THE NORDIC SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2025

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS NETWORK
A GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

SDSN Northern Europe

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

THE NORDIC SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REPORT

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"The Nordic countries perform well on the social and economic SDGs but are clearly off track with respect to the environmental SDGs"

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"Per capita, Denmark generates almost five times more Scarce water consumption compared to Sweden, and Iceland generates more than five times as much plastic waste as Finland"

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"The worst performance for any Nordic country in relation to the European average is Norway's performance on the SDG 13 indicator CO_2 emissions embodied in fossil fuel export"

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List of abbreviations

BSI: Bilateral Spillover Impacts

DNK: Denmark

EU: European Union

ESDR: Europe Sustainable Development Report

FIN: Finland

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

GHG: Greenhouse Gas

HLPF: High-Level Political Forum of the United Nations

ISL: Iceland

LNOB: Leave-No-One-Behind

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NOR: Norway

NRSR: Nordic Region Status Report

ODA: Official Development Aid

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

SDR: Sustainable Development Report

SDSN: Sustainable Development Solutions Network

SWE: Sweden

VLRs: Voluntary Local Reviews

VNRs: Voluntary National Reviews

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UN-Mi: Index of Countries' Support for UN-Based Multilateralism

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Preface

The Nordic countries have long been recognised as global leaders in sustainable development. Rooted in strong democratic institutions, social reforms, and trust in societal institutions, the Nordic region has consistently shown that prosperity and equality can go hand in hand. It has, however, become increasingly apparent that the Nordic lifestyle with its economic prosperity, and substantial consumption comes with environmental costs, both domestically and abroad.

This report — *The Nordic Sustainable Development Report* — builds on the methodology of the Europe Sustainable Development Report and provides a regional perspective that situates the Nordic countries within a broader European and global context. It brings together data and analyses from the SDG Index for Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. It provides a clear picture of where our region stands today and where greater efforts are needed.

The Nordic countries perform well on the social and economic SDGs but are clearly off track with respect to the environmental SDGs. Environmental pressures, unsustainable consumption patterns, and gaps in biodiversity protection remain critical challenges. Furthermore, the Nordics' international spillovers remind us that prosperity at home can generate environmental and social costs abroad. At the same time, the Nordic model of openness, cooperation, welfare, and innovation offers a strong foundation for renewed progress.

In an era marked by uncertainty, misinformation, and geopolitical fragmentation, it is more important than ever to anchor decision-making in robust data and transparent reporting. The data presented here allow policymakers, researchers, and citizens alike to understand both the progress and the shortcomings of the Nordic countries in achieving the SDGs.

As co-chairs of SDSN Northern Europe, we aim for this report to be a trusted source of knowledge and inspiration for policymakers, researchers, and citizens dedicated to advancing a more just and sustainable future. We also hope it will foster informed dialogue, responsible action, and renewed ambition throughout the Nordic region and beyond.

Prof. Katherine Richardson and
Prof. Holger Wallbaum
Co-Chairs, SDSN Northern Europe

Aim of the report

This first edition of the *Nordic Sustainable Development Report* presents a closer look at the Nordic countries' SDG scores, trend data, and spillover effects. Furthermore, it analyses the relation between the region's SDG Index performance and the performance towards the vision of the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The report aims to support a more informed discussion on SDG implementation in the Nordic countries and identify areas for improvement, both at home and in their contributions to sustainable development globally.

Key findings

- The Nordic countries are among the top European countries in terms of SDG implementation. Among European countries they rank at the positions 1, 2, 3, 5 and 10 in the European SDG Index and have high SDG Index scores that range from 73.4 to 81.1 percent of SDG implementation. The average Nordic SDG Index score (78 %) is higher than that of the European Union (72.8 %) and higher than those of all other European regions.

- The strong performance of the Nordic countries in terms of SDG implementation derives primarily from a century-long history of social reforms and strong governance of "the Nordic model", rather than efforts made since the 2030 Agenda was ratified in 2015, and the Nordic's progress towards SDG implementation has levelled off in the last couple of years.

- The Nordic countries have challenges with regard to SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production), SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 14 (Life below water), and SDG 15 (Life on land), primarily relating to lifestyle choices, sustainable consumption and production patterns, emissions of greenhouse gases and nitrogen, natural resource utilization in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and protection of species and ecosystems.

- The Nordic countries also have challenges in terms of large international spillovers that negatively affect other countries' capacities to implement the SDGs.

- The SDG implementation profiles of the Nordic countries are quite similar, meaning that the Nordic countries share roughly the same challenges and opportunities. The countries with the most similar profiles are Finland, Denmark and Sweden.

- The Nordic countries perform well on the domestic Leave-No-One-Behind Index.

- Among European countries, there are indications of a negative correlation between indicators for international spillovers and domestic SDG implementation, and a positive correlation between indicators for Leave-No-One-Behind and the remaining SDG indicators.

- The results presented here are in line with the results of the midpoint evaluation of the Nordic Council of Ministers vision for 2030, aiming to make the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world. The midpoint evaluation acknowledges that the goal of becoming a Green Nordic Region poses a big challenge. However, the SDG dashboard presented here shows an even lower degree of SDG implementation for SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 14, and SDG 15 than the dashboard of the Nordic Council of Ministers' vision for 2030.

- Although all UN nations have signed the UN Pact for the Future, there are geopolitical tensions and increased global polarisation that bring uncertainties for the future of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. For the Nordic countries, the Nordic Council of Ministers recently adopted 14 sectorial programmes for Nordic co-operation 2025 – 2030 that promote sustainable development. However, the increasing focus on defence and national security owing to the volatile geopolitical situation and the war in Ukraine pose significant challenges to Agenda 2030 and SDG implementation in the Nordics and beyond.

Introduction: The Nordic region and sustainable development

The Nordic region comprises the nations of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, as well as the autonomous territories of Åland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland. This region is home to approximately 28 million people, roughly 0.35% of the global population. Despite their small share of the world's population, the combined economies of the Nordic countries resulted in a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 1.7 trillion Euros in 2024 (Nordics Statistics Database, 2025), representing approximately 1.7 % of the global economy and falling just below the 2.0 % shares of Canada and the Russian Federation (IMF, 2025). In terms of GDP per capita, the Nordic countries are among the richest countries in the world, and significantly above the average of countries in the European Union (EU) (Nordic Statistics Database, 2025). This means that the Nordics play an important role in global trade, investment flows, and natural resource consumption and, therefore, also in the responsibility for achieving Agenda 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Paris Agreement. In terms of climate impact, the Nordic countries emitted 198 million tons CO_2-equivalents in 2024, corresponding to 0.37 % of the global emissions (Crippa M., 2025).

The Nordic countries have a shared history with similar social, political, and cultural structures, and have long-standing traditions of social reform, democracy, and international cooperation. What is known as "the Nordic model" is comprised of economic, governance, and social policies that have resulted in societies with, for example, strong labour rights and collective bargaining between labour unions and employers, a market-based mixed economy, high taxes, a broad commitment to social cohesion and equality, a high degree of gender equality, and a strong welfare state (Kuisma, 2007, Kautto, 2010).

While Denmark, Finland, and Sweden are EU member states, Iceland, and Norway are members of the European Free Trade Association and closely aligned with EU policies through the European Economic Area agreement. Denmark, Iceland, and Norway are founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and, since Sweden joined in 2024, all Nordic countries are NATO members. The close bonds and cooperation between the Nordic countries are also formalised within the Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers, whose vision is to make the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030 (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020). While this vision enables alignment of shared priorities within the region, it does not replace the global Agenda 2030 and the SDG framework.

The national reporting on Agenda 2030 and the SDGs takes place within the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in the form of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Since 2016, all Nordic countries have submitted two VNRs, and Finland submitted their third in 2025 (Table 1). Nordic reporting at the subnational level has also been submitted to the HPLF in the form of 31 Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) from 22 Nordic municipalities, as well as three Norwegian, one Icelandic, one Swedish, and one Nordic Voluntary Subnational Review (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, 2021, Icelandic Association of Local Authorities, 2023, UN-Habitat, 2024, UN DESA, 2024).

Table 1. Number and submission years of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) submitted by Nordic countries.

Country	Number of VNRs	First VNR	Second VNR	Third VNR
Finland	3	2016	2020	2025
Denmark	2	2017	2021	
Sweden	2	2017	2021	
Norway	2	2016	2021	
Iceland	2	2019	2023	

The Nordic countries are often seen as global leaders in sustainable development. This is, among other things, reflected by the continuously high SDG Index ranking in the annual *Sustainable Development Reports* (SDRs) published by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) (UN SDSN, 2025). Between 2016 and 2024, Finland, Denmark, and Sweden have been ranked as the top three nations, whereas Norway and Iceland have been ranked between 4th to 8th, and between 9th to 29th, respectively.

The Nordic countries have long supported the UN ambition of international cooperation and multilateralism, and have repeatedly voiced their support for multilateral cooperation and rules-based international order in statements within the UN. Despite this support, the Nordic countries are only ranked at place 70 (Iceland), 116 (Denmark), 124 (Norway), 129 (Finland), and 136 (Sweden), among the 193 UN countries in the *2025 Index of Countries' Support to UN-based Multilateralism (UN-Mi)* (Sachs, 2025). The UN-Mi is composed of six headline indicators, and the performance on those indicators, as well as the UN-Mi, for the Nordic countries is shown in Table 2. Although there is substantial variation among the Nordic countries, the UN-Mi indicators for which the Nordic countries perform worst are *Percentage of votes aligned with the international majority at the UN General Assembly, Use of unilateral coercive measures*, and *Participation in selected UN organisations and agencies*. The Nordic countries perform very well on *Contribution to the UN budget and international solidarity,* and *Ratification of major UN treaties*.

Table 2. UN-Mi indicator scores and overall UN-Mi score for the Nordic countries.

Indicator	Finland	Denmark	Sweden	Norway	Iceland
Ratification of major UN treaties	91,67	91,67	95,83	87,50	66,67
Percentage of votes aligned with the international majority at the UN General Assembly	26,15	27,69	29,23	69,23	72,31
Participation in selected UN organisations and agencies	66,67	33,33	66,67	66,67	33,33
Participation in conflicts and militarisation*	57,13	70,76	40,96	38,33	99,45
Use of unilateral coercive measures**	44,65	41,38	46,83	48,29	46,11
Percentage of gross national income devoted to official development assistance	57,70	87,00	100,00	100,00	30,71
Contribution to the UN budget and international solidarity	100,00	100,00	93,20	100,00	100,00
Overall UN-Mi score	**61.6**	**63.3**	**60.1**	**62.2**	**69.5**

* Participation in conflicts and militarisation is built on data provided by the Global Peace Index.
** Use of unilateral coercive measures are sanctions adopted without the consent of the UN Security Council.

The Nordic SDG Index and Dashboards

This section of the report builds on data from the regional *Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025* (ESDR, Lafortune G. and Grayson F., 2025), the *Bilateral Spillover Impacts Toolkit* (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2024), and the Nordic Council of Ministers report *The Nordic Region – a sustainable and integrated region? Our Vision 2030 – Status Report 2023* (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2023).

The SDG index score for a country is a value between 0 to 100 and represents the percentage of SDG implementation. These scores can be used to monitor the development of SDG implementation over time and enable comparisons of SDG implementation in different countries. For more information on the SDG Index and Dashboards methods, see Methods summary.

In the *ESDR 2025*, the SDG index score for the Nordic countries ranges from 73.4 to 81.1 with an average of 78.0. Thereby, the average SDG index score of the Nordic countries is higher than the average score of the European Union (72.8) and the average scores of all other European regions (Table 2). In the comparison of SDG implementation among European countries, the Nordic countries rank high, i.e., at positions 1-3 (Finland, Denmark, and Sweden), 5 (Norway), and 10 (Iceland). (Table 3).

