Nordregio

ENABLING VULNERABLE YOUTH IN RURAL AREAS

not in education, employment or training

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Contents

1. Introduction

This report concludes work within the Nordic Thematic Group on Sustainable Rural Regional Development as part of the Nordic Co-operation Programme on Regional Development 2017–2021. The working title of the project is "A rural perspective on spatial disparities of education and employment outcomes". Part of the curiosity that drove this project was to understand better the situation of vulnerable and marginalized youth in rural areas of Norden, which arose from the Nordic Arctic Working Group 2013–2017 where we identified some local and regional processes with serious mismatch problems relating to youth education and validity in the local and regional labour market. Placing YOUTH IN FOCUS is a response to the Nordic Council of Minister's cross-sectional strategy on Children and Youth 2016–2022 as well as the Nordic Co-operation Programme for Regional Development and Planning 2017–2021. It stresses the importance of promoting social sustainability in relation to regional development. The Icelandic chair in 2019 has young people as one of three main priorities. It relates to SDG4, the fourth UN sustainable development goal, in that young people should have a key role in achieving the goal, they should be encouraged to actively participate in society and should have access to important decisions shaping the future (Norræna ráðherranefndin, 2018). Furthermore, the project also relates strongly to both European, Nordic and in some cases national policy emphasis on inclusive labour markets for youth with reduced functional capacities.

Spatial disparities in education and employment for young people in the Nordic countries are a pressing issue for a region with traditionally high standards of social justice and equity. Rural and

urban areas diverge in the rates of early school-leaving, youth unemployment and NEETs (not in employment, education or training) across the Nordic countries – this report explores the underlying reasons for this. These three contexts can be thought of as a continuum in the lives of certain groups of youth who have been left behind by social institutions. Leaving education without a qualification can mean serious disadvantages in the labour market and increases the chances of becoming excluded. At a time of ageing populations and higher specialized labour markets and digitalization, allowing the failure of young people to succeed in life may prove a heavy burden on social progress in the Nordic countries. In addition to increases in income inequality in the Nordic countries (Aaberge et al., 2018), spatial disparities constitute another layer of social inequality. Norden needs all their young people.

The first aim of this report is to give an overview of the situation of spatial disparities in education and employment for young people in rural areas in the Nordic countries; the second aim is to highlight some initiatives that have been taken in a number of areas across the region with a special focus on rural and remote areas.

To do so, we look at some of the underlying causes and question how rural and urban developments have affected them. In analysing aspects of the education systems, such as school closures in rural areas, we intersect with cultural, socio-economic and mental health aspects. Thereafter, we focus on various regional characteristics of school drop-outs, the unemployed, and NEETs, namely the groups that we see as the most vulnerable among the youth population in each of the Nordic countries. The NEETs we focus on are at dire risk of becoming permanently ill and/or misplaced if re-engagement is not mobilized in some form. To secure social cohesion in the future in the Nordic countries, all possible measures that work need to be considered and implemented, regardless of whether they are initiated by state, regional or labour market actors, or by public–private partnerships.

The last section of this report describes case studies and initiatives aimed at re-engaging young people into activity.

2. Early school leavers

A large, longitudinal Nordic study of the school-to-work transitions of young people conducted between 1993 and 2008 reported significant cross-country differences in non-completion rates at different ages (Albæk et al., 2015). It was found that the dominant activity of non-completers at age 21 was, over the next 10 years, to work or study (Albæk et al 2015). Thus, non-completion by the age of 21 does not automatically imply poor labour market outcomes in the future. However, the different pathways taken by young non-completers following compulsory schooling are strong predictors of labour market outcomes even after considering family background (Albæk et al 2015). The longer a young person remains engaged in upper secondary education (even if they do not complete it), the better are their labour market prospects (Albæk et al 2015).

There has been substantial national discussion in each of the Nordic countries on why school drop-out rates vary so much between regions. Although there is no definitive answer to this question, all evidence points to early school-leaving having significant societal and individual consequences. An additional year of schooling can increase lifetime earnings for an individual by 4–10%. The negative consequences of early school-leaving are increased risk of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, non-completion of upper secondary education is both an individual and a socio-economic cost, much of which is not immediately observable (Hyggen 2015; Nilsson 2010).

In recent years, the discussion on drop-outs in Norway has been both lively and rigorous (Svarstad, 2015). The Norwegian authorities set a goal of raising completion rates substantially with an intersectoral campaign in 2013 (Kunnskapsdepartementet et al., 2013). The media debate has focused on drop-out increasing health risks and lowering social well-being (Bogsnes Larsen & Bjørnoy Urke, 2018). Regional variations are also observable. For example, Finnmark in Northern Norway and Sør Varanger have shown strikingly high rates well above the national average; media coverage has tended to blame bad schools and bad teachers (NRK, 2016; Pettersen, 2015). How-ever, the full picture is more complex, and some studies point to socio-economic background and close relationships with friends and family as critical reasons for succeeding in school (Bakken, Frøyland & Sletten, 2016). A better understanding of what works to prevent early school-leaving and investing in effective measures to combat school drop-out are of wider societal benefit (Falch et al. 2009; Norden 2015). According to recent statistics (Map 1), Norwegian regions have begun to see the effects of various actions to improve the situation.

Access to labour markets in the Nordic countries varies. For some time, it has been almost impossible to get a job in Sweden or Finland without secondary education (MUCF 2018, Simanska, 2015), and this situation is emerging gradually in Norway and Iceland.

Who are the early school leavers? Demographics of early school-leaving show that social class, gender and ethnicity are key for leaving school unqualified (Lamb & Markussen, 2011; Lavrijsen & Nicaise, 2015; Van Caudenberg, Van Praag, Nouwen, Clycq, & Timmerman, 2017). These characteristics are intersectional, that is, they do not explain early school-leaving by themselves (Dance, 2009). In addition, they are intertwined in multiple social spheres, such as the family, the school and the community in which young people are located. Therefore, they contribute to our understanding of early school-leaving as a social process that involves several aspects and actors rather than as individual decisions taken by young people (Tilleczek et al., 2011). For example, coming from a socially disadvantaged background, being a boy, being disengaged from school and being from a migrant background are some of the risk factors contributing to young people leaving school early (Dale, 2009). In addition, parental income and educational attainment are two important factors in the process of early school-leaving because they have a great impact on educational performance (for Finland, see Erola, Jalonen, & Lehti, 2016; for Denmark, see Jæger & Holm, 2007). Figure 1 shows the educational attainment (in terms of completion and non-completion of upper secondary education) of Danish students aged 18–25 ac-
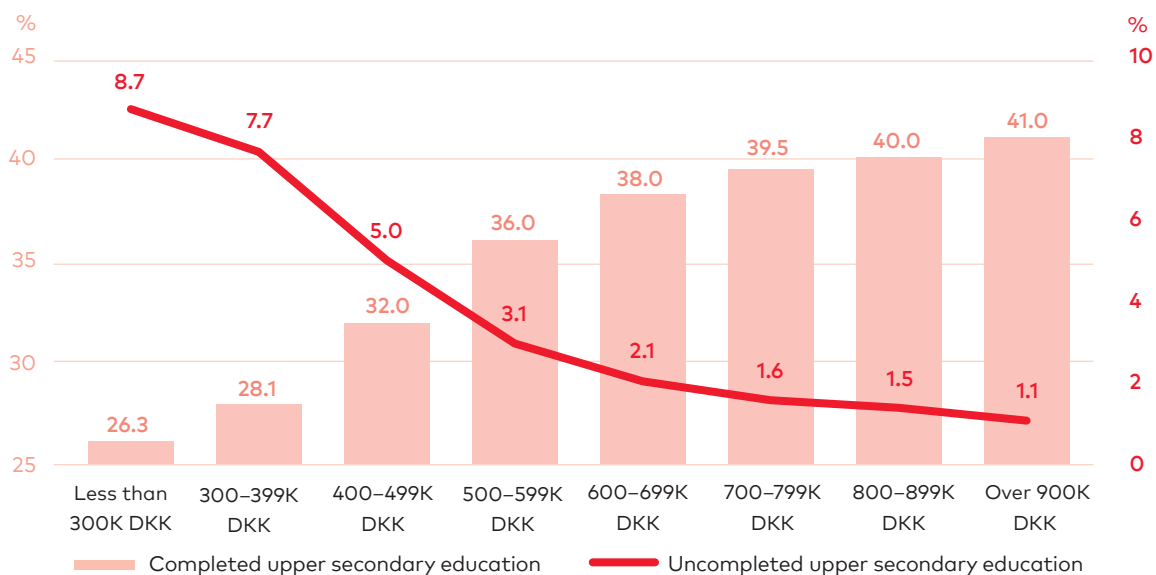
Figure 1. Educational attainment by parental income, Denmark 2017.
Source: Statistics Denmark [STATUS14]

cording to parental income level. It excludes those who are still in upper secondary school or those who have discontinued. Different forms of capital (economic, social and cultural) define social class. However, because economic capital is central to this category, parental income represents a proxy of this form of capital.
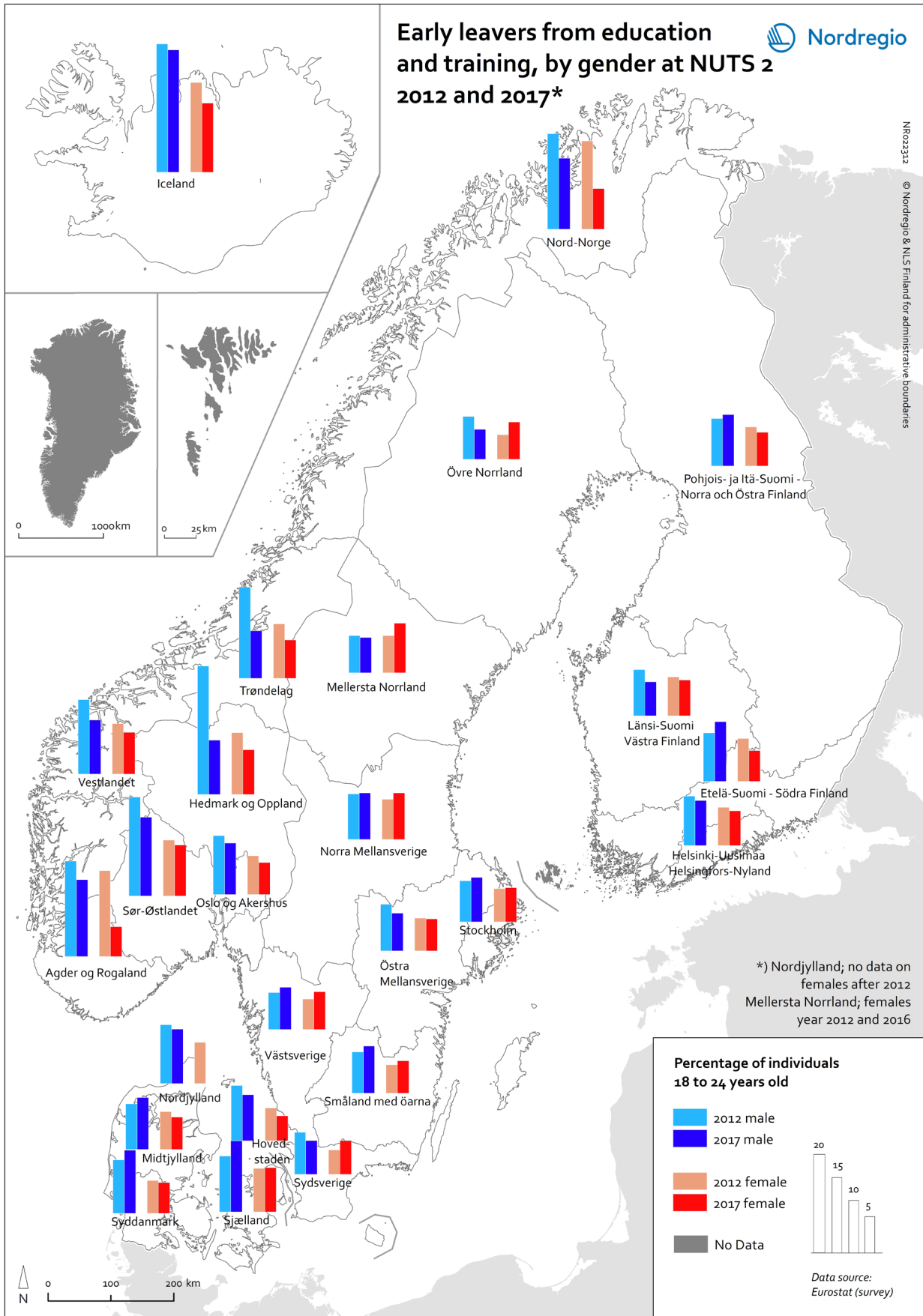
Structural mechanisms enabling young people to become financially independent during their studies through study support (SU) are available to varying degrees in the Nordic countries. In Sweden, study grants and benefits have allowed young people to become quickly financially independent from their families (Nordén, 2012). However, socio-economic background may influence completion possibilities. In Denmark, students from the poorest families (annual income DKK <300,000/EUR 40,200) have eight times higher probability of not completing upper secondary education compared with students from the wealthiest families (income DKK >900,000), even if they can apply for SU (ibid). Although Nordic societies are characterized by social mobility possibilities and less consolidation of classes than, for example, in central and southern European countries, the relationship between parental income and the offspring's educational attainment is evident. This indicates that the socio-economic background of students makes a difference and highlights the class question in an evolving Nordic society characterized by disparities in social conditions.

Map 1 (next page) shows the percentage of the population aged 18–24 who were early leav-ers from education and training, by gender, for the years 2012 and 2017 at a regional level (NUTS 2). As can be seen on the map, early school leaving rates in the Nordic Region declined overall between 2012 and 2017. Exceptions to this trend include some regions in Denmark (Syd Danmark, Midtjylland and Sjælland) where rates for young males have been on the increase, as in Southern Finland (FI).

Another clear observation is that young males are more likely to leave school early than young females though in many cases the gender gap is small or at least closing. The most dramatic reduction of this gap can be found in Hedmark and Oppland (NO) and Trøndelag (NO). Though early school leaving rates for young women also decreased during the period another trend is emerging in Sweden, with an increased rate of young women dropping out in Norra Mellan Sverige, Mellersta Norrland and Övra Norrland.

Gender differences are particularly large in Iceland, where boys show a 10% higher propensity of early school-leaving than girls. Two explanations are given in the literature for this. Grades are a fundamental aspect of the school experience and are a strong predictor of early school-leaving (Blöndal, Jónasson, & Tannhäuser, 2011). Therefore, as boys underperform compared with girls in academic achievement, they are at greater risk of leaving early. Blöndal, Jónasson, and Tannhäuser (2011) found different reasons among girls and boys for early school-leaving early, namely forming a family and finding a good job, respectively. Furthermore, the attractiveness of the labour market

Early leavers from education and training, by gender at NUTS 2 2012 and 2017*

Nordregio

Iceland

Nord-Norge

Övre Norrland

Pohjois- ja Itä-Suomi - Norra och Östra Finland

Trøndelag

Mellersta Norrland

Vestlandet

Hedmark og Oppland

Länsi-Suomi Västra Finland

Etelä-Suomi - Södra Finland

Norra Mellansverige

Sør-Østlandet

Oslo og Akershus

Helsinki-Uusimaa Helsingfors-Nyland

Agder og Rogaland

Stockholm

Östra Mellansverige

Västsverige

*) Nordjylland; no data on females after 2012 Mellersta Norrland; females year 2012 and 2016

Nordjylland

Småland med öarna

Midtjylland

Hoved- staden

Percentage of individuals 18 to 24 years old

Syddanmark

Sjælland

Sydsverige

2012 male
2017 male
2012 female
2017 female
No Data

20
15
10
5

Data source: Eurostat (survey)

Map 1. Early leavers from education and training, by gender, 2012–2017.

influences the motivation to stay at or leave school, and much research on youth work supports such claims (Einarsdóttir 2010). The economic incentive is a primary motivator for students to, first, combine work and studies and, second, to work long hours during holidays (Einarsdóttir 2010, Eydal, Rafnsdóttir & Einarsdóttir 2015). Other studies that distinguish between age groups (teenagers <18 years, and adolescents >18 years) show that the reasons for drop-out vary, among which a lack of interest and boredom, experience of being mobbed, feeling low or economic reasons are the main triggers for students to leave school (Pálsdóttir et al., 2010).

Norway and Denmark show lower but still notable differences in early school-leaving by gender. In the Norwegian context, Markussen, Frøseth, and Sandberg (2011) found that when boys and girls performed equally, boys still had a higher probability of non-completion of upper secondary education compared with girls. Therefore, the authors suggested that "higher dropout rates among boys are primarily a result of lower educational performance" (2011). In Finnmark, the completion rates in vocational education were found to be only 39% (Petterson, 2015).

It is not possible to detect gendered patterns in the drop-out rates among high school students in Åland. However, girls dominate at high school and boys are heavily over-represented in technological education. In addition, there is a clear trend showing that over time young women acquire a higher level of education (ÅSUB, 2013, 2015).

Finally, Finland and Sweden show small gender differences in terms of early school-leaving suggesting that other factors are at play. A recent longitudinal, qualitative study from Norway addresses the need to shift focus from socio-economic background and gender to looking at dropping out as an interaction between the person and the system. When young people are given the opportunity to tell why they drop out in their own words, their stories indicate the complex processes that precede – often by some years – the decision to eventually drop out. Socially mediated interactions between the person and the system they are part of must therefore be considered to understand why young people drop out (Bunting & Moshuus, 2017).

The country of birth of students is also known to affect drop-out (Table 1). In Finland, immigrant status has a stronger impact than gender on early school-leaving (Rinne & Järvinen, 2011).

In the case of Sweden, the percentage of early school-leaving for foreign-born students is more than double that of native students (Jonsson, Kilpi-Jakonen, & Rudolphi, 2014) However, national figures for early school-leaving in Sweden do not detect the growing number of increasingly younger children in-between primary and secondary school who stop attending school and become inactive (*hemmasittare*). A phenomenon also identified on the increase in Iceland and called skólaforðun. The reasons and characteristics for this will not be addressed here and require much further research; however, it is clear that increasingly younger children in Sweden or in Iceland who stop attending school are at risk of becoming inactive youngsters.

Finally, geographical inequalities also exist in terms of early school-leaving. Figure 2 shows the percentage of early school-leaving in five Nordic countries by degree of urbanization (cities, towns/suburbs and rural areas).

From Figure 2 (next page) a pattern is evident in which rural areas systematically reflect a higher percentage of early school-leaving than towns/suburbs and cities. It has been argued that educational research has not paid sufficient attention to the geographical perspective, which has led to the city becoming the default unit of analysis (Bæck, 2015). In turn, this disregards the reality of other locations, with location itself being a cause of inequality (Bæck, 2015).

Table 1. Early school-leaving by country of birth, 2017					
	Denmark	**Finland**	**Sweden**	**Iceland**	**Norway**
Foreign country	9.3%	15.2%	15.5%	19%	13.4%
Reporting country	8.8%	7.9%	6.2%	17.7%	10.1%

Source: Eurostat [edat_lfse_02]
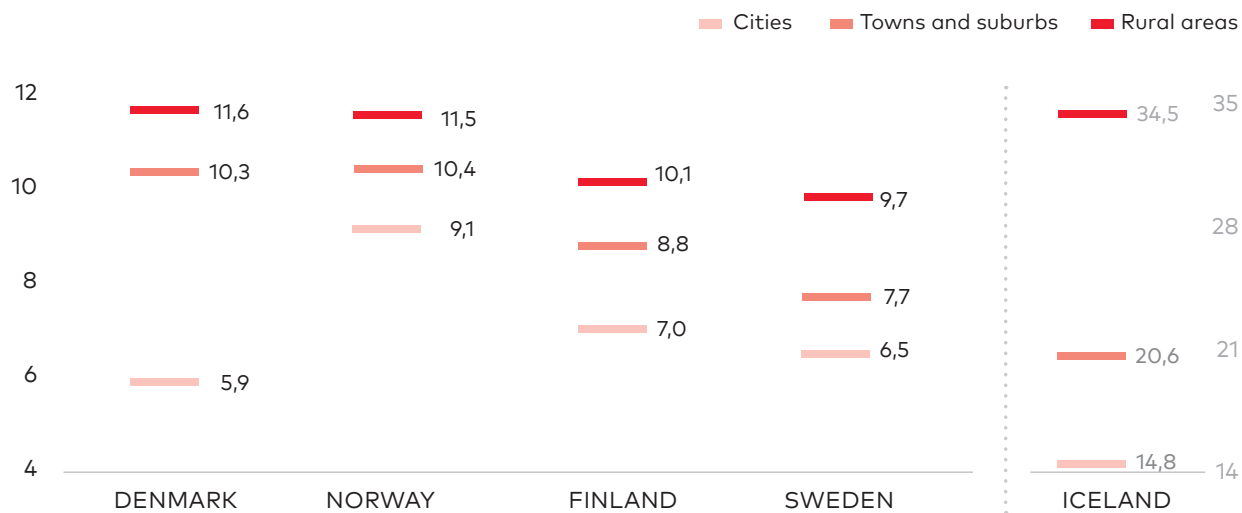
Figure 2. Early leavers from education and training by degree of urbanization, 2017. Source: Eurostat [edat_lfse_30]

Legend: Cities — Towns and suburbs — Rural areas

DENMARK: Rural areas 11,6; Towns and suburbs 10,3; Cities 5,9
NORWAY: Rural areas 11,5; Towns and suburbs 10,4; Cities 9,1
FINLAND: Rural areas 10,1; Towns and suburbs 8,8; Cities 7,0
SWEDEN: Rural areas 9,7; Towns and suburbs 7,7; Cities 6,5
ICELAND: Rural areas 34,5; Towns and suburbs 20,6; Cities 14,8

3. Youth unemployment

High levels of labour market participation are the corner-stone of the Nordic welfare state and a key component of the region's high standard of living (Halvørsen et al. 2012). All Nordic countries share a strong ambition for an inclusive labour market in which as many people as possible can participate in employment. Work provides identity and contributes to economic independence, participation and social inclusion. It gives the individual an opportunity to develop and use their abilities, which are common goals for Nordic integration and inclusion in labour market policies, to mobilize people to be active citizens (Karlsdóttir et al. 2017). Young people are more likely to experience labour market disadvantage due to their lack of experience compared with older people. This relative disadvantage is often exacerbated by economic conditions, as was the case following the financial crisis in 2008 (State of the Nordic region 2016).

Over the last decade, we can identify highs and lows of youth unemployment rates in each of the Nordic countries. In general, the economic situation strongly influences unemployment levels. In Finland, after a stable recovery after the recession of the 1990s, unemployment rates rose again in 2008, and in some regions, these included higher rates of chronic youth unemployment compared with neighbouring countries (Lindqvist, 2010). Between 2008 and 2012, rising youth unemployment in Iceland and Sweden led to youth labour migration to Norway. Young Swedes were drawn to more stable job possibilities across the border to the west (Norway) and the south (Denmark). Icelanders emigrated to rescue their soaring household economies in greatest numbers to Norway and Denmark, predominantly in the period 2008–2011.

Since 2012, the youth unemployment rate has steadily fallen with regional changes and variations. After 2014, South West Norway experienced a radical downturn due to plummeting oil prices with the loss of 50,000 jobs (Skodje, 2016; Lima, 2016; Visjø, 2016; Huuse, 2016). The younger portion of the workforce was particularly affected by this downturn, thereby increasing the burden on affected municipalities and long-term sick-leave (NAV, 2016).
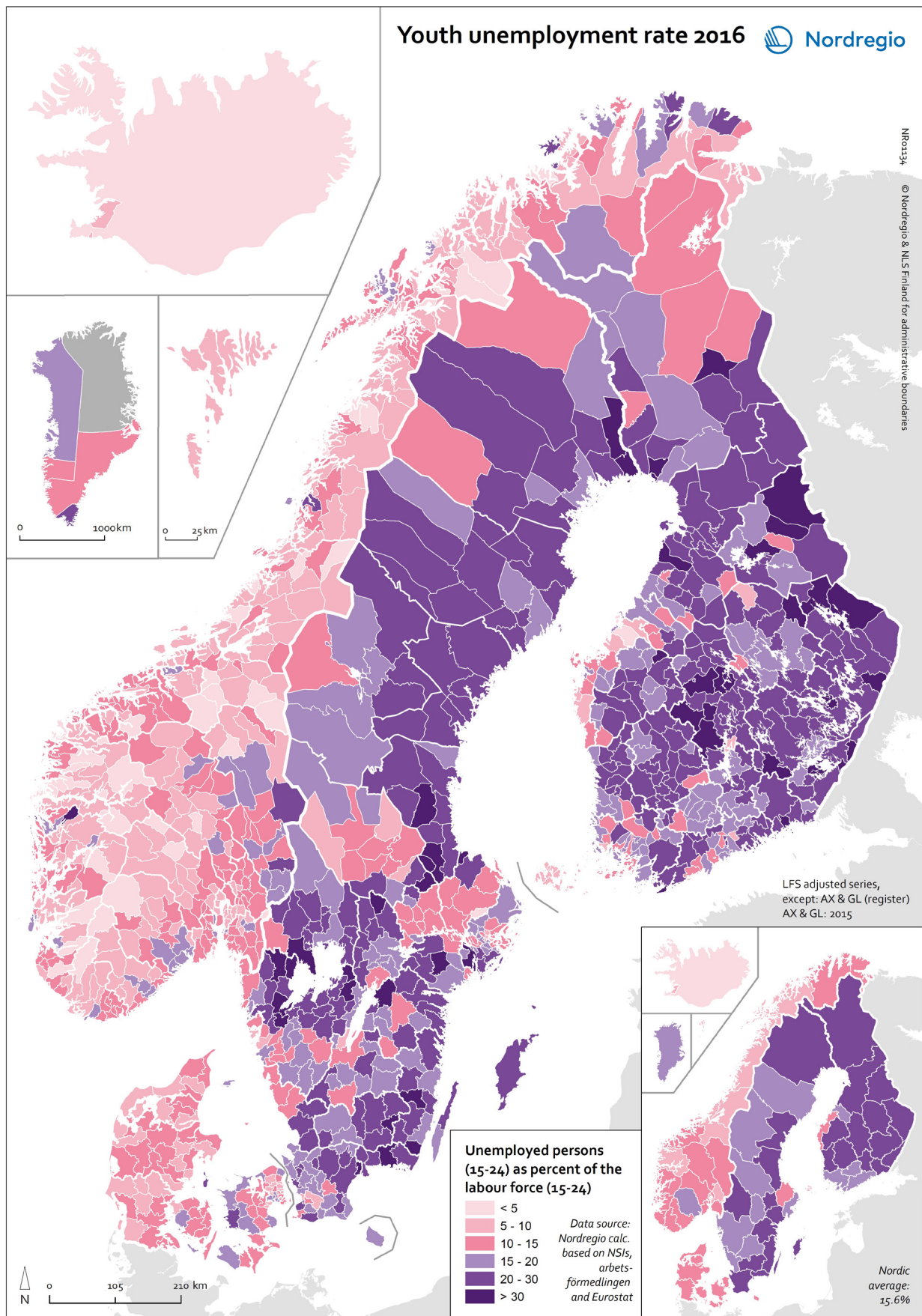
A high share of unemployment means that there are people who could work, and are actively looking for a job, but who are not in employment. A high unemployment rate can reflect economic problems related to the economic cycle or indicate more structural problems, for example, that the labour supply does not match the labour demand. Structural unemployment usually occurs when there are structural changes in the economy causing long-term unemployment. The percentage of unemployed people who are long-term unemployed is relatively low in the Nordic region (23%) compared with the EU28 (46.6%). Sweden has the unenviable distinction of having high long-term youth unemployment in specific regions where the downturn in traditional industries has affected the regional labour market negatively. Such high levels in Sweden indicate that youth unemployment is not only related to economic growth curves but that there are also underlying structural reasons (Schermer, 2019).

