

THE NORDIC REGION 2026

Strong ties in changing times

Denmark and the Faroe Islands' Presidency
of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2026



CONTENT

Foreword by the prime ministers of Denmark and the Faroe Islands	3
Foreword by the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation	5
The Nordic Region: The most sustainable and integrated region in the world in 2030	7
Intersectoral priorities	10
A green Nordic Region	15
A competitive Nordic Region	22
A socially sustainable Nordic Region	27
Striving for an interconnected Nordic Region in changing times	35
About this publication	36

Foreword by the prime ministers of Denmark and the Faroe Islands



The Prime Minister of Denmark, Mette Frederiksen, and the Prime Minister of the Faroe Islands, Aksel V. Johannesen

Photo Statsministeriet & Erla Rajani Ziskasen

The Nordic Region has entered a new era.

Russia's brutal attack on Ukraine brought war to our backyard. Misinformation campaigns are targeting our democracies, and hybrid attacks are putting our unity to the test.

In such uncertain times, it is crucial that we stick together in the Nordic Region. We are strong countries united by a unique social model, with high levels of trust, a long shared history and co-operation with deep roots. We have a need for that strong sense of community now. That is why the title of the Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2026 is *The Nordic Region: Strong ties in changing times*.

When the world changes, we cannot and must not stand still. Now that Sweden and Finland have joined NATO, the Nordic family is closer than ever. All eight Nordic countries face a major challenge in safeguarding our values and welfare societies.

To name but a few issues, we need to work even more closely together on societal security, security of energy supply, contingency planning, combating cross-border crime, competitiveness, the green transition and protecting

children and young people in the digital age. We will continue work on updating the Helsinki Treaty, the Nordic constitution, to make it possible for the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland to become full members of the official bodies involved in Nordic co-operation.

Greenland participates in some of the Nordic Council of Ministers' activities but is not part of the Danish and Faroese Presidency in 2026. Greenland will, however, play an active role in the process of establishing a commission to update the Helsinki Treaty, which will be crucial in determining whether Greenland is recognised as an equal partner in Nordic co-operation.

The Nordic countries must maintain close links with the rest of the world. In the new geopolitical reality, we cannot count on the status quo. We will strive for closer working relationships with countries around the world that share our values.

In these changing times, it is imperative that the Nordic Region remains the world's most integrated and sustainable region. Not only for the benefit of our own countries but as inspiration for the rest of the world.

We look forward to taking Nordic co-operation further.

Foreword by the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation



Denmark's Minister for Nordic Co-operation, Morten Dahlin, and the Faroe Islands' Minister for Nordic Co-operation, Bjarni Kárason Petersen

Photo By-, Land- og Kirkeministeriet & Amy Hansen

The world needs more Nordic values, not fewer. Our region has something special to offer the world. We will use the Presidency to bring all eight Nordic countries even closer together and work to realise the prime ministers' vision of the Nordic Region as the most integrated and sustainable region in the world.

We will achieve these goals by concentrating on specific policy areas. In particular, we will encourage closer co-operation in civil society as the Nordic Region consists, first and foremost, of its people.

The Nordic countries share many strong ties, such as our rich cultural heritage, physical infrastructure, social model, languages, democracies and strong civil society, all of which currently face challenges, not least due to geopolitical tensions. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Nordic Council of Ministers decided to launch an important new initiative focusing on societal security and preparedness in the Nordic Region. This will be in focus during the Presidency.

We will also prioritise the robustness of our democracies, which must never be taken for granted. Misinformation is more and more common in public debate, and threatens rather than promotes unity.

Although Nordic competitiveness is generally strong, we must do everything possible to improve it. Creeping regulation and bureaucracy prevent businesses and entrepreneurs from realising their full potential. We have commissioned an analysis of Nordic competitiveness, the results of which will be presented during the Presidency. We are very much looking forward to acting on its conclusions – and to the Presidency as a whole.

In the Nordic Region we stand together. Our unity has rarely been more important.



Photo Adam Mørk/Visit Denmark. Nicolai Perjesi/Copenhagen Capacity. Colin & Meg/Unsplash.

The Nordic Region: The most sustainable and integrated region in the world in 2030

In 2019, the Nordic prime ministers adopted a vision of the Nordic Region being the most sustainable and integrated region in the world in 2030. Progress toward realising this vision is based on three strategic priorities: **a green, competitive and socially sustainable region**. The Danish and Faroese Presidency will pursue these ambitious and important goals by focusing on the new co-operation programmes and action plans for the period 2025–2030.

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 exchange and welfare.

Crossing the finishing line on time

In 2023, the Nordic Council of Ministers presented a status report on progress toward Vision 2030. Overall, it shows that the region remains on track to become **the most sustainable and integrated region in the world**. Progress towards competitiveness and social sustainability is particularly positive. However, there is room for improvement with regard to the vision of a green Nordic Region.

A green Nordic Region

The status report from 2023 indicates that the Nordic Region faces significant challenges in a number of areas when it comes to realising the ambition of a green Nordic Region, both now and in the run-up to 2030. Although progress is generally moving in the right direction, several indicators suggest that the pace is too slow to reach the goal on time. The Presidency will focus on picking up the pace and achieving our green goals by 2030.

A competitive Nordic Region

The 2023 status report indicates that progress is good on the ambition of a competitive Nordic Region built on **green growth, innovation, mobility and a circular economy**. Based on current trends, the Nordic Region will be even more competitive in 2030. On the other hand, overall competitiveness in the EU is under pressure, and the Presidency will focus on ways that the favourable conditions in the Nordic Region can enhance competitiveness in the rest of Europe as well as at home.

A socially sustainable Nordic Region

The 2023 status report indicates that the region is generally well on the way to realising its ambitions for a **socially sustainable and equal region**. The people of the region are healthy, employment and social trust are high, and crime rates are low. However, there is still room for improvement, particularly in areas like self-rated well-being. The Presidency considers it important to maintain focus on social sustainability and gender equality in the Nordic Region.

Integration throughout the Nordic Region

If we are to call ourselves the most integrated region in the world by 2030, **all eight Nordic countries must be more closely integrated**, not just in specific policy areas and on the 12 border committees, but also in the interparliamentary work done by the Nordic Council and the intergovernmental work of the Nordic Council of Ministers. We are a region of eight countries, and proper integration requires all eight being fully on board.

Updating the Helsinki Treaty

The Helsinki Treaty, often referred to as the “Nordic constitution”, came into force on 1 July 1962 and has served as the foundation for close and deep co-operation across the region. It has been updated several times, most recently on 2 January 1996, to keep it up-to-date and make co-operation function as smoothly as possible. In changing times, **keeping Nordic co-operation relevant and working as well as possible** is a key priority for the Presidency – anything else would be folly. The political situation in 1996 was somewhat different than it is today, 30 years later. Nordic co-operation needs to reflect and cope with the differences.

