

THE NORRBOTTEN STRATEGY 2040



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The strategy sets out a shared direction for the county's future and supports the development of a sustainable and thriving county. The strategy was developed through a broad co-creation process involving a wide range of stakeholders across the county. Region Norrbotten has overall responsibility for leading and coordinating the work.

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This is our shared starting point.



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A roadmap for the future

What do we want life in Norrbotten to be like in 2040? The regional development strategy – the Norrbotten Strategy – is the county's shared roadmap. Its purpose is to support stakeholders across the county in their work to create a sustainable county for everyone in Norrbotten. The strategy links local needs with national and global goals, looking towards the future.

The Norrbotten Strategy was developed through a co-creation process. Municipalities, public authorities, academia, the business community and civil society, children and young people, national minorities and the indigenous Sámi people took part. More than 1,500 ideas and views were gathered. Together with analyses of current conditions, these have provided an overall picture of the county's challenges and needs.

The strategy is aimed at residents and stakeholders, both within and beyond the county, who contribute to development in Norrbotten. The term “we” is used to underline our shared responsibility. By joining forces, we shape the Norrbotten of today and tomorrow. Roles and responsibilities are clarified in regional action plans.

“All of Norrbotten, together, in new ways” is our shared starting point for implementing the strategy. We set out from our strengths and take on our challenges. In the co-creation process, objectives for four priority areas have emerged. These show which measures need to be prioritised and where our collective efforts should be focused. Four enabling principles are to guide implementation. They help ensure due consideration of people, sustainability, technological development, knowledge exchange and resilience.

Under Ordinance (2017:583) on regional development work, every region must produce a regional development strategy. The Norrbotten Strategy helps to coordinate the county's development work and creates a shared direction. It strengthens the county's ability to meet the challenges of both today and tomorrow. The strategy is based on local conditions and aligns with national guidelines and EU priorities. The UN Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda reinforce its strategic focus and long-term direction.



The Norrbotten Strategy brings together local forces for sustainable development based on local conditions. It links the work in Norrbotten with national goals, EU goals and global goals.



Norrbotten – our shared home

Norrbotten is vast, covering a quarter of Sweden's land area. The county is made up of 14 municipalities with just over 250,000 residents. The contrasts between sparsely populated areas, rural areas, towns and cities create diverse conditions and opportunities for people to shape their lives and futures.

Norrbotten is characterised by strong social ties and close-knit communities. Local engagement creates community and a sense of belonging. There is a rich cultural heritage and a wealth of traditions. The indigenous Sámi people and the national minorities bring cultures, languages and knowledge that strengthen both the economy and society. Nature – with its forests, mountains, rivers and coasts – shapes everyday life and underpins business, livelihoods and recreation. It is a heritage and a resource that we all have a responsibility to safeguard.

Norrbotten sits at the centre of the global transition to a green, fossil-free industry. The county's strong base in industry and natural resources is complemented by established and emerging sectors. Together they broaden the economy, strengthen competitiveness and create new jobs.

Our geographical position, with land borders with Norway and Finland, makes international cooperation, trade and exchange a natural part of living and working here. Norrbotten is part of the Arctic, which affects both climate and society. Some of the defining challenges of our time converge here. They concern security and preparedness, climate change and the balance between natural-resource extraction and respect for indigenous peoples. They also concern demographic challenges and the need to secure reliable transport links.

Development affects different parts of the county in different ways. Major industrial investments and new establishments need to be coordinated with local needs and perspectives. Land and resources are limited, and different needs and interests cannot always be reconciled. Striking a balance between development, people and the environment is one of the county's greatest challenges.

By highlighting our everyday lives, community and the opportunities that exist, we can show what it is like to live in Norrbotten. Through interaction between people and collective action, the Norrbotten we want to live and grow in takes shape.



Challenges we are taking on

The Norrbotten Strategy builds on the county's strengths. It focuses on the challenges that affect people's everyday lives and society as a whole. These are complex and interconnected, yet they also hold new opportunities and ways forward.

Attract and retain residents.

Norrbotten offers a wide variety of living environments, from rural areas to towns and cities. Sparsely populated areas have become increasingly attractive to new residents. The freedom to choose where to live according to their needs and lifestyle is an important part of the county's appeal. The labour market has long been characterised by low unemployment, high demand for labour and varied career opportunities.

The county faces major demographic challenges. The population is ageing and the share of people of working age is shrinking. This means fewer people of working age are supporting a growing number of dependants, making it harder to sustain public services and vibrant communities. Many young people leave the county to study, work or seek new experiences, and too few choose to return. More women than men move out of the county, creating an uneven gender balance.

All municipalities and stakeholders need to plan for the future. They have to create conditions for more residents while also managing a stable or declining population. The differences between municipalities are significant and shape local needs and conditions.

Promote public health. Norrbotten has several assets that support wellbeing, such as closeness to nature, good opportunities for outdoor recreation and lower perceived stress than in metropolitan regions. There is also a strong social fabric characterised by safety and trust.

At the same time, the county faces significant public-health challenges. Residents, men in particular, have shorter life expectancy and often poorer health than the country as a whole. High blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and overweight are major health challenges for residents. Among children and young people, sedentary behaviour, physical inactivity, loneliness and poor mental health are rising. An ageing population intensifies the challenges further. Differences in socio-economic circumstances, such as education, labour-market participation, income and housing, affect people's chances of good health. Culture, norms and gender roles also play a part. Meeting these challenges calls for long-term, cross-sectoral public-health work guided by equality and gender equality.

Diversify the labour market. Norrbotten has world-leading industries in green technology and natural-resource extraction. Alongside them, new sectors are emerging that broaden the economy and strengthen employment. Together, they create the conditions for a more resilient and diversified labour market.

The county's economy depends on natural-resource extraction, exposing it to swings in the global economy. Some parts of the county have a more diversified business structure and higher levels of educational attainment, a strength to build on. Major industrial investments can reshape communities quickly, requiring municipalities to adapt service provision, housing and infrastructure. This creates opportunities, but can also bring risks such as social unrest and rising crime.

Industrial growth, combined with low unemployment, increases competition for labour across sectors and industries. In several parts of the county the labour market is dependent on a handful of sectors, which increases vulnerability. On average, Norrbotten's workforce has a lower level of education than the national average. This limits people's choices and affects the capacity of sectors and industries to innovate and secure the skills they need. The lower education levels also contribute to income gaps between women and men. This is especially true in gender-segregated sectors where educational requirements are low.

Develop communities and the built environment. To build attractive communities across Norrbotten, investment is needed in housing, modern infrastructure and efficient transport. The need for housing and infrastructure is especially great in the parts of the county where business is expanding. At the same time, municipalities have differing capacities to meet local needs. The county has a great opportunity to shape the communities of the future, but rapid development also brings new challenges.