In recent years, there are fewer young people who are registered as unemployed, for example, in Sweden (Löfgren, 2017). However, job centres
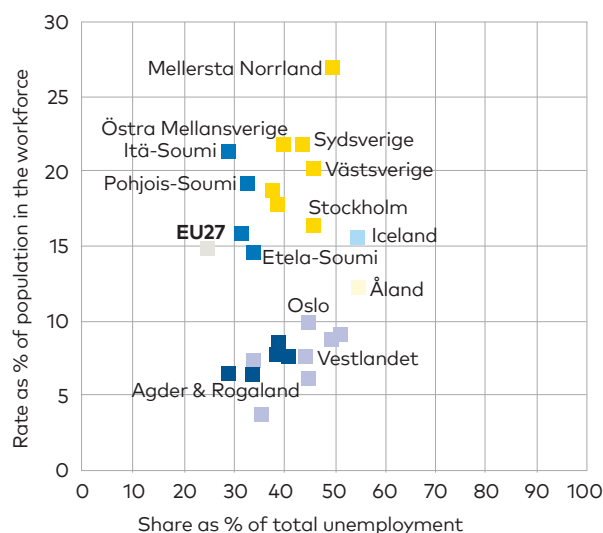
Share: youth unemployment as % of total unemployment
Rate: youth unemployment persons as % of total population in the workforce

Figure 3. Youth unemployment in the Nordic region by the end of 2008 (Lindqvist, 2010).

Youth unemployment rate 2016

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LFS adjusted series,
except: AX & GL (register)
AX & GL: 2015

**Unemployed persons
(15-24) as percent of the
labour force (15-24)**

- < 5
- 5 - 10
- 10 - 15
- 15 - 20
- 20 - 30
- > 30

*Data source:
Nordregio calc.
based on NSIs,
arbets-
förmedlingen
and Eurostat*

*Nordic
average:
15.6%*

Map 2. Youth unemployment rate 2016. Unemployed persons (aged 15–24 years) as percentage of the labour force.

warn that some groups of young people still struggle more than others, for example, those without a gymnasium degree (secondary high), those who for various reasons are not able to work as much as the average person, or youngsters born outside Europe. Individual support for those who need it should be emphasized in co-operation with the local authorities (Löfgren, 2017).

The Nordic countries have enjoyed a more favourable period of economic expansion in recent times (*højkonjuktur* 2016–2018), which has increased the demand for labour, including for young people, and consequently we see a trend of decreasing youth unemployment.

Even in small societies like the Faroe Islands with its record low unemployment, there may be complex problems that the population in small-scale communities faces when losing their jobs, for example: problems related to something you have done (damaged reputation); lack of networks (isolation); being a foreigner (discrimination); previous position as leader of a company (stigmatized/unpopular); or being "over-qualified" (too expensive and/or unsuitable for the job).

Young men often feel somewhat ashamed at the beginning of the process of being jobless. They feel that they should have been able to find work, but slowly they admit that they also need support. Then, they take important steps and begin to critically reflect on their past and future in the labour market. The shame is greater when unemployment rates are very low than when many people are jobless.

Some points about future prospects need to be kept in mind. With the labour market increasingly in flux, young people are often caught in a more precarious situation in the labour market (Halvorsen & Hvinden, 2014). Because of liberalized or deregulated fixed-term contracts, temporary jobs have emerged as a major form of employment in Europe, affecting especially young people; the share of such jobs has reached >15% in Sweden (2014) (Eichhorst & Rinne, 2016). Fragmented/empty/marginal contracts – gig work, zero-hour contracts, marginal part time, and social dumping, as well as algorithms and digital platforms as employers – are all part of the future of work that pose challenges to legal frameworks and the welfare society in Nordic countries (Hotvedt, 2019). Flexicurity in Denmark means that young people are easily hired, but also easily fired (Halvørsen et al., 2013). Increased digitalization can lead to alienation and works against labour market inclusion for the vulnerable groups who are already on the margins. Regarding unemployment, young men are particularly vulnerable as they are often employed on temporary or limited contracts and in volatile sectors with regard to fluctuations in the labour market (Hyggen 2015).

The EU's Youth Guarantee programme, which was intended to bring young people back on track in the labour market after the economic crisis in 2008, has not performed any miracles (Küchel, 2018). Within the European context, youth insecurity and labour market exclusion create "scars" among young people who become stuck in a vicious circle of low qualified, temporary and often badly paid jobs. A segment of this kind of labour market has also evolved within the Nordic countries in certain sectors, for example, Iceland and Norway. A recent pan-European study highlights the bleak relationship between unemployment, cannabis use and mental illness among young people. Clearly, today's youth will have to be prepared for new labour markets and will have to be flexible and adaptable. However, the jobs created need to be of value; people should not have to have three jobs to get by (Küchel, 2018).

4. Nordic countries and vulnerable youth

NEETs – not in education, employment or training – are an emerging group of young people who fall out of the education system. NEETs have existed for decades and are youngsters in danger of social marginalization. We will describe NEETs and related implications later but focus in this section on some of the possible causes behind the spatial disparities found in the Nordic countries in terms of early school-leaving.

Education in the Nordic countries has been a corner-stone in building an inclusive, equal and democratic society (Blossing, Imsen, & Moos, 2014a). However, a large body of literature has explored the constant threats to this goal (see, for example, Blossing, Imsen, & Moos, 2014b; Buland & Mathiesen, 2014; Dovemark, 2014; Dovemark et al., 2018; Lundahl, 2017). Accordingly, we will examine the structural causes pinpointed by such research with a focus on their impact on the spatial dispari-

ties of NEETs and early school leavers. This section is structured into six subsections. (1) We first give an overview of the development of vocational education in the Nordic educational systems. (2) We then examine, from a rural perspective, reforms adopted in education policy during the last two decades. (3) Marketization and segregation as unintended outcomes of educational policy are then discussed. (4) We next analyse the wave of school closures with the goal of highlighting how education opportunities have diminished, especially in rural areas. (5) Cultural aspects of early school-leaving and NEETs together with socio-economic conditions and gender are then discussed. (6) Finally, we focus on mental health and on the basis of existing evidence, we analyse how the mental health issues of Nordic youngsters have changed over a period of 12 years.

5. Comparison of vocational educational systems

There are indications that the vocational education system with regional variations across the Nordic countries is wrought with structural imbalances. At a time when all labour market forecasts predict a lack of vocationally educated labour in the near future, this part of the educational system is failing to attract a sufficient number of young students, just as it fails to secure sufficiently high completion rates and, in some instances, is being deprioritized as academic and literary educational programmes become more prominent in the educational landscape (Topsøe Larsen, 2017). Education systems are vital sites of rupture and conflict during economic restructuring processes. Over the last 15 years, the system has been largely realigned to adapt to global competitive demands (Ehlers 2013 cited in Topsøe Larsen 2017). The provision of vocationally skilled labour continues to play a vital role for labour markets outside metropolitan areas.

Table 2 shows the percentage of new students in upper secondary education who chose the vocational track in four Nordic countries in 2017. Data are broken down by urban–rural typology with the aim of highlighting spatial disparities between urban and rural regions in vocational education enrolment. We see that vocational education constitutes a field where spatial disparities are reproduced. In three of the four countries (except for Finland), the proportion of new students in vocational education is consistently lower in urban than in intermediate and rural regions.

Similar patterns are found when looking at vocational education enrolment at the municipal level. In addition, in recent years, the popularity of vocational education has decreased steadily in some Nordic countries, for example, in Sweden, Denmark and Finland. Table 4 (next page) shows the percentage of students enrolled in vocational education in Swedish municipalities by typology[1]. The data follow the patterns identified at the regional level and show how vocational education has been losing popularity especially since 2013.

However, this trend does not mean that students are enrolling more often in general programmes within upper secondary education. In fact, enrolment in these programmes has also fallen, except in urban municipalities where it increased from 59% in 2011 to 65% in 2017 (Skolverket). What has happened is that students in intermediate and rural municipalities have started to enrol in introductory programmes (Table 5, page 20), which are intended for those students who do not fulfil the requirements to enrol in the national programmes (either general or vocational upper secondary education) (Skolverket, 2012). In this regard, it is important to note the divergent trend that has taken place in Swedish municipalities. While vocational education and introductory programme enrolment in urban municipalities has

Table 2. Percentage of new students in vocational subjects at upper secondary level, 2017.

	Nordic region	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
Rural regions	57%	50.9%	78.8%	53.7%	35.6%
Intermediate regions	49.4%	47%	76.9%	51.5%	34.8%
Urban regions	41.4%	46.1%	78.2%	41.8%	21.6%

Sources: Styrelsen for IT og læring (Denmark), Vipunen (Finland), Utdanningsdirektoratet (Norway), Skolverket (Sweden).

1   Municipality typology is based on SKL's classification of Swedish municipalities, available at https://skl.se/tjanster/kommunerregioner/faktakommunerochregioner/kommungruppsindelning.2051.html

Table 3. Vocational education reforms in the Nordic countries.

COUNTRY	YEAR	RELEVANT ASPECTS
Denmark	2015[2]	The Danish government set four clear objectives in 2014 ■ To increase enrolment in vocational education and training (VET) to 30% by 2025 ■ To increase completion rate in VET to 60% by 2020 and 67% by 2025 ■ To maintain the high employment rate for new graduates ■ To increase students' well-being and the satisfaction of employers with new recruits
Finland	2018[3]	■ Budget cuts of EUR 190 million or 12% ■ New financing model based on number of students; completed qualifications; and graduates' employment, enrolment in higher education, and feedback ■ Replacement of apprenticeship model with a "training contract": thus, students are not employees and do not receive compensation
Iceland	2014[4]	White Paper on Education Reform ■ Simplifying basic programmes, reviewing competence requirements and shortening duration of studies ■ Include workplace training in all VET programmes and review quality assurance, accountability and funding aspects ■ Improvement of management and administration of VET by the reassessment of the roles of different partners ■ Strengthening of counselling and career guidance and promotion of VET
Norway	1994[5] and 2006[6]	Reform 94 ■ 2+2 model (2 years of school-based education + 2 years of apprenticeship training) ■ VET is the responsibility of the state and social partners Knowledge Promotion Reform 2006 ■ Reduced the number of first-year and second-year courses ■ Introduction of the in-depth study project
Sweden	2011[7,8]	Four aims of the Swedish government (Skolverket, 2012) ■ To make students ready for working life immediately after upper secondary school ■ To increase completion rates and decrease drop-out rates through raising entry requirements ■ To assure the quality of upper secondary education through the National Agency for Education

Table 4. Enrolments to vocational education in Swedish regions

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Urban	27,7%	28,0%	28,0%	26,7%	25,8%	24,4%	24,1%
Intermediate	40,3%	41,4%	41,7%	39,8%	37,8%	35,5%	35,2%
Rural	42,5%	43,2%	44,0%	42,0%	40,2%	36,7%	36,9%

Source: Skolverket (2019).

decreased, this has not been the case in intermediate and rural municipalities where vocational education enrolment has decreased but introductory programme enrolment has increased.

While Norwegian regions reveal a more stable situation in student recruitment to vocational education, the percentage of student enrolment has been on decrease in all types of regions. The

2   Danish Ministry of Education (2014).
3   Ollikainen, J.-P. (2017).
4   Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (2014).
5   Thunqvist, D.P., & Reegård, K. (2019).
6   Nyen, T., & Tønder, A. H. (2016).
7   Olofsson, J., & Thunqvist, D.P. (2014).
8   Thunqvist, D.P. (2015).

Table 5. Enrolments to vocational education in Norwegian regions							
	2013	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**
Urban	38,9%	37,1%	36,8%	36,9%	31,0%	31,8%	33,1%
Intermediate	54,5%	53,4%	52,6%	52,4%	48,6%	49,6%	51,5%
Rural	56,7%	56,0%	54,6%	55,2%	52,8%	52,6%	53,7%

Source: Utdanningsdirektoratet (2019)

Table 6. Vocational programme enrolment in Danish municipalities by typology.										
	2008	**2009**	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**
Urban	54%	51%	51%	51%	51%	49%	51%	50%	48%	45%
Intermediate	54%	51%	51%	50%	48%	47%	47%	47%	45%	43%
Rural	59%	58%	58%	56%	55%	55%	54%	54%	52%	50%

Source: Undervisnings Ministeriet (2019).

more pressing problem in Norway is drop-out and in some cases low completion rates, as well as a rather long completion time, that have been substantial concerns in vocational education.

In Denmark, the proportion of vocational education enrolment in upper secondary school decreased from 58% in 2007 to 46% in 2017 (Undervisnings Ministeriet, 2019). At the municipal level, similar tendencies to those in Sweden and the Nordic countries are reproduced, namely there is a greater prevalence of vocational education enrolment in rural than in intermediate and urban areas[9]. Disparate localities across Denmark are currently experiencing increasingly divergent development trajectories. Access to education plays a significant role in unequal development processes outside the large urban areas. Young people from these localities must negotiate limited local opportunity structures within the field of education (Topsøe Larsen, 2017).

However, in Finland, the picture at the municipal level is the opposite of that in Sweden and Denmark, at least with respect to vocational education enrolment in different types of municipality. Table 7 shows the percentage of applications to vocational education since 2008 in urban, intermediate and rural municipalities[10]. Although the declining trend shared with Sweden and Denmark also occurs here, Finnish urban municipalities have retained a higher proportion of vocational education enrolment.

Table 7. Vocational programme applications in Finnish municipalities by typology.					
	2014	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**
Urban	65.7%	61.9%	60.9%	58.0%	55.2%
Intermediate	64.6%	61.9%	58.1%	54.8%	52.8%
Rural	52.6%	48.5%	44.9%	44.1%	40.7%

Source: Vipunen (2019).

9   Municipality typology is based on Statistics Denmark classification of Danish municipalities, available at https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/dokumentation/nomenklaturer/degurba---danmarks-statistik#

10 Municipalities' typology is based on Statistics Finland classification of Finnish municipalities, available at https://www.stat.fi/meta/luokitukset/kunta/001-2019/kunta_kr.html

A Nordic perspective

What are the reasons behind the spatial disparities in upper secondary education? There is lack of labour and in many rural places there is a reliance on migrant labour in the tradesman branches. The prognosis regarding how jobs will transform in the Fourth Industrial Revolution suggests that fewer repetitive functions and more specialized vocational occupations will be characterized even more by a lack of labour. There is already a severe lack of care workers, nurses, ICT workers, carpenters, electricians, mechanics in many rural areas of the Nordic countries (Hauglie, 2019).

While it is a positive trend that a higher percentage of students choose vocational education in rural areas compared with urban-settled youth, we may ask why there are fewer urban youngsters enrolling in vocational programmes. Research carried out in Sweden suggests that the choice of upper secondary tracks is more grounded in students' socio-economic status and parents' educational background than in rurality (Rosvall, Rönnlund, & Johansson, 2018). In addition, scholars argue that socio-economic status is correlated with geography, that is, rural areas are economically disadvantaged with regard to urban areas (Rosvall et al., 2018). Similar trends were identified in research on the aspirations of rural youth in the United States, in which socio-economic status was the most important predictor of youth ambitions and, although socio-economic status was also an important factor for urban youth, it was more relevant in the rural sphere (Meece et al., 2013). Other factors influencing the choice of track within upper secondary education are the education systems of each country and gender; these aspects will be addressed below. The gap between demand for labour in specialised vocations and the lack of enough numbers of students who choose apprenticeship within these occupations supplying the adequate need for workers, addresses a problem that needs to be solved. Changing ideas about status symbols is one thing but also hinders access to lifelong learning opportunities if you choose this field of education and work as a young person.

In the case of Denmark, Jørgensen (2014) notes the impossibility of access to tertiary education from vocational education and the low esteem of vocational education and training (VET) as some of the reasons behind the low participation in VET. For example, "the completion of a vocational programme gives smooth access to skilled employment, but at the same time VET appears as a dead end concerning access to higher education" (Jørgensen, 2014: 27). In addition, applicants' grade point averages are higher for students enrolled in general education, which denotes the social inequalities on upper secondary education tracks (Jørgensen, 2014). This hypothesis is reinforced by the fact that "the transition from lower secondary to general upper secondary education is often seen as a more natural transition than the transition to VET" (Andersen & Kruse, 2016).

In 2014, the Danish government established a series of measures to raise the attractiveness of vocational education with the aim of increasing participation. These measures prioritized ways to increase the employment of vocational graduates, they implemented work-based approaches in classrooms and simplified access to vocational education for students lacking entry requirements (Cedefop, 2018a). However, although the reform was successful in increasing retention rates, the number of young people enrolling in VET dropped by 7% in 2015 (Cedefop, 2018a). During most of the twentieth century, the Vocational Education and Training System was the largest education system in Denmark, but it has gradually been marginalized in favour of higher education attainment. However, the VET system continues to play a vital role in the provision of skilled labour markets outside metropolitan areas (Topsøe Larsen, 2017).

In the case of Finland, Stenström and Virolainen (2014) acknowledge the increase in popularity of vocational education in the last two decades and attribute this to six reasons: work-oriented design of vocational education; campaigns by the national government to improve the image of vocational education; skills competition; access to higher education; establishment of universities of applied sciences; and internationalization of VET (p. 48). Some of these features are also acknowledged in other accounts of VET in Finland. Koukku and Paronen (2016) highlight the suppression of dead ends in the Finnish educational system and the equalizing of vocational and general upper secondary education in terms of social status. In addition, measures to prevent drop-out from vocational education – often a common issue at this level of education – have been prioritized. Relatedly, individualization approaches and labour-market orientation have also been promoted with the aim of encouraging basic education graduates to enrol in vocational education (Koukku & Paronen, 2016).

In Iceland, three main reasons explain the low enrolment in vocational education. First, there is a high interest in tertiary education, which implies that students do not wish to enrol in vocational education because their chances to access tertiary education are not the same as if they enrol in general education (VET students wishing to enrol in tertiary education need to take longer courses or even a 1-year bridging course). Second, as in Denmark, VET enjoys a lower level of social esteem compared with general education. Third, some courses that used to be taught in vocational education are now taught at university level (Cedefop, 2014). The White Paper on Educational Reform of 2015 outlined two main goals to be accomplished by 2018. The first was to raise the percentage of students achieving basic standards in reading literacy to 90%; to reach that level, the Icelandic government suggested eight measures, such as increasing the time for the teaching of Icelandic or providing special support to foreign-born students (Ministry of Education Science and Culture, 2014). However, the goal that was described in greater detail and to which 14 measures were dedicated was that of raising the graduation rate for upper secondary education students from 44% to 60% by 2018. Three priority areas were suggested: the reorganization of the duration of studies, the tackling of early school-leaving and the improvement of vocational study programmes. With regard to the duration of upper secondary education, the Icelandic government acknowledged that Iceland was the European country in which students graduated the latest, at the age of 19. According to the White Paper, this has consequences for both graduation rates, because students' needs are not correctly addressed, and for entry to the labour market, which for Icelandic students occurs later than for other students in other OECD economies. To address these issues, the Icelandic government proposed four measures among which were to reduce the duration of upper secondary education from four to three years and "to provide a greater choice of exit points from upper secondary education" (Ministry of Education Science and Culture, 2014, p. 34). In terms of tackling early school-leaving, the government advocated the gathering of evidence and deploying prevention, intervention and support measures. As a result, developing a record of reasons for early school-leaving in all upper secondary schools, screening the risk factors for early school-leaving, and providing special

support and funding for schools serving students at risk of early school-leaving comprised three of the five measures suggested by the government (Ministry of Education Science and Culture, 2014). Finally, suggestions for the improvement of VET focused on institutional changes in both the quality and management of vocational education. For example, the quality of vocational education could be increased by simplifying the basic programmes, reviewing competence requirements and including workplace learning within the programmes. At the managerial level, some of the suggested measures involved reassessing the roles of commissions and social partners and reviewing the legal basis of post-secondary vocational education. Lastly, the minister of education and culture is suggesting that student exam and graduation exam from vocational apprenticeship will be even in terms of access to variety of educational choices (Fréttablaðið 2018, Kormákur, 2019).

In Norway, two explanations lie behind the success of vocational education. On the one hand, it has become an effective way to enter the labour market given that it "provides skills and qualifications that are in demand in the Norwegian labour market" (Olsen, Tønder, & Hagen, 2014: 19). On the other hand, the structure of upper secondary and tertiary education allows students to keep their pathways open, which is an important issue for students (Olsen et al., 2014), especially if the labour market is considered as a fast-changing institution. In the Norwegian case, however, dropout and in some cases low completion rates, as well as a rather long completion time, have been substantial concerns in vocational education. Socioeconomic and educational achievement factors have been identified as playing a crucial role in dropping out (Norwegian Center for International Cooperation in Education (SIU), 2016). Therefore, early interventions on early school-leaving have been implemented along with career guidance services, financial incentives and practice-learning approaches. For example, for career guidance measures, an online platform in lower and upper secondary education has been created, and the opening of career guidance centres in all counties has been suggested. In addition, financial incentives for training companies have been increased up to an allocation of NOK 14,000 per training contract. With regard to teaching approaches, a focus on vocational-oriented pedagogies has been adopted (Cedefop, 2018b). In spatial terms, Olsen

et al. (2014) acknowledge disparities between the capital area and the rest of the country. The Norwegian Directorate of Education will implement curricular changes in vocational education in 2020 (Udir, 2018) from which three main implications will result for vocational programmes. First, in an effort to match better the needs of the labour market, earlier specialization will take place in the first year of the programmes. Second, new programmes in ICT, sales, hairdressing and traditional crafts will be implemented as a way to improve the alignment with labour market skills needs. Finally, because of low demand, and in public consultation with social partners, many apprenticeships will be reduced.

In Sweden, the latest reform affecting vocational education took place in 2011. Gymnasieskola 2011 (Gy11) aimed at raising the attractiveness of vocational education and increasing workplace learning and apprenticeships (Thunqvist, 2015). Regarding making vocational education more attractive to applicants from upper secondary education, the fact that eligibility for higher education was amended in Gy11 had consequences for the numbers of students choosing vocational education over academic education (Olofsson & Thunqvist, 2014). On the other hand, boosting apprenticeships and workplace learning attempted to reduce the mismatch between industry needs and graduates' skills; however, the fact that study offers were not related to necessary jobs but students' choices could not address this issue (Olofsson & Thunqvist, 2014). Some amendments have been carried out since the implementation of Gy11. In 2015, Apprenticeship Centres were established with the aim of bringing workplace learning to VET students through the co-operation of several stakeholders such as VET teachers and principals, municipalities, employers and trade unions. In 2016, the government gave Skolverket (Swedish National Agency for Education) the task of introducing digital competence syllabuses into vocational programmes, such as the *Child and Recreation Programme, the Hotel and Tourism Programme or the Industrial Technology Programme*, with the aim of improving the educational attainment of students on these programmes (Regeringskansliet, 2017). One year later, Skolverket announced a plan to update vocational programmes with digital literacy skills to match the labour market needs in terms of programming abilities.

Thunqvist and Hallqvist highlight the low social esteem of vocational education and the school-based approach as challenges to vocational education and, thereby, its relatively low enrolment (Thunqvist & Hallqvist, 2014). They argue that vocational education is still viewed as low status for a number of reasons: it leads to occupations in which skills are not as valued as in other occupations; most students enrolled come from unprivileged backgrounds; and it leads to positions of subordination at the workplace (Thunqvist & Hallqvist, 2014). On the other hand, they acknowledge that the current system does not fully match the demands of the labour market (Thunqvist & Hallqvist, 2014). In addition, as in the case of Iceland, access to higher education in Sweden requires completion of mandatory subjects only taught in general education with the consequence that vocational students must take longer paths to meet the requirements (Rosvall et al., 2018). In acknowledging the decreasing interest in vocational education in the country, Skolverket has focused on providing information, career guidance, and financial incentives to reverse the trend (Skolverket, 2016). For example, for the provision of information, a follow-up system has been developed with the aim of producing sound analysis on school-to-work transitions of vocational education graduates. Moreover, because the requirement of completion of mandatory subjects in order to gain access to tertiary education has been amended, currently all learners have the right to attend courses leading to tertiary education. Finally, financial incentives aiming to bring back into education unemployed individuals with low education levels have been proposed in parliament (Cedefop, 2018).

School reforms in rural areas

Research on educational reforms in the Nordic countries identifies three distinct periods since the end of the Second World War (Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006). In the first period between 1945 and 1970, the role of education was highly embedded in the building of the welfare state. The second period, between the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, focused on both pedagogical and governance autonomy. The student was placed at the centre of teaching and municipal authorities gained more control in planning (Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006). The last period, from the 1980s, had globalization and neo-liberalism as its principal tenets.

As a result, the Nordic model was weakened given that market-based goals such as efficiency, efficacy, quality and competition were adopted (Knutas, 2017). In addition, policies of privatization, deregulation and marketization were extended and gave rise to the widening of social and spatial inequalities (Telhaug et al., 2006). Arnesen, Lahelma, Lundahl, and Öhrn (2014) note that marketization, new public management (NPM) and individualism became guidelines for emerging neo-liberal reforms that took place in the Nordic countries in the late 1980s, and this creeping shift in values undermined the Nordic welfare model based on social justice and equality. This perspective is reinforced by the account Irgens provides in terms of school management culture imported from other education and state systems, mainly from the United States (2018). While having a "good historical-cultural foundation in the Nordic countries for developing schools based on democracy, dialogue, and participation" (2018: 31), the adoption of a more instrumental management model may have led to a deterioration of teachers' working conditions, such as reduced job satisfaction, greater sickness absence, and increased staff turnover and stress levels (Irgens, 2018).

