



Nordic Council  
of Ministers

# The Nordic region – safer, greener, freer

Programme for the Swedish Presidency 2024



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This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version at:

<https://pub.norden.org/politiknord2023-733>

# The Nordic Region – safer, greener, freer

## Introduction by the Swedish Prime Minister and the Minister for Nordic Co-operation

Due to Russia's brutal and illegal aggression against Ukraine, the Nordic Region and Europe are now in the most serious security situation in a very long time. This also makes our co-operation, and defence of democracy and the right of all people to live in peace and freedom more important than ever.

Our nations share a history, basic values and a strong democratic tradition of democracy. Based on those pillars, we have devised ways of working together to address not only security policy crises and challenges, but also issues concerning climate and the environment, energy, law enforcement, civil emergency preparedness and much more. Sweden will assume this Presidency with the firm conviction that ever-closer Nordic co-operation is crucial for our countries' shared prosperity and resilience. Standing together will make us stronger and safer.

The vision of the Nordic Region as the most integrated and sustainable region in the world by 2030 will guide the work of the Swedish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2024. We will continue efforts to ensure the region remains a leader in the green transition, globally competitive and socially sustainable in line with the strategic priorities we have set out together.

Nordic co-operation is an engine for growth. In many ways, we are one of the most competitive regions in the world. In fact, the Nordic Region is the world's twelfth-largest economy and big enough to be part of the G20. It is home to world leaders in industry, green technology, mobility, digitalisation, and research and development. There is much to be proud of, but our economic strength and position must not be taken for granted. Continuing to make it easier for companies and people to operate across borders is a crucial parameter.

The Swedish Presidency will focus on measures to improve cross-border mobility and integration. In this context, we will pay special attention to the fact that the joint Nordic labour market has served our nations well for 70 years and

contributed to our shared prosperity.

In 2024, Sweden will also chair the informal Nordic and Nordic-Baltic co-operation formats for foreign and security policy. Continued strong support for Ukraine and its struggle for freedom will be a priority in this work. As free democracies, it is our obligation and duty to support those who fight for the same rights and, by extension, defend our own.

**We look forward to working with our neighbours in the Nordic Region in 2024.**



The Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and the Minister for Nordic Co-operation Jessika Roswall.



# Introduction

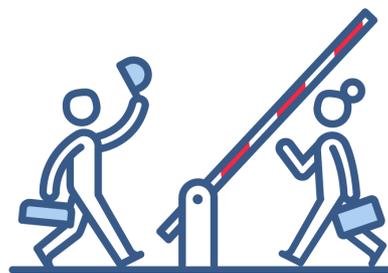
The vision of the Nordic Region as the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030 guides the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers. In 2024, the Nordic Council of Ministers will adopt a new joint overall action plan for 2025–2030 based on programmes approved during the year by the councils of ministers responsible for the various sectors. The Swedish Presidency will strive to ensure that the action plan has clear objectives and priorities, effective working methods and measures that generate clear Nordic synergy and help realise the vision.

The Presidency will strive to ensure that the work of the Council of Ministers continues to take into account the three intersectoral perspectives: sustainable development, gender equality and children and young people. Sweden will also continue to promote the dialogue with civil society that is so central to Nordic co-operation.





# An integrated Nordic Region with cross-border freedom of movement



It should be easy to live, study, work and run companies throughout the whole Nordic Region and across its borders.

It should be easy to live, study, work and run companies throughout the whole Nordic Region and across its borders. In many ways, the Nordic labour market is already well integrated – for many people, working on the other side of a border comes naturally. However, the Nordic Region falls below the European average in terms of the number of cross-border commuters. To meet our shared objectives and maximise the potential of a fully integrated region, we must step up the pace at which we remove barriers to cross-border freedom of movement, especially in light of the challenges posed during and after the pandemic.