Roads and railways are under mounting pressure from growing freight traffic. This affects living environments, land use, road safety and mobility. Capacity constraints and a substantial maintenance backlog reduce the efficiency of the transport system. Limited digital connectivity and public transport create unequal conditions for sparsely populated areas, rural areas, towns and cities. The roll-out of digital infrastructure is largely market-driven and is thus not always prioritised according to need. Unequal access to public transport hampers the shift to more sustainable travel. This affects residents' ability to live, work and travel.

Increase preparedness and self-sufficiency. Norrbotten's experience, knowledge and cooperation with our Arctic neighbours are important strengths. We have the conditions needed to build resilient communities that harness the capabilities of the entire population in preparedness efforts. The global situation places new demands on how we plan communities and strengthen preparedness. Long distances, few alternative supply routes and heavy reliance on imports make the region vulnerable. A robust transport infrastructure is vital, both in everyday and crisis scenarios. Limited local production and stockpiling leaves the community vulnerable and shows the need to strengthen local supply capacity. Disruptions to food and energy supply, and to other essential functions such as transport, public services and digital infrastructure, can quickly have serious consequences. At the same time, conditions for land-based sectors are worsening. To reduce vulnerability, we need greater local production, resource availability and stockpiles in the region. Experience and methods rooted in traditional and contemporary knowledge are necessary to build robust preparedness throughout society.

Act for climate and nature. Norrbotten is a key player in the global climate transition and contributes to European competitiveness. Some of the world's most ambitious investments in fossil-free industry take place here. This offers a chance to



support sustainable development through innovation. Local industry has long had a major climate footprint; Reducing that footprint is part of taking responsibility both today and for the future. Climate change already affects people's daily lives, health, business and society. The effects are felt in both the short and the long term. Managing climate impacts calls for both preventive and long-term adaptive action.

Nature and biodiversity are under heavy strain. Threatened ecosystems can no longer provide the same ecosystem services, such as clean water, pollination and climate regulation. The transition must take place within ecological limits. Trade-offs must be made, with both developmental and environmental concerns in mind.

Balance land-use interests. Norrbotten is a place for reindeer husbandry, forestry, agriculture, nature-based tourism and other land-based industries. At the same time, communities are transforming quickly, with major new establishments, industrial transition and increasing pressure on land and water resources. This means communities must develop in ways that weigh different interests and perspectives against one another and shape long-term solutions for each place.

Land use is one of Norrbotten's most complex issues. Despite the county's vast area, land is limited. This stems from rich natural resources, valuable assets, and multiple areas and interests of national importance, all of which lead to intense competition. Societal development affects land, water, nature and people in many ways. Development must be balanced, with regard for local communities, laws, environmental goals and national interests. Competing land-use claims need to be managed so that their combined impact on nature and society is no greater than necessary. Meeting these needs requires a holistic view and dialogue.

Secure the energy supply. Norrbotten is one of the largest producers of fossil-free energy in Sweden and Europe. This gives us both a responsibility and an opportunity to lead the way towards a sustainable energy system. Phasing out fossil fuels in society requires technological development. Large amounts of electricity are produced here, and part of the surplus has long been exported. Capacity in the electricity grid varies across the county and does not always match local demand.

To accommodate new industrial establishments, we need to use a greater share of our electricity surplus locally and make energy use more efficient. We also need to increase production and expand infrastructure where capacity is limited. Long lead times, growing competition for raw materials to produce bioenergy and conflicts over land use must be managed with a holistic view where all perspectives are considered.

For present-day and
forward-looking statistics, visit
utvecklanorrbotten.se/rus



Our way forward

To meet the challenges of today and tomorrow, we need to work together, think in new ways and build on what works. By taking a place-based approach and tailoring measures to local conditions, we can create solutions that strengthen Norrbotten as a whole.

Four enabling principles must be considered in all our work. They help us take responsibility for people and sustainability, harness the opportunities of digital transformation, learn from others and build a resilient society.

The work takes place within four priority areas: *A life full of opportunity*, *A learning and attractive county*, *Innovative and competitive* and *A closer Norrbotten*. Decisions and priorities must benefit both those who live here today and future generations, and contribute to the transition in Sweden and Europe. Conscious choices must guide the initiatives and investments that strengthen the county's competitiveness and resilience.

To reach the goals we need to try new ways of working, share knowledge and learn from experience. By exploring new approaches while building on what already works, we can create solutions that move development forward. When measures are tailored to the specific conditions and needs of each place, the whole county grows stronger, both today and for the future.



NORRBOTTEN 2040

All of Norrbotten, together, in new ways

A LIFE FULL OF
OPPORTUNITY

A LEARNING AND
ATTRACTIVE COUNTY

INNOVATIVE AND
COMPETITIVE

A CLOSER
NORRBOTTEN

We put people and sustainability at the centre

We create opportunities through digital transformation

We learn from others and share our knowledge

We build a resilient society



All of Norrbotten, together, in new ways is the starting point for implementing the Norrbotten Strategy. The enabling principles must be considered in all work within the strategy's four priority areas.

Enabling principles

The enabling principles build on local conditions, responding to both current and future needs. The principles should inform all decisions and contribute to sustainable development, in line with national and global goals.

We put people and sustainability at the centre

As we develop the county, we should take account of both current and future generations. We should care for every place, with respect for history and responsibility for the future. Girls and boys, women and men – regardless of their identity, background, ability or place of residence – should have equal opportunities to be heard, participate and shape their lives. Honor culture and the oppression of individuals must never be accepted. Development should strengthen the individual's independence and ability to improve their living conditions.

A sustainable society rests on a balance between social, economic and environmental dimensions. We should promote good health and safety, remain within planetary boundaries and use economic resources as a tool. Gender equality, equality and anti-discrimination must run through all our work to increase participation and reduce differences. Development should promote circular solutions, create value, give back more than we take and protect ecosystems.

We create opportunities through digital transformation

Digital transformation is about how new digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), changes the way we work, collaborate and create value. The technology can free up time, analyse data, detect patterns and offer new solutions to complex problems. In Norrbotten, digital technologies that help overcome distance plays a particularly important role in strengthening accessibility, inclusion and services across the county.

Successful digital transformation requires curiosity, courage and an exploratory way of working. Investment in learning and skills development should include everyone, from preschool to working life. Digital technology is a powerful resource when used responsibly and inclusively. Security and ethical considerations should be integrated throughout the development process.



