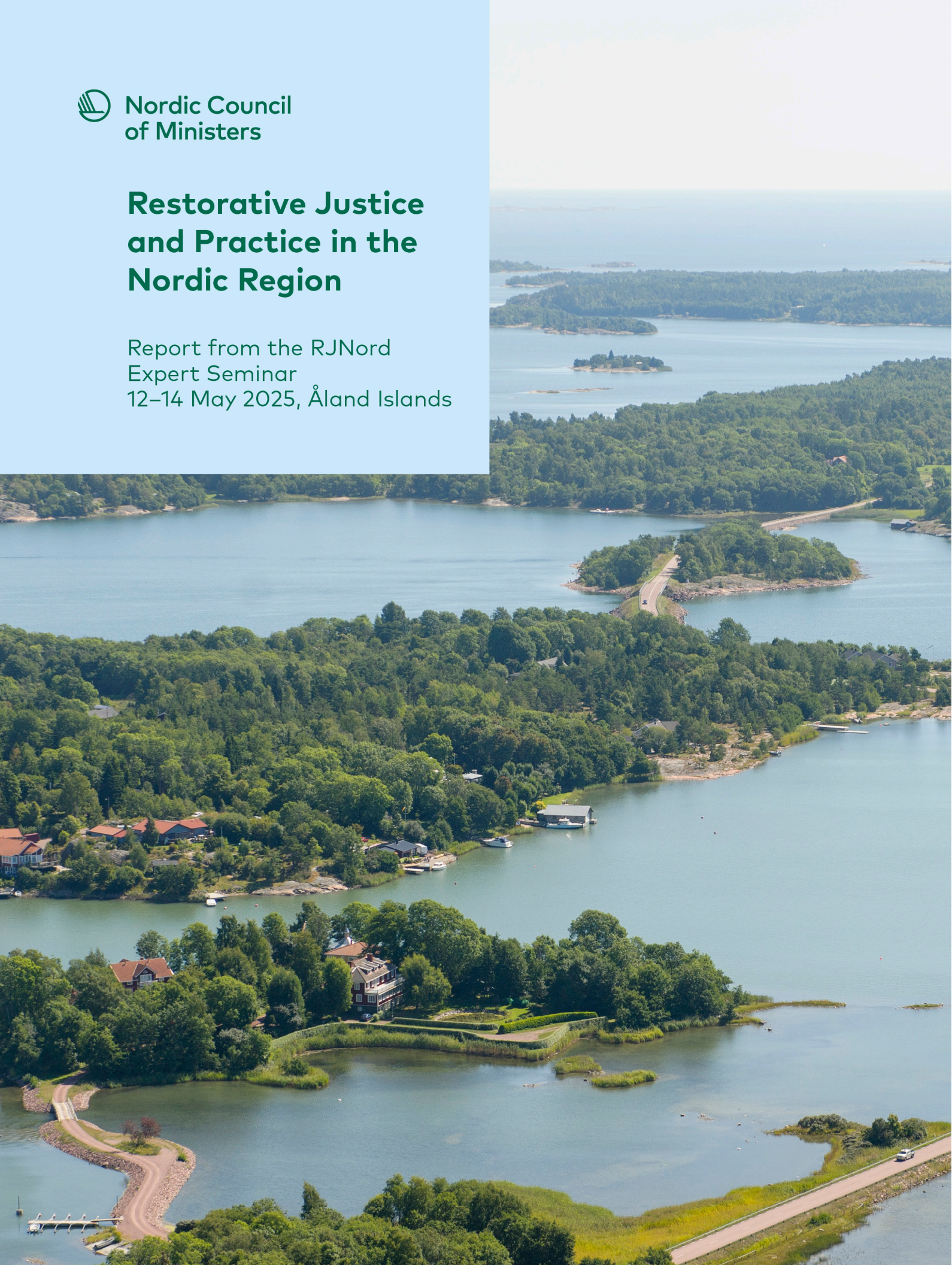




Nordic Council
of Ministers

Restorative Justice and Practice in the Nordic Region

Report from the RJNord
Expert Seminar
12–14 May 2025, Åland Islands



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This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version at:
<https://pub.norden.org/temanord2025-557>

About the report

This report is a documentation of the RJ Nord expert seminar "Restorative Justice and Practice in the Nordic Region – Nordic Benefits?" held on the Åland islands 12–14 May 2025. The Åland Islands Peace Institute as the lead partner of the project would like to thank the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Justice Affairs (ÄK-JUST) at the Nordic Council of Ministers for financing the project, as well as the Finnish Section of the Nordic Federation of Public Administration (NAF) for additional financial support. A special thanks to the members of the project steering committee:

National Mediation Service (Norway): Karen Kristin Paus

Association for Restorative Justice and Practice (Denmark): Karin Sten Madsen

Ministry of Justice (Finland)/National Council for Crime Prevention (Finland): Saija Järvinen and Arne Kinnunen

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Åbo Akademi University (Finland): Heidi Jokinen

Voluntary mediator (Finland): Julia Nymark-Björkstam

Åland Islands Peace Institute (Finland): Pia Slögs and Petra Granholm

Thank you also to all the participants for co-creating this event and its results. Lemböte Lägergård as venue, and its staff, contributed to a wonderful atmosphere of community.

Summary

Summary – RJNord Expert Seminar 2025: Restorative Justice and Practice in the Nordic Region – Nordic Benefit?

The RJNord Expert Seminar took place on Åland, May 12–14, 2025, bringing together around 40 in-person participants and an additional ten online attendees from across the Nordic and European countries. The event gathered practitioners, researchers, civil servants, and policymakers with a shared goal: To deepen collaboration and knowledge exchange in the field of restorative justice (RJ).

Background and Purpose

The seminar aimed to ignite a stronger movement and sense of community among RJ practitioners, researchers, policy makers and others active in this field in the Nordic region. A steering group – comprising representatives from the Ministry of Justice (Finland), National Council for Crime Prevention (Finland), the Finnish institute for Health and Welfare (Finland), Åbo Akademi University (Finland), the National Mediation Service (Norway), and the Association for Restorative Justice and Practice (Denmark), coordinated by the Åland Islands Peace Institute (Finland) – had worked for over a year to lay the groundwork for the event.

The seminar format emphasized connection and community-building, with participants staying together at the Lemböte camp facility, engaging in informal discussions around the campfire, and enjoying nature and sauna sessions, as well as others participating digitally.

Program Highlights

Day 1 – Opening and Keynotes:

The seminar opened with a video greeting from Dr. Aarne Kinnunen (Ministry of Justice Finland), followed by keynote presentations. Dr. Ian Marder (Maynooth University, Ireland) discussed the European legal framework and its implications for the Nordic region. Professor Emeritus Ivo Aertsen (KU Leuven, Belgium) presented insights from the forthcoming European volume of *The International Encyclopaedia of Restorative Justice*, highlighting the Nordic results.

Day 2 – Workshops and Dialogue:

The second day focused on societal trends such as polarization and increasing crime, with expert commentary from Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Denmark.

Participants then joined workshops on:

- Restorative Justice Theory (values, legislation, and interpretations)
- Quality Assurance (challenges and standards)
- Child-Friendly Restorative Justice (practices and potential)

Professor Aertsen also gave an impromptu talk on the history of the European Forum for Restorative Justice, emphasizing the potential of this Nordic initiative as a model for regional collaboration.

Day 3 – Plenary and Future Planning:

The final day featured a research presentation by PhD candidate Aino Jauhianen (University of Helsinki) and a plenary session to summarize outcomes and plan next steps. The "Åland Declaration" was initiated, intended to serve as a guiding document for future efforts.

Public Lunch Seminar:

The seminar concluded with a public lunch event titled "*Conflict Resolution as a Life Skill – How to Develop Child-Friendly Justice?*", co-hosted with Save the Children Åland. Real-life conflict scenarios, developed by a youth panel, were analysed by experts on restorative practices within schools and municipalities from Norway and Sweden.

