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# Water, nature and people

Programme for the Finnish Presidency of the  
Nordic Council of Ministers 2016





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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, and 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. Common Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

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## Foreword

Nordic co-operation is very important for the Nordic countries and for Finland as a Nordic country. It is also an important part of European and international co-operation and its goal is a strong Nordic region in a strong Europe. Nordic co-operation aims to strengthen common Nordic interests and values. Common goals and values strengthen the position of the Nordic region as one of the world's most innovative and competitive regions.

The main themes of the Finnish Presidency are water, nature and people. During its Presidency, Finland would like to advance work through networks with specific objectives and projects. Our goal is to raise interest in and the relevance of Nordic co-operation, also for business and civil society.

Our three main themes contribute to the goals we have of removing obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement, promoting digitalisation and strengthening the importance of the Nordic countries jointly in the European Union.

People see many tangible examples of co-operation on obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement in their everyday lives. Among other things, co-operation on these issues facilitates people's mobility and employment, which in turn boosts economic growth.

Digitalisation is a megatrend that will also change Nordic societies. We are only at the beginning of this change, and during this critical period co-operation will be of particular importance. The development of smart power grids, the bioeconomy, cleantech, smart traffic and digitalisation of health care offer practical opportunities for Nordic co-operation and opportunities to be pioneers in these areas. Co-operation in these areas can also strengthen the importance and weight of the Nordic countries jointly in other fora, such as the European Union.

During our Presidency we also want to focus on the relevance of Nordic co-operation in a globalised world. Our goal is a Nordic region that can make a strong contribution to peaceful development in Europe and worldwide. The vision statement of the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation *Together we are*

*stronger* in 2014 provides a good basis for developing this co-operation. We would like to highlight the role of the Nordic region in the world in line with the objectives mentioned in the sections of the vision statement entitled *Visibility and International engagement*.

In recent years Nordic co-operation has increased and deepened, even in the changed security policy situation. By interacting, the Nordic countries can strengthen security in their own region and simultaneously work for increased influence in terms of promoting international security. Ever closer Nordic co-operation, as well as co-operation between the Nordic and Baltic countries and within the framework of the EU and NATO reinforces stability and security in the Baltic Sea region and all of northern Europe.

We consider it important that the Nordic welfare societies have a secure future. The common challenges we face include the slow pace of GDP growth, security, climate change and lower birth rates. The Nordic countries, like other developed countries, also face other major challenges related to technological changes, globalisation and an ageing population. Here too, the importance of Nordic co-operation is increasing.

The Nordic countries have a shared value platform for the welfare state. This has been guided by three basic principles: gender equality and equal opportunities, the pursuit of universality as well as public responsibility and openness in society. We consider it important that in future these principles should continue to guide the Nordic social and health care systems, which are facing challenges. Open labour markets and flexible education are important factors when it comes to responding to future challenges.

Climate change is a threat for the whole world, but for Arctic regions and the Nordic region the consequences of global warming could be particularly significant. The Nordic countries have co-operated closely during the UN climate negotiations.

For its part, the new global development agenda imposes far-reaching new objectives for all countries in the world to work to eradicate poverty and re-



inforce sustainable development. During the negotiations on these new goals the Nordic countries have stressed, among other things, the importance of strengthening the position and rights of women, sustainable consumption and production methods and democratic and participatory governance.

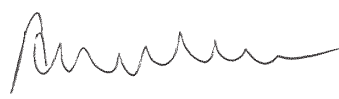
This ambitious and comprehensive global action programme for sustainable development will be initiated in early 2016, and will require actions from the Nordic countries too. The Nordic countries have excellent prerequisites to implement the actions, even though we are sure to encounter challenges. The Nordic countries' regional co-operation around sustainable development issues has aroused interest globally.

We are proud of the task that Finland has in presiding the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2016.



  
*Juha Sipilä*  
Prime Minister



  
*Anne Berner*  
Minister for Nordic Co-operation



## Introduction

The Nordic countries have a very positive brand internationally. This is largely due to the fact that our societies have been successful from the perspective of the individual, businesses, the environment and in other ways. The first strategy for international branding of the Nordic region, published in October 2014, obliges the Nordic countries to make this work more effective in a strategic manner. During our Presidency we will ensure that the Nordic countries jointly select one or two priority areas that we can work on together. Furthermore, a project will be initiated during our Presidency with a particular focus on branding work via co-operation with start-up companies. In the longer term successful branding will yield results for each Nordic country that will be seen at both the economic and political level.

