

nabo

– Social Inclusion of Youth in
the Nordic Region



Nordic Council
of Ministers

COMPARISON OF THE
COUNTRY REPORTS



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Preface

Young people in the Nordic region generally have good living conditions. However, at the same time the Nordic countries share some challenges, we have groups of youth that feel they do not belong in the community, feel that they are not listened to and are not taken seriously when participating. We also know that there is a geographical factor. The place where young people live and grow up affects their opportunities. Regardless if they grow up in a city, a vulnerable city district, a rural village or a sparsely populated area, these preconditions differ, and it is important to emphasize.

According to the country reports, the conditions and opportunities for the Nordic youths strongly depended on where they live. Basically, there is divide between young persons living in privileged city districts in larger cities and a youths living in smaller towns, rural and sparsely populated areas and more vulnerable city districts in larger cities.

An inclusive society is one where everyone feels social belonging and have opportunities to engage in different parts of the social life. The main challenge for creating and sustaining peaceful and inclusive societies within the Nordic region lies in combatting the existing inequalities and find ways to guarantee equal treatment, equal access and equal opportunities. Public support and services must be timely, of good quality and provided with respect for the individual in focus. This must be the case regardless of who you are or where you live.

The Nabo-project have produced reports which shed light on how youth describe various aspects of social inclusion in all the Nordic countries and in Greenland, the Faroe Island and Åland. This is the comparison study of these eight reports.

This report has been carried out by the Nabo-project in cooperation with Emerga Institute. The author is Elisabeth Abiri , PhD and expert in human rights.

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About the project

Nabo – social inclusion of youth in the Nordic region is one of four projects launched under the Swedish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2018. Nabo is a pan-Nordic project and seeks to make the youth perspective on social inclusion visible through the words of Nordic youth. The aim of the project is to investigate and visualize the perspectives of Nordic youths on social inclusion and to develop tools and methods for youth participation. In doing so the project have been focusing on four main parts:

- Country reports in collaboration with Nordic researchers
- Policymaking processes involving youth
- Development and testing of the method *Right Based Youth Perspective* (Rättighetsbaserat ungdomsperspektiv)
- Events and seminars in the countries co-arranged with actors from the public sector and civil society, including the national youth organizations in the Nordic region.

The Nabo project is led by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society through activities carried out by project manager Jeff Jonsson and development manager Linus Wellander.



Jeff Jonsson (left) and Linus Wellander (right)
Photo: Hasse Karlsson

Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society produces and disseminates knowledge in two principal areas: Youth policy and policy focused on civil society. We produce knowledge on youths living conditions across a range of areas such as work, housing, education, health, leisure time and influence.

Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society also has the task of working to ensure that the youth perspective is developed in the work of other state agencies and to provide support for the municipalities in their youth policy work.

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Introduction

NABO is a pan-Nordic project about the social inclusion of young persons in their respective societies. The project was launched under the Swedish presidency in the Nordic Council of Ministers 2018 and runs over the period 2018–2021. The project focuses on how youths talk about themselves and others in relation to five aspects of social inclusion – experiences of belonging, opportunities to influence, opportunities to participate, access to society's resources and services and support from family and social networks. These five aspects of social inclusion were presented in "Vilka ska med? Ungas sociala inkludering i Sverige" a report published by the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society in December 2018. This report was based on statistics collected by the authority via two main surveys carried out during 2018.¹ This statistical data was then complemented with focus group interviews with different groups of youths. The qualitative part of the Swedish report became the foundation for similar studies carried out in the other Nordic countries and in the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.

The methods of the eight country reports

The methods of data collection have been the same for the eight reports. The qualitative data were collected through focus group interviews with young persons between 17 and 23 years old. The focus group interviews were based on the same interview guide. In total, 55 focus group interviews were conducted with 296 young persons.² The country researchers strived to include a variety of participants in their focus groups. To accomplish this aim, the focus groups were conducted in different areas and with different compositions of the participants, for example youths from sparsely populated areas, smaller cities and larger cities. Within the cities, focus groups were carried out both in so-called vulnerable and privileged city districts.³ After the focus group interviews, the recorded discussions were transcribed into texts, which formed the basis for the country reports. The country

-
1. Nationella ungdomsenkäten and Attityd- och värderingsstudien
 2. 9 focus groups with 42 participants in Denmark, 10 focus groups with 40 participants in Finland, 3 focus groups with 17 participants in the Faroe Islands, 3 focus groups with 16 participants in Greenland, 6 focus groups with 37 participants in Iceland, 15 focus groups with 56 participants in Norway, 12 focus groups with 87 participants in Sweden and 3 focus groups with 18 participants in Åland.
 3. The country reports use a variety of terms for these city districts, ranging from vulnerable, non-privileged, non-vulnerable and privileged areas.

reports were authored by eight different researchers, with different academic backgrounds, something which naturally have influenced the analysis and the presentation of the country data.

The definition of the five aspects of social inclusion were also the same in all eight reports. These definitions were mostly copied directly from the Sweden report into the other country reports. They were as follows: 1) young persons' sense of belonging and being part of a larger context at local, regional and national level; 2) young persons' opportunities for influence over the development of society in different parts of society and at different levels; 3) young persons' opportunities for participation in various aspects of society including cultural, leisure and social activities, non-profit involvement and paid work; 4) young persons' access to basic public sector services, including access to education, healthcare and medical services, public transport and housing; and 5) young persons' feeling of social inclusion in society at local, regional and national level as well as their social relationships and opportunities for support from family and social networks. The fifth aspect also included questions regarding young persons' vulnerability in terms of discrimination, harassment and bullying. The extent to which these five aspects were actively used as an analytical tool when processing the country data has been difficult to ascertain.

Aim and method

The main aim of this report is to compare the findings of the eight different reports. To carry out this comparison, the texts of the reports have been coded in accordance with a list of tags, among them:

Coding tags

definitions	belonging – residential areas
research references	belonging – civil society
method	belonging – country
gender	influence
age	influence – home
LGBTI	influence – politics
ethnicity	influence – public actors
cities	influence – public initiatives
rural areas	participation
sparsely populated areas	participation – jobs
vulnerable city districts	participation – civil society
privileged city districts	community service – education
recommendations	community service – healthcare
	community service – public transport
	community service – housing
	social relations/trust
	discrimination
	mobbing

The sections of the reports with the same tags were then compared to each other in search for similarities and differences.

The comparison showed that the country reports in general painted very similar pictures of the social inclusion of youths in their countries or regions. The main differences between the reports were, unsurprisingly, found between the three home rule regions – Åland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland – and the countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The former three regions only have between 29,000 and 56,000 inhabitants, a fact that also appeared to influence the participating youths' views on social inclusion. In most areas, their views align with the youths from more rural and sparsely populated areas in the five countries. Otherwise, the main differences between the participating youths appear to be present within all countries and regions. Consequently, the results of the comparisons between the reports mainly showed similarities – also in their differences. The results are presented in the following chapters.



Belonging

The first aspect of the overarching concept social inclusion used in the country reports concerned young persons' sense of belonging and being part of a larger context at local, regional and national level.⁴

Belonging in the residential area

The feelings of belonging to one's home area was a common denominator for all young participants, regardless of sex, ethnicity and age. However, the definitions of the places they called home varied among the participants. According to the Finnish report, the youth who lived in smaller municipalities saw themselves as belonging to a larger geographical area, e.g. Northern Finland, while the young persons who lived in larger cities considered themselves to belong to a specific city district rather than to the city as a whole. The Faroe Islands report pointed out that the youth's sense of belonging was strengthened by the fact that they did not only have their immediate family close by. Commonly, they also had a large group of other relatives living in the same area. This type of family structure could also be found in the more sparsely populated areas in the other countries.

The young persons living in cities were aware of the status of their city district in relation to other districts. It is worth noting that the youths who lived in so-called socio-economically vulnerable city districts in general expressed pride in their residential areas. They felt a strong sense of belonging to these districts even when they did not feel at home in the other city districts.⁵ This did not mean that they were unaffected by the negative media images their residential areas have. However, their reactions to these images varied.

According to the country reports, the feeling of home was often strongly associated with the place where the participants had grown up. It was there they had

4. *About belonging to the local area* – Denmark report, p. 23, 28 56, 59–60; Finland report, p. 12, 21, 34; Faeroe Islands report, p. 7, 10–13; Greenland report, p. 19, 23, 25; Iceland report, p. 17, 29, 34; Norway report, p. 23–24, 55–56; Sweden report, p. 30–31, 34; Åland report, p. 19–20; Faeroe Islands report, p. 10; Norway report, p. 23–24, 25–27, 55–56; Sweden report, p. 30–32, 34
About belonging to civil society – Faeroe Islands report, p. 11; Denmark report, p. 24, 50; Greenland report, p. 19; Iceland report, p. 30; Norway report, p. 28–29, 36
About belonging to the country – Denmark report, p. 41, 57, 59, 61; Finland report, p.21; Greenland report, p. 25; Sweden report, p. 35–36.

