



Nordic Council  
of Ministers

# Co-operation Programme for **Labour** 2025–2030

Bridging the Skills Gap



# Content

|                                                                                                                                                                                                      |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Foreword</b>                                                                                                                                                                                      | 3  |
| <b>Introduction</b>                                                                                                                                                                                  | 5  |
| <b>Political Priorities 2025–2030</b>                                                                                                                                                                | 7  |
| Goal 1: Ensure a timely and fair transition of the labour force that leaves no-one behind and ensures we have people with the right skills to implement the green and digital transition             | 8  |
| Goal 2: Strengthen labour supply and equal opportunities for all, so that the Nordic Region can better meet the needs of the labour market and bring all of the skills of the labour force into play | 10 |
| Goal 3: Strengthen conditions for fair competition and enable greater labour mobility through decent conditions and fewer border obstacles in the Nordic Region                                      | 12 |
| Goal 4: Further promote and support a good and secure working environment that is adapted to both the new and existing conditions and demands of the labour market                                   | 14 |
| <b>Evaluating the Co-operation Programme</b>                                                                                                                                                         | 16 |
| <b>About this publication</b>                                                                                                                                                                        | 17 |

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# Foreword



Mats Persson, Swedish Minister for Employment and Integration and  
Karen Ellemann, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers

In 2019, the Nordic prime ministers adopted a vision for Nordic co-operation, with an aim for the region to be the world's most sustainable and integrated region by 2030. This vision is being implemented through three focus areas which seek respectively to ensure a green, a competitive and a socially sustainable Nordic Region. Labour is a central pillar of the Nordic welfare systems and, as such, it is of crucial significance to realising the vision.

However, the vision is being pursued at a time in which our labour markets are beset by a range of challenges, but also opportunities, that are common to the entire Nordic Region:

- Climate change means that it is necessary for the Nordic labour markets to undergo a green transition and to make the right investments not just for a more sustainable future, but in order to ensure that the Nordic Region can retain its position as a front-runner within green development.
- Demographic challenges require a continued focus on labour supply, so that we can ensure good access to a qualified labour force that in turn will allow us to continue to finance our welfare systems.
- The increased use of digitalisation, artificial intelligence (AI) and new technologies enables a range of new opportunities, but also entails a greater need for transformation, competencies development and a greater focus on the working environment. This applies both to employers and employees, and to the collective agreements which establish the framework for working life in the region and constitute the foundation of our Nordic welfare model.

The Nordic Region has had a common, Nordic labour market for more than 70 years. Although we are different countries, we make up a single, unique community, and this is something that we should exploit to find the best and most sustainable solutions to our common challenges and opportunities. It is with this in mind that we have established the Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour (MR-A) whose mission is to prioritise labour initiatives that can benefit the greatest possible number of Nordic

citizens. This shall be attained by directing focus towards labour market policy, labour legislation and the working environment not just nationally, but regionally and even internationally as well.

The purpose of this co-operation programme is to establish a strategic direction for all MR-A initiatives and activities in the 2025–2030 period. It is our vision that this work will strengthen Nordic co-operation to get as many people as possible into jobs that are defined by a good working environment, good working conditions and equality of opportunity.

In this way, we can bolster both the competitiveness and adaptability of the Nordic labour markets and, in so doing, equip the Nordic Region to attain our vision of being the world's most sustainable and integrated region by 2030.



**Mats Persson**

Swedish Minister of Labour



**Karen Ellemann**

Secretary General of the Nordic Council  
of Ministers

# Introduction



Within the co-operation programme, we have prioritised initiatives that draw on knowledge, the exchange of experiences and co-operation in order to generate trans-Nordic benefits and ensure better conditions for the development of the Nordic Region's labour markets.

The ambition is to create solutions that contribute towards policy development at the national level in each of the individual countries. Similarly, there is also an ambition to coordinate common viewpoints and declarations within areas in which the countries can achieve more in union than they can on their own.

In order to secure trans-Nordic benefits and progress in line with the vision of the co-operation programme, tight-knit co-operation will be required across the Councils of Ministers, in addition to continuous dialogue with the Nordic Council, civil society and, not least, social-partner organisations.

The unique Nordic labour-market model is also an important tool. Not just when it comes to matters such as pay and working hours, changing conditions on the labour market and training, but also, and especially, when it comes to creating the right conditions to achieve the Nordic vision for 2030.

The co-operation programme was approved by the Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour on 29 August 2024 and applies for the 2025–2030 period.

# 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.

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 sector will work with the three strategic priority areas.

# Political Priorities 2025–2030



A large and skilled labour force, adaptable labour markets, good working conditions and a sound and inclusive working environment are all crucial factors in creating a green, competitive and socially sustainable Nordic Region. These priorities are mutually dependent and cannot be brought about separately from one another.

At the same time, the Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour will also use the coming period to direct more attention towards sustainable development, equality and the youth perspective. The Council will pay consideration to these and to other interdisciplinary focus areas within its initiatives and activities in co-operation with the other Councils of Ministers.

Against this background, the Council has adopted the following overarching goals and sub-goals for its work in the 2025–2030 period in order to contribute towards the vision of the Nordic Region as the world's most sustainable and integrated region by 2030.

# Goal 1: Ensure a timely and fair transition of the labour force that leaves no-one behind and ensures we have people with the right skills to implement the green and digital transition

## Everyone takes part

There is plenty to suggest that the green and digital transition will mean fewer jobs in certain sectors and more jobs in others. For this reason, it is crucial that those people who are at risk of losing their jobs are ushered into other sectors in the throes of growth. Active labour market policy and investments in skills development, up-skilling and further and continued education and training will have an active role to play in this transition. The realisation of this goal is crucial not only to the success of the green and digital transition, but it is also essential to avoiding greater inequality.