In spring 2014 Secretary General Dagfinn Høybråten published his report entitled *New Nordic Region*, which lists 39 recommendations for making Nordic co-operation more effective. We support the process that was started by the Secretary General and consider it important that the co-operation is also made more effective and modern as regards its relevance.

The work of the Nordic Council of Ministers in neighbouring regions is also important. Unfortunately this has become more difficult in Russia recently, but our objective is to continue neighbouring area co-operation with various countries.

Removing obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement is important for citizens and companies alike and we will make this work a particular focus. Work on cross-border freedom of movement is a traditional Nordic area of co-operation and is the part of the co-operation that is very much visible outwardly to Nordic citizens. Removing obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement also has a positive impact on businesses and employment and thus promotes economic growth, which is very important in the economic situation of today.

We would also like to support the new initiatives of the Nordic Council of Ministers on democracy, inclusion and security. The welfare and integration of all persons and countering discrimination and radicalisation are questions that are important for us.

We would also like to highlight the report by Bo Könberg *The Future Nordic Co-operation on Health*. It contains 14 recommendations for extended co-operation within the health care sector. We would like to stress the importance of inter-sectoral co-operation in promoting the welfare of the population and countering socio-economic differences in health.

Working life and leadership are being transformed, with professions changing rapidly. The key drivers for change for future work are globalisation, new technologies, and digital and population trends. People's attitudes towards work and ways of working have also changed, which is reflected both in labour organisations and the position of men and women in the labour market. A more thorough-going review of the labour market's future challenges and development contributes to formulating policy in a new way. Acting jointly strengthens the image of Nordic co-operation in developing working life and can be used both in EU co-operation and in projecting the Nordic brand. We look forward to the final outcome of the strategic review of Nordic co-operation on working life which has now been launched by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The basis of the Council of Ministers' co-operation in the gender equality sector is a vision of gender equality in the Nordic societies. In the 2015–2018 period the work of the gender equality sector will be guided by the co-operation programme *Together for Gender Equality – a stronger Nordic Region* which highlights for example gender equality in public spheres (such as the media) and in conjunction with welfare and innovation.

The Nordic Council of Ministers is conducting an assessment of the Nordic agreements in 2015, and this work will continue in 2016. Further actions may if necessary entail amendments to the agreements. When deciding on further actions, account will also be taken of the further consequences for Nordic co-operation of the agreement inventory exercise and the way the agreements are used as a tool of co-operation.

Finland will host the UNESCO press freedom conference from 3 to 4 May 2016. Simultaneously the 250th anniversary of the world's first press freedom regulation will be celebrated. Anders Chydenius, who was a member of parliament in the Kingdom of Sweden at the time, managed to enact the world's first publicity law in 1766. This is significant since as recently as 1990 there were only 13 countries in the world with a corresponding press freedom law in force. Today over 100 countries have a corresponding law.

The main theme of the conference is information freedom, and the related events stress press freedom, artistic and cultural freedom of expression, the



importance of media education for implementing human rights, a functioning civil society and global democratic development. During the conference there will be a global forum where developments in freedom of expression in various parts of the world will be evaluated. Particular regional questions will also be highlighted. Our aim is to raise the visibility of the Nordic countries in conjunction with the conference.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966. In 2016 we intend to mark the 50th anniversary of the covenant. Civil society in the Nordic countries is very active and the Nordic Council of Ministers is in the process of renewing its strategy on this.

Haga co-operation concerns the Nordic countries' co-operation in rescue services and preparedness. An annual meeting of rescue ministers is held with the aim of improving the security of society and preparedness in the Nordic countries by developing new forms of co-operation to strengthen the capacity of Nordic society in crisis, accident and emergency situations. Finland will preside the Haga co-operation in 2016.

The Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) will celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2016. The bank was originally founded at the initiative of the five Nordic countries to improve access to capital and harmonise the member countries' economies. In 2005 the Baltic countries also became members of the bank. Today NIB finances projects which contribute to improved competitiveness and the environment. During its anniversary year NIB will organise an event in conjunction with the Nordic Council Session in October.