5. Finland, Norway, Sweden

developed their social relations by playing with others and meeting their families. They described their home places as places where they had people nearby to ask for help, general meeting places to meet up with friends and social activities open for all the young persons of the area. It was common for the youths to mention that they felt at home because they were acquainted with everybody who lived in their residential area. The fact that "everybody knows everybody else" strengthened the feeling of belonging. Since many of the young persons had recently moved or were contemplating a move, mainly to continue their studies, the place where they grew up had become even more important. The participants said that it could be difficult to get to know new people and get a social context in a new area as they got older.

The majority of the participants said that they felt safe and secure in their local communities. It was mainly young girls in the major cities, who mentioned that they sometimes felt unsafe walking around at nights.

Unsurprisingly, there were advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a smaller or a greater locality. The sense of safety and belonging might be stronger in the smaller localities, especially if you had grown up there. Then again, the social control might be a conservative force that did not allow for "too much" differences. Larger communities might on the other hand provide the youths with more choices both when it came to themselves, their friends and activities. It was easier to "go under the radar" in a greater locality, especially if you had not grown up there. Yet, it might be difficult to feel the same kind of belonging in a larger community, something which could be part of the explanation of why young persons from the larger cities did not feel at home in the city itself but rather in the district where they lived.



Belonging in relation to civil society

Most of the young persons who participated in the country studies said that they spent their free time with family and friends. In general, the young persons tended to be part of informal groups of friends, either in their own residential area or on social media. Local organisations and activities were also mentioned as a crucial part of the youths' sense of belonging. Many youths were engaged in some kind of organised leisure activities focusing on culture or sport. The most common cultural leisure activities revolved around music. Another interest mentioned in the studies was different kinds of online gaming. Most young persons mentioned at least one community or organisation that was important to them, e.g. sports associations, cultural organisations, and other non-profit groups.

In more privileged city districts of larger cities there were commonly a number of choices available for the young persons of the area, when it came to sports, music and other hobbies. The youths in these areas also had more access to city events like concerts and festivals. In other areas – both more rural and sparsely populated areas and more vulnerable city districts, there was a need of strong local commitment in order to create and sustain a lively civil society. According to the Sweden report, the youths from these areas stressed the need to create the kind of activities that they believed their home areas should have access to. However, the participants also described what they considered to be a decrease in commitment and willingness to work voluntarily in their local areas. For example, annual local events were discontinued, sports teams could not recruit new coaches and so on. The youths themselves either said that they already did a lot of voluntary work or stated that they did not feel that their work would make any difference.

Most country reports mentioned the difference in leisure time options for young persons under and over 18 years. In general, persons under 18 had more access to subsidised or free culture and leisure activities and also to places where they could meet up outside their homes. 18-year-olds and older experienced that everything became more expensive once they turned 18, at the same time as they no longer had access to the cheaper activities. Instead, they were referred to commercially organised activities or club sports with the other adults. A number of the focus group participants mentioned the need to develop activities, meeting places and events for young persons, who were over 18 but who still were in school or were without the necessary funds to engage in commercial activities. Persons between 18 and 23 might still want to meet up with persons of the same age range rather than engaging with adults of all ages. Without such meeting places some youths described how they felt like they were dropped from civil society activities when they turned 18.

Only a handful of the young persons stated that they were engaged in a political party. Some youths mentioned that they participated in different variants of youth councils in their municipalities.



Belonging to the country one lives in

According to the country reports, the majority of the young persons had a rather uncomplicated relationship to the country they lived in. To be Norwegian, Finnish, Danish and so on were simply a matter of course. The youths were aware of the positive aspects of their respective countries. At the same time, they did not find that their national identity was that important in their everyday lives.

The relationship to one's country was unsurprisingly not as straight-forward for persons who belonged to a national or ethnic minority. Even if these youths themselves felt a sense of belonging, they also felt that others did not consider that they belonged to their country to the same degree as the ethnic majority. This was especially true for so-called visible minorities, whose physical appearances stood out from the majority's. Most country reports mentioned this problem, which will be further discussed in the section on discrimination. The Finland report pointed out that persons from the Swedish linguistic minority also felt that parts of the majority population did not see them as "full" citizens.

The youths from the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland mainly felt that they belonged to their respective regions. Their connections to Denmark (in the case of Greenland) and Finland (in the case of Åland) were considerably weaker. The Faroe Island report did not discuss belonging in relation to Denmark. About half of the Greenland youths did not feel any sense of belonging to the Danish commonwealth (Rigsfællesskabet). The Åland youths mainly feel that they belong to Åland rather than to Finland as a whole.

The Sweden report pointed out that some of the participants in more rural and sparsely populated areas and in vulnerable city districts might feel at home in their own part of the country. However, they questioned whether their existence were included in the decision-makers' and the majority's concept of Sweden.

Roundup

To sum up, the country studies stated that the majority of the participants had a strong connection to the place where they live, and they felt safe there. However, some young persons did not feel a sense of belonging neither to their residential area nor to civil society. These youths mentioned that they did not feel that they fitted into the established groups that existed at school or in organised leisure activities. The reasons behind this situation were difficult to ascertain in the focus group setting. The sense of belonging to one's country differed between different groups. Youths from more privileged areas belonging to the country's linguistic and ethnic majority felt a natural sense of belonging. Other youths, living in more rural or sparsely populated areas or vulnerable city districts did not feel the same sense of belonging to the country as such but rather to their home area. This feeling was exacerbated for youths of so-called visible minorities, who often felt that the majority did not consider that they belonged to their country.



Influence

The second aspect of the all-encompassing concept of social inclusion used in the country reports concerned young persons' opportunities for influence over the development of society in different parts of society and at different levels.⁶

Influence in the home

All country studies stated that the young persons, who lived at home, felt that they could influence what happened there. In general, these youths felt that their opinion mattered. The examples of direct influence mainly concerned smaller decisions relating to their everyday lives, for example, the dinner choices or the colour of the walls in the living room. Many young persons described their family as a supportive safe place. Others saw the family as a place that strengthened their desire for autonomy since they thought their parents decided over their lives as long as they lived at home.

The Norway report especially mentioned the group of youths who lived in dormitories connected to their upper secondary schools. This group experienced that their everyday life to some extent was limited by the house rules that regulated everything from bedtime to visits and when to come home at night. According to the report, the youths considered that these detailed rules in the long run became paternalistic. The Finland and the Iceland reports both mentioned that the size of the family also might affect the degree of influence the individual youth could have in the home. More siblings also mean more persons who potentially may influence decisions and home rules.

6. *About influence in general* – Denmark report, p. 24, 29, 33–36; Finland report, p. 25; Iceland report, p. 18; Sweden report, p. 44; Åland report, p. 23 – 26
About influence at home – Denmark report, p. 27; Finland report, p. 23–24; Faeroe Islands report, p. 7–8; Greenland report, p. 21; Iceland report, p. 17; Norway report, p. 35
About influence in public initiatives – Denmark report, p. 25, 28, 30, 61; Finland report, p. 23–25; Iceland report, p. 17; Norway report, p. 31–34; Sweden report, p. 46, 48
About influence in politics – Denmark report, p. 27, 30–32, 35; Finland report, p. 23–24; Faeroe Islands report, p. 8–9; Greenland report, p. 21; Iceland report, p. 18, 20, 33; Norway report, p. 29, 32; Sweden report, p. 52

Influence – public actors

According to the country reports, the general discussions on influence varied a lot depending on where the young persons lived, which in turn also introduced issues of class and ethnicity into the mix. The Sweden report described how the participants in several focus groups questioned the willingness and ability of public actors to make good decisions that benefitted the people. This doubt was more often aimed at the local public actors, which might be explained by the fact that the municipality's decisions more directly affected their everyday lives. Another main difference could also be found between young persons who were active in some kind of youth councils, interest groups or voluntary organisations and other youths who were not. According to the country reports, the former youths maintained that it was possible to influence political processes even if it was demanding to do so. The latter group were more sceptical about their possibilities to influence society. If they were asked for their opinions, they did not believe that the public actor in question really was interested in meeting their wishes and demands. Rather, they considered such consultations as a way for the public actor to look good or tick a box. An interesting exception was young persons from privileged city districts. Not only did they express a more positive attitude towards public actors they also felt that they could have an influence in society. These youths described that they could exercise influence directly but more often indirectly through their parents.