**In 2024, the Swedish Presidency will actively strive to promote freedom of movement in all relevant constellations under the Nordic Council of Ministers, as**

**well as via the Freedom of Movement Council. The mandate of the Freedom of Movement Council expires during the year**, and when a new one is proposed, the Presidency will take initiatives to make its work and co-operation with relevant stakeholders more effective. This will include anchoring these efforts more clearly in both the Nordic Council of Ministers and the national governments.

The Presidency will encourage all official bodies to seek solutions that promote an even more integrated Nordic Region. This will involve prioritising areas of great importance to individuals' opportunities to relocate and work without hindrance across national borders, such as ensuring digital access to official agencies in countries other than their country of residence. To facilitate decision-making, the Presidency will give priority to drawing up statistics for border regions.

An integrated Nordic Region in which it is easy to live, work and study in all of the countries was one of the main ideas that underpinned the agreement on a single Nordic labour market when it was signed on 22 May 1954. The Swedish Presidency will pay special attention to **70 years of the Nordic labour market** and highlight its significance to the Nordic Region. Above all else, it will work to promote greater freedom of movement and tackle the shared challenges faced by the Nordic countries, such as skills shortages and skills matching.

The role of **public-sector employment agencies** has changed in recent years. Due to the ongoing **reform of them** in several of the Nordic countries and **changes associated with digitalisation**, the Presidency will focus on sharing experiences of reform and the potential to work together in the new structures, especially with regard to issues that affect skills supply.



# A green Nordic Region



The Nordic Region should continue to be at the forefront of a competitive and innovation-driven transition, both at home and abroad, by promoting Nordic green solutions in the rest of the world.

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges of our era, but the transition to a climate-neutral circular economy also provides opportunities if we manage and use natural resources well. **The Nordic Region should continue to be at the forefront of a competitive and innovation-driven transition, both at home and abroad, by promoting Nordic green solutions in the rest of the world.** By working together and sharing experiences of good methods and effective tools, Nordic business – at both local and national levels – can help cut emissions and introduce climate-adaptation measures while simultaneously bolstering Nordic competitiveness.

Climate and environmental questions are global issues. The Nordic countries should **continue to speak with a strong, clear voice to promote effective solutions in international environmental and climate negotiations.** In 2024, a new global agreement on plastic pollution is set to be adopted, and the Nordic countries have a leading role in this process. The Presidency will prioritise closer Nordic

co-operation under the new framework for biodiversity, on nature-based solutions and on preventing and combating the spread of invasive species in the Nordic Region. The Nordic countries have worked successfully together for many years at the Nordic, EU and international levels to minimise the risks to humans and the environment from chemicals, and the Swedish Presidency will continue to focus on this issue.

**Transitioning the transport sector** is crucial for a competitive Nordic Region and central for the Nordic countries to achieve their climate and environmental goals. The Presidency will, therefore, continue to prioritise the electrification and digitalisation of the transport system. In the [Fredrikstad Declaration](#) of November 2022, the Nordic transport ministers undertook to increase co-operation on promoting innovative zero- or low-emission technologies. Among other activities in line with the declaration, the Swedish Presidency will act for enhanced understanding of an increased integration of electric vehicles in the electricity grid in the Nordic Region and explore how the Nordic countries can promote sustainable land transports to and from ports, to complement the ongoing work on green shipping corridors. The Presidency will also highlight the completion of the vision projects on accelerated electrification and sustainable Nordic freight transport.

**Rural, coastal and urban development** are important for the development and competitiveness of business and for the overall quality of life in the Nordic Region. The way in which society has developed in recent years has led to rapidly changing economic, demographic and social conditions. New industrial ventures driven by the green transition present both opportunities and challenges that affect the whole of society and the natural environment. These developments require good coordination and effective planning in terms of infrastructure, house building, skills supply, etc., as well as access to commercial and public services, culture, and health and social care. More pooling of experiences will help ensure that Nordic societies continue to develop in a socially and environmentally sustainable manner.