Other aspects of educational reform include deregulation and privatization (Dovemark et al., 2018).

How did these reforms impact the schools in rural areas in the Nordic countries? Imsen, Blossing and Moos (2016) outline some of the consequences of what they identify as a neo-liberal turn in rural schools in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. For example, they suggest that teachers and students in rural Denmark became subjects within a hierarchical structure, which prioritizes accountability and competition goals, at the expense of previous flatter structures boosting community building (Imsen, Blossing, & Moos, 2016). In the case of rural Norway, this included (a) the adoption of a discourse based simply more on learning, thus, leaving aside the focus on basic values of education, and (b) the undermining of municipal autonomy through recentralization outcomes in terms of evaluation and reporting (Imsen et al., 2016).

Imsen et al. emphasize the organizational consequences of these reforms in Sweden. Based on a report by Skolverket, they note that since 2006 segregation between schools has increased to the point that some schools only have immigrant students: the "marketisation of education and free

school choice have created an obvious segregation between schools in Sweden" (2016: 10).

In researching the Swedish case, Lind finds that the consequences of neo-liberal policies in rural Northern Sweden include higher commuting distances, which translate into fewer opportunities for low-income students, fewer study programmes due to rising costs in small municipalities, and lower graduation rates for students in small municipalities (Lind, 2017). These findings are also supported by Danish research (Topsøe Larsen 2017).

Marketization and segregation
Marketization measures in education have been implemented in many countries in the last two decades under the assumption that competition and school choice raise the quality of education (Dovemark et al., 2018), thereby representing a kind of consumer perspective to education. In a Nordic overview of how neo-liberal mechanisms such as privatization, decentralization and marketization have affected the Nordic education model, Dovemark et al. (2018) describe what role marketization has played in these education systems. They note that marketization measures have been more widely implemented in Denmark and Sweden than in Norway, Iceland or Finland. In Denmark and Sweden, private providers and school choice are allowed, and as a marketization characteristic, schools rankings are published periodically. Iceland has adopted an in-between position; although private providers are allowed and schools rankings are published, school choice becomes limited. In contrast, neither Norway nor Finland has a large share of private providers and school choice is also limited. However, while Norway does not publish schools rankings, Finland does (Dovemark et al., 2018).

Some scholars claim that neo-liberalism became prominent at the cost of educational welfare, for example, in Denmark (Rasmussen & Moos, 2014). While economic neo-liberalism focuses on raising economic competitivity, educational welfare seeks to promote social equality. The implementation of accountability and differentiation measures in educational systems makes schools function as private actors. They are meant to compete in the education market and are ranked by performance. This creates a situation where schools are forced to adopt measures that are more in the spirit of competition in the education market, rather than safeguarding welfare

and social equality. One such measure is continuous testing as a way to measure learning outputs that serve as a school's quality indicators and by means of which schools are ranked from best to worst (Rasmussen & Moos, 2014).

Segregation and inequality are on the rise in the Swedish context (Dovemark, 2014). Lundahl identifies the consequences of marketization in Sweden in both urban and rural areas as an increase in inequality that has fostered divisions within society. Increased competition and social segregation are at the core of this division. First, schools compete with each other to attract the best students and reject the weakest ones with the aim of boosting their reputation and, thereby, expanding their pool of customers. Second, students from advantaged backgrounds benefit from segregation because the best schools are found in their neighbourhoods (Lundahl, 2017). The inequalities emerging out of these priorities impact not only within urban areas but also between urban and rural areas. Given the reduced educational opportunities rural youth enjoy as a result of competition, they find themselves in the dilemma of either staying in or moving to the large cities to continue their careers. This poses a barrier to education for some as affording the expense of commuting is not available to all students (Lundahl, 2017).

6. School closures

Denmark

In Denmark, the total number of primary schools decreased between 2000 and 2018. In 2000, there were 2,595 primary schools, including *folkeskoler*, *friskoler*, international schools, *efterskoler*, special schools and day care centres. By 2018, that number had decreased to 2,385. However, patterns of change differ by type of school. For example, the number of *folkeskoler* fell from 1,673 to 1,265, while the number of *friskoler* increased from 460 to 556. Also noteworthy is the general increase in after school centres (SFOs), although numbers have fluctuated. Between 2000 and 2011, the number of SFOs rose from 84 to 255; from 2011 to 2018, the number fell to 167.

In addition, spatial disparities are also present in the country. Map 3 (next page) shows the trends in the numbers of primary schools in Denmark at municipal and regional levels for 2010–2017.
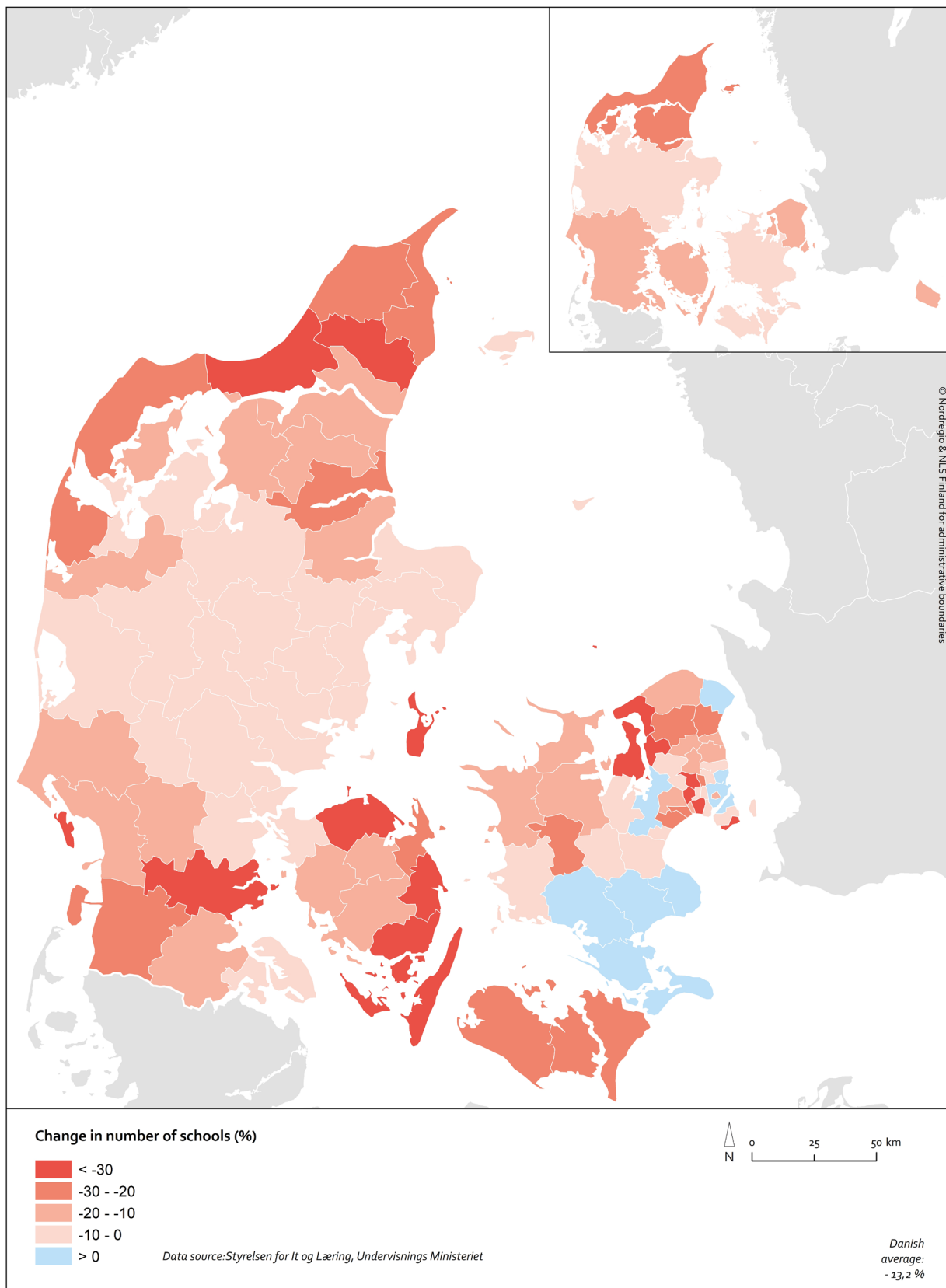
As we see from Map 3, some municipalities surrounding urban areas such as Copenhagen, Roskilde or Helsingborg have increased numbers of primary schools. In contrast, most of the municipalities where school closures have occurred more severely are located in the remote regions of North Jutland and South Denmark. Public schools in the sparsely populated countryside have primarily been those closed rather than ones in small towns or urban settlements. During 2000–2016, 516 schools were closed nationwide, most of them between 2010 and 2013 (Svendsen & Sørensen, 2018; Svendsen & Svendsen 2018). This represents a decrease of 32% in all public schools, which is unevenly distributed around regions in Denmark. For example, while there has been an increase of 5% in urban municipalities, a 30% decrease is seen in countryside municipalities and up to 43% in remote municipalities (Svendsen & Sørensen, 2018). Quantitative research supplemented with qualitative data was conducted on demographic developments after school closures in eight parishes in Southern Jutland with a special focus on Tønder municipality. Negative consequences seen were accelerated out-migration, falling house prices and problems in attracting families with children. Social fragmentation occurred in all local communities: before closures, children would have stayed together during the daytime; subsequently they became dispersed into a number of schools and in some cases lost contact. In more than one place, civil society organizational activities decreased, and social cohesion weakened by losing important meeting places. The positive impacts mentioned from the study were the establishment of youth clubs, and in one community, closure spurred the motivation to establish a "free school" (*friskole*) and the community gained common ground in fighting for that to happen (ibid.).

Finland

The number of elementary schools in Finland decreased steadily in the period 2000–2016, during which there was a drop from 3,276 to 2,334. In percentage points, this represents the closure of 37.4% of Finnish schools over 16 years. In spatial terms, however, the pattern is uneven across the territory. According to Vipunen (2019), rural municipalities lost 50.5% of their elementary schools, while semi-urban municipalities lost 37.7% and urban municipalities 27.3%. Kalaoja and Petarinen (2009) argue that economic depression and budgetary cuts in basic services in Finland put rural schools at risk from the beginning of the 1990s, a trend that proved to continue until 2016.

Map 4 (page 26) illustrates school closures in Finland at municipal (left) and regional level (right). Notably, the number of schools increased in only two municipalities: Nurmijärvi, neighbouring Helsinki, and Masku, neighbouring Turku. In contrast, municipalities where the number of schools has decreased by more than 60% are spread nationwide. However, several of these municipalities are located in Lapland and eastern regions (Kainuu, North and South Karelia), which are predominantly rural remote regions.

Change in the number of primary schools in 2010-2017

Nordregio

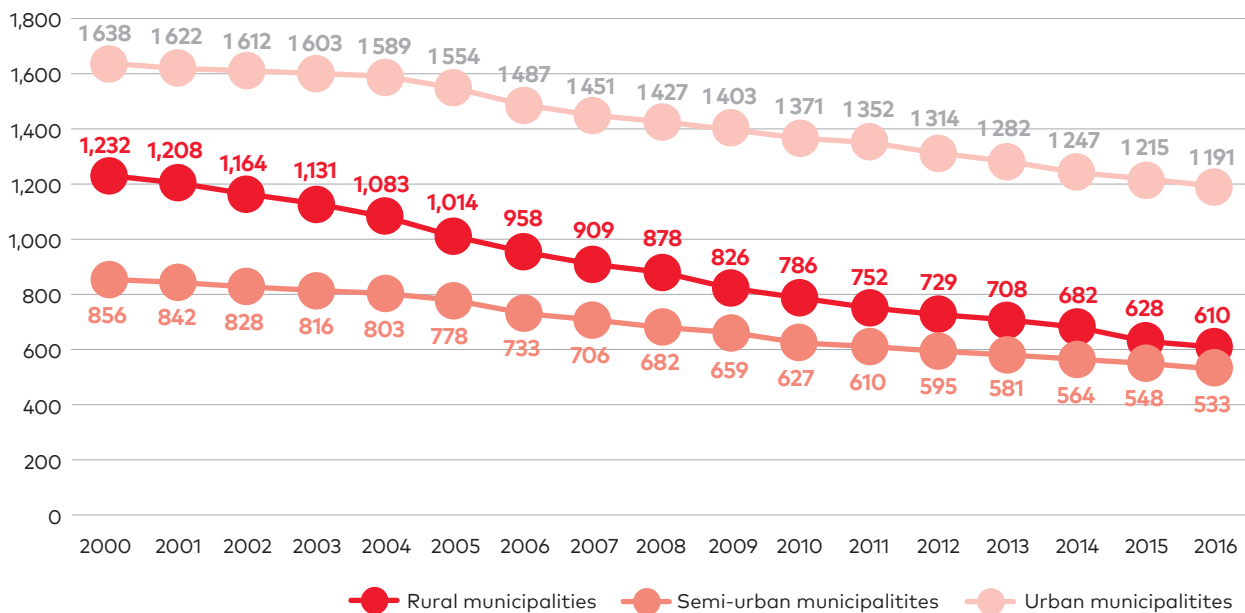
Change in number of schools (%)

- < -30
- -30 - -20
- -20 - -10
- -10 - 0
- > 0

Data source: Styrelsen for It og Læring, Undervisnings Ministeriet

N

0   25   50 km

Danish average: - 13,2 %

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Map 3. Change in the number of primary schools in Denmark, 2010–2017.

Figure 4. Number of elementary schools in Finland by spatial typology, 2000–2016.
Source: Vipunen (2019).

Iceland

Trends in the number of schools in Iceland largely resemble those in other Nordic countries. In 2000, there were 190 schools in the country; by 2018, the number had fallen to 169. Likewise, these changes were uneven across the country (Map 5, page 27); the number of schools in the capital region increased from 66 to 75, while other regions suffered decreases.

Norway

According to data from Utdanningsdirektoratet, the number of elementary schools in Norway declined from 3,245 to 2,821 between 2005 and 2018, which represents a decrease of 13.1%. We have used Nordregio's urban–rural regional typology, based on Eurostat guidelines, to examine the spatial disparities in school closures in Norway because these data do not detail the spatial typology of municipalities. As a result, we find that rural regions lost 17.9% of their elementary schools, intermediate regions lost 12% and elementary schools in urban regions increased by 4.7%.
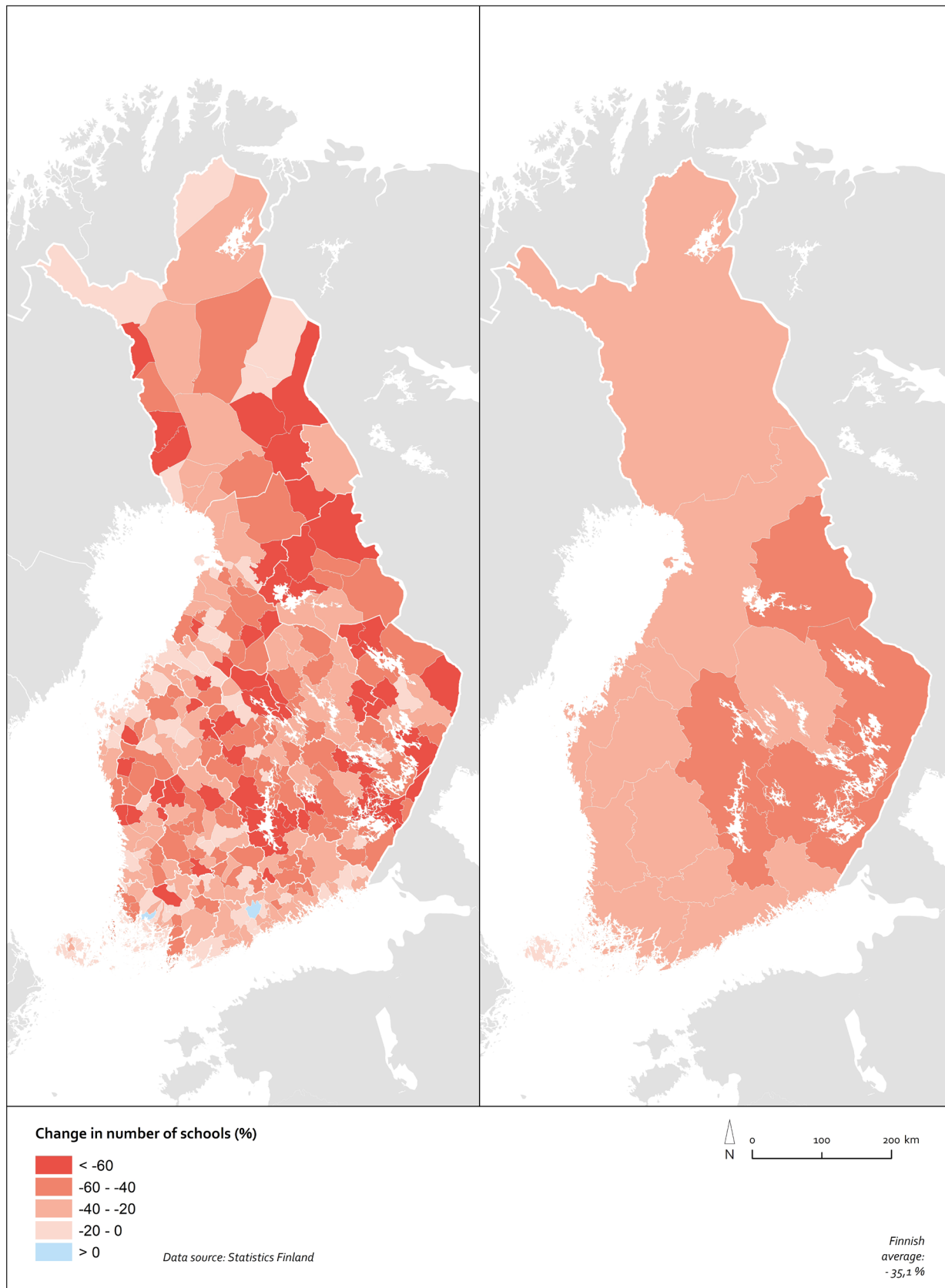
Map 6 (page 31) shows school closures at municipal and regional levels. We see that municipalities with an increase in the number of schools are those surrounding urban clusters such as Oslo, Sandnes and Trondheim. In contrast, remote rural regions such as Finnmark, Oppland and Sogn og Fjordane have a higher number of municipalities with schools' closures.
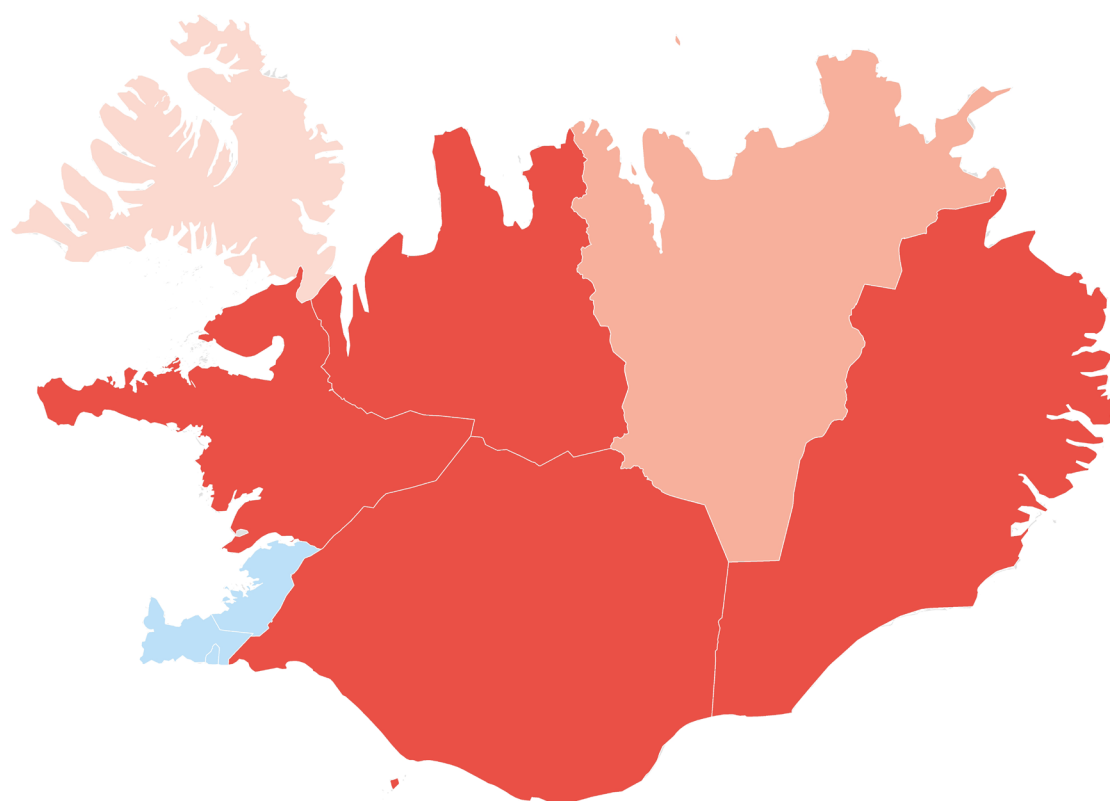
Sweden

For Sweden, the period 1993–2017 shows the patterns of school closures in the country. According to data from Skolverket, the total number of elementary schools decreased from 4,654 to 3,990 during these 24 years, a drop of 14.3%. We are able to identify a pattern of spatial disparity in school closures using the classification of municipalities by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL) (see the Appendix). We find that small towns and rural municipalities with a visitor industry lost on average 24.6% of their elementary schools; the percentage is even higher for rural municipalities at 38%. In contrast, the number of schools in medium-sized towns and municipalities nearby decreased by 14.2%, and that in large cities and commuting municipalities fell by 3.3%.

Map 7 (page 32) highlights the change in the number of primary schools in 2000–2017 by municipality. It is notable how the number of schools increased in southern municipalities while it decreased in northern municipalities. This is better exemplified at the regional level where the imbalance is much more striking.
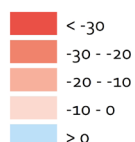
Change in the number of primary schools in 2005-2018

Nordregio

Change in number of schools (%)

- < -60
- -60 - -40
- -40 - -20
- -20 - 0
- > 0

Data source: Statistics Finland

0   100   200 km
N

Finnish average: - 35,1 %

Map 4. School closures in Finland at municipal and regional levels, 2005–2018.
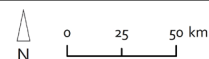
Change in the number of primary schools in 2000-2017

Nordregio

Change in number of schools (%)

< -30
-30 - -20
-20 - -10
-10 - 0
> 0

Data source: Statistics Iceland

0   25   50 km

N

Icelandic average: - 11,1 %

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Map 5. School closures in Iceland at the regional level, 2000–2017.