According to the country reports, most participants believed that it was easier to influence matters at local level than regionally or nationally. In fact, the examples mentioned in the country reports focused on concrete everyday matters of a local nature, for example, issues relating to their tenement houses, schools, or the availability of leisure activities.

Many of the focus group participants expressed the opinion that they could have influence if they took the initiative to present their opinions to the right actor and sector. However, they might not know who the right actor should be or which authorities that were responsible for which issues. Young persons who had not been active in formal arenas for participation and influence, tend to lack the more bureaucratic language that often is necessary to find one's way around the public sector and the municipal political infrastructure. According to the Norway report, this was especially true for youths from non-privileged city districts. The ability to use this type of language is a kind of cultural capital that allows some youths to e.g. get involved in local politics in order to influence the local development. Nevertheless, the youths commonly believed that they could find the necessary information if they looked for it. The Finland report mentioned that some youths believed that this search for information would be difficult and laborious. Consequently, some young persons, who believed that they were able to influence their surroundings considered it too difficult to actually attempt to do so in practice.



Influence – public initiatives

The Greenland and Faroe Islands reports both indicated that the participating youths were a bit reluctant and seemed to have doubts about what to answer when it came to questions of local influence. They described different things they were dissatisfied with, but they were not trying to influence the situations. The Åland report mentioned that the youths described how they had been encouraged by politicians who visited schools. However, they pointed out that discussions do not always lead to change. Therefore, the youths wished that decision-makers and other societal actors would enable young persons more direct ways to influence.

According to the other country reports, youth councils were the most common form of organised initiatives focusing on youth influence. This kind of councils was described as a group of non-partisan youths functioning as an advisory body for the municipal council. The youth councils mainly focused on municipal services for young persons and on projects with relevance for youths. The selection process of the council's members varied both between and within countries. In general, the members were elected at secondary and upper secondary schools and youth clubs in the municipality. In general, this type of targeted efforts aimed at strengthening young persons' influence in local politics and social projects were important for the youths involved. The Norway report pointed out that youths who had experiences from such councils expressed themselves differently and their knowledge of and commitment to societal issues were clearer. The Sweden report described that the participants had mixed experiences of trying to influence the society in this way. While some youths were positive about youth councils, others stated that public actors that arranged different kinds of youth councils mainly wished to create a positive image and were not that interested in changing anything.

Political influence

Only a few of the youths were members of political parties and considered this as an important arena. These young persons believed that the politicians in the municipality actually listened to them and took them seriously. Influence were more commonly sought within schools and civil society organisations and the aforementioned youth councils. The fact that youth influence commonly related to separate arenas rather than different political decision-making arenas appeared to make it difficult to transfer experiences of influence e.g. in school to more standard political settings. Most country reports stated that the focus group participants rarely said that they were interested in politics. At the same time, almost all of them expressed clear opinions on political issues, such as urban planning, community services, infrastructure, integration and equality issues. Even if these areas are commonly defined as political, the youths did not consider them to be a part of what they considered to be "politics". Thus, it appeared as if the youths had a rather narrow definition of politics as party politics. To be interested of politics was mainly understood as following the different political parties. Consequently, many young persons were not interested in getting involved politically. At the same time, they were often prepared to protest against political decisions with the potential to affect them negatively. As the Sweden report pointed out, this meant that political commitment was related to protesting against ordinary political decisions, acts that the participants themselves did not consider to be a version of political commitment.

Roundup

To sum up, most young persons felt that they had influence in their homes and that their voices counted in the family context. When it came to influencing the local context, the participants had mixed experiences. Some believed influence was possible while others were more cynical and considered that public actors' invitations to influence local development were only a kind of window-dressing. Many youths expressed the belief that they could influence actions if they wanted to, and that they could find information on how to do so if they looked for it. Most of the participants did not consider themselves to be interested or engaged in politics. However, they were often engaged in issues that are of a political nature.



Participation

The third aspect of the concept social inclusion used in the country reports concerned young persons' opportunities for participation in various aspects of society including cultural, leisure and social activities, non-profit involvement and paid work.⁷

Young persons and different forms of social participation

All country reports mostly referred to the youth's participation in relation to organised sports or leisure activities. The availability of such activities mainly depended on where the persons in question lived. In more rural and sparsely populated areas or in vulnerable city districts, the young persons mainly spent their free time with friends, either outside or at home. They also spent time online playing games or being active on social media. Others spent their free time running or playing football. Furthermore, accessibility to leisure activities depended on the young persons' financial status. There might be attractive alternatives available, e.g. cinema, pubs or sport clubs and public swimming pools, but the young persons could not afford them. Some youths mentioned that they might not be aware of all activities that were on offer. Furthermore, several of the young persons in rural and sparsely populated areas as well as vulnerable city districts pointed out that if they wished to do something on their free time it was up to them to organise such activities. This worked for young persons who were interested in the same things as many others, but not for youths who had other interests. Some youths described how they had started to appreciate sports simply because it was the only thing available.

Focus group participants from more privileged city districts generally stated that there was a rich selection of different things to do in their free time if they wished to do so. Here time was mentioned as a common obstacle. The participating youths would like to be engaged in more activities, but they did not feel that they had time enough for everything they wanted to do, mainly because of their studies.

Several country reports brought up the fact that many young persons would like to engage in non- competitive sports. In general, sports for youths of around 15 years of

7. *About participation in general* – Norway report, p. 37–41, 58; Denmark report, p. 21, p. 23–25; Finland report, p. 27; Faeroe Island report, p. 10; Iceland report, p. 15–16; Sweden report, p. 63–64, 66; Åland report, p. 29–32. *About participation in relation to employment* – Finland report, p. 28; Greenland report, p. 23; Island report, p. 22, 34; Sweden report, p. 69–70

age aimed too ambitious for many of them. The Norway report mentioned that these youths either felt that they were not talented enough to continue, or because the training required affected both their schoolwork and other hobbies.

Both in rural and sparsely populated areas and vulnerable city districts, the participants described a lack of meeting places for older youths. The lack of places where you could meet up free of charge often made the youths hang out outdoors or in each other's homes. The importance of free meeting places appeared to be more important for the older youths since they in general had to pay with their own money, while the parents might pay for younger persons. The lack of meeting places was not mentioned as a problem by participants in privileged city districts.



Participation in the labour market

The country reports showed that the young persons' views of their potential to find jobs were very varied. Some youths stated that it was difficult to find work, especially since most jobs required academic educations. Others maintained that it was easy to find employment. Some participants said that many young persons did not bother to look for work. Many youths considered that their chances of finding a job were relatively good, but this presupposed that you were ready to take any job. The available jobs might neither be the jobs the youths wanted nor the ones that corresponded to their education – at least not in smaller towns and rural areas.

More young women than men stated that there were lots of jobs around. However, many of these jobs were of a contemporary nature, in areas that did not match their educations and mainly in female-dominated occupations in the public sector. Many of the young men did not share this view. In the areas, where the young women believed that it was rather easy to find a job, the young men stated that it was difficult to get a job since there were almost no vacancies where they lived. These

young men rarely mentioned job opportunities outside the local industries.

Even if many youths believed that there were jobs to be found if one was not too picky, others talked about the difficulty to get established in the labour market, when job experience often was a requirement for getting a job in the first place. Several young persons mentioned the crucial role personal contacts or social networks played for finding employment since the competition was fierce.



Roundup

To sum up, the country reports described youths as mainly discussing participation in relation to sports and leisure activities. While the youths from more privileged city districts maintained that there were almost too much to do (and too little time), young persons in rural and sparsely populated areas as well as vulnerable city districts pointed out that if they wished to do something on their free time it was up to them to organise such activities. Many participants highlighted the lack of meeting places for older youths. When it came to participation in the labour market, the views differed quite a lot. Many youths believed that there were jobs out there if you lowered your expectations. Others stated that it was difficult to find employment.



Public sector services

The fourth aspect of the overarching concept social inclusion concerned young persons' access to basic public sector services, including access to education, healthcare and medical services, public transport and housing.⁸

Education

According to the country reports, most of the participants were generally pleased with their educational opportunities. Consequently, they did not discuss the availability, accessibility and quality of the education as such. Instead, the main focus was on the availability and accessibility of further education in the municipality or region in which they lived. Many of the youths, both those living in vulnerable city districts and those living in rural and sparsely populated areas were concerned over the lack of options for their upper secondary education. While the rural areas often lacked upper secondary schools, the upper secondary schools in vulnerable city districts tended to only offer a couple of the national study programs. Consequently, many of the youths had to commute in order to continue their studies at upper secondary level. These commutes could be quite long, which in turn led to long days and fatigue.

