



The welfare state in a Nordic perspective

Programme for the Norwegian Presidency
of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2012





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Nordic co-operation

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

Nordic co-operation has firm traditions in politics, the economy, and culture. It plays an important role in European and international collaboration, and aims at creating a strong Nordic community in a strong Europe.

Nordic co-operation seeks to safeguard Nordic and regional interests and principles in the global community. Common Nordic values help the region solidify its position as one of the world's most innovative and competitive.

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Preface

It gives us great pleasure to introduce the programme for the Norwegian Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2012, a year which promises to bring challenges as well as opportunities. The programme prioritises the welfare state and its continued development in a Nordic perspective.

In many ways, the Nordic Region and Nordic co-operation are at a crossroads as 2012 approaches. The economic crisis in Europe has made its presence felt in the Region, as a result of which our shared welfare-state concept is under pressure. The Nordic countries must work together to meet these challenges and further develop regional co-operation.

Norway wishes to continue to promote broad popular involvement in Nordic co-operation. Jobs and sustainable welfare are inextricably linked. We must make sure that everybody is involved in generating prosperity and maintaining high levels of employment. Gender equality and equal status are also fundamental to welfare and sustainable development.

The Norwegian Presidency aims to keep the Nordic Region at the forefront of progress, especially in the area of green growth, which entails basing economic development on the sustainable use of natural resources. Particular attention will be paid to closer interaction between education, research and innovation in relation to green growth and sustainable health and welfare.

Co-operation across borders and the removal of obstacles to freedom of movement are important aspects of Nordic co-operation. The flexibility and attractiveness of the Nordic labour market can be improved further, and more must be done to guarantee student mobility in the Region.

The languages of the Region bind us together. To preserve our cultural ties and promote a sense of Nordic identity, we must work to maintain and promote the use and mutual understanding of the Region's languages.

The Nordic Council of Ministers must continually adapt to social change. This work is expected to gain pace in 2012, and will therefore demand increasing flexibility. Norway, in close collaboration with the Nordic Council, looks forward to making a positive contribution to this process.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jens Stoltenberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Jens Stoltenberg
Prime Minister

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rigmor Aasrud". The signature is cursive and elegant.

Rigmor Aasrud
Minister for Nordic Co-operation

Introduction

The Nordic welfare states have earned considerable international recognition in recent years, serving as a source of inspiration to many other countries. The high level of welfare and equality in the Region, combined with strong competitiveness and flexibility, are particularly valuable assets in an increasingly globalised world. Commitment to an equal society, in which women participate on equal terms with men, is a key element of a sustainable welfare state. It is important that Nordic co-operation retains this model and enhances it to meet the challenges of the age.

The Nordic welfare states face significant challenges in the future. A sustainable welfare state is affected by economic, social and environmental developments, etc. Countries must adapt to shifting demographics, globalisation – including greater competition and migration – and the consequences of climate change. The Nordic countries have felt the negative impact of the international recession in recent years. Indeed, considerable uncertainty remains about future economic trends – both in the Region and globally.

The development of a sustainable welfare state in a Nordic perspective will be the main theme of the Norwegian Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2012.

The Presidency will address the various challenges faced by the Nordic welfare states, and how we can meet them by looking at the structure of the welfare state and identifying ways in which the public sector can operate more efficiently. This will also include looking at co-operation between the public sector and both sides of the labour market, as well as at broader co-operation with, e.g. voluntary sector organisations, in order to promote widely acceptable joint solutions to the challenges faced.

The future of Nordic welfare is linked to both the creation and distribution of wealth. The Norwegian programme will follow up on recent presidencies' focus on knowledge-based and green economic growth in a global perspective. We aim to boost the Region's capacity for innovation and create more jobs. It is also important to continue efforts to promote inclusion and family-friendly workplaces; to prevent young people dropping out of ed-

education and training and offer them a smooth transition to the world of work; to develop adequate social-security arrangements; and to assure equality in health-care provision in the Nordic countries. The quality of life in the Region is an important asset and a social responsibility that must be addressed by the sustainable welfare state. In 2012, Norway will highlight important factors that affect health and well-being.

Recent surveys show that the level of mutual understanding of the Nordic languages is now lower than ever. To maintain our close cultural ties and promote a sense of Nordic affinity, it is necessary to continue efforts to preserve and promote the use and mutual understanding of the Nordic languages.

