



Nordic Council
of Ministers

Co-operation Programme 2021–2024

The Nordic Council of Ministers
for Fisheries, Aquaculture,
Agriculture, Food and Forestry

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1. Foreword

MR-FJLS is the Nordic Council of Ministers for Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry. Both individually and collectively, these represent key economic sectors in the Nordic countries. Taken as a whole, the bio-based industries generate considerable economic activity and provide more than 2.2 million workplaces in the Nordic region. This co-operation programme concerns how the Nordic countries are collaborating to find good solutions in the fisheries and aquaculture, agriculture, food and forestry sectors (FJLS) over the next four years.

The Nordic governments have adopted a new vision for the Nordic co-operation: "The Nordic region will be the world's most sustainable and integrated region by 2030." This includes the defined 12 overarching objectives that apply for the period 2021-2024. The FJLS sectors are crucial for the attainment of the vision and its objectives. Sustainable use of natural resources generates sustainable economic activity and workplaces in all parts of the region while protecting nature and the environment, which is essential for driving the Nordic welfare societies.

Key aspects of the task for the FJLS sectors are production of food, biomass, bioenergy and associated services, and healthy diet, including knowledge and technology with a focus on innovation and digital integration. The sectors cover a fundamental need for Nordic citizens, they generate great values, and they are significant export industries. In a global perspective, the Nordic region makes a great contribution to improving global food supply systems and chains, as it has some of the most efficient production methods in terms of resource use, climate impact, and waste. The Nordic region also makes a contribution in the global work to improve health through nutritious and sustainable diets. In this way, the MR-FJLS initiatives support the three objectives in the vision – a greener, more competitive, and socially sustainable Nordic region.

In general terms, the Nordic bio-based industries must adapt to similar climatic and geographical factors of production. They also have an important role with regard to climate change, through systematic work to reduce the carbon footprint in production, and through carbon capture and storage in soil, forest, and sea. With a growing population and climate change, the Nordic region is dependent on the bio-based industries maintaining their already high rate of innovation, to contribute good solutions that the world needs. The global COVID-19 pandemic has been a reminder of the importance of Nordic co-operation to ensure long-term resilience in the Nordic FJLS sectors.

The co-operation programme steers activities in the sector, but must also be seen in the context of other Nordic Council of Ministers policy documents, including Our Vision 2030, and national presidency programmes and other cross-sectoral strategies for the Nordic co-operation relating to gender equality, greater involvement of children and young people, and sustainable development.

MR-FJLS is, in itself, a cross-sectoral Council of Ministers, where bio-based industries are the strongest common denominator, and where the sectors, collectively and individually, create a basis for settlement and value creation throughout the Nordic region. The focus of MR-FJLS on a

sustainable Nordic bioeconomy and food supply systems in the next four years creates the continuity from the extensive work in the sector. At the same time, it creates new, stronger ambitions in the light of the new vision of the Nordic Council of Ministers for a competitive, sustainable, and integrated Nordic region.



PHOTO: RITZAU/SCANPIX.DK

2. Framework of the Nordic FJLS co-operation

All the work in the Nordic Council of Ministers will contribute to the attainment of Our Vision 2030, i.e. that the Nordic region will be the world's most sustainable and integrated region by 2030. This co-operation programme therefore describes how the FJLS sector will work with the three strategic priority areas – a green Nordic region, a competitive Nordic region, and a socially sustainable Nordic region – and how the sector will contribute to reaching the 12 objectives in the Action Plan for 2021-2024 in the work to attain Our Vision 2030.

The 12 objectives in Our Vision 2030

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.*

In 2021-24, the Nordic Council of Ministers will:

1. strengthen research and development and the promotion of solutions that support carbon neutrality and climate adaptation, including in relation to transport, construction, food, and energy;
2. contribute to the safeguarding of biodiversity and the sustainable use of the Nordic region's nature and seas;
3. promote a circular and bio-based economy, sustainable and competitive production, sustainable food systems, and resource-efficient and non-toxic cycles in the Nordic region;
4. make it much easier and more attractive for Nordic consumers to prioritise healthy and environmentally and climate-friendly choices, with joint efforts relating to sustainable consumption;
5. contribute to the positive development of international co-operation on the environment and climate, such as by promoting Nordic green solutions in the rest of the world.

