



Action Plan for Nordic Co-operation on Disability 2018 to 2022



Nordic Council
of Ministers

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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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NORDIC CO-OPERATION ON DISABILITY 2018 TO 2022

Equal opportunities and security regardless of a citizen's gender, ethnicity, religion, belief, functional capacity, age, or sexual orientation are cornerstones of the Nordic welfare societies. Our social rights provide everyone with equal access to healthcare systems, social services, education, culture, and the labour market.

The Nordic countries are very highly regarded internationally with respect to human rights and equality. Demographic developments mean that our Nordic societies must be able to meet the needs of an increasingly ageing population in which reduced or altered functionality is the norm. In the Nordic Region, inclusion is a public interest.

The Nordic countries seek to achieve sustainable social development based on their citizens' opportunities for individual freedom and self-fulfilment.

By working together, the Nordic countries demonstrate the value and benefit of an inclusive society and the universal design of both digital and physical environments. Universal design requires social planning that is both smart and effective and that contributes to growth and economic development not only for welfare systems but for businesses too.

In February 2014, the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation published their vision statement, *The Nordic Region – Together we are stronger*,¹ outlining the optimum conditions for citizens to be able to move freely between the Nordic countries and for

¹ <http://www.norden.org/en/nordic-council-of-ministers/ministers-for-co-operation-mr-sam/declarations/the-nordic-region-together-we-are-stronger>

an innovative Nordic Region that focuses on welfare, education, creativity, entrepreneurship, sustainability, and research. Additionally, the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation want to ensure that Nordic co-operation in international affairs complements the efforts of other organisations. Co-operation should create a Nordic advantage, provide added value for everyone, and lead to concrete results. Co-operation with the Baltic countries is also important.

When compared with co-operation within the EU, the Council of Europe, the UN, and other forms of international co-operation, the added value of Nordic co-operation lies in our many similarities, which means that Nordic co-operation can run deeper. We are able to discuss and compare what we have learnt in more detail, as well as share our positive experiences relating to inclusion, welfare, and demographic development.

The three dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic, and ecological) underpin the ideology of Nordic co-operation, creating the conditions for equal opportunities, social solidarity, and security for all. The Nordic Council of Minister's strategy for sustainable development, *A Good Life in a Sustainable Nordic Region: Nordic Strategy for Sustainable Development*,² and the new co-operation programme for sustainable development, *Generation 2030: Nordic programme for Agenda 2030*,³ support the implementation of Agenda 2030 in the Nordic Region as set out in *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.⁴

² <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A701472&dswid=7571>

³ <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1153406&dswid=1646>

⁴ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

Based on the message of Agenda 2030 – “Leave no one behind” – it is essential that the Nordic Region successfully integrates the perspectives of gender, children and young people, and disability. Processes relating to sustainability policy should also include and benefit those with disabilities. These perspectives must be integrated from the outset and throughout implementation. This is, again, a public interest.

Disability policy is about building a sustainable society in which no one is excluded. The objective of the disability policy is the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of society. The policy is increasingly characterised by a rights perspective which has gained global expression through the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).⁵ All the Nordic countries have ratified the convention.

This action plan lays out the Nordic Council of Ministers’ co-operation strategy for disability and is based on recommendations from activities in the previous action plan for the period 2015 to 2017, inclusion of people with disabilities, and strategies for Nordic co-operation and other forms of international co-operation that have a bearing on sustainable development. Worth mentioning specifically are the UN’s Agenda 2030 for sustainable development, EU directives and regulations relating to accessibility and participation, the Council of Europe’s strategy for the inclusion of people with disabilities, priorities for the social and health sectors in Nordic co-operation, and the vision statement of the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation: Together we are stronger.

⁵ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/CRPDIndex.aspx>

NORDIC CO-OPERATION ON DISABILITY IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

Nordic co-operation on disability primarily consists of three tools: the Nordic Welfare Centre, which is an institution under the Nordic Council of Ministers for Health and Social Affairs (MR-S); the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability, which is an advisory body for official Nordic co-operation as a whole; and the Nordic Council of Ministers' action plan, which itself is cross-sectoral. In addition, the Nordic Welfare Centre administers a support scheme for co-operation between disability organisations at the Nordic level.