As will be made clear in the individual sectoral programmes, each of the Nordic Council of Ministers' sectors has its own role to play in the development of the welfare society in the Region. This is the case in areas where the countries have something to learn from each other, and in areas where Nordic values and co-operation have a role to play in developing joint solutions.



1. Work and sustainable welfare

- Widespread social inclusion and high rates of employment are the best way to generate wealth and provide welfare.
- Welfare ensures a more even distribution of income and living standards; provides secure environments for children; promotes healthy lifestyles, good living conditions and stable family relationships; and prevents marginalisation and exclusion. Adequate welfare, health and care services are important elements in the development of a sustainable welfare state.
- A healthy diet and appreciation of food, good water quality and an active lifestyle are important for both the individual's quality of life and the development of the welfare state.
- Knowledge, education and training benefit society per se, and are key to the ability of individuals to pursue their goals and realise their potential. Education, training and skills-enhancement have positive effects on employment rates and participation in democracy.
- A modern welfare state seeks to maximise access to culture and participation in cultural activities.

Inclusion, including the labour market

An inclusive labour market

One priority for the Norwegian Presidency is to ensure that an inclusive, family-friendly working life is available to all. Good public health is an important prerequisite for achieving this goal, as are proper working conditions and a working environment that is not detrimental to health and keeps people fit throughout their working life. The conditions need to exist for as many people as possible to enjoy the opportunity and feel the motivation to work. In part, this will be achieved by employers, unions and other relevant stakeholders working together.

The Nordic countries rank highly in international comparisons of employment rates. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of the working-age population are unemployed. The frequency of sick leave and the number of people receiving incapacity benefits or on other schemes are high. Just having a job is

an important factor affecting health. Education and training promote health per se, and keeping skills up to date staves off early retirement. Cultural initiatives help create good working environments and keep down levels of absenteeism and drop-out rates from the world of work.

The working environment has a greater impact on some groups than on others, and certain industries are characterised by unacceptable working conditions and the phenomenon of social dumping. The Norwegian Presidency wants the Nordic countries to learn from each other's experiences in order to prevent adverse effects on health, further improve the working environment, promote social inclusion and productivity, and reduce levels of sick leave and premature withdrawal from the labour market.

Mobility of labour in the Nordic Region and Europe benefits individuals and helps maintain the skills and diversity of the workforce. It is also important that immigrants are integrated into the world of work in their countries of residence. The goal of an inclusive labour market will be achieved through ensuring good working conditions, a positive working environment and safe workplaces. These factors will also make the Nordic labour market attractive to migrant workers.

Inclusion and youth employment

More and more jobs require an upper-secondary or higher education, as well as relevant vocational skills. Dropping out leads to exclusion from both work and society, and represents one of the biggest social problems faced by the Nordic Region and by Europe as a whole. All of the Nordic countries are therefore striving to improve retention rates in the educational system as well as to ease the transition between school and work.

Early intervention and practical, varied training at all levels of the education system help keep drop-out rates down. The prevention of social exclusion starts in kindergarten, so steps will be taken to make provision for pre-school children a higher priority within Nordic co-operation. The Presidency will also promote dialogue on how to make Nordic vocational training more relevant and inspiring. A new Nordic research programme on education and communication, the aim of which is to support efforts to raise retention rates, will commence in 2012.

Some youngsters – boys in particular – who drop out of school and work suffer from multiple and complex problems. Closer co-operation between different public services will help remove barriers to inclusion and ease the transition to working life. The Presidency will arrange exchanges of information about how the Nordic countries provide for the needs – and protect the interests – of young people who interact with multiple public agencies. This particularly applies to the interaction between educational and labour-market bodies regarding the provision of vocational qualifications that will lead to permanent jobs, as this is one of the areas in which most of the means to achieve this already exist.

The Norwegian Presidency will identify knowledge of measures that prevent young people from being excluded from employment for health or other reasons. One effect of this will be to include far more young people with disabilities in the world of work. The Presidency will also promote better learning conditions for children, young people and adults in need of special help and support. This will involve improving the ability of kindergartens and schools to enhance development and learning for children and young people with special needs, as well as children and young people with immigrant backgrounds.

Greater participation and active ageing

More people are living longer and enjoying good health in later life, partly as a result of relatively high levels of welfare. The demographic trend in the Nordic countries means that the proportion of older citizens is increasing. There is also a significant regional dimension to this trend, with areas that are sparsely populated and those in which population growth is stagnating presenting particular challenges.

Higher employment rates among older citizens may help to offset the burden of payment that would otherwise be a consequence of an ageing population. However, those who need to retire should have the opportunity to do so in a dignified manner.

