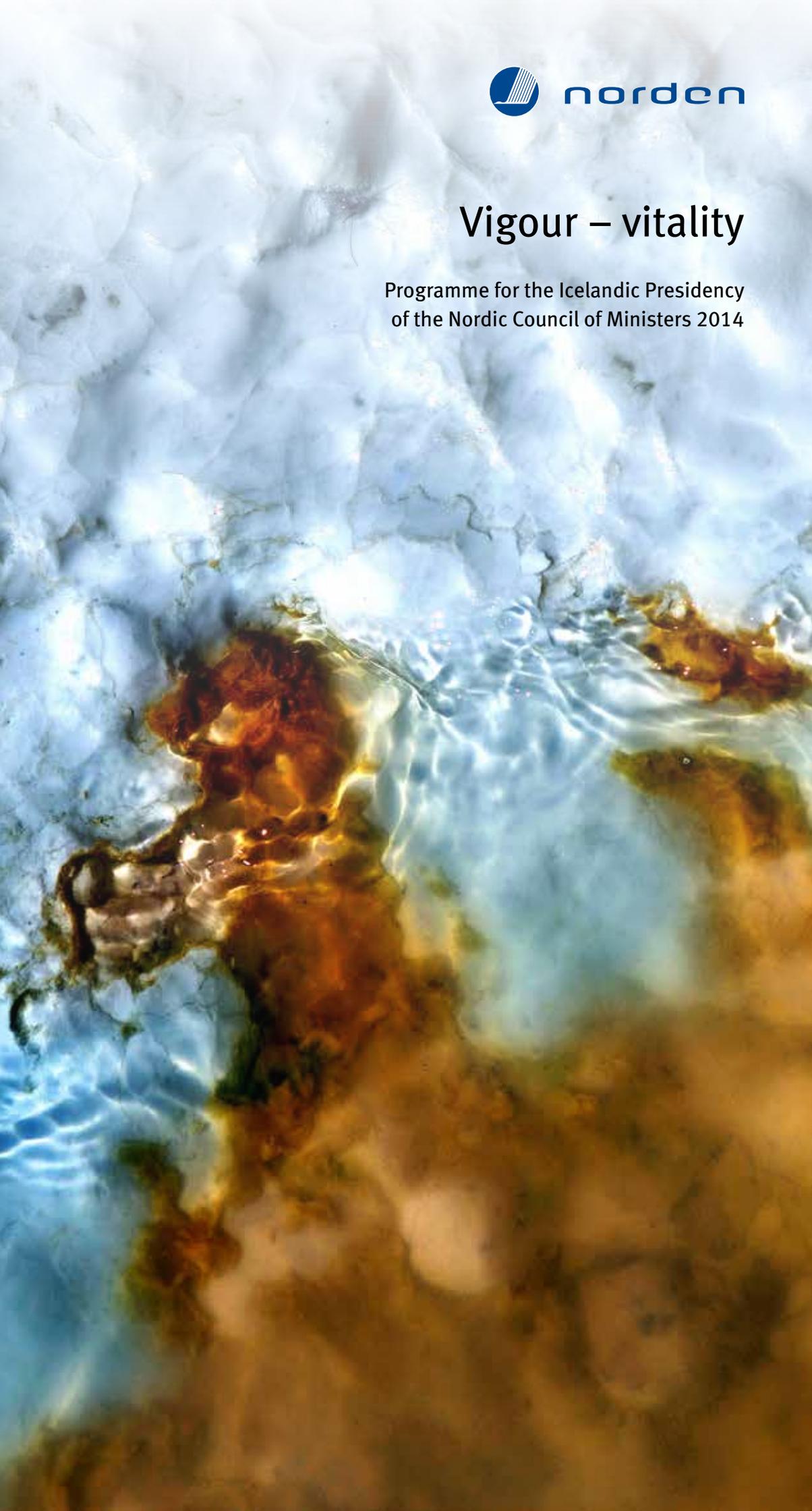
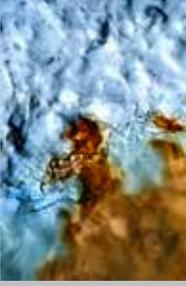


Vigour – vitality

Programme for the Icelandic Presidency
of the Nordic Council of Ministers 2014





Vigour – Vitality

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Nordic co-operation

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

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

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

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Foreword

Vigour and *vitality* is the heading of Iceland's programme for its presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2014.

These concepts are the core values in the three focus projects of Iceland's presidency.

The objective of the *Nordic Bioeconomy* is to find ways to utilise our natural resources better, whether they are found in the air, on land or at sea. Biomass is an underutilised resource, on which the bioeconomy of the future will rely for its livelihood. Currently an enormous amount of valuable organic material goes to waste in rubbish tips throughout the world, with the accordant pressure on the environment. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimates that around one-third of the world's food production ends as waste, while at the same time millions of people go hungry. This we have to change. The Nordic countries are teeming with innovation and creativity, which is a premise for blazing the path for the bioeconomy and getting a head start in this field.

Despite the downturn of recent years, the infrastructure of Nordic societies is strong. We still have access to our basic resources: forests, minerals, fish and energy. The driving force, however, comes from the people who live in these countries, who create value and welfare through their inventiveness and ability. The educational level is high and social security is strong. But national welfare, of the type which prevails in Nordic countries, is not a matter of course, and it is important to arrange things so that it will be sustainable in the long term. Economic fluctuations clearly jeopardise the welfare system. With its presidency project the *Nordic Welfare Watch* Iceland hopes to shed light on the resilience of the Nordic welfare state and its ability to intervene quickly and respond to setbacks in times of sudden recession.