Nordic comparison

When the issue of school closures of primary schools is analysed from the Nordic perspective, the clearest conclusion that can be drawn is that spatial disparities have emerged in the trends of school closure. In all countries examined, the highest percentages of school closures are located in rural areas (either regions or municipalities). Sporadic studies provide us with some evidence; for example, in Denmark decisions on school closure are based on the declining birth rate in more sparsely populated regions, and with a declining population of reproductive age, running schools with ever fewer students places a serious strain on municipal economies. There is also evidence showing that one consequence of school closure is to spur another negative cycle of development in the region, in which fewer families with children decide to move in. While more comprehensive studies are needed to support these findings, there are clear indications that over time these factors will cause and drive demographic developments and lead to relatively fewer children and youth as inhabitants.
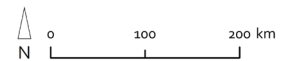
Change in the number of primary schools in 2004-2018

Nordregio

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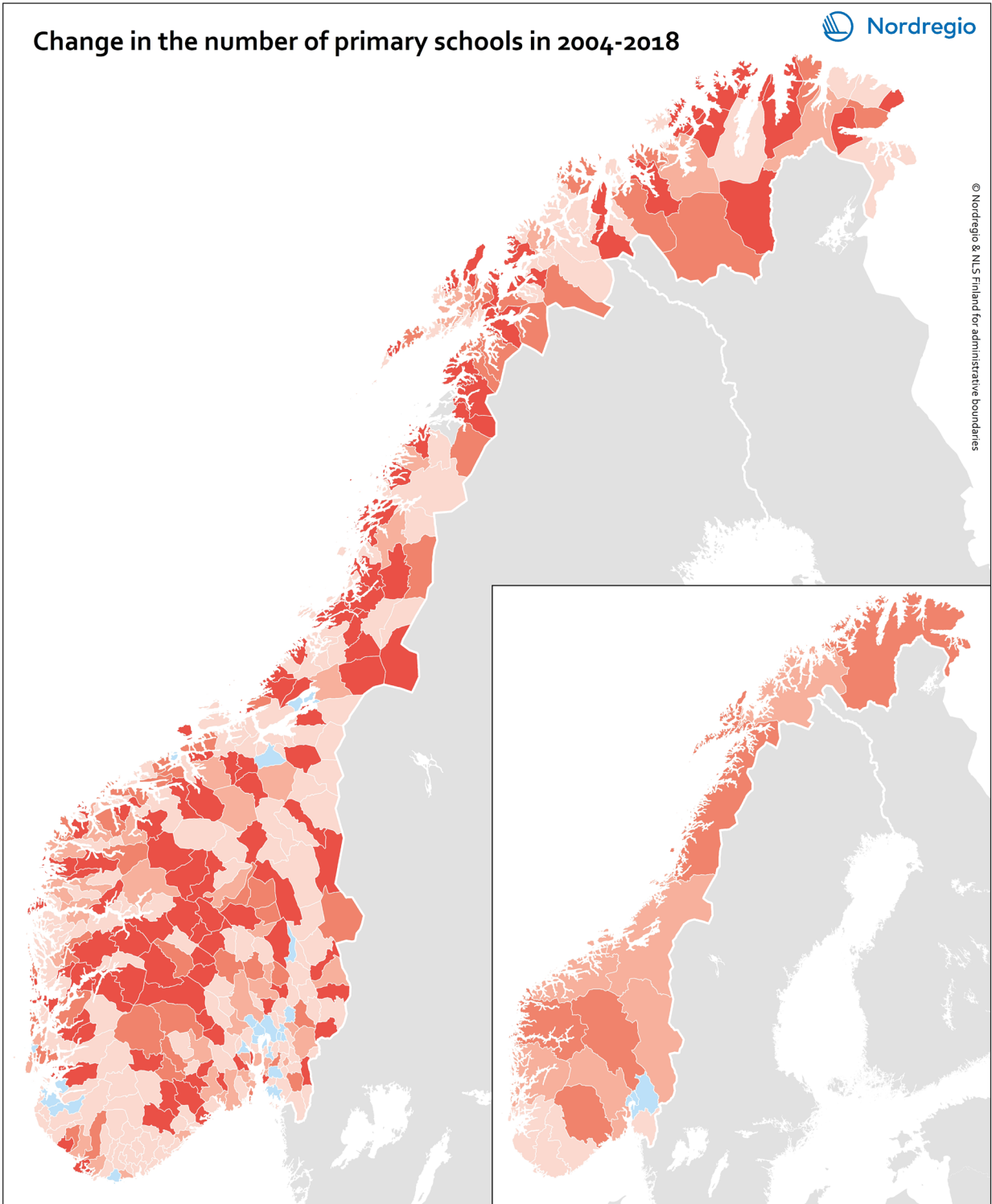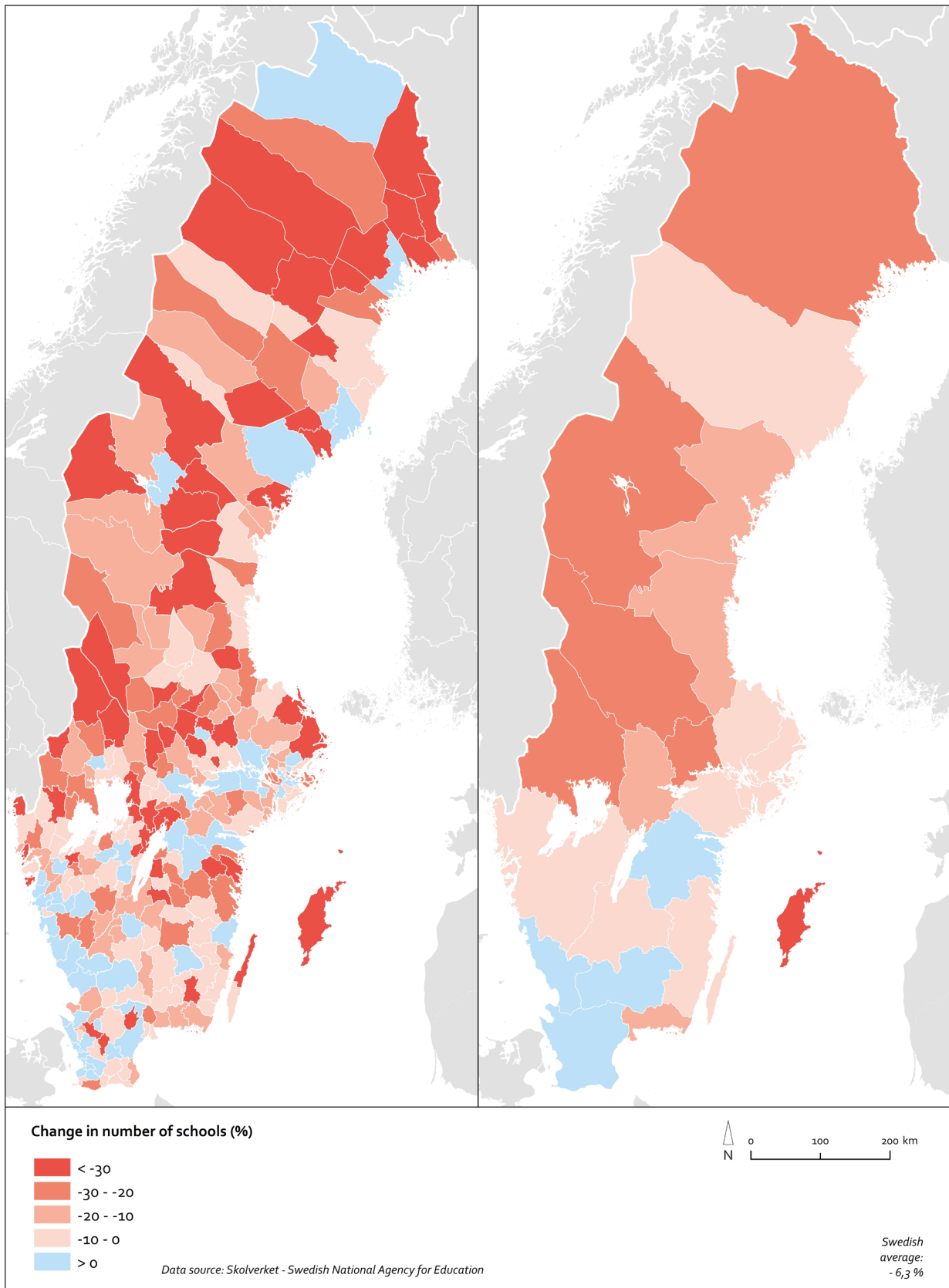
Change in number of schools (%)

- < -30
- -30 - -20
- -20 - -10
- -10 - 0
- > 0

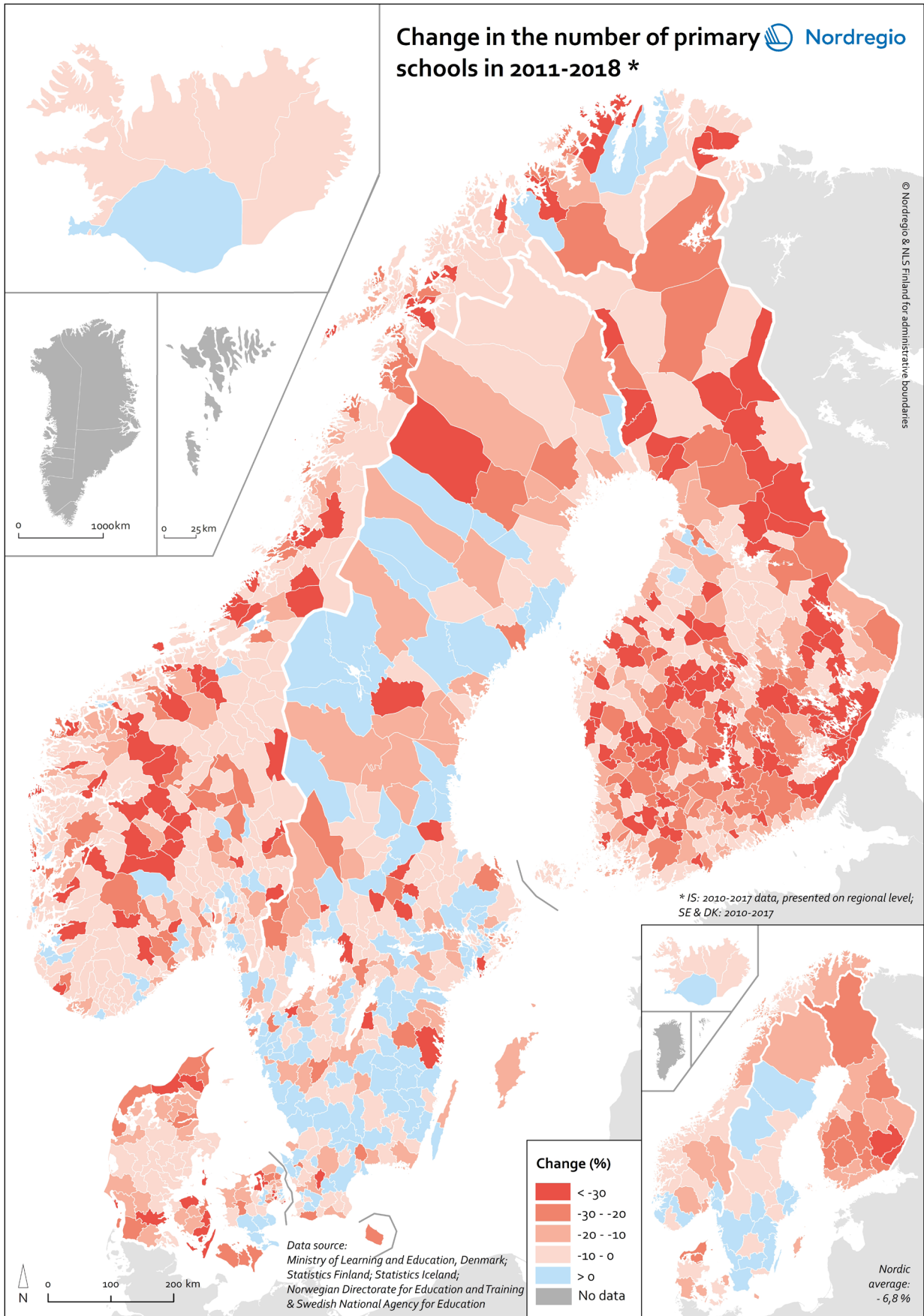*Data source: Utdanningsdirektoratet – Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training*

0   100   200 km

Norwegian average: - 13,7 %

Map 6. School closures in Norway at the municipal and regional levels, 2004–2018.

Change in the number of primary schools in 2000-2017

Nordregio

Change in number of schools (%)

- ■ < -30
- ■ -30 - -20
- ■ -20 - -10
- ■ -10 - 0
- ■ > 0

Data source: Skolverket - Swedish National Agency for Education

0   100   200 km

N

Swedish average: - 6,3 %

Map 7. School closures in Sweden at the municipal and regional levels, 2000–2017.

Change in the number of primary schools in 2011-2018 *

Nordregio

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* IS: 2010-2017 data, presented on regional level;
SE & DK: 2010-2017

Change (%)
- < -30
- -30 - -20
- -20 - -10
- -10 - 0
- > 0
- No data

Nordic average: - 6,8 %

Data source:
Ministry of Learning and Education, Denmark;
Statistics Finland; Statistics Iceland;
Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training
& Swedish National Agency for Education

N

0   100   200 km

0   1000 km

0   25 km

7. Socio-economic conditions

As noted, it is widely acknowledged that socio-economic status plays a key role in early school-leaving and educational performance (Lamb & Markussen, 2011; Lavrijsen & Nicaise, 2015). In this respect, it is important to stress the broad aspects of socio-economic conditions that affect early school-leaving, such as employment, migration, housing and health (Noorani, Balcon, Borodankova, & Czort, 2017). One way in which socio-economic status influences the probabilities of early school-leaving is through the family. Families affected by poverty are at greater risk of being involved in precarious environments in which substance abuse, criminality or mental health issues are common (Dale, 2009). These factors can harm the schooling experience of youngsters in that parents show negative attitudes towards education, such as a lack of supervision, low expectations and little interaction with their children (Dale, 2009). Rinne and Järvinen (2011) note that in the Finnish case, "children of parents in weak labour market positions, with low incomes and basic education" are the group most exposed to social exclusion (p. 222). Similar factors are reported in Swedish and Danish research; children of parents with low educational attainment or low income have higher probabilities of dropping out of education (Cederberg & Hartsmar, 2013).

Mobility capital (in Bourdieu's terms) is cultivated in some rural families through ordinary and habitual patterns of socialization, such as regular travel to distant places, book literacy, connections to extended family living in urban and suburban places or engagement in the "scapes and flows" of physical and virtual transmissions of information, goods and bodies (Corbett 2007). The ability to abstract oneself outside a particular "locale" is key to establishing a serious engagement in the abstract and imaginative work necessary for secondary school success, because many young people from rural areas need to make a locational shift in-between school stages once they become teenagers. Although becoming mobile is a powerful compulsion for rural youth, getting out of town is no easier than it has ever been. Formal education is a key component of self-mobilization not only in terms of classic forms of upward social mobility, but also in spatial terms. Youth stuck in particular devalued class positions and places (i.e., backward rural villages) have become a principal target of pedagogy in the last two decades along with globalization immersive status (Corbett, 2007). The notion that staying and actively contributing to even a small or rural community equate with being stuck should be avoided. Education that enables local engagement is sustainable at its core and may contribute to the green wave in future rural Norden.

Gender and socio-cultural aspects

As noted, early school-leaving is also a gendered issue as statistics show that early school-leaving rates are higher for boys than girls in all five Nordic countries. In Norway, studies show that more teenage boys than girls fall into the category of NEETs, but that the situation is reversed by the mid-twenties, with more young women becoming categorized as NEETs (Holte 2017; Grødem et al. 2014). Thus, gender is a central aspect when focusing on young early school leavers and youth unemployment.

The point of departure for much of the literature that focuses on gender in relation to education is an understanding of place as gendered. This approach draws attention to how places are embedded with certain understandings of what is considered feminine and masculine (Massey 1994). As highlighted by Faber et al. (2015), places thereby influence how spaces of opportunity are socially defined for men and women and the freedom of choice that they experience. Traditionally, the structure of the labour market in rural areas has followed a gendered arrangement by which men are responsible for hard manual labour, for example, fishing, hunting and handiwork (Paulgaard 2015; Dahlström 1996). In the literature, exploring rural masculinity and marginalization of young men in rural areas has received considerable attention in recent years (Bye 2009; Stenbacka 2011; Gaini 2006, 2017).

Social anthropologist Firouz Gaini has conducted several studies in the North Atlantic on the marginalization of young men and how this is con-

nected to perceptions of masculinity (Gaini 2006, 2017). He points to how masculinity on the Faroe Islands is largely affected by the masculinity of the past, where men were educated though learning by doing and hard-earned experience (Gaini 2006). In those days, there was no youth category because boys worked from a young age with their fathers and were educated through this work. Learning from 'the book of life' was much more important than intellectual formal education. The modern handyman or 'Atlantic cowboy' is one of two dominating groups of young men on the Faroes presented by Gaini. For them, learning by doing and participation has much higher priority than formal academic skills and is linked to their masculinity. They believe they retain an authentic Faroese masculinity that has been lost, especially by the growing group of young men that Gaini refers to as 'urban youths' who invest their time in pursuit of intellectual higher education. The Atlantic cowboys consider formal education a non-masculine waste of time that consists of reading and writing activities that threaten the identity, nature and virility of 'real' men (Gaini 2006).

According to Gaini, the lack of formal education that was not a problem in the past is now handicapping the cowboys in their efforts to keep on track. A new type of masculinity has taken over according to which formal education has become the central factor defining a man's value as manpower. The local capital is overrun by new ways. This development that has created new types of social marginalization is not a case that is isolated to the Faroe Islands, but has a clear parallel to other rural areas. In a Danish context, Bloksgaard et al. (2015) point to how global processes have changed the labour market from primary and secondary production to service and knowledge production. As a result, what is deemed valuable has shifted.

Likewise, studies conducted in Sweden show that some young men in rural areas do not prioritize school because the knowledge gained there is not considered transferable to the job market they know (Gustafsson & Öhrn 2012). A distinction is drawn between 'school knowledge' and 'real knowledge'. Young men in rural areas expect to find work within the local community in such fields as craftsmanship, hunting or fishing; thus, they do not find it necessary to study hard (Holm & Öhrn 2014:163). In Norway's High North, Paulgaard (2015) found that resistance towards school and

formal education was strong, especially among young men. Similarly, this context has historically been characterized by recruitment within patterns of informal education, where hard, manual work was equated with masculinity, while intellectual labour was not valued in the same manner.

In Greenland, Gaini reports how boys lose motivation for school and education as they feel they do not belong there (Gaini 2017). The knowledge and perception regarding their place in society do not fit the expectations they meet at school. As with the Atlantic cowboys on the Faroe Islands, the 'hunter in the city' in Greenland faces the difficulty of adapting the traditional understanding of masculinity to modern working life. The values and skills attributed to the 'real' man of the past no longer hold the cultural and social capital that they once did, thereby placing them in a marginalized position (Gaini 2006, 2017). Sons have traditionally held a valuable position in Greenlandic families as the 'saviour of the family' who will conquer the hunting grounds. This portrayal of masculinity does not fit the lifestyle of urban communities; thus, boys and men face the dilemma of following the ideas of masculinity and traditional expectations of men, or the reality of contemporary society in which these activities are pushed to the periphery as leisure activities.

Focusing on some young men's understanding of masculinity is one way in which a gender perspective on rural disparities can lead to an understanding of why some boys and young men fall outside the educational system. The young men and their understanding of masculinity do not match the expectations and understandings of contemporary society, and thereby end up feeling misplaced and marginalized. As Gaini concludes in his study of traditional masculinity in Greenland, there has been a shift in the understanding of the 'wanted and needed men'. This has forced the Greenlandic man to completely rethink his role and status in Greenland (Gaini 2017:65).

As demonstrated, traditional rural masculinity is strongly connected to 'hard, honest work' where a man earns his own money. As a natural consequence, unemployment then becomes associated with laziness, weakness and dependence on the welfare state (Paulgaard 2015). The increasing number of young men who end up unemployed in rural areas therefore collides with the traditional masculine values and capacities.

Our understanding of rural masculinity and

'the real man' that make some young men dismiss school and the value of knowledge gained through formal education is no longer supported by the structural changes that have taken place in rural areas. However, the local ideologies of masculinity are still intact in the minds of some young rural men along with their perception of the world and their place within it. As Paulgaard argues, structural and cultural changes do not necessarily 'follow the same track' (2015:162). When winding up in unemployment because of a decision originally based on a perception of rural masculinity, they end up with the exact opposite of their goal. They do not receive the reputation of a 'real man' but instead of a lazy man dependent on social welfare. In Paulgaard's study of men in northern Norway, several of the informants who were unemployed regretted not pursuing further education and blamed themselves for the situation they had ended up in (Paulgaard 2015).

A Swedish study on achievement and gender (2014) showed a dissociation between dominant youth masculinities and school work. In general, boys were expected by both themselves and by others to study less than girls in school and were deemed to have a more relaxed attitude towards studying. Moreover, if they were achieving well, it should appear effortless. Likewise, a Danish study concluded that the culture in the educational system produced stereotypes of what is considered masculine and feminine behaviour (Hutters & Brown 2011). To be a 'cool' boy is not connected with being a successful boy in school, but instead with showing indifference and creating distance to school work (ibid.; Nielsen 2010). Other scholars argue that abilities at school are closely intertwined with feelings of self-worth, so by creating distance to studying, boys are protecting their self-worth. As such, if they fail, they can argue that it was based on a lack of effort and not a lack of intellectual capacity. Likewise, if they succeed without appearing to have made an effort, they can emphasize their natural talent, which has a higher value than study effort (Öhrn 2018). Consequently, it is argued that girls' higher grades, which are generally associated with focused studying and hard work, become devalued (Holm & Öhrn 2014). In turn, this reflects an ambivalence regarding girls' positioning in school where they generally perform better, but to a lower degree than boys who are considered talented or intelligent (Öhrn & Weiner 2017). Although gender has received and continues to receive considerable attention in relation to achievement in school, scholars have pointed to the fact that this focus reproduces a binary understanding of gender, in which the general picture is that one gender (the masculine) is losing to the other (the feminine), and seldom includes the greater impact of social background on grades and test results (Öhrn 2018).

In the literature, the connection between femininity and rurality often concerns women's higher degree of mobility and a large out-migration of women from rural areas (Dahlström 1996; Johansson 2016; Hutters & Brown 2011; Bloksgaard et al. 2015). What has been termed the 'rural exodus' of women has focused on women seeing few job possibilities in rural areas and, to a greater extent than men, pursuing higher education in the cities (Holm & Öhrn 2014). Studies have highlighted that young men have a higher degree of place attachment than do young women (Bloksgaard et al. 2015; Paulgaard 2015). Although pictured as the 'passive stayers' left behind by 'dynamic mobile' women, other explanations for men's greater degree of place attachment have been ascribed to a tendency to use and access nature more through leisure activities such as fishing and hunting (Bloksgaard et al. 2015).

However, new masculinities are also on the rise in the rural areas. Gaini's 'urban youth' is one example, where new types of masculinity adjust to the changed local work possibilities. Bloksgaard et al. (2015) emphasize that it is important to acknowledge the diversity of young men, and that different understandings of masculinity coexist. Furthermore, researchers also note that rural communities in recent years have opened up to more flexible masculinities (Bye 2009). There has also been a focus on reschooling men to enter the job market in what were previously defined as 'women's jobs' (Baagøe Nielsen 2011).

The review presented in this section has highlighted the importance of including a careful focus on gender and the traditional socio-cultural understandings of gender that may prevail in the rural context, especially with regard to masculinity, when investigating spatial disparities among early school leavers and NEETs.

8. Mental health

Mental illnesses among young people in the Nordic region have become a challenge in recent years (Kolouh-Söderlund, Lagercrantz, & Persson Göransson, 2016). Research carried out in Nordic countries shows a relationship between socio-economic background and mental health issues in young people (Hutton, Nyholm, Nygren, & Svedberg, 2014; Nielsen, Stewart-Brown Vinther-Larsen, Meilstrup, & Holstein, 2016; Torikka et al., 2014). In addition, mental health constitutes an important factor in early school-leaving (Brännlund, Strandh, & Nilsson, 2017; Butterworth & Leach, 2018; Jackson, 2009; Mikkonen, Moustgaard, Remes, & Martikainen, 2018).

The Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues has published a series of national reports addressing the situation of young people regarding mental health.

For these reasons, we address aspects of mental health here. Using data extracted from the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) survey carried out in collaboration with the World Health Organization, we show results for five Nordic countries over a period of 12 years. The survey is conducted every 4 years and to identify time-changing patterns in the variables examined, we include the last four phases of the survey (2001–

2002, 2005–2006, 2009–2010 and 2013–2014). The survey is disaggregated by 11-, 13- and 15 year-olds but the analysis here involves the whole sample. We have broken down the statistics by gender to elucidate the differences between boys and girls. The variables used were "sleeping difficulties" and "feeling low" and they were chosen because they are good indicators of how mental health impacts youngsters' educational attainment.

Sleeping difficulties

In the HBSC survey, sleep quality is measured by the frequency with which adolescents report sleeping difficulties during one week. It is a relevant aspect of adolescents' mental health because it is correlated with school performance (De Ridder et al., 2013; Dewald, Meijer, Oort, Kerkhof, & Bo, 2010) and, thereby, with early school-leaving. Several studies emphasize that socio-economic background plays an important role in sleeping difficulties (Grandner, Williams, Knutson, Roberts, & Jean-Louis, 2015; Marco, Wolfson, Sparling, & Marco, 2012). Difficulties regarding timing, duration and regularity of sleep were shown to be related to adolescents' socio-economic conditions and are suggested to be the consequence of neighbourhood insecurity or home disposition,
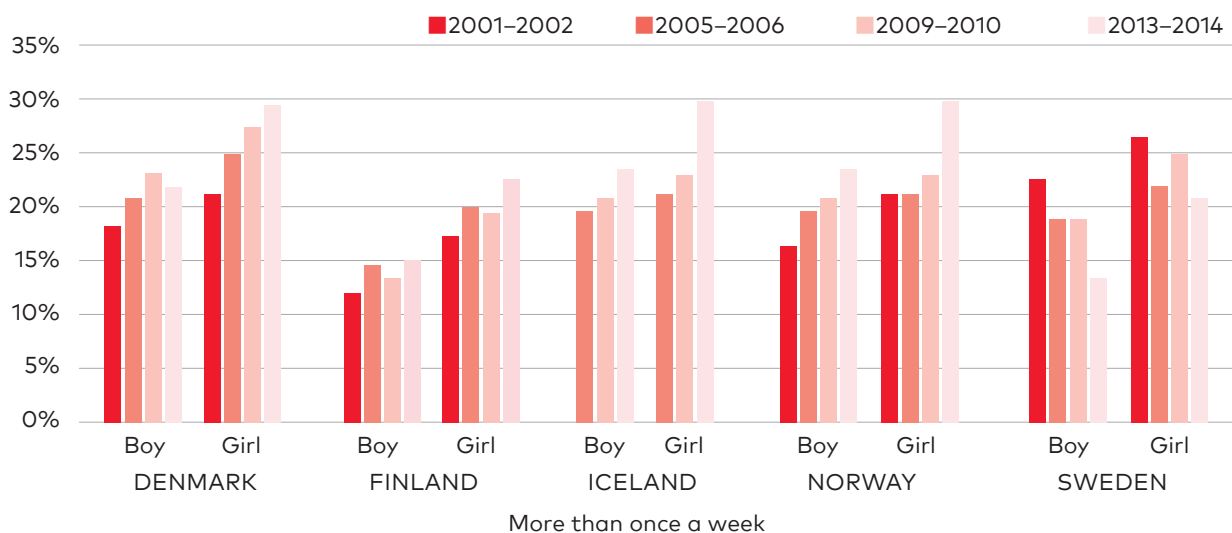
Figure 5. Share of young people expressing sleeping difficulties.

such as shared sleeping places or parents working night shifts (Marco et al., 2012).

The results on the variable of sleeping difficulties in the last four phases of the study are shown for Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. In addition, they are broken down by gender so that both country and gender differences can be seen in figure 5 (next page).

First, the percentage increases in four of the five countries are noteworthy. Over the four periods, the percentage of youngsters of both genders reporting sleeping difficulties more than once a week increases in all countries with the exception of Sweden. Second, it is notable that the percentage of girls reporting sleeping difficulties is higher than that of boys in every country and in every phase of the study. Among girls, Danish (29%), Icelandic (30%) and Norwegian (30%) girls report the highest percentage in 2013–2014, while Finnish (22%) and Swedish (21%) girls report slightly lower percentages. Among boys, the pattern is similar, although they report lower percentages of sleeping difficulties compared with girls. Danish (22%), Icelandic (23%) and Norwegian (23%) boys report greater sleeping difficulties than their Finnish (15%) and Swedish (13%) counterparts. These results are in line with the findings of medical research that point to the prevalence of biological factors such as pubertal development or menses, rather than psychosocial factors, in explaining gender differences in sleep quality (Fatima, Doi, Najman, & Al Mamun, 2016; Johnson, Roth, Schultz, & Breslau, 2006).

Feeling low

Although no detailed information on the definition of 'feeling low' is provided, the HBSC survey places emphasis on the impact that feeling low can have on a person's life. For young people, feeling low can trigger depression, which can lead to substance abuse or academic underachievement.[11] Several studies have found a relationship between mood disorders and school drop-out (Esch et al., 2014; Melkevik, Nilsen, Evensen, Reneflot, & Mykletun, 2016).

Figure 6 shows the percentages of young people feeling low in the five Nordic countries. In this case, although there is no clear change over time, an increase is evident in the last wave in four of the five countries and for both genders. In 2013–2014, girls in Norway and Sweden showed the highest percentages of feeling low (26%) more than a week. In contrast, only 6% of boys in Denmark reported that they felt low more than once a week in the same wave. While these developments give general insight into the conditions of young people in the Nordic countries, the data on regional and subnational levels are not available.

