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In the wake of the pandemic: what can we learn

Our common goal is to make the Nordic countries “the most sustainable and integrated region in the world” However, our countries have responded differently to the COVID-19 pandemic, and made life difficult for Nordic citizens to work, study, travel or invest in another Nordic country. The circumstances make our efforts to combat barriers even more important.

Meanwhile, like the climate crisis, green transition and rivalry between the superpowers, disharmony in Europe and the first world, call for Nordic unity and leadership.

Democracy, human rights and the rule of law are under pressure in Europe – even among our closest neighbours. These three values are the cornerstones of Nordic cooperation and, like the UN Sustainable Development Goals, they should always be beacons in our work. The pandemic has exposed a need to follow up on the Könberg Report’s proposals regarding, for example, antibiotic resistance.

Each of us is too small to succeed alone. Together, we are strong and influential. This applies in the political, financial and cultural spheres.

Nordic cooperation – defence and contingency planning

We must now learn from the crisis so that the Nordic countries remain the world's best-integrated region – even in a time of crisis. We should seek to intensify communication between our civil servants and at ministerial level before we take decisions that put Nordic nationals in a difficult position, including decisions to close borders and implement quarantine periods, test requirements, furlough, working from home, etc. We must resist and prevent barriers including those erected during the COVID-19 crisis – and concomitantly exploit fresh experience of using digital solutions in place of physical presence at the workplace, as they may help to improve both employee satisfaction and productivity.

We must formulate a stronger, joint preparedness strategy to ensure that our countries are better prepared to meet crises, pandemics and climate-induced natural catastrophes, such as flooding, drought, forest fires, etc. (see the Nordic Council's strategy on societal security and items adopted by a meeting of the leaders of the Nordic countries' emergency planning agencies, Copenhagen, February 2020), and, not least, cyber-attacks (see the Stoltenberg and Bjarnason reports).

British and American isolationism has triggered a leadership crisis in Europe that calls for a Nordic vision and elements of Nordic-style leadership, with regard not only to the climate and environment,

but also to security in the broadest sense of the word. Notwithstanding the Nordic countries' very varied alliances, under the auspices of NORDEFCO they can enhance their influence via significantly closer cooperation on security and defence. As the superpowers jostle for influence in the Arctic, the Nordic countries' reaction should be to work together with a view to defusing tension in the Arctic region. Arctic issues deserve stronger focus in the Nordic Council.



Johannes Jansson / Norden.org

Nordic climate initiatives

The Nordic countries are known for strong climate political leadership and green solutions. Climate change calls for scientific cooperation and investments in green transition and innovation, for both of which the Nordic countries are uniquely well equipped – with focus on the significance and repercussions of climate change for the human population and for commerce, transportation, fisheries, construction, forestry, animal life, etc.

The climate crisis is not only an economic challenge, but also an opportunity for us to market Nordic solutions across the globe. Nordic climate initiatives should also lead to a joint Nordic climate strategy.

Nordic citizens are generally concerned about climate change and increasingly calling for more Nordic cooperation in this field. The Nordic Council wholeheartedly applauds the Nordic Council of Ministers' intentions to appropriate much more climate funding.



Helgi Thorsteinsson / Norden.org

Nordic youth culture and language initiatives

While we speak different languages, the Nordic linguistic and cultural community is unmistakable. It constitutes an important home base for the 27 million people who live in the Nordic countries. Each of the Nordic countries has a culture based on trust, decency, economic resilience, equality, welfare and strong involvement in clubs and associations.

Unfortunately, the Nordic linguistic community is rapidly evaporating. While we in the Nordic countries make every effort to educate our young people to become global citizens, it is also important that the young experience and educate themselves in the other Nordic countries, and get to know Nordic linguistic and social conditions. Equally important is that they have access to other Nordic countries' media. Via a joint Nordic e-ID, we can minimise superfluous barriers for those who wish to train/study, work, travel and invest in another Nordic country.

We need long-term initiatives to promote cultural and linguistic understanding, not least for students and teachers during teacher training. We must create better opportunities for practical work experience in and exchange schemes between the Nordic countries. We must make it easier to compare qualifications and identify supplementary training courses when education programmes are not comparable.



Yadid Levy / Norden.org

Tourism cooperation

The corona crisis has devastated the tourism industry. The Nordics are the world's 11th-largest tourist destination measured by the number of international visitors who visit several countries in connection with travel (see the Plan for Nordic Tourism Cooperation published last time Denmark chaired the Nordic Council). We need to amplify the story of everything the Nordic countries have to offer in the way of natural landscapes, gastronomy, culture, democracy, welfare, sustainability, equal opportunities, lifestyles, etc., much of which many will recognise from popular Nordic films and series.



Benjamin Suomela / Norden.org