

Advancing the 2030 Agenda and shaping the next global development agenda

About the study

- A study implemented by Nordregio
- Together with the Associations of Local and Regional Governments
- Financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers
- Timeline: April 2025 – January 2026



About the study

Aim: Contribute Nordic local and regional level perspectives to the global dialogue on shaping the post- 2030 Agenda

Key questions:

- What has worked well with the 2030 Agenda?
- What are the key challenges in working with the 2030 Agenda?
- What can be done to accelerate progress?
- How should the next global development agenda look like?

How: Focus group discussions, interviews, written input



Contributors to the study

24 municipalities

4 in Denmark
6 in Finland
2 in Iceland
2 in Norway
10 in Sweden

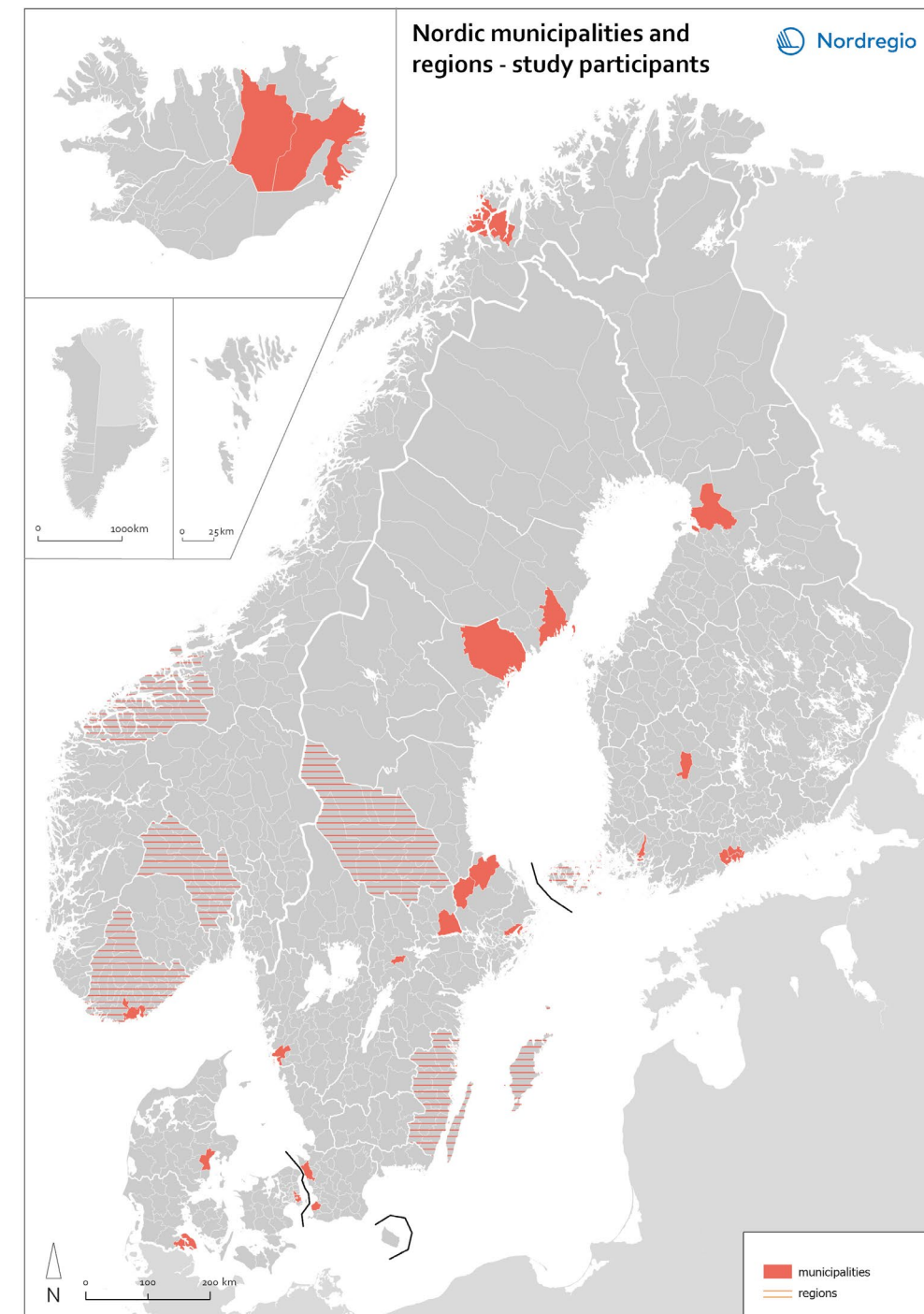
6 Associations of Local and Regional Governments (LRGAs)

Kuntaliitto, KS, SKR, Samband, Ålands Kommunförbund, Kommunufelagið

6 regions

3 in Norway
3 in Sweden

Government of Åland
+Nordic Youth
(ReGeneration 2030)



Preliminary study findings

What has worked well?