In order to achieve the objective of a timely and fair transition of the labour force, the Council of Ministers for Labour will use the coming period to place focus on the following:

**Sub-goal 1.1**

Develop a greater understanding of how the Nordic labour markets and the need for skills are affected by the green and digital transition.

**Sub-goal 1.2**

Promote a green and digital transition of the labour market both within but also beyond the large cities of the Nordic Region.

**Sub-goal 1.3**

Promote lifelong learning and adaptability, in part by creating better opportunities and incentives to choose vocational career paths in close collaboration with relevant sectors.

## **Goal 2: Strengthen labour supply and equal opportunities for all, so that the Nordic Region can better meet the needs of the labour market and bring all of the skills of the labour force into play**

### **Every skill comes into play**

The Nordic Region is made up of relatively well-educated and equal populations who work within the framework for the Nordic labour market model. This model ensures security, flexibility and adaptability with high levels of occupation and productivity as a result. However, the Nordic countries also face demographic challenges in that the share of their working-age populations is growing smaller while the number of older citizens with care needs is increasing. These changes are happening at a time when an excessively large share of the labour force is neither in work nor in education. At the same time, parts of the labour market are still characterised by structural barriers which hinder mobilisation of the full range of skills existing within the labour force. The Nordic Region is also experiencing a rise in international competition when it comes to attracting and retaining qualified labour force.



In order to achieve the goal of a strengthened labour supply and equal opportunities for all, the Council will use the coming period to place focus on:

### **Sub-goal 2.1**

Develop more knowledge on how to get more people into employment or training, with a special focus on groups on the margins of the labour market, such as senior citizens, persons with disabilities, women of non-European descent and young people who are neither in work nor in unemployment.

### **Sub-goal 2.2**

Improve the levels of equal treatment and equality on the labour market in order to enable the Nordic Region to mobilise the full range of skills in the labour force, regardless of gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other beliefs, disability, sexual orientation or age.

### **Sub-goal 2.3**

Uncover barriers and identify potential initiatives to better attract and retain qualified work force to/in the Nordic Region under fair and decent conditions.

## **Goal 3: Strengthen conditions for fair competition and enable greater labour mobility through decent conditions and fewer border obstacles in the Nordic Region**

### **Fair competition**

A central element when it comes to the competitiveness and adaptability of the Nordic Region is fair competition. This requires decent and proper conditions on the labour market and free mobility. With this follows a strong and continued effort to tackle border obstacles, work-related crime and social dumping. The development and application of the unique, Nordic tripartite labour-market model is central to this work. So too is close co-operation around EU matters that concern conditions of interest to the Nordic Region as a whole, and in relation to generating understanding of and respect for the Nordic labour-market model and the autonomy and roles of its parties.



In order to achieve the objective of fair competition and greater labour-market mobility, the Council will use the coming programme period to place focus on:

### **Sub-goal 3.1**

Strengthen initiatives to combat cross-border work-related criminality and social dumping, in part through the Nordic-Baltic collaboration on work-related crime.

### **Sub-goal 3.2**

Promote labour-market mobility between the Nordic countries, in part by reducing border obstacles.

### **Sub-goal 3.3**

Ensure balance between employee protections and labour-market flexibility in part through collaboration around EU matters and with international actors with respect for the special roles of the social-partner organisations.

## **Goal 4: Further promote and support a good and secure working environment that is adapted to both the new and existing conditions and demands of the labour market**

### **Highly functional working life**

In order for the labour element to function well, a good working environment is central for both the individual worker and for the Nordic countries at large, as it creates the right conditions for economic growth and the financing of our welfare systems. However, there exists a number of factors which influence and change the landscape for labour as we know it.

This applies both to the ways in which we perform our work as well as to the creation of new forms of work. At the same time, considerable focus is also directed towards the psychosocial challenges that exist. Both employees and employers need to adapt to these new conditions and demands. In order to succeed, transition processes need to be fair, effective and inclusive.



In order to attain the objective of a Nordic labour market which is characterised by a good and secure working environment, not just today but in the future as well, the Council will use the coming programme period to place focus on:

#### **Sub-goal 4.1**

Promote a sound and healthy working environment in a time when the use of hybrid working environments, platform work, flexible contracts, new employment forms and longer working lives are on the rise.

#### **Sub-goal 4.2**

Develop greater knowledge on the causes, effects and ways of handling the psycho-social and organisational working-environment challenges that exist today on the Nordic labour markets.

#### **Sub-goal 4.3**

Develop greater knowledge on the opportunities and challenges that exist on the Nordic labour markets in relation to increased digitalisation, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI).

#### **Sub-goal 4.4**

Promote effective work-environment strategies and supervisory formula methods that prevent occupational illnesses, injuries, deaths and unacceptable working conditions.

## Evaluating the Co-operation Programme



The co-operation programme applies for the 2025–2030 period, which in turn is divided into two, three-year work plans for 2025–2027 and 2028–2030, respectively. An evaluation will be performed in the middle of the period, on the basis of which the Council can choose to make adjustments to the co-operation programme. The evaluation can also be used to provide input in regard to how the work plan for the last period should be formulated. Continuous evaluations are also undertaken at the discretion of the Council and the General Secretary.

# About this publication

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