We learn from others and share our knowledge

Norrbotnen is a central part of the European Arctic. The county has land borders with Norway and Finland and a long coastline along the Bay of Bothnia, the northernmost part of the Baltic Sea. We need to use our geographical position and our historical ties to the neighbouring regions of the North Calotte to strengthen the county's strategic role for Sweden, the EU and NATO. This creates opportunities for greater trade, more innovation and closer international cooperation. In light of the changing security environment, the EU's interest in the Arctic is also growing, which further reinforces the county's importance.

The county's vast area and sparse population, together with climate change and sensitive ecosystems, affect our communities. Promoting mutual learning and cooperation is therefore especially important. By drawing on and sharing knowledge and experience, we can develop solutions suited to our Arctic conditions. In this way we can make more effective use of our collective assets.

We build a resilient society

Preparedness and safety require a holistic approach. When preparedness issues are integrated into planning and decision-making, society's ability to act and remain resilient during crises and in the event of war is strengthened. Sweden's total defence system, encompassing both military and civil defence should be capable of being reinforced quickly in the face of climate change, social unrest or security threats. By strengthening self-sufficiency and reducing dependence on vulnerable supply chains, endurance and stability are created. This requires a robust transport infrastructure that can secure the supply of goods and services even during disruptions.

A resilient society rests on trust, participation and democratic values. It is strengthened when the public sector, business and civil society collaborate. Good public health, culture and sport foster community and strengthen preparedness.



Priority areas

Four priority areas set the direction for Norrbotten's development. The objectives show where our collective efforts should be focused. Together with a description of the ways forward, they clarify which measures are needed to create a strong, competitive and cohesive county.

A LIFE FULL OF OPPORTUNITY

OBJECTIVES:

- Culture, sport and outdoor recreation for all
- Spatial planning for safe and attractive living environments
- Thriving rural areas with accessible services
- Health and wellbeing throughout life

A LEARNING AND ATTRACTIVE COUNTY

OBJECTIVES:

- A dynamic skills system
- A gender-equal and inclusive working life
- Lifelong learning for skills and development
- Retaining and attracting workers and supporting their integration into working life and local communities

INNOVATIVE AND COMPETITIVE

OBJECTIVES:

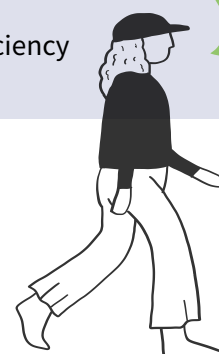
- A good place to do business
- A more diversified business base for stronger communities
- Transition to sustainable resource use
- Collaboration that strengthens research and innovation

A CLOSER NORRBOTTEN

OBJECTIVES:

- Developing resilient infrastructure
- Building an integrated transport system
- Promoting sustainable transport
- Strengthening digital infrastructure and energy efficiency

The speech bubbles highlight input from dialogues across the county





A LIFE FULL OF OPPORTUNITY

Good access to culture, sport and outdoor recreation strengthens well-being, community and public health. Safe, well-planned living environments make the county more attractive. Cooperation and new solutions help build thriving local communities. This section describes our shared journey towards a life full of opportunity.

OBJECTIVE

Culture, sport and outdoor recreation for all

Ways forward

- Promote active leisure and participation in nature-based, sporting and cultural activities
- Strengthen the independent role of the arts and foster creativity
- Strengthen civil society and the influence of children and young people
- Safeguard and strengthen the county's cultural heritage and cultural diversity

Culture, sport and outdoor recreation play an important role in society. They build community and improve quality of life, helping residents feel they belong and find meaning. Norrbotten's nature offers opportunities for experiences, movement and recreation. By developing these environments, we shape places where residents thrive and meet. The environments should be accessible and inclusive, so that people with particular needs can also take part and engage. When restrictive norms are challenged, new opportunities arise and we can shape a Norrbotten where everyone feels welcome and needed. Culture and creativity should be given room to grow, and the arts should be an integral and independent part of society.

A strong civil society and more meeting places are needed to promote social participation. By strengthening community associations and voluntary organisations, arenas are created where people get involved. Public, private and civil-society organisations together create the conditions for local communities to grow and develop. Children and young people should have the chance to shape their lives and contribute to social development. With greater influence and a stronger voice, new opportunities open up for them to organise their own activities, take part in community life and influence decisions about their future.

The county's cultural heritage environments – such as buildings, traditions, languages and stories – need to be cared for, brought to life and made accessible. They draw visitors, spark curiosity and strengthen the sense of belonging. When past meets present, new ideas can grow and communities renew themselves.

Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset, Swedish Finns and the indigenous Sámi people are of particular significance to Norrbotten's culture and history. It is above all here that the national minority languages Sámi, Meänkieli and Finnish meet. The cultural heritage of Sápmi and the Torne Valley, which over generations has shaped the county's character and cultural identity, needs to be brought to the fore. By strengthening cultural understanding and competence in society, room is created for the minorities' languages, traditions and participation.

OBJECTIVE

Spatial planning for safe and attractive living environments

Ways forward

- Strengthen resource-efficient urban and rural development
- Promote variety in the housing supply
- Strengthen ecosystems and biodiversity
- Strengthen cooperation in spatial planning

Spatial planning should promote sustainable construction, reuse, sharing services and circular resource flows. Existing environments and buildings should be maintained and used as resources in development. Planning should integrate functional and social values to create safe and lively living environments. Planning should integrate a gender-equality perspective and ensure that living environments and public spaces meet society's needs. Art and culture should be integrated as part of planning.

Urban and rural development should build on existing corridors and nodes to ensure efficient use of land and water resources. Nearby nature, green areas and parks are important for play, movement, outdoor life and meetings between people all year round. By integrating nature, green spaces and waterside environments into planning, the character of places and residents' quality of life are strengthened.

A well-functioning housing market requires a varied supply of homes that meet residents' differing needs and circumstances. Targeted measures are needed for older people, young people and lower-income households. Work and housing opportunities should be developed so that more people can live and work in the same place. This strengthens the basis for local services, schools and healthcare and broadens municipalities' tax base. Where fly-in/fly-out working arrangements are used, it should be planned so as to contribute to safe and inclusive communities, without disrupting the housing market.

Climate adaptation is essential to manage the consequences of climate change. Through both preventive and direct measures we can preserve natural environments, restore ecosystems, strengthen biodiversity and safeguard essential infrastructure. In this way the county can better handle the impacts of climate change and make society more resilient.

Cooperation on spatial planning that involves several municipalities, counties and national stakeholders needs to be strengthened. Regional planning evidence and strategies should be used to create a holistic view, long-term thinking and collaboration. They clarify connections, conflicting objectives, areas and interests of national importance and the combined effects of different measures. Through regional and national coordination, shared challenges can be managed and opportunities seized.