Conclusions

There is considerable variation in how RJ is structured across the Nordic countries, ranging from state-funded mediation systems to local grassroots initiatives. During the seminar, participants shared successful models, particularly in the areas of youth mediation and conflict resolution in schools. A recurring theme was the need for greater coordination, the establishment of shared standards, and the promotion of cross-Nordic research. A Nordic RJ network is currently in development, and for Sweden – where national coordination is still lacking – a foundational meeting was held during the seminar to begin addressing this gap.

The seminar was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers with additional support from the Finnish Section of the Nordic Federation of Public Administration (NAF). It was led by the Åland Islands Peace Institute in collaboration with Nordic partner organizations. The next network meeting is tentatively planned in Denmark in 2027.

Sammanfattning på svenska

Sammanfattning – RJ Nord Expert Seminarium 2025: Restorativ rättvisa och praxis i Norden – nordisk nytta?

RJ Nord expertseminariet ägde rum på Åland den 12–14 maj 2025 och lockade omkring 40 deltagare på plats och ytterligare tio online-deltagare från Norden samt andra europeiska länder. Evenemanget samlade praktiker, forskare, tjänstemän och beslutsfattare med ett gemensamt mål: att fördjupa samarbetet och kunskapsutbytet på området restorativ rättvisa.

Bakgrund och syfte

Seminariet syftade till att skapa en starkare gemenskapskänsla bland utövare, forskare, beslutsfattare och andra aktörer inom restorativ rättvisa i Norden. En styrgrupp bestående av representanter från Justitieministeriet (Finland), Rådet för brottsförebyggande (Finland), Institutet för hälsa och välfärd (Finland), Åbo Akademi (Finland), Konfliktrådet (Norge) och Foreningen for Genoprettende Ret og Praxis (Danmark), samordnat av Ålands fredsinstitut (Finland) hade arbetat i över ett år för att lägga grunden för evenemanget.

Seminariets format betonade gemenskap och nätverkande, där deltagarna bodde tillsammans på Lemböte lägergård, deltog i informella diskussioner runt lägerelden och njöt av natur och bastu, medan andra deltog digitalt.

Programmets höjdpunkter

Dag 1 – Öppning och huvudtalare:

Seminariet inleddes med en videohälsning från Dr. Arne Kinnunen (Finlands justitieministerium), följt av öppningstal av Dr. Ian Marder (Maynooth University, Irland) som diskuterade den europeiska rättsliga ramen och dess implikationer för Norden. Professor emeritus Ivo Aertsen (KU Leuven, Belgien) presenterade därefter insikter från den kommande europeiska volymen av *The International Encyclopaedia of Restorative Justice*, med fokus på den nordiska situationen.

Dag 2 – Workshops och dialog:

Den andra dagen fokuserade på samhällstrender som polarisering och ökande brottslighet, med expertkommentarer från Finland, Island, Norge och Danmark.

Deltagarna deltog sedan i workshops om:

- Teori om restorativ rättvisa (värderingar, lagstiftning och tolkningar)
- Kvalitetssäkring (utmaningar och standarder)
- Barnvänlig restorativ rättvisa (praxis och potential)

Professor Aertsen höll också ett improviserat föredrag om bakgrunden till *European Forum for Restorative Justice*, där han betonade potentialen i föreliggande nordiska initiativ som modell för regionalt samarbete.

Dag 3 – Plenarsession och framtidsplanering:

Den sista dagen innehöll en forskningspresentation av doktoranden Aino Jauhianen (Helsingfors universitet) och en plenarsession för att sammanfatta resultaten och planera nästa steg. En så kallad "Ålandsdeklaration" togs fram som är tänkt att vara ett vägledande dokument för framtida insatser.

Offentligt lunchseminarium:

Seminarier avslutades med ett offentligt lunchevent med titeln "Konfliktlösning som livskunskap – hur utveckla barnvänlig rättvisa?", som anordnades i samarbete med Rädda Barnen Åland. Konfliktscenarier ur vardagen, utvecklade av en ungdomspanel, analyserades av experter på restorativ rättvisa inom skolor och kommuner från Norge och Sverige.

Slutsatser

Det finns stora skillnader i hur restorativ rättvisa är strukturerad i de nordiska länderna, från statligt finansierad medling till lokala gräsrotsinitiativ. Under seminariet delade deltagarna med sig av god praxis, särskilt inom områdena ungdomsmedling och konfliktlösning i skolor. Ett återkommande tema var behovet av ökad samordning, fastställande av gemensamma standarder och främjande av nordisk forskning. Ett nordiskt nätverk för restorativ rättvisa är nu under utveckling, och för Sverige – där nationell samordning fortfarande saknas – hölls ett grundläggande möte under seminariet för att börja åtgärda denna brist.

Seminarier finansierades av Nordiska ministerrådet med ytterligare stöd från den finska avdelningen av Nordiska administrativa förbundet (NAF). Det leddes av Ålands fredsinstitut i samarbete med nordiska partnerorganisationer. Nästa nätverksmöte är preliminärt planerat att hållas i Danmark 2027.

1. Introduction

Nordic countries once held biannual seminars to share developments in the field of mediation and restorative justice (RJ). However, these seminars ceased over a decade ago, and since then, collaboration has become sporadic or limited to small-scale efforts among a few individuals. In recent years, a renewed interest has emerged among practitioners of RJ and mediation across the Nordic region to re-establish a more structured and consistent network. Responding to this need, the Finnish Ministry of Justice together with the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and the Åland Islands Peace Institute took the initiative to seek funding for the project. With help of a working group supporting the Åland Island Peace Institute a proposal was written and later approved by the Nordic Council of Ministers' Committee of Senior Officials for Justice Affairs (ÄK-JUST).

This project contributes to a socially sustainable Nordic region. Achieving sustainability goals at the global, Nordic, and local levels requires a cultural transformation. In recent decades, restorative practices in various forms have offered new ways of viewing societal and individual conflicts. However, such practices remain marginal within criminal, judicial, and social policy. There is significant potential for RJ to be applied more broadly as an alternative, complement, or continuation of other processes.

RJ can be briefly described as a way of addressing conflict, crime, or polarization through dialogue that tackles harm by engaging the affected parties. When structurally applied, the potential for shared understanding and trust contributes to stronger social cohesion. This is further supported at the Nordic level through a common understanding of concepts, principles, and methods – which this project aims to foster.

RJ, as expressed through various forms of mediation, reconciliation, conferences, and peace circles, enables us to shift our perspective from individual truth to shared truth, and thus to the shared values central to the strategic goal of a socially sustainable Nordic region. When it comes to cultural transformation, RJ has the potential to change society's narrative from one of separation (between individuals, communities, and nature) to one in which interpersonal connection is strong and understanding can be achieved through dialogue, underpinning democratic values.

This project is grounded in the idea that RJ contributes to human well-being and thus to sustainability. Its pan-Nordic dimension is at the core of the project's vision, aiming for improved cooperation, knowledge exchange, and ultimately more harmonized policy and legislation in this field.

2. Attendance and audience

Over the course of the three days, a total of 54 participants took part in the RJNord Expert Seminar, with 40 attending on-site and 14 joining online. The participants represented a diverse range of professional backgrounds, including academics, police officers, mediators, consultants, and government officials.

Denmark had the largest delegation with 16 participants, of whom 11 attended on-site and 5 online. Finland was represented by 13 participants, with 8 attending on-site and 5 online. From Sweden, 10 participants joined the seminar – 4 on-site and 6 online. Norway contributed 7 participants, all of whom attended on-site. Åland had 6 participants, all attending on-site.

In addition, there were individual participants from Belgium, Ireland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom – each represented by one on-site attendee.

The public lunch seminar arranged at Hotell Arkipelag in Mariehamn gathered around 60 participants on-site and 10 online.



Lemböte lägergård.