A competitive Nordic region. *Together, we will promote green growth in the Nordic region based on knowledge, innovation, mobility, and digital integration.*

In 2021-24, the Nordic Council of Ministers will:

6. support knowledge and innovation and make it easier for companies throughout the Nordic region to take full advantage of the development opportunities created by the green, technological, and digital transformation, and the growing bioeconomy;
7. develop skills and well-functioning labour markets that match the requirements of the green

transition and digital developments, and that support freedom of movement in the Nordic region;

8. leverage digitalisation and education to bind the Nordic countries even closer together.

A socially sustainable Nordic region. *Together, we will promote an inclusive, equal, and interconnected region with shared values and strengthened cultural exchanges and welfare.*

In 2021-24, the Nordic Council of Ministers will:

9. contribute to good, equal, and secure health and welfare for all;

10. work to involve everyone living in the Nordic region in the green transition and digital developments, utilise the potential of this transition, and counteract the widening of gaps in society as a result of this transition;

11. give Nordic civil society, and especially children and young people, a louder voice and greater participation in Nordic co-operation, as well as increase their knowledge of the languages and cultures of neighbouring countries;

12. maintain trust and cohesion in the Nordic region, its shared values, and the Nordic community with an emphasis on culture, democracy, equality, inclusion, non-discrimination, and freedom of expression.

Our vision 2030

A **competitive** Nordic region

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

A **green** Nordic region

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

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

A **socially sustainable** Nordic region

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



Policy documents

1. Our Vision 2030

Target group: Nordic Council of Ministers

Duration: Up to 2030

2. Action Plans for a green Nordic region, a competitive Nordic region and a socially sustainable Nordic region

Target group: Nordic Council of Ministers

Duration: 2021-24

3. Cross-sectoral perspectives

Target group: Nordic Council of Ministers

Duration: Up to 6 years

4. Co-operation programmes

Target group: Sector-specific

Duration: 4 years

In addition to Our Vision 2030 and the cross-sectoral strategies in the Nordic co-operation, MR-FJLS emphasises contributions to achieving the United Nations 17 Global Sustainable Development Goals. Not all the UN sustainability goals are equally relevant for the FJLS sectors, so the work and priorities should be related to the various goals and sub-goals that are deemed most important. The goals regarded as being particularly relevant for the sector are Goals 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14 and 15.

The FJLS sectors contribute to resolving many of the biggest global challenges, from climate change to the development of resistance in pathogenic bacteria and the growth of lifestyle-related disorders. This also means that the Nordic countries, through the FJLS co-operation, can play an important role in identifying and implementing Nordic solutions to the big challenges facing society and by disseminating these solutions to the rest of the world. Consequently, the Nordic countries will increasingly use their collective position of strength to promote common Nordic interests internationally. Collectively, the Nordic countries comprise a significant strength on the international arena – economically, culturally, and socially.



Note that food security embraces both food security/food safety and ensuring food supply/sufficient food. In the UN, fisheries and aquaculture are included in the concept 'agriculture'.



PHOTO: UNSPLASH

3. MR-FJLS priorities for the period 2021-2024

The Nordic countries have different strengths, but common to all of them is that the bioeconomy is of great or crucial economic importance. Through the Nordic co-operation, the countries in the region have taken responsibility for collaboration on sustainable use of their biological natural resources and bio-industries, with the objective to make these sectors more value creating, competitive, and socially sustainable. MR-FJLS is a cross-sectoral Council of Ministers that comprises the bio-based sectors – fisheries and aquaculture, agriculture, food and forestry. In order to gather and create synergies between these areas, in the next four years the FJLS sector will strengthen the collaboration in order to develop a value-creating sustainable Nordic bioeconomy and sustainable and secure food systems.