Some of the youths from vulnerable city districts, who had enrolled in an upper secondary school in another city district in order to study a certain study program, said that they felt insecure if the school was situated in a more privileged district of the city. This insecurity was felt both within the school premises and in the city district at large. In this way, the young persons from more vulnerable city districts experienced that they were seen as a threat to the inhabitants of the more privileged areas.

For some participants a daily commute was not even a choice since the school was too far away. These youths had to move away from their family and find housing in

8. *About public sector services in general* – Denmark report, p. 44, 63; Iceland report, p. 19; Åland report, p. 34 – 35
About housing – Denmark report, p. 42–43, 48; Finland report, p. 30; Faeroe Islands report, p. 10–11, 13; Greenland report, p. 23; Iceland report, p. 23; Norway report, p. 46–47; Sweden report, p. 87
About healthcare – Denmark report, p. 42–44, 52–53; Finland report, p. 30; Greenland report, p. 24; Iceland report, p. 31; Norway report, p. 50; Sweden report, p. 82
About public transport – Denmark report, p. 21, 39–42; Finland report, p. 29; Faeroe Islands report, p. 10; Greenland report, p. 21; Iceland report, p. 20; Sweden report, p. 85; Åland report, p. 33
About education – Denmark report, p. 36, 39–40, 43, 62; Finland report, p. 29; Faeroe Islands report, p. 11, 13–14; Greenland report, p. 23; Norway report, p. 26, 29, 35, 43–45; Sweden report, p. 80

the proximity of the school. In other words, they had to start taking care of themselves at the age of 15–16 years. Additionally, they had to stop engaging in any activities in their home areas during the school weeks and find a new social context during the school weeks. The youths, who had to continue their education at an upper secondary school in another municipality, pointed out that this situation also had a financial impact on them or their families. The longer and more costly transports to and from school or the increased cost of living for students living away from their families might not always be covered by the available state subsidies. The participating youths from more privileged city districts rarely mentioned the lack of educational choices, mainly because all variants of upper secondary school study programs were available nearby. Consequently, these youths mainly focused on the stress of studying at upper secondary level in order to get the grades needed to continue their studies at college or university level.



In general, colleges or universities are situated in major cities. Consequently, the youths who wanted to continue their education beyond upper secondary level, encountered the same challenges as mentioned above – if they did not already live in a university city. Either they had to commute in order to continue their studies or they had to move away from their family and find housing in the city in question. This situation appeared to be accepted by the youths who did not live near a university. If they wished to continue their studies, they had to leave their home and their social context. Even persons who lived in a university city might have to move to another city in order to get admitted to the study program of their choice.

The smaller regions and countries had fewer options available and some of the youths mentioned that they might have to move abroad to find the study program of their choice. For example, the Iceland report mentioned that you cannot study to become a veterinarian in Iceland, since the training is not offered in any of the

country's universities.

According to the Finland report, the Finnish-Swedish youths had significantly fewer study choices than the Finnish-speaking majority population. As a consequence, some of these youths mentioned that they considered to continue their studies in Sweden since that would allow them to study in their mother tongue.

Healthcare and medical services

According to the country reports, the young persons had quite different views on the accessibility and quality of the healthcare system. The youths' main concerns related to mental health issues and their positive and negative experiences of the healthcare system – mainly on local level, e.g. general practitioners, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and other contact persons.

In general, young persons from the more privileged city districts considered that they could access different kinds of healthcare services. However, participants in vulnerable city districts and more rural and sparsely populated areas had a more critical view of the available healthcare services as had some of the LGBTQ youths. In these areas, the participants' dissatisfaction mainly concerned the treatment they had received when they had tried to seek help. Some of the youths in these areas described how the healthcare staff did not take them seriously. Instead, they seemed to try to get rid of them as soon as possible. They were often sent between different healthcare instances, e.g. from the local healthcare centre to the regional hospital and back again. Some participants mentioned that they had lacked support to deal with neuropsychiatric diagnoses and other disabilities, which in turn made it more difficult to succeed in school. In sparsely populated areas, the participants describe a concern that the care is far away from where they live.

Several of the youths considered that the local healthcare centres constituted a kind of free low-threshold service that might be open during the afternoons and evenings when they had time off school. Such free low-threshold healthcare services was repeatedly mentioned as important for the youths or as possible improvements of the current situation. In connection to this overarching request, the youths mentioned a wish for extended opening hours at their healthcare centres, maybe with drop-in times also on weekends. In addition, shorter telephone queues and above all shorter waiting times for appointments were highlighted as necessary ways to make the healthcare more accessible for all.

Some of the participants pointed out that there might be healthcare services available that they did not know existed. For example, the Iceland report described how a young woman who wanted to see a psychologist did not know about a program where she could get this type of treatment for free. In general, there appeared to be a need for more information both in the schools and in other places frequented by young persons. The Iceland report also mentioned that the focus group participants also wanted more education on alcoholism, depression, anxiety, computer-game addictions and other health-related issues.

Public transport

According to the country reports, the young persons who were most dependent on and spent most time travelling by public transport were also the ones who experienced the biggest problems with its shortcomings. Young persons living in larger cities commonly described the public transport as well-functioning and frequent although somewhat expensive. However, both the youths in vulnerable and more privileged city districts appeared to take for granted that they could move around the city quickly and easily. Some city youths did mention that public transport delays in the wintertime could become a real problem, especially if they attended schools in other city districts. Young persons living in more rural and sparsely populated areas generally described public transport as deficient, expensive, and even non-existing. Nevertheless, most of them had to use public transport on a daily basis, even if it complicated their daily lives because of low frequency and unreliable timetables.



Overall, the youths' mobility options determined what they could do and when. Most young persons considered public transport to be expensive but cycling and walking were sometimes viable options for city youths when the distances tended to be shorter. In more rural and sparsely populated areas, public transport was still expensive but also very sparse. In these areas, the young persons often needed a car in order to get around. Consequently, they also wished to acquire driver's licenses in order to increase their mobility and freedom. However, acquiring a driver's licence and accessing a car, were commonly too expensive for most young persons, who had fewer resources and less money than adults.

According to many of the young persons living in rural areas, the public transport was limited to a couple of buses a day, which matched the beginning and end of the school days. Thus, the youths could not leave school earlier even if they had finished their classes for the day. Long days in combination with long-distance commute made it difficult for these youths to have any meaningful leisure time. Lack of public transport options or too expensive public transport outside of the larger cities affected the young persons' access to further education or work, since their opportunities to commute to larger cities were limited. It also made it unfeasible to use a larger city's facilities such as swimming pools, concert halls and cinemas and to meet friends or family outside of the local residential areas.

Housing

All country reports highlighted housing as both an important issue and a challenge for most young persons. Many of the youths lived at home with their parents, either because of their age and their need for parental support or because of the difficulties in finding housing. Across the Nordic countries, most youths agreed that it was difficult to find housing and especially affordable housing. Housing that was within the means of youths who either worked as unskilled workers or studied and supported themselves on some kind of student loans were very difficult to find.

Most of the youths who lived in larger cities stated that the price of housing in their cities was incredibly high. The waiting time for rental flats was very long. At the same time, the rents might also be too high. Nevertheless, many young persons from the larger cities maintained that it might not be impossible to find a flat or room in a dormitory, if one were willing to live with others, lower one's standards or live in the outskirts of the cities. However, several of these youths said that they considered moving out of the city and either commute to the city or find work outside the city once they needed to find more permanent housing. According to the Iceland report, some youths even considered moving abroad because of the high accommodation costs, which limited their options.

Outside of the larger cities, opinions on the housing shortage differed. Some youths said that there was almost impossible to get housing, while others stated that it was easy for find housing, e.g. through social media channels – at least if you were raised in the area. However, the housing situation in the cities also influenced the youths outside these areas since many of the participating youths had to move in order to continue their education. This further increased the pressure to find affordable housing in the city areas.

Overall, the country reports described a situation where the young persons appeared to have accepted that the housing situation is and will be difficult for the foreseeable future. It might be easier to find housing outside of the major cities because the rent is cheaper and the housing prices were lower, but on the other hand, the job opportunities tended to be fewer in these areas. This equation was difficult to solve for most of the Nordic youths.

Roundup

To sum up, the views of the accessibility and quality of public services varied depending on the young persons' domicile and the public sector in question. There was a lack of upper secondary schools, or schools with a variety of study programs in most areas, with the exception of the privileged city districts. As a result, many youths had to commute long distances or move closer to school. Since universities are mainly situated in the major cities, the youths who wished to continue their studies had to move away from their home area. Young persons living in more rural and sparsely populated areas and in vulnerable city districts expressed concerns over the accessibility of healthcare in general, and mental healthcare in particular. They had also both experienced not being taken seriously and being treated without respect. Young persons living in cities were in general used to a functioning public transport system. However, the youths living in more rural and sparsely populated areas commonly described public transport as deficient and expensive. Nevertheless, most of them had to use public transport on a daily basis. Finally, the housing situation for most young persons in the Nordic countries appeared to be difficult and affordable housing was sparse.



