



Nordic Council  
of Ministers

Supplement to

# **Nordic Co-operation Programme on Gender Equality 2019-2022**

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Equal rights, treatment and  
opportunities for LGBTI people  
in the Nordic region

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# Foreword

In many countries and regions in the world, the rights and opportunities of gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people are under pressure. In the Nordic region, it should be the other way around. That is why we in the Nordic co-operation are taking the lead in promoting equal rights, equal treatment and equal opportunities for LGBTI people.

The official Nordic gender equality co-operation has been working for over 40 years to make the Nordic region one of the most gender equal regions in the world. In 2020, the co-operation was formally extended to include the prevention of marginalisation, promotion of inclusion, and strengthening of the active citizenship of homosexual, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons in the Nordic societies.

The Nordic countries are striving to lead the way. There is a need to place focus on the area of LGBTI across our countries, and there is a need for progress both in the Nordic region and internationally. At the same time, this initiative will contribute to fulfilling the overall vision of the Nordic Council of Ministers that the Nordic region should be the world's most sustainable and integrated region.

For the co-operation to be meaningful, with long-term effects and high relevance, this co-operation programme has been developed on the basis of a thorough mapping, outlining the need for efforts within this area in the Nordic countries.

This document presents our focus areas and goals, which are based on recommendations from Nordic LGBTI organisations and national authorities, and constitute the Nordic Council of Ministers' most important political priorities for the LGBTI co-operation in 2021 and 2022. We will work to promote greater freedom and openness for LGBTI people, a better quality of life and living conditions, and a strengthened Nordic network and civil society in the LGBTI area.

In the Nordic countries, everyone has the right to belong.

## **On behalf of the Nordic Ministers for Gender Equality:**

**Peter Hummelgaard**, *Minister for Equal Opportunities*

Danish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020

**Thomas Blomqvist**, *Minister for Nordic Co-operation and Equality*

Finnish presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021



## Introduction

Internationally, the Nordic countries have long been progressive in the LGBTI area, but despite the fact that some legislation is in place, there are still many challenges to address before LGBTI people obtain equal opportunities and rights.

In 2020, the Nordic Ministers for Gender Equality initiated a formal co-operation, under the Nordic Council of Ministers, on equal treatment and equal rights for LGBTI people in the Nordic region. The umbrella term LGBTI is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex. The abbreviations may vary in the Nordic countries, but LGBTI is used throughout the official Nordic co-operation, corresponding to that of other international organisations.

The co-operation is led by the Ministers for Gender Equality in the Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality and LGBTI (MR-JÄM), who adopted the following overall objective on 17 September 2019:

**The Nordic Council of Ministers will strive to achieve equal rights, treatment and opportunities for LGBTI people in the Nordic region.**

The Nordic Council of Ministers is the official government co-operation between the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, together with the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

This text is a supplement to the Nordic Co-operation Programme for Gender Equality 2019-2022. The supplement governs the Nordic co-operation in the LGBTI area, and describes the most important priorities until the end of the programme period.

The addition was adopted on 5 November 2020, and applies for the remaining programme period from 1 January 2021 – 31 December 2022.

## Intersectionality

In order to cease the discrimination of LGBTI persons, an intersectional perspective

must be used to define and implement the co-operation and the initiatives that result from it.

Intersectionality is defined here as an analytical perspective to strengthen awareness and understanding of the way in which sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics, in interaction with other identity categories, position LGBTI people in the Nordic countries differently and provide different conditions for their equal participation in society.

The Nordic co-operation must take account of the fact that LGBTI people differ, both between the groups lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex, and within the individual groups, with further differences that may relate to socio-economic background, ethnicity, religion, disability, asylum status, age and other identity categories.

An intersectional approach ensures that the Nordic co-operation and its efforts will benefit not only the individual, but also society as a whole.



[Nordic co-operation programme on gender equality 2019-2022](#)

## Strategic focus areas



# 1. Freedom and openness

**Everyone must be able to live and work in the Nordic region without fear of discrimination, threats, violence or hatred. Freedom and openness are prerequisites for the possibilities of LGBTI people in the Nordic region to participate in society on an equal footing, and are essential to prevent and prohibit marginalisation, exclusion and unhappiness.**

**Initiatives in this focus area are linked to the Nordic Council of Ministers' Action Plan 2021 - 2024, including but not limited to Goal 10 and Goal 12.**

**The Nordic Council of Ministers seeks to ensure that:** LGBTI persons can live freely and openly, enjoying the same opportunities in life as the rest of the population. Discrimination and hate crimes must be prevented and counteracted. LGBTI people must have the same access to mobility in the Nordic region as the rest of the population.

Many LGBTI people refrain from living openly for fear of the reactions of those around them, and are more exposed to discrimination and hate crimes than the rest of the population. The Nordic co-operation must work to prevent this. Discrimination and hate crimes are an unacceptable violation of the freedom of the individual.