**We need to generate more fossil-free energy** to facilitate the large-scale electrification that is one of the keys to the climate transition. In the Nordic Region, work is underway on new fossil-free electricity from onshore and offshore wind, solar and nuclear power. It is vital that we seek out and make good use of collaborative solutions involving various stakeholders in these areas. The **Nordic**

**electricity market co-operation** is unique and one of the world's most integrated forms of regional co-operation. The Nordic Region is also a world leader in sustainable energy and climate-smart solutions. However, we must further develop the Nordic electricity market to reduce the climate impact and break with the European reliance on Russian fossil-fuel-based energy. The Swedish Presidency will make this a particular priority.

To achieve the vision of a green Nordic Region, we must continue **to promote the sustainable, competitive use of natural and genetic resources**. The development of bio-based industries in fisheries and aquaculture, agriculture, food and forestry and their production capacity are critical to the green transition, employment, food supply and contingency, as well as open landscapes and the attractiveness of rural areas. The Nordic transition relies on the bio-based industries maintaining their level of innovation. To make the most of Nordic innovation, the work in this area will focus on operational activities, specifically generating higher knowledge while integrating traditional craftsmanship methods related to soil, forests and fisheries. The Presidency will also continue efforts to develop more intersectoral initiatives. In agriculture, the focus will remain on the climate, carbon storage and long-term viable and competitive production. The Nordic Fisheries co-operation will increase the focus on the sustainable production of blue food products and identifying positive synergies for the coexistence of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors with other interests in the ocean. In terms of forestry, questions of resilience, preparedness, land use, climate change and digitalisation are topical.



# A competitive Nordic Region



The Nordic Region's global competitiveness is vital not only for business but also for ensuring our future prosperity.

The Nordic Region is one of the biggest regions in the world. Our global competitiveness is vital not only for business but also for ensuring our future prosperity. Nordic co-operation's core tasks include improving upskilling and reskilling and creating the best possible conditions for people and companies to operate across national borders.

If our countries are to thrive in global competition, **education systems** of high-quality and equity are needed, with a clear link to in-demand skills in the labour market particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. The Swedish Presidency will, therefore, make *Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)* an overarching theme in co-operation on education and research, along with Nordic research infrastructure and interdisciplinary research in areas such as the Arctic, health and welfare.

**Greater and sustainable access to innovation-critical metals and minerals** is a precondition for the green transition, makes business more competitive, and also improves the Nordic Region's emergency preparedness. The electrification of our

societies means that minerals and metals are increasingly important. The Nordic countries have unique access to many of the metals used in new technologies, opportunities to extract them sustainably, and a strong tradition of standing up for sustainability and human rights. The Swedish Presidency will, therefore, prioritise continuing the work in this area in conjunction with Nordic Innovation.

**Developing the Nordic bio-economy and sustainable food systems** is a strategically important area and one in which Nordic co-operation can provide significant added value. A more robust food supply chain, production and further processing of biological raw materials provide better conditions for job creation, greater resilience and more sustainable growth, which strengthens the whole Nordic Region. While the challenges in sustainability work are largely global, the solutions are primarily local. The Swedish Presidency will bring up the issue of updating the Nordic bioeconomy programme. Special attention will be paid to preparedness in food and drinking water systems by discussing the lessons learned, the success criteria, and how the Nordic countries can work more closely together in this area.

**Differences in building regulations between the Nordic countries** make it difficult for construction companies to operate across borders. Closer co-operation within new areas of regulation and development will help improve freedom of movement across borders and the competitiveness of the Nordic market. Therefore, the Swedish Presidency intends to strengthen co-operation through increased information exchanges about the implementation of relevant new and amended EU legislation.

The high level of **digital maturity** in the Nordic-Baltic region, in terms of competency and access, is a competitive advantage with great additional potential. Higher levels of data use, new technology and 5G are all fundamental to capitalising on the opportunities provided by digitalisation in both the private sector and in health and social care and to the promotion of a green digital transition.

