical and land-use planning undertaken by the various Nordic countries. Moreover, it is also important that work relating to the green transition take account of the needs and rights of indigenous populations in the Nordic Region.

Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning can contribute towards ensuring that the Nordic countries' climate and energy transition is undertaken in conformity with sustainable regional and local solutions, so that the green transition promotes local benefits and entails advantages for Nordic regions, cities and rural areas.

A competitive Nordic Region

Key to enabling a Competitive Nordic Region is the existence of innovative regions that are able to adapt and which have a capacity for development, in addition to a competitive business environment. Initiatives adapted on the basis of local and regional conditions and competitive advantages are also an important part of the solution. It is important that Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning support and stimulate business-promoting measures so that the Nordic countries can harness their development potential for smart and sustainable development.

In order to bring about a Competitive Nordic Region with a good social balance, it is important to ensure attractive housing, working and living conditions across all parts of the Nordic Region. This, in turn, requires good framework conditions for innovation, development and employment, especially in rural areas which are characterised by long distances, where it can be more challenging to offer attractive jobs and to attract and retain qualified workforces.

Nordic co-operation within development and planning can contribute towards promoting integration and cohesive solutions in all parts of the Nordic Region, in order to promote a Competitive Nordic Region.

A socially sustainable Nordic Region

Recent demographic and socio-economic developments – characterised by growing regional and intra-regional differences in population development and composition, in levels of income and education, and in regard to technical development – exert a central effect on development both regionally and locally within the Nordic Region. This applies both to the societal challenges and opportunities that such development presents. Examples include the tax base, the basis for skills supply in the labour market and access to public and private services. In rural areas characterised by long distances and sparse populations, this is often a considerable challenge, especially with regards to the handling of local or regional crisis situations. At the same time, other parts of the Nordic Region are facing challenges in the form of fast and large-scale population growth within small areas.

Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning can contribute towards the promotion of a Socially Sustainable Nordic Region via innovative Nordic solutions to these significant societal challenges, tailored to the different parts of the Nordic Region.

Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning

Nordic co-operation on regional development and planning between now and 2030 will therefore place focus on ensuring that:

- The green transition shall generate development and opportunities for people and businesses in all parts of the Nordic Region, including both cities and rural areas
- The regions in the Nordics must be both competitive and integrated
- Both cities and rural areas in the Nordic Region shall be characterised by

positive and secure living conditions.

The Nordic Council of Ministers for Sustainable Growth (Regional) has adopted a decision on the goals and sub-goals for the work to be undertaken in the 2025–2030 period. The political priorities are governing for all activity within the policy area of Nordic co-operation. This means that initiatives are to be developed on the basis of these goals, and that their activities, outcomes and effects must bring about the desired change.

Nordic co-operation which supports jointly prioritised initiatives and promotes learning and co-ordination between the Nordic governments, and other Nordic actors at various different levels, can help to bolster national, regional and local conditions for a green, competitive and socially sustainable Nordic Region.

Learning and greater knowledge – attained via research and analysis, follow-up, evaluation and the exchange of experience – can also bolster the ability of the Nordic countries and regions to address important societal challenges and better make use of the opportunities they present, thereby contributing towards the attainment of the goals for the regional development policy and planning of the Nordic countries.

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A strong civil society, access to work, education, transport and access to both public and private services – in times of peace and times of crisis – are important components in ensuring that regions, cities and rural areas can remain secure and stable across the entire Nordic Region.

Goal 1: The green transition shall generate both development and opportunities for people and businesses in all parts of the Nordic Region, including cities and rural areas



Work focused on regional development and good spatial planning is important in order to create the right conditions for a sustainable green transition. It is crucial for land-use planning in the Nordic countries to promote sustainable living environments characterised by a reduced climate footprint, the preservation of biodiversity and eco-system services in an altered climate. Regional policy and physical planning in the Nordic countries are important tools for succeeding in this. Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning shall contribute towards promoting a green transition in the Nordic Region – a transition that will generate development, opportunities and both regional and local advantages in all parts of the Nordic Region, including cities and rural areas.

Sub-goal 1.1: There shall exist a good knowledge basis on, and processes for, efficient land use and prioritisation in the Nordic countries

The green transition requires the prioritisation of land areas for renewable energy production, food production, forestry, outdoor recreation, nature and natural heritage protection and green business development. The use of land entails challenges that span municipal, regional and national borders, and which require solutions that leverage geographic potential in an optimal manner. At the same time, it is also necessary to view local land use as part of a larger vision and to mitigate conflicts of interest. Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning must work in the name of better land use and to promote the development and testing of methods and processes.

Sub-goal 1.2: Cities and rural areas must have good conditions in order to benefit from the opportunities inherent to the green transition

The Nordic countries are facing a number of interlinked societal challenges that span across national borders – the green and digital transitions, demographic changes, issues relating to skills supply and development, and the development of transport and infrastructure. It is important to promote initiatives that contribute towards solving the specific and practical challenges faced by cities, and in particular by rural areas, in benefiting from the opportunities inherent to the green transition. Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning must work to promote the opportunities of both cities and rural areas to derive benefit from the green transition and to unlock and harness the potential that exists for smart and sustainable development.