The 2024 Session of the Nordic Council unanimously adopted a recommendation that the governments update the Helsinki Treaty to make the self-governing territories **full members of the Nordic Council and Council of Ministers** if they so wish and to the extent their constitutional frameworks make it possible. On 4 April 2025, the co-operation ministers decided to appoint a legal expert to examine the national, EU and international legal issues involved in updating the treaty. The report was completed under the Finnish and Åland Islands’ Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The 2026 Presidency and the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation (MR-SAM) will follow up on the legal report and continue work on updating the Helsinki Treaty.

Freedom of movement in an integrated Nordic Region

The ambition of being the most integrated region in the world will require as much freedom of movement across the eight Nordic countries as possible. In 2024, the Freedom of Movement Council was reorganised. It is now more modern and operational and able to advise the Council of Ministers on new measures and improvements that will remove obstacles to cross-border mobility. In 2026, the Freedom of Movement Council is halfway through its four-year term, and the Presidency will work closely with it on a mid-term review in 2026. It is a **key priority for the Presidency that this work on freedom of movement is as successful as possible**. It will benefit the people and businesses of the region. However, we must also be able to work together on the use of instruments such as border controls to combat cross-border, organised and gang-related crime, which is a major and growing problem in the Nordic Region, cf. the section *Organised crime and gangs*, so that the region remains a community of nations that trust each other.

The most effective way to reduce the number of obstacles to freedom of movement is to avoid them in the first place. The Nordic countries have different ways of achieving this. For example, in Denmark and the Faroe Islands it is a legal requirement that new legislation must not create barriers to cross-border mobility in the Nordic Region.



Photo Visit Faroe Islands. Daniel Rasmussen/Copenhagen Capacity. Johan Nilsson/Øresundsbron/Visit Denmark.

Intersectoral priorities

The 2026 Presidency will adopt an **intersectoral focus to enhancing societal security and the role of the Nordic Region in the world.**

Greater societal security

The Presidency will focus on enhancing societal security, building on the important steps taken by the Nordic Council of Ministers during Finland and Åland's Presidency in 2025, which prioritised societal security and preparedness.

The Nordic Region needs to be **more resilient in the face of future crises and hybrid attacks**. To facilitate this, all eight Nordic countries need to integrate more closely and be part of the work. This applies to resilience and to agency in all areas of responsibility. The 11 councils of ministers will focus on how to develop their policy areas to enhance overall societal security in the Nordic Region. The Presidency will also continue the positive interaction between the work of the councils of ministers and other Nordic efforts to promote societal security, *see Figure 1*.

Nordic co-operation on societal security and preparedness to make the Nordic Region more resilient to future crises and hybrid threats

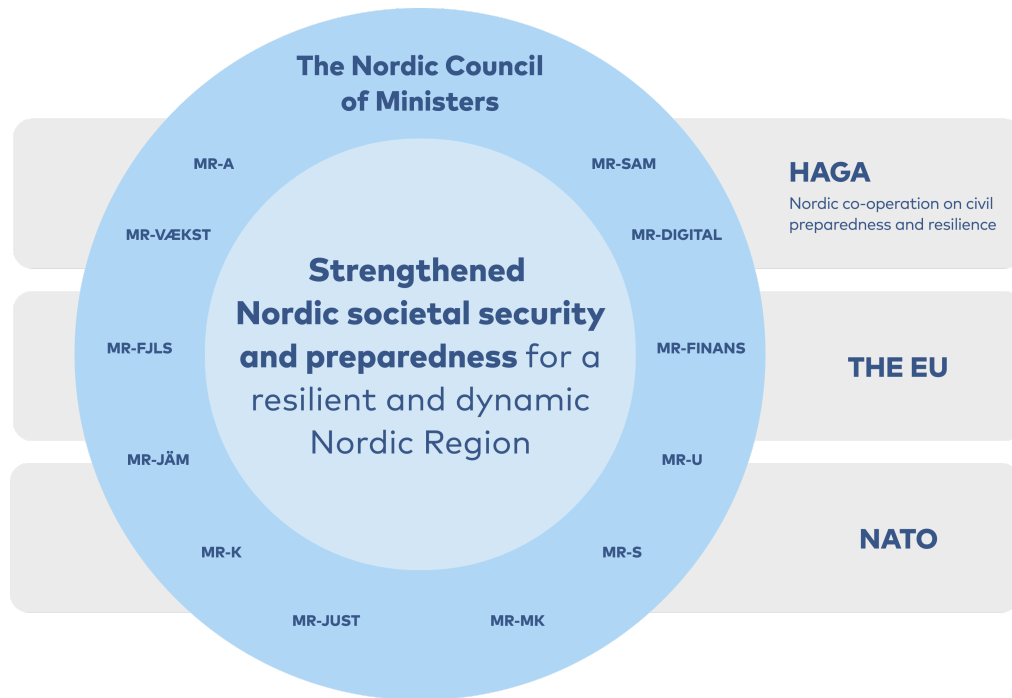


Figure 1 Societal security is a priority for all sectors of the Nordic Council of Ministers and a joint responsibility for all of the ministerial councils within the overall framework established by the EU, NATO and HAGA, and taking into account national security interests.

Improving security of supply in the Nordic Region

Security of supply is essential for maintaining the stability of vital functions and is a key element in improving societal security. The Danish and Faroese Presidency will prioritise security of supply to help **guarantee access to socio-economically critical resources**.

By prioritising closer co-operation on security of supply, the Presidency will help to ensure that the region is **strong, adaptable and united** in the event of any future supply crises. To this end, we will **consolidate the new Nordic network for security of supply**, the remit of which includes discussing relevant new areas of co-operation to promote security of supply throughout the Nordic Region. This will include sharing knowledge and experience of analytical methods and resilience strategies to give the Nordic authorities greater capacity to deal with supply chain disruptions, by sharing knowledge and experience of guaranteeing access to critical resources and preventing and mitigating supply crises.

Efforts to enhance Nordic co-operation on security of supply will target complementing, not duplicating, efforts in other international forums.

Multiple official agencies and private actors depend on the same resources. Assessments by the agencies involved in the sector concerned can generate value, security and co-operation on the procurement of critical resources, e.g., via joint procurement processes, shared warehouses, renting and borrowing from each other, etc.

Making Nordic industry more robust links into the Nordic business ministers' declaration on a joint Nordic industrial partnership and will contribute to the Vision 2030 goal of a competitive Nordic Region.

Antimicrobial resistance and pharmaceutical co-operation

We need to do more to ensure our countries are **equipped to deal with health threats** now and in the future. The increasing prevalence of antimicrobial resistance calls for action. Antibiotics have saved countless lives, but more and more bacteria are becoming resistant to them. We need to encourage the Nordic countries to share knowledge and experience on how antimicrobial resistance develops. At international level, more and more inter-sectoral work is being done on the issue by integrating work on human, veterinary, plant and environmental health in order to generate better results together. Nordic co-operation should also be increasingly inter-sectoral. The Presidency will encourage joint procurement to ensure antibiotics are available throughout the Nordic Region.