Other substantial factors affecting the mental health of young people are described in emerging and recent research. These trends relate to the use of social media, online cliques and social stratification, feelings of inadequacy due to social media role models and ideals even causing self-injury behaviour (Lewis et al., 2012). However, it is emphasized that underlying processes are not yet well understood even if there is increasing evi-
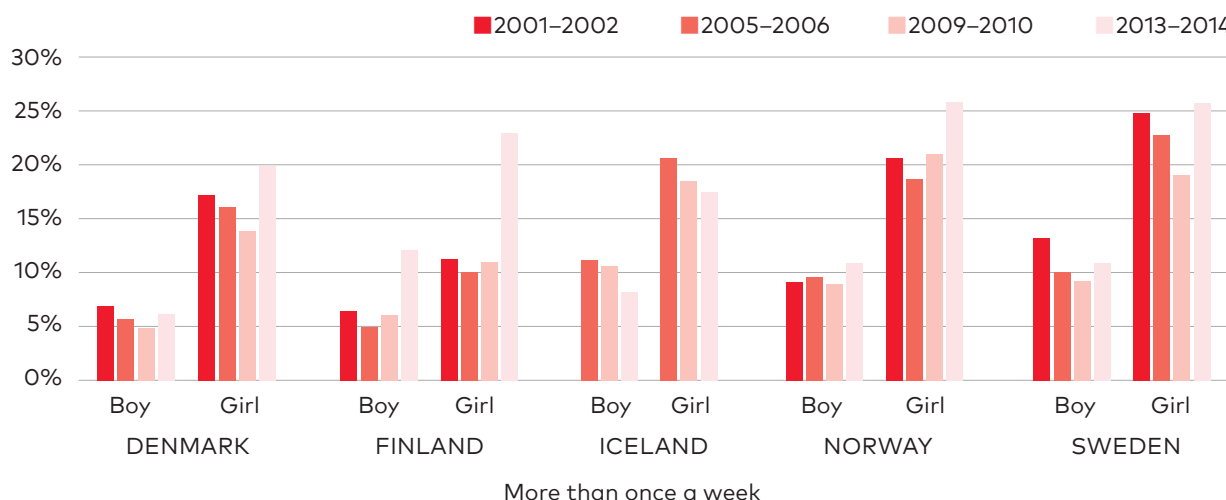

Figure 6. Share of young people feeling low.

11 http://www.hbsc.org/publications/datavisualisations/feeling_low.html

dence supporting the notion that the culture of comparison affects young people's mental health negatively (Hurley, 2019). Furthermore, studies argue that the state of constant connectivity may cause unease and stress and the feeling of immediateness, in some cases creating screen abusive dependencies and even physical neurological disorders (Sigman, 2017). However, other studies do not support the notion that use of social media *per se* is a factor that has a worse impact on well-being; rather, the tendency to engage in vaguebooking (posting unclear but alarming-sounding posts to get attention) can be a warning sign of serious issues (Berryman et al., 2017).

While these factors would affect the mental health status of young people to varying degrees, no research details the differences that may be experienced between youth in rural communities and those living in urban settings; therefore, we only address the need for more research on the topic without drawing any conclusions.

9. NEETs or vulnerable youth

As noted, NEETs are an emerging group of young people who fall out of the education system. They have existed for decades and are youngsters in danger of social marginalization. Already in 2012, 5–10% of the generation born in 1989–1997 in the Nordic countries were NEETs and were thus already identified as a group at risk of becoming permanently displaced in the system. Similar proportions of these cohorts were at serious risk of dropping out of school as well as the labour market, and thus the Nordic countries could be facing a lost generation. At that time, most NEETs were found in Sweden and Finland (8–9%) (Halvørsen et al. 2012); 6–11% of youngsters 18–24 years old received social support, most of them residing in Finland, Denmark and Sweden. Around 2–3% of those aged 20–34 were already disqualified from the labour market due to early retirement and permanent disability (*førtidspension*). The percentage rates were similar across the Nordic countries but were highest in Iceland closely followed by Sweden (ibid.). The increase in young people on the brink (*unge på kanten*) grew rapidly after 2008, which is often characterized as the peak of the global and European financial crisis, while in Iceland's case, it was financial collapse.

Groups at greatest risk were those from an immigrant background, and with health-related and/or social challenges connected to family and/or social milieu. That is, problems related to the impact of substance abuse and/or criminal activities. While using the term NEETs, we are aware that this group is heterogeneous and may only share the experience of not having followed the "ideal" young person's straightforward, uninterrupted transition into adulthood (Aaltonen et al., 2016). However, from the perspective of the system or the authorities, NEETs are passive, marginalized and at risk of becoming socially excluded.

In the Nordic countries, many policy interventions have addressed and supported this group. There are local, regional and national projects to bring this group of young people into education and employment. According to Eurostat, the NEET rate in each region and country illustrates the percentage of the population of a given age group and gender not employed and not involved in further education or training. Figure 7 shows the percentage of NEETs in four Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Norway) by age and degree of urbanization.
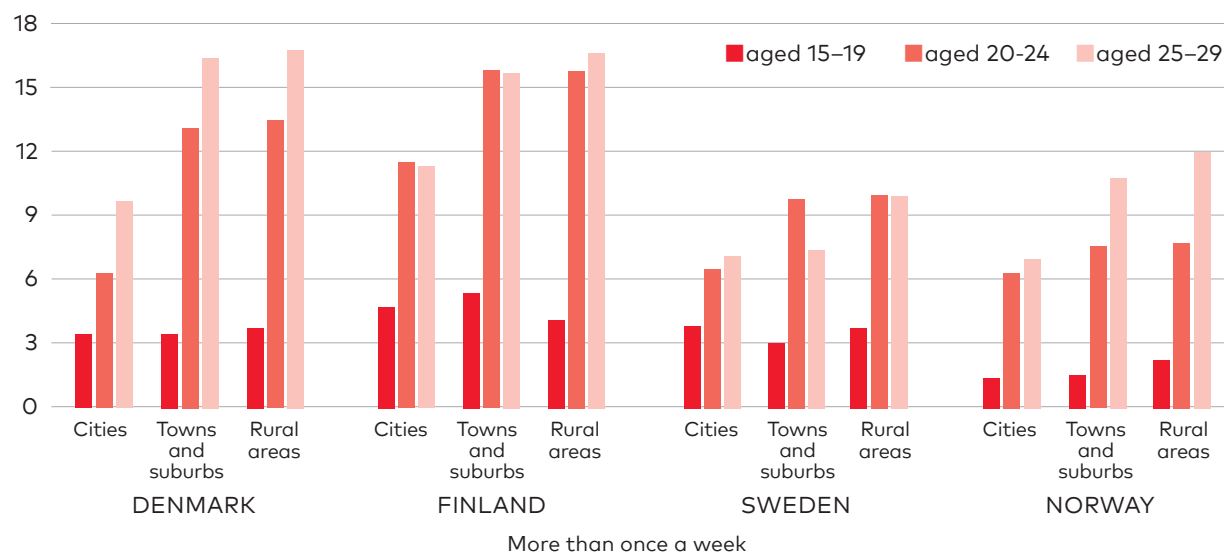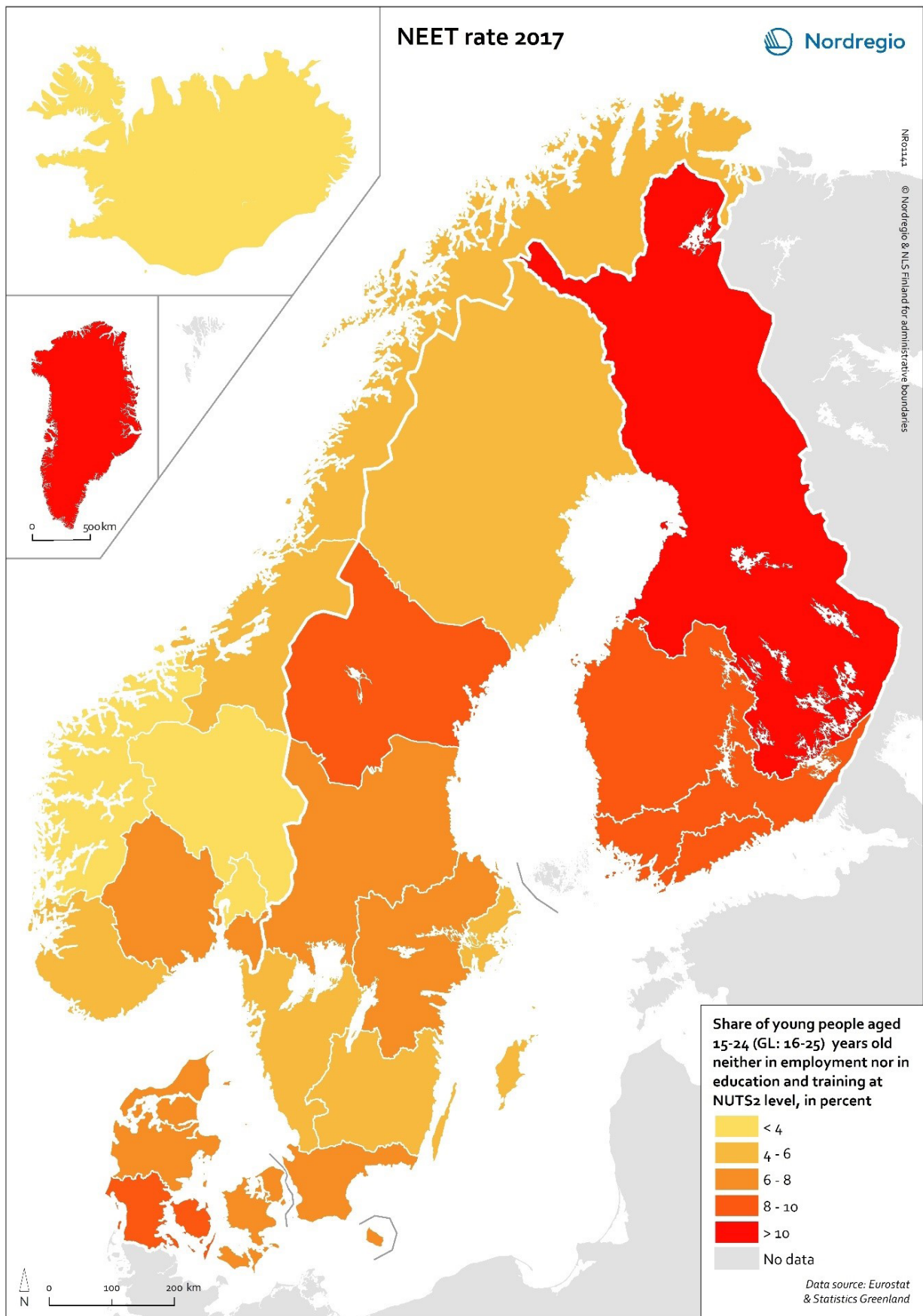
Clear differences appear both between and

Figure 7. Percentage of NEETs in Nordic countries by age and degree of urbanization, 2017.
Source: Eurostat [edat_lfse_29]

NEET rate 2017

Nordregio

0   500 km

Share of young people aged 15-24 (GL: 16-25) years old neither in employment nor in education and training at NUTS2 level, in percent

- < 4
- 4 - 6
- 6 - 8
- 8 - 10
- > 10
- No data

Data source: Eurostat & Statistics Greenland

N   0   100   200 km

Map 9. NEET rates in Nordic countries, 2017.

within countries where age and urbanization are examined as factors relating to NEETs. Denmark and Finland show higher percentages of NEETs than Sweden and Norway in almost every category. However, two common trends in the four countries are evident. The first is that NEET rates tend to remain low for the 15–19 age group because most of this population is still enrolled in education. However, NEET rates increase steadily thereafter, so that those aged 25–29 are the most affected. This may also prove to be the group most at risk of being the lost generation (post-2008 crisis). The second trend is that cities systematically show lower NEET rates than towns/suburbs and rural areas.

NEETs are not just numbers in statistics

Despite gaining widespread usage in youth research, the NEET concept has recently been questioned. While widely used as a term in media discourses, researchers who try to get in touch with these young people face challenges in that they prove largely invisible and uncontactable. Recent research from Norway problematizes this situation and notes that NEET studies suffer from researchers shying away from meeting actual NEETs, and instead focus on the statistics (Holte, 2017). We have also faced this problem. As a result, we have mainly gained our knowledge from consultants and different social worker groups who are engaged with young people on the margins. We agree with Holte and other who criticise this. Throughout the various interviews conducted with people working with youngsters, we have learned that it would be quite false to view NEETs as a homogeneous group. Several aspects of young people's contexts have a direct influence on their progression towards adult life. A British study also questions figures behind escalating rates of youth unemployment and inactivity among 18–24-year olds. In that study the researcher found there have been attempts to embrace a much broader and older groups which fall outside the scope of the originally defined cohort. Changing statistical collection methods can be an explanation behind a growing group, and therefore methods behind statistics should be carefully considered (Maguire, 2015). The author calls for a more inclusive approach to the range of young people who fail to make sustained transitions and argues that the authorities need to address the collective struc-

tural dynamics in creating and sustaining unacceptably high levels of youth disengagement (Maguire, 2015). While it is widely accepted that young adults in such a position have motivational problems regarding education because of issues such as negative schooling experiences, interrupted education and absenteeism, education is commonly proposed as the solution to the problem of the high proportion of 15–29 year-olds who are NEETs. Katznelson (2017) addresses the paradox of having to motivate young adults under pressure and proposes five new approaches to motivation. The author's conclusion is that motivation as a phenomenon is always linked to the individual and therefore needs to be mobilized with the individual. Katznelson also discusses the challenges connected to promoting a focus on motivation at a time when the liberalization of education is increasingly central to the welfare state.

Another recent study within digital sociology looks at "hidden youth" who are marginalized and disengaged from society but heavily engaged in massively multiplayer online (MMO) games (MMORPG, MOBA), and suggests that there are structural barriers in contemporary societies that could lead to young people becoming self-secluded. It is argued that "hidden youth" could feel a sense of powerlessness towards hierarchical macro structures, while mastering the game in the other dimension (online). In other words, although functional in cyberspace, there is a sense of meaninglessness towards interactions and participation in society. Conversely, the author suggests that these youngsters rely on emerging digital social structures and networks to seek other forms of "being social" (Wong, 2018).

Three distinct groups of NEETs

In a background study for the extensive Nordic youth and welfare project "Unga in i Norden – psykisk hälsa, arbete, utbildning" (Nordens Välfärdscenter, 2016), Aaltonen, Berg, and Ikäheimo proposed a framework that we have found useful in our work. They identify three groups of NEETs according to their education, work experience and general situation in life and life history (Aaltonen, Berg, & Ikäheimo, 2015, 2016).

The first of these groups is what the authors call 'victims of recession'. They are characterized by having achieved good educational attainment, mostly upper secondary education, in a field they enjoyed, but they live in an area with no jobs. Fur-

thermore, because of the economic crisis, a shortage of jobs in their field led them to becoming stuck in a situation of being unemployed or underemployed. Thus, joblessness is the most significant issue for this group (Aaltonen et al., 2016). While we know that a part of the group we refer to as NEETs in Finland may be in this situation, we cannot exclude that some of the NEETs in Iceland or Denmark also belong to this group. Furthermore, we know from research from Spain on the so-called "generación ni-ni" (where ni-ni means neither study nor work) that a considerable portion of the contemporary generation of adolescents and young adults are in this situation (Roseman, 2013). Having struggled to become valid on a labour market that does not seem to have a use for their human capital or skills, joblessness is a serious barrier to achieving their purpose of life, namely to be able to take care of themselves. In the end, they are disillusioned and give up, and may become NEETs. If programmes are launched that enable them to use their abilities and re-engage with the labour market or re-skilling through training, thereby making them more valid on the labour market, a significant step forward is taken. The EU's Youth Guarantee and Training Guarantee programmes (see examples from p. 53 onwards) are among the positive steps that have been taken in that direction but need to be more effective.

A second group of NEETs can be characterized as 'worker-citizens in the making'. They are on the path to becoming worker-citizens; they were enrolled in one or several vocational programmes but discontinued their studies at some point. What these NEETs have in common is that they have struggled with bad relationships in school and many have had to deal with learning challenges (dyslexia, dyscalculia) or minor social disabilities (ADD, ADHD, the mild end of the autism spectrum, Asperger's) or they have been exposed to bullying, which hollowed out their self-esteem in social relationships, or even forced their relocation causing them to discontinue education. In educational terms, most of these worker-citizens in the making have not succeeded in education and dropped out for various reasons. Two of the most likely reasons are mental health problems and bad relationships with peers in school. Part of this group comprises young people some of whom did not enjoy a healthy childhood because of their parents' divorce, death of a parent or living in an abusive childhood home. Some of those who belong to

this group have been recurrently in touch with the social services, in some cases to the point of being overwhelmed by many social workers (psychiatrists, psychologists, school counsellors), which caused them stress. Participants interviewed in the study mentioned their desire to return to education or work, but they felt they did not have what it takes to study given their past experiences. They wondered if they should just have pulled themselves together, but they simply could not (Aaltonen et al., 2016). Motivational and empowering actions would contribute to helping this diverse group, not only with possibilities of engaging them through training and transition from education to work, but with special attention to social skills and reinforcing their self-worth. Other ways of learning that can break up the rigid conventional classroom approach to organizing apprenticeship or that enable creativity may also be of value.

The third group of NEETs is the 'troubled'. What they have in common is that they have experienced some types of mental health problems in the past or they were currently suffering from them. These varied from debilitating depression to symptoms of schizophrenia. Some had experienced difficulties already at primary school, and some were deprived of parental protection during their upbringing because of parental (alcohol) issues and/or divorce (Aaltonen et al., 2016). Most of the individuals belonging to this group have suffered mental problems as well as homelessness, physical abuse or unstructured families. In addition, insomnia and depression were also common

INDIVIDUAL PLACEMENT & SUPPORT

IPS is a specific method for providing individualised support for labour market integration, initially developed by jobseekers with a mental condition. The key principles of IPS include a focus on employment in the regular labour market, rapid placement with a minimum of assessment, training on the job instead of prevocational training & the integration of vocational services with mental health care. There is evidence base for a positive effect in Iceland, Sweden and Denmark (EU Commission 2016; Bejerholm et.al, 2015).

problems with a direct influence on one's life (see the earlier section on mental health), given that solving these issues was a prerequisite to engaging in education. Young people categorized as troubled face a life of uncertainty in which school plays a secondary role because of the existence of other more pressing issues. In spite of such challenges, the informants described by Aaltonen, Berg and Ikäheimos had completed compulsory education, although none had completed post-compulsory education. Regarding young people's expectations, the focus is on recovering from their illnesses and being able to have a normal life in which they could carry out their leisure. Troubled young people may have a hard time navigating the jungle of available services and lose faith in a situation of high staff turnover. For example, a new person (psychiatrist or other professional groups) in mental health may mean literally start from the beginning since trust evolves in long-term client-advisor relations and confidence in talking about serious personal problems is abrupted with high staff turnover (Aaltonen et al., 2016, p. 103).

They may also need different kinds of support on an individual basis, day-to-day support and follow-up. Actions towards engaging troubled youngsters may need to include low-threshold services with all services gathered in one place, as well as IPS (Individual Placement and Support – see text box for explanation) and other long-term individual support.

Denmark

In Denmark, while NEET rates are similar in all regions for the 15–19 age group, they are higher in towns and rural areas than in cities for the 20–24 and 25–29 age groups. For example, for 20–24-year-olds, NEET rates are more than double in towns and rural areas than in cities (Eurostat, 2017). We know from existing studies that around 10% of young Danes aged 16–24 were NEETs in 2015. Since 2015, authorities have focused especially on municipalities in West and South Sjælland and on Lolland and Samsø, which had high rates of NEETs, followed closely by Jammerbugten in Jutland and Bornholm, which is part of the capital region but is predominantly characterized by small towns and rural areas. Between 2008 and 2015, around 50% of young people succeeded in making the transition to the labour market, training or education. There was an overall increase in NEETs in this period, especially among 21–24 year-olds

(Danmarks statistik, 2017). Young men in Denmark fare less well than young women (Nordiskt samarbete, 2018). Differences appear between the age groups rather than between regions; those aged 25–29 show higher NEET rates than those aged 20–24 independently of where they live.

In recent years, both national and regional authorities have gone to great lengths to address ways to re-engage NEETs. Guidance centres have been established in which activities focus on early school leavers (including VET students) as Denmark reformed its unemployed youth benefit system. The aim of the guidance centres is to guide youths through the different offers of education programmes and, initially, to find the best-suited education programme for every student (Simanska, 2015). However, the challenge is substantial, with around 50,000 NEETs. One initiative is through labour market training that is specifically designed to address the needs of those aged 18–30 with little or no educational background. These are young people who have engaged in criminal activities, who have become radicalized or dealt with drugs or alcohol abuse, or those with social or psychological diagnoses. The programme is called TAMU (an abbreviation for training school labour market education) and the way in which it has been implemented has led it to becoming a learning model in Norden, the USA and Europe (Kastholm, 2018).

Finland

In Finland – which from a Nordic perspective shows high levels of NEET rates – there are differences between cities and towns/rural areas, although not as pronounced as in Denmark. That towns and rural areas have similar NEET rates may indicate regional disparities. Finland is the only Nordic country that has national legislation requiring municipalities to employ youth workers who are proactive in seeking out young people who are inactive (Nuorisolaki 1285/2016/New Youth Act 111/2016). This is usually carried out using a snowball method: knowing someone who knows someone who knows of this young guy or girl who has vanished from conventional social arenas (Juvenia, 2018). The extensive tradition of youth research in Finland has made Finns the Nordic region's leaders on NEET issues. Finnish research indicates that a substantial portion of NEETs in some regions have not recovered from the economic crisis. While Finland has relatively high completion rates in school, many young people go from education into un-

employment (Halvørsen et al., 2012) and so some NEETs may belong to the "victims of recession" group. On the other hand, as in Greenland, many young people have experienced complex grief due to the sudden death or suicide of friends or family members, most notably among men in their early thirties (Eurostat, 2015; Yle, 2016, 2018). We also have evidence from interviews with youth workers that depression and disillusion about formal structures are prominent in explanations for why young people get derailed. For the more complex challenges that young people face in the labour market, actions such as screened labour market engagement and rehabilitation services are usually operationalized. Finland has good experience with proactive outreach work with youth who fall out of the system (Halvørsen et al., 2013). One-stop and low-threshold services have been developed in Finland to address NEETs and support them in re-engaging. A nationwide one-stop guidance centre network offers diversified support to young people concerning general guidance and services covering specific education, social care, health care and employment to foster youngsters emotionally, socially and professionally – all this occurs in one place and without the burden of bureaucracy (Simanska, 2015) (see also text box on p. 52).

Norway

In the case of Norway, regional disparities are not sharp for the 15–19 and 20–24 age groups. However, the NEET rates differ for 25–29 year-olds according to where young people live. For example, those in rural areas show higher probabilities of becoming NEETs than the same age group in towns/suburbs and cities. In terms of age, we find large differences not only in cities but also in towns and rural areas, especially between the 15–19 and 20–24 age groups. In addition, in towns and rural areas, there are also striking differences between the 20–24 and 25–29 age groups.

There has been a rapid growth in the youth population in Norway because of high immigration. While the absolute number of young people in work has increased since 2008, the number of NEETs has also increased. Of 86,000 registered NEETs in 2016, two-thirds were inactive, meaning that they are often not in touch with public services. The high drop-out rate from school in Norway means that those without an upper secondary degree face the risk of becoming NEETs. In an OECD comparison, in Norway, a much larger percentage

of youngsters below upper secondary education become or are inactive, with 43% of total registered NEETS (2015), compared with the OECD average of 23% (Scarpetta and Carcillo, 2018).

Identifying the group context and challenges in Norway reveals that NEETs are twice as likely as other young people to have come to Norway as migrants. They are more than nine times as likely to report poor health and six times as likely to report feeling depressed. Furthermore, they are twice as likely to have a father who was not working when they were 16 years old (Scarpetta and Carcillo, 2018). To warn against stigmatizing and fixating this group, studies in Norway reveal that many youths spend at least some time as NEETs. It is not a diagnosis but a state that will transient into another state, one that is hopefully better.

Over two-thirds of all young people in Norway have a spell as NEETs between the ages of 16 and 24 but only one-third remain NEETs for more than 1 year in total. The share of long-term NEETs (>1 year) is double that for migrants compared with natives; among males born in 1990, the likelihood of long-term inactivity was reported to be much more pronounced than among females (Det kongelige kunskapsdepartement, 2016). Incapacity-related benefits serve as income support for difficult-to-employ youth in bad times. While completion rates are low, combating early school-leaving has long been a priority in Norway and there is much success in ensuring that compulsory school graduates transition into upper secondary education. In a Nordic comparison, the follow-up services were highly effective at tracking high school drop-outs. As an example, 94% of NEETs in their target group were successfully contacted. Nevertheless, a challenge remains in that completion rates especially for VET students are exceptionally low (see also examples p. 8). Throughout the country, NAV offices serve as one-stop shops (or low-threshold services) for employment and social services (Scarpetta and Carcillo, 2018, Lien et al., 2018). As a follow-up to 'Ny Giv' (a country-wide policy effort aimed at preventing and reducing school drop-out, starting in 2011) (Halvorsen et al., 2012), a central focus on the user was stressed in a new initiative for youths. It required NAV to provide personalized support to all youngsters within eight weeks of registration, in addition to clearer guidance and strengthened support for highly disadvantaged social assistance recipients by means of expanding qualification programmes. The Norwegian approach in action

may be useful guidance for other Nordic countries in that it is very clear in presenting these efforts as an investment in the next generation and as a fresh opportunity for young adults (Det kongelige kunnskapsdepartement, 2016). If such approaches were adopted, many NEETs would benefit from activation and motivational programmes to become reintroduced into working life or education, especially with vocational offers that are closely co-ordinated with the local labour market.

Sweden

In Sweden, although there are lower percentages of NEETs in the cities, the differences with towns and rural areas are not very marked. Indeed, for the 25–29 age group, cities and towns report very similar percentages, which makes it a particularity in the Nordic context. In terms of age, Sweden follows to some extent the same pattern as in other Nordic countries with NEET rates increasing disproportionately for the 20–24 and 25–29 age groups. Both age groups present similar rates except for young people living in towns, where the 25–29 age group reports a lower NEET rate than the 20–24 age group.

Sweden also differs in that young women are more prone to become NEETs than young men, a trend that was also identified in the drop-out statistics, even if Sweden has high completion rates compared with, for example, Norway. Since 2000, various governments have attempted to reduce youth unemployment with a special focus on NEETs. However, regional initiatives have evolved in the last decade. It is noteworthy in Sweden that the regional context seems to have a stronger influence on NEET rates than age.