The Millennium Technology Prize, which is awarded in Finland every second year, is one of the world's leading science and technology prizes. The prize is a Finnish distinction for technical innovations that contribute to solving humanity's major challenges and supporting sustainable growth. The award will be presented in 2016. The prize is awarded to a leading researcher in his/her sector, generally in the active period of his/her career. The Millennium Technology Prize is open to all technological sectors and citizens of all countries. Candidates for the prize are screened and assessed by a jury consisting of leading researchers representing various disciplines and geographical regions. The innovation receiving the award must demonstrate practical applications and stimulate new research. The Millennium Technology Prize was awarded for the first time in 2004. The prize is awarded by Technology Academy Finland (TAF). The foundation was set up by the Finnish scientific community, the Finnish state and industry. The prize is worth one million euros.

## Water

Besides being a precondition for all life, water is also a strategically important natural resource for everybody in the Nordic region, both nationally and internationally. It has economic, social, environmental as well as foreign and security policy dimensions. Water is in many ways an intrinsic element of life in the Nordic region. In water questions the Nordic countries have shared objectives of promoting peace and stability, strengthening the international system based on common rules, realising economic, social and cultural rights, reducing poverty and promoting sustainable use of natural resources. Water is a comprehensive and cross-cutting entity and is therefore ideally suited as a priority theme in the Nordic Presidency.

There is plenty of good, clean water and unspoilt nature in the Nordic countries. Natural resources are appreciated and used in a sustainable manner with a view to the future and they constitute a central element in the Nordic cultures. The Nordic countries are perceived as countries with unspoilt nature, clean water and clean technology. This provides a good basis for efforts to promote our Nordic brand and tourism. The lakes in the Nordic countries are used in many ways for recreation, fishing, cottage holidays and excursions. Nature tourism is part of everyday life in the Nordic region.

It is important to co-ordinate water matters at the Nordic level, and globally water matters have become ever more important. Important co-operation fora include those involved in implementation of global and regional boundary water agreements, the various UN processes, in particular related to the preparation and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as the World Water Forum. Climate change is an important factor for water supplies.

The new agenda for sustainable development *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* includes important water objectives. These aim at access to safe drinking water and sanitation for all, improved water quality through reduced loads, more efficient water usage, harmonised planning of water resources, inclusive boundary water co-operation, protection of water ecosystems and improvements to developing countries' readiness and support for local communities in their management of water resources. Measures are urgently needed for proper management and pro-



tection of water resources. Water resources are being affected by population growth, urbanisation, production methods and consumption habits as well as climate change. If the current trend continues, global water usage will exceed available water resources by 40 per cent in 20 years. It looks as if water could become the most contested natural resource in the future.

The blue bioeconomy can be of great help when it comes to sustainable use of water and marine natural resources. The blue bioeconomy is an area where the Nordic countries have co-operated and focused on developing.

In future, climate change and growing competition for natural resources will impose pressure to increase agricultural production, and the ample water resources in the Nordic region are of great importance for maintaining agriculture.

The Nordic countries' expertise and technological know-how provide scope for finding possibilities for economic growth globally within the water sector. Challenging conditions and scarce natural resources have led to the development of efficient environmental solutions. There are skills in many areas, for example providing and constructing systems for clean drinking water and other water supply systems as well as systems for purifying and using industrial process water. Integrated management of water resources is also important. There is great interest in Nordic know-how in the sector.

A Nordic focus on cleantech could also provide more opportunities for companies, including through joint export and infrastructure projects. It is important that the actors in the water sector participate in international water fora, e.g. the World Water Forum and UNESCO's IHP programme. Nordic co-operation will have a positive effect here too. Water is also an important issue for energy co-operation.

The Nordic countries' experience of negotiating international agreements, peace mediation and development policy in combination with advanced know-how in the water sector provide scope for a more visible profile in questions related to water diplomacy. Making water a leading theme in the Presidency creates a basis for successfully influencing water issues internationally.

In July 2010 the UN General Assembly declared water to be a fundamental human right. Water has a significant influence on both individual and societal welfare. The perception of water and sanitation as unequivocal human rights has been strengthened considerably in recent years. Development



work in the water sector is an important element in conflict prevention. The Nordic countries' development co-operation is long-term and innovative and development co-operation within the water sector could be seen as a leading sector that promotes innovation and development in societies. Through active development co-operation in the water sector the Nordic region can also contribute to increased regional stability and promote its own and global security.