Contingency planning for vulnerable and at-risk citizens

The Presidency will launch a project under the auspices of official Nordic co-operation on social and senior affairs to support knowledge sharing about good ways **to incorporate thinking about the needs of vulnerable and at-risk groups in contingency planning**. The project will include mapping national work on contingency planning, with a focus on support needs of senior citizens, people with disabilities and socially vulnerable citizens (e.g., homeless people) – both current needs and any that may emerge as a result of various crises. We expect to present the results of the survey in late 2026.

A Strong Nordic Region in the World

The Nordic Region must play an even stronger role in the world. In changing times, it is crucial that we **work closely with our allies and forge even stronger ties with our neighbours**.

The Nordic Region in the Arctic

The Arctic makes up a significant proportion of the Nordic Region. Since 1996, the Nordic Council of Ministers' Arctic Co-operation Programme has generated positive results by focusing on the environment and climate, social conditions, economic development and promoting partnerships. The programme celebrates

its **30th anniversary** in 2026. Throughout the year, the Presidency will focus on Nordic achievements in the Arctic over the last three decades. The main priorities of the Nordic Arctic Programme are resilience and strong civil societies in the Arctic, which will be promoted through Nordic co-operation and partnerships in the Arctic.

Geopolitical tensions, including in areas close to the Nordic Region, are having an adverse effect on international and multilateral co-operation in the Arctic, pose significant challenges to the international rule of law and put pressure on the longstanding policy of keeping tension low in the Arctic. The Nordic Region must continue to do its utmost to maintain stability and sustainable growth in the Arctic. In the world of today, sustainability is also about resilience in the face of a changing world and global tensions.

The Nordic Arctic Programme 2025–2027 focuses on an Arctic that is resilient in economic, social, climate and environmental terms, priorities that are linked to the Nordic Council of Ministers' Vision to create a socially sustainable, green and competitive Nordic Region. Arctic co-operation focuses on developing resilient local communities, supporting local business, encouraging sustainable economic growth and promoting the green transition. The Presidency will strive to promote synergies with the Kingdom of Denmark's chairmanship of the Arctic Council.

The Nordic Region and its neighbours to the West

One important objective of co-operation with our neighbours to the West is to help forge new contacts, build networks, encourage greater mobility and the exchange of knowledge, research and culture across the Nordic Region, USA, Canada, the UK and Ireland. The Presidency will focus on three main priorities:

- **Encouraging the exchange of ideas and knowledge** through closer co-operation between the Nordic Region and partners in the US, Canada, the UK and Ireland, with the focus on promoting innovative solutions to shared challenges.
- **Encouraging North-to-North co-operation** across the Nordic and North American parts of the Arctic, with the focus on greater mobility, networking and exchange programmes for young people, civil society and researchers.
- **Working to establish a representative presence in Canada**, either virtually or by appointing an office manager to enhance co-operation with our neighbours to the West.

The Baltic and Nordic countries

The Baltic and Nordic countries have a great deal in common, including democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and our co-operation grows closer all the time. Demographic changes and increasingly complex needs place new demands on the Nordic and Baltic welfare systems. There is great potential for the Nordic and Baltic countries to work together to **bolster overall resilience**,

innovation and sustainability. The value of such partnerships is already visible in current collaborations like the Nordic-Baltic network on work-related crime, which combats exploitation and activities that distort competition in the labour market. Due to the global security situation and tensions in the Baltic Sea region, the Nordic Council of Ministers is working increasingly closely with the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as with civil society in Ukraine and the dissident movement in Belarus. The Baltic countries have also been invited to be an integral part of the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Digitalisation (MR-DIGITAL), which addresses political and operational issues and joint opportunities and challenges in the digital field. The Presidency will also work with the Baltic countries in the Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture (MR-CULTURE) to improve contingency planning in the cultural sphere. It will also seek to **increase the number of equal partnerships with the Baltic states** and offer participation in more parts of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The Nordic Region in the EU

The Nordic Region is a pioneer in many areas and **a strong player in Europe**, particularly in digitalisation and the green transition, both of which contribute to Nordic competitiveness and sustainability. The Presidency will build on the experiences and initiatives that Denmark made during its Presidency of the EU in autumn 2025. In particular, the Presidency will continue to focus on a safe, competitive and green Europe.

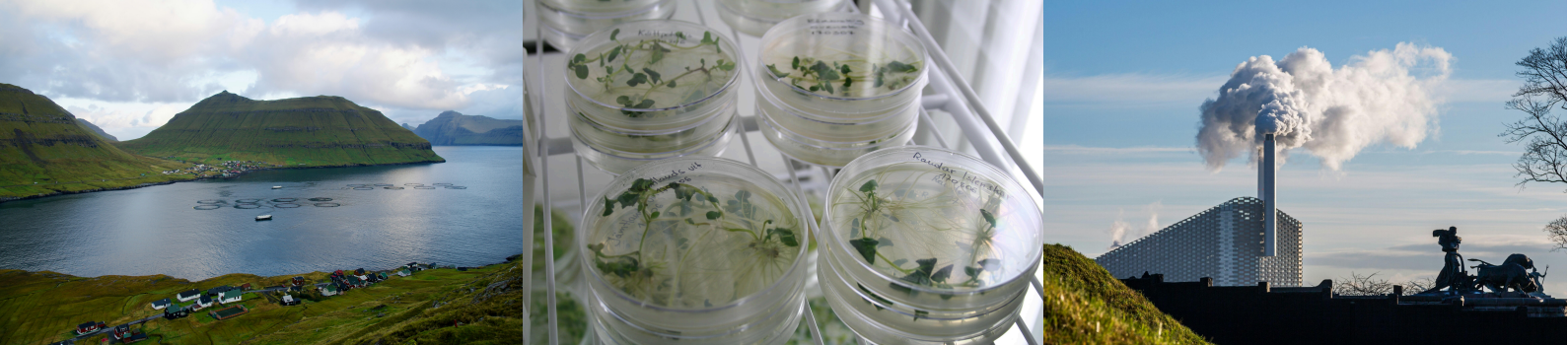


Photo Andy Arbeit/Unsplash, NordGen/Norden.org, Ian Taylor/Unsplash.

A green Nordic Region

The biggest challenges of our time include **climate change, vulnerable ecosystems and declining biodiversity**. It is crucial that we find good and effective solutions to future-proof a green and sustainable Nordic Region. We will achieve this by promoting new green technologies, local support for the green transition, the right financial incentives, sustainable construction and sustainable transformation of the agriculture and food sector. The Nordic Region must lead the way in an innovation-driven and competitive green transition.