The creative sector is a major factor of business and economic life in the Nordic countries. The creative energy and imagination of the people who work in a wide variety of pursuits in this field is a unique Nordic resource. It is important to create a framework enabling this sector to flourish – its

artistic and social value is clear and the economic advantage is unequivocal. Through the project *Nordic Playlist* Iceland wishes to assist in the promotion and export of Nordic music. There is no reason to doubt that the project will be self-supporting once support for its launching concludes.

Nordic co-operation rests on a solid foundation, based on functioning democracy and a high level of social capital. Active social debate and a strong sense of community bear witness to the rich and varied cultural heritage which these nations share. The Nordic countries have an influence in global fora and our combined economic impact is strong. As vigorous and vital nations, we can take advantage of this to the full.

Iceland places Nordic collaboration at the forefront and undertakes its presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers with pride and high expectations.



Sigmundur Davíð Gunnlaugsson
Prime Minister



Eygló Harðardóttir
Minister for Nordic Co-operation



Vigour – vitality

The image of the Nordic countries is comprised of a variety of factors which characterise the peoples who live in the region and which give them, in many respects, a unique position. This uniqueness is not unlike a valuable trademark, and something the countries want to keep.

As is generally acknowledged, the Nordic countries are in the forefront when the nations of the world are compared using recognised international measures. Despite deteriorating external conditions during the economic downturn of recent years, Nordic countries retain their image of equality, peace, welfare and prosperity. A further aspect of Nordic uniqueness is the long-standing mutual acceptance of diplomatic negotiation as the way to resolve disagreement and international disputes, through the forum of the United Nations and other international bodies.

Nordic countries were early and avid proponents of sustainable development, an ideology which has now spread throughout the world. Equality is another core aspect of the Nordic image, and a priority in Nordic co-operation with other nations. Even though these countries differ in many ways, and may take different positions on many questions, depending upon the interests at stake in each instance, they share certain basic values enabling them to speak with one voice.

Regional co-operation among Nordic countries is among the earliest of its type in the world. This co-operation is a common denominator of the values which Nordic countries represent. Nordic synergy has from the beginning been the guiding principle of the co-operation, but the solidarity and collaboration resulting from it is just as important – making Nordic co-operation an objective in itself. At times, Nordic co-operation has come under pressure and doubts have been expressed about its future. Through flexibility and adaptability it has proved possible to withstand the doubts expressed in some quarters and seldom has it been as vigorous and solid as at present. Iceland wishes to utilise its presidency to direct this collaboration into new and exciting paths, where there are additional opportunities for Nordic synergy. The Icelandic presidency will focus on projects including the *Nordic Bioeconomy*, *Nordic Welfare Watch* and *Nordic Playlist*.

Green Social Development

Iceland wishes to spotlight ecological resources in the Nordic countries which can be better utilised. Green growth combined with sustainable development is the key emphasis of the project on the *Nordic Bioeconomy*. Natural resources can be exhausted and we are responsible for ensuring their sustainable utilisation and waste minimisation. To ensure green growth and sustainable development in the long term these emphases must be integrated into child raising and education. Emphasis will be placed on promoting these areas through projects using creative methods of education and research.

The bioeconomy refers to economic activities based on optimal utilisation of maritime and terrestrial biological resources. Sustainable utilisation of these resources presents important opportunities to increase welfare and stimulate green growth in the Nordic countries, e.g. through the production of biomass and its more effective usage in various sectors.

The Nordic Bioeconomy is a very extensive, cross-disciplinary project combining the efforts of the Councils of Ministers for the Environment (MR-M); for Fisheries and Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry (MR-FJLS); for Trade, Energy and Regional Policies (MR-NER); for Education and Research (MR-U); and for Culture (MR-K), with those of a large number of other Nordic institutions, scholars and other stakeholders.

Various projects will be carried out under the umbrella of the *Nordic Bioeconomy*, all of them aimed at increased value-added for the environment and the community. The Nordic countries are well equipped to blaze a trail for the bioeconomy and their leadership in this field is important.

New tasks for Nordic welfare

The Nordic welfare systems continuously face new challenges. The countries' changing demography is a prime example of such. Demands for a sustainable welfare system call for a reassessment of current emphases. Higher unemployment and global economic recession create new issues requiring resolution. One recent example is the economic collapse which occurred in Iceland in the autumn of 2008. The Icelandic welfare system faced a major threat, as suddenly it had to deal with social problems of a much greater scale which few could have foreseen. The global economic recession can be expected to affect all Nordic countries, and to continue to test the resilience of Nordic welfare systems in the next few years.

The welfare system has long been a focus of Nordic collaboration. In August 2013, the Nordic Prime Ministers launched the programme *Sustainable Nordic Welfare*. Its principal objective is to develop new solutions for welfare issues in the Nordic countries. The work includes compiling a so-called Könberg report, prepared on the initiative of the Nordic ministers responsible for healthcare. During its presidency, Iceland will takeover the project *Sustainable Nordic Welfare* from Sweden and ensure its successful continuation

Iceland intends to make the project *Nordic Welfare Watch* its contribution towards increasing the sustainability of the welfare system and link this to the emphases of the project *Sustainable Nordic Welfare*. The *Nordic Welfare Watch* is partly based on Iceland's experience of the Welfare Watch set up by the Icelandic government early in 2009, in response to difficulties in the wake of the economic collapse. The project includes, for instance, research on responses to the consequences of serious economic crises in the Nordic countries in recent decades, what lessons can be learned from the actions taken and what consequences are likely to have resulted from inaction on the part of governments. The project will also develop welfare indicators on which to base welfare policy formulation and actions in Nordic countries.