Goal 2: The Nordic regions must be both competitive and integrated



In order for a Competitive Nordic Region to be possible, it is necessary for businesses across the entire Nordic Region to have good conditions which will allow them to help generate growth, development and prosperity. However, stark differences often exist between cities and rural areas. Digitalisation, the developed use of new technologies (such as artificial intelligence), access to training and education, business-promoting initiatives and both public and private services are all crucial in order to attract and retain the necessary and qualified labour force and to ensure attractive living conditions. Regional policy collaboration between the Nordic countries around common challenges is important in order to strengthen the entire Nordic region and promote cross-border co-operation and locally tailored solutions. Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning must work to bolster regional and local competitiveness, resilience and integration across municipal, regional and national borders in the Nordic Region.

Sub-goal 2.1: There must be good framework conditions for sustainable growth, innovation and resilience in place in all parts of the Nordic Region

Innovation, entrepreneurship and business enterprise are central components of a Green and Competitive Nordic Region, and of the solutions to the major societal challenges that affect the environments, cities and rural areas that make up the wider Nordic Region. Nordic co-operation around regional development and planning should be undertaken from a territorial perspective in order to contribute towards the creation of good conditions for sustainable economic activity, innovation and resilience in all parts of the Nordic Region.

Sub-goal 2.2: There must be good conditions in place in order to attract and retain qualified labour forces in all parts of the Nordic Region

Good access to a qualified labour force for businesses in all parts of the Nordic Region is crucial to the region's competitiveness. Good skills supply and development will enable the labour market transition that is required in order to attain a sustainable level of development and a greater level of competitiveness. Digital solutions within education and the world of work can boost the recruitment base available, even in rural areas characterised by long distances, and they can facilitate the development, innovative capacity and diversification of the business and public sectors. Nordic co-operation around regional development and planning must contribute towards the promotion of solutions linked to skills supply based on a territorial perspective and a perspective that takes account of the different conditions of cities and rural areas.

Sub-goal 2.3: There must be good framework conditions in place for border-region collaboration and functional regions

It should be simple to live, study, work and run a business across the entire Nordic Region. The Nordic border regions constitute a collaborative hub for the promotion of business competitiveness, the adaptation of skills supply, the identification and removal of border obstacles, the development of sustainable and climate-friendly environmental and energy solutions, the promotion of sustainable land use and the development of cross-border infrastructure and communications. Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning needs to drive forward sustainable, territorial development work across national borders, with a view to developing vital border regions that can thus promote the development of an integrated Nordic Region that is Green, Competitive and Socially Sustainable.

Goal 3: Both cities and rural areas in the Nordic Region must be characterised by good and secure living conditions



Security and good living conditions in the cities and rural areas of the Nordic Region imply access to jobs, private and public services and the securing of a stable supply and production, both in times of peace and in crisis situations. This also means good and attractive living and housing environments in which nature and heritage landscapes are protected. This is a condition to attract and retain both younger and older citizens in the rural areas of the Nordic Region. Regional policy and physical planning in the Nordic countries play an important role in promoting sustainable solutions based on the conditions and adaptive capacities of local areas. Nordic co-operation around regional policy and planning should contribute towards promoting the ability of the regions in the Nordics to create developing, sustainable and resilient areas in which people want to live, and to contribute towards innovative solutions as part of our transition towards sustainable development.

Sub-goal 3.1: There must be positive social development in the cities and rural areas of the Nordic Region

It is important that work undertaken in relation to regional development and planning contribute towards preventing and addressing housing segregation, socio-economic inequality and social exclusion. These are issues which constitute a common challenge – particularly in the cities of the Nordic Region. At the same time, new industrialisation in smaller localities and rural areas requires a clearer and more holistic approach to land-use planning, as well as linkage between local labour markets and housing supply in order to promote sustainable development. Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning should contribute towards creating a level playing field for all, regardless of living environment, identifying common challenges related to the construction of and access to quality housing in the cities and rural areas of the Nordic Region, and promoting solutions that can ensure various alternatives for housing rental in rural areas.

Sub-goal 3.2: There must be good access to public and private services both in times of peace and in crisis situations in the Nordic Region

Good and stable access to both private and public services is essential to ensuring that it is an attractive prospect to live, study and work in all parts of the Nordic Region, and a prerequisite for the competitiveness of local and regional economy. This also applies to rural areas characterised by long distances and sparse populations. At the same time, the changing geopolitical situation underscores the importance of a strong civil society. Nordic co-operation within regional development and planning should promote collaboration and preparedness locally and between different actors in the Nordic countries in order to create good access to public and private services in all parts of the Nordic Region. The purpose of this is to bolster the attractiveness, cohesion, proximity and resilience of the Nordic areas, both in times of peace and in crisis situations.

Evaluating the Co-operation Programme

The co-operation programme applies for the 2025–2030 period which, in turn, is divided into two, three-year work plans for 2025–2027 and 2028–2030 respectively.

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. It shall also give them an opportunity to receive feedback on how the work plan for the final period should be formulated.

In addition, there will also be on-going evaluation at the discretion of the Secretary General and the Council of Ministers.

About this publication

Nordic Co-operation Programme for Regional Development and Planning 2025–2030

PolitikNord 2024:753

ISBN 978-92-893-7979-3 (PDF)

ISBN 978-92-893-7980-9 (ONLINE)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.6027/politiknord2024-753>

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Frontpage icon: Knud Andersen

Photo: norden.org, Pixabay, ImageBank Sweden, Business Finland

Published: October 2024



The Nordic Council of Ministers

Nordens Hus, Ved Stranden 18, DK-1061 Copenhagen, www.norden.org

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