

## Call for applications: The Labour Market Committee is issuing a call for funding within two selected themes

[The Labour Market Committee](#) under the Nordic Committee of Senior Officials for Labour (EK-A) invites applications for funding for maximum 2-3 projects within any of the following two themes: developments in disability benefits in the Nordic countries and comparison of wage subsidy schemes in the Nordic countries. The total budget is DKK 2.100.000 and the deadline for submitting a project application is 2 October 2026 3 PM.

The project must create clear Nordic added value and cover the Nordic region (at least 3 Nordic countries). Collaboration across countries, disciplines and institutions is strongly encouraged.

### 1. Background

The Nordic Council of Ministers' [Co-operation Programme for Labour 2025–2030](#) sets out the overall objectives and guidelines for the Labour Market Committee.

The overall focus of the programme reflects the Nordic Council of Ministers' Vision 2030, which aims for the Nordic region to become the world's most integrated and sustainable region by 2030, as well as the vision's three priority areas: a green, competitive, and socially sustainable Nordic region.

In the field of labour markets, the objectives are to strengthen the match between the supply of and demand for skilled labour, and to increase labour market participation, including among vulnerable groups. Other objectives are to strengthen integration, ensure equal opportunities, and promote mobility within the Nordic labour market. Furthermore, the committee has an important role in promoting a shared Nordic knowledge and experience base for the further development and modernisation of labour market policies and administration in the Nordic countries.

### 2. Who can apply?

Universities, colleges, institutes and other primarily public research institutions, as well as relevant consortia composed of such institutions. One institution must act as the main applicant and will be responsible for the project implementation, reporting as well as financial administration.



### 3. Purpose of the call

The Labour Market Committee seeks research and knowledge which provides insight, in-depth understanding, information, and practical recommendations and solutions that labour market experts and authorities can use for better planning and facilitation of a future flexible and adaptable labour market. In this context, particular attention is given to the role of active labour market policies (ALMPs) in balancing social protection and labour supply. The focus of this year's call is two different themes, and applicants may choose which theme they wish to focus on.

### 4. Theme 1: Developments in disability benefits<sup>1</sup> in the Nordic countries – why are they so different?

There are significant differences in disability rates across the Nordic countries, both in terms of levels and developments over the past 15–20 years. In 2008, the share was highest in Sweden and Norway (around 10 percent). Since then, it has fallen to around 4 percent in Sweden, while it has increased somewhat in Norway. In Finland, the share has decreased from 8 to 5 percent, while it has remained relatively stable in Denmark, the Faroe Islands, and Iceland. During the same period, the general retirement age has been raised and is increasingly linked to changes in life expectancy.

There is particular concern about the increase in disability rates among young people under the age of 30. The increase is found in most countries but is largest in Norway. Among young people, mental health disorders are the most common cause of disability. The regulatory frameworks vary between countries: Norway has no lower age limit (after age 18), Denmark generally does not grant permanent disability benefits before the age of 40, while Sweden has stricter eligibility requirements and uses temporary benefits for young people.

Differences in the design of benefits, such as eligibility criteria, benefit levels/compensation rates, duration, and the use of temporary schemes, affect the level of disability rates and make comparisons challenging. Reforms and changes in practice have also influenced developments over time.

At the same time, the Nordic countries face demographic challenges with ageing populations and slower growth in the labour force. Increasing employment is important in order to ensure sustainable welfare systems and to meet the rising demand for labour, particularly in the health and care sectors.

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<sup>1</sup> In Swedish: sjuk- och aktivitetsersättning, in Norwegian: uføretrygd, in Danish: førtidspension



Issues to be examined in the project:

- To what extent are differences in disability rates (levels) due to different national schemes/regulations?
- How much of the difference in developments over time can be explained by changes in regulations and practices?
- What other factors might explain why developments in disability rates have differed across the Nordic countries?
- How has a change in disability rates (e.g., in Sweden and Finland, where they have declined) affected the share of people in employment and the share receiving other benefits?

Examples of other relevant issues:

- Are there differences between countries in terms of diagnoses among those granted disability benefits?
- What is the impact of limited access to permanent disability benefits on young people's labour market inclusion and a later disability status?
- Are there differences in labour market attachments and the follow-up of young people on disability benefits across countries?

## **5. Theme 2: Comparative study of wage subsidy schemes in the Nordic Countries**

Over time, the Nordic countries have developed different models for promoting labour market inclusion for individuals who require support. At the same time, the region faces growing labour shortages and a political ambition to maintain high levels of participation in the regular labour market.

The schemes differ in terms of target groups, duration, funding models, and the extent of workplace adaptations. They range from permanent arrangements to temporary measures aimed at training and transitions into ordinary employment.

In Sweden, several types of subsidized employment are available. Among these are three forms of wage subsidies (*lönebidrag*) that may be granted to employers who hire individuals with disabilities or health conditions affecting their work capacity. These different forms of wage subsidies can be used both for temporary and more long-term workplace adaptations.

In Denmark, the *flexjob* scheme combines wage subsidies with adjusted working hours and pay, while other schemes target individuals with temporarily reduced work capacity.