Table 3. The SDG index rank and score for the Nordic countries and the average SDG index score for European regions.

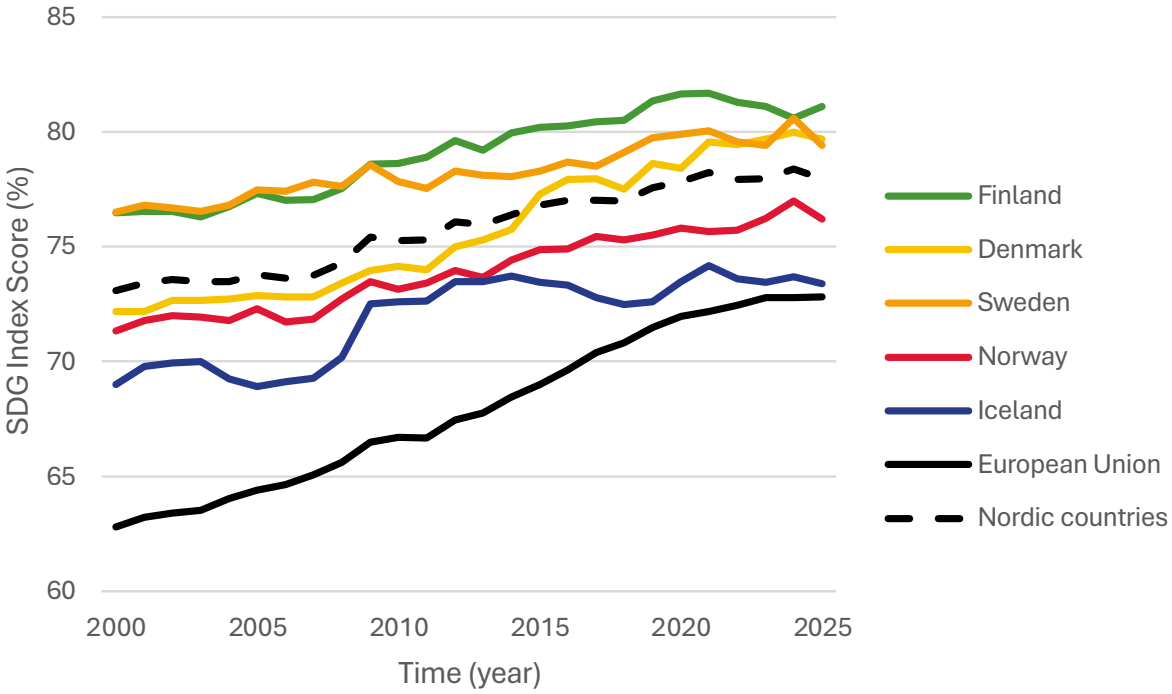
Nordic SDG Index rank	ESDR SDG Index rank	Country	SDG Index score (%)
1	1	Finland	81.1
2	2	Denmark	79.7
3	3	Sweden	79.4
4	5	Norway	76.2
5	10	Iceland	73.4
		Regions	
		Northern Europe	78.0
		Western Europe	74.1
		European Union	72.8
		Southern Europe	71.2
		Central and Eastern Europe	70.1
		Baltic States	69.6

The score for the Northern Europe region is the average score for the Nordic countries. The score for the European Union, as well as for the Western, Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe regions, is taken from *the Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025* (Lafortune G. and Grayson F., 2025).

Although the Nordic countries rank highly in the SDG Index, it is important to note that this does not result from extraordinary sustainability efforts since the launch of the UN Agenda 2030 in 2015. The high rankings of the Nordic countries are indicative of a century-long history of social reforms and strong governance, leading to "the Nordic model" as described above, which has resulted in the current high SDG Index scores for the Nordics' social and economic SDGs.

When examining the evolution of SDG performance since the early 2000s, the SDG Index scores of the Nordic countries have increased but started to level off between 2021 and 2025. In contrast, the score for the European Union increases from a lower level in 2000, but at a higher pace, and continues to increase until 2024 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. SDG Index score for the Nordic countries and the European Union over the period from 2000 to 2025.



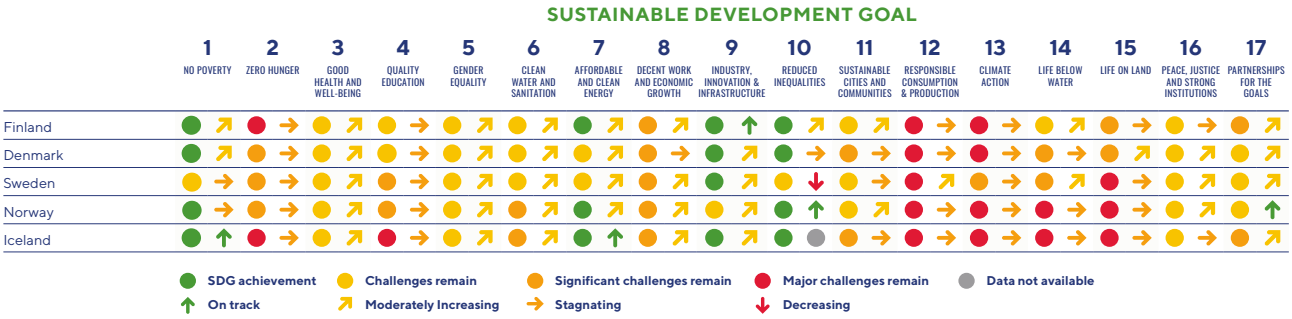
The time series for the Nordic countries is the average score for the five Nordic countries. Data from *the Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025* (Lafortune and Grayson, 2025).

As a complement to the SDG Index scores, the *Sustainable Development Reports* contain SDG Dashboards to track progress on specific SDG indicators. These dashboards aim to highlight the status of SDG achievement by country and, particularly, the SDGs that require attention and action. The dashboard is visualised using the colour categories green, yellow, orange, and red. In this categorization, green means SDG achieved, yellow means challenges remain, orange means significant challenges remain, and red means major challenges remain (Figure 2). The dashboard aggregate indicator ratings for each SDG are estimated by averaging the two variables on which a country performed worst, thereby pinpointing sustainability challenges that require more attention. In addition, the dashboard contains visualisations of implementation trends over time at the levels of SDGs and indicators. The trends are visualised as the

arrows upwards (On track), half upwards (Moderately improving), sideways (Stagnating), and downward (Decreasing) (Figure 2).

The SDG dashboard from the *ESDR 2025* shows that the Nordic countries have major or significant challenges for SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 4 (Quality education), SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production), SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 14 (Life below water), and SDG 15 (Life on land). The biggest challenge is found for SDG 12, where the average Nordic SDG Index score is as low as 47.8 %. The trends for these SDGs are mostly stagnating except for moderately increasing trends for SDG 14 in Finland, SDG 15 in Denmark, and SDG 12 and SDG 14 in Sweden (Figure 2).

Figure 2. SDG dashboards and trends for the Nordic countries.

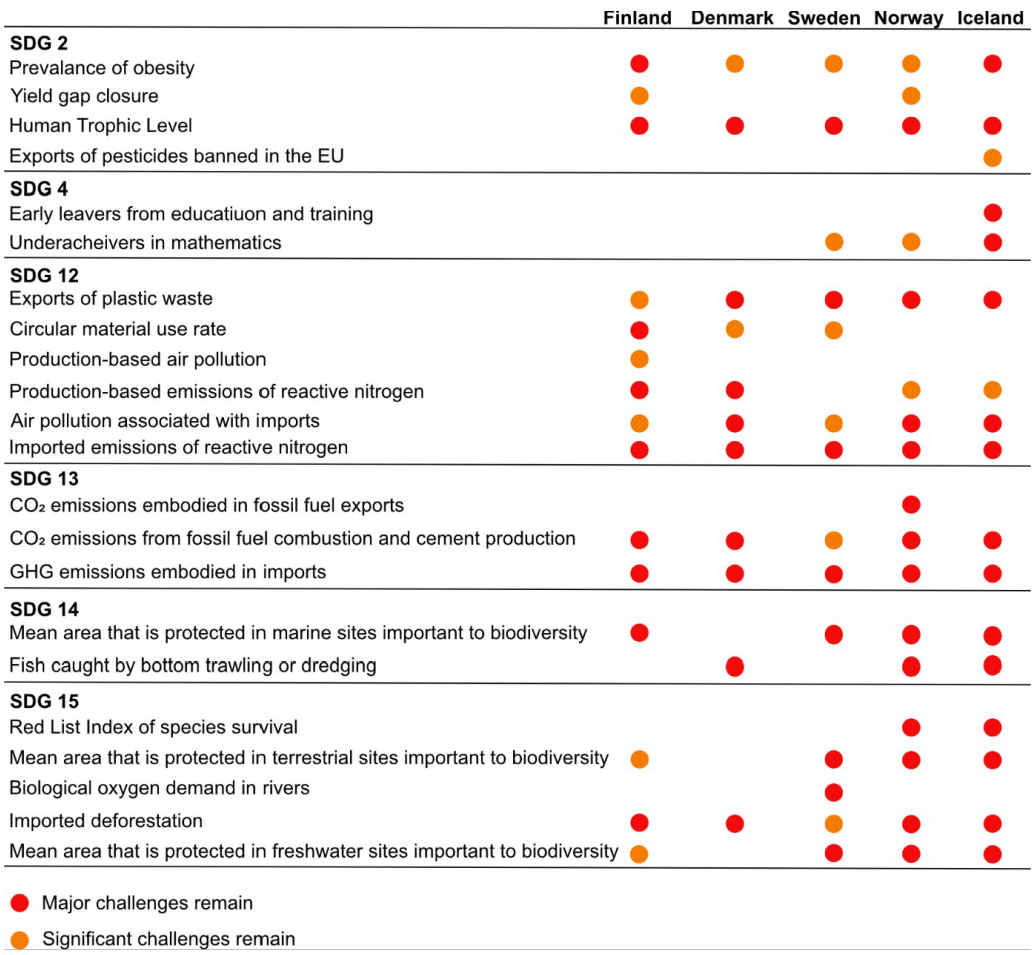


Data from *the Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025* (Lafortune G. and Grayson F., 2025).

When analysing these challenges at the target level, it is clear that all Nordic countries have major or significant challenges for the indicators *Prevalence of obesity*, *Human trophic level*[1], *Exports of plastic waste*, *Air pollution associated with imports*, *Imported emissions of reactive nitrogen*, *CO_2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion and cement production*, *GHG emissions embodied in imports,* and *Imported deforestation* (Figure 3). Several of the Nordic countries also have challenges for *Yield gap closure*[2], *Underachievers in mathematics*, *Circular material use rate*, *Production-based emissions of reactive nitrogen*, *Fish caught by bottom trawling or dredging*, *Mean area that is protected in marine, terrestrial, and freshwater sites important to biodiversity*, and *Red List Index of species survival*. These challenges primarily relate to lifestyle choices, education, sustainable consumption and production, emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) and nitrogen, natural resource utilisation in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and the protection of species and ecosystems (Figure 3). The responsibility to mitigate these problems falls on the governments and authorities in the Nordic countries, on the private sector to improve their business models, and on the public to consume less and consume more sustainable products.

[1] The indicator Human Trophic Level is a mean of the trophic level of food items in the diet, weighted by quantity. It is a measure of the energy intensity of the diet composition and reflects the relative amounts of plants as opposed to animals eaten. A higher trophic level represents a greater level of consumption of energy-intensive animals.
[2] The indicator Yield gap closure is the percentage of a country's potential yield in the three annual crops using the most land area, weighted for the relative importance of each crop in terms of surface area. The long-term objective for this indicator is a value of 80.

Figure 3. SDG indicators for which the Nordic countries score orange or red in the SDG Dashboard.