As parties to UN conventions and as part of their co-operation within the Council of Europe and the EU, the Nordic countries and autonomous territories are committed to the inclusion of people with disabilities at an international level. The same is true of the Baltic countries. Set out below are examples of international commitments to the inclusion of people with disabilities.

United Nations

The Nordic countries have made commitments to and participate actively in UN efforts to promote human rights. The countries are well regarded internationally in this area. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) prohibits violence and discrimination. Conventions specific to certain target groups identify particularly vulnerable groups and clarify the body's articles on general human rights of 1948 and how these can be implemented for all. Of particular relevance to this action plan are: the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR); the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UN's



PHOTO: PIXABAY.COM

sustainable development goals in Agenda 2030 are also highly relevant to Nordic co-operation.

Council of Europe

The Nordic countries participate actively in the Council of Europe, which co-operates on human rights with 47 countries on the basis of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. All the Nordic countries have undertaken to comply with its statutes. In particular, the Council of Europe undertakes to support national efforts to promote the human rights of persons with disabilities.⁶ The issue has been highlighted by way of conventions and recommendations proposed by the parliamentary assembly of the co-operation organisation, councils of ministers, expert committees on the rights of people with disabilities, and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI).

⁶ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/disability>

The Council of Europe has several publications in this area, and on the situation of women and girls with disabilities in particular. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention), which outlines the rights of women and girls to health and safety, is also relevant and has been adopted by all the Nordic countries. The Council of Europe's strategy in the area, *Human rights: a reality for all*, is in effect from 2017 to 2023.⁷

European Union

The EU has an action plan for the inclusion of people with disabilities as well as specific initiatives for co-operation, including the promotion of barrier-free movement between Member States by way of the *European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe*.⁸ The EU is the only regional organisation to have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). This demonstrates a high level of ambition and requires Member States to make changes and do the right thing.

The EU's Employment Equality Framework Directive (2007/78/EC) has a direct influence, as do the commission regulations on passenger rights relating to travel by bus (181/2011), boat (1177/2010), train (1371/2007), and plane (264/2004) within the EEA.⁹

The web accessibility directive (2016/2102/EU) addresses the digital accessibility of public websites. A directive on accessibility of a more general nature, entitled the European Accessibility Act, is currently being negotiated. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has published several reports on the situation of people with disabilities.

⁷ <https://rm.coe.int/2017-2023-disability-strategy-en/16806fe7d4>

⁸ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0636:FIN:en:PDF>

⁹ https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/travel/transport-disability/index_en.htm



PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES, AND NORDIC BENEFITS

The overall purpose of the action plan is to contribute to the inclusion of people with disabilities by way of better Nordic knowledge-sharing and closer co-operation with regard to disability policy issues.

Nordic co-operation on disability:

- benefits the countries involved and makes a difference for Nordic citizens with disabilities;
- complements and strengthens current national processes that aim for the inclusion of everyone in all areas of society;
- deepens existing and creates new synergies with other forms of international co-operation and processes aimed at inclusion;
- creates the necessary conditions for the exchange of experiences, preservation of expertise, and development of methods for the inclusion of people with disabilities for a number of strategic areas and selected contexts;
- raises awareness of the disability perspective within the Nordic Council of Ministers' and the Nordic Council's key bodies and activities, such as secretariats, institutions, programmes, and networks, thus exemplifying Nordic and Nordic-Baltic co-operation in terms of how official organisations can incorporate diversity and the inclusion of people with disabilities;
- increases the degree of accessibility of and within the activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers and Nordic Council to people with disabilities;



PHOTO: JOHNÉR.DK

- strengthens the image of the Nordic Region as being innovative, inclusive, and socially sustainable, and as a region in which no one is excluded; and
- meaningfully integrates into its activities perspectives on: gender equality between women, men, girls, and boys; the rights of children and young people; and sustainable development.