At the EU level the Nordic countries can assess in what area Nordic co-operation on water resources delivers added value with a view to ongoing work and national implementation of water management.

## ACTIONS

- We will start the Presidency project *Nordic Road Map for the Blue Bioeconomy* and organise a conference on the blue bioeconomy in Finland in June 2016. The aim of the project is to identify areas of Nordic co-operation in the blue bioeconomy and create a roadmap for using the potential related to water and natural resources, inter alia by developing joint research.
- We will initiate the Presidency project *The Socio-Economic Benefit of Arctic Surface Water in the Nordic Region*.
- We will strengthen Nordic co-operation and develop Nordic solutions. Promotion of clean water, water know-how and the blue bioeconomy in Nordic branding work.
- We will strengthen Nordic co-operation internationally so as to promote the position of the Nordic countries as pioneers of water diplomacy, the water economy and clean technology. Through active co-operation the Nordic countries have a possibility to take a leading role in the international water dialogue.
- We will forge closer links between Nordic water actors.
- We will host the informal meeting at a technical level between Nordic officials within the water sector in Finland in 2016.
- We will endeavour to create conditions for developing Nordic know-how, economic activity and strong growth in the sector. The impact will come from the input of people and businesses, strong growth in the sector, increased welfare and improved sustainability.
- We will investigate the possibilities of obtaining a financial instrument in conjunction with the NDF.
- We will highlight World Water Week in Stockholm in August, where participation is planned.
- We will organise a Nordic water event in conjunction with the UN's World Water Day on 22 March 2016.
- The Academy of Finland's closing seminar *Sustainable Management of Aquatic Natural Resources 2012–2016* is to be held in November 2016
- We will look into a survey of the water theme and the Nordic countries' measures within the water sector.
- Participation in the 2016 annual forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region in Sweden in co-operation with the Nordic Council of Ministers in Sweden is being planned. Blue growth is one of the themes of the forum.
- The objective is to highlight the water theme in conjunction with climate issues in schools.







## Nature

The unique and diverse nature in the Nordic region is an important resource for people in the region and also a central element in the way the Nordic region is perceived internationally.

The tourism sector is closely linked to the Nordic regional brand. Success in the sector goes hand in hand with how well known the countries and their values are. And tourism in turn makes the Nordic countries better known by attracting tourists there. The tourism sector is well placed for joint Nordic actions that increase awareness of the Nordic countries as innovative and sustainable tourist destinations. This work can be done through focused initiatives together with other sectors such as culture, food, dining, architecture and design.

Fishing and water tourism are also an essential part of the blue bioeconomy. Tourism benefits from unspoilt landscapes and the calm of nature, well managed wildlife resources and cultural features.

It is important to safeguard natural diversity and ecosystem services. The aim of an ecosystem-based approach and sustainable forestry is to promote nature protection and sustainable use of natural resources, including the principles of multiple usage. The bioeconomy is also important for forests. As part of our Presidency, we wish to link Nordic co-operation closer to the work being done in the EU and internationally. In that way Nordic co-operation can contribute to a sensible approach to issues that are important for the Nordic countries.

The Nordic countries are also known for safe, healthy and high-quality foods that are produced sustainably. It therefore makes sense for us to benefit together from the attention and interest that food safety and new Nordic food are attracting internationally and promote the Nordic food culture in the Nordic countries and especially abroad. It pays to continue dialogue and building networks between the Nordic countries especially regarding food education for children and young people, short distribution chains and sourcing procedures, as well as food tourism. Reduced food wastage is also mentioned in the goals for sustainable development.



In the Nordic region, the Swan ecolabel is the main tool for disseminating information on sustainable choices to consumers. Work is ongoing to further develop the Swan label and important factors to take into account are the products' environmental friendliness, the reasons for the label and the work being done in the EU on the ecological footprint.

The climate summit in Paris in December 2015 strove to reach an international climate agreement, with implementation to start in 2016. The Nordic countries have co-operated closely in the UN climate negotiations within the NOAK working group. The Nordic countries also have a strong role in global climate policy. The Nordic region has had an important role in areas including combating deforestation and ending subsidies for fossil fuels as well as in initiatives around reducing the amount of short-lived pollutants, which have consequences for the climate.