Comprehensive management of Nordic resources

The FJLS sectors involve sustainable production of biomass from soil, seas, and forest, and the journey of the products to market as food, feed, ingredients, materials, textiles, fuels, or various industrial raw materials and products. The sector focuses on all aspects of sustainability in these value chains, and works to strengthen resilience. MR-FJLS will contribute to the Nordic region using its strength in terms of availability of bio-based resources, management, knowledge, and value creation, and using new digital technologies. Here, collecting, increasing accessibility to, and sharing data between the private and public sectors and between the Nordic countries could provide new opportunities for development. In this way, the FJLS sector will contribute to solutions to some of the world's greatest societal challenges – better utilisation of resources, increased economic value creation, adaptation to climate change, and good climate solutions that also safeguard a healthy diet, food security and sustainable food systems, and prevent loss of biodiversity. In recent years, the Nordic countries have strengthened collaboration on challenges relating to food waste in the food chain. The advantages of efficient and sustainable resource management and combating food waste throughout the supply chain are obvious, because it frees up resources that can create more value, and contributes to long-term production security. The work of the FJLS sector in this area particularly supports the Our Vision objectives for a green and competitive Nordic region, including, but not limited to, objectives 2, 3 and 6.

A sustainable bioeconomy that drives growth and transition

A bioeconomy means creation of economic value through sustainable management of renewable biological resources and production of food, feed, wood-based products, bioenergy, other bio-based products, and ecosystem services as a basis for settlement and workplaces in rural areas. This is a field in which innovative development is taking place in the Nordic countries, both within existing primary production and in better utilisation of residual products, which can be upgraded to products of a higher value. In the next few years, the Nordic region will strengthen the collaboration on the bioeconomy by, for example, helping to create an incubator for new technology and digitalisation, and by promoting the importance of skills and expertise, recruitment, and gender equality. Consequently, the sector, in close collaboration with other sectors in the Nordic Council of Ministers, will focus on a special initiative on how the bioeconomy can work as a driver for growth and the green transition in rural areas. In addition, a special cross-sectoral initiative will strengthen the work in the Nordic region on a sustainable maritime economy. The work of the FJLS sector in this area particularly supports the Our Vision objectives for a competitive Nordic region, including, but not limited to, objectives 6, 7 and 8.

Greater resilience and reduced impact on climate

Emission of greenhouse gases poses a real threat, both for the Nordic region and the world. Production of food and biomass also generates emissions, but at the same time the growing biomass, for example in Nordic forests, helps to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases by absorbing and storing carbon and by replacing fossil-based products. At national level and within the Nordic co-operation, activities have been started that map out the scope and opportunities for climate adaptation and emission-reducing measures. The FJLS sectors will strengthen collaboration on these challenges by, for example, mapping existing emissions in the sectors and proposing measures to reduce emissions, supporting increased biological carbon storage in combination with ensuring biodiversity, and promoting and enabling adaptation to climate change. The sector will also work on supporting research and developing and broadening knowledge on cultivation and operating systems that can give positive effects on biodiversity, the environment and climate, and strengthening and upscaling measures for ocean-based solutions. The work of the FJLS sector in this area particularly supports the Our Vision objectives for a green Nordic region, including, but not limited to, objectives 1 and 2.

Genetic resources

NordGen is the joint-Nordic knowledge centre for genetic resources of plants, farm animals and forests. NordGen is also a genebank for seeds and plants, and contributes to preservation strategies to ensure genetic diversity for plants, farm animals and forestry. The seed collection contributes to resilience and sustainable solutions to avoid the loss of important biodiversity, and to the attainment of climate solutions, robust food and feed supply, new protein sources, and better health, as well as ecosystem services. Through NordGen's work, the Nordic countries will continue to characterise and evaluate the seed collection, so that more data will be available for the Nordic community. NordGen will also help to strengthen the domestic biodiversity in the Nordic region, and support the countries' work to develop robust and climate friendly agricultural plants and animals through genetic improvement. The work of the FJLS sector in this area particularly supports the Our Vision objectives for a green Nordic region, including, but not limited to, objective 2.