The Presidency wishes to facilitate better utilisation of the labour, skills and resources represented by the older section of the population, in order to make the welfare state more sustainable. A positive working environment and an inclusive labour market are important for ensuring that older people remain in work longer. Increasing the employment rate in the older section of the population also requires positive incentives to continue a career, as well as appropriate physical and psychosocial conditions. The individual's competences must be developed throughout a long working life, and they must be afforded opportunities for lifelong learning. The EU has announced that 2012 is to be the European Year for Active Ageing, which will focus, amongst other things, on how to keep greater numbers of older people in work.

Policy related to senior citizens also addresses participation in other areas, e.g. society, politics, education, culture and the voluntary sector. Achieving a balance between work and family is also important for this age group. Policy should also focus on health, in order to improve quality of life and help older people remain functional and independent for longer.

Universal design helps people with disabilities to work and enjoy a long and active working life. It also necessitates changes to infrastructure and building policy. The goal is to remove barriers so that individuals are able to live in their own homes for longer and cope with daily chores themselves. The Presidency will propose the development of a joint Nordic strategy for universal design.

“Down on the Farm” (Inn på tunet) – agriculture provides green welfare services

Norwegian agriculture is working with other relevant stakeholders on the development and provision of quality-assured services that benefit the whole of society.

“Down on the Farm” is the name given to the green welfare services programme in Norway. The farms serve as a vehicle for providing education/training, child care, health care and general services. Approx. 850 farms are involved. They deal with issues such as mental health, drug and alcohol abuse, school drop-out rates, dementia, work experience and integration.

“Down on the Farm” enhances the spectrum of local-authority services in a manner that provides greater potential for individual adaptation. It also serves as an example of partnership between business and the public sector. Sixty-four councils are involved in developing the programme. The annual “Down on the Farm” conference serves as an important opportunity for Norway to learn from Nordic and international experience and to build networks. Several Nordic countries are conducting research into green welfare, and it is important to exchange experiences and documentation with other countries. The Norwegian Presidency will promote this form of co-operation.

Quality of health and care services

Health and care services in the Nordic countries are continually developing. An emphasis on continuous improvement and learning lies at the core of work on quality assurance and patient safety. An exchange of experiences is needed between the Nordic countries about the type of measures and incentives needed to promote quality enhancement in health and care services.

Co-ordination and holistic health services are another challenge. In this context, models are required that identify the correct approach to patients at all stages of their illness, from the perspectives of public health, individual prevention, early treatment, specialised services and rehabilitation.

Based on the shared Nordic objectives for welfare services in the areas of health and care, the Norwegian Presidency will propose that the Nordic strategy for sustainable development takes the form of a forward-looking tool that addresses a range of social changes. This will involve, e.g. identifying positive partnerships between the public and private sectors.

In light of the ageing nature of the population, it is important to qualify, educate, train, recruit and retain employees across the whole of the health and care sector. The Norwegian Presidency will propose that a model-development programme be initiated to identify success factors and positive examples.

The Nordic countries have worked together on public health for many years. The Presidency will further develop this partnership.

Nordic food, health and quality of life

A sustainable welfare state is dependent upon a healthy working population. Diet and an appreciation of food, access to clean water and an active lifestyle are important factors for health and quality of life. Food is not merely a prerequisite for survival. Without proper food it is impossible to produce anything of value. It is also a source of joy and pleasure and an important part of social gatherings and festivities. Food also plays an important role in inclusion, helping to forge identities and build cultural bridges. Several chronic conditions that are increasingly prevalent in the Nordic countries stem from poor diets and physical inactivity. Chronic conditions have consequences for individuals and the welfare state, e.g. in the form of increased health costs, lost working days and, therefore, lower productivity. The Presidency wishes to place particular emphasis on preventive work in 2012, and will strive to ensure not only longevity but also more years of good health and quality of life for the individual, while at the same time reducing social inequality in health.

Dietary habits and the importance of mealtimes are determined by the prevailing food culture. If healthy food is to be preferred, there must be a range of good-quality, tasty food readily available and it must be easy to choose the healthy option. An emphasis on natural ingredients also contributes to a more active lifestyle. The Presidency will continue the New Nordic Food programme and strive for a sense of identity and pride in Nordic cuisine. This will help to increase employment and wealth creation, and promote a diet that improves health and quality of life. The Presidency will also focus on safe drinking water, which is crucial for both food production and personal health.