A Nordic region without barriers

Agreements on Nordic co-operation, which form its institutional framework, reflect the countries' desire to make the Nordic area a single region where exchanges between nations are smooth and cross-border trade is not hampered by incompatible rules. As administrative obstacles affect citizens, enterprises and entrepreneurship in the Nordic countries, all the countries need to work jointly at reducing them. Although much has been done in past years to remove administrative obstacles, considerable work remains. This task, which it was hoped would prove a temporary aspect of Nordic collaboration, has become entrenched. Strong political will is needed to make further progress and prevent new obstacles from developing following new national legislation. If the Nordic countries wish to strengthen their competitive position in a globalised world and create a region where it is attractive to live, set up a business, or study and pursue research, improvements are needed.

It is important to make sure new arrangements for work to combat administrative obstacles, which are to be implemented at the beginning of the Icelandic presidency, get off to a good start and become the force which is hoped for. It is especially urgent to deal with those barriers pointed out in

the report of the working group on obstacles in social and employment affairs published in 2012, which also contains the working group's proposals for ways to resolve these; it is important to follow up on this.

Living culture

Cultural collaboration has always been accorded an important place in Nordic co-operation and in recent years growing attention has been devoted to the creative sectors, which are rapidly advancing in all the countries. The creative sectors comprise a major resource which needs to be better utilised. By linking up the energies arising in creative sectors and presenting to the rest of the world the best the Nordic countries have to offer, we can achieve the value-added aimed at through Nordic collaboration. It should also be borne in mind that grass roots initiative is very valuable and a framework needs to be created to encourage innovative thinking and fertile ideas.

Iceland wishes to take advantage of opportunities arising during its presidency to support the flourishing Nordic music scene. The *Nordic Playlist* is a developmental project aimed at boosting the Nordic music market and calling attention to Nordic music. The project provides opportunities to increase export possibilities for Nordic music, to create a contemporary record of Nordic music and at the same time demonstrate the importance of Nordic collaboration.

Nordic synergy outside the Nordic countries

In the early 1990s the Nordic Council of Ministers began co-operation with the Baltic States, marking the beginning of specific collaboration between Nordic countries and adjacent areas. Co-operation with Northwest Russia began in 1995. Much has changed since then and the international co-operation of the Nordic Council of Ministers has become ever more significant as it spreads further. Such co-operation is carried out through the European Union, e.g. the European Humanities University, and the Northern Dimension, as well as in other regional bodies such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Arctic Council. Nordic embassies also work closely together, with the encouragement and support of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Co-operation efforts have also included Germany and Poland, as well as neighbouring countries to the west, Canada and the US. All of this is evidence that Nordic co-operation is sought-after far beyond the borders of the Nordic countries, bearing witness to the strong basis of this co-operation.

During the Swedish presidency, work concluded on revising guidelines for co-operation by the Council of Ministers with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and with Northwest Russia, and on co-operative efforts in Belarus and the Barents region. The guidelines will enter into effect upon the commencement of Iceland's presidency. The new guidelines show clearly that they have been drafted in close collaboration between the Council of Ministers and neighbouring countries, and guided by the requirement of common utility. There is strong mutual interest in the collaboration, and the interests in common are evident. It is assumed that in the future the focus of international co-operation by the Council of Ministers will be in the Baltic Sea Region. Co-operation with other countries and regions will be considered with an open mind if this is sought.

The budget

Certain economic conditions have made it necessary to prioritise and utilise in a rational manner those funds which the countries have decided to contribute to the collaboration of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Work is currently underway on reassessing and renewing this collaboration with the aim of clarifying its objectives and ensuring its success.



Nordic environmental consciousness

The Nordic nations have always had ambitious objectives, acted jointly and made a major contribution in environmental affairs, both within and outside of the Nordic region. During its presidency, Iceland will prioritise projects which create Nordic value-added for the environment and society. Such projects are not only of major Nordic importance but also comprise the Nordic countries' contribution to environmental affairs internationally.

Iceland wants to place green social development in the forefront, including taking advantage of opportunities offered by bioeconomic development (see further p. 17) to restrain climate change. Encouraging environmentally favourable methods of production and sustainable consumption can reduce negative impact on the environment. Furthermore, it is important to increase public consciousness of the value of a healthy environment and nature. Emphasis will be placed on promoting biodiversity, ecosystem services and the Nordic Ecolabel. The spotlight will also be directed at improved utilisation of raw materials and waste, ocean affairs and the interaction of climate and energy issues. In addition to these specific areas of emphasis, Iceland will contribute to making a success of the introduction of the *Nordic Environmental Action Plan 2013–2018* and joint Nordic sustainable development policy, *A Good Life in a Sustainable Nordic Region – Nordic Strategy for Sustainable Development*.

Iceland emphasises preventing degradation of ecosystems and strengthening their resilience. Furthermore, it is important to rebuild and recover damaged ecosystems, with the aim of ensuring that they can provide the necessary services in the future. As public health and society are dependent upon ecosystem services, from a health protection perspective their services should be ensured and green areas protected. In recent decades major achievements have been made in recovering and expanding vegetation and sustainable forests in the Nordic countries and it is important to continue this work.

Consciousness of the value creation inherent in utilising waste products, such as for production of compost, meal and fertiliser, needs to be increased. Improved utilisation of raw materials, together with sorting and utilisation of waste, reduces its volume and mitigates the negative environmental impact.

In recent years the Nordic Council of Ministers has directed concerted efforts at promoting the Nordic Ecolabel. Iceland has contributed to the advancement

of the ecolabel domestically, and the number of certified enterprises has increased. Iceland has been at the forefront of preparation for and supervised the implementation of the Nordic Ecolabel strategy which will be in effect until year-end 2014. During its presidency, emphasis will be placed on commencing preparation for the future Nordic Ecolabel strategy after 2014.