Photo: Tabita Nordberg



Participants in the expert seminar getting to know each other.
Photo: Liz Lindvall



Group photo of RJ Nord expert seminar participants.
Photo: Liz Lindvall

3. Setting the scene

Participants from the different Nordic countries gathered in Mariehamn on a mid-May Monday afternoon to take the joint bus to Lemböte Länergård, the Mariehamn parish' campsite. Lemböte Länergård is situated outside of Mariehamn in natural surroundings by the sea. Participants were welcomed with home-made cinnamon buns and asked to take their shoes off indoors – something one participant noted "made us all equals". Most participants stayed both nights together at the site, enabling them to enjoy evening sauna, dips in the sea, nature walks and chats by the campfire. The surroundings contributed to a feeling of community and joint mission to bring RJ to the forefront in Nordic social and criminal policy, something that is greatly needed in times of rearmament, increased polarization, conflicts and hate-crimes.. Nordic cooperation in this field is not new but has been paused in recent years. To give the participants a background to this project and previous collaboration efforts, Dr Aarne Kinnunen, Senior Ministerial Advisor of the Ministry of Justice in Finland was asked to open the seminar and reflect on the progress and challenges in Nordic cooperation over the past 15–20 years.



youtu.be/JRHRxQx_YjA

Dr. Aarne Kinnunen highlighted previous Nordic seminars held in Finland (2007 and 2012) and Norway, noting that many of the themes remain relevant today – particularly the uneven development of RJ across the Nordic countries. He acknowledged some progress, such as Finland's decision to transfer responsibility for mediation services from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health to the Ministry of Justice, a change set to take effect in 2027. However, he also pointed out ongoing challenges, including a lack of public awareness, political support, and media attention for RJ. Funding remains a significant issue, reflecting a broader lack of trust in mediation compared to traditional justice institutions. Kinnunen emphasized the importance of continued collaboration and dialogue to strengthen RJ in the Nordic region, especially in difficult times. He also expressed gratitude to the Nordic Council of Ministers for funding the seminar and underscored the importance of our shared Nordic values.

Once the background of the current efforts was given, the host of the seminar, the Åland Islands Peace Institute, welcomed everyone to Åland. Project manager **Petra Granholm** provided a brief history of the islands and the example of peace and conflict resolution that Åland is. The peaceful "Åland solution" of the League of Nations in 1921 has served both Åland, the Finland – Sweden relationship and the world in that it has combined autonomy, demilitarisation and neutralisation, and minority rights into the "Åland example". That is why the Åland Islands are called the "Islands of peace", something Director **Susann Simolin** noted rhymes well with the idea of RJ and the work of the peace institute. Participants were very interested to hear of the unique case of conflict resolution that the Åland Example portrays.

4. A restorative outlook on the Nordics: overviews and in-depth explorations

Despite variations in how mediation and RJ are implemented and applied, common ground has been found in the underlying values, guiding principles, and shared visions for the future. In this context, the Nordic region stands out for its unified foundation of values. At the same time, emerging global challenges and evolving criminal trends present a collective concern.

4.1 European legal framework and the implications for Nordic countries.

Dr. Ian Marder is Associate Professor in Criminology at Maynooth University School of Law and Criminology at the National University of Ireland.



youtu.be/wwN2AOHFeuo

Dr Ian Marder's presentation is found in the [appendix](#).

Summary of the lecture

Dr. Ian Marder's presentation explores how the European legal framework supports the development of RJ, particularly in the Nordic context. He emphasizes that RJ should be accessible to all individuals at every stage of the justice process and suggests that it is increasingly being recognized as a human right. The Council of Europe has issued recommendations to promote RJ, calling for national action plans, inter-agency collaboration, standards of practice and the removal of barriers such as gatekeeping and limited information sharing. RJ is also recognized in EU: s victims' directive, although not as strongly promoted.

Marder highlights the Nordic countries as leaders in justice reform and encourages them to continue setting an example by implementing inclusive strategies, consider automating referrals for assessment, and applying restorative principles beyond criminal justice. He draws on findings from the "Restorative Justice: Strategies for Change" project, which showed that meaningful change is possible through coordinated efforts among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. The presentation concludes with a call to action for Nordic countries to build on their strengths and lead the way in embedding restorative practices across society.

4.2 Restorative Justice in criminal matters – Comparison of the Nordic countries

Ivo Aertsen is Emeritus Professor of Criminology at the University of Leuven in Belgium.



youtu.be/ACX6Dz3AtK4

Prof. Ivo Aertsen's presentation is found in the [appendix](#).

Summary of the lecture

Professor Ivo Aertsen's presentation offered a comprehensive overview of RJ in the Nordic region from a European and global perspective. He highlights the aspirations of RJ—such as meeting victims' needs, supporting offender rehabilitation, and strengthening communities—while also addressing key challenges like underuse, institutionalization risks, and unequal access. The presentation is based on the forthcoming International Encyclopaedia of Restorative Justice, which documents RJ developments across six global regions. In Europe, RJ – especially victim-offender mediation – is widespread but often limited to minor offenses and controlled by criminal justice agencies. Nordic countries show varied progress: Finland and Norway have well-established, nationally coordinated systems with strong community involvement; Denmark and Sweden have more limited and fragmented practices; Iceland has seen minimal implementation. Aertsen emphasizes the need for broader societal engagement, better communication of RJ's benefits, and a balance between formal integration and preserving RJ's core values. The Nordic region, with its mix of top-down policy and grassroots initiatives, offers valuable lessons for advancing RJ both regionally and globally.

RJ varies significantly across the Nordic countries in terms of development, institutional support, and practical implementation.

Finland

- Developed and institutionalized RJ system.
- RJ is integrated into national legislation (e.g., Mediation Act 2006).
- Services are coordinated by the Institute for Health and welfare (THL) with strong municipal involvement.
- Broad application: criminal cases and disputes, schools, workplaces, and intercultural conflicts.
- High number of volunteer mediators and strong community involvement.

Norway

- Also highly developed, with a national mediation service (NMS) under the Ministry of Justice, legislation on RJ since 1991.
- Long history (since 1981), with a mix of top-down policy and bottom-up community engagement.
- Covers both civil and criminal cases, including serious offenses.
- Strong focus on youth justice and restorative practices in civil society.

Denmark

- Main program: *Konfliktråd* (Victim-Offender Mediation), coordinated by police. Legislation on RJ since 2010.
- Available for all offenses but a decreasing number of referrals.
- Weak public awareness and limited political or institutional support.

Sweden

- Mediation mainly for juveniles, co-ordinated by municipalities.
- No national coordination or consistent data collection.
- Lack of political interest and structural support has led to fragmentation.

Iceland

- Small-scale pilot projects with minimal continuation.
- Mediation mostly police-led and limited to youth and minor offenses.
- No strong grassroots or political movement supporting RJ.

5. Contemporary societal trends



Commentators from Norway, Iceland, Finland and Denmark discuss contemporary societal trends.

Photo: Petra Granholm

In this session, speakers were asked to give an account of societal trends in their respective countries. They addressed questions such as: Is polarization becoming more prevalent? What are the current crime trends, are crime rates increasing or decreasing? Are there noticeable developments related to youth crime? In addition, the discussion included whether RJ strategies are in place and, if so, to what extent they are being implemented.

Professor Sakari Melander, University of Helsinki, Chair of the National Council for Crime Prevention (FIN)

Finland is a strong democracy with a stable, high-trust society. However, Finnish communities are increasingly affected by global challenges. Historically a relatively homogeneous nation, Finland is now experiencing significant demographic shifts. As diversity increases, growing societal polarization has become a matter of concern.

While overall crime rates have declined over the past two decades, a troubling rise in criminal activity among children, primarily boys under the age of 15 has emerged. Although most young people are doing well, a small group of recidivists is responsible for a disproportionate share of serious crimes. These are often rooted in socio-economic disadvantage. Notably, children from immigrant backgrounds are statistically more likely than native Finns to be both victims and perpetrators of crime.