OBJECTIVE

Thriving rural areas with accessible services

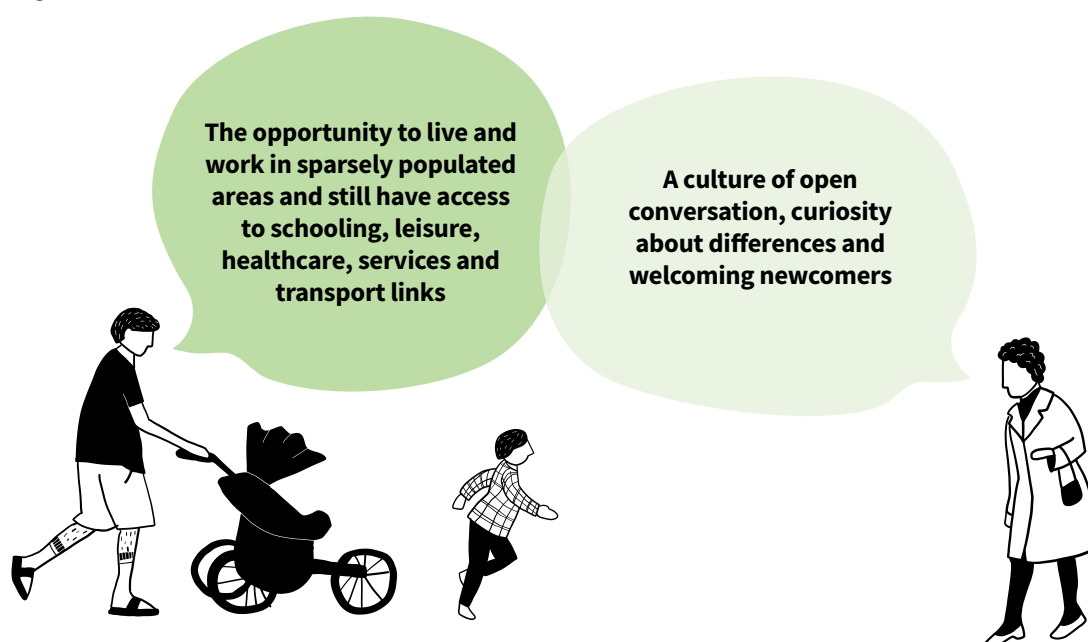
Ways forward

- More opportunities for culture, education and social contact
- Promote everyday services close to people
- Strengthen local hubs and shared solutions
- Promote local engagement and collaboration

For the whole county to be an attractive place to live, new solutions and ways of working are needed. This requires close cooperation between local, regional and national stakeholders. Such cooperation helps bridge distances, secure services and create thriving local communities. Digital services can improve access to culture, education, services and social interaction. These need to be complemented by physical places where people of all ages can meet. In this way, participation, inclusion and social cohesion are strengthened.

In rural areas, access to groceries, fuel, postal services, pharmacy services and payment services must be secured and developed. Public transport needs to be fit for purpose so that residents can access public and other services. Service points should be developed and strengthened as local hubs to facilitate everyday life and support local enterprise. Cooperative and shared solutions need to be encouraged. In this way residents and local stakeholders can create services, broaden the range of services and improve access, together.

Civil society creates local capacity for development. Local associations and voluntary initiatives should be supported through collaboration and access to resources. Through shared premises and coordination, more people can organise activities and create meeting places. This promotes participation and offers the chance to develop vibrant rural areas together.



OBJECTIVE

Health and wellbeing throughout life

Ways forward

- Strengthen collaboration for health-promoting and preventive work
- Promote physical and mental health at all ages
- Reduce health differences through gender equality and equality
- Integrate health aspects into spatial planning and living environments

Public health is the foundation of a strong society. To improve conditions, cooperation is needed between the region, municipalities, public agencies, businesses and civil society. Through investment in health-promoting and preventive measures, the share of residents with good mental and physical health rises. When more people feel well, demand for healthcare is reduced, and society's preparedness and resilience are strengthened.

Children and young people need access to safe environments, supportive adults, healthy eating habits, daily physical activity and support to succeed at school. Early measures involving children and parents should be carried out so that more young people can complete upper secondary education and enjoy good health. These conditions serve as a foundation for lifelong learning, personal development and healthy living habits.

The conditions for a good balance between school, work, leisure and social relationships need to be strengthened. The whole population, of all ages, should have access to meeting places and cultural and leisure activities. These strengthen mental wellbeing, social contact and participation. Networks that counter loneliness also need to be developed.

Differences in socio-economic circumstances such as income, education, employment and housing affect people's chances of good health. Culture, norms, gender roles, gender identity and other living conditions also play a part. To reduce these differences, measures to promote equality and gender equality are needed, including through cultural competence that makes it possible to understand and meet the needs of different groups. Early support measures create good conditions for wellbeing throughout life, and collaboration between stakeholders reinforces the effect of those measures. Health aspects should be integrated into spatial planning and into residential, school and workplace environments.

**We need to work
on changing
norms, attitudes
and behaviour**







A LEARNING AND ATTRACTIVE COUNTY

Education is fundamental to development and skills provision. More residents should have the chance to find their own paths into employment and entrepreneurship. Diversity is an asset in a labour market where everyone is needed, and education and training provision needs to adapt continuously to changing needs.. This section describes our shared journey towards a learning and attractive county.

OBJECTIVE

A dynamic skills system

Ways forward

- Promote effective structures for collaboration
- Improve skills matching
- Develop tailored and flexible solutions
- Create more pathways into employment, education and training.

The county's labour market is constantly changing. Unemployment is low while demand for labour is high. The labour market needs the full participation of the working-age population. Through effective structures for collaboration between stakeholders at local, regional and national levels, the county's skills challenges can be identified more clearly, making coordinated measures and shared solutions possible. Skills needs in the county and the local labour-market areas need to be mapped and analysed regularly. This provides a basis for prioritising the right measures over the long term.

Joint efforts should improve the match between skills supply and labour-market demand. Strategic partnerships and innovative solutions are needed to make it easier for employers to recruit. Employers, together with education providers, need to take responsibility for planning and delivering training. Education and training provision should be flexible and tailored to both the public sector and business.

When many stakeholders collaborate and think in new ways, knowledge can be shared and common resources used effectively. This gives more residents the chance to explore paths in employment, entrepreneurship and education. At the same time, it contributes to communities where residents, civil society, academia and the public and private sectors take responsibility and play an active part in developing the county's labour market.