The ocean is a source of livelihood and quality of life for Nordic residents. Major changes have taken place in the marine environment and much ocean pollution can be attributed to onshore anthropogenic activity. Dumping waste in the ocean seriously impacts the marine ecosystem and human health. Both Nordic and international co-operation is needed to deal with marine pollution and acidification, and to ensure marine biodiversity. An ecosystem approach needs to be applied to marine resource utilisation and regional arrangements strengthened. New methods and tools are needed to ensure effective utilisation and protection of maritime regions and fishing stocks. To this end, it is urgent to increase understanding of eutrophication, acidification, climate change and the cumulative effects of hazardous substances on the oceans. Work will be directed at increasing knowledge of hazardous substances in products, their prevalence in the environment and the sources of emissions for the purpose of minimising the damaging impact of such substances on human health and the environment. Nordic co-operation has already resulted in better access to information on substances and their effects. It is important that institutions in environmental and consumer affairs, as well as the sector organisations in Nordic countries, join hands to boost information dissemination and increase supervisory collaboration.

Iceland will support continuing Nordic co-operation on climate change. The Nordic countries will be encouraged to support negotiations on a new global climate change agreement in 2015, and seek ways of bridging the gap between industrialised and developing countries, for instance, through the efforts of the Nordic working group on international climate change negotiations. Support will be provided for projects where the Nordic countries are in the forefront and can share their knowledge and experience, for instance, on carbon recapture in vegetation, soil and bedrock, and not least in the field of renewable energy, such as hydro and geothermal energy, biofuels and wind energy. Energy research is important to deal with new challenges in the area of energy issues, and here Nordic Energy Research has played a key role. It has enabled the Nordic countries to influence, for example, policy and solutions in the implementation of European legislation.

Energy and environmental issues are closely related and therefore resource utilisation and the impact of energy usage on the environment must be viewed in a holistic manner. The interplay of energy and climate change,

renewable energy developments, energy efficiency and integration of the Nordic electricity market are emphases in Nordic co-operation. One of the largest undertakings is the replacement of fossil fuels by more eco-friendly fuels. During the Icelandic presidency, work will proceed on energy conversion in the transport sector and ways will be sought to replace fossil fuels, especially with regard to fuel consumption of fishing vessels. Further efforts will be based on the emphases of globalisation projects in energy affairs.

PROJECTS

- Work will be undertaken on analysing ecosystem resilience and proposals advanced as to how building up ecosystems can reduce the impact of natural catastrophes and climate change on social infrastructure.
- A conference will be held on the future of the Nordic Ecolabel co-operation.
- Work will be undertaken on developing sustainability benchmarks for sustainable utilisation of natural resources.
- A conference will be held on changes in the distribution of fishing stocks with reference to climate change.
- A conference will be held on maritime refuse, emphasising how this can be reduced and prevented in the future.
- Iceland will endeavour to have an assessment made of the conclusions of the policy formulated for Nordic forestry co-operation, based on the Selfoss Declaration, which was adopted at a conference of the Ministers for Forestry in 2009, and open discussion on the future strategy for Nordic forestry co-operation.
- Iceland will take an active part in projects under the auspices of the co-operation committee for Nordic forest research.
- Work on energy affairs will be in accordance with the new Nordic energy co-operation programme, which will take effect in 2014.
- Work will be undertaken on quality management of energy systems. In this connection emphasis is placed on finding the energy sources which are most suitable for use in each instance.



Objectives:

- To reduce negative environmental impact and ensure sustainable utilisation of resources in all areas of society.
- To minimise waste and maximise the utilisation and benefits of biological products.
- To promote innovation, the green economy and regional development.
- To prevent waste creation and increase recycling.

The bioeconomy is an important driver of all Nordic economies and one of the main pillars of green growth and sustainability. The bioeconomy is based on an economy where the utilisation of biological products, waste materials and other products arising from processing is maximised, with the aim of minimising waste from the value chain and reducing pressure on the environment, guided by the interests and opportunities of current and future generations to enjoy the bounty of nature. The intention will be to increase the sustainability of and benefit from utilisation of biological resources, such as marine catches, pasture lands, forests and agricultural produce.

Biological resources are the basis of welfare in Nordic countries and are of major significance for the economy and business and industry. Their effective utilisation needs to be insured, based on the interests of both society and the environment, to encourage growth and the creation of competitive business and society without irreversible consequences. Products must be fully utilised, and emphasis will also be placed on preventing production of waste and increasing the re-usage of any by-products created, thereby reducing pressure on the environment and stimulating innovation and the green economy.

New methods and solutions for utilisation and production offer various opportunities, for instance, for development and innovation. Thus building up the bioeconomy can strengthen business and industry and provide stronger support for development in those regions which are most dependent upon the utilisation of biological resources. Emphasis will be placed on further strengthening Nordic co-operation on new routes in education, R&D and innovation, in close collaboration with business and educational institutions. To this end a variety of projects will be undertaken on development in education and instructional methods, product development and innovation in the spirit of the bioeconomy.



Opportunities to advance

The development of sustainable solutions for utilisation of biological resources and raw materials, prevention of waste creation and increasing recycling will be prioritised during the presidency. Biological resources are in many cases the basis for sustainable industrial and regional development. The emphases of the bioeconomy open up opportunities for eco-friendly production and innovation from different biological raw materials, and can increase value creation in production and ensure sustainable consumption and utilisation of resources. Innovation in Nordic business and in the creative sectors plays a major role in green social development. The importance of these factors is underlined in the programme for co-operation in innovation and business, which enters into effect during the presidency.

Plenty of opportunities are available for innovation in existing enterprises and traditional business sectors. The role of governments in promoting innovation in the Nordic countries needs to be examined more closely. Greater opportunities for innovation enable businesses to present new solutions and boost their competitiveness compared to foreign firms.

During the presidency, attention will be directed to Nordic ocean and coastal areas and agricultural and forestry areas, which are rich in biological resources, will be mapped. The focus will be on communities which are dependent upon the utilisation of these resources for their livelihood. The intention is to analyse in more detail the opportunities and challenges facing these regions, with the emphasis on improving resource utilisation. Emphasis will be placed on product development projects, cross-cutting production sectors, with a view to maximising utilisation of biological resources. The project will be carried out with the active involvement of business and industry, research institutions, the educational system, public administration and other stakeholders.