To combat the unusually high youth unemployment in Sweden (compared with other European countries), three regions were granted extra support from the EU's Youth Employment Initiative (YEI): Southern Sweden, Central Norrland and North Central Sweden. These regions received at least SEK 1 billion in EU aid. Sweden has strived to allocate funds to secure Swedish projects dedicated to the YEI from the European Social Fund (2014–2020). Examples of measures benefitting individual young people (specifically NEETs) that were supported by the YEI from 2014 in Sweden are as follows.

- the provision of traineeships and apprenticeships
- the provision of first-job experience (placements)
- the reduction of non-wage labour costs
- job and training mobility measures
- start-up support for young entrepreneurs
- qualitative vocational education and training (Simanska, 2015)

To understand better the social inclusion of youth, another large initiative was launched in 2018 by the Swedish government chair of the Nordic Council of Ministers, known as the project Nabo undertaken by MUCF (the authority on youth and civil society questions).

The first findings from the project indicate that in general Sweden needs to boost among its youth a sense of inclusion and belonging to society. According to a recent survey (N=6,000), only half of Swedish youth feel heard or included. The focus groups in the study were young people in urban segregated areas (vulnerable and privileged) and in rural areas. The percentage of those reporting they felt heard or included was even lower among youth in rural areas (MUCF, 2019a). Young people who need to commute or move away from home to attend upper secondary school describe their situation as difficult. Those who commute a long distance lack the time and energy for meaningful leisure time activities. For some, it becomes a financial issue to move away from home to attend upper secondary school. The survey shows also that more than one in six youths have been bullied or ostracized by peers during the past six months and one-third have been abused or treated unfairly in a serious way. More than one in seven say that they do not confide in anyone. In all areas, girls are more often exposed to bullying and ostracizing behaviour, while boys more seldom confide in others (MUCF, 2019). In oral feedback from young people in one of the youth centres we visited in a small town in Sweden, we heard that very often the young people who became marginalized and dropped out only had minor deviant needs in the school system. The way schools were managed and run could make no allowances for these students, who then unnecessarily became vulnerable and in the end maybe displaced. One boy commented: "The teachers and the schools don't bother, they don't want students who are different." The effects of school reforms in Sweden have

created a situation that streamlines teaching to the extent that there is little room for individual variation in students' learning needs or engagement, and beneficial relationships with students with minor learning challenges are not adequately fostered. The system feels rigid and heavy.

Greenland

While statistics are not easily available on inactive youth or those who could be termed NEETs in Greenland, the evidence on school drop-outs and youth unemployment suggests that these are important issues to be heeded (Greenland Statistics, 2018; Nordic Centre of Welfare and Social Issues, 2017). Very little research or information is available on this group but changes in number of the NEETs by regions indicates that there are spatial disparities. In a national study, 78% of Greenlandic adolescent boys and 93% of girls reported at least one mental health problem such as anxiety, nervousness, poor appetite and nightmares (Bjerregaard & Pedersen, 2012).

Some regions in Greenland such as Kujalleq in the South and Avannaata in the North suffer from 20–30% unemployment rates among 15–24 year-olds (Karlsdóttir, Randall & Norlén, 2018). Average youth unemployment in Greenland is 15–20% (ibid.). The suicide rate in Greenland is one of the highest in the world per capita. According to the National Centre for Childhood Grief (Det nationale sorgcenter; Børn, Unge & Sorg, 2018), grief is a more collective expression in all of Greenland, especially in smaller towns and rural areas where everyone knows each other, and the individual ways of grieving become overwhelming for the whole community (Det nationale sorgcenter – Børn, Unge & Sorg 2018). Data and interviews confirm that complex grief is widespread among young people. Around 20% of all deaths reported over a period of 13 years were due to "unnatural causes", where suicides were the most predominant cause. Suicides and accidents are the third and fourth most common causes of death among Greenlanders (Karsberg, 2012). In total, 60% of the population in Greenland have lost friends or family members in suicides; among 18–24-year-olds, 69% have lost a close family member to suicide. A study focusing on post-traumatic disorder (Karsberg, 2012) showed that 86% of young Greenlanders have been directly exposed to at least one potential traumatic experience during their youth, with specifically high exposure to death in the near family, which 66.2% of young people experience (ibid.). In comparison, this figure is 12.9% higher than in the Faroe Islands and 23.5% higher than in Iceland.

Numerous Greenlandic studies have found an exceptionally high lifetime prevalence of sexual abuse, ranging from 4.4% to 16% among men and 14.6% to 43% among women. In studies focusing on sexual abuse in childhood involving young people, the prevalence of childhood sexual abuse was 4.4–9% among boys and 14–28% among girls (Karsberg et al., 2012). Violence is currently a serious health issue in Greenland. Even though the number of cases involving violence has been decreasing since 2008, the number of cases per inhabitant is still very high, for example, five times higher than in Denmark (Politiet i Grønland, 2011 cited in Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues, 2017). Young people in particular are exposed to violence. In the 2011 national survey (Pedersen & Bjerregaard, 2012), 10% of young Greenlandic students reported having witnessed their mother being exposed to crude violence (such as hitting, kicking, choking) within the previous year. In addition, approximately 10% of students were exposed to crude violence from one parent. One in six students had been exposed to violence (from mild to crude violence) from one parent at some point. The violence does not just occur within families; one-quarter of students reported being exposed to violence outside the family (Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues, 2017).

While 17% of 15 year-olds had tried cannabis in 2002, this share had risen to 26% in 2014 (Niclasen, 2015). Men were the most frequent users and they were characterized by having stopped their education after primary school or gymnasium. Among those unemployed were young men on social transfers or simply those staying at home. Some regional differences were identified: the fewest cannabis smokers were found in East Greenland while the most frequent smokers lived in South Greenland. More of the regular cannabis smokers had grown up with alcohol problems at home and therefore it was considered extremely important to inform orally the risk of harmful effects for this younger age group in particular. Young men were therefore targeted through different media. Informants who have gone through rehabilitation and therapy confirm that in many cases abuse is partly due to the social inheritance and back-
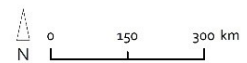
NEET rate in Greenland
2010-2017 change

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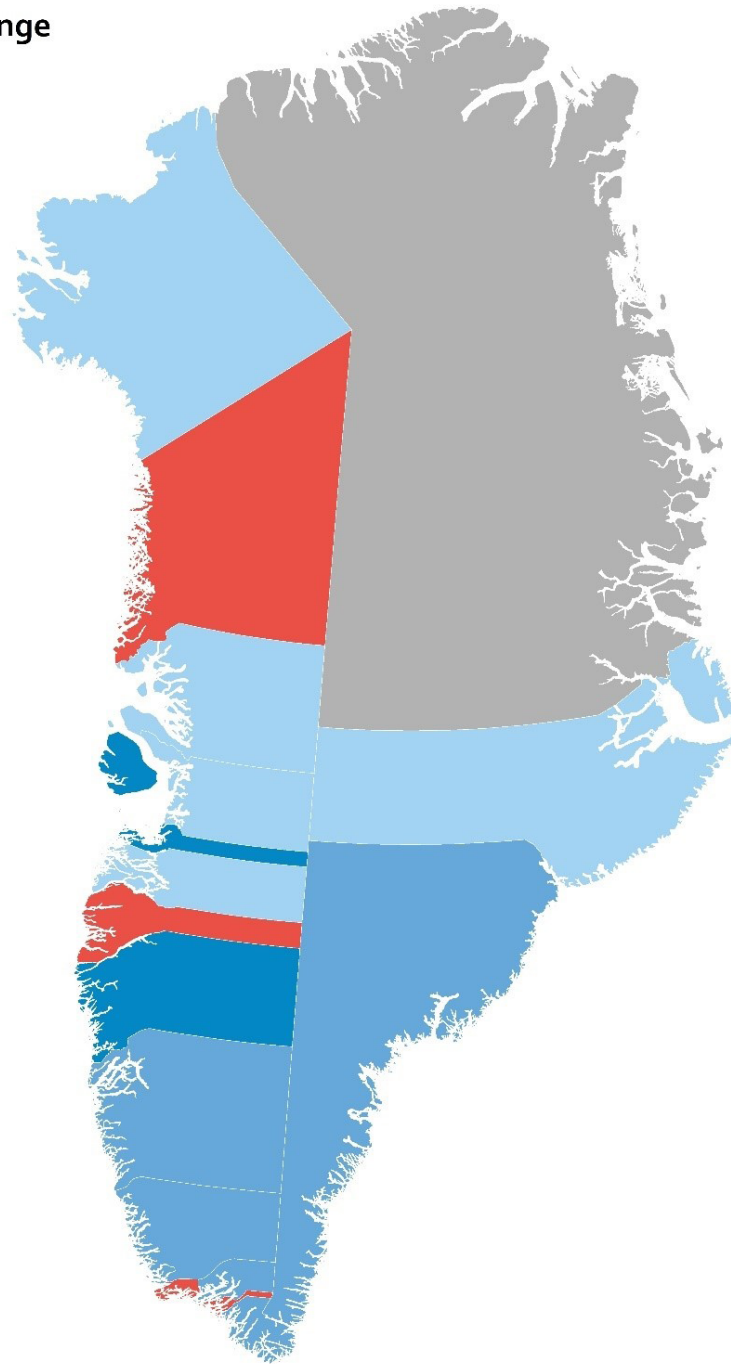
Annual average change 2010-2017, in percent

- < - 2
- - 2 - -1
- - 1 - 0
- > 0
- No data

NEET rate in Greenland:
Share of young people
aged 16-25 years old
neither in employment
nor in education or
training, in percent

N

0   150   300 km

*Greenlandic
average:
- 1,3*

Data source: Statistics Greenland

Map 10. The annual average change rate for the Greenlandic districts during 2010-2017

ground of growing up with parents or care-takers who were themselves abusers.[12]

It is not an understatement that a number of social challenges and related abuse represent a great cost for Greenlandic society (Departementet for sundhed, 2015). In 2016, the national authorities and the Minister for Health in the autonomous government initiated a special campaign aimed specifically at 15–25-year-old males (Greenland Government, 2016). A 2014 population survey and survey among schoolchildren (Dahl-Petersen et al., 2016, Niclasen, 2015) showed that the increase in the number of 15–17 year-olds who had tried hashish and the number of 18–24 year-olds who smoked cannabis regularly were on the rise. In 2016, citizen meetings were held in South Greenland towns about the epidemic in cannabis-related psychosis.

There are regional disparities in the supply of consultation services between the capital region (Nuuk), and towns and settlements: 70% of inhabitants of smaller settlements are struggling with the aftermath of suicides or other causes of post-traumatic stress, which is a much higher proportion than in the larger towns or the capital. However, services and therapies are provided, although to a much lesser extent, where they are needed; much greater intervention is required to take into account these regional variations (Bjerregård, 2009). A series of actions were taken (as described above) by the Minister for Health in 2016 and also by regional authorities in Kujalleq municipality (KNR, 2016).

Faroe Islands

By Firouz Gaini

The Faroe Islands have the lowest unemployment rate among the Nordics at just 1.5% (2018). However, the true rate of youth unemployment may be higher than indicated by official numbers because young people who have never been in a regular job or registered at the Unemployment Services (Arbeiðsloysisskipanin, ALS) represent a hidden group that is difficult to measure. Some are registered within the Social (Welfare) Services. Many academically oriented young students leave the country after having completed secondary education. Others have the status as student without being active participants at any educational institution.

The Faroe Islands have a small population (51,540 in 2019) and in 2018, there were just 232 (fully) unemployed persons (119 women and 113 men) in the Faroes, of which 24 were below the age of 26, and 10 youngsters were in ALS's 'long-term unemployment' category. Apart from during the crisis in the early 1990s, unemployment rates have been relatively low for several decades, but many Faroe Islanders have relied on part-time work (especially women) or seasonal jobs. In times of recession, the workforce seeks employment in neighbouring countries but in general, the labour market is considered highly flexible with effective transitional forces between industries (FEC Report, 2012).

The transition from early modern to late modern society took place in the 1980s and 1990s in the Faroes. New educational, social and cultural 'capital' (resources and values) are essential for young adults seeking a job and fortune in life today. Young people with poor educational records and limited or no social network find it increasingly difficult to enter the job market. More than 20% of 24–29-year-olds do not have post-primary education (Manntal, 2011) and among young men, the rate is 26%. The educational level is higher in the capital area than in the other regions of the country. There is a tripartite geographical division of the Faroes: Torshavn at the top, the northern region in the middle, and the southern region at the bottom.

Even if most young people seem to be optimistic about their future, it is necessary to re-energize youth employment policies in the Faroes because there is an emerging generation of young people who are experiencing high levels of dissatisfaction, isolation and disillusion in relation to the structures of opportunities in their lives. They are at risk of (permanent) marginalization and need help in post-compulsory school transition to further education, employment and training. Uneven access and participation in education, employment and training have resulted in what some observers have called 'delayed transition to adulthood' (Ryan, 2011; Hayford & Furstenber, 2008). Today, the Faroe Islands is a modern society with a high standard of living, a (relatively) high level of education, an ultramodern fishing (and booming salmon farming) export industry, and a Scandinavian-style public welfare system. It is also a society in transition, facing challenges related to its small scale, demographic composition and relatively peripheral location, all of which have an impact on

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12 https://www.peqqik.gl/Emner/Livskrise/Misbrugsbehandling/EtLivUdenMisbrug?sc_lang=da-DK

young people's everyday lives, identities and future visions (Gaini, 2013). It is vital to improve our understanding of the situation of young people and to develop sustainable interventions that lead to the reduction of marginalized youth without jobs or education in the Faroes. In a small-scale, socially transparent and family-oriented society like the Faroes, it might feel especially uncomfortable to be one of the few outsiders without job in the 'good times'. A person may feel unwillingly exposed as they observe the progress of the majority group.

Dream and reality

Young people who have never been in the labour market represent the group that is most difficult to reach. ALS has recently hired a social worker and established collaboration with Social (Welfare) Services to obtain more knowledge about young people in the social system. When youngsters are on the edge of ALS (i.e., reaching the maximum time with the right to be registered as an ALS customer), close to the point where they are 'downgraded' to what they perceive as the humiliating Social Services, fish filleting plants and small municipalities often offer the affected local youth without jobs a new chance. This reflects some of the informal mechanisms at play in small communities, where every person is attached to their local community through a web of social and family links. That said, being small scale is a double-edged sword in the Faroes. A person stepping out of line is stigmatized and might bring upon themselves difficulties in relation to one's working life. According to interviewed youth workers, it is very important to teach young people to look after themselves (e.g., in relation to social media) to avoid getting a bad reputation and name. Another challenge for youngsters involves some of them having very unrealistic dreams and ambitions. They believe that they can become something, which is very far from reality. Of course, dreams should not be killed off without reason, but sometimes the illusion might be an obstacle leading the unemployed person into a dead-lock.

Iceland

In Iceland, 4,100 16–29 year-olds were neither in education nor employment in 2015 (OECD, 2016) of whom 1,736 were registered unemployed (Vinnumálastofnun, 2016a). In year 2018 2400 in the age 16–24 were in NEETs, around 6% of youth in

this age group (Hagstofa Íslands, 2019). Based on data from the City of Reykjavik, Vilhelmsdottir (2017) estimated that 795 individuals received financial assistant from the municipalities, 805 were on disability or rehabilitation benefits and 764 were supported by their families or by themselves. Although these statistics give some general idea about the situation, little is known about the details behind the statistics. In a study of young people (148 individuals, 18–24 years old) receiving financial assistance from the City of Reykjavik in 2008–2011, Brynjólfsdóttir (2013) reported that an average of 57% were on benefits throughout the period, with 68% receiving benefit payments during last year of the study (2011), demonstrating that a large portion of the group were long-term beneficiaries. Only 4–6% were in paid employment during the period. When investigating the reported explanations for being registered for financial support, Eydal and Brynjólfsdóttir (2015) revealed that illness was the main reason: 30% had reported depression, 20% anxiety and 60% combined with addiction problems. Almost 20% had experienced violence in childhood and the government agency for child protection had been involved in cases with 25% of the group (Guðný Björk Eydal & Klara Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir, 2015).

Icelandic studies have suggested that dyslexia increases the risk of drop-out from school, as it affects learning outcomes and self-esteem (Kristjánsdóttir, 2013; Bjarnadóttir, 2012).

According to analysis from the Directorate of Health, there are serious shortcomings in the provision of mental health services and continuity in services in Iceland before and after the age of 18. This applies also for young people dealing with both mental illnesses and addictions, especially in regions outside the capital region (Directorate of Health, 2017). Health care centres and hospitals outside the capital region do not have the financial capacity to provide the specialized services needed. There are cases where mental health care staff and psychiatrists have not attended an area where services are urgently required for several months at a time. In Eastfjords, the specialized psychiatric or mental health service is very sporadic even though it is sorely needed (RÚV, 2019). After this was reported and a series of cases highlighted in a number of media outlets, the Minister of Health promised to strengthen and promote mental health services for young people and announced an increased budget from the state (Fré-

ttablaðið, 2 January, 2018). Many private and public initiatives have been developed but demands for them are always higher than the capacity they can offer.

The Icelandic Social Science Institute emphasizes that actions are needed and advise that students require increased access to study and career counsellors, psychologists and social workers during education to prevent drop-out. In research conducted by the Institute on young people receiving disability or rehabilitation pensions for non-congenital diseases, 72% were based on mental illness and 28% on musculoskeletal conditions. In total, 75% of participants reported that they started to feel anxiety and depression already in grade school and 58% noted low self-esteem. The study revealed that one-third of participants had received no or little professional support before being registered for the pension. The researchers argued that increased access to professionals to deal with mental health issues would have a considerable value in preventing people from withdrawing from work and education. The participants frequently reported limited access to mental health services and a poor progress follow-up (The Icelandic Social Science Institute, 2016).

10. Overview of case studies

Ways to re-engage

We now describe examples of cases that through different means have managed to re-engage the young people in focus in this work in different types of rural regions across the Nordic countries. We examined up to 100 actions and programmes, some of them with term-limited funding and others with continuous funding. We identified three main approaches: the *creative* approach, the *activating/ empowering approach and the caring* approach.
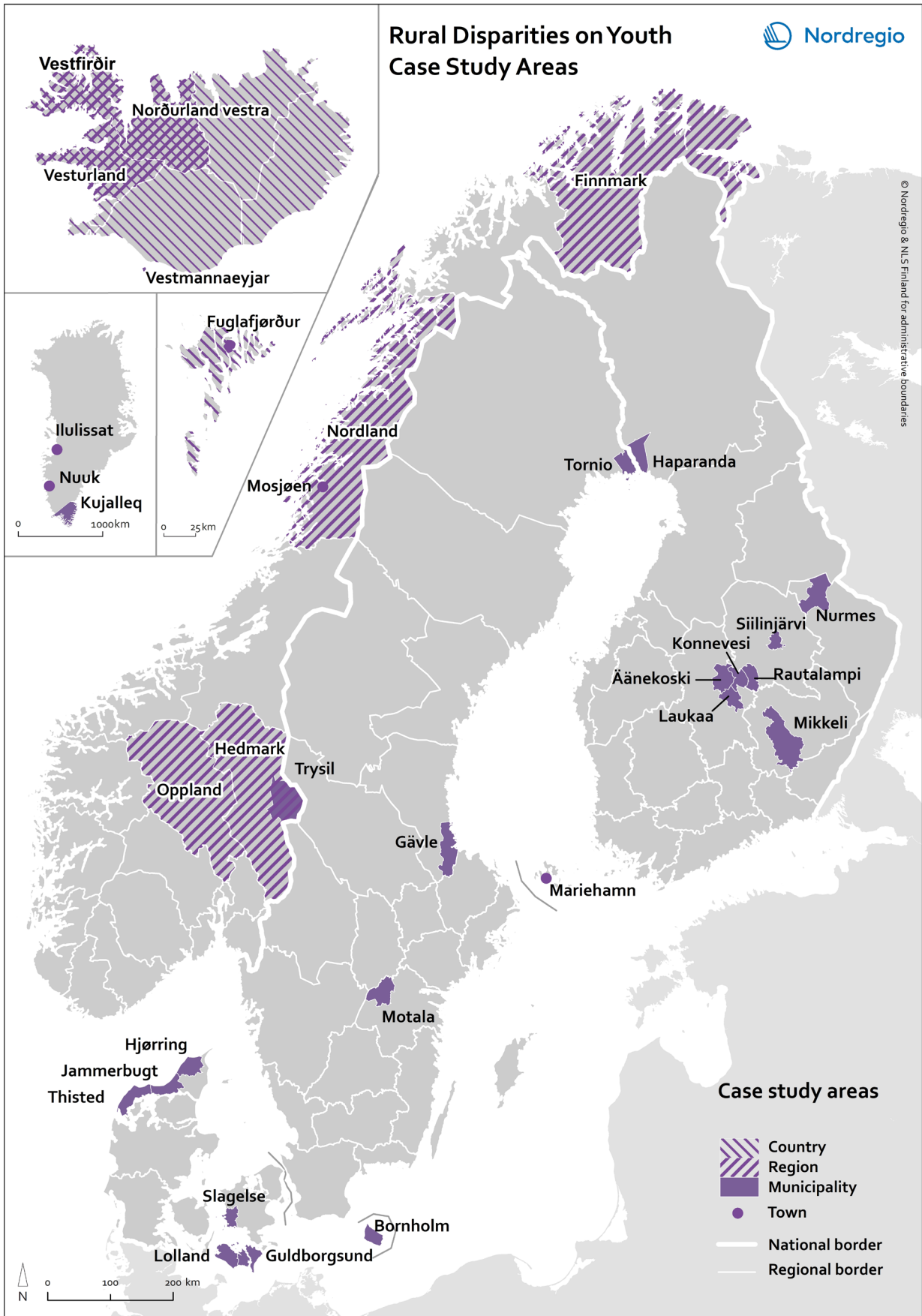
Denmark
SUME

SUME is a project run by the two municipalities of Slagelse and Kalundborg in West Sjælland in co-operation with EUC North West Sjælland (a business development centre). SUME stands for 'Særlig ungeindsats med effect' (special youth emphasis with effect). The project focuses on the provision by the municipal employment services of vocational education to unemployed or marginalized young people who are on the brink of the labour market. The project manager acknowledges that many of the youngsters participating in the programme suffer from poverty, substance abuse and mental illnesses. To work with them, both municipalities have developed their own strategy according to the needs identified in each municipality. The aim is to make the young people who participate more employable and the approach is individual.

For example, in Slagelse, when working with participants who suffer from mental issues, "the focus is not on the education but on the participants' personal conditions because that is the main issue for them, it is their life". To reinforce this approach, participants attend the project facilities, consisting of a sort of gym, where they can go to either exercise or relax. According to the project manager, this environment is provided because it allows for a relaxed conversation between youngsters and the employment services, an environment that sharply contrasts with employment offices full of people where staff and youngsters talk briefly in a bureaucratic manner that limits a more personal approach. It has proven to be an effective means to help young people.

"They do it the way they want, and they can be there for 2, 3, 4 or 6 months without having pressure, which helps them to open up, because you need to spend time with these people."

In Kalundborg, on the other hand, the employment services focus on the mapping of youngsters' qualifications in order to give them better advice on what path to take next. Sometimes

**Rural Disparities on Youth
Case Study Areas**

Nordregio

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Inset (Iceland):
Vestfirðir
Norðurland vestra
Vesturland
Vestmannaeyjar

Inset (Faroe Islands):
Fuglafjørður

Inset (Greenland):
Ilulissat
Nuuk
Kujalleq

0   1000km
0   25km

Finnmark

Nordland
Mosjøen

Tornio   Haparanda

Nurmes
Siilinjärvi
Konnevesi
Äänekoski   Rautalampi
Laukaa
Mikkeli

Hedmark
Oppland   Trysil

Gävle

Mariehamn

Motala

Hjørring
Jammerbugt
Thisted

Slagelse
Bornholm
Lolland   Guldborgsund

Case study areas

Country
Region
Municipality
● Town

─── National border
─── Regional border

0   100   200 km

N

this includes the development of basic habits that could be lacking in some of the participants due to their mental situation. However, most of the work consists of preparing participants' curricula vitae and explaining to them how to apply for jobs. In addition, the project is in touch with educational institutions and they can introduce participants to some courses in which they might be interested. This includes sessions that participants attend about different courses to see what the course consists of or to discuss with teachers the requirements. According to the project manager:

"The key is that instead of putting them in boxes we take an individual approach so every student can choose the right way for him or her."

Three elements have been highlighted by the SUME project in Denmark: the focus on the participants' personal conditions, the provision of time and support to participants, and the individualized approach to every participant in the project. This project is funded by the European Social Fund and ends in late 2019.

Educational track to work, Sjælland

This project grew out of a need in Region Sjælland, which had the highest proportion of young people aged 18–24 on social transfers in Denmark. Local companies had long reported mismatch problems and failed recruitment of local young people, where the skills of local human capital do not meet the needs of the firms. Odsherred, Lolland, Vordingborg, Kalundborg, Faxe, Guldborgsund and Slagelse are examples of places with high proportions of low-skilled people. The negative effects of a mismatch in production potential were widely felt in the region. The strength of the project is that it co-ordinates all the different partners in vocational education/training and the labour market that need to be engaged for a scheme that firmly follows up on progress, like Educational Track to Work (DK: uddannelsesvejen til vækst) does. Emphasis is laid on matching the needs of apprentices, whose incentives are met by remunerating them under the training period, and companies, which are remunerated by the municipality if they take on a trainee. In this way, a chain of incentive is created where the coalition of trade unions (*Fælles fagligt forbund*) is also involved in mediating contacts between programme managers, students and recruiters, so that networks can be secured

and expanded. As a prerequisite, a needs analysis among 1,000 local companies in the region was conducted. This project is funded by the European Social Fund until the end of 2019. Besides enabling young people into work, a broader aim of the project is to raise educational levels in the region and contribute to a thriving and dynamic business life in influencing the companies to think of education as a strategy and an intrinsic part of their plans. On an even wider level, education and lifelong learning are sustainability markers benefitting both youth and local companies.

Re-engaging long-term unemployed into employability, North Jutland

The municipalities of Morsø, Thisted and Jammerbugt in Denmark teamed up to develop new collaboration models among labour market actors. The aim was to increase the number of young people completing youth education by providing them with jobs, guidance, mentoring internships and traineeships. The target group was youngsters aged 18–30, all of whom were without formal qualifications, and participants totalled 1,391 while the programme lasted (2010–2018). It was a well-prepared action in which long-term unemployment risk groups were identified. It included needs analysis among 350 unemployed to start with, focus groups interviews with 40 people about expectations, and development seminars with 50 leaders and staff from the participating municipalities. All of these steps helped to identify risk groups, among which were zappers (young people who had unstable employment experience), education-scared youth (*uddannelsesforskrækkede unge*) and youth with vocational education. Among the most common profiles were young men without specialized education (*ufaglært*), young people with attitude resistance to education and unemployed with health problems. Important in making this programme work were the early intervention (contact after a maximum of 3 months' unemployment registration), special screening of the risk group, mobilization of an intensive job-seeking process with continuous follow-up and conversations with a life coach and job psychologist (Mploy, 2011).