SDG targets shown is selected from SDGs for which a Nordic country score red at the goal level. Indicators with blank spots have yellow or green dashboard colours. Data from *the Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025* (Lafortune G. and Grayson F., 2025).

The Nordic countries compared with the rest of Europe

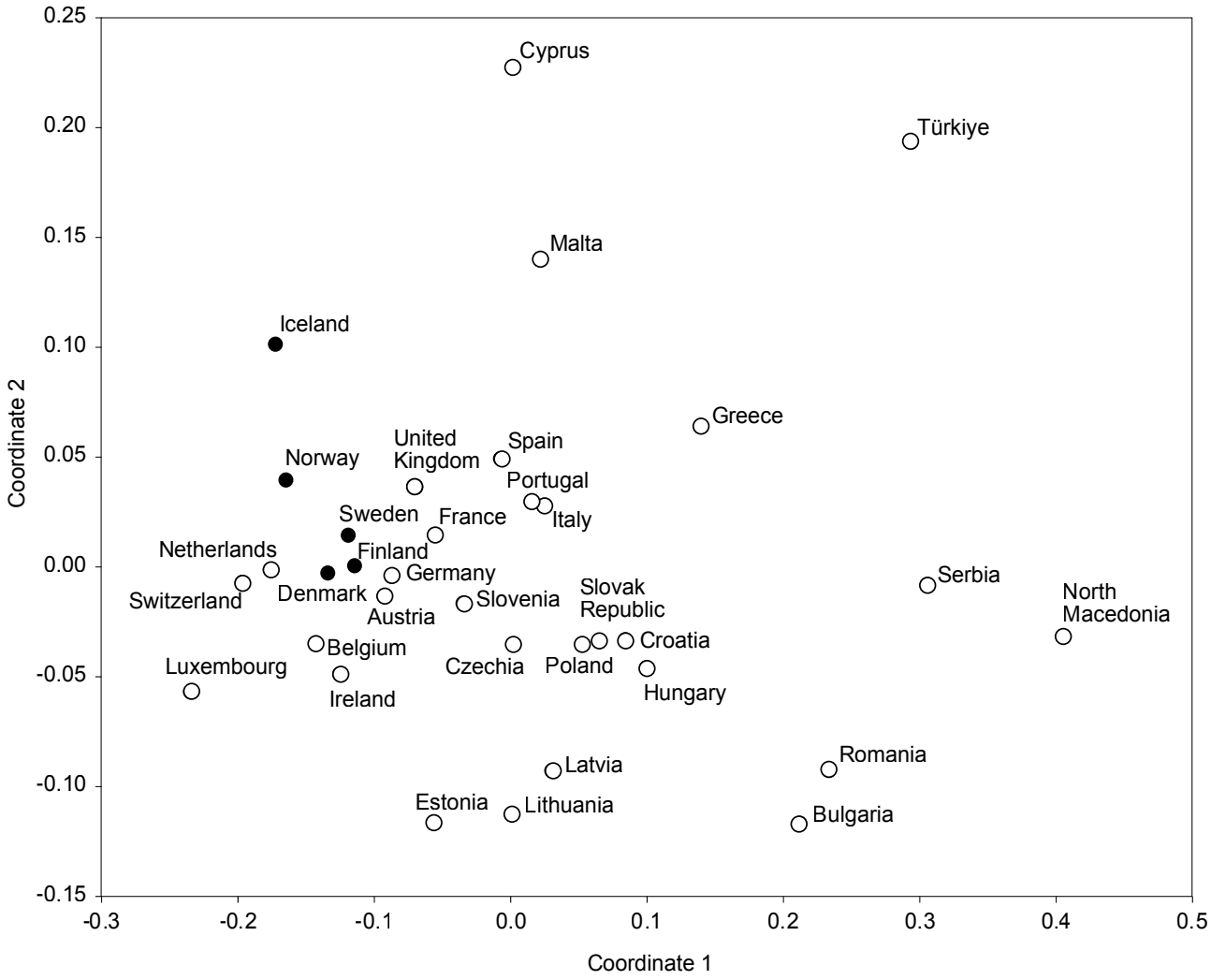
SDG implementation performance depends on country-specific economic, environmental, social and political conditions. As countries differ with regard to these perspectives, they have different implementation profiles over the 17 SDGs.

A multivariate statistical analysis comparing the SDG Index score profiles of European countries shows that the Nordic countries have fairly similar profiles. Figure 4 visualises the SDG Index score similarity profiles of European countries in a non-metric multidimensional scaling plot. For more information about this methodology, see Figure 4 legend and the papers by Clarke (1993) and Ricotta and Podani (2017). The quite small distance between the Nordic countries in Figure 4 means that the Nordics have similar profiles. The countries with most similar profiles are Finland, Denmark and Sweden, which form a tight cluster on

the figure. Norway and Iceland have less similar profiles and are positioned higher up in the plot. Other European countries that have profiles similar to the Finland, Denmark and Sweden cluster include Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and France. Quite close to the Nordic countries are Belgium, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland.

It also appears from Figure 4 that Western European countries have more similar SDG implementation profiles than the Eastern European countries. There is, however, no clear divide between Western and Eastern European countries. For example, implementation in Slovenia, Czechia, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Croatia, and Hungary is quite similar to that in Western European countries.

Figure 4. Non-metric multidimensional scaling plot that shows Bray-Curtis similarity index distances of the SDG Index profiles of European Countries.



The distances between countries reflect their relative similarity, i.e. the closer two symbols are, the more similar are the SDG Index profiles of those countries. The axes do not represent fixed variables but are ordination dimensions chosen to best represent the pairwise differences among the country SDG Index profiles in reduced space. Black symbols represent the Northern European countries, whereas open symbols represent other European countries. The stress value is 0.13 and the two coordinates account for 81.5 and 12.1 % of the variance in the plot, respectively. Data from *the Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025* (Lafortune and Grayson, 2025) and analysis performed by the authors.

In order to identify the SDG indicators generating the differences between the Nordic and the other European countries in Figure 4, an analysis of z-scores for each indicator was performed. Z-scores were calculated by subtracting the Nordic countries' indicator scores from the corresponding averaged indicator score for all non-Nordic European countries and then dividing the difference by the standard deviation of the indicator scores for all the European countries. For more information, see Methods section. The indicators with the highest positive and lowest negative z-scores represent those for which the Nordic countries perform well and poorly, respectively, compared to other European countries.

The approach to analysing the z-scores of a country's indicators is different from the SDG dashboard approach. The dashboard approach used in the 2025 ESDR (Lafortune G. and Grayson F., 2025) uses predefined threshold values and determines the traffic light colours based on the average of the two indicators for which a country performed worst under each SDG. The z-score approach used here analyses each indicator score independently, without predefined threshold values, and compares a Nordic country score to the average non-Nordic European country score.

The z-score for an indicator can be seen as the fold change between a Nordic country and the average of non-Nordic European countries. For example, Finland has z-scores of 2.73 for the SDG 12 indicator *Gross value added in environmental goods and services sector*, and -2.12 for the SDG 3 indicator *Population engaging in heavy, episodic drinking at least once a week* (Annex, Supplementary Table 1 and 2). This means that Finland performance is 2.73 times better and 2.12 times worse that the European average, for the former and latter indicator, respectively.

The SDG indicators that all Nordic countries have on their top ten z-score lists are *SDG 7: Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption* and *SDG 5: Seats held by women in national parliaments*. The top ten z-score indicators shared by four Nordic countries are *SDG 4: Adult participation in learning* and *SDG 16: Corruption Perceptions Index*. The top ten z-score indicators shared by three Nordic countries include *SDG 3: Subjective wellbeing*, *SDG 9: Population with at least basic digital skills*, and *SDG 9: Patent applications to the European Patent Office*. The full list of top ten z-score indicators is given in Supplementary Table 3.

The SDG indicators that, on the other hand, are found on four Nordic countries' bottom ten z-score lists are *SDG 14: Mean area that is protected in marine sites important to biodiversity*, *SDG 2: Human Trophic Level*, and *SDG 15: Imported deforestation*. The bottom ten z-score indicators shared by three Nordic countries include *SDG 3: Population engaging in heavy, episodic drinking at least once a week*, *SDG 8: Fatal work-related accidents embodied in imports*, and *SDG 12: Exports of plastic waste*. The full list of bottom ten z-score indicators is given in Supplementary Table 3.

Despite the methodological differences, the bottom ten z-score indicator lists for the Nordic countries (Supplementary Table 2) show similarities with the SDG Dashboard results shown in Figure 3. Indicators for SDG 2, SDG 12, SDG 14, and SDG 15 are present both in Figure 3 and in the bottom ten indicator lists shared by the Nordic countries (Supplementary Table 3). There are, however, some interesting differences. For example, some of the Nordic countries clearly perform worse than the average European country for two of the SDG 8 spillover indicators, *Fatal work-related accidents embodied in imports* and *Victims of modern slavery embodied in imports* (more information on spillover effects is given in the next chapter). In addition, the performance of Finland, Denmark and Norway is worse than the average European country for the SDG 3 indicator *Population engaging in heavy, episodic drinking at least once a week*. The worst performance for any Nordic country in relation to the European average is Norway's performance on the SDG 13 indicator *CO_2 emissions embodied in fossil fuel exports* (z-score = -5.66).

The Nordic Spillover Index

International spillover effects have been calculated annually in the *SDRs* published by the UN SDSN (UN SDSN, 2025) to quantify benefits (positive spillovers) or costs (negative spillovers) from actions in a country that generate effects in another country. Spillover effects can hence affect the abilities of these other countries to achieve the SDGs. Spillovers can be grouped into i) environmental and social impacts embodied in trade, ii) economy and finance, and iii) multilateralism, peace and security. Trade in global supply chains often generates negative environmental and/or social impacts that are not reflected in market prices in importing countries (Schmidt-Traub, 2019, Sachs, 2024). Goods imported to Nordic countries can, for example, give rise to GHG emissions or be produced under conditions of modern slavery in exporting countries.

Most of the spillover indicators developed in the *ESDR 2025* measure negative environmental and social impacts that hamper exporting countries from implementing the SDGs. There are also both negative and positive spillovers in economy and finance, for example, *Shifted profits of multinationals* and *Official development assistance*, respectively. In the category of multilateralism, peace and security, negative spillovers include *Exports of major conventional weapons*, and positive spillovers include *Index of countries' support to UN-based multilateralism*[1].

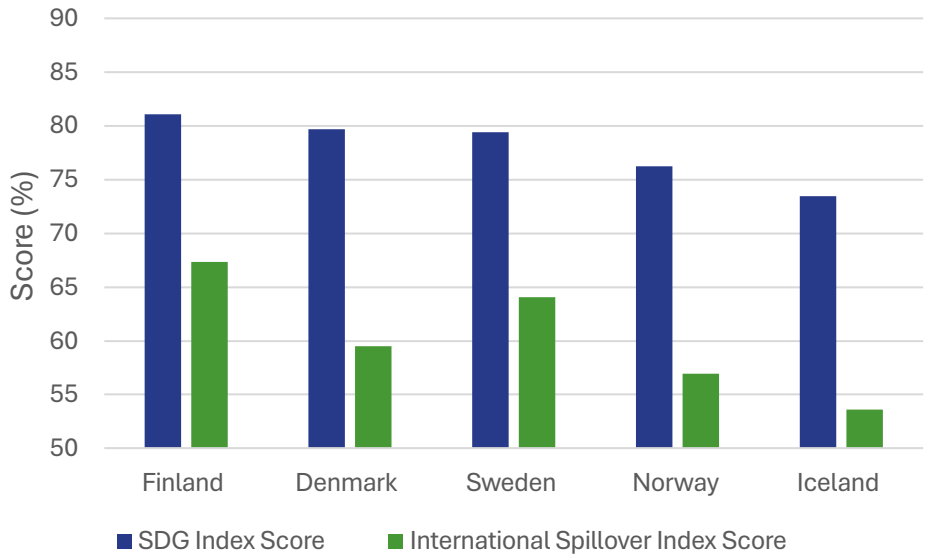
The spillover indicators are aggregated into the International Spillover Index. The list of the indicators used for the International Spillover Index is presented in Table 4. The International Spillover Index should be interpreted in the same way as the SDG Index, namely that a high index value is positive and implies small negative spillovers, whereas a low index implies large negative spillovers (Lafortune G. and Grayson F., 2025).