Professor Melander highlighted two recent phenomena in Finnish crime trends. Firstly, the increase of serious violent crime and secondly the rise in the number of the so-called street gangs. Approximately 30% of the first mentioned violent criminal acts are committed by individuals under the age of 18. As for the second trend, Helsinki police estimate that approximately ten active street gangs are operating in the city and surrounding areas, with indications of increasing organizational structure.

In 2024, Finland has implemented a government resolution and action plan for preventing and combatting youth and gang related crime. The action plan is not focused on but recognises mediation and RJ.

While some policymakers consider RJ as an effective and empathetic response to juvenile offending, others advocate for harsher punitive measures. The Finnish government, however, views RJ and mediation as a valuable approach for reducing recidivism and fostering accountability among young offenders. Current efforts include developing conferencing models that actively also involve families and communities in the process of mediation.

Professor Helgi Gunnlaugsson, University of Iceland (ICE)

Iceland shares many societal trends with Finland, including high levels of trust and stability. Ranked as the most peaceful country in the world by the Global Peace Index, Iceland has a low prison population and a variety of non-custodial sentences. These features suggest fertile ground for RJ, yet no RJ strategy has been implemented.

In recent years, however, concerning developments have occurred. Youth re-offending and serious crimes, such as aggravated assaults involving knives and even homicides, have triggered concerns within Icelandic society. Social polarization is also on the rise. Over the past 25 years, the percentage of foreign nationals in Iceland has grown substantially from 2% to 20%. No other nation has increased the number of foreigners so much in such a short time. While this diversity is broadly seen as positive, it brings certain challenges. This increase in immigration has not

impacted the statistics on crime as such, but with the opening of borders come what is called "tourist crime" and instances of transnational offenses such as drug trafficking.

Currently, RJ in Iceland is rarely used and remains limited to cases by referral of state prosecutor. Although pilot projects have been conducted successfully, evaluated and met with general satisfaction, they have not translated into broader implementation. Resistance within the traditional criminal justice system remains a barrier.

Moreover, RJ is not widely accepted for handling gender-based violence or other serious crimes, which further restricts its application. In theory, stakeholders recognize its potential, but in practice, Iceland has yet to implement RJ as a systemic solution.

Edle Pallum, Head of Department, National Mediation Service (NO)

Norway has extensive experience with RJ which primarily consists of victim-offender mediation, but also larger meetings. Annually between 7–8,000 cases are referred to mediation. Mediation is possible at all stages of the criminal justice process. Approximately 60% of cases involve participants under the age of 25, many victims and offenders are minors.

Norway has enacted legislation on youth sentencing and follow-up programs that incorporate RJ approaches. This extended process can last up to three years and goes beyond traditional victim-offender mediation. Its aim is to foster safe, enduring connections that support young offenders in reintegrating into society.

A trend that is similar to Finland and Iceland is the rise of hate crimes and a smaller group of young persons under the age of 15 that commit serious crime like robberies and violent crimes. Radicalization, both Islamic and right wing, is on the rise. Risk factors are social exclusion, poverty, drug use and disengagement. Public reports highlight parental support as critical.

The benefits of RJ are recognized. However, an expert report concludes that there is untapped potential in this field. Strategic discussions emphasize the need for further development, particularly through enhanced cross-sectoral collaboration. Additionally, strengthening research on the impact of RJ is essential. The current societal trends pose challenges both to the criminal justice and RJ systems.

Katrine Barnekow Rasmussen, Assistant Professor, University of Copenhagen (DK)

Since the mid 1990s, crime rates in Denmark have been on a steady and substantial decline reaching a reduction by half in our decade. At the same time, the last decades' penal politics have increasingly been characterised by a tough-on-crime approach, problematising (perceived) high crime levels and (perceived) lack of public safety and promoting harsher sentences, especially for crimes against a person.

Young individuals with immigrant and immigrant descendant backgrounds are overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Attempts to explain and problematise this overrepresentation remains a heated topic in public discussion and is linked to debates on immigration politics. However, it should be noted that research has consistently shown that these groups are subject to increased police attention; they are substantially more likely to be arrested and charged without it leading to a conviction and at large more likely to get caught *if* they have committed an offence. Also, overall the registered offending of these population groups is declining, following a curve parallel to that of ethnic majority Danes.

Furthermore, with the political shift towards harsher sentences, less sentences are conditional, even for less serious violent offences, and more include a prison sentence. As a consequence, Danish prisons are currently facing issues of overcrowding and understaffing, which has affected the availability of education programs and limited opportunities for inmate visitations.

In Denmark, victim offender mediation is based within the police. It is called 'Konfliktråd' like its Norwegian source of inspiration. Yet, based in the police and without a clear budget and clear prioritisation by the political and management level, this service is quite different in structure and capacity. There are notable differences between police districts and there has been a steady decline in number of cases referred to mediation. We are now at a level where the Norwegian Mediation Service has 20 times as many mediations as its Danish sister-in-name.

In 2019, the Youth Offending Boards were introduced in Denmark. Offenders aged 10 to 17 years can be referred to the boards, and if the offence is against a person, the referral is almost mandatory. The boards involve judges, police, and social workers and they can decide on various responses to avoid reoffending. As the age of criminal responsibility in Denmark is 15 years, offenders under 15 years will not receive a formal sentence, but the decisions of the boards are mandatory for the young offenders to follow whether they are over or under 15 years of age. There are two overall types of responses: Immediate reactions (fast responses related to the

offence) and improvement programmes (e.g. rehabilitation or support initiatives). The immediate reactions are rarely used. However, when they are used, it is normally in the shape of victim-offender mediation or pre-meetings for this.

Concluding remarks

All Nordic countries are currently facing similar criminal trends, particularly involving youth and gang-related offenses. In addition, growing societal polarization is evident across the region. These issues were further highlighted during discussions following the presentations, where it became clear that Sweden is also experiencing these patterns. However, Sweden lacks a national strategy for mediation or RJ, as these responsibilities fall under the jurisdiction of individual municipalities.

6. Workshops

To ensure the event was inclusive and dialogic, we organized three workshops that addressed key topics. The aim was to gather insights from various Nordic countries to deepen our understanding of national practices and promote mutual learning. Each workshop was designed and led by a different country, with the presenter also arranging table hosts to document the group discussions. The summaries from the workshops build on notes taken during the discussions, reflecting the participants' perspectives in the workshop and is not necessarily a full picture of status in each country. All participants joined all three workshops, but were divided into small groups, each composed to reflect as diverse a representation as possible from across the Nordic region.



Thematic workshops were led by Finland, Denmark and Norway. Photo: Liz Lindvall

6.1 Restorative Justice Theory. Values and principles, legislation and understanding in the Nordic countries

Restorative Justice offers a way of dealing with crime and other conflicts. RJ is based on values like respect, inclusion, voluntariness and dialogue.

The European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ) defines RJ as an approach of addressing harm or risk of harm through engaging all those affected in coming to a

common understanding and agreement on how the harm or wrongdoing can be repaired and justice achieved.

The first workshop, led by university lecturer **Heidi Jokinen** from Åbo Akademi University in Finland, explored our understanding of RJ in the Nordic countries, focusing on the following themes.

How do we practice restorative justice, or do we?

The group discussed the role of RJ in both personal and professional contexts. They unanimously agreed that restorative values are embraced in their everyday lives, at home, among friends, and in hobbies. These values come naturally in daily interactions and relationships.

Embracing RJ can be seen as a strength, especially in personal relationships. It's reflected in a mindset of curiosity, a desire to ask questions, seek understanding, and remain open to personal growth and new perspectives. As a life skill, these values encourage compassion, offer space for second chances, and promote non-judgmental attitudes.

At the heart of restorative practice is radical, deep listening. When we truly listen, we make others feel heard. The focus shifts to how our actions affect others, and we begin to reflect on our own behaviour, even when emotions run high.

What are the objectives of the current practice?