Renewable energy in the Nordic countries and the EU (2004–2023)

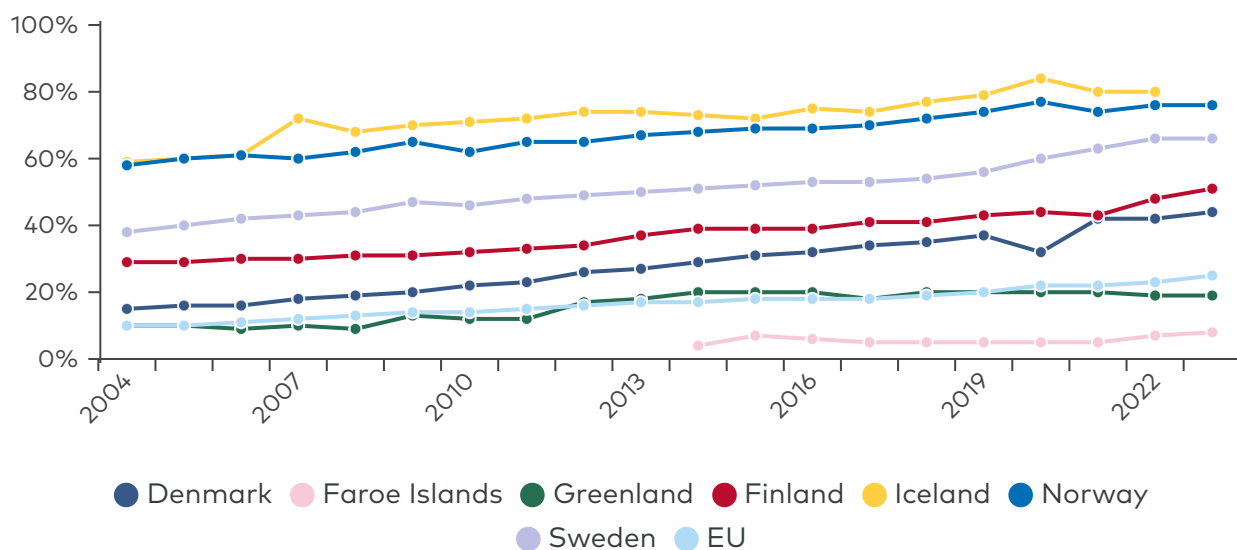


Figure 2 shows the amount of renewable energy used in the Nordic countries and the EU as a share of total energy consumption. Conversion losses are not included, e.g., during electricity generation and in district heating. Åland has been omitted due to a lack of available data.

Source Nordregio and Nordic Statistics Database (ENER08) as well as The Faroese Environment Agency, regarding data from the Faroe Islands.

An economically sustainable green transition

The Nordic countries agree on the need for climate action and will work together to achieve the targets set by the Paris Agreement. We also agree that the green transition should be as cost-effective as possible. We want the most green transition for our money. As far as possible, it should be geographically balanced and help to promote the development of our societies throughout the Nordic Region. In changing times when global support for the green transition is fluctuating, the Nordic Region must lead the way and show the world that the transition is not only a necessary investment in the future of the planet and the coming generations, but also **an economically sustainable investment** that improves human health. We will illustrate the cost-effectiveness of the green transition throughout the Nordic Region by sharing knowledge, integrating climate considerations into macroeconomic models and working together on economic policies that stimulate transition. The transition of emission-intensive sectors offers clear synergies with efforts to improve air quality and make nature more resilient.

The *Agreement on Implementing a Green Denmark* makes Denmark the first country in the world to introduce a carbon tax on agriculture. The government has also earmarked billions of kroner for a major conversion of the nation's landmass to make room for more forest and nature, which will reduce the climate impact and nitrogen emissions and be of great benefit to the aquatic environment. The agreement represents a tangible move to facilitate the green transition as part of a broad political agreement. Based on Danish experiences with this agreement, the Presidency will focus on Nordic co-operation that maximises the green transition while maintaining a sustainable social balance. One area in which the green transition cannot succeed without Nordic co-operation is green ferry routes between the Nordic countries, which the Nordic Ministerial Declaration of 2022 envisages will be running by 2030. Similarly, an agreement has been reached on a new course for Danish fishing, which sets the direction for a green transition of the sector, focusing on a better marine environment.

As they progress, the green transition and climate adaptation measures are changing our cities, landscapes, working life and leisure time. The Presidency will focus on ways of making the green transition **beneficial to local communities and peripheral areas**. It is crucial for the success of the transition that climate adaptation and investments in renewable energy, for example, also provide opportunities for local communities and are not just perceived as a negative burden imposed on them. The same applies to the greening of traditional and primary industries (fishing, agriculture and forestry).

The Presidency also wishes to focus on the green transition in the way we live and build. We will host a **Nordic ministerial meeting on housing and construction** in 2026 to focus on opportunities to promote the green, circular and digital transition of construction and housing.

New technology to speed up the green transition

If it is to be the most sustainable region in the world by 2030, the Nordic Region must pick up the pace of the green transition. A wide range of new and known technologies can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. What is needed now are good and appropriate frameworks for the development of new green technologies, such as hydrogen and carbon capture and storage (CCS).

Hydrogen

The Nordic countries have already made significant progress in their green transition and serve as an inspiration to the rest of the world in many ways. One of the next steps is to **secure fuels for sectors and companies that are struggling to transition to a climate-neutral future**. This is particularly relevant for the heavy and energy-intensive parts of industry as well as aviation and shipping, which are unsuitable for electrification. Green hydrogen or other power-to-x fuels can help phase out fossil fuels and replace them with renewable energy sources.

Particularly in the transport sector, access to CO₂ is expected to be of great importance. A balanced approach to utilising captured carbon is crucial. If we are to fulfil our green ambitions, companies must have access to hydrogen as they transition.

The production of hydrogen and power-to-x can also help make off-take in an energy system more flexible with a growing share of renewable energy and customisable production of green fuels to match the hour-by-hour availability of green power.

The market for green hydrogen and other PtX products is still developing, but demand is expected to grow dramatically across the whole of Europe, not just in the Nordic countries. In other words, the potential could be huge. The Presidency will focus in particular on **promoting the conditions for green hydrogen and other power-to-x fuels** in order to realise that potential.

CCS

Carbon capture and storage (CCS) is a vital tool for **meeting global climate goals** under the Paris Agreement, EU targets and the Nordic ambition of being the greenest region in the world by 2030. Specifically, CCS can help reduce CO₂ emissions from waste facilities, combined heat and power (CHP) plants and heavy industry, among others. It is even possible to achieve negative emissions by capturing and storing CO₂ from, for example, biogas plants and biogenic sources in the supply sector. In this way, CCS can also contribute to achieving the targets of climate neutrality and a 110% reduction in carbon emissions.

The Nordic Region has already made good progress in developing frameworks for CCS and has the opportunity to lead the way and promote a **competitive green transition** using this technology in the years to come. Sweden has some of

the largest amounts of biogenic CO₂ in Europe, and a broad political majority in Denmark wants to utilise the fact that the Danish underground has the capacity to store far more carbon than the country generates. The Nordic countries are working more and more closely together on CCS. Ørsted is commissioning the first full-scale CCS plant in Denmark, as part of which they will use a Norwegian CO₂ storage facility (Northern Lights). The plant is expected to be fully operational in 2026.

At Denmark's request, the Nordic Council of Ministers has initiated a three-year CSS programme that seeks to promote closer co-operation between the countries and facilitate a faster rollout of the whole value chain. Government subsidies to establish the value chain are relatively high in Denmark and Sweden. The Presidency intends to focus on cross-border CCS transport and infrastructure.