The approach and accurate competence of authorities and bodies that help and guide the public are important elements in effectively combatting discrimination and hate crimes. The Nordic co-operation must contribute to promoting knowledge and experience sharing in this area.

In the Nordic region, there are good opportunities for mobility between neighbouring countries, but there is still room for improvement. LGBTI people who seek work in or move to another Nordic country sometimes risk losing the recognition of, for example, family structure and gender. In order for the Nordic region to become the world's most integrated region, dialogues and cross-sectoral co-operation should be initiated, for example through the Freedom of Movement Council, which works to secure freedom of movement in the Nordic region.



**The Nordic Council of Ministers seeks to ensure that:** Traditional perceptions of gender and sexual orientation do not hinder LGBTI people in the Nordic region from being able to live as they wish. Negative attitudes directed at LGBTI people must be counteracted.

Negative attitudes towards LGBTI people are part of the reason why it can be hard for some to live openly or as they wish. If LGBTI people do not follow the norms in the local community, or in society in general, feelings of loneliness and of being invalid can arise. This applies to people who experience being different early in life, but also to older people who only later in life recognise themselves in gender identities or orientations other than cisgender and heterosexuality.

Homophobia, biphobia and transphobia still exist in Nordic societies, and are expressed and affect LGBTI people in different ways. The Nordic co-operation in the LGBTI area must take into account the existence of groups that are particularly exposed to this from an intersectional perspective. Focus must be on initiatives that contribute to changes in attitudes, so that freedom and openness can be a possibility for all.





## 2. Quality of life and living conditions

**Everyone in the Nordic region has the right to the best possible prerequisites for good health. Access to competent healthcare and other social welfare services must not bypass LGBTI persons, including older LGBTI persons. Special efforts must be targeted at LGBTI children and young people, who are entitled to an upbringing in safe environments free from loneliness, bullying or exclusion.**

**Initiatives in this focus area are linked to the Nordic Council of Ministers' Action Plan 2021-2024, including but not limited to Goal 9.**

**The Nordic Council of Ministers seeks to ensure that:** LGBTI people have equal access to good physical health and mental well-being. The marked differences in both physical and mental health that exist between LGBTI people and the rest of the population must be reduced. LGBTI persons must have equal access in all areas of society.

Good quality of life is measured according to a number of different parameters, and although the Nordic countries score relatively highly on international scales for LGBTI-inclusive legislation year after year, challenges still remain.

One of the challenges is the differences in physical and mental health between LGBTI persons and the rest of the population in the Nordic region. Poorer health among LGBTI people is partly due to greater substance use, more frequent cases of self-harm and suicide, and higher levels of stress compared to others in the Nordic region.

A prerequisite for reducing these differences is that the healthcare system understands the particular challenges that LGBTI people experience, and can offer the best possible treatment and counselling.

A similar need exists in the labour market, where a positive attitude towards our

different ways of living can contribute to the dynamism and well-being of the work environment. Here it is important to exchange knowledge and experience about the limitations for LGBTI people in the labour market, the differences between industries, and ways to boost well-being. Older LGBTI people may also face certain challenges. Withdrawal from the labour market may increase the risk of loneliness and isolation. Knowledge about the situation of older LGBTI people is also important for promoting equal health and care services.

The Nordic co-operation in the LGBTI area must promote active participation and social inclusion throughout life in various types of communities.

**The Nordic Council of Ministers seeks to ensure that:** LGBTI children and young people have equal access to education, leisure and quality of life, and equal opportunities for development, security, and good conditions while growing up.

Studies show that young LGBTI people are particularly exposed to marginalisation. Accordingly, the co-operation must focus on the well-being and happiness of LGBTI children and young people, so that the right to a good and healthy development and upbringing can be secured at home, in school and in leisure time.

Recognition and participation in communities is essential for the inclusion and well-being of children. Good examples of how schools and educational institutions can contribute to inclusive learning environments that are free from bullying and harassment are needed, in order to bring about positive and lasting change.

The Nordic co-operation must contribute to the opportunities for LGBTI children and young people to participate in associations on equal terms, for example within sports and in social activities and networks. The same levels of well-being and happiness must also apply to children in rainbow families.



### 3. Networks and civil society

**Dialogue and co-operation that supports civil society must govern the Nordic co-operation in the LGBTI area. This is a prerequisite for ensuring equal rights, equal treatment and equal opportunities for LGBTI persons in an effective and sustainable way. By supporting civil society and its networks, continued development can be ensured in the LGBTI area in the Nordic region.**

**Initiatives in this focus area are linked to the Nordic Council of Ministers' Action Plan 2021-2024, including but not limited to Goal 11.**

**The Nordic Council of Ministers seeks to:** Involve the knowledge and experience of LGBTI organisations in civil society in the work for equal rights, treatment and opportunities for LGBTI people, and contribute to and strengthen the development, networks and exchanges of experience of civil society for the continued development of the LGBTI area in the Nordic countries.