FOCUS AREAS AND ACTIVITIES

HUMAN RIGHTS

Support and strengthen work on the national implementation and monitoring of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Strengthen inclusion, promote equality, and tackle discrimination against people with disabilities from a diversity perspective in all aspects of Nordic society through the strategic integration of the disability perspective in efforts relating to sustainable development by way of the universal design of various environments.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Promote freedom of movement and remove barriers to freedom of movement faced by people with disabilities in particular.

HUMAN RIGHTS

All the Nordic countries have ratified the UNCRPD and implement the intentions and rights set out in the convention within their systems of governance. There are several shared challenges as well as a common need for greater and better knowledge and positive examples of successful implementation.

Activities in this focus area not only support UNCRPD implementation processes but also involve other conventions and efforts relating to human rights and disability in general.

1.1 Efforts to improve knowledge and dialogue relating to human rights and disability, and making the Nordic voice heard internationally

The purpose of these efforts is to create platforms for the exchange of knowledge and experience and the development of effective instruments for implementing the UNCRPD. These efforts contribute to a deeper understanding of the UNCRPD, strengthen the skills of those involved in its implementation, and showcase positive examples of this implementation. Furthermore, these efforts create synergies with other forms of international co-operation and processes aimed at inclusion.

The objective is to implement efforts relating to, for example, comparable statistics and other information, forums/hubs for the sharing of experience, and a Nordic master's degree programme and research programme in disability studies. In order to make the Nordic Region's voice heard more clearly within the UN, an anthology is being compiled of the Nordic countries' previous and current involvement in the UN system



relating to disability. During the action plan period, annual Nordic events will be held at UN State Party meetings and in other relevant international contexts.

A number of initiatives have already been launched under the previous action plan. The Nordic Welfare Centre is co-ordinating these efforts, which fall within the scope of its mission under its notice of funding from EK-S. The Nordic Welfare Centre applies for funding and implements initiatives together with other relevant national, Nordic, and international partners. Reference groups are appointed as required and in dialogue with stakeholders.

1.2 Project on indigenous peoples and disabilities

Generally speaking, there is very little systematised knowledge on disability relative to indigenous peoples in the Nordic countries, including the Sami and the Inuit. This lack of knowledge has been raised by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in its reports on individual countries and has been highlighted as an area for development in forthcoming reports.

This project broadens knowledge about the Nordic Region's indigenous peoples and disability, and develops Nordic networks regarding the implementation of the UNCPRD specifically for indigenous peoples. In addition, the project contributes to the implementation of *Nordic Partnerships for the Arctic: The Nordic Council of Ministers' Arctic Co-operation Programme 2018–2021*.¹⁰

¹⁰ <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1153655&dsid=-6325>

The objective is to support research, professional networks, and Nordic networks of people with disabilities and their relatives from among Nordic indigenous peoples.

The project is based on knowledge, experience, and networks established in the Nordic Welfare Centre's project on Sami people with disabilities.¹¹ The Nordic Welfare Centre applies for funding from the Nordic Atlantic Cooperation (NORA) and/or the Arctic Co-operation Programme for 2018 to 2021.