- Increased understanding of sustainability
- Relevance to local work
- Communication and engagement tool
- Motivation and direction
- International connection

"The contents are very relevant and part of our everyday work in the city." (FI)

"It's a universal platform... it helped broaden the understanding that sustainability is more than just recycling." (SE)

"The goals are easy to grasp... the visual identity helps connect civil society and local leaders." (DK)

"It pointed us in the right direction... the process and motivation matter more than ticking off goals." (LRGA)

"It helped us show how our local work contributes to the global effort." (Åland)

Challenges

- Lack of political prioritisation and weak leadership
- Working in silos and lack of holistic thinking
- Resource and capacity constraints
- Measuring progress
- Knowledge gaps

"The 2030 Agenda has lost momentum. It's not discussed as much anymore, and that's largely due to shifts in national and international politics." (SE)

"Siloed structure and sector-based thinking in the public sector make it difficult to monitor and coordinate the holistic work required by the 2030 Agenda." (NO)

"Smaller municipalities are overwhelmed by the complexity of the SDGs." (LRGA)

"Without follow-up, goals lose weight. We need a full chain of accountability." (SE)

"One major challenge is the lack of understanding of the SDGs and holistic sustainability." (FI)

What can be done to accelerate progress?

- Keep the Agenda 2030 alive and relevant
- Political support and clear direction
- Strengthen communication
- Mainstream sustainability into everyday work
- Integrate the SDGs into existing steering and management tools

“One of the most important things is to keep the agenda on the agenda — to keep it relevant, current, and alive.” (LRGA)

“What’s important is that politicians support and act on sustainability initiatives.” (DK)

“We have to change the way we communicate if we want to be heard. .. we have to recognize that many people outside this circle think very differently.” (LRGA)

“It's an integral part of our everyday work, no matter where you work in a municipality — whether you're a teacher, a daycare person, or an infrastructure worker.” (FI)

“We need ready-made tools that link existing data to sustainability work.” (NO)

What can be done to accelerate progress?

- Move beyond GDP to measure progress and development
- Engage citizens and the private sector
- Revitalise local democracy
- Emphasize synergies, avoid trade-offs

"Quality of life is important..[how we define success] should shift in that direction wherever possible."
(DK)

"We're now focused on discussing challenges with citizens and companies — co-creation is really starting to bloom." (DK)

"Questions of democracy are becoming increasingly important... they support trust and social unity, which are essential for resilience." (SE)

"We need to understand both the trade-offs and the synergies." (SE)

Beyond 2030: shaping the next development agenda

- Keep the 2030 Agenda, but revise
- Keep the holistic perspective but simplify
- Stronger focus on implementation
- Strengthen follow-up and accountability

"The strength of the agenda is that it acknowledges the interdependence of the three dimensions - social, environmental, and economic. That should absolutely be preserved." (SE)

"Monitoring should drive accountability and show where we're falling behind to focus efforts for real impact." (LRGA)

"It is important to keep the agenda alive, to show that even though the world faces a lot of challenges there are good actions taken as well. It is important to keep the counter argument alive and reinstall hope" (FI)

"It should be much more action-oriented, more focused on how to actually create change." (LRGA)

Beyond 2030: shaping the next development agenda

- Recognise the role of cities and local level
- Circular economy and overconsumption
- Focus on well-being, equity and planetary health
- Strengthen human rights and local democracy
- Embed innovation as a horizontal priority

"Involving local governments and civil society in shaping the global framework rather than leaving it to UN member states alone, could have a major impact."
(Åland)

"Innovation should be integrated as a horizontal, enabling factor across all SDGs."
(LRGA)

"We need to emphasize the democratic dimension more clearly."
(SE)

"Replacing growth with ethics of care, belonging, and local community would be helpful in improving wellbeing, security, and our response to the ecological crisis."
(FI)

Key take-aways

- **Growing challenges** for local implementation of the 2030 Agenda due to declining interest and support from national and international levels, competing priorities, and complex geopolitical situation.
- Municipalities where SDGs are embedded in their governance structures still see clear **benefits and added value** in using the 2030 Agenda in their work.

Key message for post-2030:
**Keep the 2030 Agenda, but modify, re-prioritize
and enhance accountability mechanisms.**



Thank you!



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Nordregio

Sustainable Nordic Municipalities and Regions

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