The LGBTI organisations of civil society are a strong voice in the Nordic region. These organisations fulfil several important functions which contribute to ensuring equal rights, equal treatment and equal opportunities for LGBTI people in the Nordic region, and are therefore an important priority for the Nordic co-operation.

Amongst other things, the organisations function as a rallying point, knowledge centre and representative for LGBTI people at all levels of society. This means that there are good examples of practices, knowledge dissemination and information material available in the Nordic region.

Support for the co-operation and networks of civil society is a prerequisite for advanced progress in the LGBTI area. Examples of promising initiatives at local or national level must be disseminated and made accessible, so that they can benefit more people in the Nordic region.



## International responsibility

A Nordic vision is for the region to have an international outlook and strengthen its co-ordination internationally. The role of the Nordic co-operation is also to support each other's international obligations in relation to the common goal of equal rights, equal treatment and equal opportunities for LGBTI people in the Nordic region.

This work must contribute to cross-cutting synergies and take into account recommendations and legal developments at the European Court of Human Rights and in the UN Human Rights Committee. The Nordic co-operation should also take into account the knowledge and experience that can be derived from committees, expert functions and contact points in the UN, the Council of Europe and European umbrella organisations in the LGBTI area.





# Implementation

## Operationalisation of the co-operation

The Nordic co-operation in the LGBTI area should be seen in the context of the Nordic Council of Ministers' other governing documents, including Vision 2030, Action Plan for Nordic Co-operation 2021-2024 and Nordic Council of Ministers policy for mainstreaming sustainable development, gender equality, and a child rights and youth perspective. The work will also follow Children and Young People in the Nordic Region – a cross-sectoral strategy for the Nordic Council of Ministers 2016-2022, as well as the principles and approaches of the Nordic Council of Ministers for involving children and young people in its work, published in 2020.

The work in the LGBTI field must be conducted intersectionally and be based on relevant knowledge and facts. The co-operation places great emphasis on the exchange of experience and discussion in the creation of Nordic platforms, dissemination of good examples, information efforts, attitude changing, research in the LGBTI area at the Nordic level and the exchange of information on national legislation.

In addition to this, the co-operation wishes to support networks and initiatives in the field, and has therefore established a Nordic LGBTI Fund in addition to the Nordic Gender Equality Fund, which is administered by Nordic Information on Gender (NIKK).

## Organisation in the sector

### The Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality and LGBTI (MR-JÄM)

The co-operation of the Nordic governments in the field of gender equality is led by the Nordic Ministers for Gender Equality, who make up the Nordic Council of Ministers for Gender Equality and LGBTI (MR-JÄM). The ministers meet at least once a year to discuss current issues and take joint decisions in the areas where Nordic co-operation creates greater benefit than the individual countries can create individually: the so-called Nordic Value.

### The Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Gender Equality and LGBTI (EK-JÄM)

The Committee of Senior Officials, which consists of representatives from all of the Nordic countries, together with Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland, usually

meets three times a year. The Committee leads the practical work and prepares the meetings of the ministers, as well as implementing their decisions.

In order to strengthen competencies and ensure quality, one member per country has been appointed to contribute specific knowledge in the LGBTI area.

## **Evaluation and follow-up**

The evaluation of initiatives in the LGBTI area will be carried out at the same time as the Nordic Co-operation Programme on Gender Equality 2019-2022 is evaluated. A new co-operation programme in the area of LGBTI and Gender Equality will subsequently be drawn up.

# Terminology

**Cisgender:** A person whose experienced gender and gender expression corresponds to the sex assigned at birth.

**Heterosexual:** A person who is sexually or emotionally attracted exclusively to the other sex.

**Intersex variations:** Umbrella term for individuals with congenital internal or external anatomical variations or sex characteristics that are not unambiguously defined as typically male or female. The variations may be physiological, genetic and/or hormonal, and some, but not all, may require medical treatment.

**Gender identity:** The way in which you perceive and experience your gender. There are many different gender identities, of which cisgender and transgender are examples.

**LGBTI:** Abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex. The abbreviations may vary in the Nordic countries, but LGBTI is used throughout the official Nordic co-operation in a way corresponding to that of other international organisations.

**Rainbow family:** A rainbow family is a family of children in which at least one of the parents is an LGBTI person.

**Transgender:** Umbrella term for individuals whose gender identity or gender expression is to a greater or lesser degree not in accordance with the gender assigned at birth.



# About this publication

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### **Nordic co-operation**

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

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, economics and culture and plays an important role in European and international forums. The Nordic community strives for a strong Nordic Region in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation promotes regional interests and values in a global world. The values shared by the Nordic countries help make the region one of the most innovative and competitive in the world.

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