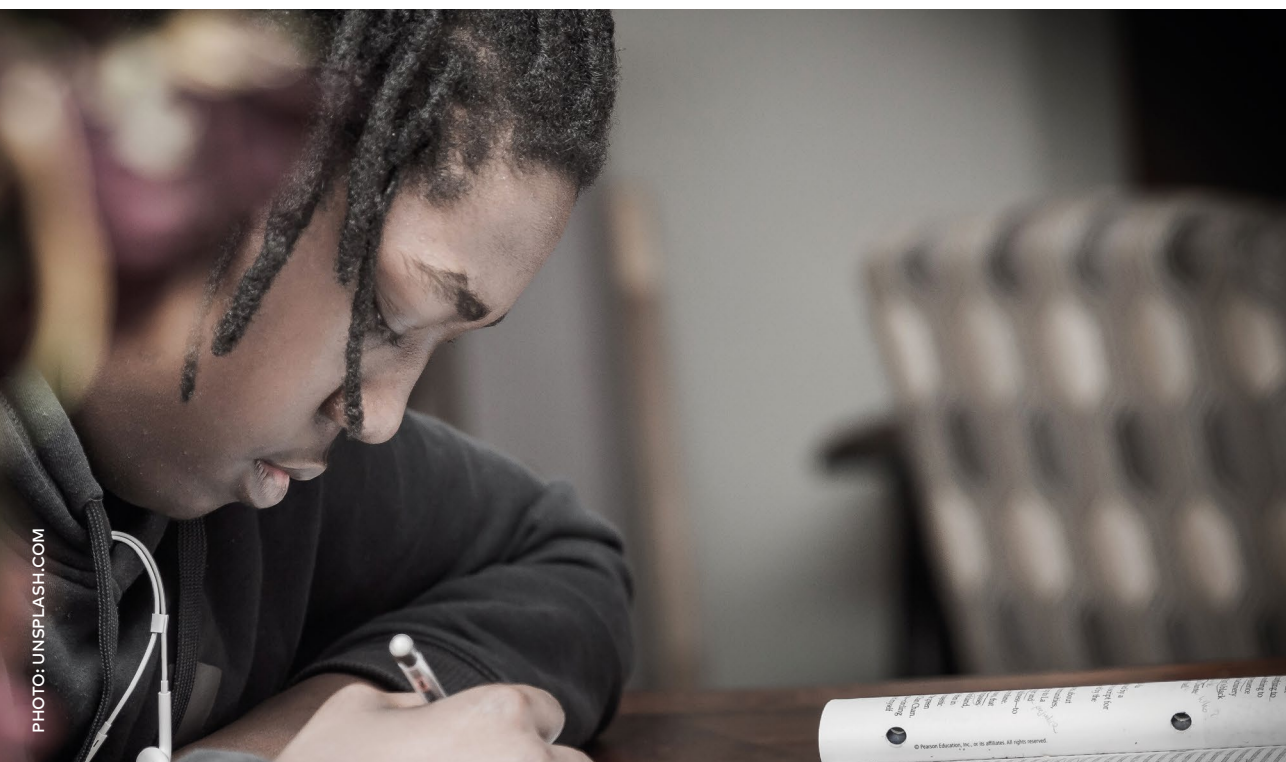
1.3 Project on the health of children and young people and their participation in school and recreation

Children and young people with disabilities are in poorer health and have less of a foundation for participation than other children. A challenge faced by the Nordic Region as a whole is the creation of equal living conditions and opportunities for all children to be heard, regardless of their level of ability.

This project strengthens the sharing of knowledge and experience between experts throughout the Nordic Region who work to promote the health and participation of children in school and recreation. Two groups of children with special accessibility needs – children with a hearing impairment and children with an intellectual impairment – are actively involved in the project.

The project will collate knowledge about the situation of children and young people with disabilities, as well as on methods and positive examples and lessons relating to how

¹¹ <https://nordicwelfare.org/projekt/samer-med-funktionsnedsattning/>



to make the voices of children and young people better heard in school and recreation. Specifically, this relates to the implementation of articles 30 (cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport), 6 (women with disabilities), 7 (children with disabilities), and 25 (health) of the UNCRPD. In addition, the project refers to Unicef's work with children with disabilities.

The project can build on these efforts – including networks – generated by the Nordic Welfare Centre's 2016 seminar on children and young people with disabilities.¹² The project is being developed by a group of experts appointed by way of dialogue between NORDBUK and the Nordic Welfare Centre. The project is anchored in EK-K, EK-U, and EK-S. The Baltic countries are involved where possible and when they show interest.

¹² <https://nordicwelfare.org/en/evenemang/>



PHOTO: VICTORIA HENRIKSSON

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The sustainable development of the Nordic welfare model is based on the ability of as many people as possible to contribute to the economy by way of a high level of employment. This necessitates an inclusive education and labour market policy. A society that is more universally designed and the development of and access to new technologies facilitate the better inclusion and increased independence of people with disabilities.

Activities in this focus area help Nordic co-operation and co-operation between the countries to achieve these objectives by way of better inclusion in the labour market, in state environments, in cultural life, etc. A number of international policy processes are underway in which the Nordic countries are participating.