Hjørring has had a high proportion of its population on social transfers, involving those people considered to be far from the labour market. The municipality decided to invest DKK 125 million (EUR 17 million) to reduce the caseloads of case-

workers with disadvantaged individuals on social assistance through active labour market policies (Ravn & Bredgaard, 2019). They did this through hiring additional staff and intensifying activation of the disadvantaged unemployed. As a result, the caseloads of caseworkers responsible for activation of disadvantaged persons on social assistance were reduced from 70–80 to 35–40 cases per caseworker. The caseloads were reduced to enable better framework conditions for providing high-quality (employment-focused) social work and for establishing a good working relationship and collaboration between caseworkers and clients. This case is one of the recent "best cases" in Denmark in reducing high caseloads in employment services (Ravn, 2019).

TAMU

TAMU stands for training school labour market education. It operates six centres in Denmark, five of them located in Jutland, Fyn and Sjælland far from the capital region. TAMU is built on the ideology of consequence pedagogy with the slogan: "We go to action, we take responsibility, we look forward" (TAMU, 2019). TAMU is an independent organization that is run according to labour education laws. It is 75% state financed and 25% of income is generated through the sales of products and services in which trainees are involved. TAMU attempts to create a bridge in a labour market paradox, namely in the mismatch between shortage of labour and the unemployed without the right skills. It provides labour market training to a special target group that has been given up on by most institutions or who themselves have given up on the system. The education period is ~1 year and is built on practical learning and 50/50 with social learning through work. Five steps are involved: competence assessment on entry, a trial period, a first industry period, a second industry period and finally placement in job and education (a job guarantee). The target group is youngsters aged 18–30 with little or no educational background. Some of them have been engaged in criminal activities and/or drug or alcohol abuse, and some have social or psychological diagnoses. Training is provided within 18 different branches including cleaning services, furniture production, catering, logistics, construction and tourism etc. The social skills trained have a prominent place in the learning process as does the practical experience through work. These social skills encompass self-determination, self-help, account-

ability, credibility, respect, co-operativeness and receptiveness. There is a policy of zero tolerance of substances (alcohol or drugs) at the centres where the apprentices live while under training, and they are provided with pocket money and three meals a day. Many individual sunshine stories have been born out of this approach to training. Niels is one TAMU student who did not fit into the traditional education system but who has managed well and was able to become successful through the programme. Beforehand, he was unemployed for years and became a Hells Angels member. He was convicted twice for selling drugs and for violent behaviour. He said of his experience: "TAMU could see beyond my tattoos. They saw me like a real human, a person who could be trusted and others could depend upon. That was my first time in my educational life I had that experience. TAMU was the last wake-up call". The effect of the programme is valuable in terms of long-term impacts for those who complete it, with around 35% still engaged either in work or education 5 years after completion. The close follow-up and consequence-based pedagogy work for this group that everybody else has given up on (Kastholm, 2019).

Finland

Laukaa, **Äänekoski** and **Konnevesi** are small municipalities. Konnevesi had four primary schools in 2017 providing education to 265 students; in 2001, there were six schools with 383 students. This trend is in line with what was reported in the section on school closures in rural Finnish municipalities.

Uutta Virtaa (New Power)

The project Uutta Virtaa (New Power) was conducted in some small municipalities in Central Finland, Äänekoski, Laukaa and Konnevesi, located around 50 km from Jyväskylä. The project's main goal was to create a knowledge chain between public employment services and municipal authorities that helps to re-engage marginalized young people by enabling them either to enrol in education or to join the labour market.

Project managers pointed out that, most of the time, the early school leavers they dealt with did not know what they wanted to achieve in life and this posed a serious barrier to their personal development. Therefore, the project sought to approach these youngsters with the aim of providing them with an achievable goal. However, project managers stated that they were the ones

who had to search out the youngsters because of the attitude of rejection towards formal authorities that youngsters showed. Project managers stressed that after extended periods of inactivity, in addition to unfortunate past experiences with the authorities, participants had developed a lack of social skills. Nonetheless, good outcomes of this approach were identified in that participants showed appreciation that someone was paying attention to them.

Knowledge chain refers to the effort made by the project to ease the flow of information between the different actors. To do so, two steps were taken. The first consisted of improving the work ability of participants, especially in terms of physical and mental health issues. Thus, the focus was on mapping participants' health through continuous appointments with project nurses. The second step consisted of career guidance, with the help of the public employment services, focusing on assessing what young people had done in their lives before and what they wanted to do in the future, whether to study or to work. In addition, participants' strengths were assessed through face-to-face meetings to get to know them, and this turned out to be a strategy that gradually allowed project managers to determine the best path for participants.

When referring to how the project developed and whether it achieved its aims, managers noted that the issue most usually raised by participants was that they had never been asked before what they wanted to do; they had only ever been given instructions, without taking into account their actual problems. To counter this, the project managers adhered to two slogans: 'Listen, listen, listen!' and 'We have one mouth and two ears, so we listen twice as much as we speak!' In addition, the working practice was adopted by managers of not limiting the time given to meetings with the participants.

Uutta Virtaa builds on the notion that giving time, listening and paying attention to participants yield effective results in raising their motivation and, thereby, their chances to be re-engaged.

Jyväskylä Rock Academy and Veturitallit
Developing the creative talents of marginalized young people could be an effective way to foster both the hard and soft skills of those who find themselves out of education or work. FabLabs (see description later in this chapter) and the Jy-väskylä Rock Academy have used this approach from two different perspectives that nevertheless share a great deal of creativity at their core: technology and art. Jyväskylä's Rock Academy is located at Veturitallit (railway roundhouse), Jyväskylä's municipal youth centre and mainly provides all the required resources for young musicians to start and develop their musical careers. At the Academy, young musicians can find recording studios, technical equipment and stages to perform. In addition, human resources are also available in the form of sound engineers who help youngsters to set up sound quality and professional musicians who come to teach youngsters how to play the instruments, how to write lyrics, and they also give advice and recommendations from their experience.

The Academy is open to all youngsters, and besides music, other arts such as theatre, dance, circus and poetry are also available. The Academy managers stress that their openness allows marginalized youngsters "to come, to hang out and then they find activities and engage in them". By providing these activities, youngsters are not only active in their self-development, but also engage in social practices that are beneficial for them. The managers say that the Academy helps youngsters in three ways. First, by providing a safe space, youngsters do not get involved in harmful behaviours such as substance use. Second, they see adults as peers rather than as authoritarian figures such as teachers or parents, and are therefore able to open up for help. Third, they meet with other youngsters in similar situations and form support networks that help them to socialize and not be isolated. As one of the managers put it: "when they do creative things here, they see by themselves what they are capable of".

In conclusion, it could be said that the *creative* approach to re-engaging marginalized young people consists of fostering their individual creative talents and skills, which at the same time, entails the enhancement of social relations that help fulfil their personal development.

TOPIKS addressing early school leavers
The TOPIKS project took place in Mäntyharju, a small rural municipality 45 km from Mikkeli in the region of South Savonia, Finland. The project's main goal was to engage unemployed young people and early school leavers into vocational education training by diversifying the modes of delivery of education (ESEDU, 2017).

The project worked with marginalized youngsters who were victims of poverty, substance abuse or mental illnesses. To achieve its goals, the project consisted of two phases. The first consisted of the recruitment of participants based on close collaboration with the public employment services and social services of Mikkeli. The second phase had as core elements the rebuilding of participants' attitudes, the mapping of participants' potentialities and finally enrolment in workshops. Regarding rebuilding participants' attitudes, practitioners focused on guiding and coaching participants in how to acquire basic habits such as being on time. According to the project manager, one goal of this second phase was to enable participants to be on time for the sessions five days a week. Once this step was accomplished, practitioners and participants would work together on drafting a plan to take participants through the project. This meant discussing what options were more suitable for participants in terms of, for example, which workshops to attend. In this regard, the project manager emphasized that "spending time with participants discussing their development was a powerful method because that way we let them explain to us their situation without pushing them". Finally, when participants were enrolled in vocational education based on on-the-job learning, the project would provide them with support by means of specialized teachers and weekly meetings to check participants' progress. To make

the training more meaningful, the workshops would take place in actual work settings, namely kindergartens, shops or other workplaces.

During the project, the focus was put on providing time and emotional support as key issues to motivate the participants, as the project manager explained:

"It is very important for these people that you show interest in them and you make them know they have potential and that they are not dull or something like that. This is the best approach to re-engage them, to show them that they are important for somebody and to tell them that everyone has the capacity to learn, because socially excluded young often see themselves as lacking the necessary skills to be part of society."

Thus, the *caring* approach is illustrated by this project in that the focus is placed on developing motivated attitudes through the understanding of participants' life situations and the provision of emotional and time support.

Norway
Completion rates among students in upper secondary education in Nordland County

Nordland County in Northern Norway has had a political focus on young people leaving education or training. The group of young students with the lowest completion rates are those enrolled in vocational training. It is common that youngsters take a break from their studies to go to work in the fishing industry in certain seasons when there are well-paid jobs available.

Nordland County has 16 secondary schools and many students complete secondary school when they are 24–29 years old. Therefore, students in Nordland County spend more time finishing their upper secondary education because some take a break and work. Completion rates were 3% under national average. The focus therefore was to ensure that students graduated in an efficient way to contribute as an educated labour force and enable them to make progress with work experience.

At each school, there is a follow-up service that helps students to find strategies for completing school. Some also make use of the e-learning courses offered in their field of education to continue work while finishing their education.

Local leadership of the schools is important in improving the feedback mechanisms to those

who drop out. Every student cohort has ~10% of NEETs, consisting of youngsters who drop out early, and those with diverse physical, psychological and social problems who fail to adapt to school and employment.

In 2006–2011, Nordland made some progress in completion rates, primarily in the field of general studies; the progress in completion rates for vocational training was slightly lower. Comparing the two subregions in Nordland County, South Helgeland and Middle Helgeland, the completion rate increased if the group who 'completed beyond the normative length of study' (i.e., 5 years) is included.

South Helgeland consists of the municipalities Bindal, Sømna, Brønnøy, Vega and Vevelstad. Middle Helgeland consists of the municipalities Herøy, Alstahaug, Leirfjord and Dønna. Both subregions had a completion rate of ~50% with some variations from year to year, for example, South Helgeland had lower completion rates in 2011–2016 because the number of young people still in upper secondary after 5 years increased from 8.8% to 13.5%.

The group of students not completing secondary education (14%) was slightly lower in South Helgeland compared with Middle Helgeland (17.6%). Where the results from Nordland differ significantly is in the transition between lower secondary and upper secondary (Vg2 and Vg3). On a national basis, 82.8% of students have a regular transition, while in Nordland County, the proportion is only 75.9%. Those who 'fall out' at this time do not necessarily end their education permanently. Some take a break and return, some find alternative ways to complete their educational programme via OT (there is a follow-up service at every school) and/or through online-based courses. Many students get jobs after they drop out and this is particularly true for those who have a certificate from having had 2 years of school. An effective approach in raising completion rates involves support and individual programmes for students who want to complete their education but who cannot manage within the normative length.

The situation started to improve gradually after county authorities initiated special focus on this, monitoring the situation with annual reporting (Nielsen, 2018). Places already available for training helped to improve the results. For example, a large portion of the 532 Vg2 vocational students gained a training place in the autumn of 2015; over 1,800 Vg3 students were in training in the autumn of 2017, which was a record. An important step in raising completion rates was the number of available training places that had a direct effect in raising motivation among students to complete. The efforts being made in Nordland are systematic and demonstrate that broader structural efforts that are continuous and ongoing in increasing local availability of training contracts work. Enabling young people to exercise their apprenticed skills for real is an essential ingredient in raising their motivation and reducing mismatch problems.

Mosjøen vocational school and Arktisk mat

One limited but highly interesting initiative in raising motivation in vocational schools has been the initiative of Arctic Food. This is a locally organized event with international participation but aimed at the local vocational education students in Mosjøen. It has the effect of increasing students' sense of having a world of possibilities in their hands with the skills they are achieving through education while testing them out with real-world role models in food production. Learning about sustainable local entrepreneurship and gourmet food. Cooking classes involve locally produced or grown raw materials from the region; street festivals have a gastronomic focus. The event is funded by local companies and the municipality as well as national stakeholders, for example, Norsk sjömat. A range of internationally known Michelin chefs arrive in the small town of Mosjøen in the harvesting season in the autumn to explore food-making and creativity and train local vocational students for a whole week, ending in an international seminar on some pressing issues relating to sustainability and food resources, or entrepreneurship and creativity in catering or cuisine. The initiative is co-ordinated with teachers from the school and students are extremely motivated; suddenly their world of apprenticeship makes sense to the larger world as to the local context. It is a long-term initiative climaxing once a year with the event and classes, which may in the future produce some new, young, world-leading chefs, sustainability advocates or entrepreneurs in cultural industries and tourism.

Early school leavers in Oppland and Hedmark Counties – counter-measures

The responsibility of ensuring upper secondary education to a county level may have played an important part in reducing early school leavers

in Hedmark and Oppland Counties. According to the Status Report of Upper Secondary Education in Oppland County, the mandate given through the education programme 'Ny Giv' and the sub-programme 'Fellesfag, Yrkesretting og Relevans' (FYR), has allowed for increasingly tailored measures to curb early-leaver rates (Oppland Fylkeskommune, 2016). This includes restructuring the core school subjects to become more vocationally oriented and relevant for the students in vocational studies and their future in the labour market (ibid.). Furthermore, initiating a trial of an 'exchange model' (*Vekslingsmodell*) as part of a national 'Social Contract for Apprenticeships 2012–2015' (Utdanningsdirektoratet, 2017) has had a positive effect (cf. Oppland Fylkeskommune, 2016:26). Over 70% of participants were given an apprenticeship contract (ibid.). This model allows for training to take place both in the classroom and in the apprenticeship firm, which motivates students and clarifies the relationship between their educational training and their later professional lives (ibid.).

Additionally, upper secondary schools in Oppland County redirected the focus towards the individual student, ensuring that vulnerable students are seen and supported, alongside good mentorship and securing the availability of apprenticeships as part of the vocational education (Oppland Fylkeskommune, 2016). This structural change – ensuring that the student is meeting teachers and mentors, and not systems – has been crucial to improving completion rates (Oppland Fylkeskommune, 2016; Hyggen, 2015). Furthermore, the early trial run of the recently adopted structural change in upper secondary education may have played a key role, allowing students in vocational studies to complete their education and apprenticeships, before adding an additional year to their education to ensure the possibility of pursuing higher education later (Kirke-, Utdanning- og Forskningskomiteen, 2016).

Trysil youth guarantee

A youth and vocational training guarantee was initiated as a pilot in Trysil, Norway. The youth unemployment rate in Trysil was almost double the national average (21% vs. 11% in 2016). Moreover, the educational level of inhabitants is lower than the Norwegian average. Trysil municipality was the first in Norway to initiate a youth guarantee for young people seeking vocational training. It en-

tails co-operation with local companies that take on apprentices. Both the participating workplaces and the students are remunerated. Co-operation with the municipality is based on a set of requirements that have proven to work well. To date, the municipality and the companies have offered apprenticeships in 25 different vocations.

Ta sjansen in Hedmarken

The Norwegian authorities established an agreement on inclusive work life (the IA Agreement), which was revised and is now valid for 2019–2022 (Regjeringen, 2019). This agreement emphasized efforts to increase the employability of young people with reduced capacity to work (*nedsatt funksjonsevne*). Ta sjansen (Take the chance) was established with NAV (employment agencies) centres in Hamar, Ringsaker, Stange and Løten municipalities in Hedmark County in 2013–2017, because there were as many young people on social and unemployment transfers as there were available jobs (part of the IA Agreement) that were not filled (Lien et al., 2018). The programme focuses on young people under 30 with specially adapted effort needs or reduced capacity to work. The way it works is through closed job fairs at which local companies choose candidates from NAV through brief job interviews. The aim is to improve matchmaking and make the selection process an integral part of the encounters between businesses and individuals. In 2013–2018, 17 arrangements were held with 329 participants. It is worth noting that the project targets a group that in most cases is quite far from the labour market. However, since the beginning, 27% of participants have managed to become employed; 42% are no longer NAV clients, which may indicate that the remaining 15% engaged in educational efforts.

JobbLoop in Hordaland

JobbLoop was also part of the initiatives launched in relation to the inclusive labour market policy of the work and welfare ministries. The JobbLoop model involves co-operation between NAV and employers. We focus here on the efforts in Hordaland, where the project is driven by the employers and the role of NAV is primarily to recruit potential candidates. The target group is young people aged 18–30 who are considered to be far from work life or have physical, mental or combined challenges to deal with in their lives. Private companies are also the target group because they can enable the

youngsters to end up in a regular job after partici-pation in the initiative. While enrolled in the initia-tive, participants are still registered as jobseekers and can stop the programme whenever they wish. The way it works is that each participant is in the programme for 1 year, rotating for 4 months in three different job places. The ultimate aim is to find a good match for both employers and the young person's interests (Lien et al., 2018). A work life coach is essential in mediating the experience of both parties in the process. Once in the workplace, the youngster is allocated a mentor, who might be a leader or an experienced colleague. Social attrib-utes contribute to including the candidate into the work community. The candidates are part of the usual staff and expectations of them are equal. They enter into training to become responsible for certain job functions within the workplace. This guided learning is rather important in making the candidates feel a sense of achievement in learning and developing. In many cases, candidates have blossomed in the process when they came to real-ize they had capabilities they never believed they mastered (Lien et al., 2018). In some other regions of Norway where JobbLoop was instigated, it was criticized as merely focusing on bringing people off social benefits. However, rather, it was a limited attempt to enable the most vulnerable youngsters to see the possibility of becoming active through their recruitment in an employer-driven project, where NAV merely acted as a supporting partner. The first attempt at this in Hordaland was a suc-cess, given that all participants were recruited onto the staff of one of the JobbLoop companies where they had worked during the programme en-rolment period.

Reducing drop-out rates by improving public health and well-being, Alta Finnmark

Completion rates in vocational education in some locations in Finnmark were under 37%. Following some negative media coverage on the issue, the authorities speculated about where the main cause of the low completion rate lay (see pg. 5). As counter-measures, the county and municipality of Alta implemented a series of activities to promote health and well-being (Finnmark Fylkeskommune, 2015). Several factors were identified as causes of poor public health among youth: the milieu grow-ing up (whether children were exposed to bullying or poor well-being); the learning milieu (early school drop-out rates and share of low educated); mental

health measures (troubling loneliness in school, in-creased mental challenges, suffering among chil-dren and 15–29 year olds); and physical inactivity and nicotine dependence. This cause and effect relationship was put on the agenda.

"Students that report poor well-being are on the rise while the share of those who are bullied is fall-ing. Increased well-being is at the core of public health work. The school is an important arena for children and youth. Many factors increase student motivation to learn and therefore also the challeng-es they face in everyday school life. In the long run, poor well-being can affect drop-out in upper sec-ondary school because gaps created in the knowl-edge base from junior high are a contributing factor to leaving education. Especially for girls, well-being in school is closely related to life satisfaction." (ALTA KOMMUNE, 201)

While this is a systemic approach initiated by the regional authorities, improvements were already visible (Alta Kommune 2016, Alta Kommune 2018). Drop-out rates had decreased even if they re-mained above the national average (31% vs. 21%). Drawing attention to some of the factors that contribute to well-being and social, physical and mental health, the regional authorities and mu-nicipalities could initiate actions to promote bet-ter health and thereby gain a better overview of where emphasis should be placed to follow up on further improvements.

Sweden
Ung I Gävleborg

Together with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL), Region Gävleborg in Sweden has instigated two projects aimed at reducing early school-leaving and at increasing youth employment, especially in rural areas: 'Plug In' and 'Ung i Gävleborg' (Youth in Gävleborg). Plug In aimed to "[reduce] the drop-out rate in upper secondary school and to get more young people to complete their studies with pass grades" and therefore served a broader regional development purpose to raise the educational level in the region (Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting, 2016). Ung i Gävleborg, on the other hand, focused on giving increased opportunities to join the labour market to people aged 15–29. The project was introduced in 10 municipalities throughout Region Gävleborg. We visited Sandviken, one of the municipalities

where the project was taking place, to see it in action. For this report, we interviewed policy makers at SKL, project managers in Region Gävleborg, and social workers in Sandviken, thereby acquiring a better understanding of how the projects were developed.

Although the lack of resources at schools was not the motivation to launch these projects, all three actors identified this lack as an important factor in early school-leaving. As noted, the causes of early school-leaving may be part of a process originating outside the school and related to social factors. Thus, early school leavers are often victims of conditions that they themselves have not created but the schools nevertheless become part of that context. Managers at Region Gävleborg point towards the lack of strategies in schools to prevent early school-leaving:

"Schools do not have the strategies for this [preventing early school-leaving]. It is one teacher or one mentor taking care of this and it does not work. There is a lack of strategies on how to discover early on these problems." (Youth worker in Region Gävleborg).

They acknowledge that schools do not have the necessary time to deal with this problem and that school staff cannot address all of the students' situations. Social workers in Sandviken add that teachers' time is limited and, therefore, they place the responsibility on students who often are not able to manage their situation. Social workers described the case of one student with special needs who went unnoticed by teachers because he was quiet in the classroom:

"That's the big problem too, the one who doesn't make a sound. If students start a fight they will get noticed, but the quiet ones just slip under the radar all the time."

Thus, schools are not prepared to accommodate the more vulnerable students who usually lack both material and cultural resources. Region Gävleborg and social workers report that most of the youngsters they deal with do not possess the equipment required to do the activities they propose. Such activities are an important aspect of their re-engagement strategy because social workers aim to include all youngsters but there are some barriers. Social workers also acknowledge

the importance of family background in cultural terms:

"The education they have in the family also affects the children. If parents have a university degree, the children will probably pursue one too. They are motivated. However, if parents themselves dropped out from school, their children are not motivated, and they will probably drop out too."

Managers and policymakers are also aware of the role that family plays in students' future. Remarks on cultural aspects were also present; parents' lack of educational attainment was seen as an important factor influencing early school-leaving. Ung i Gävleborg managers as well as officials at SKL stressed the importance of role models and family background.

"These kids are living the same story as their parents. Their parents also left school and the children do not have a role model. The culture is inherited and spread among the youngsters as well. That is what we have seen from the rural areas."

This trend has been highlighted in previous sections of this report: it is not only individual factors that weigh in regarding early school-leaving. A school being an unwelcoming place for disadvantaged youngsters is the result of both socio-cultural and structural factors. On the one hand, schools are being deprived of the necessary resources to address early school-leaving due to budgetary measures. On the other hand, there may be defensive understanding on the part of the school and its role in advancing the possibilities for young people, which results in students rejecting school. Social workers in Sandviken noted:

"They are never going back to school for different reasons. That is often the [school] environment they do not want to go back to."

At the practical level, the aim of Ung i Gävleborg is to bring back into either secondary or adult education early school leavers by sparking their motivation in life. The project owns a house where youngsters and mentors work together through coaching sessions. The project works in co-ordination with local schools. The latter contact the municipal authorities when they identify a student who has left school and the project mentors then

attempt to get in contact. Once they have done so, youngsters are assigned a mentor who will help them through the period, which can vary in length depending on individuals. First, the mentor evaluates the youngster's more pressing issues. Then, coaching sessions are oriented towards improving five areas of the youngster's life – health, family, finances, friends and work – that tend to have deteriorated because of a long history of continual failure. For example, one of the key areas is that of health. As one mentor commented:

"We know, for instance, that health is a big concern. They come to us and say: 'I have bad health'. We then take a blank sheet and write down different health issues; it can be sleep, eating, exercise, etc."

Mentors work with an action plan, drafted in accordance with the youngsters' desires and goals, consisting of the development of activities directed at identifying youngsters' strengths and weaknesses. For example, the first steps focus on building a trust relationship, so practitioners can better understand participants' needs. To do so, sessions where youngsters can open up and talk to mentors are scheduled. According to one mentor, direct talk could pose some barriers for youngsters to start talking. Thus, alternatives such as using videogames or going to the gym together have turned out to be effective in that they set a friendlier environment where youngsters feel safer. Then, youngsters evaluate themselves in these same areas so that mentors can focus on the aspects that are not working in youngsters' lives. In several cases, mentors focus on providing youngsters with routines to acquire healthy habits, which is often necessary because they have neglected themselves as a consequence of not having obligations. In this case, therefore, mentors involve youngsters in group activities with a strong focus on exercise to get them moving.

Klara färdiga, gå (Ready, Set, Go)
This is a long-term initiative in the Strängnäs municipality of Hornudden that has recently received support of the EU's Leader Programme. It is one aimed at increasing the possibility of young people getting out and functioning in the local labour life. The general aim is to create a space for practice and training, with guidance for NEETs, thereby increasing their employability in the long run and instilling faith in their future. The idea is that training

happens in the ordinary workplaces in Hornudden where an individual action plan is the point of departure. This project is inspired by the TAMU project in Denmark. Some of the skills that are trained are social skills, for example, practising being on time. The project offers young people a training arena to increase their social manoeuvre competence and to find new ways ahead. The project is being developed by Strängnäs municipality in cooperation with the Swedish Employment Agency.

UngKomp and Fountain House, Motala
Motala has long had the highest youth unemployment rate in Västra Götalands län (county), and in some cases in all of Sweden (e.g., in 2016). This town has lost thousands of jobs (4,000 in 2000–2012), and the education level is lower than the national average. The project UngKomp (youth competence) was therefore launched with funding from the European Social Fund in 2016 and the municipality of Motala and the Swedish Employment Agency started a campaign to reduce youth unemployment. Already by 2017, unemployment among 18–24 year-olds had started to reduce significantly. While UngKomp targets the youth group that needs more support and resources in their job-seeking, there are other groups of the unemployed that need deeper support. These young people fit into the categories of youth workers in the making who earlier had difficulties with learning and staying in school, and a group with mental health challenges and reduced functional capacity (Dockson, 2017). UngKomp provides support and resources for employment-seeking youth: labour market counsellors, study and VET guides, job psychologists, social consultants, work therapists, job brokers (*arbetsförmidlare*) and client resources (peers who support). Peers supporting and encouraging i.e biking with the employment seeker to give social and mental support, or waiting in front of a store while the jobseeker leaves his/her CV at the counter. UngKomp is a nationally initiated programme that has been implemented in the towns where youth unemployment has been most chronic (Dockson, 2017). Of 350 18–24 year-olds who were unemployed, 150 were females and 201 males. Girls study longer, as shown in the statistics, and it is therefore easier for them to get a job after graduating from gymnasium.