Secure food, healthy diet, and enjoyment of food

The Nordic countries have been closely collaborating in this area for many years. Secure food is a fundamental condition, and the Nordic countries use knowledge-based management as a basis for secure, healthy, and sustainable food. A "soil/sea to table" approach, with good animal health

and welfare as a basis for secure food, is a core element in Nordic food production and is necessary to enable the Nordic countries to maintain and improve their responsible consumption of medicine, with low levels of antibiotic resistance. Exchange of experiences between food authorities in the food security area will continue, to ensure secure food, healthy fish, animals and plants, efficient management, and uniform implementation of EU legislation as a Nordic competitive advantage to avoid unnecessary border obstacles. The work to reduce food waste is also important in this context. Consequently, in the period 2021-2024, the FJLS sectors, in close collaboration with other sectors in the Nordic Council of Ministers, will run a special project on sustainable lifestyles, and build further on, and develop, the collaboration on New Nordic Food. The Nordic Nutrition Recommendations (NNR) are a cornerstone in the collaboration, with a common action plan, common monitoring, and a common nutrition label, the Keyhole. Good food habits are established early, and initiatives aimed at children and young people are therefore important. The work of the FJLS sector in this area particularly supports the Our Vision objectives for a socially sustainable Nordic region, including, but not limited to, objectives 4 and 9.

Nordic Nutrition Recommendations

The Nordic Nutrition Recommendations (NNR) comprise an important part of the scientific basis for national nutritional recommendations and food-based dietary advice in the Nordic countries. Consequently, the recommendations also contribute to the vision for the Nordic region to be the world's most sustainable and integrated region. Recent research findings and greater understanding of sustainable food consumption and production means that there is now a need for a new scientific assessment and update. This work will result in updated nutritional recommendations with integration of a sustainability perspective in 2022.



PHOTO: RITZAU/SCANPIX.DK

4. International collaboration

The bio-based industries occupy a central role in the work to attain sustainable development locally, regionally, and globally. MR-FJLS supports international involvement and collaboration at various levels, including The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, in which the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers has the role of coordinator for Priority Area Bioeconomy. Other examples are support for the Large Ocean Nations initiative, as well as the conservation of genetic resources from around the world in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. MR-FJLS can also support Nordic initiatives at large international events relevant for the sectors, such as the UN Food Systems Summit (2021), the Global Bioeconomy Summit, and the UN Climate Conference (COP) and biodiversity conferences (CBD). In addition, the FJLS sector will continue the collaboration on EU-related and international issues with a view to promoting joint Nordic viewpoints where this is relevant. The work of the FJLS sector in this area particularly supports the Our Vision objectives in several areas.



PHOTO: UNSPLASH

5. Gender equality, and a children and young people's perspective

MR-FJLS places great emphasis on contributing to the cross-sectoral strategies of the Council of Ministers on gender equality and children and young people. A new analysis of gender equality in the Nordic forestry sector will form the basis of specific measures in the area, and is also expected to be followed up with corresponding investigations in the other FJLS sectors. The co-operation under MR-FJLS on children and young people has taken a number of measures to strengthen inclusion of young people in activities and decision-making processes in the sectors. Examples are inclusion of a youth representative on the board of Nordic Forest Research (SNS), targeted events (match-making days), youth representatives in various international events, and collaboration with schools and pre-schools about development of educational material on genetic resources. MR-FJLS will continue the work to systematise the involvement of young people, both in the policy work and in decision-making processes in the sector. The work of the FJLS sector in this area particularly supports the Our Vision objectives for a socially sustainable Nordic region, including, but not limited to, objectives 11 and 12.

"The most important room in the world."