Food production in Nordic countries is of high quality, and carried out under optimal conditions. Sustainable development in agriculture and production sectors is becoming ever more important, especially having regard to the growing world population. The Nordic countries have a contribution to make to increase global food security. Of prime importance is increasing research, development and innovation in seeking sustainable solutions for the production sector.

Traceability of foodstuffs and effective quality control are major factors in food safety. A great number of small and medium-size enterprises process local produce and as a result can increase the traceability of foodstuffs. There is a growing interest among the general public in the Nordic countries in locally produced food products. This gives smaller producers opportunities to instil confidence in consumers and boost their own benefit. Focusing on small-scale food production makes it possible to increase food safety and value creation as well as providing support for sparsely populated areas where the production takes place.

Work will continue on more sustainable regional welfare, green growth and promotion of sustainable development in Arctic regions, in accordance with the programme for regional development co-operation. The affairs of sparsely populated areas and co-operation in the West Nordic region are of special concern to Iceland during its presidency. Many sparsely populated areas have been subject to persistent depopulation, despite the rich resources found in their immediate vicinity. These resources have created and supported the welfare of towns and cities, but have not delivered equivalent benefits to sparsely populated areas. Ways will be sought to strengthen them through innovation, improved utilisation of natural resources and increased collaboration with research institutions and universities. Special attention will be given to Arctic regions, and what effects measures to combat climate change have on the settlements and livelihood of the inhabitants of these regions. Work on the project *Arctic Bioeconomy*, where the focus is specifically on tasks in northern regions, has already begun.

PROJECTS

- Work will continue on finding better energy solutions for sparsely populated regions, as in many instances these areas have limited access to strong energy distribution systems.
- Iceland will support the work of Nordic Centre for Spatial Development (Nordregio) and Nordic Atlantic Co-operation (NORA), as both institutions play an important role in regional development.
- Efforts will be directed at ways of increasing R&D and innovation in food production and agriculture.
- Ways will be sought to deal with the problems of sparsely populated areas experiencing further depopulation, despite rich resources in the immediate vicinity. To this end, emphasis will be placed on strengthening these communities through innovation, improved utilisation of natural resources and increased collaboration with research institutes and universities.
- Work will be carried out to map the opportunities offered by the *Nordic bioeconomy* and to define opportunities for increased value creation.
- Development projects will be based on improved utilisation of biological resources and increased value creation.
- Conferences will be held on a variety of topics connected to the *Nordic bioeconomy*.
- Nordic co-operation on matters connected with various areas of the bioeconomy will be increased.
- Support will be provided for developing the project on public-private co-operation in plant breeding. Work on this project began in 2011. Iceland will contribute to strengthening it and promoting the opportunities it offers, having regard to the emphases of the bioeconomy.



Knowledge in a new era

The strength of Nordic business and industry and the Nordic knowledge society derives from fresh thinking, vigorous innovation, strong research and education, which can drive business, regional development and green growth. It is important to take advantage of this strength to create new opportunities for Nordic communities and to enable them to deal with current challenges.

The Nordic countries are among those areas of the world where innovation and development are flourishing, and this has to be maintained. Technological progress and growing competition call for continuous review of university and scientific work. Strengthening research and universities encourages innovation and progress and is a premise for success. In their universities and research Nordic countries have aimed at increased efficiency and division of tasks between institutions. More attention needs to be given to the emphases, integration and co-operation of Nordic countries, in particular linking together different specialised sectors, technologies, arts and sciences, so that their strengths and specific expertise can be optimally utilised. A variety of premises and expertise, including health and welfare, democracy and human rights, equal rights, sustainability, creativity and literacy, together with knowledge of mathematics, science and technology, contribute to progress in our society. These aspects need to be reinforced with the aim of building an educational system which can respond to the demands and needs of our modern society and labour market.

Iceland's emphases in the field of education and science are based, among other things, on the programmes of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Green Growth and Sustainable Nordic Welfare. Both place strong emphasis on the role of education and research and their importance in strategic planning. Co-operation across institutions, scientific fields and national borders, with a view to utilisation, knowledge creation, creativity, welfare and green growth, gives good returns to the Nordic countries and boosts their contribution to international fora.

Opportunities need to be created for young people to make a place for themselves in science and innovation through a variety of routes. Work will continue on the Nordic Master project and Nordic universities' emphases on quality through collaboration, specialisation and concentration. Attention will be

given to improved utilisation of IT to disseminate knowledge and develop university studies independent of residence.

Increased globalisation with rapid changes in IT together with the varied background of students in schools call for adaptation and renewal in education, both with regard to content and methods. The quality of education and efficacy of the educational system is based on qualified and professional teachers. Countries wishing to make a place for themselves in the knowledge economy of a new century must give careful thought to their strategy in teacher education and teaching.

Building the bioeconomy underlines the importance of co-operation in new educational methods and cross-disciplinary development and innovation. In line with this, development projects will be carried out in the field of education and cultural affairs reflecting the Biophilia ideology, which endeavours to integrate education, science and technology with exploratory musical workshops and scientific communication. The project emphasises linking together technology, science and creativity across educational levels, scientific disciplines, institutions and business in new ways. Biophilia breaks up the traditional form of education and encourages broad participation across age groups, subjects and disciplines, using creativity as a method of education and research. Biophilia's ideas and methods provide a common venue and basis for co-operation, consultation and exchange of views between people of all ages, of artists as well as scientists, students as well as teachers. Interdisciplinary co-operation of this sort encourages the development of teaching methods reflecting changed times, individual growth and a sustainable society.