**It takes courage
to challenge old
assumptions about how
education is delivered**



OBJECTIVE

A gender-equal and inclusive working life

Ways forward

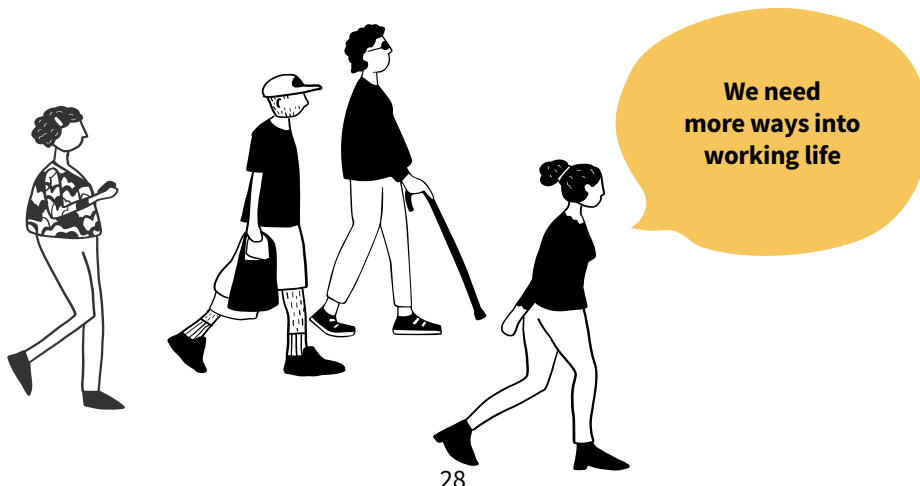
- Broaden recruitment and draw on diversity
- Promote gender-equal study and career choices and working conditions
- Lower thresholds in working life
- Strengthen validation and recognise all skills

To achieve an inclusive working life, everyone should have equal opportunities for influence and be able to participate fully. It is especially important that young people get the chance to establish themselves early in the labour market and gain work experience. Recruitment practices need to be broadened and occupational gender segregation reduced so that more can take part. Employers need to see diversity as an asset, and efforts to prevent discrimination and unequal treatment needs to be prioritised on the basis of everyone's equal worth.

Early measures in school are important for breaking down gender segregation in occupations and industries. Pupils need to be encouraged to make study and career choices based on interest rather than gender-stereotyped norms and traditions. At the same time, working life should offer equal and gender-equal conditions and a good work-life balance. This promotes both health and commitment.

Measures and support for both individuals and employers should reduce exclusion and reduce barriers to employment. Language training combined with work can accelerate labour-market integration for foreign-born residents. New technology, such as AI and other digital solutions, can improve accessibility by removing barriers in the working environment for people with physical, sensory or cognitive disabilities.

Skills validation needs to be strengthened to make people's experience and skills visible. By assessing and recognising both formally and informally acquired skills and competences, the time needed for education and training can be reduced and pathways into employment or career transitions made easier. Validation also makes people's skills visible to employers and makes it easier to match people's skills with labour-market needs.



OBJECTIVE

Lifelong learning for skills and development

Ways forward

- Raise educational attainment and broaden the range of available options
- Strengthen lifelong learning
- Develop local learning centres as education hubs
- Increase collaboration between education and working life

Educational attainment among the county's residents and access to education need to improve. The education system spans from preschool to university, and every step matters for individuals' opportunities to develop throughout life. Preschool and compulsory school play a particularly important role in providing a stable foundation for lifelong learning. Quality teaching and adequate teacher staffing levels create conditions for everyone to complete their studies, regardless of where they live or other circumstances.

After upper secondary school, there should be good access to university, adult education, liberal adult education, higher vocational education and labour-market training. Programmes, courses and continuing professional development need to be updated regularly to keep pace with rapid change. This also applies to people already in working life. The range of education and training opportunities should be broad enough to give everyone the chance to participate on their own terms. Learning centres in the county's municipalities need to be developed both technically and pedagogically to act as local hubs for education. Through well-developed learning environments, residents are given equal opportunities to develop and upgrade their skills, wherever they live.

Close cooperation between employers and education providers creates more placement opportunities and apprenticeships. This gives pupils and students the chance to apply their learning and make contact with working life. At the same time, it helps more people gain better conditions to enter employment with employers in the county and stay on after completing their education.

Wider access to educational and career guidance, combined with a broad range of educational opportunities, makes individual career choices and mobility within and between occupations easier. Continuous professional development creates better conditions to meet changes in the labour market and to develop as an individual.

OBJECTIVE

Retaining, attracting and establishing workforce

Ways forward

- Build strong and credible place brands
- Promote contentment and inclusion
- Make the breadth of the labour market and lifestyle options visible
- Strengthen the capacity to welcome new residents

For more people to want to live and work here, strong and credible place brands need to be built for both the municipalities and the county as a whole. Through targeted marketing, the county's range of opportunities can be highlighted. A brand is built from within and should reflect reality. This depends on local pride, well-being and confidence in the future. Local nature and outdoor life add to the appeal and quality of life by offering people varied opportunities for recreation and meaningful leisure.

Everyone who lives in Norrbotten should be able to participate in developing the place where they live and work. Newcomers need to be actively included so that they thrive, feel at home and develop a sense of belonging. When established and new residents engage and share experiences, environments are created where people want to live and stay.

To attract talent nationally and internationally, we need to make visible the breadth of the labour market and the different lifestyles the county offers. There are many sectors and occupations here, including some not always associated with Norrbotten. There are jobs both for people with shorter educational backgrounds and for those with specialist expertise.

Attracting new residents is not enough. Measures that support well-being and integration into working life and local communities, improve the likelihood of people choosing to stay. Municipalities, businesses and civil society must work together to draw on people's experience and language skills and promote participation in cultural and leisure activities. In this way, the county can become a long-term choice for more people.







INNOVATIVE AND COMPETITIVE

Norrbotten's competitiveness is strengthened through innovation. An improved business climate gives companies and new ideas room to grow. A broader and more diversified business base makes the county less vulnerable. This section describes our shared journey towards an innovative and competitive county.

OBJECTIVE

A good place to do business

Ways forward

- Promote an entrepreneurial mindset
- Develop business support structures for entrepreneurship and enterprise.
- Strengthen the innovation ecosystem
- Increase international trade and global market reach

Entrepreneurial spirit is strengthened by a culture that welcomes new ideas and encourages exploration. This promotes fresh thinking and gives people of all ages, backgrounds and circumstances a chance to contribute and develop. To support this, schools, the business community and business support organisations need to work together to inspire children, young people and professionals. Guidance, role models and exchange of experience create opportunities to test ideas and develop them together. Support and mentoring shorten the path from idea to business creation. This builds long-term relationships between companies and skilled people and lets us draw on new perspectives.