Plant genetic resources are among the most valuable things a society can have. For millennia, many plant types have been cultivated to suit different growing conditions: climate, soil, day length, diseases, pests or needs in society. This also means that climate change, new diseases, or other environmental changes can have a far-reaching impact on food security. Seed banks therefore represent an important measure for preventing the loss of biodiversity. The Nordic seed collection is kept at NordGen in Alnarp in Sweden. There are backup copies of these seeds in Denmark, and extra backup copies stored deep in a hillside just 1200 km from the North Pole, in the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. The Seed Vault, which is owned by the Norwegian state and run by the Nordic Genetic Resource Centre, contains backup copies of more than 40% of the world's seed collections, in the event of a disaster impacting the originals. This is why we like to say it is the most important room in the world. You can read more about the Svalbard Global Seed Vault and NordGen here: <https://www.nordgen.org/en/global-seed-vault/>



Photo: Scanpix.dk

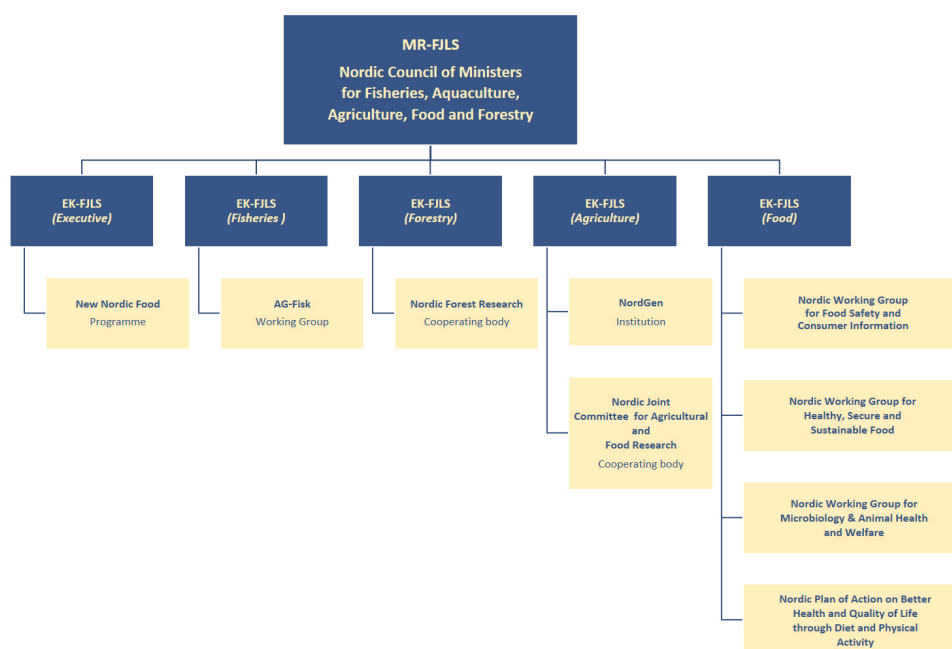


PHOTO: UNSPLASH

6. Organisation in the sector

The structure of senior officials in the Council of Ministers consists of five integrated departments: an executive committee and individual committees for fisheries and aquaculture, agriculture, food, and forestry. The executive committee and the four departments each have the status of a committee of senior officials. Under MR-FJLS is the Nordic institute, the Nordic Genetic Resource Center (NordGen), whose tasks involve conservation and utilisation of Nordic genetic resources for agriculture and forestry. The committees vary in terms of underlying structure. Under EK-FJLS (Fisheries and Aquaculture) is the Nordic Working Group for Fisheries and Aquaculture (AG-Fisk); under EK-FJLS (Agriculture) is the cooperating body, the [Nordic Joint Committee for Agricultural and Food Research \(NKJ\)](#), whose purpose is to promote and support Nordic research collaboration in the agriculture and food sectors; under EK-FJLS (Forestry) is the collaboration body, [Nordic Forest Research \(SNS\)](#), whose main purpose is to promote research collaboration and networks for sustainable forestry and use of forest resources. Under EK-FJLS (Food) are three working groups: The Nordic Working Group for Healthy, Secure and Sustainable Food (HSSD), the Nordic Working Group for Food Safety and Consumer Information (NMF), and the Nordic Working Group for Microbiology & Animal Health and Welfare (NMDD). The steering group for New Nordic Food is under the EK-FJLS (Executive).