Sustainable and resilient food, agriculture and fisheries sectors

The Nordic Region must take the lead in ensuring the availability of healthy and sustainable food and the green transition of the Nordic agriculture and fisheries sectors. We will only achieve this if we integrate thinking about solutions and look at all parts of the transition. We have to bring everyone on board. The global situation has highlighted the need for robust food security, both nationally and in the Nordic Region. The agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture sectors can make a positive contribution to this.

Resilient Nordic food systems

The Nordic food, agriculture and forestry sectors are crucial to the security of supply. The Nordic Region has already made great strides towards more resilient food systems, most recently with the Karlstad Declaration on Preparedness and Robustness (2024). The Presidency will follow up on the discussions at the Council of Ministers meeting in Kuopio in June 2025 and launch initiatives to encourage more exchanges of experiences and co-operation between the Nordic countries to make the region more robust with **greater resilience and preparedness in the food and agriculture sector**.

NordGen is a crucial part of the infrastructure that preserves agriculture's genetic resources, which form the foundation for research and breeding to meet the demand for food and feed and also to meet climate and environmental demands. The Presidency will seek to safeguard NordGen's work.

Generational change

More young people are needed in the Nordic agriculture, food, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry – the whole of the MR-FJLS sector. The sectors face significant recruitment challenges, and the average age of workers in them is rising, partly due to the difficulty of competing with the wages and working conditions in other sectors.

In 2023, the Nordic Council of Ministers made an important decision to launch a vision project to **give young people more of a role in the Nordic food systems** and to make the sector more diverse. The Nordic Council of Ministers' research centre, Nordregio, is responsible for this work.

The Presidency will follow up on the project, launch potential new initiatives, present the final vision and initiate core actions.

Sustainable food systems

It is important that the Nordic countries take the lead and work together on safe, healthy and sustainable diets, including plant-based and aquatic foods, as well as working together to reduce food waste throughout the Nordic Region. The focus will be on co-operation on **sustainability and resilience in the Nordic food systems**, including value generation and competitiveness in the sectors.

The Nordic Region is a proud culinary region. New Nordic Food and the New Nordic Food Manifesto have created a strong international brand over the past twenty years. The Presidency will seek to roll out New Nordic Food to everyday food in the region, and discuss the potential for the New Nordic Food movement to unite the region in moving towards more healthy, profitable and resilient food systems.

The Presidency will commission an analysis of ways in which marine raw materials and food can help improve public health and security of supply, as well as encourage a proximity and preparedness perspective. This will give the Nordic Region a competitive advantage and benefit the environment and climate.

Sustainable fisheries management

The seas are under pressure from various human activities. It is crucial that we are aware of how we affect the nature we use. The Nordic countries must promote fisheries that take better care of our marine environment and ensure sustainable fish stocks, and do so on the basis of an **ecosystem-based approach** that balances utilisation and protection of the sea.

There is a need for a holistic approach to managing the Nordic seas that addresses and supports opportunities and solutions, one that looks at how to manage and utilise marine areas in a way that guarantees sustainable fish

stocks and is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. The Presidency will focus on the green transition of the fisheries sector and ecosystem-based fisheries management.

We need to reduce cumulative pressures on the marine environment by adopting a holistic approach to planning how we use marine areas, an approach that balances fisheries, aquaculture, nature and new marine infrastructure such as wind energy, including how it interacts with demersal species like cod.

The Presidency will host a Nordic conference in the Faroe Islands about the situation of demersal species, focusing on the composition of the stock and how fisheries, management, climate and ecosystems interact.

Fisheries management is part of the overall management of the marine environment and the structures and functions of ecosystems. The management of stocks fished in the Nordic Region should focus on ensuring sustainability using an ecosystem-based approach to make the utilisation of future resources economically and ecologically sustainable.

Marine ecosystem-based management and coexistence at sea

The Nordic Marine Programme aims to address the **planetary triple crisis** – climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution – by the Nordic countries working more closely together on the sustainable development of the marine environment and coexistence between activities in it. The programme builds on a number of Nordic declarations, including ministerial statements on the sea, climate and biodiversity, and the prime ministers' declaration on a sustainable marine economy and green transition. These declarations form the political foundation for coordinated and ambitious action in the region.

The programme also seeks to create strong links to the Kingdom of Denmark's priorities in the Arctic during its chairmanship of the Arctic Council. Particular emphasis will be placed on area-specific conservation measures, developing tools for maritime spatial planning, and addressing environmental impacts such as underwater noise and marine litter in Arctic waters. Through an integrated approach to marine management, the programme aims to promote synergies between environmental protection, economic development and climate considerations, with a particular focus on vulnerable Arctic ecosystems.

The Presidency will host a major Nordic workshop in Copenhagen focusing on protected areas (MPA and OECM) and the link between the seas and the climate, including ocean acidification, marine heat waves, carbon sequestration and climate refugia.

The workshop will also focus on joint ecosystem-based management, including coexistence between marine environmental protection, fisheries and offshore wind, as well as on a mid-term status for the continuation of the vision projects Samskag and NorScen.

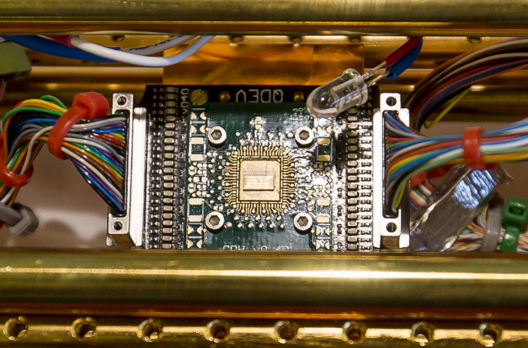


Photo Niels Bohr Institutttet, Visit Faroe Islands, Kim Wyon/Visit Denmark

A competitive Nordic Region

The Nordic Region's economic resilience and competitiveness are crucial to prosperity and the ability to afford the increasing demand for welfare. In general, Nordic companies cope well with global competition, but they need to keep innovating to maintain a prominent role in competitive markets. A competitive Nordic Region calls for a broad approach. Our countries ought to work even more closely together on favourable framework conditions for businesses to **promote exports and productivity**, and continue the digital transition throughout the Nordic and Baltic countries in order to maintain our position as Europe's digital spearhead.