PROJECTS

- Work will continue on the introduction of new arrangements and working practices for the Council of Ministers for Education and Research (MR-U) in accordance with decisions taken on the basis of a working group in May 2012.
- A co-operative network of Nordic communities will be set up, linking together different educational levels, institutions and business and industry, with emphasis on increasing innovation, sustainability, science, creativity and technology in all educational settings.
- Work will continue on the co-operative project on a Nordic *knowledge train*. Representatives of universities and research institutions will be setting up scientific events with the aim of stimulating young people's interest in research and university study. Work on the project will be linked to current themes, e.g. the Knowledge Triangle network.
- A Nordic project will be developed to improve utilisation of knowledge and of regional contributions to promote innovation. The objective is to increase co-operation and integration of R&D activities, boost collaboration with universities and support innovation based on regional specificities and opportunities. Special attention will be given to the contribution of the creative sectors, the arts, humanities and social sciences.
- A conference will be held on professional development of teachers and school administrators. Here the education of teachers in Nordic countries will be discussed, with the spotlight on possibilities of Nordic teachers to develop educational structures and teaching methods in line with the advancements in technology, society and culture in the 21st century.
- The conference *Nordic Bridges for Lifelong Learning* will be held in collaboration with the Nordic Network for Adult Learning (NVL). Development of new methods in adult education will be discussed and what lessons can be learned from strategy formulation in this area.
- Iceland wishes to follow up on Sweden's emphases on linking vocational education with on-the-job learning.

Nordic creativity

The Nordic countries' shared history and culture is one of the basic pillars of Nordic co-operation and increases the feeling of community and understanding between them. The value of Nordic co-operation is reflected in their common traditions and cultural heritage, closely related languages and not least in strong education and knowledge development.

The Nordic Council of Ministers for Culture has adopted a strategy setting the framework for their co-operation and Nordic emphases in cultural affairs for 2013-2020. The programme is based on five main pillars: the sustainable Nordic region, the creative Nordic region, the intercultural Nordic region, young people in the Nordic region, the digital Nordic region. The programme's objective is to reinforce and promote Nordic culture and encourage the cultural participation of as many people as possible. Flourishing cultural activities and access to culture can have a positive impact on people's health, their participation in the community and their welfare. During its presidency, Iceland will follow up on Swedish emphases in this area, examining in more detail what actions have proven successful and how this success can be followed up on. During its presidency, Iceland will support education and research focusing on shared language and culture. In addition, special emphasis will be placed on integrating creativity, education and science through the Biophilia project (see further p. 24).

Nordic co-operation is based on cross-cultural collaboration of different groups, countries and age groups, where there is room for the emphases of everyone. The co-operation is unique in reinforcing historical and cultural connections between the countries. These connections are maintained through the co-operation of a large number of NGOs and broad public involvement. The work of grass roots organisations in the field of culture and the arts is vital for Nordic societies. These organisations oversee a large variety of Nordic co-operation projects and carry out very significant work on behalf of Nordic culture. It is important to give this work proper credit and increase it.

During this presidency, the focus will be directed at the role of music and design. Special attention will be drawn to these fields and they will be promoted in a wide variety of fora, e.g. with participation in events connected with fashion and with the *Nordic Playlist* (see further p. 30).

Digital technology opens up a great number of opportunities for the Nordic countries, in part by reinforcing the shared experience connected with culture and language. The use of digital media is a desirable way to secure access to Nordic arts and culture and to increase public knowledge and interest. In addition, digital technology is a major factor in presenting the common cultural heritage, and thereby strengthening the sense of Nordic community. Emphasis will be placed on utilising digital technology to an increasing extent, for instance, to enable improved access by the public to sources and data stored in Nordic national archives.

Children's and youths' affairs are a priority area of Nordic co-operation and this is reflected in strategy formulation in many areas. The stated objective of the Nordic Council of Ministers is that the Nordic countries should be the best place in the world for children and youth. Participation in cultural life and democratic activities is a basis for quality of life and equal rights. In 2013 the first Nordic Council Children and Young People's Literature Prize was awarded. In making this award, the Nordic Council underlines the importance of literature for children and youths in Nordic culture. During its presidency, Iceland plans to follow up on this initiative and hold a major celebration of children and young people's literature in Iceland. The intention is to make such a celebration an annual event.

The Nordic countries work together on strengthening the creative sectors in various fora, for instance within KreaNord, and by participation in developing cultural co-operation within the Northern Dimension. Cross-disciplinary co-operation in KreaNord has encouraged increased collaboration between business and culturally linked activities, strengthening both areas.

The co-operation programme in industry and innovation for 2014–2017 emphasises the role of culture industries and creative sectors in economic growth. Cross-disciplinary collaboration in areas related to culture and employment affairs is necessary to boost creative sectors.

There is a long tradition of Nordic co-operation in the international arena, for instance, in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). UNESCO committees in the Nordic countries also work closely together and meet regularly. The countries co-operate regarding UNESCO World Heritage agreements, e.g. through the Nordic World Heritage Foundation (NWHF) in Oslo and Nordic network of world heritage associations. Iceland wishes to honour this work and direct attention to world heritage agreements and other projects under the auspices of UNESCO. Projects have been carried out concerning the role of education in promoting sustainable development, for instance, in connection with

climate change. Such projects have been carried out as part of UNESCO's Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, which concludes in 2014. Possibilities of further collaboration on similar projects will be examined.