Social relations

The fifth dimension of the overall concept social inclusion concerned young persons' feeling of social inclusion in society at local, regional and national level as well as their social relationships and opportunities for support from family and social networks. This fifth aspect also included questions regarding young persons' vulnerability in terms of discrimination, harassment and bullying.⁹

When it came to questions of social relations, the country reports mainly discussed social relations in the form of emotional and practical support from friends and families. Many of the youths also pointed out that it always helped – or even was necessary – to know “the right person” in order to for example, find a flat or a job. Even if the parents remained the strongest support for the youths, most of them mentioned that they also had at least one friend who functioned as a stable support. Many of them also mentioned persons who they had met on social media or through online gaming, as close friends.

Some young persons said that they can choose who they share their experiences and problems with their parents or their friends. Other youths stated that they were only able to talk to their parents. Some youths could only talk to their friends since they did not want to share their experiences with their parents or family. For strictly confidential matters, some youths preferred to talk to a psychologist, while others maintained that they mainly talked to their families, friends or partners when it came to confidential matters.

9. *About social relations* – Denmark report, p. 21–22, 47–48, 57; Finland report, p. 33–34; Faeroe Islands report, p. 11–13; Greenland report, p. 19, 23–24; Iceland report, p. 21–22, 24; Norway report, p. 29, 49–50; Sweden report, p. 100; Åland report, p. 39–40



According to the country reports, most of participants knew people in their neighbourhoods, with exception of the youths who had recently moved to a new location. The youths who lived in smaller communities did not only know their parents and siblings, but also a larger group of other relatives who often lived nearby. The young persons who had recently moved to their residential area tried to get to know people there. These youths described how it was hard to make new friends or keep the old friendships going. They tried to get to know people in their schools, through civil society organisations or in through shared hobbies. However, some young persons stated that they did not belong to or felt involved in any social communities.



Discrimination

When asked whether the participating youths had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment in their everyday lives, most of them answered that it did not happen on an everyday basis. However, it appeared as if the majority of the participants had experienced some kind of discrimination and unfair treatment in their lives, although this differed significantly between individuals, mainly depending on their age, ethnic origin or place of abode, sexual orientation or gender identity, psychosocial health status, eventual disabilities or socio-economic status. These youths had more repetitive and systematic experiences of discrimination. Several country reports mentioned that the participating youths tended to emphasise that most experiences depended on the individual's attitude and approach to life. The Denmark report mentioned that this kind of position could be based on the reluctance of the young persons to be categorised as belonging to a certain group that were subjected to more structural generalisations and discrimination.¹⁰

Discrimination – age

According to all country reports, the young persons experienced age discrimination in many situations. Many youths described how their opinions and problems rarely counted in relation to older more established persons within the public sector. Few civil servants and politicians asked for their opinions in the first place and even fewer seemed to care what they actually had to say. This kind of age discrimination was worst for the youths who sought support from the healthcare system – especially if their problems were related to their mental health, like depression, anxiety or neuro-psychological diagnoses.

Many of the participants said that it was more difficult being an older youth than being in your earlier teens. Many of these older youths described how they did not really fit in anywhere. They were not children, so they were not included in the public sector's efforts, like organised activities and open places to meet up in free of

10. *About discrimination in general* – Denmark report, p. 49–50, 52, 55 – 56; Finland report, p. 34; Iceland report p. 15, 18, 25–28; Norway report, p. 26, 45; Sweden report, p. 102, 131
About discrimination in relation to ethnicity – Denmark report, p. 35, 48–51, 56, 59, 62; Finland report, p. 21, 25, 28–29, 31, 34; Iceland report, p. 27, 32–33; Norway report, p. 24, 51–52; Sweden report, p. 70
About discrimination in relation to LGBTI issues – Denmark report, p. 51, 53; Finland report p. 25, 31, 35; Iceland report, p. 15, 25, 28, 30, 32, 34–35; Norway report, p. 29, 40, 53; Sweden report, p. 30–31, 38, 84
About discrimination in relation to gender – Denmark report, p. 25, 53–54, 62; Finland report, p. 20–21, 23, 31, 34; Greenland, p. 19; Norge report, p. 27, 35, 41, 52; Iceland report, p. 15, 18, 25–28; Sweden report, p. 70, 88
About age discrimination – Denmark report p. 23–24, 48, 51–52, 54, 62;

charge. At the same time, they were not considered – and did not consider themselves – to be adults. They lacked the money and resources that were needed to be treated as adults, even if they had reached the age of majority.



Discrimination – gender

According to the country reports, gender was rarely talked about in terms of discrimination. Nevertheless, many focus groups participants mentioned a number of areas where they thought that their gender influenced their position and possibilities. These areas related to city spaces, schools and the labour market. Most country reports stated that young women living in cities felt insecure and vulnerable when they were out on the town. Some things that triggered their insecurity were men who loudly commented their physical appearances or called them names. The girls often mentioned that their parents worried about them when they were out at night, which by itself turned into a stressful moment. On the other hand, most of the young men from vulnerable city districts and the youths living in more rural areas maintained that they mostly could decide when they returned home without any parental concerns. According to the country reports, the few youths who mentioned that they had been physical attacked or been in fights were all young men.

The focus group interviews sometimes showed differences between the opinions of young men and women. Some girls were of the opinion that the school and their teachers required more of them than of the boys. The Sweden report described how girls and boys in more rural and sparsely populated areas viewed their possibilities to enter the labour market quite differently. As mentioned earlier, young women stated that both the public sector and the local businesses needed labour, especially in female-dominated occupations like childcare, school and care of the elderly. However, the young men in the same areas stated that there may be some job

openings, but mainly at the local industries. They did not consider any of the female-dominated occupations. The Denmark country report described how a group of young women experienced that they did not have the same opportunities as boys and young men in the same residential area. According to them, young boys were the target group for most public initiatives. The young women explained this circumstance as a case of rewarding those who shout the loudest. Other gender equality issues mentioned during the focus groups concerned the possibility of advancing in working life and the salary level. According to some young women, they had to perform better than the young men. They had also experienced how they had received a lower salary at work than the boys, even though the boys had less work experience.

Discrimination – ethnicity

The majority of the country reports described how youths who belonged to an ethnic minority group experienced more discrimination in the interaction with other youths and adults, but also in the education and healthcare sectors. This situation were exacerbated by the residence areas of the young persons. Many of the country reports described how segregation permeated both cities and more rural areas. The Iceland report mentioned a small village with only 200 inhabitants that nevertheless managed to segregate the Icelanders and the ethnic minorities with some kind of "iron curtain".

The so-called visible minorities were more exposed to discrimination than other youths. Many of the young persons from an ethnic minority were concerned over the fact that their opportunities for further studies and paid work were not equal to those of the majority population. These youths also discussed the limited opportunities for visible minorities to integrate into society if the majority of the population was not willing to include them in their everyday lives.

The participants with non-Nordic background approached everyday incidents differently. Some youths stated that they rarely interpreted behaviour, statements and situations as discriminatory, while others were much more aware of how they often were stereotyped by others. According to the Denmark report, youths belonging to an ethnic minority actively sought to be tolerant and chose not to react to public insults and discrimination, but at the same time their negative experiences diminishes their sense of belonging. Some young persons from vulnerable city districts described how they were met with prejudice in the city, because of their physical appearance or religious attire. They had experienced verbal insults, but it was more common that they were met with looks and a certain body language that the youths experienced as negative and discriminatory. It was mainly girls with headscarves and young men who were considered as criminal who were harassed in the public sphere.

According to the Sweden report, participants living in vulnerable city districts said that discrimination made it more difficult for them to get a job. However, some of them maintained that discrimination did not lead to them not getting a job, but they did have to fight harder to find employment. They mentioned strategies they used to deal circumvent discrimination in an employment process. Some changed the address in the CV to an address in a more privileged city district, or they changed

the name on the CV, if their own names did not sound traditionally Swedish. However, this did not apply to the young men, who arrived as unaccompanied minors, who stated that they had applied for lots of jobs without finding employment.

The Finland report mentioned how some of the youths from the linguistic minority groups felt that parts of the majority population did not consider them to be “real” Finns. This affected their feeling of being a full citizen. Finnish-Swedish youths, who wanted to be serviced by the authorities in Swedish – one of Finland’s two official languages – described how their requests appeared to arouse irritation and criticism. Furthermore, the Finnish-Swedish youths maintained that they had significantly fewer choices than the Finnish-speaking majority population when it came to education.