Employment rates in the Nordic countries and the EU (2005–2024)

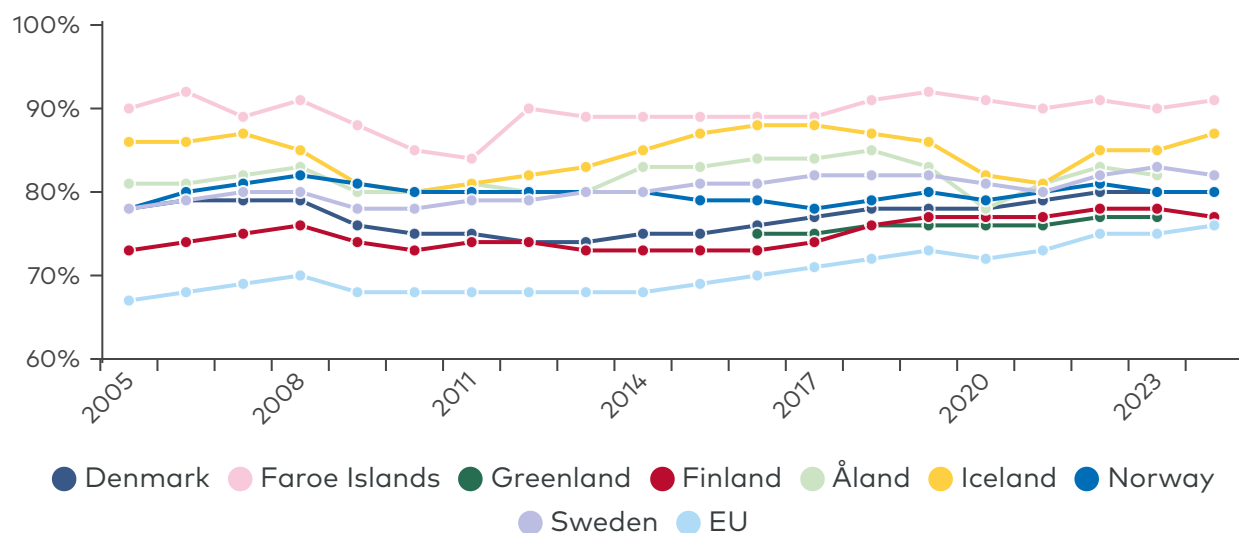


Figure 3 shows the percentage of people aged 20–64 in employment in the Nordic countries and the EU.

Source Nordregio and Nordic Statistics Database (WORK02)

The Presidency will promote the competitiveness of Nordic companies through closer cross-border co-operation and greater innovation. It will also continue the important work on the **Nordic and Baltic digital transition and integration** to ensure that citizens and businesses encounter fewer digital barriers to mobility in the region.

The Presidency will focus on **robust Nordic economies**, which are a prerequisite for the financial room for manoeuvre needed to make investments in key priorities and solutions, including the development of tomorrow's technologies, robust strategic value chains and solutions that mitigate climate change and promote biodiversity – priorities that will secure the Nordic Region's place as the most sustainable region in the world. Robust economies are also a prerequisite for maintaining the quality of and support for the Nordic welfare model and a socially sustainable Nordic Region, including a modern healthcare system, an inclusive education system and more coherent public services across the Nordic Region for the benefit of people and businesses alike.

Robust and competitive Nordic economies in the EU and the world

It takes a robust economy to navigate changing circumstances while safeguarding shared Nordic interests. Robust economies are a prerequisite for meeting the urgent need for higher defence spending. The Presidency will focus on **robust and competitive Nordic economies** with sound and sustainable public finances. This work will include focusing on economic reforms of the labour market and framework conditions for companies, including reducing administrative burdens to support a productive business sector that is competitive in a global context.

The Presidency will support enhanced competitiveness in the Nordic countries with a focus on challenges faced by all of our countries and possible solutions that will boost growth potential.

The Presidency will map the lessons learnt and experiences gained from COVID-19 and the energy crisis. Our aim is to learn from periods of uncertainty in the past and react more strongly in the event of any future economic shocks.

Nordic Competitiveness Report

Mario Draghi's report on the state of and perspectives for EU competitiveness highlighted two of the fundamental challenges facing the Union: productivity and competitiveness. The Nordic Region is in a strong position and has the right preconditions to lead the way towards a stronger Europe while focusing on a green, digital and socially sustainable home region. The Presidency and the

Nordic Council of Ministers will issue a tender for **a report on Nordic competitiveness**. The report will add to our knowledge base about Nordic competitiveness, including positions of strength and development opportunities that will contribute to Vision 2030 of being the world's most competitive and green region.

The Presidency and the Nordic Council of Ministers will hold the annual vision conference focusing on Nordic competitiveness in autumn 2026.

Automatic sustainability reporting in the Nordic Region

Nordic companies need efficient ways of **exchanging data**, including sustainability data, with each other. This will promote business sustainability and the green transition, further integrate the Nordic market and reduce administrative burdens for companies, which will, in turn, accelerate competitiveness.

The Presidency will promote co-operation on automatic sustainability reporting in the Nordic Region.

Using and developing artificial intelligence to boost Nordic competitiveness

The Presidency wants to focus on the use of **artificial intelligence** to promote Nordic and Baltic competitiveness and efficiency in the public sector. Specifically, we will create smart and user-friendly digital solutions and reduce the burdens on Nordic and Baltic businesses.

The Presidency will follow up on the recommendations for this from *the Nordic Ethical AI Expert Group*, among others.

Tech sovereignty in the Nordic and Baltic countries

The current geopolitical situation has highlighted the need for the Nordic Region and the rest of Europe to build their own capacity and **reduce strategic dependence on a few global technology suppliers**. It is not a question of isolating ourselves from the global market, but of providing real alternatives and creating a more balanced market in which regional solutions are better able to compete. The Presidency will discuss the strategic options and specific actions the region can take along with the EU.

Closer Nordic-Baltic co-operation on the EU Digital Identity Wallet and the European Business Wallet

In recent years, the Nordic and Baltic countries, under the auspices of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Digitalisation (MR-DIGITAL), have worked closely and successfully together on the implementation of EU legislation on digital identities. However, there is more to be done. The European Commission's proposal for **the European Business Wallet** is intended to make cross-border communication between businesses and between public authorities and companies simpler and easier. For the Nordic and Baltic countries, the European Business Wallet will also facilitate easier co-operation across national borders, simplify interactions with official agencies and ultimately reduce the administrative burden on businesses.

The Presidency will take stock of the work done so far on digital identities and discuss the possibility of working even more closely together on the European Business Wallet.

An integrated education and research region

A competent and well-educated population is a precondition for sustainable economic growth and strengthens competitiveness in a changing world that is placing great demands on people's ability to adapt.

The competencies needed for the digital and green transition will be a topical theme throughout the Nordic Region. Education and training must reflect the skills needs of society and working life. The education sector must be more integrated. The Nordic Region must also strive to create meaningful communities and improve the well-being of children, pupils and students at all levels of education and training

An integrated research region

Research and innovation are crucial for solving the big social challenges we all face, as well as for national and Nordic security. The Presidency considers collaboration on green research and critical technologies, responsible internationalisation and research security to be important priorities.

The Presidency will promote a strategic Nordic initiative in **quantum technology**. It will also focus on the existing guidelines for **research safety** and how they are implemented now and in the future. The key will be to work together and facilitate access to knowledge exchange programmes, joint research projects, research infrastructure, capacity and training. It is a matter of how best to promote Nordic research collaborations and how we position ourselves as a research region in a world characterised by geopolitical movement and fierce global competition on new technology. The Presidency will also focus on the links between research, innovation and competitiveness.