Organisation diagram for MR-FJLS



Strategic mandate for the Nordic Genetic Resource Center (NordGen)

The Nordic Genetic Resource Center (NordGen) is the joint Nordic genebank and knowledge centre for genetic resources of plants, farm animals and forests, and the joint Nordic genebank for seeds and plants. The mandate of the institution is laid down in the statutes adopted by the Nordic Council of Ministers (MR-FJLS) on 10 September 2014, which came into force on 1 January 2015.

As a knowledge centre and genebank, NordGen will promote the Nordic co-operation on sustainable management, use, and storage of genetic resources for the benefit of agriculture, horticulture, forestry, and food production in the Nordic region, including related environmental aspects. NordGen will be active in developing co-operation with various user groups in the Nordic region, and contribute to developing knowledge about and prerequisites for sustainable use of genetic resources.

As a knowledge centre, NordGen will also promote collaboration in the areas of farm animals, plants, forest, and the environment, as well as disseminate knowledge and raise awareness about genetic resources. NordGen will also promote management and competences within the three disciplines.

When necessary, NordGen will provide technical advice and information to decision makers in the Nordic countries for use in national, Nordic, and international negotiations on the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources.

NordGen has a special responsibility for conserving and documenting genetic variation of Nordic material to ensure biodiversity and sustainable use of genetic resources. As early as 1979, the Nordic countries decided that a joint-Nordic genebank for plants should conserve and facilitate the utilisation of national plant genetic resources.

In the Kalmar Declaration from 2004, the Nordic countries adopted the basis for how NordGen should manage access and rights to genetic resources. All accessions in the genebank, except for collections held by NordGen for other genebanks, are under joint-Nordic management and are a common good.

The seed collection in the genebank will promote greater resilience and new solutions to avoid biodiversity loss, and contribute to increased use of genetic resources to achieve sustainable climate solutions, robust food and feed supply, including new protein sources, sustainable plant choices in the forests, better health, and sustainable ecosystem services. At the same time, efforts will be made to improve documentation by characterising and evaluating the seed collection, so that more data is made available to the Nordic societies.

NordGen manages the 'Nordic Public Private Partnership for Pre-breeding' (PPP), which aims to support the development of Nordic plant pre-breeding.

NordGen has operational responsibility for the Svalbard Global Seed Vault (SGSV) in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food in Norway and the Global Crop Diversity Trust.

Evaluation of the co-operation programme

The FJLS sector and the co-operation areas under the Council of Ministers conduct evaluations to ensure effective and target-oriented follow up of political signals and priorities. The FJLS sector will evaluate the co-operation programme before the end of the programme period. The evaluation will take place in close dialogue with the countries' representatives in the FJLS co-operation, including the respective specialist committees. All co-operation areas (working groups, collaboration bodies and institutions) are also planned to conduct an external evaluation before 2024.

Summary

This co-operation programme describes the most important priorities for the Nordic Council of Ministers for Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food, and Forestry in the period 2021-2024. The programme focuses on sustainable bioeconomy and value creation, sustainable and health-promoting food supply systems in the Nordic region, and associated initiatives, all of which support the vision for the Nordic region to be the world's most sustainable and integrated region by 2030. At the same time, the Nordic co-operation contributes to the resolution of many of the most important global challenges that the world's countries have agreed to prioritise through the UN's 17 Global Sustainability Goals.

About this publication

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Nordic co-operation

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

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Shared Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

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How the Co-operation Programme relates to Our Vision 2030

All activities in the Nordic Council of Ministers will contribute to fulfilling our vision that the Nordic region will be the world's most sustainable and integrated region in 2030. The co-operation programme describes how the FJLS sector will work with the three strategic priority areas and contribute to reaching the 12 objectives in the Action Plan 2021-24 in the work to attain Our Vision 2030.

Read more at norden.org