Discrimination – LGBTQ

The majority of the country reports described how youths who belonged to a sexual minority group experienced more discrimination in the interaction with other youths and adults, but also in the education and healthcare sectors. A number of the LGBTQ youths described many years of bullying at school with limited opportunities for activities in their free time, mainly for fear of being exposed there as well. Other LGBTQ youths said that they rarely were exposed to prejudice and discrimination related to their gender or sexual orientation in the public sphere. They were not a visible minority and could mostly go under the radar if they chose to do so. However, some of the LGBTQ youths mentioned incidents of harassment, for example when they were out on town.

Traditional gender norms, with mothers and fathers defining the nuclear family were restricting for the LGBTQ youths, as other forms of the nuclear family were

marginalised. Yet another concern for these young persons was sports that were strongly gender defined, which limited the participation of some LGBTQ persons. The LGBTQ youths also described situations where they were faced with a choice. For example, if they were asked if they had a husband and had to explain that they were queer or homosexual, or when they went to a doctor's appointment. Even if the youths themselves attributed e.g. depression and anxiety to discrimination and non-acceptance, the healthcare staff still tended to seek the underlying reason for their mental health problems in their sexual orientation or identity. In these kinds of situations, the young persons in question always had to assess whether they should "come out of the closet" or not.

According to some country reports, the LGBTQ participants did not feel the sense of belonging to their residence area that other persons did, except when they lived on a university campus. Youths who lived in more rural and sparsely populated areas mentioned that they felt somewhat exposed. First of all, there were not that many young persons living in the area and secondly there were not really any places to go to if you belonged to a sexual minority. The situation was different online. Young LGBTQ persons found other communities to belong to, and many of the LGBTQ youths felt that they belonged to a LGBTQ community more than anything. On the other hand, young persons who participated in social media debates on LGBTQ issues were exposed to discrimination and hatred on social media and comment fields. Nevertheless, the LGBTQ youths particularly highlighted activities in a civil society organisation for young LGBTQ persons as an incredibly important community. Some said that it was the first social community they felt that they belonged to and where they could be themselves.

Some young LGBTQ persons were committed to create safe spaces in real life as well, where they could share experiences with others who, like themselves, had identities that break with society's norms.

Roundup

All country reports described how many of the young persons were discriminated against in their everyday lives. Many youths were quite used to being discriminated on the ground of their age. Some of the young women said that they had to perform better to be treated in the same way as boys. Besides these discrimination grounds, the young persons said that they were discriminated or treated differently because they belonged to ethnic, religious, linguistic or sexual minorities, or had need of social and psychological support. Some of the young persons chose to not interpret this type of incidents as discrimination, while others considered this kind of treatment to be clear cases of discrimination.



Differences depending on domicile

According to the country reports, the situations and options available for young persons were highly dependent on their domicile. The participating youths did often contrast their situation with that of young persons living in other places. A main division was found between youths living in smaller towns or in more rural and sparsely populated areas on the one hand and young persons living in larger cities on the other hand. The situation of the youths living in major cities further depended on the city district in which they lived. The distinctions between these three main groups have been mentioned in connection with the chapters on the different aspects of social inclusion. However, they are worthy of a separate section, since the differences are significant.¹¹

Cities – vulnerable and privileged city districts

Living in cities were commonly associated with less social control but also with the feeling of being anonymous. The young persons who lived in major cities distinguished between the city as a whole and the city district in which they lived. This meant that even if they on one level maintained that they lived in the city, there sense of belonging was more connected to their own neighbourhood. The youths were very much aware of the differences between more privileged and vulnerable city districts. Often, they felt at home in their own parts of the city but quite exposed in other city districts. However, as the youths grew older, they tended to lose some of their connection to their city districts when they no longer attended school or participated in leisure activities there.

In general, the young persons who lived in major cities were satisfied with the availability of public services and in particular the public transport. They were simply

11. *About larger cities in general* – Denmark report, p. 23, 61; Finland report, p. 27, 29–30; Faeroe Islands report, p. 10; Norway report, p. 24, 28, 34, 46, 51; *About privileged city districts* – Finland report, p. 21; Norway report, p. 26–27, 29, 35, 38, 40–41, 43–44, 49, 55; Sweden report, p. 34, 47, 63, 66, 69, 80, 82, 85, 87
About vulnerable city districts – Denmark report, p. 21, 25, 30; Finland report, p. 25; Iceland report, p. 33; Norway report, p. 33, 35, 38–39, 40–41, 44, 49, 51, 58; Sweden report, p. 31–32, 36–37, 46, 64–66, 69, 70, 81–82, 85, 88, 103
About rural and sparsely populated areas – Denmark report, p. 29, 40–42, 52, 57, 61; Finland report, p. 22, 28 – 29, 31; Faeroe Islands report, p. 10; Iceland report, p. 18–19, 22–23, 29–30; Norway report, p. 24, 27, 34, 44–46, 49–50, 56; Sweden report, p. 30, 32, 35, 37, 46, 63–64, 66, 70, 80, 84, 85, 88

not limited by public transport as youths living in more rural and sparsely populated areas.

Privileged city districts

According to the country reports, young persons living in more privileged city districts appeared to feel a self-evident sense of belonging to their country. Furthermore, these youths expressed that they felt that they could influence society, either directly or indirectly through their parents. Some youths described how their parents asked for their opinions on various issues passed their suggestions on to those who decide on the issue in question.

Some of the young persons from privileged city districts mentioned that they knew they had better or much better opportunities in life than other youths. They went to good and reputable schools and came from good families with a high level of education. They believed that that would give them more opportunities later in life. The youths in question did also mention the fact that their parents, or their friends' parents, were connected to people with political influence. At the same time, these youths often mentioned the stress and pressure they felt in their everyday lives mainly from their studies.



Most of the youths from privileged city districts stated that they have a wide range of leisure activities to choose from. However, they often felt compelled to opt out of activities since they spent much of their time doing homework. The young persons maintained that their parents encouraged them to engage in leisure activities. The parents commonly payed for the activities and also drove their children to and from them. Lack of meeting places was never mentioned as a problem by the participants

from privileged city districts.

The participants in privileged city districts were concerned over a housing shortage, which some of them was exacerbated by the lack of reasonably priced housing, especially in the city districts that the youths wanted to live. Some of them discussed moving outside the city in order to find housing there. Others planned to move from the city simply to try something new or to study at university level.

Vulnerable city districts

The country reports indicated that the youths living in vulnerable city districts did not feel that unquestionable sense of belonging the young persons from more privileged districts did. These youths had to consider how they were perceived and treated by others and the extent to which they felt that the public sector services treated them correctly. Young persons in vulnerable city districts also mentioned that they had a feeling of insecurity when they travelled to other places, both within their cities and further away. According to many of them, they were sometimes met with name calling, discrimination and disdain. The segregation between their city districts and the rest of the cities made it feel like they went abroad when they took the bus to the city centre. Some of the participants from vulnerable city districts also said that they wished that they had an upper secondary school in their district, since they were exposed to harassment in the public environment in more privileged areas. Young persons from the more vulnerable districts who attended school in areas with higher socio-economic status also described experiences of recurring discrimination both by other students and by the teachers and other school staff. When it came to the public transport, many of the participants described how they felt a sense of belonging to the public transport route that went to their own city district. They considered their own bus or underground lines to be a part of their home areas.

Youths living in more vulnerable city districts often expressed a distrust of public actors' the willingness and ability to use the tax money to improve the situation for residents. Instead, many young persons maintained that they had to engage in local change in order to counteract negative tendencies and to create services and activities that were missing in their districts. Youths, who had no experience of working in civil society organisations or youth councils, often maintained that they did not know how to influence decisions that affected them. Even if most of the young persons from vulnerable city districts said that they had large networks, these networks rarely included persons with any political influence. Thus, their social networks appeared to be less influential and the youths did not mention personal networks as important for job opportunities or opportunities for influence in society.

As mentioned earlier, several of the young persons in more vulnerable city districts highlighted the need of free low-threshold public services, especially when it came to healthcare and medical services. They described how the healthcare system did not take their illnesses and injuries seriously. The youths wished that there should be shorter waiting times to receive care for mental health problems. Furthermore, they wanted treatment centres for different diagnoses in the vicinity of their own neighbourhood rather than in areas with a higher socio-economic standard.

In general, the young persons from vulnerable city districts had less leisure activity

options than other city areas. However, most of these youths stated that they were satisfied with the leisure activities that existed. Some of the young person's said that they missed places where they could hang out with friends. Other youths mentioned the local youth clubs as important meeting places, while young people from other places often met at each other's homes, at school, in the sports association or out in the city. Some of the young persons stated that there were no arranged activities or meeting places for girls in these city districts. According to them, the girls who would like to hang out in the youth centre run the risk of gaining a bad reputation. There was a tendency for boys from vulnerable city districts to use the local urban space and its facilities to a greater extent than other youths.