For the group with deeper support needs, Fountain House is an option in Motala. Fountain House is a social intervention in community re-

habilitation of the severely disabled psychiatric patient. The model stresses four messages to the clients: clients are members, their presence is expected, their presence is wanted and they are needed as contributors. In addition, the model is based on four beliefs: every client has potential productivity, work is important, a social life is important and everyone should have adequate and pleasant housing. Fountain House includes a pre-vocational day programme, a transitional employment programme, evening and weekend programmes, an apartment programme and an outreach programme (Beard et al., 1982). That something is difficult does not mean it is impossible. Fountain House rests on a liberating notion of mental health, building on the belief that everyone regardless of reduced functional capacities can do much more than they themselves think they are capable of, if the conditions are right. It is an *empowering* approach with a caring focus. There are no patients or white hospital gowns or closed doors – only members and supervisors who together plan and run the house on a daily basis. Humanity, socializing and the joy of working characterize the spirit instead of only focusing on the pathogenesis. Fountain House also operates in Mariehamn, Åland.

Rampen (Haparanda–Tornio)

The Rampen (Swedish) or Ramppi (Finnish) project is an example of cross-border co-operation between the municipalities of Haparanda (Sweden) and Tornio (Finland). It has been developed by Sverigefinska högskolan (the Swedish–Finnish vocational school) located in Haparanda together with Haparanda municipality and Peräpohjolan Kansanopiston (municipal high school) located in Tornio. The project duration is 3 years (2016–2019). The objective of the project is to foster co-operation between institutions in both municipalities with the aim of re-engaging 300 unemployed young people on both sides of the border by providing them with vocational education and coaching services. With the help of collective workshops, the unemployed youth learn new skills and create networks, gain knowledge, get inspiration and receive coaching to become more employable in the labour market on both sides of the border.

We interviewed the project leader to gain a more detailed understanding of the project and the results achieved to date. It was explained that failure at school and mental health issues were two factors causing young people to lose hope in their future and, therefore, to become unemployed. To address their situation, the project attempted to provide safe spots for young people to share their fears and worries with mentors so that the latter could give them advice on what paths they could follow. The project leader told us that the project encourages young people to join vocational courses and other activities so that they can regain confidence in themselves by both learning a job and socializing with other peers. The approach adopted has helped young people to develop a bond with mentors as the basis for the development of more trustworthy relationships, something that was lost due to failure at school or mental health issues. In the project leader's view, the greatest success of the project has been to raise the issue of marginalized young people in the Haparanda–Tornio area with the local authorities to garner their collaboration in addressing the situation. According to the Haparanda City Council, 40 youngsters were given summer jobs to ease their way into the labour market (Haparanda Stad, 2018).

Greenland

Two examples of educational pathways that enable vulnerable youth in Marjoiraq in Kujalleq municipality, South Greenland and Sapiik in Ilullissat, NW Greenland.
By Leneisja Jungsberg

In Kujalleq municipality, ~50% of the students completing grade 10 of lower secondary education do not continue directly to upper secondary education, for which there are a number of reasons. Some need to improve their grades from lower secondary school before continuing, some are tired of school, some want to attend boarding schools abroad, some take a job while others are unemployed. Another reason not to continue directly to upper secondary school is uncertainty about what direction to choose.

In 2015, one-third of 18–20 year-olds were registered as inactive and thereby not enrolled in education, employment or training. Being unemployed, young people can receive DKK ~700 each week and house rent, electricity and child care are also paid. This constitutes an economic challenge for the municipality; furthermore, approximately one-fifth of citizens received social benefits in 2015 (Jensen 2017). However, it is vital to support

this group beyond financial assistance in helping them to begin or enrol in education. There are now institutions that are active in reaching this group of young people.

The leader of Majoriaq in Qaqortoq, Poul Halberg Jørgensen, describes their approach with the metaphor of a hand reaching out and supporting young people into further education and labour market participation through upgrading qualifications and supervision in the process of considering different educational and employment opportunities. Opportunities for entrepreneurship and possibilities for e-learning for certain courses in upper secondary education are also part of the supervision. Supervisors working in Majoriaq actively reach out to NEETs to co-develop actions plans for future occupations.

From the young people's perspective, the considerations also address the question of whether to stay or to move somewhere else. Previous studies on young people's mobility in South Greenland indicate that they prioritize interest and preference when choosing education beyond territorial/geographical location (Karlsdóttir & Jungsberg, 2015).

One group in focus is the youngsters who complete grades 9 or 10 of lower secondary education to support them to continue in the educational system. In Kujalleq municipality, 25% of the population have a formal education after grades 9 or 10, compared with the national figure of 26.9% (Finansdepartementet, 2016). In total, 31% of 16–25 year-olds are employed, while 35% are NEETs (Kujalleq municipality, 2017).

Majoriaq

Majoriaq is an institution established by the Government of Greenland with a representative in the larger towns in all municipalities. The qualification route involves a 1-year process to complete primary and secondary education to gain credits to further education. Some of the effects they see from the institutional work carried out by Majoriaq involve encouraging all youngsters under 25 by means of co-created action plans to begin education, up-qualification, work training or another relevant path.

The municipality deploys a holistic approach acknowledging the linkages between those students having a difficult time in school and those affected by social problems. This basically entails many different institutions working together at different levels to support vulnerable young people. There is an informative data flow from the public school (lower secondary education) to Majoriaq as well as with Campus Kujalleq (upper secondary education in Southern Greenland) to support transfers of students to and from the different school institutions.

One reason why many young people do not continue in the educational system directly is due to a lack of language skills. A key challenge is thus the lack of quality in primary schools in preparing youngsters for upper secondary education. Until grade 10, almost all materials are in Greenlandic; subsequently, 70% of materials are in Danish; many teachers are Danish and teach courses in Danish. It is estimated that only 50% of students completing public school qualify to continue. Before this situation can be remedied, the quality of the early years in public schools must also improve. Building bridges between the secondary education and primary schools is thus essential.

According to Kujalleq municipality, this is a challenge to be considered from a holistic perspective. The vulnerability of the region is visible through several indicators (beyond those mentioned earlier, pg. X). The income gap between citizens and between settlements in Greenland is one indicator of a group of vulnerable young people. Another is suicide rates; in 2010–2015, 48 suicides were registered, with ~80% of them involving people from smaller villages (Jensen 2017).

In the literature, key elements of vulnerability are connected with access to material and welfare, housing and the local area, health and safety, day care and education, social relationships, behaviour and lifestyle, leisure and citizenship, and subjective well-being. Vulnerability can also arise from self-understanding and can occur when expectations and realities are not matched, for example, when young people lack the confidence and skills to feel they are in control of their lives (fate control). Supporting this group requires cooperation between several agencies and the overall responsibility is shared between state, government and municipality.

■ state (the Kingdom of Denmark): the police, the legal system, prisons
■ government: hospitals, prevention consultants, housing companies, education, churches, 24-hour care centres, institutions for disabled people, etc.
■ municipality: the social services department, family centres, prevention consultants, etc.

Sapiik

Sapiik is a project supporting and motivating grade 9 and 10 students to clarify their dreams and consider what educational, work or trainee activity could currently help them. Three tracks focus on young people in different parts of Greenland.

■ Sapiik Atuartut for grade 10 students in Nuuk, Ilulissat and Qaqortoq
■ Sapiiksumik Siunisaaq for vulnerable young people who completed grade 10 but who have not decided on continuing their education in Qaqortoq
■ Sapiik Ilinniartut for young people attending their first year in higher education in Nuuk, Qaqortoq and Aasiaat

The word Sapiik means 'courage' and the project helps young people to be courageous to share their dreams about the future as well as plan it. Sapiik co-operates with the municipality and schools in the three cities where they have activities (Nuuk, Ilulissat and Qaqortoq). A local project leader is employed in each of the cities and they meet with school teachers and principals to co-ordinate the support for youngsters.

Volunteers are also engaged in the activities with young people as part of the project; for example, they participate in organizing summer camps for children. This also contributes to anchoring the projects in each city by mobilizing local people to take part in the activities. To gain an understanding of young people's experience of Sapiik, an evaluation was carried out. Some of the results were as follows.

■ 85% (36/40) of the young people answered that they received the support they needed
■ 85% (36/40) answered that Sapiik has been supportive as part of their school attendance
■ 95% (38/40) said they received information about educational opportunities from Sapiik
■ 82% (34/40) replied that before the summer holidays they had been accepted to begin independent boarding school for lower secondary students, they had been accepted into higher education, or for an AFS study abroad semester/term

Some of the lessons learned from Sapiik are that the extra effort to support young people pursuing their dreams is very well received. The school teachers, community as well as many local businesses are eager to co-operate with the Sapiik project to help youngsters find a path they define themselves.

Faroe Islands
Greenhouse and Ocean Liner
By Firouz Gaini

The focus on youth started in 2010, when youth unemployment was on the rise, and reflected a new societal era with new social values and norms. Two women at the employment agency were in charge at ALS for some years and the former head of ALS was a visionary daredevil who wanted to develop skills among unemployed to make the proud of being engaged.

One of the first projects signalling the 'new standard' in ALS was the greenhouse in the village of Sandavágur. In 2012, ALS customers were set to cultivate high-quality flowers and vegetables, but without the intention of becoming a competitor to private businesses in the Faroes. The delicious strawberries from Sandavágur were a real favourite among the islanders. The greenhouse had been rented from the Agricultural Fund for the purpose, and established an arena where young unemployed people could earn valuable working experience, develop new skills and competences, and be part of a dynamic team. A group of 10 youngsters worked in the greenhouse for 3 months, followed by a new group of 10 for 3 months, and so on. Project manager Lív Petersen says that in the greenhouse "it feels like there is summer and sun every day" (ALS 2012). This project was part of the composite programme for unemployed people. It was meaningful, motivating and exciting for young unemployed people to work in the greenhouse, even if some did not like the idea of 'working' in this way when you are jobless. At the same time, another project turned ALS into the largest potato 'farmer' on the Faroes. The greenhouse activities of ALS ran for a few years.

Another early project – Ocean Liner -, which also represented a U-turn in relation to prior paradigms, was launched in co-operation with Smyril Line, a Faroese company running the important North Atlantic ferry link between Denmark, the Faroes and Iceland. The 'mini-crisis' of 2011–2012 had forced ALS to rethink its schemes and to limit young adults' temporal gap between jobs. Late in 2011, ALS contacted Smyril Line to ask the shipping company about its need for new workers for M/S Norrøna. A large group of foreigners, mostly Poles, had been working on board for years, but

now the company (probably upon request from ALS) wanted to recruit more Faroe Islanders. By the next year, 45 former ALS customers were on Smyril Line's payroll. ALS sent 155 persons to 'speed-dating' (5–8 minutes) job interviews at Smyril Line, where the ALS customers briefly presented their individual skills, experiences, interests and motivation. To go straight to the 'job match' table, with face-to-face contact with a potential future employer, was a huge step for some of the ALS customers. Smyril Line was very satisfied with the initiative. The company was completely taken by surprise; it did not expect to find such a talented and valuable workforce among ALS customers. This situation reminded Svein í Heiðunum, the human resources manager of Smyril Line at that time, of what his father (head of a fish factory in the 1980s and 1990s) had once told him: in time of crisis, many people are unemployed even if they are very skilled (ALS, 2012). This success story changed the image of unemployed young adults among business leaders, and they became more positive to the idea of recruiting workers from the ALS system.

FabLabs Faroe Islands and Iceland

Developing the creative talents of marginalized young people could be an effective way to foster both hard and soft skills of those who find themselves out of education or work. FabLabs and the Jyväskylä Rock Academy have used this approach, albeit from two different perspectives, with much creativity at their core: technology and art.

FabLabs is a worldwide project originating at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It aims to "provide widespread access to modern means of invention" (*I'm new here. What's a Fab Lab?*, 2018). There are 34 FabLabs in the Nordic region (9 in Denmark, 8 in Iceland, 7 in Finland, 5 in Norway, 4 in Sweden and 1 in the Faroe Islands) and they collaborate closely with educational institutions such as universities and schools.

We visited one of them on the small island of Vestmannaeyjar, in Iceland, and one in Fuglafjordur, in the Faroe Islands, to conduct interviews with their managers (Karlsdóttir & Cuadrado, 2018). Two points are relevant for the role of Fab-Labs in re-engaging marginalized young people. The first is the pedagogical approach taken in these fabrication laboratories in which teachers act as guides helping students to follow their own path, rather than following a strict curriculum and a set of rules. One of the managers commented:

"We can guide you through [the process] and it leads to different directions (…), for instance, a carpenter will see the many potentialities of 3D printers and someone else will see the textile [clothes designing equipment]. Everybody sees the FabLab with their own perspective and they can have much out of it depending on their interest and background."

FabLabs provide an environment where students are not required to complete a syllabus and can experiment at their own pace:

"You can come here out of curiosity and start doing things. And then you can also come to courses in school. And there are also open days when you can come and do whatever you like."

Thus, this methodology enables students to be free to develop their projects without the pressure of achieving certain goals and being subject to school discipline. This is a central element in the re-engagement of early school leavers or NEETs because experiences of failure (repeating grades) and conflicts with teachers (misbehaviour) are often the root of their disengagement (Byrne & Smyth, 2010; Fernández Enguita, Riviére Gómez, & Mena Martínez, 2010).

The second relevant point is that FabLabs promote both hard and soft skills, often referred to as the skills required for working life in the 21st century. One of the managers noted that the role of FabLabs "is to bring the skill set of the future to the population". Regarding hard skills, by developing their projects, students find themselves in an activity that can foster feelings of excitement, which is not a frequent sensation in 'traditional schooling' (Blikstein, 2013). In addition, by embarking on meaningful projects that trigger their interests, youngsters can acquire knowledge that was hitherto out of their reach (Blikstein, 2013). Regarding soft skills such as team-work, communication or problem-solving abilities, the FabLab environment enhances the sharing of knowledge given that students are frequently faced with such challenges; advising mates or asking for their help is a way to improve personal skills. Lastly, besides providing skills, the work of FabLabs can also boost students' mental health. For example, one successful example of re-engaging excluded students was

told by the Vestmannaeyjars FabLab manager:

"There was a student there that was unemployed and hardly went out of home, all day playing videogames and so on, and then [he] came to a workshop in a FabLab and he found himself, and started working here and there, and started volunteering in the FabLab and now he has been hired to work in a FabLab. And we have seen many examples like that. People find themselves in different areas, they come to a workshop in a FabLab and they grow in confidence out of it."

Mental well-being is an important aspect of personal relationships, both between students and teachers and between students themselves.

Iceland
Menntun núna

This project is a governmental initiative aimed at the vulnerable area of Breiðholt, Reykjavík with a high proportion of drop-outs and immigrant youth, and at North West Iceland (Norðvestur kjördæmi), a region with the lowest educational level/background in the population, and one characterized by a mix of remote agricultural areas and small towns. Menntun núna had the objective of raising the educational level of the population where it was offered as a programme through increasing the number of individuals that complete vocational education, as well as promoting knowledge in Icelandic language among immigrant youth in the region. Activities carried out to meet those aims were, for example, increasing access to skills assessment (*raunfærnimat, real kompetence vurdering*), supporting individuals in completing their education, and encouraging youth to transit to secondary school. This was set up by increasing the provision of support from education and career counsellors. In some cases, Icelandic language educational opportunities were introduced on the job (on-the-job language learning) (http://menntun-nuna.is/).

This project grew out of two initiatives launched by the government in 2011. In a period when unemployment was unusually high in Iceland, the project "Active young people" was launched to enable youth with the goal of guaranteeing either a job or an educational path to all those 16 years old and over who had been unemployed for 3 months. The project proved successful; after 1 year, 50% of participants had found a job and 80% were content with the emphasis of the pro-

gramme (Vinnumálastofnun, 2012). The second initiative involved a general policy of raising educational levels on the labour market, funded by the unions. It evolved into more formalized practices of real competency validation, now taken over by the Education and Training Service Center (*fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins*) and offered at 40 branches. This is based upon a tripartite agreement, funded and owned by the Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASÍ), the Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA), the Federation of State and Municipal Employees (BSRB), the Ministry of Finance and the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland.

VIRK – The Icelandic vocational rehabilitation fund

The vocational rehabilitation fund is a result of an initiative established in 2008 by all principal public and private sector agents in a tripartite agreement. It is responsible for financing and organizing work rehabilitation in Iceland. VIRK means 'active' in English. The project is non-profit and covers all Iceland in its scope and activities. It is not primarily aimed at young people but a substantial group that would be defined as NEETs is being helped through this initiative: 8% of users of VIRK are aged under 25, 23% are 25–34 year-olds, which means that 31% of users are young people.

The emphasis of VIRK is on early intervention, but this can only take place in co-operation with the labour market in Iceland. The labour market parties in Iceland have played a significant role in building up and driving important parts of the welfare system. The sources of payments comprise 80% from labour market and sickness funds and 20% from the state. Currently, ~1.2% of the total labour force is using VIRK (Jónsdóttir, 2019).

In 2008–2018, ~7.6% of the total labour force attended rehabilitation services; following a low-threshold principle, they comprise 560 service functions, with a variety of professionals such as therapists, supervisors and medical staff. It is free of charge for users and individualized in its approach to clients. Every client who attends can receive a combination of services that are provided after meetings with each client about his or her needs and challenges in life. Thereafter, a plan is developed with the client and in co-operation with various stakeholders. The length of services ranges from weeks to several years; the average length of enrolling in the rehabilitation programme is 16 months.

The clients of VIRK are 70% women and 30%

men. About 80% of them have psychological or musculoskeletal problems. Almost all are dealing with very complex problems and the individuals reflect a cross-section of the labour market. A higher proportion of them are unskilled workers, individuals from the service sector and individuals with basic education. Since 2011, every year 74–85% of those discharged from VIRK with work ability enter the labour market, or go into training or education (Virk, 2018).

Individual evaluation of clients' well-being at the beginning and at the end of VIRK services reveals successful progress in the approach to re-engage. Most users (81%) consider psychological consultations provided to be among the most important services. The user's self-image is boosted, their workability has increased and physical and mental health are improved. Society needs employers who are tolerant towards individuals with mental health problems and other chronic health

challenges. It is vital to instil these changes now, given changing work conditions, and an increase in illnesses that reduce workability and sickness leave due to mental illnesses (Virk, 2018). The director of the programme, Vigdís Jónsdóttir, says it is an important mindset for the journey ahead, for the future of the labour market and for its human resources to learn, and to be humble and open-minded. This caring approach enables people to re-engage on their own terms.

Creative, activating/empowering and caring approaches

By exploring different programmes, initiatives and projects in re-engaging young people, we have highlighted examples of re-engaging young people far from education, training and employment into activity. The following diagram (Figure 8.) illustrates the described approaches and underlines that there are no universal solutions – but multiple.

		Creative approach	Activating/Empowering Approach	Caring Approach
W-Sjælland	DK		X	
Sjælland Lolland	DK		X	
Jammerbugt	DK		X	
Hjørring	DK		X	
TAMU	DK			X
Laukaa, Äänekoski, Konnevesi	FI			X
Jyväskylä Rock	FI	X		
Veturallit Jyväskylä	FI	X		X
South Savonia	FI			X
Nordland	NO		X	
Mosjøen	NO	X		
Oppland & Hedmark	NO		X	
Trysil	NO		X	
Hedmarken	NO		X	
Hordaland	NO		X	X
Alta, Finnmark	NO		X	X
Ung Gävleborg	SE			X
Plug In Gävleborg	SE		X	
Hornudden, Strängnäs	SE			X
Motala	SE		X	X
Haparanda-Tornio	SE			X
Kujalleq	GL		X	
Ilulissat & Nuuk, Qaqortoq	GL		X	X
Sandavágur	FO	X		
Fuglafjordur	FO			X
Westman Islands	IS	X		
NW-Iceland	IS		X	
VIRK	IS		X	X

Figure 8. Approaches to re-engaging rural youth NEETs.

11. Conclusions

This report aimed to answer the complex question: What are the patterns and reasons for spatial disparities for young people in the Nordic countries in terms of early school-leaving, youth unemployment and NEETs.

Why spatial disparities?

Young people in rural areas of the Nordic countries are being left behind compared with their urban counterparts. In this report, we have examined the situation for young people who become marginalized through dropping out of school or who do not have access to the labour market; thus, our focus has been on those young people who become marginalized by not being in employment, education or training – NEETs. We have attempted to explain the spatial disparities through a number of possible causes. In addition, we have described some initiatives the Nordic regions have taken in trying to address the issue. Our aim is to provide useful and varied approaches in re-engaging young people back into society.

In the section on early school leavers, we highlighted the situation of rural and urban areas in the Nordic countries. We showed that although Nordic countries are doing relatively well from a European perspective, rural areas in Nordic countries are systematically more affected than urban areas in terms of early school-leaving. In addition, we examined other important factors related to early school-leaving such as social class, gender and ethnicity.

We found that economically disadvantaged youth, boys and immigrants are at greater risk than their advantaged counterparts, girls and natives and that there may be both socio-cultural and structural factors at play.

A number of possible structural factors may contribute to these spatial disparities. The reasons are to be found in a combination of socio-economic conditions, gender culture, unintended outcomes of school reforms and school closures, as well as mental health problems on the increase. For example, the reforms in educational systems prioritizing marketization as a management model have had segregation effects, even if unin-tended. The impact of school closures and longer distances to upper secondary education is felt in rural areas and has implications, e.g., for school completion rates.

The young people not in employment, education or training – NEETs – have been our focus here. All the Nordic countries are faced with displaced youngsters, or a hidden youth or an inactive youth group for various reasons. Based on youth research, we divided them for analytical reasons into three types of challenged youth: victims of recession, workers in the making and the troubled, because we have evidence-based reasons that each of these different groups needs different approaches in supporting them. While we have qualitative evidence from interviews that this group is becoming younger, we also see that the percentage of NEETs continues to increase for 25–29 year-olds. In addition, in most cases, the percentages of NEETs are the highest in rural areas for all age groups.

Complexity of challenges

Given the complexity of the challenges for the Nordic welfare states, we are not able to identify single solutions that would "solve" the problem. Rather what we can hope for is to achieve a better understanding of the many different approaches and efforts that can improve the situation for NEETS, unemployed youths and drop-outs.

Co-operation in the Nordic countries on good transitions from childhood to youth to adulthood

Several factors in our study rhyme with strengthening Nordic co-operation in the social field in a regional perspective. The Nordic countries have sought to provide possibilities for a good childhood that transitions into youth and adulthood in which young men and women are equipped to continue their personal development and their development as citizens. However, there are clearly issues that require greater efforts (Árnason, 2018). Vulnerable youth and adults are a growing group, many of whom are struggling with mental health problems. As we have argued, many suffer to some extent the effects of demographic trends that cre-

ate structural conditions resulting in an increased risk of marginalization for men and women living and growing up in small communities.

What our informants have in common is that they have stressed that while some of the challenges that young people are dealing with have been **minor to start with**, intervention that comes too late to help youngsters re-engage has made the pathway to recovery and activity more complicated.

Many youngsters are at risk of developing long-term social exclusion, which may in future give rise to a number of social and health problems that can extend far into adulthood. This highlights the importance of **early intervention** and interventions that focus on the user, thereby **emphasizing social interventions focusing on the user**.

"Today, the individual can experience the social system and the rules in the social area as perplexing and complex, and the system as not centred on the citizen... Passivity often leads to a worsening of mental problems or abuse. This in turn can lead to housing problems, making it harder to find a solution to a situation of homelessness. Where do we begin? Can we offer abuse treatment without providing sufficient individual support and the prospect of a suitable education that leads to the development of skills and subsequent employment?" (Árnason, 2018).

While we have merely highlighted good examples of actions initiated by various actors – the state, labour market agents, regional authorities, the unions and private actors – the picture we provide is not complete and is always in motion and emerging.

The Nordic countries can co-operate systematically on knowledge and initiatives that work in the social field, and we hope this report helps towards this objective. Our hope is also that this contributes to a better understanding of how knowledge can be brought into action.

The criteria for success in re-engaging young people are not carved in stone. A number of perspectives seem to be crucial for motivation – not any one model. **Low-threshold services** and the provision of a range of support expertise appear vital. **Individual placement and support** also. **Orienting the actions towards identified needs** where the action is launched and **establishing good client–consultant/apprentice–mentor relationships** are also crucial. Frequent staff turnover should be

avoided. The projects vary in the extent to which they build initially on individual consultations and listening to **individual needs**. While this practice was strongly emphasized in many of the Finnish projects and initiatives, we see it also emerging as a trend in many other countries and regions, which underpins the finding by Katznelson (2017) that motivation is a phenomenon that always rests with the individual and should therefore be aimed at the individual.

The projects we have highlighted also differ in approaches (see the diagram above). Many of the projects that we have learned from have had a limited time perspective; for example, those funded by the Social Innovation Fund (many of them in Sweden, Denmark and Finland), in some cases time-limited national programmes (e.g., NAV or erhvervsstyrelsen DK), as well as more structural policy interventions synthesized with national priorities (many of them in Norway). Thus, there are limits to gaining knowledge about the long-term effects. Other projects that are longer lasting will track their participants over time and they have already seen the positive effects of the efforts made.

Unbecoming youth, blossoming as adults

Young people are unbecoming youth; they are always by their nature in transition towards adulthood. However, the group we have focused on here has, for various reasons, had difficulties in this transition. While becoming acquainted with the multifaceted nature of re-engaging young people in rural areas in the Nordic region, we have encountered the notion of socially investing in this group. Shifting the idea from social burden to social investment is an important approach. It is also a preventive one in including the varied group of young people in focus into training, education or work to secure the future welfare society in the Nordic countries. From the perspective of young people, however, they cannot be reduced to an investment and should not feel that they are a return on anyone's investment. Youngsters are many and diverse and constitute an important part of society that should be enabled to pursue their life goals individually. In that way they become an important resource to the region they live in.

From a rural regional perspective, we see many inspiring and inclusive actions to re-engage youngsters. On the other hand, we have also iden-

tified that for many rural places, access to adequate services and support is often complicated by distances, and shortage of financial capacity to accommodate needs and people may only be sporadically provided help (e.g., in Iceland, Greenland and some areas of Finland). We also see that these complex layers of health, education, training, work, well-being and young individuals are crucial for the rural regional areas to thrive.

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