A well-functioning digital infrastructure is vital to society. The Nordic countries are dependent on international subsea cables not only for communication with the outside world but also for **national electronic communication**. The geopolitical situation makes secure global communication central to Nordic, EU and international co-operation. The Nordic Region is a hub that has the potential, via

an Arctic link, to connect the Nordic Region and the EU with the rest of the world. The Swedish Presidency will pay attention to the need for Nordic consensus and co-operation, with a view to supporting current initiatives aimed at securing global redundant connectivity.

The Swedish Presidency will also drive efforts to reduce digital exclusion in the area of e-identification. Work will also continue at the Nordic-Baltic level to build an infrastructure for Nordic and European digital identity wallets in order to enable the safe exchanges of so-called attested attributes, such as grades and registration data.

Capitalising on the fast pace of technological development and the comprehensive digitalisation of society is vital for Nordic competitiveness but also involves a number of challenges. One important aspect is that the big tech companies have substantial influence and, therefore, responsibility for developments. The Swedish Presidency will, therefore, continue to bring together relevant actors to discuss both physical and **digital infrastructure** and how we can uphold safe, secure and open democratic conversations.

The Nordic pavilion at the World Exhibition in Osaka (Expo 2025) provides a unique opportunity to promote an innovative and competitive Nordic Region, sustainable Nordic solutions and Nordic values. In 2024, the preparatory work will be intensified, with a view to putting together an inviting pavilion that effectively promotes the Nordic countries.

During the Presidency, the Nordic Economic Policy Review (NEPR) will act as an important discussion forum and a platform for generating Nordic consensus on shared policy challenges. In particular, it will focus on fiscal policy in times of macroeconomic uncertainty.



# A socially sustainable Nordic Region



A socially sustainable society also means that members of the public feel safe and that society's resilience to serious crime of various types is robust.

If the Nordic Region is to be the most sustainable and integrated region in the world, it must be easy for people and companies to relocate and operate across borders.

A socially sustainable society also means that members of the public feel safe and that **society's resilience to serious crime** of various types is robust. The Swedish Presidency will therefore place special focus on co-operation and exchanges of knowledge and information between the Nordic countries about organised crime, welfare fraud, violent extremism and terrorism, as well as the enforcement of sentences. This may include questions about corruption and other unauthorised influence from organised crime, human trafficking, and measures aimed at preventing children and young people from being drawn into the world of gangs.

By sharing insights and experiences about preventing and dealing with serious

crime, we can base our work on the best available knowledge. One example is **illegal waste management**, which is characterised by a combination of huge profits and a low risk of being caught. The Presidency proposes to conduct a comparative study of the preconditions for combating crime in the Nordic countries.

A socially sustainable Nordic Region also requires research- and education systems characterized by equity and high-quality, a single labour market, a dynamic cultural life, language initiatives, and commitment from and participation by young people. Nordic civil society is a driving force for a socially sustainable Nordic Region.

The Swedish Presidency will also focus on initiatives to **promote good and equal health for all in the Nordic Region**. It will continue the work of preventing and remedying involuntary loneliness and isolation through initiatives such as membership of sports clubs and associations, state leisure cards and putting exercise on prescription. A conference will be arranged on this theme.

**Digitalisation and remote solutions provide new opportunities** for the Nordic welfare model, particularly in relation to the Nordic Region's **ageing population and sparsely populated areas**. The Nordic countries face common issues relating to digital exclusion, access and participation in the digital transformation, and we need to address them together.

The Swedish Presidency will look at the question of **remote social and health care**. Sweden will also work to strengthen Nordic co-operation on emergency preparedness in social and health care.

**Antimicrobial resistance** is a global public health problem that is on the rise at an alarming rate. The Swedish Presidency will strive for closer Nordic co-operation in this area. A conference will be held to discuss the work, outcomes and progress that was made during the Swedish EU Presidency in 2023 in this area.

Two focus areas in the **labour market** will be skills supply and lifelong learning for women and men. The aim is to achieve better joint understanding in order to build knowledge and create inclusive green jobs and educational opportunities. Other priorities will be economic equality and efforts to counter gender segregation in the labour market.