Photo Agaton Strom/Norden.org. Mathias Engmark/Roskilde Festival/Visit Denmark. Ricky John Molloy/Norden.org

A socially sustainable Nordic Region

Our Nordic welfare societies are largely based on trust, but several trends are now putting both the welfare model and social cohesion under pressure. We must keep the Nordic Region socially sustainable and robust. The Presidency will focus on ways to develop and improve the services that help more people live independent lives and participate in society. This applies to all citizens, including older ones who need care and attention. A robust welfare society is also one in which we create welfare together in close interaction with local communities and civil society. This entails **promoting active citizenship**, so that people, including those from a migrant background, engage in their communities and participate in democratic processes.

Social sustainability entails equal **opportunities for a good life** and the same freedoms for all. Naturally, that includes girls and women with an immigrant background who are subjected to negative social control. At the same time, we must all protect the environment and resources for future generations, which also means that society must be resilient in the face of external challenges and pressures. Our democracy and values such as equality and fairness are at the core of our Nordic identity. We must keep it that way.

Income inequality in the Nordic countries and the EU (2005–2024)

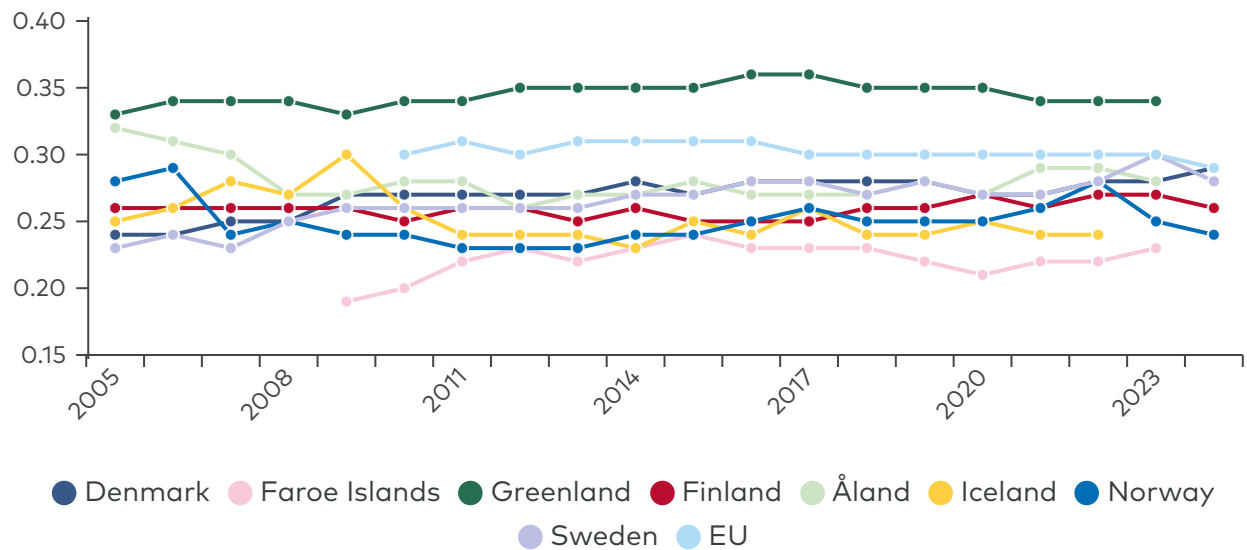


Figure 4 shows the Gini coefficients for the Nordic countries and the EU. The Gini coefficient illustrates the degree of inequality in a country's income distribution on a scale of 0–1. At 0 everybody has the same income, at 1 a single individual has all the income.

Source Nordregio, Nordic Statistics Database (GINI01) and Statistics Iceland

Strong democracies

Social cohesion is the foundation of the Nordic welfare societies, and we must continue to strengthen it. Social cohesion helps create a safe and supportive environment for individuals and groups, which makes us more resilient in times of crisis. Another challenge to social cohesion is when individuals and groups do not adhere to the rules and principles of the community as a whole. Such behaviour reduces cohesion and faith in the rule of law and makes the community less resilient in the face of crises. The Presidency will focus on combating cross-border crime, strengthening democracy and raising levels of trust.

Stronger democracy and greater trust

The Presidency will focus on how to strengthen the **unique Nordic association life** – the important everyday local democracies in which children and young people learn to be part of democracy and get into the habit of participating in it. This will greatly contribute to future-proofing national democracy and trust-based societies.

As a boost to civil society, the Presidency will commission the Nordic Association and the Danish Youth Council to organise a civil society conference.

Organised crime and gangs

The Nordic countries face multiple problems with organised crime and gangs, problems that are increasingly cross-border in nature. Close co-operation is of great importance to the Nordic countries' ability to deal with these problems. The Presidency will continue the fight against cross-border, organised and gang-related crime. Specifically, we wish to strengthen Nordic co-operation to combat the **misuse of digital services by organised crime**, including the recruitment of children and young people. We also wish to beef up Nordic co-operation with third countries from which criminals orchestrate serious crime in our part of the world.

Promoting equality for all in the Nordic Region and globally

Gender equality is a pillar of democracy and a core value in the Nordic Region. Gender equality and equal rights for LGBT+ people are essential for individuals' ability to shape their lives and for the development of society. If the Nordic Region is to remain competitive, everybody must feel able to contribute and have equal opportunities to influence society.

The Nordic Region has made a great deal of progress toward gender equality, but we are not there yet. Pressure has also begun to be exerted on gender equality and LGBT+ rights in other parts of the world. To address this situation, the Presidency will take a broad approach to promoting gender equality.

Pushing for Progress

In a number of countries and international forums, coordinated and targeted opposition is being waged against women's equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as equality for LGBT+ people. The Nordic countries have adopted the multi-year programme *Pushing for Progress* to highlight that we are united in our opposition to those forces and in our determination to promote equality.

The Presidency will organise a Nordic celebration of IDAHOT+ (International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia) and a conference on gender equality and women's right to control their own bodies and lives.

Men, masculinity and gender equality

In recent years, the Nordic Council of Ministers has focused increasingly on men and masculinity. Gender norms and expectations also affect the lives of men and boys, their opportunities and the challenges they face.

The Presidency is writing a report, 'State of Nordic Men 2026', which examines men's online lives and attitudes towards gender equality, among other topics.

Early detection of intimate partner violence and treatment for perpetrators

Gender-based violence is a violation of an individual's integrity and has serious negative consequences for the individual, for the family, other close relationships and for society as a whole. Combating violence is a priority in Nordic co-operation and other international forums.

The Presidency will focus on developing new methods in preventive and early intervention throughout the Nordic Region and in collaboration with the Baltic countries.

Competitiveness and equality

Gender equality is important for the competitiveness of the Nordic Region. It is a prerequisite for people to be free to contribute to society with their talents and competencies.

The Presidency will launch a study of competitiveness and gender equality, including how gender equality boosts economic growth.