*Isbryderordningen* is offered to young people with disabilities as support for entering the labour market.

Norway operates both permanent and temporary wage subsidy schemes, which are used for different target groups and to varying extents by NAV. Finland offers wage subsidies through, among other measures, *palkkatuki*, which may be granted on either a temporary or a longer-term basis. Iceland has schemes that combine subsidized employment with a gradual transition into regular employment.

Taken together, these schemes illustrate that the Nordic countries have a diverse, though differently designed, set of policy instruments for labour market inclusion, creating opportunities for learning across national borders. In order to strengthen the knowledge base on effective policy measures, funding is being made available for a comparative analysis of wage subsidy schemes in the Nordic countries.

The purpose is to generate new and comprehensive knowledge about how different wage subsidy schemes operate in practice, and how various Nordic models contribute to the labour market inclusion of individuals who require support to obtain or retain employment. The project should compare scheme designs, target groups, incentive structures, and outcomes.

Possible areas of focus include:

- Permanent and temporary wage subsidy schemes: Mapping the use of different wage subsidy schemes across the Nordic countries. Where possible, this should include estimates of the proportion of total employment in each country covered by some form of wage subsidy.
- Use of wage subsidies across sectors: The project should provide an analysis of how public and private sector employers use wage subsidies, and the implications for labour market inclusion and workforce mobility.
- Comparison of institutional frameworks: The project should analyze financing, governance, and how schemes balance incentives for employers, employees, and public authorities.
- Outcomes and effects: Are there available data that would allow the project to examine effects on labour market participation, employment stability, and transition rates into regular employment? Comparative data showing outcomes for similar groups across countries would be particularly valuable.



## 6. Eligibility criteria and assessment

For an application to be considered, it must be documented that at least three Nordic countries, or two Nordic countries plus at least one non-Nordic country, are involved. Involvement means participation in the management or implementation of the initiative, for example in a reference or steering group, so that the results of the project can be effectively disseminated in all participating countries. This does not necessarily require having a researcher in each participating country, however, it would be beneficial to at least cooperate with someone who has access to or can provide relevant country data.

The application must have a Nordic perspective and the more Nordic countries included, the better. It will be considered an advantage if the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland are also included.

Read more about the [general conditions](#) for funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Applications will be reviewed and decided upon by the Nordic Labour Market Committee during the first half of October 2026. The committee assesses applications based on the following criteria:

- the project's relevance within the framework of the call
- academic/scientific content
- the project's novelty and development of new knowledge
- Nordic added value and involvement from the countries
- the academic qualifications of the project group
- research design and identification strategy
- the likelihood that the project will be completed within the proposed timeframe and budget

Special attention will be given projects using Nordic register data and which apply empirical research methods to assess effects and consequences. Such as statistical and econometric analyses, as well as methods based on comparison groups or discontinuities in connection with reforms, particularly studies with harmonized designs across countries which examines variations between countries or policy changes.

The Labour Market Committee prioritizes fewer, but larger projects which generate real Nordic added value. The plan is to fund a total of 2-3 projects within the budget of DKK 2.100.000 and listed themes above.

## 7. Communication and dissemination

Applicants must describe how the project's activities and results will be communicated to relevant target groups. Projects receiving funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers



must contribute to raising awareness about Nordic cooperation. All external communications related to the project must clearly state that the project is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. A communication plan must be developed during the initial phase of the project. This plan should describe how the project's activities and results will be communicated to relevant target groups. Where relevant, the project shall cooperate with the Nordic Council of Ministers on communication activities of shared strategic interest or where joint visibility would be beneficial.

Further communication requirements and guidelines will be provided upon the award of funding.

## 8. Application process

Applications must be submitted in English or in a Scandinavian language (Danish, Norwegian, Swedish) in the project description scheme, which is attached on the site of the call. See guides on how to fill it in [here](#). Applicants may attach CVs as an appendix to the application.

Applications must be submitted electronically to the Committee Secretary Benedicte Stavnum ([Benedicte.Stavnum@nav.no](mailto:Benedicte.Stavnum@nav.no)) and Frida Månsson ([friman@norden.org](mailto:friman@norden.org)), no later than **2 October 2026 at 15:00 (3 PM)**. The application is considered received as soon as the applicant receives confirmation from the committee secretary by email. Applications received after this date will not be considered.

By submitting an application, applicants consent to the Nordic Council of Ministers processing the application, including any personal data it may contain, in accordance with applicable regulations.

Applicants should take into account previous projects and publications financed by the Committee, which can be found [on this site](#) under 'Publications'.

The selected applicant must submit a final project description and detailed budget in the Nordic Council of Ministers' digital grant management system later and upon request. The grant agreement will be based on the standard terms and conditions of the Nordic Council of Ministers, unless otherwise agreed.

## 9. Timeline

Indicative timeline:

- October 2026: Assessment of applications and decisions on the allocation of funds
- November/December 2026: Submission of final project description and detailed budget plus signed grant agreement
- January 2027: Project start