Culture and inclusion

The Presidency has set itself a goal of breaking down barriers that prevent participation in cultural life and to ensure access to cultural experiences for everyone regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, economics, disability or age.

Inclusion in cultural life is about breaking down barriers that prevent participation by individuals or groups. It must be a goal that the cultural sector is perceived as open and relevant to all, regardless of the individual's cultural, social or geographical background. This is in line with the work that has been done in the Nordic Region to include people with minority and/or immigrant backgrounds in cultural life, both as active practitioners and as users. The Presidency wishes to ensure that children and young people enjoy access to a diverse range of arts and cultural activities.

Participation in cultural life helps youngsters develop an identity, self-esteem and a sense of well-being. A wide range of activities also provides them with a wide spectrum of idioms from which to choose, allowing them to learn to express themselves through art and culture, regardless of social, economic and cultural status.

Children and young people mainly encounter art and culture in their local community. A focus on a diverse, organised and local cultural life for all children and young people is important if they are to have the opportunity to evolve into active participants in cultural life.

The Presidency will focus on these and other relevant issues, including the interaction between art and cultural life and kindergartens and school/education.



2. Green growth, knowledge and innovation

- The Norwegian Presidency will prioritise green growth. This entails ensuring that economic growth and development are sustainable, in order to maintain ecosystems and natural capital. Norway will promote joint Nordic initiatives with the aim of providing constructive input into global climate negotiations.
- Investment in knowledge is necessary in order to meet new and demanding challenges and facilitate social restructuring. Special attention will be paid to closer interaction between education, research and innovation in relation to green growth and sustainable health and welfare.
- The Presidency will raise the profile of the Nordic Region as a creative and dynamic cultural region.

Green growth and the climate

The world faces major environmental challenges, including global warming, loss of biodiversity, and the emission of hazardous chemicals and other pollutants into the air and water. These challenges require a change in the way we use and reuse resources.

The Nordic economies are sound. We enjoy high levels of employment, and the ongoing restructuring, research, development and implementation of new technology has resulted in productivity exceeding population growth, which has increased prosperity. However, this growth has been achieved in a way that does not take sufficient account of the environment and climate. The challenge ahead is to achieve sustainable growth – i.e. growth that is not achieved at the expense of future generations.

The answer lies in “green growth”, which really made it on to the agenda after the financial crisis of autumn 2008. The main aim is to ensure continued economic growth on the basis of sustainable production and consumption. The transition to a more sustainable society will be of major significance to the development of Nordic welfare, and presents a challenge to our ability to adapt. However, as history shows, the Nordic Region is particularly adept at problem-solving.



**Nordic chairs/presidencies
of regional bodies**

Nordic Council of Ministers

2012: Norway

2013: Sweden

The Barents Council (BEAC)

Autumn 2011–2013: Norway

Arctic Council

Spring 2011–2013: Sweden

Council of the Baltic Sea States

Summer 2011–12: Germany

Summer 2012–13: Russia

EU

First six months of 2012: Denmark

Challenges also mean opportunities, including for economic development. Through systematic efforts, based on collaboration between official bodies, business and industry, experts and organisations, we must ensure sustainable economic development in which environmental technologies play an integral part. To promote the development and use of environmental technologies, we must mobilise industry's capacity for innovation, problem-solving and efficiency. Official bodies must also provide the framework conditions that make it worthwhile to offer and demand sustainable solutions. The focus on environmental technologies should therefore be viewed in the context of regulations, quotas and taxes designed to combat pollution.

Green economic growth will be a core priority of the Danish EU Presidency during the first six months of 2012. The Nordic Region will work closely with the Danish EU Presidency in advance of the UN Summit in Rio in June 2012, in order to ensure that the Region presents practical proposals for greener development at global level. This will include incorporating a gender equality and equal rights perspective.

The Nordic strategy for sustainable development will be revised in 2012. The strategy emphasises the climate and renewable energy, sustainable production and consumption, education and the development of the welfare state. A revised environmental action plan for 2013–16 will be drawn up. As far as the climate negotiations are concerned, it is important to further enhance and bolster the Region's role as an advocate of real solutions, including via the testing and implementation of new mechanisms, tools and research. The Presidency will also work to ensure that the Nordic Region pushes for ambitious agreements under the UN Climate Convention, in order to keep the global rise in temperature below 2 degrees.

Developing a sustainable green economy also depends on maintaining robust ecosystems and stemming the loss of bio-diversity – in relation to which the Arctic and northern regions are particularly vulnerable. One potential new way of intimating the true value of nature is to give it a price tag. The Presidency will continue to develop Nordic initiatives designed to promote the appreciation of ecosystem services.