Children and young people

Making sure that children and young people have good lives is an important foundation for a socially sustainable Nordic Region. The Presidency will prioritise **young people, including their involvement in society**. We must help them to learn about and feel a sense of ownership of the Nordic Region and countries. In other words, we need to **make coming generations enthusiastic about Nordic solidarity**.

How children and young people live differs from country to country. It differs between big cities and peripheral areas, where it is difficult to organise. It is important that we empower the younger generations in peripheral areas.

The Faroe Islands will host the Generation North Atlantic event during the Presidency, bringing together young people from all eight Nordic countries for workshops, presentations and company visits to inspire innovative approaches and regional development

Children and young people's well-being

Far too many children and young people in the Nordic Region do not have a sense of well-being, feel excluded from meaningful communities and are increasingly anxious about the future. We need to share good examples of ways to help children and young people grow up healthy and safe.

Early detection and prevention are key to children and young people receiving the right help in time, so that they do not suffer from prolonged periods with poor well-being. The Presidency also wants to see more knowledge sharing in the social sector about approaches to children and young people that work in practice.

The Presidency will organise a new version of the Nordic Mental Health Summit, which was first held during the Danish, Faroese and Greenlandic Presidency in 2015.

The Presidency will also focus on the well-being of children and young people by initiating activities based on the recommendations (2025) of the Danish Well-being Commission, activities that will reach out to children, young people and other relevant actors in the field.

The Presidency will also strive to improve public health in the Nordic Region, for example, by focusing on preventive measures to stop children and young people from using tobacco and nicotine products.

Harmful content and the protection of children and young people

Harmful and illegal content on **digital platforms** is a major problem, especially for children and young people. There is a growing need to protect children and young people from addictive algorithms, unethical business models and extensive data harvesting and profiling. The EU's digital regulatory framework will be put to the test in our region. The Presidency will discuss the political question of what more the Nordic Region, as a digital frontrunner, can contribute in terms of good practices and tangible solutions, including the enforcement of EU legislation and future legislation in this area that can inspire the rest of Europe.

Children and young people in a digital age

Digitalisation has changed the lives of our children and young people. With the rise of new technologies, social media, artificial intelligence and the need for digital literacy, we need children and young people to learn to reflect critically on how they use technology and navigate the digital world. It is important that we protect Nordic children and young people in the digital age.

The Presidency will also focus on children and young people's **screen time**, i.e., the negative consequences of more time spent on screen by children and young people, and in particular their safety online. It is important that new technology supports and promotes the well-being of children and young people and their learning.

Sustainable working life

We must safeguard the unique Nordic labour-market model and collective bargaining system, which **ensures we have a safe and healthy working environment and fair competition in our labour markets**. The model involves governments, employers and trade unions working closely together to find workable solutions that ensure both competitiveness and decent conditions for workers. However, we also live in changing times, in which the Nordic labour markets all have to deal with a range of new challenges.

Improving the Nordic labour market model

The Presidency will focus on how to **future-proof our Nordic labour market model** in a way that allows for a high degree of autonomy for the social partners and on encouraging ongoing dialogue to improve the model and support for it. This is especially important at a time when the workforce is changing. All of the Nordic countries face these challenges, and we can learn from each other and inspire each other to prepare for the future.

Greater Nordic efforts to combat workplace-related crime

The Presidency will continue Nordic co-operation to **combat workplace-related crime and social dumping**. Orderly conditions and fair competition must be a basic condition in the Nordic labour market. It is a matter of ensuring fair and free movement in the Nordic labour markets through proper pay and employment conditions, including for foreign and posted workers, and effective enforcement of the rules for this.

Workplace-related crime has proven to be a growing and general challenge in the Nordic Region, and the Presidency will focus on the countries sharing experiences and best practices to counter it.

A secure culture and media sector

Boosting culture in the Nordic Region

The current geopolitical situation emphasises the importance of the **shared Nordic culture**, which is bound together by a community built on trust, unity and democratic values. The Presidency will underline the role culture plays in the Nordic sense of community, including as a safeguard for cohesion, identity and democratic values.

Among other things, the Presidency will explore how the countries can protect and support the large swathes of cultural life that contribute to our unique Nordic human and social values. This will include providing greater access to culture, protecting our tangible and intangible cultural heritage, promoting the love of reading among children and adults, supporting Nordic language policy, etc. The work will be done in close dialogue with the Baltic countries, with which the Nordic Region shares strong values.

Supporting the cultural industries

In terms of boosting culture, the Presidency wishes to see greater emphasis placed on the cultural industries. The Nordic cultural industries are not only a symbol of innovation and growth, but also contribute to a stronger and more value-driven brand that stands for democratic values and openness. At a time when misinformation and polarisation are spreading, culture and creativity are becoming economic and strategic tools of which the Nordic Region can make greater use in order to spread our values.

Making the most of the cultural industries' potential will entail closer co-operation throughout the Nordic Region and targeted efforts to make Nordic culture more visible across the region and on the international stage. To this end, the Presidency will examine how the Nordic countries can work strategically **to export culture more widely**, particularly in a geopolitical context.

More public service content throughout the Nordic Region

As part of its work on the cultural industries, the Presidency will place particular emphasis on the media. Throughout the Nordic Region, there is a strong tradition of creating public service content that is not just for profit and entertainment but also for information and enlightenment. However, over the past decades, streaming services from other parts of the world have gained a significant foothold in both the Nordic and European markets. Netflix and HBO Max alone had 7.7 million subscribers in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden at the end of 2023. Their dominance threatens Nordic cultural understanding as we risk diluting local narratives, languages and cultural reference points in favour of content from elsewhere.

Closer co-operation on public service content can help to ensure linguistic diversity, local anchoring and a global perspective – both in the Nordic countries and the rest of the world. The problem cannot be solved at the national level and requires co-operation and strategic support throughout the region.

The Presidency will discuss and launch initiatives to support more and broader public service content across the Nordic Region and the rest of the world. The work will be based on the working group that MR-K has agreed to establish under the Finnish and Åland Presidency.



Photo Smyril Line. Martin Thaulow/Norden.org. Ólavur Frederiksen.

Striving for an interconnected Nordic Region in changing times

This programme outlines the Presidency's priorities and objectives for 2026. We are strongly committed to Nordic co-operation and look forward to driving it forward.

The work of the Nordic Council of Ministers has proven valuable for everybody in our countries and made this a world-class region over time. We have all benefited and enjoy high levels of security and sustainability, but it has taken more than half a century. The Nordic Region has not stood still. It has evolved and moved forward. Only by constantly evolving will we be able to retain the core of what is Nordic. We must continue that work and ensure the way we work together is always the best possible.

As the world changes, it is important that the Nordic Region keeps looking for sustainable new solutions to challenges and stresses the Nordic perspective in international forums. ***The Nordic Region: Strong ties in changing times.***



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The Nordic Council of Ministers

The Nordic Council of Ministers is the official body for inter-governmental co-operation between Åland, Denmark, Finland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

In 2019, the Nordic prime ministers presented a vision of the Nordic Region as the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030. The work of the Nordic Council of Ministers is designed to pursue that goal by making the Nordic Region green, competitive and socially sustainable.

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