The new global agenda for sustainable development will be launched in 2016 *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Sustainable use and protection of natural resources and ensuring natural diversity and ecosystems are high on the Nordic agenda. The Nordic countries have co-operated and stressed the position and rights of women, sustainable consumption and production methods as well as democratic governance, the rule of law and human rights.

## ACTIONS

- We will initiate the Presidency project *The Swan Nordic Ecolabel – the Circular Economy and the Ecological Footprint*.
- The Finnish Institute of International Affairs will organise an expert seminar on the challenges posed for the Nordic countries by the UN’s post-2015 sustainable development goals and follow-up of the COP21 climate agreement in Paris.
- The Nordic ministers have decided to task NOAK and KoL with beginning to plan the Nordic Council of Ministers’ post-COP 21 activities. At present a workshop is planned for the end of January for Nordic negotiators and selected consultants and experts.
- Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway are members of the group Friends of Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform. In spring 2015 the group published a communiqué which was also signed by the USA and France as the country presiding COP21. This work will continue in 2016.
- The Nordic Investment Bank (NIB) will celebrate its 40th anniversary with a high-level event in conjunction with the Nordic Council Session in October. The working title of the anniversary seminar is *Financing the future – the next 40 years*. The aim is to quantify the competitiveness and environmental situation of the Nordic and Baltic countries, the future challenges and in particular the role of the financial markets.
- We will draw more attention to the recycling of nutrients.
- We will organise a competition on locally produced food. The objective is to increase interest in and appreciation of Nordic ingredients amongst consumers and industry experts, raise skills within the food sector and emphasise culinary traditions.
- In conjunction with the Gastro food fair we will organise a Nordic event on environmental responsibility and healthy meals in a professional kitchen and provide a meeting place for networking for street food actors.
- We are planning a seminar on gastronomic culture and education, approaching the food topic both from the perspective of nutrition, social aspects and cultural values.
- We will continue the work started by Denmark by focusing on nature tourism and including ecosystems in sustainable nature tourism and by enabling the conditions for commercial activity related to other ecosystem services.
- We will ensure that the work on guidelines for Nordic forestry co-operation is completed and implementation started.



## People

The Nordic countries are in the top ten in most global comparisons based on indicators of welfare. There are differences in the Nordic model between the countries, but as a whole the fundamentals appear to remain relatively uniform even amidst the pressure of globalisation.

In recent decades all the Nordic countries have been faced with challenges related to maintaining the welfare society. For example, ever greater income differences, long-term unemployment, rapid changes in working life, increased child poverty, an ageing population and a lowering of the level of social protection are leading to increasing and entrenched health differences and polarisation.

The objective of the social and health care policy conducted in the Nordic countries has been to emphasise equal treatment and justice as central principles. Promoting health and welfare through co-operation between various sectors is a particularly important method for bringing down differences in socio-economic welfare. On the other hand, the worsening dependency ratio, increased freedom of choice, people's freedom of movement and competition between service entrepreneurs are phenomena that are challenging the traditional Nordic welfare model to reform.

Given this situation, there has been a sharp increase in co-operation within health and welfare sectors in the Nordic countries. Extensive analysis has been done on the possibilities for public health, register research and biobanks in Nordic co-operation (inter alia in the Könberg report of 2014). NordForsk's research programme Health and Welfare has brought together expertise and research environments to strengthen Nordic co-operation within this area.

Future topical questions for the welfare state include globalisation and ever greater migration, which is linked to economic development in Europe and its consequences for the Nordic welfare state. Questions associated with the free movement of persons and services in EU legislation also affect freedom of movement between the Nordic countries. Nordic co-operation has long traditions in questions relating to cross-border social protection. The objective should be to promote the Nordic countries' principles on gender equality and individual rights in the EU.



In the gender equality sector, the principal themes in Finland's Presidency include gender inequality in public spheres (e.g. the media, the impact of threatening speech on democracy) and work on violence and attacks against women, violence in close relationships and human trafficking. The ministers for gender equality are to receive a report on gender equality challenges for men and boys and their role in gender equality work as well as decisions on possible actions. Furthermore, the Council of Ministers for Gender Equality will continue to co-operate with other Councils of Ministers and would like to keep gender equality as an overarching element in the work of the Council of Ministers. The gender equality sector is participating in implementing the project *Welfare in the Nordic Region 2020* together with the social, employment, cultural, educational and research sectors.