The focus groups in vulnerable city districts did not only discuss the lack of affordable housing alternatives. They also discussed whether – and under what conditions – they could remain there in the future. This depended on whether it was possible to reverse the negative developments in their areas.



Small towns, rural and sparsely populated areas

Many of the participants in smaller towns and in sparsely populated and rural areas mentioned how they felt that they and their home places were forgotten by decision-makers on different levels. They described how national and regional decisions and priorities often had unfair consequences for their everyday lives, simply because they did not live in a city. It appeared as if no one really cared whether central or regional decisions worked for them as well.

In general, the young persons living in smaller towns, rural and sparsely populated areas did not expect much public service in their residential areas. Some of the youths from small places said that they believed that they relatively easily could influence local issues if they wanted to. At the same time, they emphasised that it

was easier for young persons in larger cities to organise around specific issues of importance. For many of the youths, their main possibility to influence their community were through some kind of non-profit commitment. Sometimes, they took over the responsibility for public services in order to keep them running. At other times, they organised to create a service based on an identified shortcoming in their area.

Others described how people had "given up" and moved away, since the access to various types of public and commercial services and leisure opportunities became increasingly limited. According to the country reports, the young persons who lived outside the major cities described how it was expected of them to move to the larger cities in order to find education, career opportunities and new communities. The youths in these areas either had to be ready to commute on a daily or weekly basis or consider moving to one of the larger cities to be able to continue their education. Depending on the facilities in their home areas, some of the young persons had to move already as 16-years-olds, since the nearest upper secondary school was too far away to allow for a daily commute. All youths living outside of the major cities had to move if they wished to continue their education on college or university level.

Many of the youths living in more rural or sparsely populated areas mentioned that there was a limited access to proper healthcare. The participants were concerned over the fact that healthcare and medical services could only be found far away from where they lived. When hospitals and other healthcare units had closed down, the youths said that the challenge was to be able to get to a place where they could find the healthcare they needed when they needed it.

All youths outside of the larger cities stated that they were very dependent on reliable public transport, in order to arrive to school or work on time. However, the public transport was often limited to a couple of buses and train departures per day. In smaller towns and more rural and sparsely populated areas, the scope of leisure activities was limited. Here, activities such as football, handball and working on cars were the norm. The youths who did not find these activities appealing, had difficulties finding other interest communities. There appeared to be a resignation among the young persons who preferred to do other things on their free time. The youths, whose leisure time was largely occupied by one of the area's sports described that they had plenty to do on their free time. At the same time, some of them said that they had learned to appreciate sports because that was what was available. In more rural and sparsely populated areas, the focus group participants maintained that there was a general shortage of meeting places, especially for older youths. The young persons in sparsely populated areas said that they spent time in each other's homes but that the lack of more neutral places made it difficult to meet new persons. Different activities were more easily accessible in larger cities but since public transport was limited, the young persons who wished to participate in these activities were completely dependent on parents or friends with driver's licenses – if they did not have access to a car themselves.

According to the country reports, young persons living in smaller towns or rural areas mentioned the problem with social control in form of prejudices and rumours. The downside of being part of a smaller community where everybody knew everybody else was that rumours spread quickly. Persons who had gained a "bad" reputation had difficulties moving beyond these opinions, because people remembered earlier

incidents.

Several young persons in smaller towns and rural areas talked about the difficulty of gaining a foothold in the labour market, especially since the employers presupposed that new employees should have work experience. Access to social networks was crucial for finding a job. Some of the young persons talked about lack of job opportunities in their areas. It was difficult to find work, let alone one that corresponded to the person's education.

Many of the youths living outside the major cities also mentioned a housing shortage. However, their main concern for this group of young persons was not so much if they could find housing in the future. They worried over the survival of their hometowns and areas and if they could find work and public services allowing them to live there in the future.

Roundup

According to the country reports, the conditions and opportunities for the Nordic youths strongly depended on where they lived. Basically, there is a divide between young persons living in privileged city districts in larger cities and youths living in smaller towns, rural and sparsely populated areas and more vulnerable city districts in larger cities. The former group felt a sense of belonging to their residential area and to the country as a whole. They had opportunities to participate in all kinds of activities and influence their surroundings. The public services were close by and mostly a non-issue, since they were available and functioning. The range of leisure activities were wide. They also had social networks that usually included prominent persons that were important when finding employment.

The other youths living outside these city districts had a more problematic view of their sense of belonging to the country in question. Their views on their possibilities of participation and influence varied but they did not always trust the politicians and the public sector to have their best interest at heart. Public services were not always at hand or of good quality. Furthermore, the general treatment these youths met in different parts of the public sector was often problematic. There were not so many available leisure activities and their social networks, although large, did not include any influential persons.

The only thing that appeared to be a problem for all participants were the lack of affordable housing alternatives.



Recommendations

The country reports' recommendations varied quite substantially in numbers, specificity, and breadth. However, the point of departure for the recommendations remained the same. The aim was to ensure that children and young persons should have the best conditions to grow up and become of age while they were able to influence these conditions themselves. In order to strengthen the youths' ability to influence their own lives, they must be treated with dignity and respect, and as equals in all aspects of their lives, including their encounters with public services and the welfare system at large. The recommendations have been summed up under seven headings; politics, public sector services in general, the educational system, public transport, leisure activities, knowledge and awareness-raising, and focus on vulnerable city districts and more rural and sparsely populated areas. It is worth noting that none of the recommendations in the country reports concerned housing, since it appeared to be a common problem for almost all youth persons in the Nordic region.¹²

Politics

The decision-makers at different levels should work to increase the election turnout of young persons. This should be done by increasing the youths' interest and trust in the democratic system.

Legislation and youth policies should be reviewed in order to strengthen routines ensuring young persons' concrete participation and influence. In addition, the legislation and policies must be able to counteract the marginalisation and discrimination of certain groups of young persons.

12. *Recommendations* – Denmark report, p. 63; Finland report, p. 15; Faeroe Islands report, p. 6; Norway report, p. 59; Sweden report, p. 110; Åland report, p. 42



Public sector services in general

The public sector should develop clearly inclusive practices including real dialogue between the youths and the professionals. This was deemed necessary both in order to recognise the young persons' knowledge and experiences and in order to develop services and support that actually meet the needs of the young persons.

The work for gender equality, discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment should be intensified to make it easier for all youths to get the support and services they need.

Professionals working in the public sector, especially in the schools and in the social and healthcare sectors, should increase their knowledge of gender normative thinking, the conditions of ethnic, religious and sexual minorities.

The availability and accessibility of healthcare and medical services should increase and the queues, especially for mental health services should be shortened.

Young persons' knowledge about the public sector's support and services should increase and their opportunities to contact authorities at different levels and also provide feedback should be simplified. Most importantly, the youths' knowledge of where and in what way they could get support in difficult life situations should increase.

The educational system

A systematic work should be initiated aimed at guaranteeing non-discrimination and counteract the schools' negative impact on personal self-esteem, social well-being and belonging. The efforts to end school bullying as well as sexual harassment and hate speech should intensify.

It is recommended that young persons in the last year of secondary school should be offered a course in political participation and involvement. Gender equality issues and gender roles should also be discussed more actively in the schools. The youths should also be offered more education on for example, alcoholism, depression, anxiety and computer-game addictions. There should also be more education on LGBTQ and other minority groups since these youths want to be normalised, instead of marginalised.

The conditions for upper secondary education should be improved for young persons who lived far from a school that offered a study program that they wanted to study. For example, the accommodation allowance for students in upper secondary schools should increase.

The competition for study places at upper secondary and university level should decrease in order to give young persons better possibilities to study. Special encouragement better opportunities for continued education should be given to youths with immigrant background.

Public transport

The efforts to improve mobility within and between smaller towns and rural and sparsely populated areas should increase, for example by increasing the frequency of public transport, reducing ticket prices and offering young persons free travelling during vacations.

Leisure activities

More inclusive low-threshold meeting places for young persons should be established. Some meeting places or arrangements at these places should be more age specific, giving older youths – including young adults the opportunity to meet people in their own age group. Other arrangements should focus on mixed age groups. The availability of such meeting places will increase the opportunities for joint coexistence and the creation of collective and safe communities. Furthermore, they will improve the integration of youths who recently have moved to a residential area.

The possibilities for youths to engage in sports that are not focused on high-level performance should be expanded. The opportunities for children and youths from less well-off families to participate in hobby activities should increase, for example by developing leisure activities, which do not require elite investments or extensive financial resources.