This question is broad and multifaceted. The group agreed that there are many different objectives, and these vary significantly depending on context. Practices differ between countries and regions, shaped by legal frameworks and the roles of various authorities. Additional variation arises from mediators' understandings of RJ, their professional backgrounds, and the way they approach and deliver RJ processes.

The group reflected on whether a single, unified understanding of RJ objectives is achievable – or even desirable. It was noted that the language used to describe victim-offender mediation affects perceived goals. Should we instead speak of *restorative*, *reparative*, or even *preparatory dialogues*? The term *preparatory dialogue* may be particularly appropriate in cases involving intimate partner or domestic violence, where careful framing is crucial. Ultimately, the group emphasized that objectives must be flexible and responsive to the specific needs of the parties involved.

RJ objectives can encompass a range of themes depending on the level of focus. In individual cases, goals may centre around healing, understanding, and accountability. Societal-level objectives, however, might include reducing reoffending and victimization, lowering costs for the criminal justice system, improving standards and practices, and enhancing the quality of dialogue.

The group urged a shift in public discourse—from reactive, punitive approaches to forward-looking, problem-solving perspectives. A cultural transformation is needed. Instead of teaching future generations to assign blame and exclude, we should inspire the values of empathy, accountability, and constructive conflict resolution.

How are restorative justice and mediation practices challenged by the political climate in the Nordic countries?

One of the key challenges facing RJ and mediation today is the lack of sustained political attention, which results in inadequate guidance and limited political will. In several Nordic countries, a punitive mindset seems to have pushed RJ further to the margins than before.

To counter this trend, we need to build stronger, localized evidence of RJ's effectiveness through long-term collaboration between practitioners and researchers. By forming lasting partnerships, we can produce data that not only supports RJ but is also rooted in real-world outcomes.

Equally important is shifting the public narrative: we should focus more on the transformative stories and values of RJ, rather than framing justice solely through punitive responses. At the same time, we must be aware of crime trends and statistics to ground our arguments in clear, factual context. Policymakers and the media need accessible and clear answers to the question: *What does successful RJ look like?*

A practical step forward would be co-creating effective policy frameworks in dialogue with decision-makers. Listening to politicians and understanding their priorities can help ensure that RJ is conceptualized more clearly and consistently across national contexts.

What kind of legal obstacles or challenges are there to the development of RJ practices?

The challenges that RJ and mediation face differ significantly across Nordic countries due to varying stages of legal development and legislative frameworks.

In *Iceland*, a major barrier is the absence of RJ in statutory law. While the state prosecutor permits RJ through a directive, the concept of who qualifies as a mediator is narrowly defined and is currently limited to police officers. Moreover, a full police investigation must precede any mediation referral, placing police in the dual role of investigator and mediator. This arrangement is seen as a conflict of interest in other Nordic countries and is therefore not permitted. The justice system in Iceland remains rooted in traditional thinking, making it difficult to introduce new ideas or expand the scope of mediation. Broader legal reasoning and a more inclusive understanding of who can act as mediators are needed.

In *Norway*, mediation in criminal cases is politically and institutionally supported. Police are both encouraged and obliged to refer cases. The use of mediation is widespread and is applied in criminal and civil matters, as well as in prisons and schools. Legislation allows RJ at different stages in the criminal procedures, included during prisons sentences – between prisoners and victims, or with prisoners own families, communities, and workplaces, this practice is however still limited. Need for Information, priorities and resources may challenge even broader application in practice.

In *Denmark*, the mediation system lacks national coordination. Regional authorities have the autonomy to organize and develop mediation services, leading to inconsistencies in access and implementation. Barriers include the perception that mediation is "soft on crime" and the dependence on highly motivated individuals, rather than institutional support. Sustainable mediation practices need to be integrated into organizational structures. Prosecutors, police, and judges should be trained continuously to enhance the understanding and use of mediation in criminal cases.

Common obstacles identified were inconsistent terminology that can lead to confusion about the purpose and goals of mediation and RJ. Legislative barriers restrict the application of mediation in criminal cases, while others hinder expansion and development. Existing laws are often underutilized, with narrow definitions regarding who may serve as a mediator and what kinds of cases qualify. A clearer, more coherent conceptualization of RJ is essential for its broader implementation and development.

How have we translated RJ in the Nordic Countries? Where have we drawn inspiration from?

Translations used are "*reparativ rättvisa*" and "*restorativ rättvisa*" in Swedish, "*genoprettende Ret*" in Danish, "*gjenoprettende prosess*" in Norwegian, "*korjaava oikeus*" and "*restoratiivinen oikeus*" in Finnish and "*uppbyggileg réttvís*" in Icelandic. The word "mediation" or "Victim-offender mediation (VOM)" is often used as a synonym for RJ.

Consistency in terminology is vital, especially to prevent confusion around what we mean by RJ. While the concept is clear in English, to translate it into Nordic languages is a complex issue. The term "restorative" can be interpreted in several ways.

In Nordic languages the term carries different meanings, which can make communication difficult, it can be difficult to find native words that accurately describe the meaning.

The term "mediator" poses its own challenges. It often suggests two equal parties in a conflict, which doesn't always reflect RJ dynamics. While "facilitator" might be more accurate, it doesn't always resonate well, particularly with younger audiences. Interestingly, in our work with children and youth, we've found that "mediator" feels approachable and non-threatening – they often see a mediator as someone with good intentions.

When discussing RJ, it's important to emphasize the *reparative* dimension especially with youth. They tend to connect well with the idea of "repairing" something, like a damaged relationship.

Of course, the most effective terminology can vary widely from person to person and situation to situation. That's why it's essential that those of us working in mediation develop a strong conceptual vocabulary.

One important question we might ask ourselves: *Are we explaining restorative justice clearly enough, given how often people struggle to grasp what it really means?*

What terminology do we use and why?

The language we use to describe those involved in conflict or harm is important, both ethically and practically. While some refer to the individuals involved as "*parties*," this term may imply an equal standing that doesn't always reflect the dynamics of a given situation, for instance in cases of domestic violence, where power imbalances can be significant.

At times, it is necessary to use more direct terms like *offender* and *victim* to acknowledge responsibility. Recognising the harm and who is accountable can be important to achieve justice.

Terminology also shifts depending on the stage of the legal or mediation process. For instance, in Finland, early on the terms *victim* and *suspect* are commonly used. In Norway, there is an emphasis on not assigning roles, which influences language choices.

Ultimately, careful and context-sensitive language supports the integrity of mediation and ensures that everyone involved is approached with respect and accuracy.

Concluding remarks

To summarise the workshop, all countries, despite their differences, agreed that RJ holds untapped potential across the Nordic region. There was a shared recognition of the need to broaden the scope of practices, strengthen structures, and enhance cross-sector collaboration. Public awareness remains limited, and a deeper understanding of the objectives, values and principles of RJ is needed. The importance of using clear messaging and consistent terminology was also strongly emphasised.

6.2 Quality Assurance in Restorative Justice Practice

What can people reasonably expect when they choose to participate in a RJ process? Providing high quality services require that practices have standards and are committed to providing a service that is safe, beneficial, and upholds the values of RJ. The topic of the second workshop was quality assurance in restorative practices.

The workshop was led by **Karin Sten Madsen**, facilitator and a member of the Danish Association for Restorative Justice and Practices. The purpose of this workshop was to reflect on and share how institutions and organizations work with quality assurance – from setting standards to aligning with values and learning from practice. Quality assurance means ensuring that the service provided is evidence-based, ethical, and effective.

The European Forum for Restorative Justice recognizes that *“The restorative justice practitioner and organization are tasked with creating and sustaining the optimal conditions in which participants can engage in generating the outcomes that are most satisfactory to them.”*

Therefore, the workshop was framed around a set of key questions:

- Where are we at in terms of quality assurance? What have we already succeeded with?
- What are we missing – and what could we wish for?
- What can we learn from each other?
- What would be useful to discuss further in a Nordic context? What specific follow-up actions would we suggest for the topic of quality assurance?

What were some of the main points of discussion in the groups?