The economic crises in recent years have impaired the ability of persons with partial working capacity to participate in the labour market. Due to demographic developments and with a view to equal treatment it is important to act so that individuals and groups who find themselves in a weak position can participate in the labour market. Participating in working life is one of the preconditions for welfare for both the individual and the Nordic welfare society.

Children and young people are an important target group in Nordic co-operation. The Nordic Council of Ministers has prepared a strategy for work with children and young people in the Nordic countries. The vision is that the Nordic region should be the best place in the world for children and young people. During the year of our Presidency, the aspect of children and young people will be supported by means of inter-administrative co-operation. "The Nordic region, the best place in the world" stands for a living environment that promotes the health of children and young people. An environment that is conducive to health encompasses many administrations' areas of activity, e.g. a school with a safe learning environment and free of bullying and a community that supports initiative and is safe to move about in. An environment that is beneficial to health also includes healthy food. An environment that supports health provides children and young people with healthy food, and food advertising should support healthy alternative choices. As well as advertising, adults need to set an example – a constructive attitude that encourages healthy choices strengthens the welfare of children and young people.

In the Nordic countries the development of education has been guided by careful consideration for human resources. The Nordic countries have endeavoured to combine high-level skills, equal treatment, gender equality and efficiency. Although the countries still have a strong skills basis to build on, a

degree of impairment can be discerned within sectors that are essential for the future. The share of young people with weak basic skills has increased. We need to pool our knowledge to break this trend in the Nordic region.

We should also invest in the start of the learning process under all conditions. High-quality early childhood education and basic education promote equality and social cohesion and create a basis for future success. The Nordic dialogue on pedagogy and the content of early childhood education provide a good platform to take this work forward.

Culture is also a factor which creates strong links between the Nordic countries. It is also one of the mainstays of official Nordic co-operation. The differentiation of our societies means that the Nordic countries are becoming increasingly multifaceted and multicultural. In parallel with this positive development, however, inequality is also growing. It is important to find methods to counter inequality and the consequences of it. The Nordic countries have begun to prevent violent extremism.

Another common challenge faced by almost all the Nordic countries is sparsely populated areas. A dynamic sparsely populated area requires functioning infrastructure and road connections, the area needs to be connected to development and learning networks and needs a diverse business and service structure based on local solutions. Data connections infrastructure plays an important role when it comes to improving the regional balance and competitiveness. Government functions are also being digitalised. Functioning and comprehensive data connections contribute to flexibility in the siting of business activity and provide opportunities for diverse business activity in various areas.

Digitalisation also affects our skills requirements, our activities, the way we interact with each other and challenges our ability to interpret different sources of information. In future it will be even more important how learning takes place and to constantly update knowledge in a changing operating environment. Raising the skills level of the adult population to match the needs of the labour market is a common challenge for all countries in the Nordic region.

Digitalisation and the ability to process ever greater amounts of information electronically are also changing science and the way we make art. Public electronic databases open up access to a wider user basis and enable various types of information to be re-used. All the Nordic countries are currently seeking national solutions to promote the use of open research data and processes.

New technology has also brought transparency and new ways of creating, experiencing and consuming within culture and art. At its best, digitalisation leads to better access, availability and openness when it comes to cultural services. The importance of skills and creativity for the economy and social development will increase in future and this area can contribute to economic growth and societal development.

New forms of work are altering the position of employees and are affecting, amongst other things, labour law, the working environment and gender equality. Diversity leadership, parental leave schemes and part-time work underline the equal treatment and gender equality aspects. With a globalised economy and work split into international value chains, global labour market trends are having ever greater consequences for the labour market in the Nordic countries. Improving the position of women in the labour market is a central challenge, especially in a global context.

The theme *The future of work* is also related to the topics at the 100th anniversary of the International Labour Organisation and the discussions about how to focus the ILO's activities in future. A more in-depth view of the future challenges and needs of the labour market, including the working environment, will provide support when choosing a new policy direction. Internationally, Finland and the Nordic countries are among the leading countries regarding the working environment, and this can be used in branding the Nordic region.

Limiting chemicals harmful to health and the environment is a common challenge for the Nordic countries. Particular attention is being paid to the chemicalisation of everyday life, chemicals in products and risk assessment. Taking hazardous chemicals out of circulation is also an important element of the recycling economy.

In 2016 Finland also holds the presidency for co-operation in public health preparedness. This is based on the Nordic Public Health Preparedness Agreement. The practical work is co-ordinated by the Svalbard Group. Finland will organise the annual conference on public health preparedness.