Nordic **co-operation on integration** will focus on establishing a foothold in the

labour-market. This will enhance Nordic knowledge of the validation and assessment of foreign qualifications, digital opportunities and how the parental roles of foreign-born women and men affect their opportunities to establish themselves in the labour market.

Co-operation on **research, education and language** is an important tool for addressing national and international challenges. The mandate of the Network for Democracy, Inclusion and Social Cohesion (DIS) ends during the Swedish Presidency. A conference will be held on democracy in schools, with a focus on anti-Semitism. The Swedish Presidency will also focus on experience sharing on how to develop and strengthen high-quality education systems characterized by equity and inclusion. Furthermore, the Presidency will highlight Nordic knowledge and mathematics results in the Pisa Study.

Through activities in the education and cultural sectors, the Swedish Presidency will also promote **the Nordic Region as a reading region**. The revision of the Nordic Language Policy Declaration is currently in its final phase and is expected to be completed during the Swedish Presidency.

**Culture is one of the cornerstones of the Nordic sense of community.** An inclusive culture promotes democracy, diversity and quality of life. The challenges of recent years, including the pandemic and the international security situation, have ramifications for the Nordic countries and for Nordic cultural co-operation. For this reason, the Swedish Presidency intends to contribute to discussion and exchanges of experience on emergency preparedness in the cultural and media sector, for example, the potential for **better protection of cultural heritage in the event of crisis or war**.

The Nordic Council of Ministers has been working with **the Baltic countries** for a long time. There is great potential to extend this co-operation, which covers education and research, culture, health preparedness, medicine, sharing health data and the digitalisation of official bodies in general, knowledge about an ageing population and dementia, cyber-security, illegal working practices, the sustainability of social security and the work of the statistics committees. The Swedish Presidency will pursue opportunities to intensify Nordic-Baltic co-operation in various areas.

The Nordic countries must, as part of their emergency preparedness, be better equipped to **produce vaccines**. Based on the mapping of Nordic capacity and

potential for Nordic co-operation in the development and production of vaccines, the Swedish Presidency will continue the work to find the most appropriate ways of working together in this area.

In terms of gender equality and LGBTIQ issues, **Nordic efforts to combat honour-related violence and oppression** will be highlighted. A long-term and strategic objective is to strengthen and develop these efforts, including by enhancing knowledge of how the Nordic countries and autonomous areas work with honour-related violence and oppression, included work concerning honour-related violence and oppression against with LGBTIQ people.

The Swedish Presidency will also continue to make visible and promote a Nordic voice in various international forums against the growing resistance to gender equality and the **equal rights of LGBTIQ people**.

# Our Vision 2030

## A **competitive** Nordic Region

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

## A **green** Nordic Region

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



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

## A **socially sustainable** Nordic Region

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

# About the programme

## The Nordic region – safer, greener, freer

PolitikNord 2023:733

ISBN 978-92-893-7691-4 PDF

ISBN 978-92-893-7692-1 ONLINE

<http://dx.doi.org/10.6027/politiknord2023-733>

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Published: 31/10/2023

Front page photo: Per-Pixel Petersson/imagebank.sweden.se

Photo on the other pages: imagebank.sweden.se

Introduction: Emelie Asplund, Cecilia Larsson Lantz, Simon Paulin

An integrated Nordic Region with cross-border freedom of movement: Maskot, Faramarz Gosheh, Tina Axelsson

A green Nordic Region: Asaf Kliger, Sofia Sabel, Henrik Trygg

A competitive Nordic Region: Plattform, Jann Lipka, Jan-Olof Yxell

A socially sustainable Nordic Region: Scandinav, City of Stockholm, Melker Dahlstrand

### **Nordic co-operation**

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

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, economics and culture and plays an important role in European and international forums. The Nordic community strives for a strong Nordic Region in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation promotes regional interests and values in a global world. The values shared by the Nordic countries help make the region one of the most innovative and competitive in the world.

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