A favourable business environment gives companies of all sizes the opportunity to establish, develop and grow. When measures are tailored to geographical conditions and companies' specific needs, they become better targeted and more effective. To strengthen the county's long-term competitiveness, sustainable local establishments and investments need to be encouraged. The business support system should offer meeting places, education, capital and advice. By integrating gender equality and equal opportunities into the system, its ability to support enterprise and innovation improves, and new perspectives are taken on board.

Regional innovation ecosystems must be strengthened by linking stakeholders, resources and meeting places. Companies, organisations, public agencies and research organisations need to collaborate more to exchange knowledge and experience, and to think in new ways. This bolsters opportunities for innovation across sectors and industries.

To boost foreign trade, better conditions need to be created for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to reach international markets. Digitalisation is opening new avenues for collaboration and business development. Companies should be encouraged to build on their strengths and develop tailored, globally competitive products.



**Encourage creativity
and inventiveness
at school**

OBJECTIVE

A broader business sector for a stronger community

Ways forward

- Increase diversification and resilience
- Raise value added
- Strengthen companies' access to skills and support
- Promote a gender-equal and equal business sector

The county's resource-based industries, which use natural resources such as minerals, metals, forests and energy, are the core of the economy. They create value for Norrbotten, Sweden and Europe. Through targeted measures, existing industries are to be strengthened, the business base diversified and natural resources used sustainably. This makes the county less vulnerable and strengthens the resilience of its businesses. It also contributes to greater self-sufficiency and creates better conditions for thriving communities and a stable economy that can withstand both economic fluctuations and external pressure.

Value added refers to the additional value created in a product or service before it is sold. This can mean improving quality, adding features or adapting products and services to better meet customers' needs. As value added increases, companies can realise more of the local potential and become more competitive. To create new business opportunities, companies need access to resources, skills, support and advice. This makes it possible for them to develop their products and services to their full potential.

To create a more gender-equal and inclusive business sector, between genders and more broadly, companies and organisations need to encourage openness and cooperation, so that ideas from different perspectives can grow. When more people get the chance to contribute, the rate of innovation capacity increases and new business opportunities can arise. By stimulating a diversity of ideas, both new and existing companies develop across different sectors and structures. This broadens the business sector and makes it less vulnerable. For Norrbotten, a broader and more resilient business base is essential for attracting and retaining residents and skills.

OBJECTIVE

Transition to sustainable resource use

Ways forward

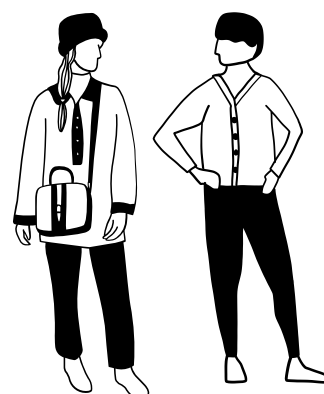
- Promote the shift to fossil-free energy and production
- Strengthen companies' resource use and capacity for innovation
- Develop circular business models
- Strengthen the return of resources for regional and local benefit

Through the transition to fossil-free production and more efficient use of resources, carbon emissions in resource-based industries are falling. This creates new opportunities, makes the county less dependent on imported fossil energy and strengthens resilience against global crises. For the transition to succeed, the county's companies need to adapt to new requirements and market opportunities. By strengthening their competitiveness, they can contribute to the transition of society and industry.

To promote a circular economy, new ways of working, business models, products and services need to be developed. The focus should be on long-term profitability through efficient resource use, less waste and longer-lasting materials. By-products should be seen as a resource and returned to circulation, where they create new value and reduce demand for virgin resources. Greater collaboration between public, private and civil-society stakeholders is needed, so that knowledge and experience can be shared and used. This creates conditions for innovative solutions to reduce dependence on finite resources.

By strengthening collaboration between industry, society and civil society, solutions can be created in the communities where industries are located. Part of the economic return from place-bound natural resources such as ore, minerals, hydropower and wind power needs to be returned to the areas where they are extracted or generated. This enables economic returns to benefit local communities, generating regional and local value, supporting welfare and enabling investment in essential public services.

**Invest in innovation,
sustainable enterprise
and the development of
new business models**



OBJECTIVE

Collaboration that strengthens research and innovation

Ways forward

- Foster an innovation-driven culture
- Promote innovations that solve societal challenges
- Strengthen research infrastructure and collaboration
- Promote needs-driven research

Innovation involves both developing new solutions that open up new markets and improving existing products and services. We need to promote a culture that actively supports innovation. A key element is to offer equal opportunities to contribute to innovation, with attention to both gender equality and wider equality, encouraging people to think in new ways. Fostering cooperation between academia, civil society, private and public sectors creates environments where ideas can grow. In this way, solutions can be developed to meet complex societal challenges.

Partnerships with other regions, nationally and internationally, should connect Norrbotten to wider innovation ecosystems and research networks. A well-developed and accessible research infrastructure makes it possible to access resources and skills. Together, these partnerships and infrastructures create better conditions to put knowledge into practice and develop new products and services in collaboration.

A strong research environment is an important resource and creates opportunities to remain at the forefront in various fields. Innovation environments, where knowledge can be translated into practical applications, are needed to bring research closer to practical use. By promoting interdisciplinary research, where different fields of expertise collaborate, advanced solutions can be developed. Test and demonstration environments make it possible to turn research into concrete products and services that meet the county's needs. Here, new solutions can be tried and refined before they reach the market and users.







A CLOSER NORRBOTTEN

Infrastructure connects people, places and businesses, making everyday life easier. Well-functioning roads, railways, airports and ports, together with a stable energy supply, are essential for people to live, work and visit the county. Mobile and broadband networks should cover the whole county and be both fast and reliable. This section describes our shared journey towards a closer Norrbotten.

OBJECTIVE

Developing resilient infrastructure

Ways forward

- Promote coherent planning
- Build robust solutions for safety and preparedness
- Strengthen the interplay between infrastructure and landscape
- Increase inter-regional collaboration

Norrbotten's physical infrastructure should form a coherent and resilient system. It needs to meet needs in transport, energy, digital communication and water and wastewater infrastructure. The infrastructure should be planned so that everyday life is safe and accessible. Flows of energy, information and goods also need to be secured. In this way, vital connections are created both within the county and to the wider world. A resilient infrastructure that quickly returns to full functionality after a disruption is crucial for security, crisis preparedness and the continuity of vital societal functions. Investments therefore need to be planned and carried out to strengthen robustness and increase flexibility. These investments should also serve both civilian and military needs.