Nordic energy co-operation will be established through the action plan for the period 2010–2013. Energy co-operation makes a number of contributions to green growth and forward-looking solutions. The Presidency will focus on developing the Nordic electricity market, promoting renewable energy in and between the Nordic countries, and promoting greater energy efficiency in the energy and construction sector in the Region.



Research, education/training and innovation

The Nordic welfare model depends on close co-operation in the “knowledge triangle” of education/training, research and innovation in order to make sure that value is added to the investments being made. Education and research enhance the ability to innovate, which is a prerequisite for the future funding of welfare, and for raising the profile of the Region in a global context.

Higher education in particular must be viewed in the context of research and innovation, so that long-term knowledge generation in the Region is systematic in all regions and local communities.

The knowledge triangle concept is used at both Nordic and European level to denote interaction between education/training, research and innovation. The Norwegian Presidency will take the initiative to make the most of the opportunities presented by the triangle. In this light, the Presidency will prioritise knowledge generation and innovation in health and welfare. This will take into account Nordic-level development work in this field, and it will also leave scope for evaluating new problems that need to be addressed.

The Nordic Top-level Research Initiative (TRI) on climate change, energy and the environment has attracted considerable attention in Europe. TRI is one of the biggest-ever joint Nordic research and innovation initiatives. The Norwegian Presidency will continue to promote the joint Nordic approach to global climate change, but would like to see this work based on the knowledge triangle to a greater extent. The Presidency also aims to boost research and innovation in the Region, and to assess how green growth can be more clearly integrated into this work.

The creative Nordic Region

A key objective of the Presidency will be to develop and strengthen a joint Nordic market for cultural products and the cultural industries. Expanding the national domestic market to include the whole Region would create huge growth potential as well as jobs. It would also extend the revenue base for artists and others employed in the cultural sphere. Closer and more binding Nordic partnership would also enhance the international impact of this work. The Presidency will strive to raise the profile of the Nordic Region as a lively and dynamic cultural region.

Networks for the exchange of experiences about production, product development, marketing and distribution are important for innovation and business development in the food sector, but alliances that transcend the sector may also generate value. Food can provide new experiences, just as music or design can, so deserves to be recognised as a part of the creative industries. Nordic and Scandinavian design have already established an international reputation for high quality. The Norwegian Presidency will set up networks involving stakeholders from the food-industry sector and other creative sectors in the Region. Networks such as these promote innovation, open new markets and generate value.

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3. Nordic affinity

- Cultural and linguistic affinity was a basic prerequisite for formal Nordic co-operation. These Nordic ties must be maintained and strengthened if co-operation is to remain close. Cross-border mobility helps to reinforce Nordic links, and to support a well-organised and flexible labour market in the Region.
- Promoting gender equality and combating discrimination will be central to the programme of the Norwegian Presidency. Gender equality and equal status are fundamental values that underpin welfare and sustainable development.
- It is of great importance for all citizens that the Nordic countries improve freedom of movement. Norway intends to continue the strong commitment to freedom of movement at Nordic level, and to help raise awareness of these efforts in the individual countries.
- The Norwegian Presidency will continue to work closely with the Nordic Region's neighbours.

Language

Now, as ever, the ability to understand the neighbouring languages is based upon contact between people. It is therefore important to involve new Nordic citizens in order to improve understanding of and commitment to Nordic co-operation in the future. What makes the Nordic language community special is that it is underpinned by the political will to maintain it.

In a globalised world, the Nordic Region faces many new language-policy challenges – and the number of people who understand neighbouring Nordic languages is lower than ever before. Recent research reveals that the number of people who understand the neighbouring languages in the Region has fallen. This has a knock-on effect on the sense of Nordic affinity.

Promoting the Nordic language community is a priority for the Norwegian Presidency. The Presidency will also strive to make the Nordic languages visible in the education system and in television, film and other audiovisual media. Nordic-language output should be more readily available in print, speech, literature and the performing arts.

The two priorities stipulated in the Action Plan for Nordic Cultural Co-operation (2010–2012) are improving the understanding of the neighbouring languages, and children and young people. The Presidency will strive to take this work forward.

Gender equality

Gender equality and combating discrimination will be key elements of the programme for the Presidency, and will be incorporated into the work of the various sectors. Equality is about the utilisation of resources regardless of gender, disability, ethnicity or sexual orientation. An equal society also benefits boys and men, as it generates greater economic and social value. Gender-equality policy touches upon all aspects of society, including political participation, financial independence, employment, parenting and freedom from violence.