In the groups, there was great interest in sharing and learning how RJ is organized and practiced across the different Nordic countries. Participants were particularly interested to know about:

- national laws and regulations governing the implementation of RJ
- institutions and organizations responsible for carrying out RJ
- visions and values guiding the practice
- training and forms of RJ processes
- measures to ensure the delivery of high-quality RJ processes.

One group focused on desired standards and guidelines: Who defines the standards? How do we balance process expertise and professional knowledge with the participants' ownership of their conflict? How do we ensure consistency across teams and regions? Sweden, which has no national coordination of RJ, no centralized training for facilitators, and no system for quality management, highlighted the lack of a coherent framework for quality assurance as a major challenge. In contrast, Norway's *Konfliktråd* has for many years developed national standards and guidelines, which are implemented and publicly available on their website.

In another group, ways of collecting qualitative data and actively using data to improve practice and inform research were discussed.

An example from Norway highlighted the fact that facilitators in the *Konfliktråd* are required to complete a standard reflection form at the end of each process, which is submitted to the coordinator. In Finland, Iceland and Norway participants are asked to fill out a questionnaire at the end of the process. In Denmark a questionnaire is in progress. The importance of gathering feedback and reflections from partner agencies and referral sources was also highlighted.

A solid basic training as well as specialized training and ongoing support of facilitators were recognized as central to ensuring high-quality RJ processes. To enhance facilitation quality, several methods were mentioned, such as the use of pre-meetings, co-facilitation, and a reflective practice after each session.

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to write down their personal takeaways on a Post-it note. Here are a few quotes:

- *The value of a reflective practice*
- *Being explicit about values*
- *How the ten core values of RJ are implemented in mediation in Norway*
- *Pre-meetings are an important quality assurance tool*
- *I will bring back the idea of collecting learning from each case to better understand what works and what doesn't*
- *The importance of soft quality assurance through supervision, reflective practice, etc.*
- *Interesting how we receive feedback – and how we use it*
- *A solid evaluation system for practice ensures safe development*
- *Evidence that practice is working and improving people's lives is key*
- *Inspiration to share more about quality assurance in Nordic cooperation*
- *Being intentional about foregrounding RJ values as a way to ensure quality*
- *We need to share more examples of good practice.*

Concluding remarks

In sum, this workshop focused on how organizations across the Nordic region ensure safe, effective, and values-based RJ practices. Participants explored national differences in standards, facilitator training, and data collection methods. Key discussions included the need for clear guidelines, reflective practice, and consistent evaluation systems. Furthermore, participants stressed the importance of this topic and the continuation of discussions about quality assurance within the Nordic network.

6.3 Restorative Child Friendly justice in the Nordic Countries – scope of application, practices, challenges and potential

The principles of RJ align closely with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its goal to minimize punitive measures for children and young people. RJ is widely regarded as a form of justice that is child-friendly, based on values such as voluntariness, active participation, and shared ownership of both the process and its outcomes. Central to RJ is its flexibility and ability to adapt to the unique needs of each individual.

The third workshop was led by Senior Advisors **Karen Kristin Paus** and **Frøydis Heyerdahl** at the National Mediation Service Norway, and the aim was to address questions of what is needed to safeguard the key principles and values of RJ regarding children and young people. The workshop addressed how Nordic co-operation can be beneficial to further development of RJ practices with children and young people.

RJ after offences for children under the age of criminal responsibility

This group explored RJ practices involving children 14 years old or younger. Following the discussion, participants suggested topics for further, in-depth conversations within the Nordic network. Restorative approaches with this age group tend to be less formal, as the criminal justice system is not involved. The benefits for the children were emphasized, along with the importance of further developing and expanding these practices.

Participants expressed a strong interest in learning from other countries' experiences and best practices in implementing restorative processes for younger children. A recurring concern was the challenge adults face in granting agency to the children. There was a recognized need to better understand how to engage parents and caregivers in supporting, rather than dominating, the process.

Upholding restorative values was seen as essential, even though parental involvement can complicate matters. Parents, driven by concern, may unintentionally take control of the process rather than allowing the child to handle the situation with support. It's important to balance the needs of both children and adults, ensuring one does not take away focus from the other.

Restorative practices were identified as a promising way to counteract societal trends of violence and negativity, offering children opportunities to learn constructive, cooperative responses to polarization, crime, and bullying.

In conclusion, restorative processes for this age group show great promise. However, additional research and practitioner training are needed. Professionals should be equipped to facilitate child-friendly dialogues, build trust, and ensure children understand and voluntarily consent to the process.

RJ in combination with penal sanctions for children over the age of criminal responsibility

This group discussed whether RJ is applicable to all types of crime and concluded that it is important to distinguish between cases where mediation serves as the main form of punishment or part of the sentence, and those where it functions as a complementary or alternative measure. Some research indicates that RJ can be highly effective even in very serious offenses. However, these references often relate to mediation used as a supplement or integrated component of the broader justice response, rather than as the sole consequence.

The group continued to explore how to determine whether a case is appropriate for mediation. One significant concern was ensuring participant safety and preventing power imbalances – especially when minors are involved. The term “suitable” itself sparked debate: What qualifies a case as suitable? And who has the authority to decide?

The group also stressed the importance of thorough preparation, which may be time-consuming but is often critical to upholding the core principles of RJ. This need for deliberate groundwork can sometimes conflict with external pressures to resolve cases quickly and efficiently.

Ultimately, mediators must carefully assess, in dialogue with the parties, whether facilitating a direct meeting is safe and aligned with RJ values – or whether an alternative approach to dialogue would be more appropriate. Several dilemmas arise in this process. Some participants shared that they rely on highly experienced mediators for complex cases, and others mentioned using structured checklists as part of their assessment.

It's important to examine cross-sectoral cooperation throughout the various stages of the RJ process. Without effective collaboration between criminal justice and

other relevant agencies, referrals of cases may be lacking. Continued cooperation is just as essential following the RJ or mediation process. Children involved often require support not only after the process to manage their agreed-upon responsibilities, but also before and during the proceedings.

Mediation in criminal cases: Prosecutors may refer or divert cases to the Norwegian Mediation Service (*Konfliktrådet*), provided both the offender and victim agree. In these cases, mediation serves as the punishment – or as an alternative to traditional penalties. If the parties reach an agreement (e.g., an apology, guidance on future interactions, or more substantial arrangements), the mediation service informs the prosecutor that the case is closed, and the offender faces no further consequences. The prosecutor cannot impose a new penalty for the same offence. If no agreement is reached, or the offender fails to meet its terms, the case is returned to the prosecutor for further action.

Youth punishment and youth follow-up: These involve a tailored action plan for the youth, which includes RJ components. RJ may entail meeting the victim, mending other significant relationships, and fostering trust in individuals and key institutions such as the police and schools. Recent amendments to Norwegian legislation ensure that RJ elements in these penalties adhere to the general principles of RJ.

The group concluded by exploring how these discussions could be expanded within the Nordic context. Emphasis was placed on the value of sharing information. Several participants expressed interest in learning more about how RJ is implemented across different countries – both in general and specifically for young people. There was also an interest in exchanging details about frameworks, guidelines, and best practices. One idea raised was to further discuss commonalities and differences between national approaches.

RJ practices in communities related to conflicts and crime prevention in civil society

In Denmark, RJ practices are implemented in residential areas, communities, shops, and libraries. Additionally, *SSP-Samrådet* – an interdisciplinary collaboration between schools, social services, and the police – organizes mediations involving young children. Schools also use mediation, and experience shows that integrating it into school activities has a positive impact on reducing conflicts.

In Finland, mediation is practiced in schools and includes peer mediation as well as mediation between parents and teachers. Street mediation and community-based mediation are also available.

In Norway, the *Trygg læring* (Safe Learning) initiative facilitates school mediation, while the Red Cross organizes street mediation. A form of Family Group Conferencing, known as *Familieråd*, is available through child protection services.