The roll-out of physical infrastructure is important for the county's development, while coherent natural and cultural environments need to be safeguarded. Ecological and social perspectives should be considered at the earliest stages of planning to avoid barriers in the landscape. Other land-use claims also need to be included to minimise the combined impact on nature and society. Through early collaboration and a holistic view, both natural values and society's development are safeguarded.

To make measures as effective as possible, coordination is needed between national, regional and municipal authorities, including across national borders. Spatial planning data and evidence should be used as a tool for collaboration. This creates a shared view of priorities and needs. East-west connections, including border crossings, are especially important because they complement north-south investments. Additional infrastructure links between Sweden, Norway and Finland strengthen total-defence capabilities in all three countries and contribute to European competitiveness. This is in line with security-policy needs and meets requirements linked to NATO membership.

Try leaving the car at home and take public transport instead



OBJECTIVE

Building a cohesive transport system

Ways forward

- Establish good accessibility
- Improve the road network and create safe, attractive corridors
- Increase rail capacity and resilience for freight and passenger transport
- Strengthen the link to the wider world through ports and airports

Roads, railways, airports and ports connect communities across the county's vast territory. The transport infrastructure needs to be developed into a coherent system in which efficient and seamless interchanges between transport modes are prioritised. This eases business logistics and makes everyday journeys smoother, including for visitors. The infrastructure is concentrated in a few corridors, so their capacity and resilience need to be strengthened to reduce vulnerability to disruption.

In many places, especially in rural areas, the car remains very important for people's mobility. Norrbotten's geography requires a road network with standards and speed limits that make long-distance commuting possible. When the road network is of a good standard, journey times shorten and distances feel smaller. The road network matters not only for mobility, but is also an important part of rural living environments. Place-specific measures need to be carried out to create safety and well-being where people live and move. Better coordination of measures within the transport infrastructure means resources can be used more efficiently and the impact on people and the environment minimised.

The railway network in the county should be developed for higher capacity and robustness, so that greater volumes and more efficient transport of both passengers and freight is possible. The North Bothnia Line needs to be built all the way to Luleå to achieve full effect for the needs of Sweden, Norway and Finland. New stations along the railway network can expand travel options, with shorter journey times and larger labour-market regions. The Iron Ore Line (Malmbanan), all the way from Narvik to the Port of Luleå, needs to be developed to match its importance for Sweden and Europe. For a coherent and efficient transport system, Norrbotten's ports also need to be developed. This enables more efficient transport and transshipment, larger volumes and new types of goods.

The airports need to be developed and strengthened to ensure access to essential societal functions across the county. Long-term investment, coordination and greater central-government responsibility are required to reduce perceived distances within the county and to the rest of Sweden. In this way, the links to the wider world are strengthened. More direct international air connections to and from Norrbotten create better conditions for business and strengthen the county's appeal.

OBJECTIVE

Promoting sustainable transport

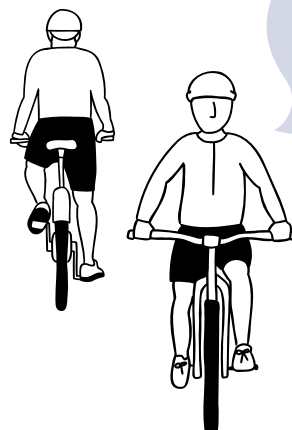
Ways forward

- Promote a gender-equal and accessible transport system
- Reduce car dependence and pursue fossil-free travel
- Encourage active travel for lively places and safe freedom of movement
- Enable seamless multimodal travel

Norrbottnen's transport system should be designed to be gender-equal and to promote accessibility for all residents. An important part of the transition is to reduce car dependence through increased carpooling, car-sharing schemes and a broader range of public transport. At the same time, the shift to fossil-free fuels must take place to sharply reduce climate and environmental impact. The transition is especially important for the county's resource-based industries, where fossil fuels and long transport routes dominate. The infrastructure for fossil-free fuels needs to be expanded. The county also needs to be at the forefront of the shift to fossil-free aviation fuels. This is a prerequisite for securing good access to the wider world without causing high greenhouse-gas emissions.

Sustainable travel and health-promoting spatial planning mean encouraging more residents to choose active travel, such as walking and cycling. Getting more people moving in public spaces also creates life and social contact, while strengthening public health and increasing the independence of children and young people.

To encourage sustainable travel by public transport, all modes – bus, rail, air, waterborne transport and taxi – need to be available and better integrated. Services need to be planned and adapted to travellers' needs and local conditions. In this way, public transport becomes an attractive option for more people. It should make it possible to travel to work, education, leisure activities and services. Collaboration between stakeholders and different modes of transport is needed to create seamless travel and meet travellers' needs. Smooth flows and good connections make it easier to travel within the county and across borders.



**Expand the cycle paths
and encourage
sustainable travel in town
and country**

OBJECTIVE

Strengthening digital infrastructure and energy efficiency

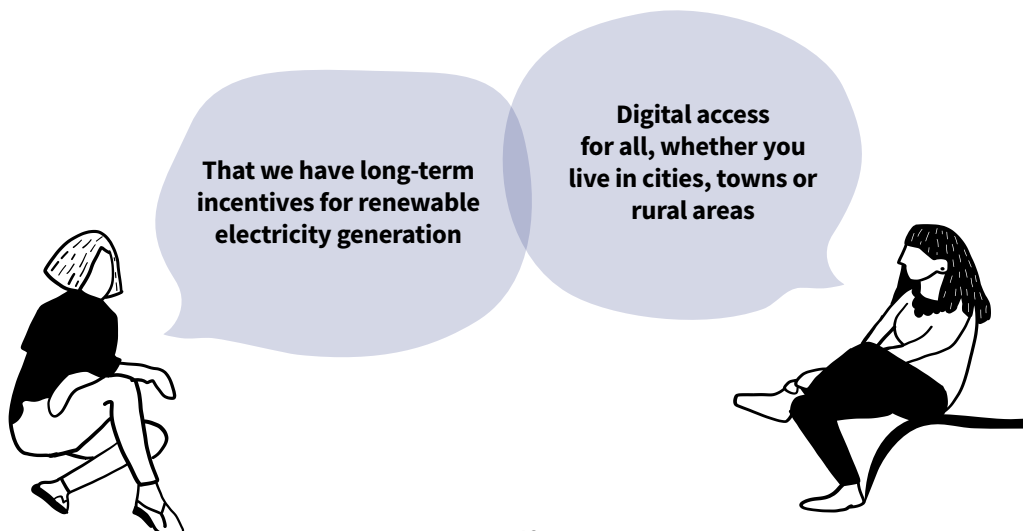
Ways forward

- Promote smart energy use and renewable energy carriers
- Secure a stable electricity supply and transmission capacity
- Develop a flexible and robust energy system
- Strengthen digital connectivity

Infrastructure for energy and digital communication needs to be developed county-wide. Smart energy use means efficiency, conversion and the use of waste energy and bioenergy. At the same time, energy production needs to increase and infrastructure needs to be expanded. Industry's transition towards lower carbon emissions increases energy needs. Therefore, local use of electricity needs to take priority over export.