2.1 Integration of the disability perspective in the activities of the Nordic Council of Ministers

The Nordic Council of Ministers works systematically to strengthen the disability perspective in all relevant policy areas. The objective is to bring about positive changes that improve accessibility and raise awareness of the disability perspective in the areas of the work environment, personnel policy, meetings and conferences, and communication. The disability perspective is underpinned by and followed up in relevant policy areas and sectors.

Between 2015 and 2017, the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability and an internally appointed working group in the Nordic Council of Ministers worked together to bring about improvements. On the basis of these efforts, new objectives will be set internally at the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of

Ministers. Particular focus is placed on Nordic institutions and other co-operative bodies, including support schemes, as well as on reaching out to senior officials within official Nordic and Nordic-Baltic co-operation and to politicians in relevant policy areas.

The work of the internal working group and the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability is implemented within separate budget frameworks. Activities and projects (within the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers and/or its policy areas) that incur costs are budgeted individually.

2.2 Universal design and accessibility – participation and democracy

The Nordic Region is being developed and branded as an inclusive and innovative region. To achieve this, the sharing of experiences between the Nordic countries is being improved. Emphasis is placed on effective local and national working models, as well as on the early involvement of users.

This project brings together representatives of the largest disability groups (vision, hearing, movement, cognition, sensory), researchers, practitioners, and politicians to engage in dialogue, spearhead development, and share their positive examples for universal design, which can help to ensure the development of a Nordic Region for everybody. The project provides synergies with other forms of international co-operation and processes aimed at inclusion. This helps to set the bar higher for the Nordic Region with regard to universal design and a society for everybody, such as by strengthening international co-operation within the EU, the Council of Europe, and the UN.

The objective is to identify positive examples relating to the implementation of Agenda 2030 from a disability perspective – specifically goals 10, 11, 16, and 17. The project identifies existing and develops new forms of dialogue between key stakeholders in the promotion of participation and democracy by way of universal design, specifically with regard to participation in political life such as through democratic elections, freedom of movement, independent living, the urban environment, and transport. The project raises awareness of Nordic co-operation and includes those who otherwise would not participate in a Nordic discussion.

The administrative body for the project could be the Nordic Welfare Centre or another organisation with expertise in this area. A reference group will be appointed consisting of experts from the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability, the Secretariat to the Nordic Council of Ministers, and EK-S.

Funding is discussed primarily with the Nordic Committee for Co-operation (NSK under MR-SAM), EK-S, and EK-K.

2.3 An inclusive labour market in the Nordic Region: follow-up of previous seminars on the labour market and people with disabilities.

Young people and adults with disabilities continue to experience exclusion from the labour market. This project contributes to the implementation of the *Programme for the Nordic Council of Ministers' Co-operation on Labour 2018-2021*¹³ and involves the sectors for business and education policy. The objective is to arrange annual expert seminars and other

¹³ <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1182660&dswid=-7875>

Nordic meetings, such as with municipal associations. Dialogue is being established with the ILO's Global Business and Disability Network and other relevant international agencies and networks. The activities of this project improve knowledge and stimulate co-operation on statistics, methods, initiatives, and projects related to labour market participation and disability. Inspirational booklets and anthologies of knowledge on specific topics are produced within the project each year. One proposal involves mapping how insurance systems stimulate work for people with a disability and/or an impaired ability to work. Another proposal is a Nordic cross-sectoral project on knowledge and co-operation related to inclusion in the labour market for people with disabilities, corresponding to the O-24 priority project focusing on the mental health of young people.¹⁴

Activities and funding are discussed with the labour market sector and possibly also the business sector, as well as the education and research sector.

¹⁴ <http://www.fafo.no/index.php/nb/forskningstema/prosjekter/prosjekter-alle/item/folgeevaluering-nordisk-O-24-samarbeid>



FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Raising awareness of and breaking down barriers to freedom of movement across country borders is a priority area within Nordic co-operation. Although many barriers to freedom of movement have been removed and there are several surveys and projects in progress, many barriers remain for people with disabilities. This may be due in part to the lack of clarification of the disability perspective, or due to other barriers that need to be removed to enable citizens with special needs to enjoy the opportunities for mobility created between the countries. The EU is also making special efforts to break down barriers for people with disabilities.

