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# **Children and Young People in the Nordic Region –**

**a cross-sectoral strategy for the  
Nordic Council of Ministers 2016–2022**

# Children and Young People in the Nordic Region – a cross-sectoral strategy for the Nordic Council of Ministers 2016 – 2022

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# About cross-sectoral strategies in the Nordic Council of Ministers

The Nordic Council of Ministers' cross-sectoral strategies describe its priorities and ambitions in areas that traverse sectors and thereby constitute a common platform and direction for the work of the various councils of ministers within these topics.

Although the cross-sectoral strategies are governing documents for all of the Nordic Council of Ministers' activities, they should also be viewed in the context of other governing documents, such as the vision for Nordic inter-governmental co-operation (*Together we are stronger*), the co-operation programmes of the various sectors, and the national presidency programmes. Furthermore, the Nordic Council of Ministers will integrate perspectives of gender equality and sustainability into all of its activities. See the structure for the Nordic Council of Ministers' governing documents below.

## Chart: Structure for the Nordic Council of Ministers' governing documents:

| Governing documents                                       | Target group                | Time                 |
|---|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Vision statement of the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation | Nordic Council of Ministers | Until further notice |
| Cross-sectoral strategy                                   | Nordic Council of Ministers | Up to 6 years        |
| Co-operation programme                                    | Sector-specific             | 4 years              |
| Presidency programme                                      | Nordic Council of Ministers | 1 year               |

This cross-sectoral strategy consists of an introduction describing its purpose and bases, followed by a description of selected strategic focus areas for the strategy's applicable time frame, as well as organisation and follow-up.





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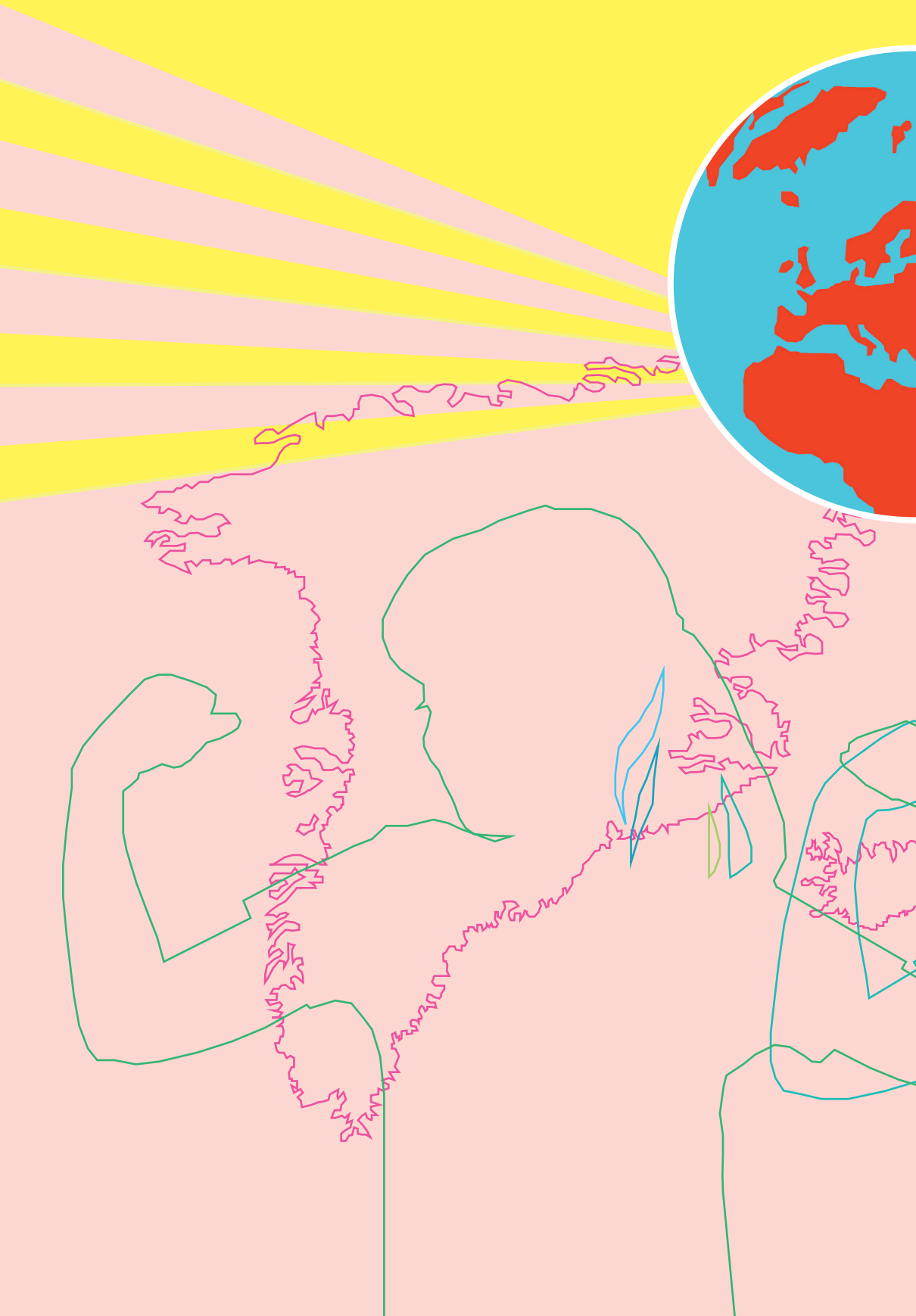
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# About the cross-sectoral strategy for children and young people in the Nordic Region

The Ministers for Nordic Co-operation approved this strategy on 11 February 2016. This strategy is to be followed up every two years and evaluated before the end of 2022.