PROJECTS

- The Nordic Fashion Biennale will be held in Frankfurt in 2014. The emphasis will be on arts and design from the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Iceland. This event will be sponsored by the Nordic House in Reykjavík in co-operation with the Nordic House in the Faroe Islands and the Nordic Institute in Greenland
- A conference will be held on the importance of NGOs and transfer of expertise and experience from older generations to younger ones. Co-operation with the Nordic Association will be sought in organising the conference.
- Work will be carried out on setting up a portal for Nordic national archives.
- Work will be carried out on integrating education, creativity and science in the project Biophilia, under the umbrella of the *Nordic Bioeconomy*.
- Iceland will use its influence to secure participation of young people and their NGOs in Biophilia, in co-operation with the Nordic Committee for Children and Young People.
- The Nordic Council Children and Young People's Literature Prize will be followed up on with a festival of children and youth literature in Iceland.
- The *Nordic Light 2014* young people's art and cultural festival will be held during the presidency. The Nordic Culture Fund provides support for the festival and has selected it as *Nordic Cultural event 2014*.
- On the occasion of the new translations of the medieval *Sagas of Icelanders* into Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, which will be published in 2014, a campaign will be launched to promote the cultural heritage they represent.
- An assessment will be made of the connections between culture and health.

- Iceland will take the lead in the international serial nomination of Viking monuments and sites to the UNESCO World Heritage list.
- A seminar will be held on UNESCO agreements to discuss how Nordic countries can collaborate on implementing international cultural agreements.
- A conference will be held on intangible cultural artefacts in connection with the UNESCO Convention on Cultural Heritage, in co-operation with Nordic folk music associations.
- The UNESCO Decade of Education for Sustainable Development will be reviewed and the achievements of this work summarised.

Objective:

- To strengthen the Nordic countries as a cultural region and reinforce Nordic cohesion.
- To facilitate access to Nordic music and strengthen the Nordic music market.
- To promote Nordic music within and outside of the Nordic countries, and boost possibilities for export.

The *Nordic Playlist* is a development project under the auspices of the export project NOMEX, which is directed by the Nordic countries' music export offices. The Playlist combines the use of digital technology with dissemination of Nordic music in a simple manner. The objective of the Playlist is to promote Nordic music among residents of the Nordic countries, while also drawing attention to Nordic music, groups and individual artists within and outside the Nordic countries, and in so doing encourage increased exports of music. On the project's website www.nordicplaylist.com, and through music portals on the Internet, the most interesting songs from all the Nordic countries will be available on a single playlist, which will be updated regularly, together with news of what is most popular in the individual countries. By this means, the public can follow the Nordic music scene and easily access what is currently in the forefront of Nordic music. While the presentation of the playlist will make it more likely to attract younger generations, it is accessible to everyone regardless of age or residence. By utilising the latest technology, interest can be sparked in Nordic countries' music, culture and languages, strengthening the basis of the Nordic countries as a living cultural region.

The *Nordic Playlist* can support Nordic culture and the creative sectors. In tandem with increased interest and a greater number of listeners, the Nordic music market can be strengthened, increasing the employment opportunities for people working in the field of music and other related sectors, which will deliver a variety of positive returns to Nordic societies. Nordic music enjoys growing popularity outside the Nordic countries, which makes it important to take advantage of the opportunities this offers. The creative sectors and strengthening them are important milestones on the route to a green economy, as they are basically sustainable.

www.nordicplaylist.com





Welfare and participation

Nordic welfare systems face new challenges which demand solutions and co-operation on many fronts: global financial recession, demographic changes and unemployment are examples of such. Included among these tasks is the need to prevent isolation and ensure citizens' involvement, equality, social security and good health and social services. The declaration of Nordic Prime Ministers on Sustainable Nordic Welfare for 2013–2015 provides a road map for co-operation in the area of welfare issues during the Icelandic presidency.

Many things affect people's health and well-being. Decisions and policy formulation in institutions or in the international arena can affect health both positively and negatively. It is important that all decision-making is aimed at improving the quality of life of individuals and families.

The success of social and healthcare services is based on research which endeavours to find and develop new solutions. It is urgent for governments, the general public and stakeholders to have good access to data and to be able to follow developments and changes in society. With the programme the *Nordic Welfare Watch* (see further p. 38), Iceland will make its contribution to creating and securing access to such information. Continuous improvement efforts and quality development also make a decisive difference in improving the services and remedies available. Continuous assessment needs to be made of the quality and success of actions and services at regular intervals and consultation and cooperation of Nordic experts increased. The issue of spinal cord injury will be taken up during the presidency and an examination made of how to improve Nordic co-operation for more effective treatment of spinal cord injury.

Iceland will emphasise the importance of a healthy lifestyle for health and well-being. The focus will be on the negative consequences of poor lifestyles, such as obesity and consumption of alcohol, tobacco and other intoxicants. Iceland will use its influence to increase Nordic co-operation in the pharmaceutical sector, as it is necessary to respond to and prevent overuse and misuse of certain pharmaceuticals, which is a growing problem everywhere in Nordic countries and very costly to society.

Iceland wishes to encourage and increase Nordic co-operation in the field of welfare technology. By so doing, Nordic countries can jointly propose ideas



for solutions which can maintain or increase quality and security in social and welfare services. The Nordic countries have also decided to increase collaboration in clinical studies. In this connection it is important to stimulate discussion as to how various aspects of the preparation of research programmes and applications to ethical and personal data protection committees can be simplified and harmonised.

During the presidency, special attention will be given to children's and family issues. Children's well-being and propitious interaction between society and families encourages active participation and lays the foundation for healthy and positive social development.

Participation in employment is a premise for well-being, as well as one of the cornerstones of Nordic welfare societies. Economic recession in recent years has decreased the employment opportunities for people with reduced work capacity. It is important to combat unemployment among young people and vulnerable or marginal groups. Long-term unemployment and the interplay of education and labour market issues will be a focal point during the Icelandic presidency.