The electricity grid within the county needs to be strengthened and transmission capacity increased. Smart solutions should be integrated to make the grid efficient and adaptable. This contributes to a stable and affordable energy supply for both households and businesses. Cooperation within the energy sector is essential so that the right energy quality can be used according to need. It is also important to create clear incentives and to apply technology neutrality, so that different stakeholders can contribute to the energy transition. Renewable energy and fossil-free energy carriers, such as hydrogen, reduce dependence on fossil energy from other countries. At the same time, the county's own energy supply is strengthened.

Fast and reliable internet access should be available across the county to give everyone equal opportunities for communication and access to services. Existing networks need to be improved and new ones built. In areas with weak coverage, innovative solutions and new technology are required. When digital and physical infrastructure work together, connectivity is strengthened. This brings people, businesses and places closer together.





Next steps

Development takes place locally, but is shaped by decisions at regional, national, European and international levels. To make the Norrbotten Strategy a reality, it must be translated into action. That requires collaboration between stakeholders, local solutions and continuous learning.

The strategy is implemented through action plans, development funding and the mandates and responsibilities of stakeholders across the county. Funding for measures is available at local, regional, national and EU levels. Together, these instruments provide the basis for implementing the strategy.

Action plans

Regional action plans support the implementation of the Norrbotten Strategy. They make the strategy concrete and translate it into practical action. Action plans are initiated when the county's stakeholders see a need for joint efforts. They are developed and implemented jointly, and linked to the strategy's four priority areas. To build ownership and commitment, it is important that all relevant stakeholders are given the chance to participate.

The action plans are coordinated by Region Norrbotten or another designated stakeholder, in close collaboration with the region. The plans are to be considered by the Regional Development Committee and the stakeholders concerned, so that they form part of delivering the Norrbotten Strategy.

The action plans should be exploratory, time-limited and updated as needed. They make it possible to test new solutions, draw lessons and adapt measures to changing conditions. Each plan should clearly describe what is to be done, how, when and by whom, and what resources are required. It should also set out how networks and cooperation strengthen implementation. Children and young people, the national minorities and the indigenous Sámi people are priority groups whose perspectives need to be considered.

Some thematic strategies already exist, and additional thematic strategies can be developed as needed to provide more detailed strategic direction within one or more of the four priority areas. The strategies have a more long-term focus than the action plans and can be initiated by Region Norrbotten or commissioned by the Swedish Government. Action plans, including their guidelines, and thematic strategies are gathered at utvecklanorrbotten.se/rus.



Together for Norrbotten

Many stakeholders contribute to implementing the Norrbotten Strategy, and together we can create change. All contribute resources, knowledge and mandates. Different stakeholders may take the lead at different times, depending on the subject and circumstances.

Region Norrbotten holds the statutory responsibility for regional development. This means the region has the state's mandate to lead regional development work in the county and decide on regional development funding. The mandate is exercised in collaboration with other stakeholders, with Region Norrbotten acting as a coordinating force. The region is also responsible for preparing, adopting and monitoring the regional development strategy. The mandate also includes providing forums for dialogue and cooperation.

The county's municipalities have a close connection to residents, civil society and business. Each municipality develops according to its own conditions and circumstances and contributes to the county's development. **Norrbottens Kommuner** coordinates and supports the county's municipalities. The association promotes common interests, gathers knowledge and provides forums where municipalities can develop solutions together.

The Norrbotten County Administrative Board is responsible for state administration in the county and works to implement national objectives while taking regional conditions into account. The County Administrative Board coordinates public interests and state measures, monitors developments and informs the government of the county's needs. The agency acts as a link between residents, municipalities, the government, the Riksdag and other state agencies. The Board also has a mandate in civil defence.

Other government agencies balance competing interests and contribute resources, knowledge and coordination. Their mandates and presence strengthen the county's ability to meet local, regional and national needs. State agencies should work to ensure that the goals of the Norrbotten Strategy are met and that account is taken of different regional conditions.

Luleå University of Technology offers both education and specialist expertise in several areas. The university and **the research institutes** contribute research and innovation, benefiting both business and society. Together with **other education providers**, they strengthen the county's skills supply and lifelong learning.

Civil society contributes to societal development by creating jobs, community and inclusion, as well as new ideas and local solutions. Associations and cooperatives create opportunities that strengthen local communities and complement the public and private sectors. They add resources, foster fresh thinking and bring perspectives on diversity and human rights to the fore. Through participation and engagement, civil society strengthens social cohesion.

The business community contributes to the county's development by developing products, services and solutions that create value for people and communities. Companies contribute jobs, growth and diversification. **Business support organisations** have a role in fostering co-operation and development across different sectors to strengthen the business community.

Joint organisations, in which municipalities, the region and other stakeholders come together, create added value. Such organisations may take the form of an inter-municipal body or a jointly owned company for shared issues and mandates. Through their work, they solve tasks and create value that individual owners or members cannot achieve on their own.



Learning in motion

Regional development requires continuous knowledge-building and a deeper understanding of the county's conditions. Analyses and reports provide insight into strengths, challenges and opportunities. A systematic approach to learning strengthens our ability to understand change and understand wider trends and interdependencies. It leaves us better equipped to make well-founded decisions and use resources in ways that strengthen the development of the whole county.

Through dialogue with stakeholders and networks, experience from implementing the Norrbotten Strategy is systematically captured. Action plans help us test ideas, develop new methods and support learning through practice. This strengthens ownership and implementation capacity. To ensure lasting impact, actions need to be followed up, evaluated and adjusted accordingly.

The strategy is followed up using indicators that are measured and analysed in relation to the four priority areas, the county's geography and the enabling principles. Where possible, results are also reported by sex and age to reveal differences and patterns. The analysis of the indicators serves as a basis for following up and prioritising measures in the regional action plans. Indicators for the Norrbotten Strategy can be found at utvecklanorrbotten.se/rus.



The Norrbotten Strategy is implemented through action plans that set out how we will reach the goals. Through cooperation within the county and openness to the world, new thinking and capacity for action are strengthened. We test ideas and draw on new insights to improve our ways of working and strengthen implementation.



**UTVECKLA
NORRBOTTEN**
EN DEL AV REGION NORRBOTTEN