## ACTIONS

- We will launch the Presidency project *An Open and Innovative Nordic Region with Healthy People 2020 – Equal Opportunities for Welfare, Culture, Education and Work*. In the context of the project, we will start initiatives such as the Nordic culture and welfare network and the related co-ordination work (including databases and research).
- We will hold the project kick-off seminar *How Are You, Nordic Region? Sustainability through Welfare, Culture and Gender Equality* in Turku on 27–28 January.
- We will start the Presidency project *The Rising North*. This is a project focusing on developing the Nordic start-up identity and thereby its international brand.
- We will launch the Presidency project *Exchange of Researchers between the Nordic Foreign Policy Institutes*. The goal of the project is to develop researcher exchanges between foreign policy institutes in the Nordic countries.
- We will hold a conference on public health and the Nordic welfare model in autumn 2016.
- We will organise a seminar on issues affecting Roma in Helsinki on 16 June.
- We will conclude the strategic review of the working life sector and start the necessary follow-up actions.
- We will organise the conference *The Future of Work – New Forms of Work* in Helsinki.
- We will hold the expert seminar *Persons with Partial Working Capacity and Working Life* in Helsinki.
- We will hold the Nordic working environment authorities' conference *The Nordic Working Environment Conference* from 7 to 9 June, in Tampere.
- We will promote Nordic co-operation to combat violent extremism in the form of inter-sectoral co-operation. Hanasaari Cultural Centre will hold a conference on the initiative around democracy, inclusion and security.
- We will mark the Chydenius 250th anniversary and 50th anniversary of the US Freedom of Information Act.
- We will hold an international conference on press freedom hosted by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education and Culture as part of the Chydenius 250th anniversary celebration. We will strengthen Nordic visibility taking into account artistic and cultural freedom of expression and media education.



- The Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK), the Ministry of Education and Culture and youth organisations will organise a seminar on the future of the youth policy of the Nordic Council of Ministers, children's and young people's participation and prevention of marginalisation on 26–27 September.
- We will participate in the Finlandsarenan event in Pori.
- We will collect and disseminate good examples of how dynamism in sparsely populated areas has been strengthened by improving the data connections infrastructure and how digitalisation can be used in economic activity.
- We will hold Nordic workshops and a broad-based seminar to forge networks between digitalisation experts and seek solutions to special issues affecting rural areas.
- Based on the five themes (the sustainable Nordic region, the creative Nordic region, the intercultural Nordic region, young people in the Nordic region, the digital Nordic region) in the Nordic Council of Ministers Strategy for Nordic Cultural Co-operation 2013–2020, we will implement the culture sectoral programme together with actors in the cultural and art field.
- We will look at how digitalisation is affecting changed knowledge requirements, learning environments and curricula. The Nordic countries will have a joint presence at the BETT digital learning fair in London on 21 January.
- The competency chain in the Nordic region is seen as a whole. Nordic co-operation will be promoted via a conference on pre-school pedagogy and early childhood education. The reports and recommendations of the Nordic working group on teacher training and the working group on qualitative higher education will be considered during the year.
- We will promote dialogue on national plans for open science and research in the Nordic countries.
- We will conduct a strategic discussion and put together a long-term plan for Nordic mobility including mobility programmes, Nordplus 2015–2020 and the Nordic Master Programme.
- We will promote Nordic co-operation in health and welfare with regard to the Könberg report.
- We will organise seminars and events on gender equality as part of the sectoral programme of the ministers for gender equality. Through this we will develop information and best practice to support the development of gender equality policy in various places in the Nordic region and the work done by the Nordic countries in international arenas.
- We will hold the Haga co-operation ministerial meeting in Finland in 2016.



## Obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement

Free movement of persons between the Nordic countries is an important part of our common identity and a strength of the Nordic societies. This is something that has worked and has been developed over five decades. However, free movement is constantly coming up against new challenges and therefore our Presidency will also focus on the removal of obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement.

Work to remove obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement is long-term and a traditional part of Nordic co-operation. Promoting freedom of movement is one of the most important objectives of Nordic co-operation and is a way of improving general welfare in the area.

Co-operation on obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement promotes the free movement of labour and employment and raises the competence and vocational skills of the labour force in various areas. Opportunities for businesses and people to move across borders are important for economic growth.