The Nordic governments have raised the question as to whether the lack of close links between the traditional school system and business and industry means that young people fail to gain experience and insight into general working life, which is an important part of each individual's development. Iceland will follow the Swedish initiative in expanding on-the-job training and its connections with business and schools. The focus will be directed at educational system development and possibilities of closer ties to business and industry, with a view to providing youths with practical on-the-job training as part of their studies. Ways will be sought to boost job-seekers' possibilities of training, so that internships can become part of job-seeking programmes. Emphasis is placed on having authorities in education and labour affairs join in discussing these issues. It is urgent that educational developments go hand in hand with developments in society and industry, so that they can reinforce one another and support broad participation.

Iceland wishes to promote the possibility of enabling as many people as possible to be active in the labour market on their own premises. A variety of jobs are needed that will meet individuals' needs, so that each person can find a task and work suitable to him or her. The work environment must be safe and healthy, and accord with employees' physical and mental capabilities throughout their lives, while at the same time being rewarding and encouraging. This calls for a flexible labour market, which can adapt to individuals' varying abilities. It is also necessary, through effective rehabili-

tation, to help people return to work if they suffer loss of health due to disease or accident. An encouraging work environment and effective support system promotes better health and enables people to remain in the labour market as long as possible.

The Nordic countries have been in the forefront in ensuring gender equality, with each country benefiting from the experience of others. During its presidency, Iceland will spotlight equal rights and status in the labour market, the gender-segregated labour market and ways to combine family life and work. Special emphasis will be placed on projects and discussion of wage equality. Involvement of men in gender equality issues, actions to combat gender-related violence and co-operation on gender equality in West Nordic countries will also be a key focus during the presidency. Iceland has always emphasised West Nordic issues and sparsely populated areas in Nordic co-operation. In this collaboration emphasis will be placed on the connections between gender equality, family life and labour market equality. Discussion of Arctic issues has to a large extent been concerned with resource utilisation and the consequences of climate change for the natural environment and human life in the Arctic. However, there is no less need to direct attention to the status of both genders and what impact the environmental and social changes which have taken place or await will have on both men and women.

All the countries are preparing to implement the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Recently attention has been directed not least at the effects of violence and sexual violence on children. Work is underway on a Nordic project for co-ordinated risk assessment concerning domestic violence. It is important to share expertise on successful actions and where further work is needed.

In dealing with new welfare tasks, many parties need to be involved. During its presidency, Iceland will emphasise consultation, collaboration and integration of remedies cutting across institutions and administrative levels.

PROJECTS

- The status of Nordic co-operative projects, institutions and committees working in the area of social affairs and healthcare and their value for the Nordic countries will be reviewed.
- Work will aim at developing registration of welfare services.
- A conference will be held on families, child welfare and family policy in the Nordic countries.
- Discussion will be launched on the importance of non-profit and volunteer organisations for Nordic welfare.
- Increased consultation will be encouraged between Nordic countries on preventive actions and new ways of responding to the consequences of poor lifestyles.
- Nordic and international experts in the area of spinal cord injury will gather and assess the success of treatment of spinal cord injury.
- Nordic co-operation on pharmaceutical issues will be increased. The Nordic countries' experiences of integrating home nursing and social services in the home will be reviewed.
- Collaboration within the Nordic Trial Alliance will continue.
- A conference will be held on the labour market, lifelong occupational health and safety and vocational rehabilitation, involving experts in vocational rehabilitation, labour market and occupational health and safety.
- A conference will be held on on-the-job training as part of traditional study, in collaboration with the Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour and the Work Environment (MR-A) and the Nordic Council of Ministers for Education and Research.
- To mark the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Nordic labour market co-operation, a conference will be held on labour affairs in collaboration with social partners in the Nordic countries.

- The women's conference Nordisk Forum will be held in Malmö, arranged by Nordic NGOs.
- The research project *Part-time work, gender and economic benefit* will conclude in the autumn months of 2014 with a conference.
- A conference will be held on gender equality in Arctic regions, and the involvement of both genders in policy formulation and decision-making in questions of socio-economic development.
- A conference will be held in the Faroe Islands on targets and routes in gender issues.
- A conference will be held on men's studies and equal rights.
- A conference will be held on actions to reduce gender-related violence, discussing successful actions in Nordic countries.
- A conference will be convened on the success and future objectives in Nordic countries in gender equality on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Nordic co-operation in gender equality. In tandem with the conference, the Ministers of Nordic countries, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania responsible for equal rights will hold a meeting.

Objective:

- To examine the impact of financial recession and related consequences on Nordic welfare systems.
- To encourage informed policymaking in welfare affairs.
- To reduce the impact of health-linked problems on welfare and increase the sustainability of Nordic welfare systems.

The *Nordic Welfare Watch* will study the consequences of financial recession on Nordic welfare systems, their impact on health, welfare and employment participation.

All the Nordic countries have, at some point in time, been subject to and have had to deal with financial crises and their consequences. This experience of Nordic countries will serve as the basis for studying the impact of increased economic burdens, persistent stress and unemployment on the mental and physical health, welfare and living conditions of specific groups. The response of Nordic countries to financial crises will also be examined, to assess what actions have proven successful and where improvements are needed to prevent negative consequences of financial crises on society and welfare.

The *Nordic Welfare Watch* aims at reinforcing the pillars and promoting the sustainability of Nordic welfare systems through co-operation, research and mutual exchange of the experience and knowledge acquired. Its objective is also to develop solutions and co-ordinate actions to meet future challenges and to develop welfare indicators which can be useful for policymaking. By so doing, a strong core of research can be created, from which information and practical knowledge can be drawn which can prove useful for Nordic countries in formulating policies and making decisions in welfare issues should similar circumstances arise in the future. In this way, the countries will be able to respond and attempt to mitigate the negative impact on welfare. Nordic countries can learn from one another, benefit from each other's experience and expertise and jointly meet upcoming challenges, to guard and reinforce the sustainability of Nordic welfare in the future.





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Further information on Iceland's
presidency of the Nordic Council
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www.norden2014.is and
www.nordic2014.com

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