



Nordic Council
of Ministers

DECLARATION FROM THE NORDIC MINISTERS OF HEALTH, CARE AND SOCIAL ISSUES ON STRENGTHENED NORDIC CO-OPERATION ON DIGITAL SOLUTIONS FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Nordic countries aim to be the most sustainable and integrated region in the world in 2030, and strive to deliver the best welfare services available. In order to achieve this the Nordic countries, have to close the gap between those who have access to digital solutions, and those who do not.



We, the Ministers of Health, Care and Social Issues of the Nordic countries, call for a further strengthening of the Nordic welfare model by ensuring quality of life and inclusion of all our citizens in the area of digital solutions. All the Nordic countries face similar challenges. Lack of accessibility may place people in vulnerable and marginalised positions. Accessibility is a prerequisite for equality and the ability to act independently in society, in particular for persons with disabilities. We need to ensure that everyone is able to use existing and future digital solutions, and be part of the opportunities in the digital revolution that is taking place.

We are determined to take the lead in meeting the challenges and finding solutions for full and effective participation in society for persons with disabilities, and use the advantages of the digital development.

We highlight the importance of the themes and priorities of the social and health sector for Iceland's presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2023, and for the years that follow in making sure that digital development leaves no one behind.

We acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has been a digitalisation accelerator, resulting in easier access to services and information. Several new tools have been introduced to increase independence and self-determination. It is however important to remember that the pandemic also increased social exclusion for many due to inaccessibility, lack of internet access and lack of digital tools. There is a risk that the digital divide will amplify health inequalities and increase mental illness among persons living in vulnerable and marginalised situations. We therefore need to work together to further improve digital accessibility and develop support systems. Government support and expert guidance is needed to support the development of accessible solutions.



We recognise that the ICT solutions are complicated and that sometimes providers – lack the ability to adapt their services to persons with disabilities. We also want to highlight that accessibility benefits all and can create new business opportunities. Demographic change creates demand for accessible solutions. We need to further improve digital accessibility and make sure that people who are unable to participate in the digital world are provided with the support or assistance they need. We are committed to making the Nordic Programme for Co-operation on Disability Issues 2023 to 2027 a reality, in line with the objective of accessibility as a fundamental pillar of sustainable social development and an inclusive society.

We are also committed to incorporating the European Accessibility Act (EU Directive 2019/882), which requires authorities and the private sector in each country to make certain products and services accessible. In addition, the aim of the Web Accessibility Directive (EU 2016/2102) is to make websites and apps of public sector bodies more accessible for users, particularly persons with disabilities.

We encourage a strengthened Nordic co-operation in order to share good practices between our countries for better access to the digital world for persons with disabilities. We must exploit the opportunities that lie within innovation, new technology, data and data sharing across the Nordic borders. A strengthened Nordic co-operation in this area will work towards a society in which no one is excluded from the development towards sustainability.

We urge everyone in the Nordic Region to join us in striving for a strengthened sustainable social development based on the opportunities of those living in the region to enjoy individual freedom and self-fulfilment. By working together and applying universal design, the Nordic countries demonstrate the value and benefit of an inclusive society, where digital environments are equally accessible to, and can be used by, everyone. Participation of organisations representing persons with disabilities, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, must be guaranteed in this work.

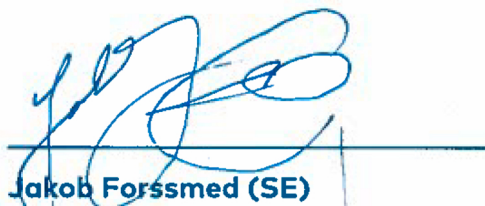


Reykjavík, 22 March 2023



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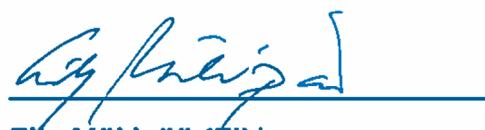
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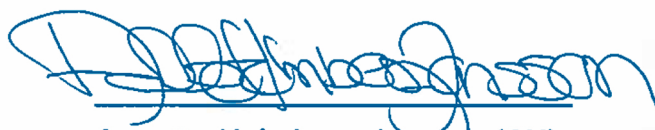
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