When comparing the high SDG Index scores of the Nordic countries to their International Spillover Index scores, the gap between domestic SDG implementation and international spillovers is clear. While the SDG Index scores range from 73.4 to 81.1, the International Spillover Index scores range from 53.6 to 67.4 (Figure 5). This points to a clear divergence between high overall domestic implementation of the SDGs in the Nordic countries and their substantial negative spillover effects internationally.

Table 4 presents the scores for the indicators used in the International Spillover Index for the Nordic countries. Expressed as the average score for the Nordic countries, the most challenging indicators for the Nordic countries are *Exports of plastic waste, Imported deforestation*, *Imported emissions of reactive nitrogen*, and *GHG emissions embodied in imports*. It is also noteworthy that the International Spillover Index Scores varies more among the Nordic countries compared to the SDG Index Scores. The indicators that vary the most are *Official development assistance*, *Exports of major conventional weapons*, and *Exports of plastic waste* (Table 4).

[1] The Index of countries' support to UN-based multilateralism measures countries' support to UN-based multilateralism via six indicators: (1) Ratification of major UN treaties; (2) UNGA votes with the international majority; (3) Membership in selected UN organizations; (4) Participation in conflicts and militarization; (5) Use of unilateral coercive measures and (6) Contribute to the UN budget & International solidarity

Figure 5. SDG Index score and International Spillover Index score for the five Nordic countries.



Data from the *Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025* (Lafortune G. and Grayson F., 2025).

Table 4. Scores (%) for the indicators used in the International Spillover Index for the Nordic countries.

Indicator	Finland	Denmark	Sweden	Norway	Iceland	Average of Nordic countries
Exports of pesticides banned in the EU	99.9	98.1	98.3	99.5	93.7	97.9
Scarce water consumption embodied in imports	80.6	73.8	77.4	69.9	73.9	75.1
Fatal work-related accidents embodied in imports	70.5	54.8	66.1	49.1	36.5	55.4
Victims of modern slavery embodied in imports	65.8	57.6	68.6	36.6	30.6	51.8
Exports of plastic waste	59.1	0	11.5	0	0	14.1
Air pollution associated with imports	68.4	56.4	69.5	54.8	63.1	62.4
Imported emissions of reactive nitrogen	45.4	27.6	38.3	15.3	12.6	27.8
GHG emissions embodied in imports	38.2	27.0	39.0	26.5	27.6	31.6
Marine biodiversity threats embodied in imports	96.5	96.2	96.0	79.0	NA	91.9
Imported deforestation	30.1	8.52	42.9	18.2	20.5	24.0
Exports of major conventional weapons	86.9	83.4	33.9	45.4	100	69.9
Official development assistance	40.0	61.1	83.3	95.6	26.7	61.3
Shifted profits of multinationals	100	100	100	100	100	100
Corporate Tax Haven Score	66.7	85.0	71.7	100	100	84.7
Index of countries' support to UN-based multilateralism	62.3	62.8	64.4	64.2	65.7	63.9

The number 0 indicates an indicator score in the bottom 2.5 percentile of European countries. NA indicates no data available.

The relation between domestic SDG implementation and spillovers

While the responsibility to formally implement the SDGs falls on nations, the international value chains and consumption and production patterns greatly affect the success of SDG implementation. The indicator set for the International Spillover Index (Table 4) is a subset of the indicators of the SDG Index. To analyse potential coupling between domestic SDG implementation performance and international spillover impacts in more detail, an average SDG Index score without the spillover indicators was calculated and compared with the International Spillover Index scores. Among the European countries having an SDG Index score, a statistically highly significant negative correlation between domestic SDG implementation performance and international spillovers was found (Figure 6). While the strength of the relationship is moderate (R^2-value = 0.56), the pattern indicates that countries producing the smallest negative spillovers are the countries that perform poorly in domestic SDG implementation. The results show that no country has both a high SDG Index score and a high International Spillover Index score, *i.e.* no country is placed in the upper right corner in Figure 6. In this context, it is important to remember that domestic SDG implementation is, to a large extent, determined by national social and economic factors, e.g., governance of poverty, health, equality, education, and decent working conditions. In contrast, international spillovers are largely determined by the imports coupled to domestic consumption which, in turn, is coupled to the economic capacity of the country's population. In other words, economically strong nations consume more, and their consumption patterns can result in negative international spillovers. The Nordic countries, shown as open symbols in Figure 6, deviate slightly from this pattern. In particular, the three countries with the highest SDG Index score (Denmark, Finland, and Sweden) are quite far from the dotted regression line.

Several of the indicators highlighting poor Nordic performance in the SDG Dashboard (Fig. 3) are spillover indicators. The indicators *Imported emissions of reactive nitrogen* and *GHG emissions embodied in imports* are red for all Nordic countries, signalling that major challenges remain. Furthermore, the indicators *Exports of plastic waste*, *Air pollution associated with imports,* and *CO_2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion and cement production* are red or orange for all Nordic countries. In addition to the indicators presented in Figure 3, all the Nordic countries have major (red) or significant (orange) challenges for the spillover indicator *Fatal work-related accidents embodied in imports*.

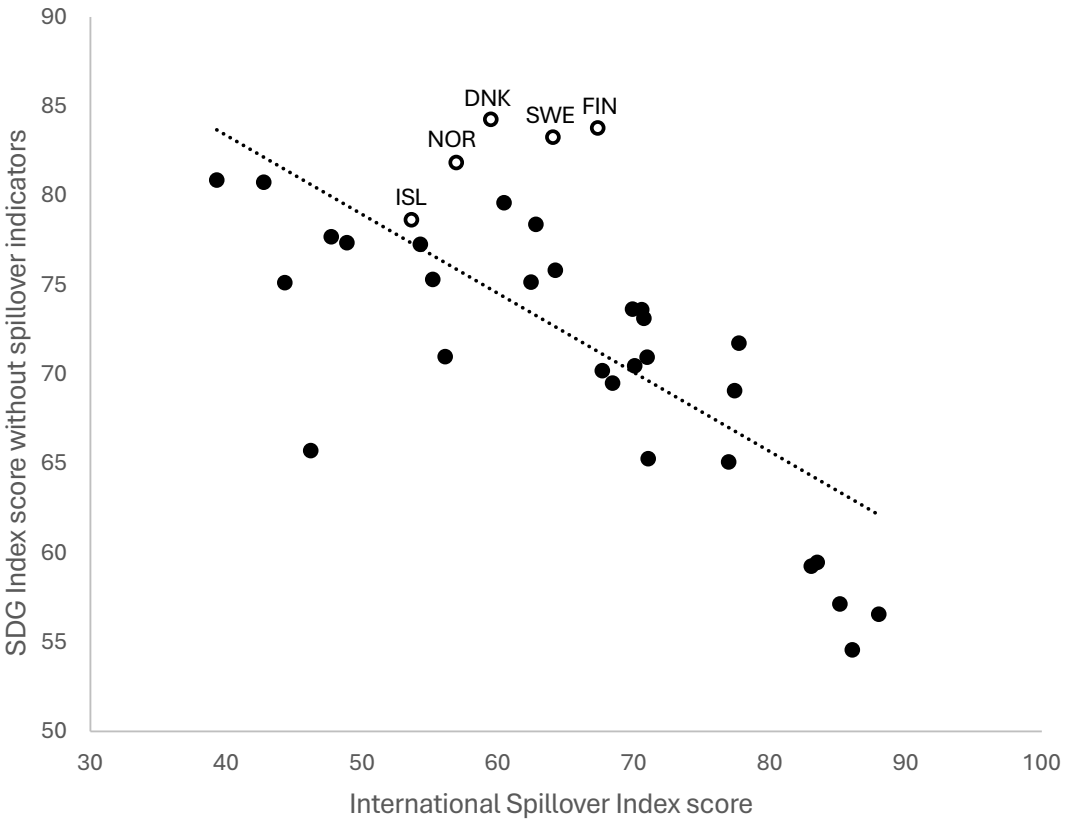
Spillover effects are bilateral and directional. In an effort to map the destination and direction of a country's spillover effects, the UN SDSN, with funding from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, has developed the *Bilateral Spillover Impacts (BSI) Toolkit* (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2024). Although international trade, economy, finance, and value chains are highly complex, and gathering data for these processes is difficult, the *BSI Toolkit* contains bilateral spillover data for eight indicators for most countries in the world. The toolkit contains six negative environmental indicators, one negative social indicator, and one positive financial indicator.

To map the countries that receive large spillover impacts from the Nordic countries, data for the spillover indicators *GHG emissions*, *NO_X emissions*, *SO_2 emissions*, *Nitrogen*[1], *Export of plastic waste*, *Scarce water consumption*, *Fatal accidents at work*, and *Official Development Aid (ODA)* from the BSI Toolkit were analysed and are presented in Figure 7. For each Nordic country and each indicator, the five largest spillovers were included.

As shown in Figure 7, the Nordic countries generate similarly sized spillovers per capita for *GHG emissions*, *NO_X emissions*, *SO_2 emissions*, and *Nitrogen*. The maximum difference between the countries for these indicators is about a factor of two. These spillovers primarily end up in China, the Russian Federation, USA, and India. For *Scarce water consumption*, however, Den-

[1] The indicator *Nitrogen* is defined as excess nitrogen emissions from crop production embodied in imported goods and services. These emissions contaminate aquifers and the environment and can result in adverse human health impacts and eutrophication.

Figure 6. International Spillover Index scores plotted against the SDG Index scores calculated without the International Spillover Index indicators for European countries.



Open symbols represent the Northern European countries and the country abbreviations ISL, NOR, DNK, SWE and FIN are given for Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, respectively. The p-value and the R^2-value for the linear regression are $4.9^* 10^{-07}$ and 0.56, respectively. Data from the *Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025* (Lafortune and Grayson, 2025) and analysis performed by the authors.

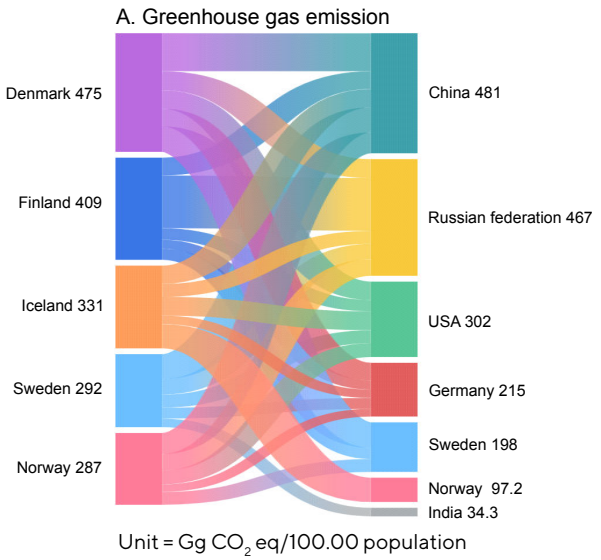
mark generates per capita more than double that of any of the other Nordic country. The largest difference between the Nordic countries is observed for *Export of plastic waste*. Iceland exports more than five times as much plastic waste per capita as Finland. Most of the *Scarce water consumption* and *Export of plastic waste* are directed towards other European countries. For example, consumption in Denmark and Iceland generates *Scarce water consumption* in the United Kingdom and Germany. For *Export of plastic waste*, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden receive large amounts of plastic waste. Some of this waste is incinerated to generate heat and/or electricity, but some is also re-exported, furthering the chain of spillover impacts.