Sweden does not currently implement RJ in schools, but it offers “Dialogue for Peace” training for young people. Starting in 2026, civil society organizations will begin working with youth through restorative circles.

In Ireland, four organizations provide training in RJ. Implementation occurs through local multi-agency cooperation and ad hoc initiatives. RJ conferences can be arranged in response to conflicts.

This group called for a united Nordic effort to strengthen RJ through concrete actions: creating a shared digital platform for exchanging RJ resources; organizing themed virtual meetups to share best practices and success stories; launching a youth-led peer mediation network to foster cross-border cooperation; connecting Denmark’s SSP and Norway’s SLT (*Samordning av Lokale rus og kriminalitetsforebyggende Tiltak*) models to enhance community coordination; inviting Nordic policymakers to witness RJ sessions firsthand through an Observer Program; presenting a joint RJ statement to the Nordic Council of Ministers; and initiating collaborative research on RJ’s long-term impact to inform policy and secure sustainable funding – altogether forming a collective push to amplify RJ’s reach and resilience across the region.

How to ensure that a restorative process is child-friendly

Children and young people seek the same dignity and respect as adults. A non-judgmental, compassionate approach – especially during mediation – helps them feel safe and heard. Consistent empathy, reflective practice, and involving parents can reveal broader dynamics influencing behaviour. Children are often open to change when treated with trust and respect, and they benefit from opportunities to take responsibility and resolve conflicts. However, they must not bear the burden alone: adults play a crucial role in shaping their environment. Emotional education and restorative practices in schools are essential to equip children with tools for growth, healing, and non-violent conflict resolution.

Concluding remarks

To sum up the content of this workshop participants stressed the agency and respect of children and their voices. Further cooperation was considered vital, especially to develop practices of RJ also outside the criminal justice system and for children under the age of criminal responsibility.

7. Lunch seminar



Lunch seminar at Hotell Arkipelag.
Photo: Petra Granholm



Lunch seminar speakers.
Photo: Liz Lindvall

To mark the conclusion of the expert seminar, a public lunch seminar was held in Mariehamn on the theme **“Conflict management as life skills – how to create child-friendly justice?”**. This lunch seminar was held in Scandinavian and attracted an audience of local persons working with children and youth as well as the expert seminar participants, in total around 60 persons.

The idea of the seminar was to let experts in youth conflict management comment on real-life conflict scenarios developed in advance by a panel of youths from Åland. The Åland Peace Institute and Save the Children Åland collaborated around involving youth in a workshop that discussed conflicts in their everyday lives, to then decide on two scenarios- one involving girls and one involving boys.

To open the seminar, the Åland Deputy Head of Government **Annika Hambrudd** was invited to speak.

Minister Hambrudd emphasised that conflicts are experienced in all dimensions of human life and should not be seen as inherently good or bad – rather a natural part of life. What matters is how we handle and resolve them. Conflict resolution is a vital skill that fosters an environment of understanding and respect. When managed constructively, disagreements and differences can lead to change, learning, and growth. At their core, conflicts are about people’s desires and the will to meet their interests and needs.

RJ is about creating dialogue between those involved, with the goal of understanding each other’s perspectives and finding a way forward together. For children and young people, this means having an active role in the process, helping them feel heard, respected, and taken seriously in conflict situations.

Mediation based on restorative principles is a lifelong learning process in empathy, where we are all encouraged to take responsibility for our own conflicts and learn to manage them. Developing conflict resolution skills early in life has long-term positive effects. It can improve relationships, reduce stress, foster meaningful dialogue, and increase trust and a sense of justice and respect. These skills better equip young people to face future challenges in both personal and professional contexts.

To conclude, Minister Hambrudd took the opportunity to echo the words of Astrid Lindgren: "Give children love, more love, and even more love – and common sense will come by itself."

Tanja Rönnerberg, who is an expert in digital lives of children and youth at Save the Children Åland, has vast experience in talking to young people and their parents about the use of social media, including the conflict that are often exacerbated by social media. She presented the scenarios developed by the youth at the lunch seminar.

Contemporary youth conflict scenarios often involve multiple dimensions and several individuals, either directly or indirectly. Identifying the exact starting point of a conflict is rarely straightforward, as underlying power dynamics frequently influence the situation. Many young people engage in these dynamics to avoid becoming targets themselves. These events typically unfold both in physical spaces and across various social media platforms.

The following two scenarios were developed by a dedicated youth panel consisting of four Ålandic young persons aged 14–16 during a workshop held on April 29. One scenario primarily involves girls – according to the panel, conflicts among girls tend to be more prolonged and revolve around gossip and social exclusion. In contrast, boys' conflicts are often shorter but more physically aggressive, as illustrated in the second scenario. The youth panel later had a chance to watch a recording of the lunch seminar and further discuss the expert solutions from their perspective.

Conflict Scenario 1: "The Gossip"

Amanda is the popular girl everyone wants to be or be around. She's considered the "boss"—at the top of the social hierarchy in both her class and school. This position gives her influence over what others say and do. Her closest friend is Felicia. Amanda is dating Hugo, another popular student known for being a bit of a flirt.

One day, Felicia is at Amanda's house when Amanda starts gossiping about their mutual friend Sara.

Amanda: "Felicia, I heard a rumour that Sara has a crush on Hugo. What if it's true??"

Felicia: "No way... do you really think so?"

Amanda: "Yeah, I heard she was flirting with him. With Hugo! He's my boyfriend! Doesn't she get that?"

Felicia: "Are you sure? I don't think Hugo is even her type..."

Amanda: "What are you saying? How can you question me? Of course, he's her type. He's everyone's type! Everyone knows he's the hottest guy in school – he's mine!"

Felicia: "Right... maybe it's true. Ugh, Sara's such a slut!"

The next day, Felicia sees Sara and feels guilty about the gossip. She tells Sara about the rumour involving Hugo. Sara denies it and is hurt that her friends believe a rumour over her own words.

The rumour quickly spreads throughout the school. Someone picks it up and "ships" Sara and Hugo on the trending social media account "Åland Shippar." "Shipping" is a current trend in Finnish schools where people pair others together on social media, often using photos taken without permission from personal accounts or school portraits.

This "shipping" intensifies the rumour. A few days later, during recess, Amanda gathers a group of followers who surround Sara and verbally attack her with accusations and questions about her supposed interest in Hugo. No one, not even Felicia, stands up for Sara.

Sara returns home devastated and eventually tells her parents, who contact the school.

Expert comment scenario 1

This scenario was commented by **Nina Wroldsen** from the Norwegian organisation Safe Learning (Trygg Laering). Nina has worked in the education sector throughout her professional life at all levels, from higher education to primary school. She has also used this method, which is based on Safe Learning, in her work as headmistress of a public international school.

Nina Wroldsen shared three key reflections on conflict resolution in schools. First, she emphasized the importance of involving parents early, especially when they are deeply concerned about their children. She advocated for a restorative approach, where students are given a safe space to share their experiences and needs, and where conflicts are resolved through dialogue and mutual understanding.

Second, she stressed the need for structured school-wide practices in conflict management. Without consistent methods, responses to conflict can become unpredictable, leading to escalation and legal involvement. She called for clear systems – such as visual aids and classroom rules – to ensure predictability and emotional safety for all students.

Third, she expressed a strong desire for more research into the psychological effects of unresolved conflicts, particularly those that may resurface over time. She highlighted the importance of integrating conflict resolution into teacher education and making restorative practices a standard part of school culture.

Nina Wroldsen concluded with a personal reflection, referencing the book *Touching Spirit Bear* by Ben Mikaelson, which inspired her vision for alternative justice for youth. She ended with a hopeful message from the Beatles: "All you need is love – and we can work it out."



youtu.be/O-xfuzzyN8E

Conflict Scenario 2: "The Fight"

The second conflict scenario involved three boys: Adrian, Emil, and Viljam, who are 16-year-old friends. They're no strangers to sneaking alcohol from their parents' liquor cabinets. This particular Friday night in downtown Mariehamn is special – Adrian has managed to get a fake ID and uses it to buy beer from a grocery store.

Outside the store, Adrian proudly shows off his fake ID and the beer to Viljam at a bus stop. Emil, who has already been drinking vodka at home, is also there. While Adrian is bragging, Emil sneaks behind him and grabs the beer from his backpack.

Adrian notices and confronts him:

Adrian: "Hey Emil – what are you doing!? That beer's mine!"

Emil: "Come on, bro, you're sharing, right?"

Adrian: "You idiot, give me the beer! I said give it back!"

When Emil refuses, Adrian shoves him to the ground, causing the beer bottle to break. Adrian throws the broken bottle at Emil but misses. Then he attacks Emil with full force – punching and kicking him.

Meanwhile, Viljam pulls out his phone, grinning and cheering them on while filming the fight. He quickly uploads the video to his Instagram story, and it spreads rapidly among their peers.

Some observant parents, who monitor their children's social media activity, see the video and realize the situation must be reported to the police. There are grounds for criminal charges – not only for the assault but also for Adrian's use of a fake ID. Additionally, Viljam filmed and shared the incident without consent.

Expert comment scenario 2

To comment on this scenario **Niklas Hägg** and **Jacob Wennerholm**, mediators from Södertälje Municipality in Sweden, were invited. They have worked together in youth services since the late 1990s and in mediation since 2014. Their mediation services are first and foremost offered to individuals under 21 and are based on principles of RJ.

They emphasize strong collaboration between schools, police, and social services. Typically, a case comes to their attention through schools, which often notice conflicts or crime first. Once informed, they assess whether mediation can begin even if a police investigation is ongoing. Their office is uniquely located within the police station, facilitating close cooperation.

The mediation process is voluntary and begins with separate pre-meetings with each party, often involving parents. They aim to understand each individual's perspective and needs, especially focusing on the victim's sense of safety. They also consider the broader social impact, including family and peer networks.

In cases involving violence or public humiliation (e.g., being filmed and posted online), they may treat it as two separate mediation cases. They also offer additional support through in-house counsellors for both victims and offenders. For offenders, they may use acknowledged methods for impulse control and social skills training to address impulse control.

Their goal is to help students coexist peacefully in school, even if they don't reconcile. Agreements often include practical arrangements like agreeing to ignore each other in the future, if that is what the parties wish. They stress the importance of early intervention to prevent escalation and long-term consequences like school avoidance.

They also advocate for integrating restorative practices into schools and ensuring follow-up to measure the effectiveness of interventions. While they see positive outcomes, they call for more research to support and expand their approach.



youtu.be/pjqAOkaXSBI

8. Conclusion and next steps



The Åland declaration in the making.

Photo: Petra Granholm

Before beginning the final discussion, which focused on summarizing the seminar's content, identifying key takeaways, and outlining future steps, we heard a presentation by doctoral researcher Aino Jauhiainen. She shared findings from her doctoral thesis and presented the outline for a current Nordic research proposal **"Restorative justice in action: A Nordic comparative study on practitioners' challenges, needs and solutions concerning restorative facilitation in criminal cases"**. The aim of the proposal is to explore what challenges, needs and solutions to implementing RJ aims Nordic RJ practitioners face in their work.

In this event we wanted to achieve a sustainable rebuilding of a Nordic network, that will hopefully continue to promote RJ practices and learn from and support each other. This last plenary was dedicated for this purpose. In the discussion several needs as well as concrete steps forward were identified. Participants stressed the importance of creating a process and identifying objectives for the

Nordic network. Topics that were suggested were: need of cross-border support in promoting restorative justice; securing funding; increasing political engagement, especially in creation of Nordic action plans that take into account the recommendations of the Council of Europe; enable the sharing of experiences, obstacles and innovations of practitioners; ensure accessibility to restorative justice services for the public; enhance public awareness of these services; strengthen cross-sectoral networks (police, prosecutors, municipalities, social workers, etc.)

The participants of the seminar agreed that arranging this type of seminar biannually would be beneficial. Optimally the Nordic seminar would alternate with the European Forum for Restorative Justice biannual international Conference. The Nordic network could also contribute to EFRJ conference with a Nordic current topic or arrange a Nordic spin-off event in connection to the conference.

It was considered important not to compete with EFRJ, but support it and function as a regional partner, sharing EFRJ information within the Nordic network.

One idea was to create a smaller group consisting of each country's mediation service coordinating authorities. The Norwegian National Mediation Service (*Konfliktrådet*) is willing to host this group.

Other ideas that were presented were that the network could arrange webinars and arrange happenings during the annual Restorative Justice week in November. More ideas that were put forward were to create a databank for information, a joint digital platform and a LinkedIn group. Regarding the three latter ideas it is still open how, who and with what funding this could be done.

Lastly the discussions moved towards strategies and common goals. Can the Nordic region identify a joint vision, objectives and aspirations for RJ practices? A joint vision became clear: Restorative Justice should be available to all who want to participate in a process.

The participants of the seminar had a mutual understanding that we are stronger together and were encouraged by the European experts to put this understanding in writing. From this thought arose the Åland Declaration that was co-created on-site.



View of the Lemböte garden.



Fire side chat in the evening.



Nature walk and talk in the Lemböte surroundings.



Concluding the seminar and deciding on next steps.

All photos on this page: Petra Granholm

9. The Åland Declaration

Background

Nordic countries have a long history of developing and implementing restorative justice. However, its development has stalled in some countries, and lags behind in others.

In multiple fields, Nordic cooperation bases itself on common values and a strong commitment to mutual aid and meeting the needs of its citizens. There is a need to develop structures to enhance and coordinate further cooperation in restorative justice research, law, policy, practice and language between Nordic countries.

In 2025, practitioners, service leaders and researchers from all Nordic countries met at the Åland Islands Peace Institute, Åland Islands, to discuss the future cooperation. It was agreed to establish a new network, RJ Nord, with a specific purpose, a shared vision and objectives.

RJ Nord will bring together participants from the Nordic region with a professional interest in the development of restorative justice. RJ Nord will share knowledge and challenges, disseminate best practice and collaborate to support the development of restorative justice. In addition, RJ Nord will advocate the use of restorative justice in each Nordic country. We hope this will also help to inspire other European regions and countries.

Vision

Restorative justice is increasingly used across Nordic communities to build safety and trust, ensuring access for all – regardless of age, type of offence, or stage in the justice process.

Purpose

To provide an infrastructure to support the Nordic region to collaborate regarding restorative justice development and practice.

Objectives

- To provide cross-border support for countries to develop restorative justice.
- To support national coordination and the development of national action plans in cooperation with the full range of criminal justice professionals on the development and implementation of restorative justice.
- To collectively undertake political engagement at the regional and domestic levels.
- To provide opportunities for practitioners to share, reflect and agree on common standards and values for practice.
- To engage the wider public to raise knowledge of, and support for, restorative justice.

Actions

- To produce a report based on the learning from the 2025 RJ Nord expert seminar.
- To establish a management or steering committee, building on the steering committee for the 2025 RJ Nord expert seminar, of researchers and practitioners from each Nordic country to develop a strategy for RJ Nord.
- To enable the wider RJ Nord network to meet altogether in one country, potentially in Denmark in 2027, with researchers, service leaders and practitioners, to support research and practice exchange as well as identify and share on key priorities and themes (e.g., restorative values).
- To enable a tighter network of organizing authorities to collaborate directly to share implementation, knowledge-based strategies and advice to Governments to further develop RJ, a network potentially lead by Norway.
- To identify language from European and Nordic legal and policy instruments to be used in documentation and ensure alignment between the work of the RJ Nord network and the work of political platforms.

The Åland declaration is the stated opinions of the participants attending the RJ Nord expert seminar and does not necessarily reflect the views of the institutions represented.

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Attachments

[Program](#)

[Flyer lunch seminar](#)

[Presentation Ian Marder](#)

[Presentation Ivo Aertsen](#)

About this publication

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