In order to develop such low-threshold meeting places and leisure activities the

public sector should consider making public spaces available also during the evenings, for example by opening up the school premises outside school hours.



Knowledge and awareness-raising

Facts and statistics about the opinions of young persons and their conditions should be gathered in a structural manner, allowing for better insights into the lives of the Nordic youths.

Cooperation between youth associations, local political actors and researchers focusing on youth should be strengthened with the aim to develop joint youth projects and reports, seminars and meetings. It is important that the youths play a major role here – not only as participants, but also as advisors, organisers and evaluators.

More material about young persons should be included in public media – in TV, radio and on the internet. The media should emphasise the importance of reflecting a diversified population, especially among young people, from places with different degrees of urbanity in different parts of the country – both in program activities and news services.

Focus on vulnerable city districts and more rural and sparsely populated areas

The challenges and conditions for different youth groups in different parts of the country should be highlighted, with emphasis on more rural and sparsely populated areas as well as vulnerable city districts. Incentive grants to student organisations in these areas should be established in order to facilitate the young persons' activities and opportunities.



Conclusions linked to the Nordic Council of Ministers' vision

NABO is a pan-Nordic project about the social inclusion of young persons in their respective societies. Focusing on how youths talk about themselves and others in relation to five aspects of social inclusion – experiences of belonging, opportunities to influence, opportunities to participate, access to society's resources and services and support from family and social networks. This report has compared the Nordic youths' views on, and experiences of social inclusion based on eight country/region reports including three home rule regions – Åland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland – and five countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

In this conclusion, the general findings of the comparative report are presented and related to the NABO project's main question on social inclusion. The findings are then used to reflect on the Nordic Region's vision to become the world's most sustainable and integrated region, which was adopted by the Nordic prime ministers in August 2019.

General findings

The comparative report show that the Nordic youths in general paint very similar pictures of social inclusion in their countries or regions. The main differences between the reports were, unsurprisingly, found between the three home rule regions – Åland, the Faroe Islands and Greenland – and the countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The former three regions have much smaller populations, which appear to have influenced the participating youths' views on social inclusion. In most areas, their views align with the youths from more rural and sparsely populated areas in the five countries. Otherwise, the main differences between the participating youths appear to be present within all countries and regions. Consequently, the results of the comparisons between the reports mainly showed similarities – also in their internal differences.

The majority of the Nordic youths has strong ties to the place where they live and feel safe there. The sense of belonging to one's country differs between different groups. While youths from more privileged areas belonging to the country's linguistic and ethnic majority feel a natural sense of belonging, young persons living in outside

these city districts do not feel the same sense of belonging.

Most young persons feel that their opinions matter within their families. Some youths maintain that it is possible to influence local development while others are more uncertain. Many youths express the belief that they can influence actions if they really want to. The young persons are often engaged in issues of a political nature but do not consider themselves interested or engaged in politics.

Youths from more privileged city districts mention that there are almost too many things to do in their spare time. However, young persons living outside these areas say that they need to organise activities themselves if they wish to do something in their spare time. Many youths believe that it is possible to find jobs, especially in the healthcare or service sectors, while others say that it is difficult to find employment.

The accessibility and quality of public services vary depending on where the young persons live. There are a lack of upper secondary schools, or schools with a variety of study programs in most areas, except for the privileged city districts. This in turn means that many youths have to commute long distances or move closer to school. Since universities are situated in major cities, most young persons who wish to continue their studies must move away from their home area. Young persons living in more rural and sparsely populated areas and in vulnerable city districts are concerned over the inaccessibility of healthcare in general, and especially mental healthcare services. While young persons living in cities in general are used to a functioning public transport system, public transport in more rural and sparsely populated areas are described as deficient and expensive. The housing situation are difficult and affordable housing sparse or non-existing for most young persons in the Nordic region.

Many youths experience discrimination in their everyday lives. As young persons, they are used to being discriminated on the basis of their age. Young women believe that they have to perform better than boys to be treated the same way. Several young persons are discriminated or treated differently because they belong to ethnic, religious, linguistic or sexual minorities, or have need of social and psychological support. While some youths do not interpret this type of incidents as discrimination, others consider them to be clear cases of discrimination.

The conditions and opportunities for the Nordic youths strongly depend on where they live. The main difference can be found between young persons living in privileged city districts in larger cities and other youths – living in smaller towns, rural and sparsely populated areas and more vulnerable city districts in larger cities. The former group commonly feel a sense of belonging to their residential area and to the country as a whole. They have opportunities to participate in all kinds of activities and influence their surroundings. The public services are close by and mostly a non-issue, since they are available and functioning. The range of leisure activities are wide. The youths who live outside the privileged city districts express more mixed views on their possibilities of participation and influence varied. Public services are not always at hand or of good quality in their home areas. The public sector's general treatment of these youths is often problematic. Furthermore, these youths do not have access to many available leisure activities. The only thing that appears to be a problem for all participants is the lack of affordable housing alternatives.



General findings – related to the question of social inclusion

Several country reports described how the focus group participants expressed a strong sense of inclusion and how they felt that they could influence decision-makers if they really wanted to do so. However, it remains difficult to assess the degree to which these statements reflected their everyday actions and lives. The focus group topics dealt with issues of a personal nature, which can be quite sensitive. It can therefore be challenging for persons to open up and talk about powerlessness or exclusion in a group of peers – especially if society expects them to be resourceful and empowered. Consequently, it has been easier to assess the degree of social inclusion from the way the participating youths talk about their everyday lives in general. Did they talk about theoretical possibilities to influence their lives or did they describe how they actually went about it? How did they describe their encounters with public services and how were they perceived by other members of society?

The country reports clearly show that it is the youths who live in more privileged areas in larger cities who feel most included, seen and listened to – in comparison with young persons from so-called vulnerable city districts and youths from more rural and sparsely populated areas. The youths from privileged city districts are also the ones who benefit the most from public services like schools, healthcare and public transport. However, living in a privileged area does not equal social inclusion for all. Young LGBTI persons, youths with physical or psycho-social disabilities and persons belonging to national or ethnic minorities are often experiencing exclusion and discrimination regardless of where they live. Young women are also more aware of gender discrimination of different kinds.

The disparities between different groups of Nordic youths mirror society at large. Discrimination and segregation – both within cities and between cities and more rural areas – lead to different living conditions and possibilities among the youths,

something which in turn exacerbates these divisions. There is one area that appears to be a problem for all Nordic youths no matter who they are or where they live – unless their families are very wealthy and well connected. The majority of the youths find it almost impossible to find their own place to live – not to mention a place they can afford. The lack of affordable housing limits the youths' possible life choices. They either have to remain in their childhood homes or search for temporary housing solutions. This in turn makes it difficult to move on or move in order to continue their studies or find employment.

The general findings – challenges for the ongoing work within the focus areas

In 2019, the Nordic prime ministers adapted the Nordic Region's vision – to become the world's most sustainable and integrated region.¹³ In order to realise this vision, the Nordic Council of Ministers' work will prioritise three strategy areas: a green Nordic region, a competitive Nordic region and a socially sustainable Nordic region. These three areas have a number of sub-areas that clearly connect with the NABO project's focus on social inclusion, especially good education for everyone; sustainable infrastructure; sustainable cities and communities; free movement; good health and well-being; equality; reduced inequality; and peaceful and inclusive societies.

These sub-areas are all of great importance for social inclusion. The findings of the comparative report show that the Nordic region already has good education, sustainable cities and infrastructure, good healthcare and free movement. However, the country reports also show that these public goods seldom are adapted "for everyone" – in this case every young person – and sometimes not even accessible for all. Schools are often of better quality in more privileged city districts than in other places. Further education opportunities are often situated far away from young persons living in rural areas at the same time as public transport outside of the main cities remain problematic at best. For these youths "free movement" transforms into "mandatory movement". Many youths talk about their problems to access mental healthcare services. Persons of non-Nordic background describe different strategies for dealing with discrimination. Young women are aware of gender discrimination and LGBTI youths described bullying at school and discrimination in the healthcare services. The majority of the participating youths have experiences of not being taken seriously because of their age.

Moving forward, the Nordic region can take solace in the fact that there are plenty of examples of good education, qualitative healthcare, well-functioning public transport and so on. There are also an abundance of public measures aimed at improving the participation of the Nordic youths. The main challenge for creating and sustaining peaceful and inclusive societies within the Nordic region lies in combatting the existing inequalities and find ways to guarantee equal treatment, equal access and equal opportunities. Public support and services must be timely, of good quality and provided with respect for the individual in focus. This has to be the case regardless of who you are or where you live.

13. Nordic Co-operation, Our vision 2030, accessed 28 December 2020, [available here](#)

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