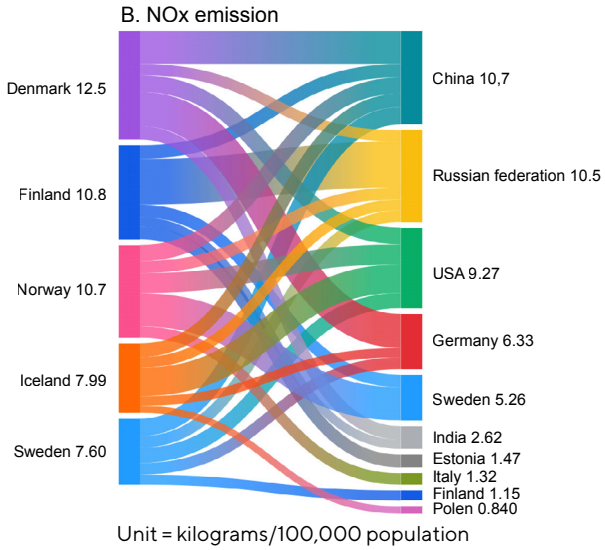
The *BSI Toolkit* also includes the negative social spillover Fatal accidents at work and the positive financial spillover *ODA*. For *Fatal accidents at work*, Nordic countries have roughly the same size of the per capita spillover impact and the fatal accidents occur mainly in China, Germany, and India. Regarding ODA, which is a positive unilateral spillover, the biggest Nordic contributor is Norway, followed by Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland. Norway has almost three times the *ODA* of Finland. Except for Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic, most of the development aid from the Nordic countries goes to African nations.

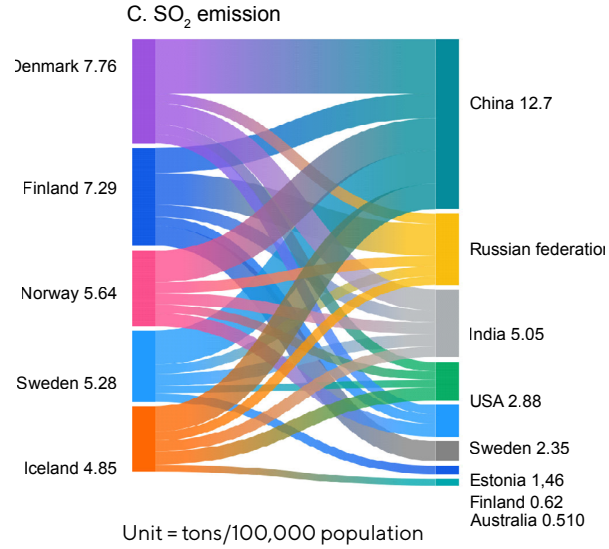
Figure 7. International spillovers from the Nordic countries (left side of panels) to receiving countries (right side of panels).

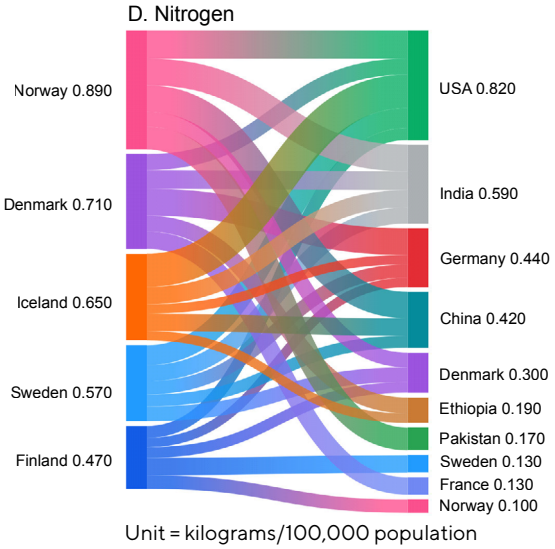
Spillovers included are **Greenhouse gas emissions** (A), **NOX emissions** (B), **SO_2 emissions** (C), **Nitrogen** (D), **Scarce water consumption** (E), **Exports of plastic waste** (F), **Fatal accidents at work** (G), and **Official development aid** (H). For each Nordic country, only the top five spillover-receiving countries are included. Nitrogen (D) is defined as excess nitrogen emissions from crop production embodied in imported goods and services. These emissions contaminate aquifers and the environment and can result in adverse human health impacts and eutrophication. Data from the *BSI toolkit* and visualisation produced by the authors using the Flourish web application.

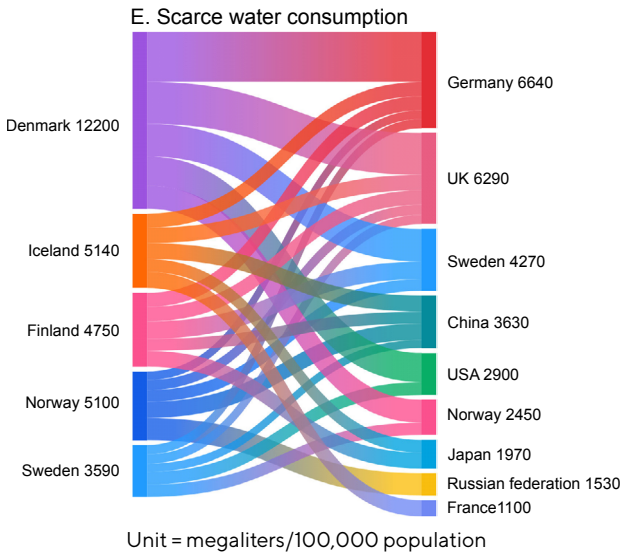
Units for the values in panels listed below each section.

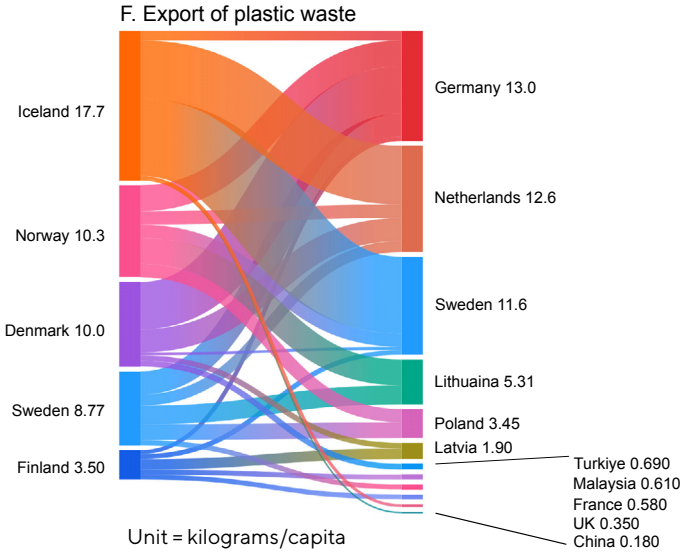


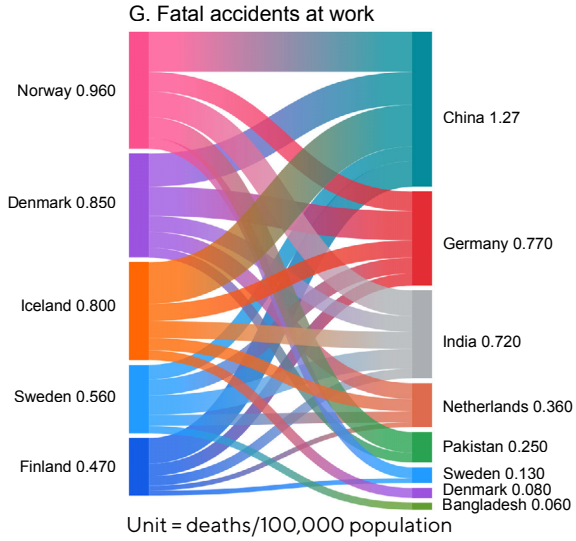


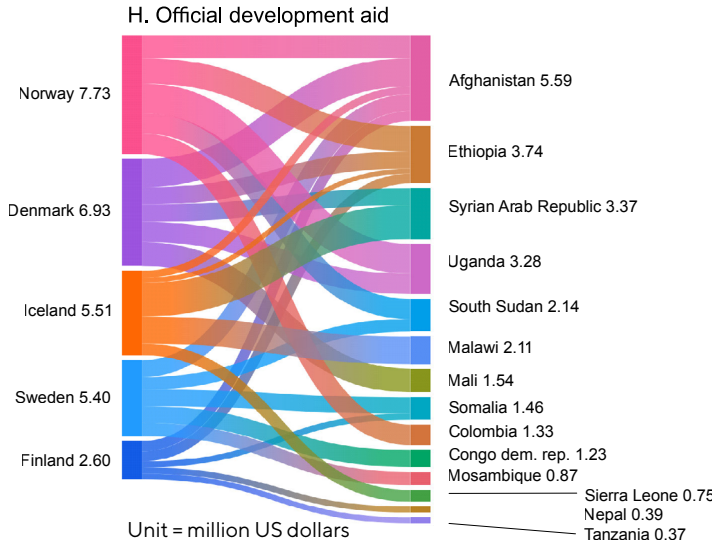





E. Scarce water consumption
Denmark 12200
Iceland 5140
Finland 4750
Norway 5100
Sweden 3590
Germany 6640
UK 6290
Sweden 4270
China 3630
USA 2900
Norway 2450
Japan 1970
Russian federation 1530
France1100
Unit = megaliters/100,000 population


F. Export of plastic waste
Iceland 17.7
Norway 10.3
Denmark 10.0
Sweden 8.77
Finland 3.50
Germany 13.0
Netherlands 12.6
Sweden 11.6
Lithuaina 5.31
Poland 3.45
Latvia 1.90
Turkiye 0.690
Malaysia 0.610
France 0.580
UK 0.350
China 0.180
Unit = kilograms/capita


G. Fatal accidents at work
Norway 0.960
Denmark 0.850
Iceland 0.800
Sweden 0.560
Finland 0.470
China 1.27
Germany 0.770
India 0.720
Netherlands 0.360
Pakistan 0.250
Sweden 0.130
Denmark 0.080
Bangladesh 0.060
Unit = deaths/100,000 population


H. Official development aid
Norway 7.73
Denmark 6.93
Iceland 5.51
Sweden 5.40
Finland 2.60
Afghanistan 5.59
Ethiopia 3.74
Syrian Arab Republic 3.37
Uganda 3.28
South Sudan 2.14
Malawi 2.11
Mali 1.54
Somalia 1.46
Colombia 1.33
Congo dem. rep. 1.23
Mosambique 0.87
Sierra Leone 0.75
Nepal 0.39
Tanzania 0.37
Unit = million US dollars

The Nordic Leave-No-One-Behind Index

The principle of Leave-No-One-Behind (LNOB) is central in the 2030 Agenda and calls for eradicating poverty, ending discrimination and exclusion, and reducing inequalities and vulnerabilities among people. LNOB aims to reduce inequalities across and within countries. To measure inequalities within countries, the UN SDSN has developed an LNOB index (Lafortune G. and Grayson F., 2025). The set of indicators for the LNOB Index is a subset of the indicators of the SDG Index, and the LNOB index is calculated in the same way as the SDG Index (see Methods summary below and Annex).

The Nordic countries top the LNOB Index ranking in the latest *European Sustainable Development Report* and thus have the same ranking in this *Nordic Sustainable Development Report*. The country with the highest LNOB index score is Norway, followed by Finland, Iceland, Denmark, and Sweden. Furthermore, the LNOB index score for the Nordic region is well above the average LNOB score of the EU or any of the other European regions (Table 5). This means that there is a higher level of equality and less discrimination and exclusion within the Nordic countries compared with the rest of Europe. The Nordic tradition and model of strong governance as well as the creation of fiscal space for societal reform have contributed to these high LNOB Index scores.