Activities in this focus area promote freedom of movement for people who are at risk of being hindered by barriers to freedom of movement due to a lack of accessibility.

3.1 A disability perspective in Nordic co-operation on freedom of movement

This activity reinforces skills in relation to the disability perspective among stakeholders studying and proposing solutions to freedom of movement issues, and also improves skills in relation to co-operation on freedom of movement among members of the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability.

Existing information on the Hello Norden and the Nordic Council of Ministers' websites that relates to people with disabilities will be mapped and improved, such as information on sign language interpreting. A progress report on Nordic mobility and disability is being developed in collaboration with those responsible for the Nordic Convention on Social Assistance and Social Services. The report focuses on barriers

to freedom of movement in the fields of society and the labour market. Special emphasis is placed on the barriers prioritised by the Freedom of Movement Council.¹⁵ Annual seminars are held involving relevant stakeholders in, for example, co-operation on freedom of movement. This also includes dialogue with the sign language network with regard to interpretation and mobility. A disability perspective will be integrated into forthcoming social security conferences in 2018 and 2019 regarding the shortening of processing times in EU matters.

Co-operation will continue between the relevant stakeholders responsible for the council of ministers' agendas in relation to disability and freedom of movement. These include the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability, the Freedom of Movement Council, and the Hello Norden information service. The activities are conducted within the regular budgets of the co-operative organisations.

3.2 Student mobility in the Nordic Region

It is an objective of the EU and the Nordic countries that students in higher education are able to complete all or part of their education in another country. This objective includes students with disabilities. Due to a number of barriers affecting students with disabilities in particular, their opportunities to study abroad differ considerably from those of other students. The project report *Equity in student mobility in higher education*¹⁶ describes these barriers and provides recommendations for improvements to the conditions for

¹⁵ <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1174950&dswid=-1508>

¹⁶ <https://nordicwelfare.org/funktionshinder/studentmobilitet>

student mobility in the Nordic Region. The aim of the project is to organise seminars in at least six locations in the Nordic Region on the basis of the report.

The Nordic Welfare Centre holds meetings together with the Norwegian organisation Universell at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) as part of a project on student mobility and disability covering the period 2015 to 2016. EK-U has allocated DKK 300,000. In addition, resources are provided by national partners.

3.3 Social and urban planning that supports freedom of movement for everyone

Many of the obstacles to freedom of movement that especially affect people with disabilities can be dealt with by way of co-operation in sectors related to urban planning. Key areas for Nordic co-operation include transport, the built environment ("smart cities" and "age-friendly cities" are examples of how this is conceptualised by the WHO and others), and tourism. The activity supports the *Nordic Co-operation Programme for Business and Innovation Policy, 2018–2021*¹⁷ as well as the *Nordic Co-operation Programme for Regional Development and Planning 2017–2020*¹⁸. The implementation of EU passenger rights and preparations for the implementation of forthcoming accessibility directives are highly relevant. The Nordic Welfare Centre is examining which forms of Nordic co-operation exist between authorities and relevant Nordic institutions and co-operation agencies.

¹⁷ <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1175601&dswid=-670>

¹⁸ <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1084699&dswid=-305>

FOLLOW-UPS

An external evaluator will conduct follow-ups in 2019 and 2021. The results will be reported to EK-S in connection with feedback on the action plan and the work of the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability. The evaluator will have contact with the organisations responsible for the project management of each activity. A progress report will be compiled by the Nordic Welfare Centre in its role as the Secretariat to the Council for Nordic Co-operation on Disability for the Nordic Council of Ministers. The progress report will be presented to the Nordic Council in 2019 and 2021.



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This action plan lays out the Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation strategy for disability. It applies throughout the Nordic Council of Ministers and has three focus areas:

Human rights

To support and strengthen work on the national implementation and monitoring of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Sustainable development

To strengthen inclusion, promote equality, and tackle discrimination against people with disabilities from a diversity perspective in all aspects of Nordic society through the strategic integration of the disability perspective in efforts relating to sustainable development by way of the universal design of various environments.

Freedom of movement

To promote freedom of movement and remove barriers to freedom of movement faced by people with disabilities in particular.

The action plan covers the period 2018 to 2022.

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