***The Nordic Region must be the best place in the world for children and young people***

This is the Nordic Council of Ministers' vision for its efforts relating to children and young people, which is also part of the Nordic Council of Ministers' overall vision *Together we are stronger* adopted by the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation (MR-SAM) in order to achieve Nordic co-operation that is characterised by *freedom of movement, innovation, visibility, and international engagement*.

Children and young people are priority target groups for the Nordic Council of Ministers, covering everyone up to the age of 25 and thus including boys, girls, and transgender children up to the age of 18 in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as young women, young men, and young transgender people up to the age of 25. Since there isn't a sharp distinction between adolescents and adults, the target group may vary for different initiatives to include those older than 25. "Children and young people" is used as a unifying term in this strategy, but it is important to remember that children and young people are different, with different identities, experiences, and situations – something which the Nordic Council of Ministers must always take into account in its work.

On the basis of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Nordic Council of Ministers will work to protect and promote the rights of children and young people and to provide opportunities for them to exercise these rights and participate in society. This means that all children and young people in the Nordic Region shall be entitled to enjoy a decent standard of living and to have influence over their own lives, regardless of their gender, gender identity or

expression, ethnic background, religion or other expression of faith, disability, sexual orientation, or age. All children and young people have the right to social and economic security, to good physical and mental health, to recreational and cultural opportunities, to an identity and language, and to opportunities to learn and develop. All children and young people must be given the chance to have influence over their own lives, their immediate environment, and society at large.

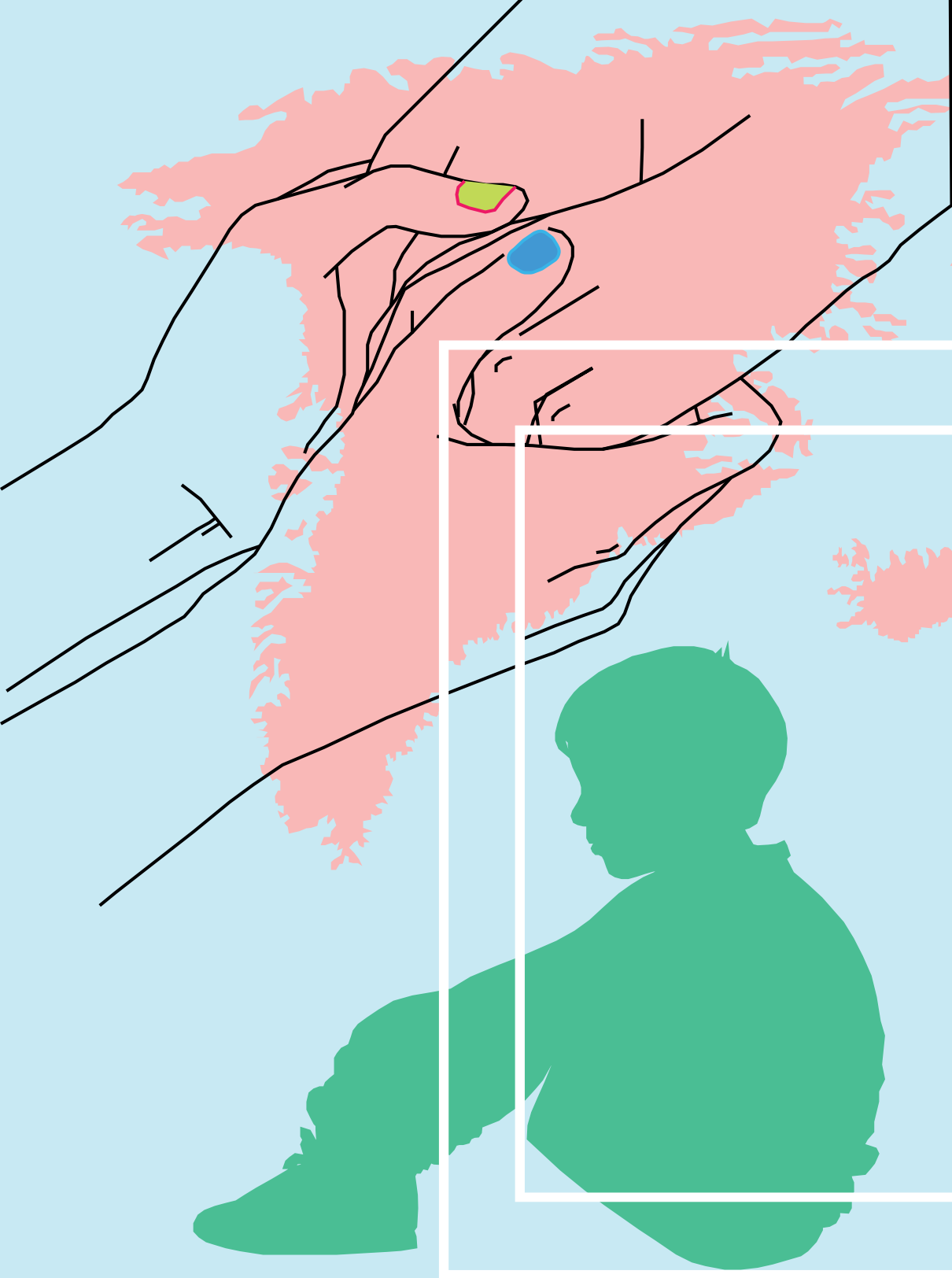
This forms the basis for the Nordic Council of Ministers' work with children and young people. The well-being of children and young people, as well as opportunities for them to exercise their rights, is a prerequisite for the continued development of the Nordic Region. For this reason, the Nordic Council of Ministers must work from the perspective that all children and young people are important here and now – not just in the future. In carrying out this work, it is crucial to integrate a gender and sustainability perspective as well. The Nordic Council of Ministers must contribute to the Nordic Region becoming a leader and pioneer in the efforts to create a society in which the rights and different perspectives of children and young people are respected and contribute to the development of society.

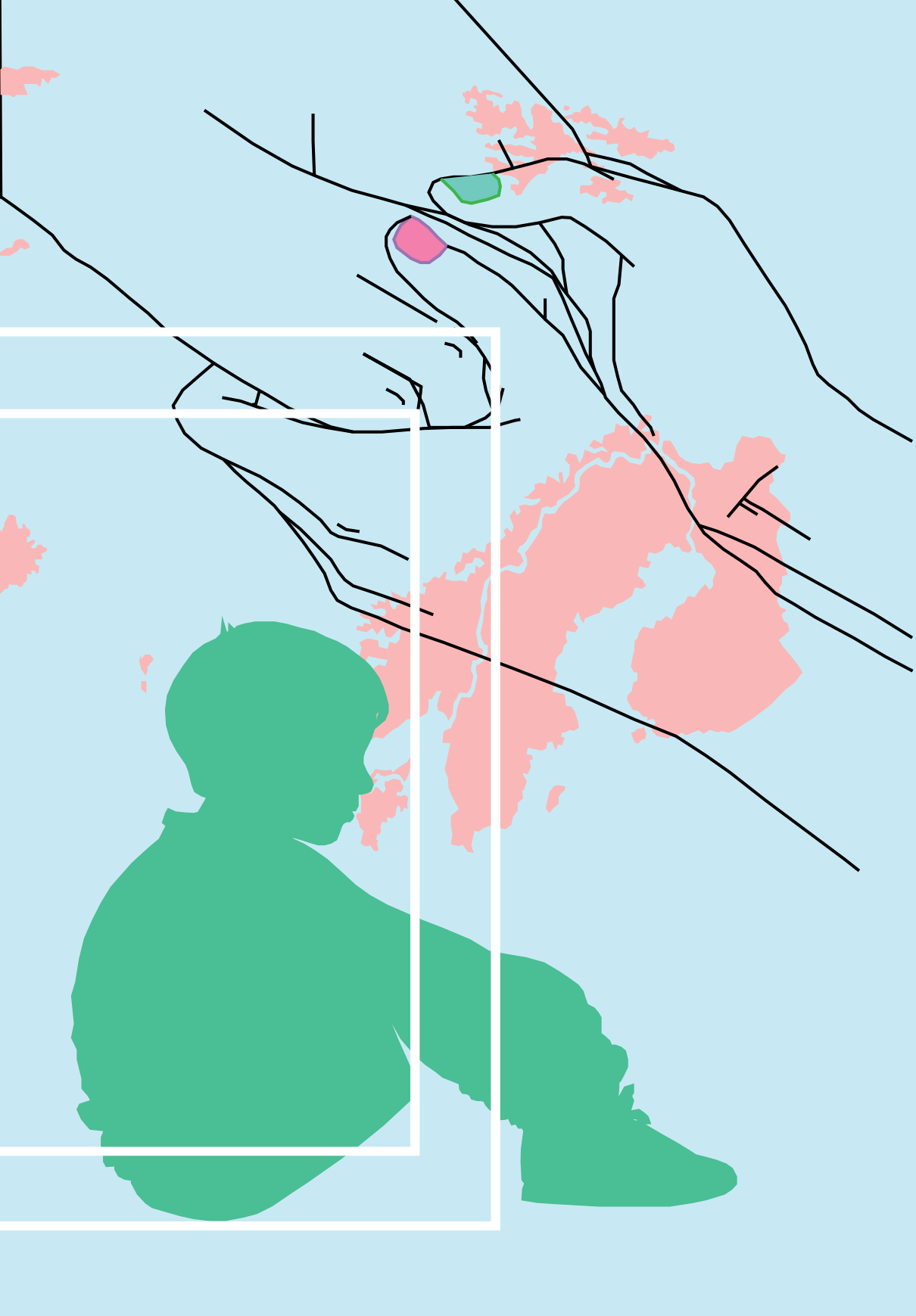
The overarching goals of the strategy are: (1) the better integration of the children's rights and youth perspective into the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers as a whole, thus better highlighting and taking into consideration the voices of children and young people; and (2) a greater focus by the Nordic Council of Ministers on the three strategic focus areas that this strategy identifies as central to its efforts up to 2022.

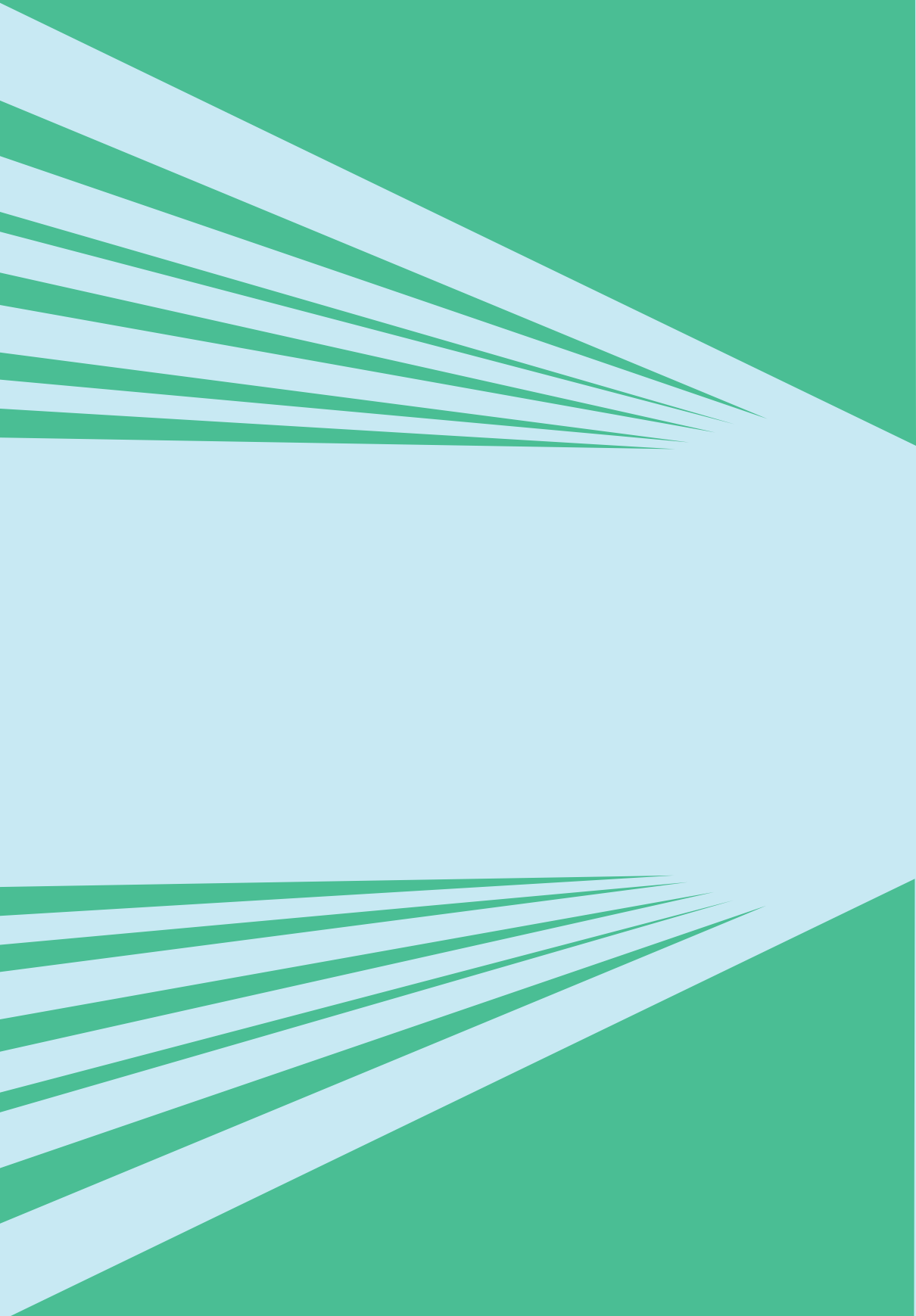
In preparing the sectors' co-operation programmes, consideration must be given to the integration of this strategy for children and young people, including the strategic focus areas.

## **The aim of children's rights and youth policy co-operation in the Nordic Region**

Through continued close co-operation with regard to children and young people, the Nordic countries, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland achieve more together than they would on their own. The disparity in living conditions among children and young people is greatly influenced by their families and where in the Nordic Region they are living and growing up. This is why a local and regional focus is important to this co-operation. Children's rights and







youth policy also touch upon and are affected by several policy areas, which often requires collaboration between different sectors of society. Nordic co-operation on children's rights and youth policy will contribute to greater knowledge and deeper collaboration between the Nordic countries, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland. Co-operation is taking place not only at a Nordic level, but internationally as well, primarily with the Baltic countries and the Baltic Sea region, as well as through co-operation with the Arctic and Barents regions, the Council of Europe, and the European Union. By enabling various exchanges and meetings between children and young people, sharing experiences as part of projects and conferences, and sharing knowledge, methodologies, and research, we can together develop policies and practices that will make the Nordic Region the best place in the world for children and young people.

## Strategic focus areas

This strategy is based on the continual development of the Nordic Council of Ministers' knowledge of the situation of children and young people in each policy area, and the development of its expertise in these areas in a way that ensures the integration of a children's rights and youth perspective. Furthermore, in pursuing this strategy, the Nordic Council of Ministers wishes to highlight three strategic focus areas.

### Enhanced support and inclusion for disadvantaged children and young people

In general, the Nordic Region is a good place for children and young people to grow up, although it is more difficult for some than others to find their place in society and have their rights respected. It is therefore imperative that the Nordic Council of Ministers works to improve conditions for the inclusion of vulnerable children and young people, as well as to ensure that they are listened to in various processes and are given the opportunity to have an influence. Similarly, the outcomes for children and young people must be analysed on the basis of the best interests of the child in connection with the decisions that concern them. This requires further work on and knowledge of the efforts needed to promote inclusion with a view towards improving children's and young people's lives based on their various situations and needs.





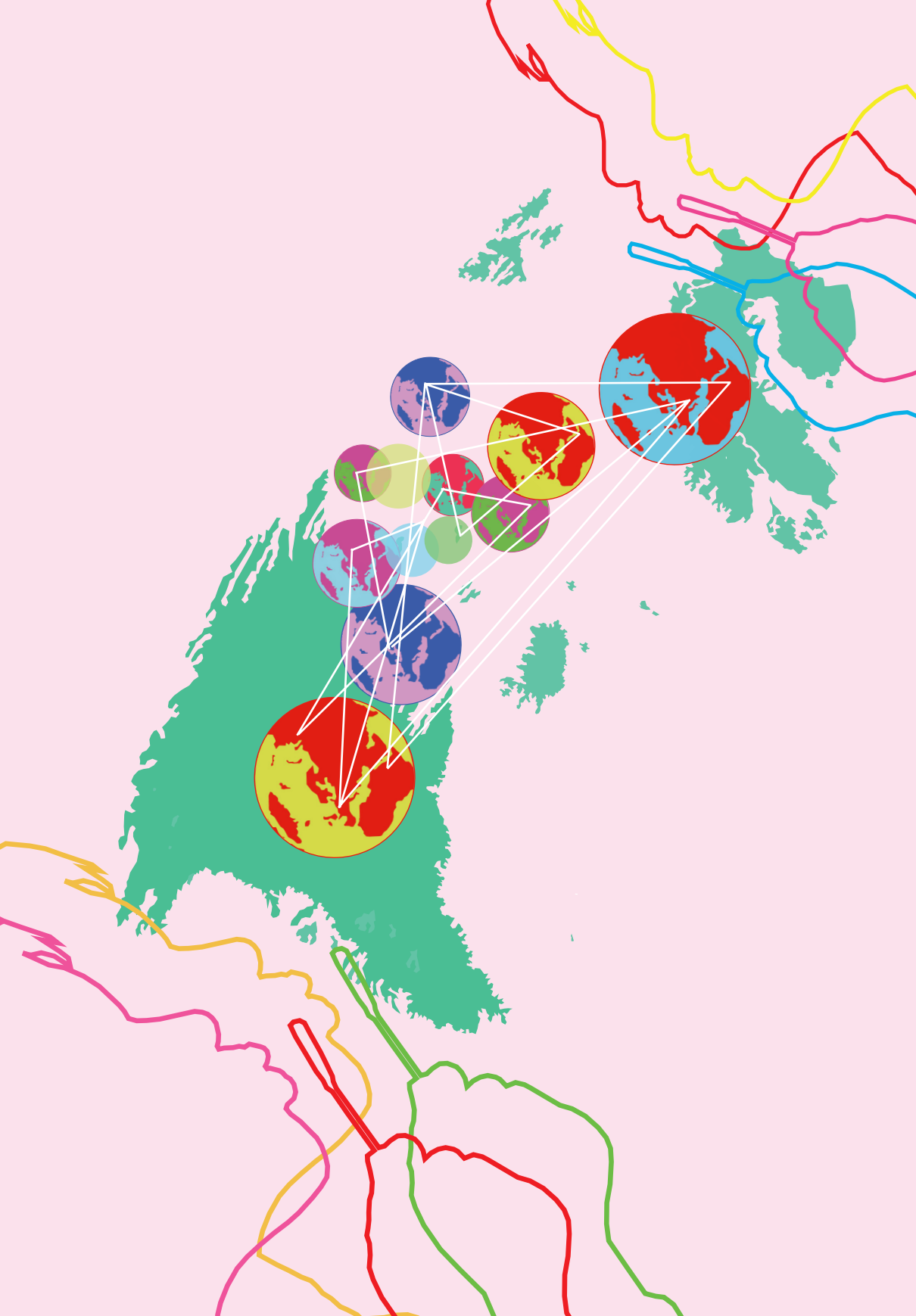
Through a stronger general focus on vulnerable children and young people in the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers, each policy area can prioritise the initiatives that are relevant and necessary in its field. This could, for instance, be about children and young people who are refugees or migrants, who are exposed to violence or abuse, who risk physical or psychological harm, who are neither in work or study, who have no access to cultural opportunities, or who are being victimised online. The difference in living conditions between girls and boys and between young women and men, as well as the vulnerability of transgender young people, warrant special focus. In the regular follow-ups of this strategy and the evaluation of the strategy as a whole, it must be clear that the Nordic Council of Ministers has prioritised the rights and living conditions of vulnerable children and young people.

## Continued collaboration with and support of civil society

The Nordic Region has a tradition of a strong civil society<sup>1</sup> which is encouraged through local, national, and Nordic forms of support. The exchange of experience across borders can reinforce activities in this area in each Nordic country, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland, as well as increase children's and young people's opportunities to convey their thoughts and ideas. Over time the desire to come together has been assuming new forms and expressions. Civil society is an arena that often provides children and young people with the opportunity to develop their creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation. For this reason, it is important that the Nordic Council of Ministers continues to support the development of the various forms of organisation and participation in democratic processes in the Nordic Region, based on the differing situations, needs, and interests of children and young people.

By continuing to collaborate with and support civil society, the Nordic Council of Ministers can enable the development of dialogue and co-operation in each policy area with relevant organisations and find ways to highlight and make use of the expertise of many stakeholders in civil society. The Nordic Council of

<sup>1</sup>. Civil society is a broad concept and can be defined as “any group of people who are not the state, the market, or a single household or individual”. One can also talk about the non-profit sector: the work and activities of associations, foundations, charities, networks, or NGOs whereby people organise themselves in relation to some sort of common goal, ideal, or interest. Nordic CSOs (groups or networks at the Nordic level) are of particular importance to the Nordic Council of Ministers. These organisations are the Nordic Council of Ministers' primary collaboration and dialogue partners.

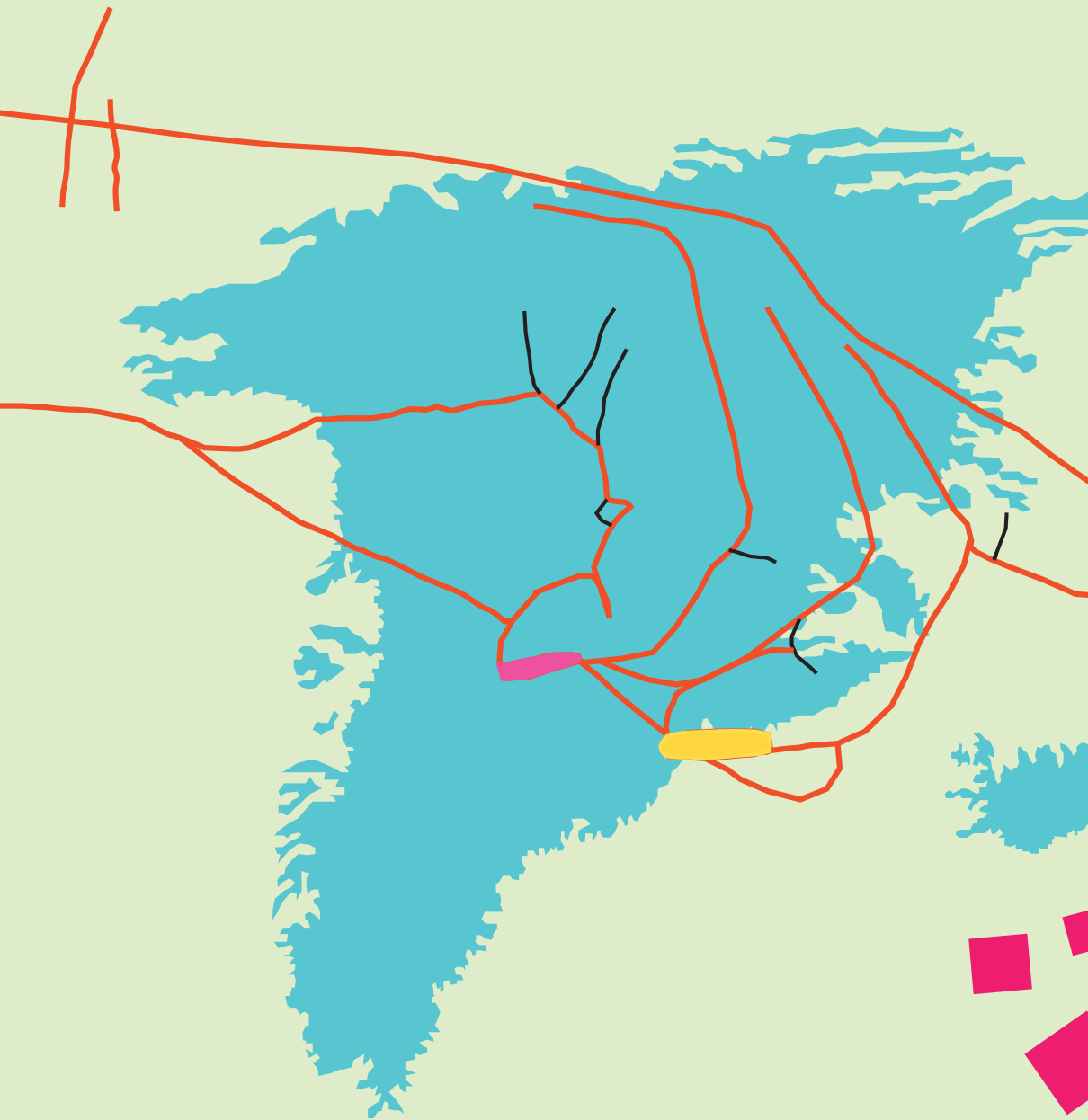


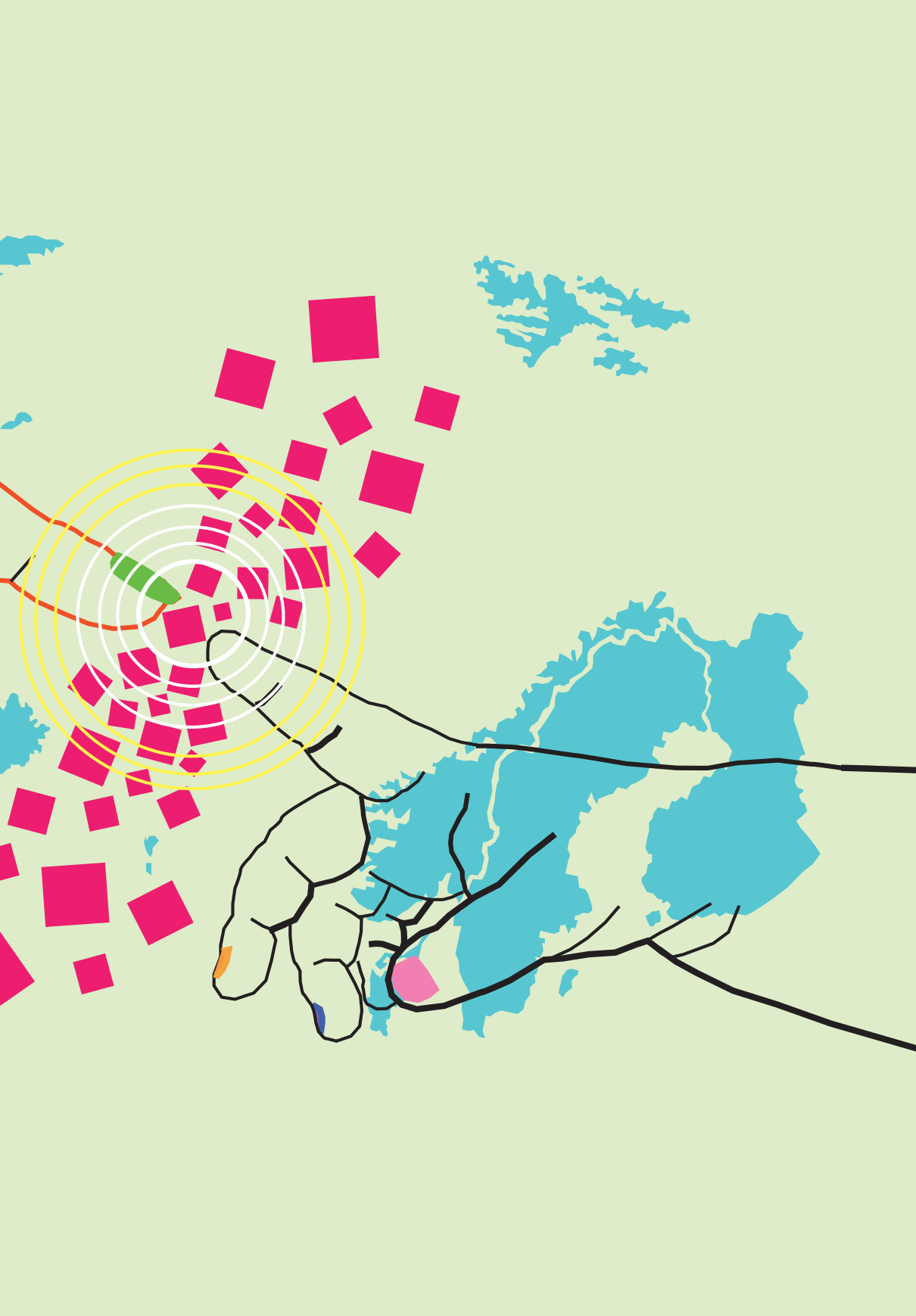
Ministers should continue to promote collaboration between public and civil society organisations that work for and with children and young people in the Nordic Region. In the regular follow-ups of this strategy and the evaluation of the strategy as a whole, it must be clear that the Nordic Council of Ministers is consciously working with and supporting civil society in its efforts relating to children and young people.

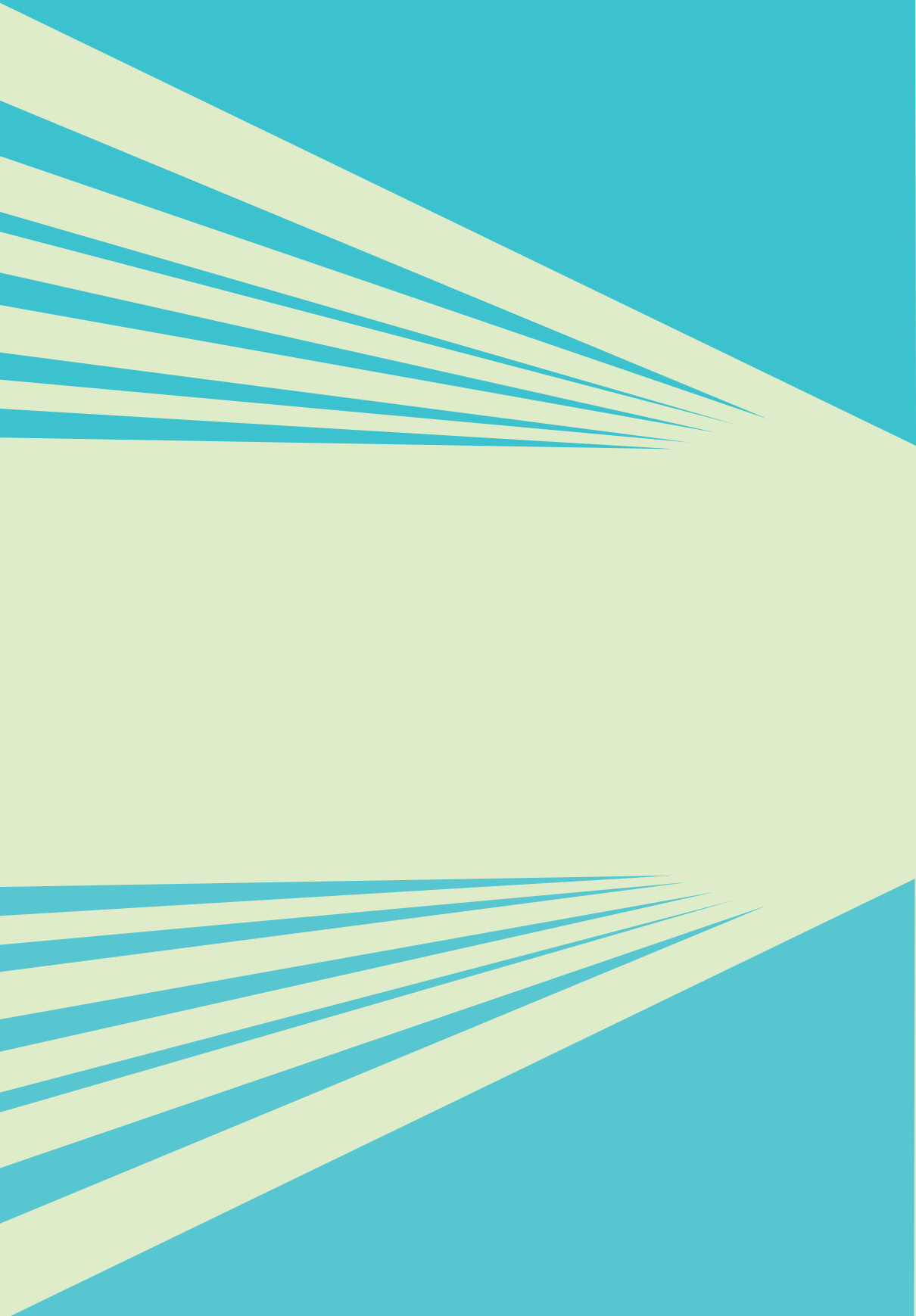
## Improved knowledge-sharing and efforts to enhance skills

In order to promote the rights and perspectives of children and young people in various sectors, the Nordic Council of Ministers must ensure the constant development of knowledge and expertise in these areas. For this reason, it is important to continue to improve the Nordic Council of Ministers' processes in order to leverage the knowledge necessary for various policy areas within the Nordic Council of Ministers so as to be able to work on the basis of a children's rights and youth perspective. In addition, there is a requirement for further skills development and training in how best to integrate the views and knowledge of children and young people into the Nordic Council of Ministers' work and to provide concrete examples of how this might be done. Such skills are often abundant in youth civil society. Furthermore, there is a need for skills development and training in how to analyse the consequences for children and young people based on the best interests of the child in decision-making processes. Consequently, this priority area involves developing processes, methods, and skills, as well as the Nordic Council of Ministers' co-operation with other international organisations that have expertise in children's rights and youth policy.

Through improved knowledge-sharing and capacity-building efforts in the Nordic Council of Ministers, each policy area can contribute to an increased level of expertise and knowledge with regard to knowledge-based work with and for children and young people. In the regular follow-ups of this strategy and the evaluation of the strategy as a whole, it must be clear that the Nordic Council of Ministers is constantly contributing to knowledge development.







# Organisation in the Nordic Council of Ministers

## A shared responsibility

All activities within the Nordic Council of Ministers have a responsibility for basing their work on the vision of this strategy. Furthermore, all activities have a responsibility for developing their knowledge of the various situations of children and young people in the respective policy areas, as well for integrating into their work a children's rights and youth perspective.

The Ministers for Nordic Co-operation (MR-SAM) and thereunder the Nordic Committee for Co-operation (NSK) have overall responsibility for co-ordinating Nordic co-operation on matters relating to children and young people at the Nordic Council of Ministers.

## Councils of ministers with special responsibility

There are certain sectors of the Nordic Council of Ministers that have particular importance in the lives of children and young people, hence the work of the three strategic focus areas of this strategy. The sectors with special responsibility for working with these areas are:

- Ministers for Labour (MR-A)
- Ministers for Gender Equality (MR-JÄM)
- Ministers for Culture (MR-K)
- Ministers for Regional Development (MR-NER)
- Ministers for Health and Social Affairs (MR-S)
- Ministers for Education and Research, including language co-operation (MR-U)





## Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK)

The Nordic Committee for Children and Young People (NORDBUK) is the Nordic Council of Ministers' advisory and co-ordinating body in matters relating to Nordic and international children's and youth policy. NORDBUK's activities are governed by the committee's regulations and this strategy. NORDBUK will assist the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation (MR-SAM) in the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of this strategy and its objectives.

NORDBUK will support the councils of ministers in working on the basis of a children's rights and youth perspective and will support cross-sectoral co-operation within the Nordic Council of Ministers on children's and youth policy matters.

# Follow-up and reporting

As support for the implementation of this strategy, an implementation plan has been drawn up by NORDBUK. The councils of ministers with special responsibility for this strategy (MR-A, MR-JÄM, MR-K, MR-NER, MR-S, and MR-U) are developing goals for their efforts within the strategy's three strategic focus areas.

These goals are followed up and reported to MR-SAM in a single report every two years along with a follow-up of the Nordic Council of Ministers' work on the integration of a children's rights and youth perspective as a whole. The report is addressed first by NORDBUK, which is responsible for assessing developments and for proposing amendments to MR-SAM.

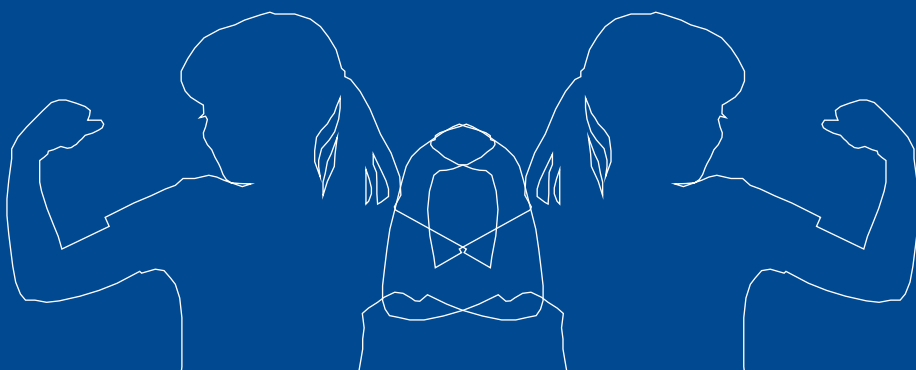
The development of the Nordic Council of Ministers' work on this strategy will be reported to both the Nordic Youth Council and the Nordic Council every two years.

## ***The Nordic Region must be the best place in the world for children and young people***

This is the vision of this cross-sectoral strategy for children and young people in the Nordic Region, which makes children and young people aged between 0 and 25 a priority target group within the Nordic council of Ministers.

A central goal of the strategy is for the Nordic Council of Ministers to integrate the perspective of children's rights and young people into their work to a greater extent, thus highlighting and taking into consideration the voices of children and young people.

Based on the principles enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Council of Ministers seeks to protect and promote the rights of boys and girls, young women and men, and to provide opportunities for them to exercise these rights and participate in society. The well-being of children and young people and opportunities for them to exercise their rights are prerequisites for sustainable development in the Nordic Region. The Council of Ministers wants to ensure that the Region is a pioneer in efforts to create a society that respects the rights and perspectives of children and young people, and gives them opportunities to contribute to the way in which their society develops.





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