Table 5. The Leave No One Behind Index rank and score for the Northern Europe countries, and the average Leave-no-one-behind Index score for European regions.

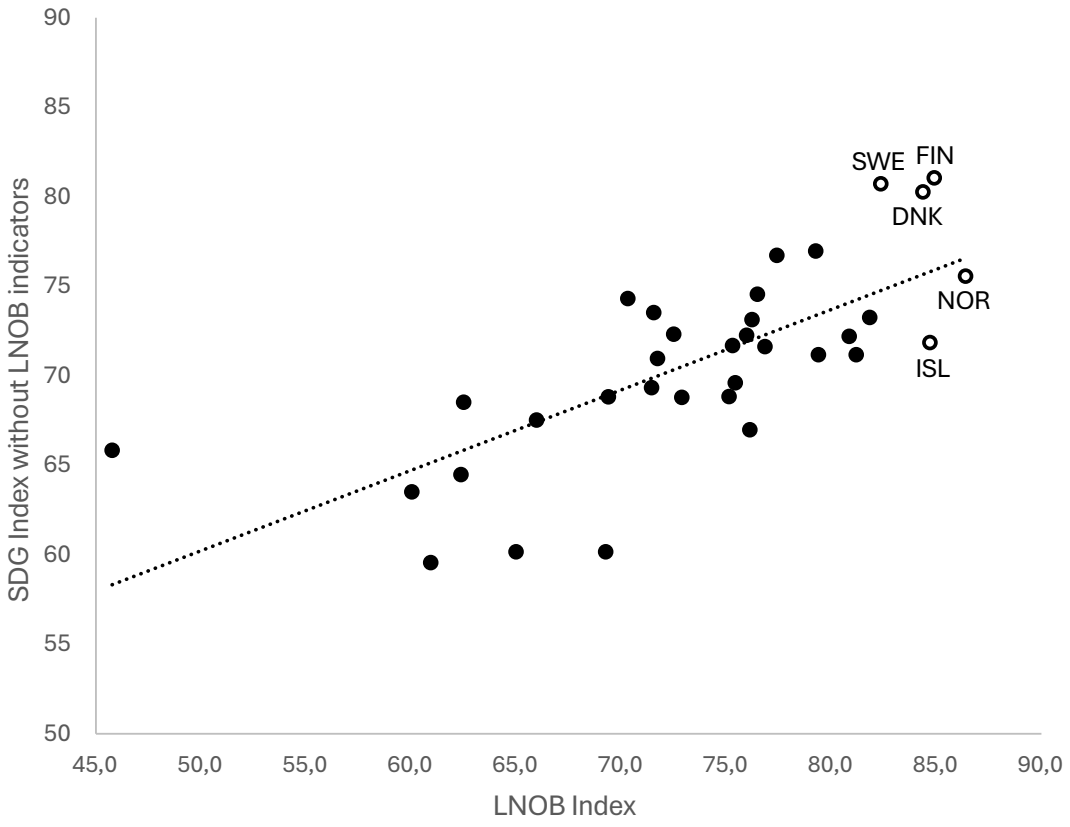
LNOB Index rank	ESDR LNOB Index rank	Country	LNOB Index score
1	1	Norway	86.4
2	2	Finland	84.9
3	3	Iceland	84.7
4	4	Denmark	84.4
5	5	Sweden	82.4
		Regions	
		Northern Europe	84.6
		Western Europe	78.0
		European Union	75.2
		Southern Europe	72.8
		Central and Eastern Europe	70.9
		Baltic States	70.7

The score for the Northern Europe region is the average score for the Nordic countries. The score for the European Union, as well as for the Western, Southern, Central and Eastern Europe regions, is taken from *the Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025*.

The relation between domestic SDG implementation and the principle of Leave-No-One-Behind

To analyse a potential coupling between SDG implementation performance and LNOB in more detail, an average SDG Index score without the LNOB indicators was calculated and compared to the LNOB Index scores. Among the European countries having an SDG Index score, a positive correlation between SDG Index scores and LNOB scores was found. This correlation is statistically highly significant, and the coefficient of determination (R^2-value) indicates that the strength of the relationship is moderate, *i.e.* that 49 % of the variance in the SDG Index score without the LNOB indicators can be explained by the LNOB scores. Nevertheless, it appears that more equal countries also perform better in SDG implementation. Shown as open symbols in Figure 8, Finland, Denmark, and Sweden are found above the dotted regression line, while Norway and Iceland are found below this line. Norway and Iceland hence have high LNOB Index scores but their scores on other SDG Index indicators, including their International Spillover Index scores, are lower than those of Finland, Denmark, and Sweden. Although Norway and Iceland have lower SDG Index scores compared to the other Nordic countries, they perform well with respect to LNOB.

Figure 8. Leave-no-one-behind scores plotted against SDG Index scores calculated without the LNOB indicators for European countries.



The country abbreviations ISL, NOR, DNK, SWE and FIN are given for Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, respectively. Open symbols represent the Northern Europe countries. The p-value and the R2-value for the linear regression are 5.2 * 10-06 and 0.49, respectively. Data from the *Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025* (Lafortune and Grayson, 2025) and analysis performed by the authors.

The most sustainable and integrated region in the world?

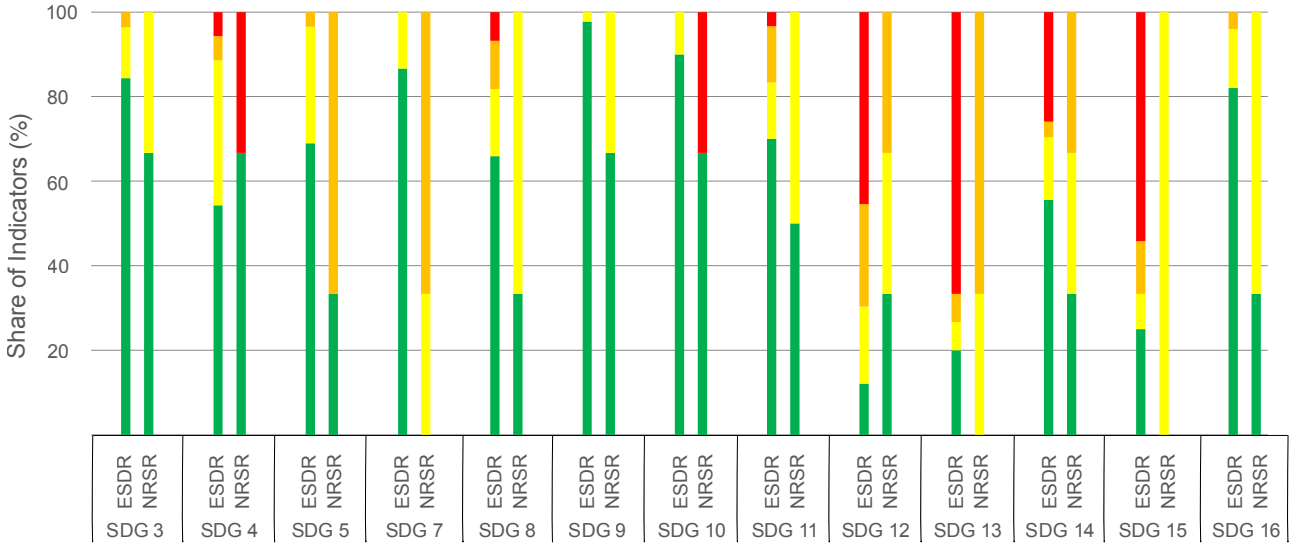
In 2019, the Nordic Council of Ministers adopted Our Vision 2030, aiming to make the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2020). The action plan for this vision contained three strategic priority areas: A green Nordic region, A competitive Nordic region and A socially sustainable Nordic region.

A mid-point evaluation of *Our Vision 2030* was made in the report *The Nordic Region – a sustainable and integrated region? Our Vision 2030 – Status Report 2023* (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2023). This report shows the results for 45 indicators. The three strategic priority areas have five focus areas each, and each focus area has three indicators. These focus areas were mapped towards the SDGs, and while some of the focus areas have identical counterparts among the SDGs, for example, *Good Health and Wellbeing* and *Reduced Inequalities*, other *Our Vision 2030* focus areas are only similar to some SDGs or have no counterpart among the SDGs. The status report for *Our Vision 2030* from 2023 acknowledges that although the Nordic Region has come a long way towards becoming a sustainable region, it faces challenges primarily in becoming a green region and has major challenges for the SDGs 12, 13, 14, and 15 (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2022).

In general, this conclusion corresponds to the results of the SDG Index and Dashboards presented here. However, when comparing the dashboard of the mid-point evaluation of *Our Vision 2030* and the SDG dashboard presented here, some differences are worth noting. For the social and economic SDGs (SDG 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 16), the SDG dashboard presented here shows a higher degree of SDG implementation than the Our Vision dashboard. However, for the environmental SDGs (SDG 12, 13, 14, and 15), the SDG dashboard presented here shows a lower degree of SDG implementation than the dashboard for *Our Vision 2030* (Fig. 9). As the two dashboards rely on different indicator sets that are not directly comparable, full alignment between them cannot be expected. For example, in the SDG dashboard presented here, the environmental SDGs includes several spillover indicators, which the dash-

Figure 9. Comparing results from the Europe Sustainable Development Report and the Nordic Region Status Report.

Data from the Europe Sustainable Development Report (ESDR) and the Nordic Region Status Report (NRSR) is shown as share of indicators coloured according to Achieved (green), Challenges remain (yellow), Significant challenges remain (orange), and Major challenges remain (red). Analysis performed by the authors.



board of the mid-point evaluation of *Our Vision 2030* does not. The poor performance of the Nordic countries on several of those spillover indicators might partly explain the lower degree of SDG implementation in the dashboard presented here. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that although the mid-point evaluation of *Our Vision 2030* acknowledges that becoming a green region presents major challenges, the SDG dashboard presented here indicates that these challenges may be even greater than the *Our Vision 2030* evaluation suggests, especially if environmental spillovers are included.

In 2024, the Nordic Council of Ministers approved 14 sectorial programmes for Nordic co-operation 2025 – 2030 (Nordic Co-operation, 2024). These programmes aim to deliver on the three strategic priorities of *Our Vision 2030*: A green Nordic Region, a competitive Nordic Region, and a socially sustainable Nordic Region. The programmes most relevant for the SDG challenges of the Nordic countries are those for Environment and Climate and Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry. The programme for Environment and Climate focuses on three goals: climate neutrality and resilience, reducing biodiversity loss, and reducing ecological footprint and pollution, i.e., goals aimed at mitigating the triple planetary crises. The programme for Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry also outlines three goals focusing on a strengthened green transition within the programme sectors, greater competitiveness through sustainable management and use of resources, and greater resilience within the programme sectors. Each of the goals in these programmes has three or four sub-goals, pinpointing political priorities for the Nordic Council of Ministers. The topics in the programme sub-goals partly overlap, and the sub-goals also aim to ensure positive results for the strategic priorities of social sustainability and competitiveness.

Examples of recent developments at the national Nordic level

At the national level, the Nordic governments have recently acted quite differently in relation to Agenda 2030.

Finland

Finland submitted a third VNR in 2025, which states that Finland is strongly committed to achieving the SDGs by 2030 and continuing sustainability work both nationally and as an international partner. It also acknowledges that although Finland has attained some proportion of the SDGs, it is still far below the level of its ambition with respect to some crucial issues. In the assessment by Lyytimäki et al. (2025), the current government prioritises economic development over environmental and social goals, while sidelining climate concerns and the concept of "green transition".