Nordic co-operation on obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement is one of the cross-cutting themes of our Presidency. We would like all Councils of Ministers meetings to heed work to remove such obstacles. Furthermore we would like all Councils of Ministers to take account of what possible new measures could be adopted within the framework of Nordic co-operation to remove obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement and prevent new obstacles occurring.

Prevention is the best method to avoid the emergence of new obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement. Therefore it would be good if in the context of EU co-operation the Nordic countries paid attention to possible obstacles already in the preparation and implementation of legislation. Co-operation between legislators in the various countries should also be furthered to detect and prevent the emergence of new obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement.

Furthermore, political commitment and a will to take the matter forward are required.

Obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement are also a central theme in the report by the former prime minister of Finland, Paavo Lipponen, entitled *A Strategic Vision for the North* and in the report by the CEO of Finland Chamber of Commerce Risto E.J. Penttilä, Magdalena Andersson and Anne Husebekk entitled *Growth from the North*. It is good that attention is being paid to obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement and that the consequences of these are also being addressed in other contexts.

## ACTIONS

- The Presidency project to develop statistics on obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement in the Nordic countries is being launched by Statistics Finland.
- Preventative work on obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement is being put on the agendas of the Council of Ministers.
- We will promote preventative work and draw attention to obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement in impact assessments when new EU legislation is prepared and implemented.
- We will draw attention to the inhibitory effect of obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement on economic growth and the free movement of labour.
- A ministerial meeting focusing specially on obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement to be organised in Tornio and Haparanda at the end of the year.
- The North Calotte Border Service is to organise two seminars in 2016, both focusing on obstacles to cross-border freedom of movement. One seminar entitled *Borders are an opportunity – business as the engine of economic growth* is directed at companies and business. The other seminar, entitled *I am a border worker* is aimed at employees and will focus on the impact of unemployment and sickness insurance and taxation from the point of view of border workers.



## More Nordic synergy in the EU

The report *New Nordic Region* deals with co-operation in the Nordic Council of Ministers in EU matters. It states that it would be good if ministerial meetings devoted more attention to EU matters and other international questions of joint interest. It is also recommended that the Council of Ministers looks into ways of extending co-operation at the level of senior officials regarding implementation of EU legislation.

The Nordic Ministers for Co-operation have stressed a pragmatic and practical approach to the link between the EU and the Nordic countries. We hope that in their meetings all the Councils of Ministers address the question of how greater Nordic synergy can be achieved in matters having to do with the European Union.

The objective is not Nordic group behaviour in the EU, rather that Nordic values should be taken into account. Furthermore it would be important to concentrate on operational co-operation and the exchange of information being as effective as possible in the implementation and preparation of EU provisions. It would be worthwhile to clarify the practical structures of our co-operation and the exchange of information between the Nordic countries in EU matters. Often different persons are involved in Nordic co-operation and in EU matters in various fora. It would also be important to define more precisely what fundamental Nordic values ought to be followed in EU co-operation.

The EU aspect also arises in the strategic assessment of the labour market sector which was started in 2015. The objectives of this include promoting Nordic co-operation by putting forward recommendations regarding the possibilities of Nordic co-operation in relation to EU and EEA matters.

In the EU, the Nordic profile is seen in particular in questions relating to transparency and good governance as well as compliance with fundamental rights and freedoms. Improved regulation and responsible use of resources are also joint overarching themes for the Nordic countries. In all these questions it often seems natural to stress the Nordic aspect and the co-operation is extensive. In parallel with these, improved growth, employment and competitiveness are key general objectives for co-operation both at the EU level and in the Nordic region.

The positions of the Nordic countries also vary in a number of issues and here it would be important to inform one another of these.

The Nordic Council has also drawn attention to the EU issue and the national parliaments have discussed it.

#### ACTIONS

- The Finnish Institute of International Affairs is planning to hold a seminar on the theme *The Nordic Region in the EU*.
- It would be desirable for all Councils of Ministers to consider at their meetings how better Nordic synergy could be achieved in EU matters.
- Regarding the implementation of EU legislation we will promote contacts at the level of senior officials between the Nordic countries.
- We aim to promote the exchange of contact information between national experts in Brussels to enable the Nordic countries to contact each other's delegated experts within sectors where they have experts of their own.





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