Equality and equal opportunities are basic human rights. They also have social value – guaranteeing equal opportunities for all benefits the Region in social, economical and political terms. Achieving gender equality is a challenge for the whole of society, especially because everybody is different due to factors such as age, ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability. All of these factors mean that men and women face different challenges – and Nordic co-operation needs to reflect this reality.

The Presidency will encourage political debate about the need to develop a diversity policy for Nordic co-operation that includes gender equality and equal status. The potential exists to work even more closely together on equality issues by sharing experiences and exerting influence on the rest of Europe.

In order to make a real impact on equality work in the Nordic Region, both men and women need to think about their traditional roles in education, jobs and parental responsibility. Equality policy needs to evolve in response to new social challenges. It also has to relate to the cultural and social diversity that exists in society at any given time.

The Presidency will strive to ensure that the co-operation on equality policy:

- confers equal rights upon both genders and combats all forms of discrimination
- ensures genuine gender equality through the redistribution of power, responsibility and care
- sees gender in the context of ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and age.

Equality is therefore a key element in the further development of the programme *The welfare state in a Nordic perspective*. The Norwegian Presidency coincides with year two of the four-year (2011–2014) co-operation programme *Gender equality creates a sustainable society*. In its equality plan for





2012, the Presidency will specifically stress the importance of the programmes *Integration of a gender and equality perspective* and *Active participation by men/boys*. Norway will also facilitate dialogue on gender equality in the academic world. The ideal of equality may well be widely accepted in the research sector, for example, but there is a long way to go before it becomes a reality.

Children and families

A secure upbringing and good family life are important to a child's development. Research shows that lack of care, major family conflicts and relationship breakdowns can lead to psychological and social problems for both children and parents. It is therefore important to identify vulnerable children and families at an early stage. Unstable family relationships can also have significant socio-economic consequences, although we have not yet quantified the extent of this. The Norwegian Presidency will strive for closer Nordic co-operation on knowledge-generation and exchanges of experiences about issues relating to children, families and society.

Freedom of movement

The strong, well-organised and flexible Nordic labour market makes it easy for citizens to work in other countries in the Region. Certain aspects of national legislation and regulations do, however, prevent an obstacle to freedom of movement. The Norwegian Presidency will follow up on the efforts already made at Nordic level in recent years to discuss and find tangible ways to improve freedom of movement. Efforts to facilitate freedom of movement for business will also be continued.

The Presidency will present reports about obstacles to cross-border mobility in the labour market and in terms of social provision, and this will form a solid basis for future work on the issue.

It remains important to prevent and remove obstacles to mobility, as well as to further improve the attractiveness and flexibility of the Nordic labour market. This will entail, for example, that the Nordic countries work together on the implementation of EU legislation in the fields of employment and social affairs so that new obstacles do not arise.

In order to promote mobility for students, the Norwegian Presidency wants to ensure access to public-sector higher education and the recognition of qualifications throughout the Region.

Co-operation across borders and the removal of obstacles to freedom of movement are important aspects of all Nordic policy co-operation. This work is done by the 13 Nordic border committees, the Interreg co-operation and the various regional-policy working groups. It should therefore be possible to resolve a number of tangible and practical issues at local level.

The Nordic Region's neighbours

The Council of Ministers has always prioritised working with the Region's neighbours. To this end, the Norwegian Presidency will continue the process of implementing the guidelines for the Council of Ministers' co-operation with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, and with North-West Russia. These guidelines apply until the end of 2013 and the process of renewing them will start in 2012. The Presidency will also commence implementation of the new Programme for Arctic Co-operation 2012–2014, and follow up and implement the Council of Ministers' guidelines for co-operation with Belarus and with the Region's neighbours in the West.

Follow-up to the Stoltenberg Report

The Thorvald Stoltenberg Report (2009) on Nordic foreign and defence policy serves as an important source of inspiration and of tangible initiatives.

The Nordic declaration on solidarity 2011 is a clear manifestation of the Nordic countries' will to follow up on the report and work even more closely together on foreign and defence policy.

Norway wishes to act as a driving force in this process of more intensive co-operation. Efforts are being made to turn the declaration into action, e.g. via collaboration on digital security and civil protection. The closer working relationship between the Nordic foreign ministries has also strengthened co-operation on defence and security policy.





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