In Finland, as in several other Nordic countries, the war in Ukraine has led to a focus on security and economic issues at the expense of a focus on developing more sustainable societies. Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness that sustainable development is critical for enhancing resilience and competitiveness (European Commission: Directorate-General for Research Innovation, 2025).

Denmark

In 2025, the Danish government published an updated action plan for the SDGs, where the current status of SDG implementation is summarised and several key initiatives contributing to SDG implementation are presented. The SDGs highlighted as challenging for Denmark include SDG 12, SDG 14, and SDG 15. No tar-

gets for SDG 2 and SDG 13 are highlighted as challenging[1]. However, intensive agriculture is still highlighted as an area where trade-offs with the environmental SDGs are occurring. The Danish government has formulated 50 specific aims for SDG implementation and assigned responsibilities to follow indicators for these aims to different ministries.

Sweden

In Sweden, the National Coordinator for Agenda 2030, tasked to support the Swedish government and other national actors with the implementation of Agenda 2030, submitted its final report in 2024. The main messages of the final report were that the transformation towards sustainable development is progressing too slowly, the implementation measures taken are insufficient, and that clearer political leadership for implementation is needed (National Coordinator for Agenda 2030, 2024).

In September 2025, the Swedish National Audit Office examined Sweden's work on implementing Agenda 2030. Their conclusions were that, although the government and parliament have expressed high ambitions for SDG implementation, the progress has not increased significantly since 2016, and the implementation work has not been effective. The audit showed several major shortcomings in the government's work. For example, not identifying a clear direction for SDG implementation, not directing and enabling Swedish authorities to contribute to the work, and not following up and reporting to the Parliament on SDG implementation (Riksrevisionen, 2025).

Norway

Norway presented its last VNR in 2021 and, to the best of our knowledge, no updated action plan has been published. However, in 2025, the Norwegian government and UNDP signed a statement of intent to strengthen cooperation on public finance for sustainable development (UNDP Sustainable Finance Hub, 2025). This statement of intent aims to help countries close the financing gap for sustainable development through stronger domestic resource mobilisation and more coherent fiscal policy.

Iceland

Iceland submitted its latest VNR to the HLPF in 2023, which, similar to the results presented here, identified international spillovers as one of the main challenges. Interestingly, this VNR contains parallel assessments of SDG progress from the Icelandic government and the Icelandic civil society. There are clear differences between these assessments, particularly for SDG 12, SDG 13, and SDG 15, for which the government assessed greater progress compared with the civil society assessment. At the HLPF 2024, the Icelandic government reassured its commitment to Agenda 2030 (Government of Iceland, 2024).

[1] The updated Danish action plan evaluates the SDG implementation status based on the UN targets and indicators, which partly differs from the indicators used in this report.

Conclusions and outlook

The Nordics are clearly among the countries that have reached the furthest in achieving the SDGs. It is, however, important to note that most of the actions taken towards achieving the goals happened before the 2030 Agenda and the associated SDGs were formulated and ratified. The long-standing Nordic history of social reform, leading to strong labour rights, social cohesion and equality, high degree of gender equality, and a strong welfare state, results in high scores for the social and economic SDGs.

However, all the Nordic countries have major challenges with respect to SDG 12 (Sustainable consumption and production) and several of the Nordics have major or significant challenges for the environmental perspectives in SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 14 (Life below water) and SDG 15 (Life on land). These challenges are manifestations of unsustainable consumption and production linked to Nordic lifestyle choices, partly insufficient education, high emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) and nitrogen, inadequate natural resource utilisation in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and poor protection of species and ecosystems. As pointed out by Lyytimäki et al. (2025), the idea of the Nordic welfare state is based on continuous economic growth, which gives the fundamental policy dilemma that achieving ecological sustainability requires questioning the paradigm underpinning the Nordic welfare society based on endless economic expansion.

Among European countries, the Nordics have similar SDG implementation profiles. The Nordic SDG implementation profiles are, however, not identical and the profiles of Finland, Denmark and Sweden are also similar to nations such as Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and France.

All Nordic countries perform well with respect to Leave-No-One-Behind, again emphasising the Nordic history of social reforms and ambitions to create a strong welfare state. However, the Nordic countries have large negative spillovers, meaning that consumption in the Nordics create negative environmental and social impacts in other countries. These impacts hinder the exporting countries from achieving the SDGs. The major challenges for the Nordic countries regarding SDG 12 also highlight the problematic Nordic lifestyle and consumption patterns, for example resulting in large exports of plastic waste and negative spillover effects of air pollution and emissions of reactive nitrogen in other countries.

Over the last century, the Nordic countries have developed into nations with high economic growth, a strong welfare state, and high material standards. Using the indices and resources presented in the report, and measuring this development as SDG implementation, has resulted in high scores for the social and economic SDGs and high scores for Leaving-No-One-Behind domestically. It could be argued that other countries could follow a similar path towards SDG implementation, but the reforms leading to the current state took a long time. At the same time, this development has resulted in low scores for SDG 12 and the environmental SDGs, and large negative spillovers. It is thus difficult to pinpoint specific actions that will help countries to holistically implement Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

The future of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

As we come closer to 2030, the lack of global SDG implementation has spurred discussions about the future of the SDGs and how global sustainable development will be handled post 2030. These discussions are ongoing at different levels and within different sectors. Within academia, several scientific papers have addressed this question. For example, Bai (2024) argues that the post 2030 set of goals should better address "who should do what" and have more explicit targets for cities and businesses. Cernev and Fenner (2024) suggest developing seven new goals that build on lessons from the Millenium Goals and the SDGs. Nerini et al. (2024) argue for the extension of the timelines for some of the SDGs to 2050, but also for adapting the goals based on the development since 2015.

Within the UN, the Summit of the Future meeting in September 2024 resulted in the consensus adoption of the Pact for the Future (Resolution A/RES/79/1). In this resolution, UN member states re-committed to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Pact for the Future is a wide-ranging international agreement that aims to adapt international cooperation to the realities of today and the challenges of tomorrow. It has chapters on *Sustainable development and financing for development, International peace and security, Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation, Youth and future generations*, and *Transforming global governance*. In addition, the Pact for the Future annexes a *Global digital compact* and a *Declaration on future generations*.

The Pact for the Future also acknowledges the need to consider how to advance sustainable development beyond 2030. Such considerations were, for example, discussed at a UN meeting in February 2025 by parliamentarians from all over the world, but the conclusions were far from unanimous (UN News, 2025).

The current geopolitical situation with new conflicts, emerging rivalries, and the associated increased global polarisation threaten global cooperation for sustainable development. For example, at the beginning of March 2025, the United States was the first nation to officially reject and denounce the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The US presidential administration claimed that "the SDGs advance a program of soft global governance that is inconsistent with U.S. sovereignty and adverse to the rights and interests of Americans" (United States government, 2025). However, it remains to be seen how the changes towards a more multipolar world, in combination with the increasing environmental disasters that follow with climate change, will affect global cooperation for sustainable development. Furthermore, the initiative to transform global governance within the Pact for the Future, as well as creating a more agile, responsive, and impactful UN 2.0 (United Nations, 2023), might bolster global cooperation for sustainable development.

The future for sustainable development in the Nordics

The official position of the Nordic countries is to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. All Nordic countries also support the Pact for the Future. The UN Permanent Representative of Iceland delivered a statement to the consultations on Chapter 4 of the Pact for the Future on behalf of the Nordic countries that fully supports the Pact and its Declaration on Future Generations.

An important development is the recently adopted sectorial programmes for Nordic co-operation 2025 – 2030, approved by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The political priorities of the Nordic Council of Ministers for 2025 – 2030 clearly states that the Nordic prime ministers share a vision of the Nordic Region being the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030 (Nordic Co-operation, 2024). The 14 sectorial programmes are clearly aligned with the Nordic *Our Vision 2030* and aim to deliver on the three strategic priorities of a green Nordic Region, a competitive Nordic Region, and a socially sustainable Nordic Region.

Although these programmes are sectorial, they have multiple cross-sectorial links and can jointly address the holistic ambition of sustainable development as expressed in Agenda 2030. In addition to the focus on delivering on the Nordic *Our Vision 2030*, the Nordic Council of Ministers political priorities 2025 – 2030 address the recent changes in global geopo-

litical development, the triple planetary crises, and future societal changes in the Nordic countries. All of these bring additional challenges and opportunities for realising the Nordic *Our vision 2030*. The political priorities 2025 – 2030 also include an increased focus on societal resilience of robustness in the Nordic countries.

As the 14 programmes have multiple cross-sectorial links, they all need to address the SDG challenges for the Nordic region. However, the challenges within SDG 2 (Zero hunger), SDG 12 (Sustainable consumption and production), SDG 13 (Climate action), SDG 14 (Life below water) and SDG 15 (Life on land) identified in this report, make the programme for the Environment and Climate, and the programme for Fisheries, Aquaculture, Agriculture, Food and Forestry highly relevant for improving Nordic SDG implementation. The latter programme also mentions that international co-operation around Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should be strengthened. The challenge of minimising international spillover effects is indirectly addressed in several of the programmes as reducing ecological footprint and waste generation (including plastic waste), promoting circular economy, resource efficiency, and solutions in emission-intensive sectors to minimise, for example, air pollution and nitrogen emissions.

The programmes are divided into two periods of 2025-2027 and 2028-2030 and will be evaluated between these periods. To date, no information has been published regarding how this evaluation will be performed or if the previous indicators for Our Vision 2030, or subsets of these indicators, will be used. In addition to cooperation at the ministerial level, actors such as government authorities, academic institutions, businesses and civil society are also encouraged to collaborate within the programme. The details of how this collaboration will be realised remain to be seen. The SDSN Northern Europe will follow the development of the new Cooperation Program for the Environment and Climate 2025-2030 and, whenever possible, support its implementation.

Country profiles and data visualisation

The data in the Nordic Sustainable Development Report can be visualised by an online data tool accessible at sdgtransformationcenter.org. This site also contains the full excel database and indicator metadata.

The links to the country profiles of the Nordic countries are: Finland, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland.

Methods summary

The SDG Index, International Spillover Index, and Leave-No-One-Behind Index are calculated according to the Europe Sustainable Development Report 2025 (Lafortune G. and Grayson F., 2025). A full description of the methodologies of the SDG Index and Dashboards is available in Lafortune et al. (Lafortune G., 2018). Furthermore, the SDG Index and Dashboards have been audited by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission (Papadimitriou, 2019). More information on the SDG Index and Dashboards methods is available under the heading SDG Index and Dashboards method description below.

The similarity of SDG implementation profiles among countries was analysed using the Bray-Curtis similarity index and non-metric multidimensional scaling in the Past 5.2.1 software (Hammer, Harper and Ryan, 2001).

The top and bottom ten lists of indicators for which the Nordic countries perform well and poorly were produced from z-scores of the indicator scores. A z-score for an indicator and a Nordic country was calculated by subtracting the indicator score from the corresponding average indicator score for all non-Nordic European countries and then dividing the difference by the standard deviation of the indicator scores for all the European countries, according to the formula

$$z = \frac{x - \mu}{\sigma}$$

where x is the score for an indicator of a Nordic country, μ is the average score for the indicator among non-Nordic European countries, and σ is the standard deviation of all European countries.

The spillover impacts from the Nordic countries were analysed using the Bilateral Spillover Impacts (BSI) Toolkit (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2024), using the proportional (per capita) values. In short, the methodology of this toolkit uses a Consumption Based Accounting (CBA) approach. The CBA method considers all impacts associated with a country's consumption and requires comprehensive data on trade flows within and between countries to trace the production and transformation of products across various economic sectors globally. Empirical trade data, typically provided by national statistical offices, is integrated by international organisations or researchers to construct Multi-Regional Input-Output (MRIO) models, and these models are used in the BSI Toolkit. The data for the Nordic countries was visualised using the Flourish application (Flourish, 2024).

SDG Index and Dashboards method description

The SDG Index and Dashboards have been used in several global, regional, and city-scale Sustainable Development Reports produced since 2016 by the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. For more information on the different Sustainable Development Reports, see the SDG Transformation Center website (UN SDSN, 2025).

In short, the methodologies of the SDG Index and Dashboards used in the Europe Sustainable Development Report and this Nordic Sustainable Development Report are based on a set of 111 indicators. Approximately 70% of the indicators come from official statistics offices (primarily that of the European Commission) and 30% from non-official data sources (NGOs, academia). The full list of sources by indicator is available online (UN SDSN, 2025).

SDG Index scores

The SDG Index score, as well as the score for each goal, can be interpreted as the percentage of achievement. The difference between a country's score and 100 % is the percentage that needs to be completed to achieve the SDGs.

The procedure for calculating the SDG Index comprised three steps:

1. Censor extreme values from the distribution of each indicator
2. Normalise the data to ensure comparability across indicators
3. Aggregate the indicators within and across SDGs

The data is censored at the bottom 2.5th percentile of the distribution.

Each variable is rescaled from 0 to 100 with 0 denoting worst performance (2.5th percentile) and 100 describing the technical optimum, based on the formula:

$$x' = \frac{\mathrm{x} - \min(\mathrm{x})}{\max(x) - \min(x)}$$

where x is the raw data value, max/min denotes the bounds for best and worst performance, respectively, and x* is the normalised value.

The aggregation for the SDG Index is done in two steps. First the arithmetic mean value of the normalised values of each indicator is calculated. Secondly, the arithmetic mean values for each of the SDGs are aggregated into an overall SDG Index score by calculating the arithmetic mean value of the individual SDG scores. This approach allows for any later addition of new variables for a particular SDG without affecting the relative weight of each SDG in the overall score. This also means that equal weights are given to indicators within an SDG, as well as across the SDGs.

SDG Dashboards

The SDG Dashboard aims to highlight SDGs that require particular attention and actions and is visualised using the traffic light categories, where green means SDG achieved, yellow means Challenges remain, orange means Significant challenges remain, and red means Major challenges remain. The SDG dashboards track progress on specific SDG indicators by aggregating indicator ratings for each SDG by estimating the average of the two variables on which a country performed worse, thus pinpointing sustainability challenges that need more attention. The green category is bounded by the maximum that can be achieved for each variable and the threshold for achieving the SDG. Such a threshold (the upper bound) can be:

1. An absolute quantitative threshold formulated in the SDG or target (e.g. Zero poverty)
2. Where no absolute quantitative threshold is available, apply the principle of "Leave no one behind" for indicators aiming for universal access or zero deprivation (e.g. Eradicate extreme poverty)
3. Science-based targets that should be achieved by 2030 or later
4. The average of the top five performers

The red category is bounded by the minimum that can be achieved and the 2.5th percentile of the distribution. The thresholds for orange and yellow categories are established based on statistical techniques (e.g. average and standard deviations) and in consultation with experts. The yellow/orange threshold is set as the value halfway between the red and green thresholds

The traffic light color for the goal is determined from the traffic light color of the two variables on which the country performs worst. In addition, in order to score green for the goal, both indicators have to be green – otherwise the goal is rated as yellow. Similarly, a red score is applied only if both worst-performing indicators score red.

Supplementary tables

Supplementary Table 1. Top ten SDG indicators with the highest z-score for the Nordic countries.

Finland		Denmark		Sweden		Norway		Iceland	
Indicator	Z-score	Indicator	Z-score	Indicator	Z-score	Indicator	Z-score	Indicator	Z-score
SDG 12. Gross value added in environmental goods and services sector	2.73	SDG 4. Adult participation in learning	2.06	SDG 7. Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	2,20	SDG 17. Official development assistance	2.53	SDG 7. Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	2.20
SDG 3. Subjective Wellbeing	2.13	SDG 3. Subjective Wellbeing	1.96	SDG 17. Official development assistance	2.10	SDG 7. Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	2.20	SDG 3. Subjective Wellbeing	2.06
SDG 7. Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	2.03	SDG 16. Corruption Perceptions Index	1.89	SDG 4. Adult participation in learning	2.06	SDG 9. Population with at least basic digital skills	1.77	SDG 1. People at risk of poverty after social transfers	2.04
SDG 8. In work at-risk-of-poverty rate	1.90	SDG 16. Access to justice	1,82	SDG 16. Access to justice	1.99	SDG 4. Variation in mathematics performance explained by students' socio-economic status	1.68	SDG 5. Seats held by women in national parliaments	1.83
SDG 16. Corruption Perceptions Index	1.82	SDG 16. Timeliness of administrative proceedings	1.80	SDG 9. Gross domestic expenditure on R&D	1.93	SDG 16. Corruption Perceptions Index	1.62	SDG 4. Adult participation in learning	1.81
SDG 4. Adult participation in learning	1.81	SDG 7. Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	1.78	SDG 3. Smoking prevalence	1.81	SDG 5. Seats held by women in national parliaments	1.56	SDG 9. Population with at least basic digital skills	1.77
SDG 9. Population with at least basic digital skills	1.77	SDG 9. Patent applications to the European Patent Office	1.63	SDG 5. Seats held by women in national parliaments	1.73	SDG 12. Production-based air pollution	1.56	SDG 4. Variation in mathematics performance explained by students' socio-economic status	1.76
SDG 5. Seats held by women in national parliaments	1.66	SDG 3. Individuals that use the internet to make appointments with a practitioner	1.51	SDG 9. Patent applications to the European Patent Office	1.63	SDG 17. Corporate Tax Haven Score	1.53	SDG 8. People killed in accidents at work	1.55
SDG 9. Patent applications to the European Patent Office	1.62	SDG 5. Seats held by women in national parliaments	1.46	SDG 9. Logistics performance index: Quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure	1.57	SDG 16. Timeliness of administrative proceedings	1.52	SDG 17. Corporate Tax Haven Score	1.53
SDG 9. Logistics performance index: Quality of trade and transport-related infrastructure	1.56	SDG 2. Yield gap closure	1.46	SDG 16. Corruption Perceptions Index	1.49	SDG 3. Individuals that use the internet to make appointments with a practitioner	1.51	SDG 12. Production-based air pollution	1.53

Supplementary Table 2. Bottom ten SDG indicators with the lowest z-score for the Nordic countries.

Finland		Denmark		Sweden		Norway		Iceland	
Indicator	Z-score	Indicator	Z-score	Indicator	Z-score	Indicator	Z-score	Indicator	Z-score
SDG 3. Population engaging in heavy, episodic drinking at least once a week	-2.12	SDG 12. Production-based emissions of reactive nitrogen	-2.51	SDG 15. Biochemical oxygen demand in rivers	-3.36	SDG 13. CO_2 emissions embodied in fossil fuel exports	-5.83	SDG 14. Mean area that is protected in marine sites important to biodiversity	-2.76
SDG 16. Gap in population reporting crime in their area, by income	-1.47	SDG 15. Imported deforestation	-1.82	SDG 16. Exports of major conventional weapons	-1.44	SDG 3. Population engaging in heavy, episodic drinking at least once a week	-2.13	SDG 17. Statistical Performance Index	-2.56
SDG 2. Prevalence of obesity, BMI ≥ 30	-1.27	SDG 3. Population engaging in heavy, episodic drinking at least once a week	-1.56	SDG 2. Human Trophic Level	-1.27	SDG 8. Victims of modern slavery embodied in imports	-2.01	SDG 8. Fatal work-related accidents embodied in imports	-2.47
SDG 2. Human Trophic Level	-1.27	SDG 8. Fatal work-related accidents embodied in imports	-1.28	SDG 12. Exports of plastic waste	-0.87	SDG 8. Fatal work-related accidents embodied in imports	-1.65	SDG 13. CO_2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion and cement production	-2.45
SDG 12. Circular material use rate	-1.19	SDG 2. Human Trophic Level	-1.27	SDG 14. Mean area that is protected in marine sites important to biodiversity	-0.86	SDG 15. Imported deforestation	-1.49	SDG 15. Mean area that is protected in terrestrial sites important to biodiversity	-2.43
SDG 15. Imported deforestation	-1.08	SDG 12. Exports of plastic waste	-1.20	SDG 14. Bathing sites of excellent quality	-0.71	SDG 2. Human Trophic Level	-1.27	SDG 8. Victims of modern slavery embodied in imports	-2.36
SDG 14. Mean area that is protected in marine sites important to biodiversity	-0.85	SDG 11. Housing cost overburden rate	-1.14	SDG 11. Overcrowding rate among people living with below 60% of median equivalized income	-0.71	SDG 12. Imported emissions of reactive nitrogen	-1.20	SDG 6. Population connected to at least secondary wastewater treatment	-2.32
SDG 3. Suicide rate	-0.77	SDG 12. Air pollution associated with imports	-0.96	SDG 15. Mean area that is protected in freshwater sites important to biodiversity	-0.63	SDG 12. Exports of plastic waste	-1.20	SDG 4. Early leavers from education and training	-1.97
SDG 5. Unadjusted gender pay gap	-0.72	SDG 13. GHG emissions embodied in imports	-0.96	SDG 15. Mean area that is protected in terrestrial sites important to biodiversity	-0.68	SDG 4. Early leavers from education and training	-1.09	SDG 15. Mean area that is protected in freshwater sites important to biodiversity	-1.68
SDG 16. Victims of human trafficking	-0.70	SDG 16. Unsentenced detainees	-0.81	SDG 15. Imported deforestation	-0.65	SDG 14. Mean area that is protected in marine sites important to biodiversity	-1.09	SDG 3. Gap in self-reported unmet need for medical examination and care, by income	-1.47

Supplementary Table 3. SDG indicators listed on at least two Nordic countries lists of indicators with highest and lowest z-scores.

Indicators occurring on top ten Z-score lists	Number of N ordic countries with indicator on top ten list	Average z-score	Indicators occurring on bottom ten Z-score lists	Number of Nordic countries with indicator on bottom ten list	Average z-score
SDG 7 Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	5	2.08	SDG 14 Mean area that is protected in marine sites important to biodiversity	4	-1.39
SDG 5 Seats held by women in national parliaments	5	1.65	SDG 2 Human Trophic Level	4	-1.27
SDG 4 Adult participation in learning	4	1.94	SDG 15 Imported deforestation	4	-1.26
SDG 3 Subjective Wellbeing	3	2.05	SDG 3 Population engaging in heavy, episodic drinking at least once a week	3	-1.94
SDG 9 Population with at least basic digital skills	3	1.77	SDG 8 Fatal work-related accidents embodied in imports	3	-1.80
SDG 9 Patent applications to the European Patent Office	3	1.62	SDG 12 Exports of plastic waste	3	-1.09
SDG 17 Official development assistance	2	2.32	SDG 8 Victims of modern slavery embodied in imports	2	-2.19
SDG 16 Access to justice	2	1.90	SDG 15 Mean area that is protected in terrestrial sites important to biodiversity	2	-1.12
SDG 16 Timeliness of administrative proceedings	2	1.66	SDG 4. Early leavers from education and training	2	-1.53
SDG 3 Individuals that use the internet to make appointments with a practitioner	2	1.51	SDG 15 Mean area that is protected in freshwater sites important to biodiversity	2	-1.18
SDG 4 Variation in mathematics performance explained by students' socio-economic status	2	1.72			
SDG 12. Production-based air pollution	2	1.54			
SDG 17 Corporate Tax Haven Score	2	1.53			

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THE NORDIC SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REPORT

December 2025

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS NETWORK
A GLOBAL INITIATIVE FOR THE UNITED NATIONS

SDSN Northern Europe

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS