

Wherever I lay my hat: Early career migration drivers and preferences

Hilma Salonen, Maria Bobrinskaya et al.

Table of Contents

Executive summary	3
Nordic Summary	4
Acknowledgements	5
1. Introduction	6
1.1 Background and aims of the project	6
1.2 Theoretical considerations: Drivers for moving and staying	8
2. Methodology: Survey	10
2.1 Limitations	10
3. Results	11
3.1 General migration trends	11
3.2 Typology of movers: Leavers, returners, and stayers	13
3.3 Other drivers to move	38
3.4 The impact of geographic background on migration preference	43
3.5 Four main typologies of Nordic people	48
4. Conclusion	49
4.1 National characteristics	49
4.2 Personal preferences as migration drivers	51
References	52
Annex I: Survey questions (English translation)	53
About this publication	64

This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version at:
pub.nordregio.org/wp-2025-1-early-career-migration-drivers-and-preferences

Executive summary

This report, conducted as part of the Competence Mobility II (Early Career Mobility) project, explores the migration patterns and preferences of Nordic people aged 25-39. The report aims to capture a period when people make long-term settlement decisions are made to explore which migration drivers play a part during different moves.

The study aims to understand the general drivers behind different migration typologies: moving from one's place of origin and continuing to move; returning to one's place of origin; and deciding to stay in one's place of origin. In addition, the study looks deeper into the draw of certain new opportunities, such as remote work or building a career in a rural area. The research is based on the Nordregio working paper "Should I stay or should I go? Early career mobility and migration drivers" (Guðmundsdóttir et al. 2023).

Regarding migration trends, a key finding of the report is that over half of respondents would not wish to live anywhere else than their current home, even under ideal conditions. In average 52% wish to stay in their current location, most of whom are people who have moved out of their place of origin. However, people wishing to settle somewhere else often plan to return to their place of origin. There are certain national differences at play. Danes and Finnish women are most likely to live very mobile lives and show a clear preference for an urban lifestyle, while Swedes are most likely to remain living in their place of origin, especially if it is a rural area. Icelanders are most likely to move out from their place of origin but to remain open to returning there in the future. Norwegians are more likely to leave their place of origin permanently, driven by work and education opportunities. In general, leavers who do not plan to return often seek urban lifestyles and better access to culture and leisure opportunities, and those open to returning value family-friendliness and personal bonds with their place of origin.

Migration decisions are influenced by a combination of push-and-pull factors, including education, work, social networks, lifestyle preferences such as seeking for a more family-friendly and nature-rich, or a more urban area, and housing. The answers of the study clearly point out to the fact that personal characteristics and preferences play a crucial role in migration decisions especially during later moves, beyond purely rational economic choices.

The study underscores the importance of understanding personal preferences and social ties in migration decisions. While practical factors like work and education are significant especially for the first move, the desire for a particular lifestyle and personal connections to a place play a crucial role. Regional actors should focus on creating environments that cater to these preferences to attract and retain residents.

Nordic Summary

Denne rapport, der er udarbejdet som en del af projektet Competence Mobility II (Early Career Mobility), undersøger migrationsmønstre og -præferencer hos nordiske borgere i alderen 25-39 år. Rapporten har til formål at indfange en periode, hvor folk træffer langsigtede beslutninger om bosættelse, og undersøge, hvilke migrationsfaktorer der spiller en rolle under forskellige flytninger.

Undersøgelsen har til formål at forstå de generelle drivkræfter bag forskellige migrationstypologier: at flytte fra sit oprindelsessted og fortsætte med at flytte; at vende tilbage til sit oprindelsessted; og at beslutte at blive på sit oprindelsessted. Desuden ser undersøgelsen nærmere på, hvordan visse nye muligheder trækker, f.eks. fjernarbejde eller opbygning af en karriere i et landområde. Forskningen er baseret på Nordregios arbejdspapir »Should I stay or should I go? Early career mobility and migration drivers« (Guðmundsdóttir et al. 2023).

Med hensyn til migrationstendenser er et vigtigt resultat af rapporten, at over halvdelen af respondenterne ikke ville ønske at bo andre steder end i deres nuværende hjem, selv under ideelle forhold. I gennemsnit ønsker 52 % at blive på deres nuværende sted, og de fleste af dem er mennesker, der er flyttet fra deres hjemsted. Men folk, der ønsker at bosætte sig et andet sted, planlægger ofte at vende tilbage til deres hjemsted. Der er visse nationale forskelle i spil. Danske og finske kvinder er mest tilbøjelige til at leve et meget mobilt liv og viser en klar præference for en urban livsstil, mens svenskerne er mest tilbøjelige til at blive boende på deres hjemsted, især hvis det er et landområde. Islændinge er mest tilbøjelige til at flytte fra deres oprindelsessted, men er åbne for at vende tilbage i fremtiden. Nordmænd er mere tilbøjelige til at forlade deres oprindelsessted permanent på grund af arbejds- og uddannelsesmuligheder. Generelt søger fraflyttere, der ikke planlægger at vende tilbage, ofte en urban livsstil og bedre adgang til kultur og fritidsmuligheder, og de, der er åbne for at vende tilbage, værdsætter familievenlighed og personlige bånd til deres oprindelsessted.

Migrationsbeslutninger påvirkes af en kombination af push-and-pull-faktorer, herunder uddannelse, arbejde, sociale netværk, livsstilspræferencer som f.eks. at søge et mere familievenligt og naturrigt eller et mere urbant område samt bolig. Svarene i undersøgelsen peger klart på, at personlige egenskaber og præferencer spiller en afgørende rolle i migrationsbeslutninger, især under senere flytninger, ud over rent rationelle økonomiske valg.

Undersøgelsen understreger vigtigheden af at forstå personlige præferencer og sociale bånd i migrationsbeslutninger. Mens praktiske faktorer som arbejde og uddannelse er vigtige, især for den første flytning, spiller ønsket om en bestemt livsstil og personlige forbindelser til et sted en afgørende rolle. Regionale aktører bør fokusere på at skabe miljøer, der imødekommer disse præferencer for at tiltrække og fastholde beboere.

Acknowledgements

This report was conducted as a part of the project Competence Mobility II (Early Career Mobility), funded by the Thematic Group on Green, Innovative and Resilient Regions (2021-2024), operating under the Nordic Council of Ministers. This research project is linked with several other Nordic Council of Ministers Thematic Group projects examining migration and mobility in the Nordic countries, including the projects Re-Start Competence Mobility in the Nordic Region (2021-2024), and Remote Work and Multilocality (2021-2024). Ultimately, this research report and the research project are related to the common Nordic goal of becoming the most sustainable and integrated region in the world.



Photo: Astrakan/Scandinav/Imagebank.sweden.se

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and aims of the project

The aims of the project were to explore the moving patterns of Nordic people between the ages of 25-39, which is assumed to be an average household-creation age, or in other words, the age when people make long-term decisions on where to settle. In addition of examining how and why people in that age group have moved and are planning to move, the survey results put a special focus on opportunities related to urban-to-rural migration and new opportunities, such as remote work.

This report, alongside the survey it is based on, relies on the Nordregio working paper "Should I stay or should I go? Early career mobility and migration drivers" (Guðmundsdóttir et al. 2023). The working paper begins from the well-known starting point that urban areas have for long been more attractive in terms of migration for various reasons, while rural areas struggle with negative net migration, especially when it comes to people under 30 years of age. However, after turning 30, especially women appear to consider more rural municipalities for settling down, resulting in a counter-migration phenomenon. As this development has slightly accelerated after the COVID pandemic, it is possible that there are some lesser-known factors drawing people to move from urban to more sparsely populated areas. (Jensen & Randall 2022; Guðmundsdóttir et al. 2023).

While migration and increasing an area's attractiveness have always been important policy issues, their current relevance is strongly linked to the lack of labour in Nordic rural areas, especially in the North. The problems related to attracting a skilled workforce to more remote industrial areas pose a bottleneck for not only regional development but also the green industrial transition agenda. (Lapland Chamber of Commerce, 2023; Slätmo et al. 2024).

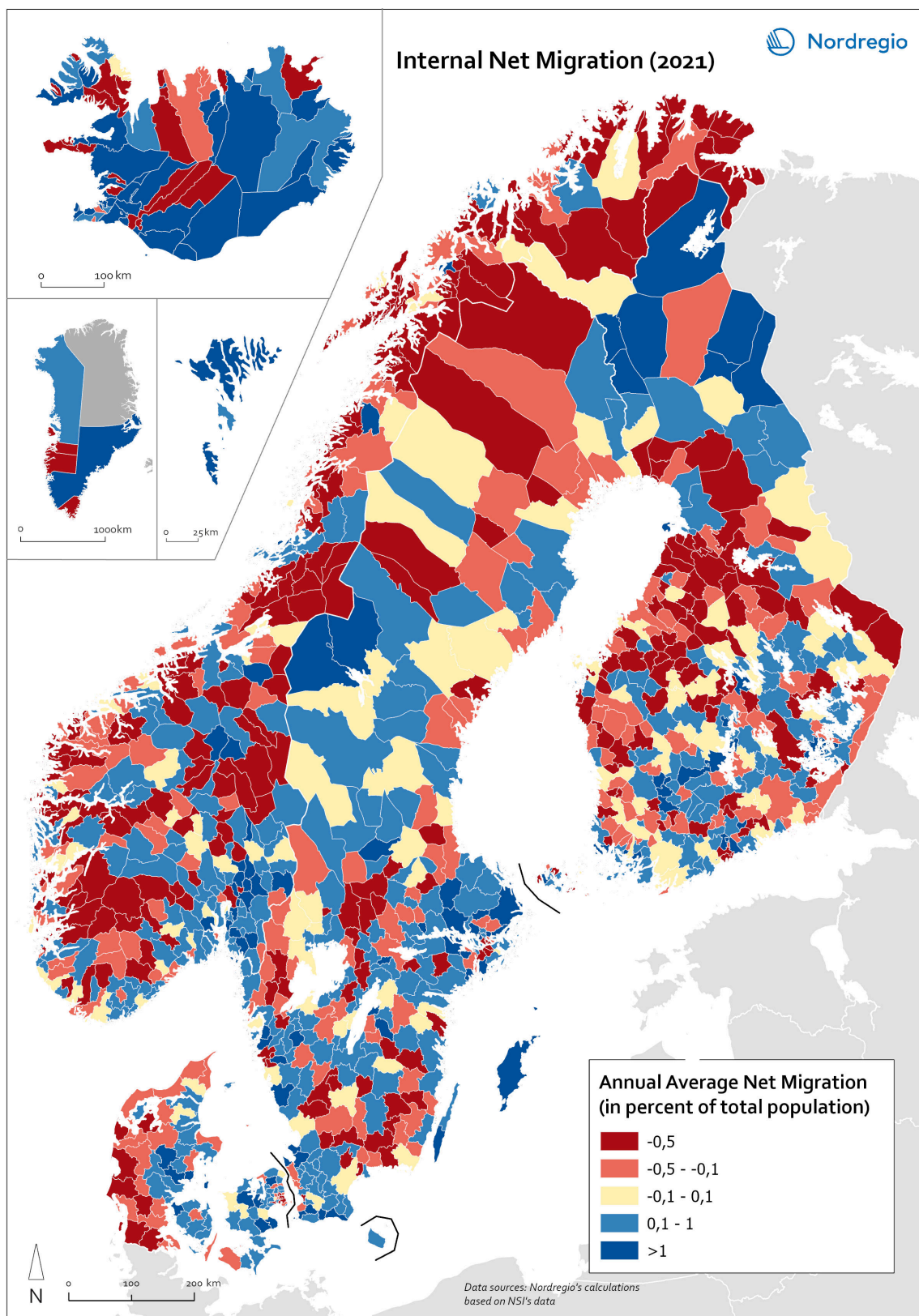


Figure 1. Internal net migration 2022. Source: Nordregio 2024.

1.2 Theoretical considerations: Drivers for moving and staying

Behind these migration fluctuations are various drivers, which the established discourse has named the push-and-pull effects: certain factors contribute to *pushing* people out of an area and others *pull* them towards another one. As people have individual, changing preferences to their homestead, each place has a combination of push-and-pull effects that have different impact in different circumstances. (Lee 1966). For example, a vibrant nightlife may work as a push factor for a family with young children, but a pull factor for a young student seeking for new friends.

The working paper by Guðmundsdóttir et al. (2023) categorises different push-and-pull factors, or migration drivers, into a list of moving for **education, work, social networks, a strong personal bond, feeling of origin, lifestyle migration** (seeking a different way of life), **housing**, public and private **services**, seeking for a more **family-friendly** area; and for people returning to a place, a **personal bond**, social bonds to a place, **family ties**, as well as **financial problems**. In addition to these, **gender** is an important and well-studied factor behind migration decisions insofar that cultural reasons, for example traditional gender norms and the insular characteristics of small communities, such as gossip, may constitute a push-out factor namely for women (Rauhut & Littke 2016; Jóhannesdóttir et al. 2021).

Analysing the literature on these drivers, the working paper concludes that although migration has traditionally been assumed to happen following rational and economic choices based on labour market conditions, further research has put more emphasis on personal characteristics, as well as a variety of other factors, as important factors at play. The literature analysed for the working paper thus points to the need to develop more understanding on the factors prompting people to leave their place of origin, and in many cases, continue moving. In other words, it is essential to consider also the influence of drivers that might fall more under **preferences** than **needs** and **demands** to reach a full overview of what makes a place attractive. (Niedomysl 2010; Guðmundsdóttir et al. 2023).

The need to go beyond purely rational reasons to grasp the dynamic complexity of reasons why people choose to migrate or stay where they are, is an essential context for these survey results. Previous research has discovered that people's migration choices are not only impacted by their direct socio-economic circumstances, but also by the distance travelled insofar that more practical considerations such as housing have more weight in short-distance migration, while long-distance moves are typically motivated by life circumstance related reasons such as employment. (Niedomysl 2011a). Another study has focused on the relationship of **experienced** quality of life and internal migration in Finland discovered that people's satisfaction with their quality of life and the economic

development indicators often do not correlate. Even though growing urban centres rate high in most development indicators, the respondents were most content with their lives in sparsely populated rural areas. The survey also discovered that most people become more satisfied with their lives following a move that allows them to search for the lifestyle that suits them better, whether that is a calmer life closer to nature or seeking a more socially active life in an urban centre. (Hanell & Mattila 2024).

This report examines migration drivers from the perspective of empirical data (survey responses) and deepens the discussions it started from the viewpoint of place attachment, understood as the experiences of individual and collective identity building and belonging related to a specific place. (Ilovan & Markuszewska 2022). The results of this survey discuss how this concept may help Nordic municipalities interpret the early career migration drivers and trends and possibly use this information to support place attachment ("place-making").



Photo: Daniel Villadsen / visitdenmark.com

2. Methodology: Survey

This research report is based on a survey that was conducted by Norstat in Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Denmark with 1000 respondents by country and in Iceland with 500 (in total 4500 respondents) between 25-39 years of age. The working paper by Guðmundsdóttir et al. 2023 directed the research questions on which the survey was based. They are as follows:

- What are the migration aspirations of people in "household creation age" in the Nordic region?
- What are the characteristics of those who wish to move?
- What are the key drivers of intended migration?
- What can the Nordic countries and regions learn from each other in relation to internal migration?

Based on these questions, we asked the respondents to answer questions about their migration history, relationship with their place of origin, reasons for moving and about drivers for a possible future move. The exact survey questions (in English) can be found in Annex 1.

2.1 Limitations

Surveys as a method has always its own limitations, as the answers are bound to be somewhat limited and susceptible to different interpretations. For this reason, we have needed to exclude some answer groups in the analysis face to decrease the risk of an overreach in conclusions.

As another limitation, it is important to consider that the survey was designed to represent the entire country as accurately as possible. This has resulted in a more prominent representation of areas with larger populations, such as cities, and less representation of respondents living in sparsely populated regions. This creates a possible bias for more urban preferences and experiences.

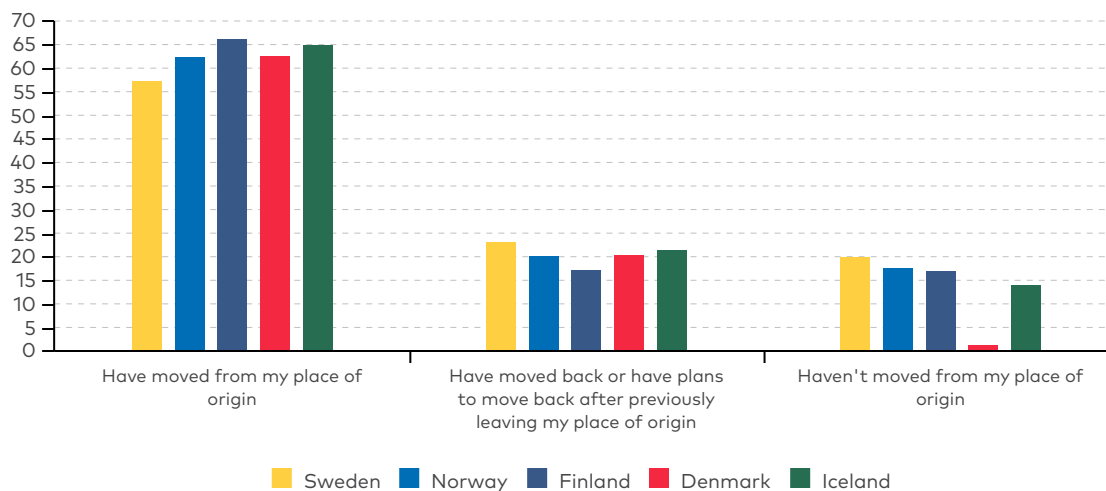


Photo: Julia Kivelä / visitfinland.com

3. Results

3.1 General migration trends

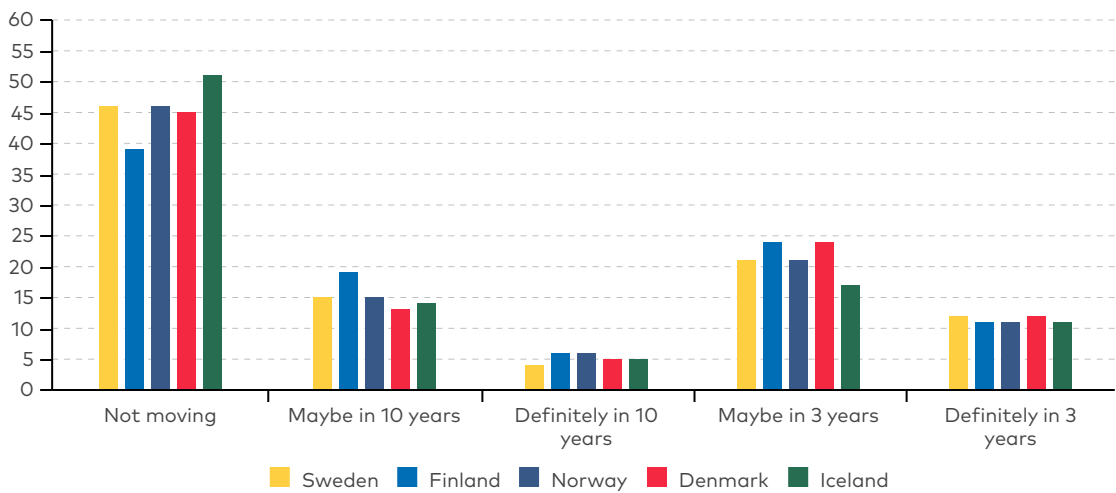
Overall, most respondents wish to remain living where they are located now: that includes 48% of Swedes, 52% of Finns, 53% of Norwegians, 52% of Danes, and 56% of Icelandic people with a 52,2% average.



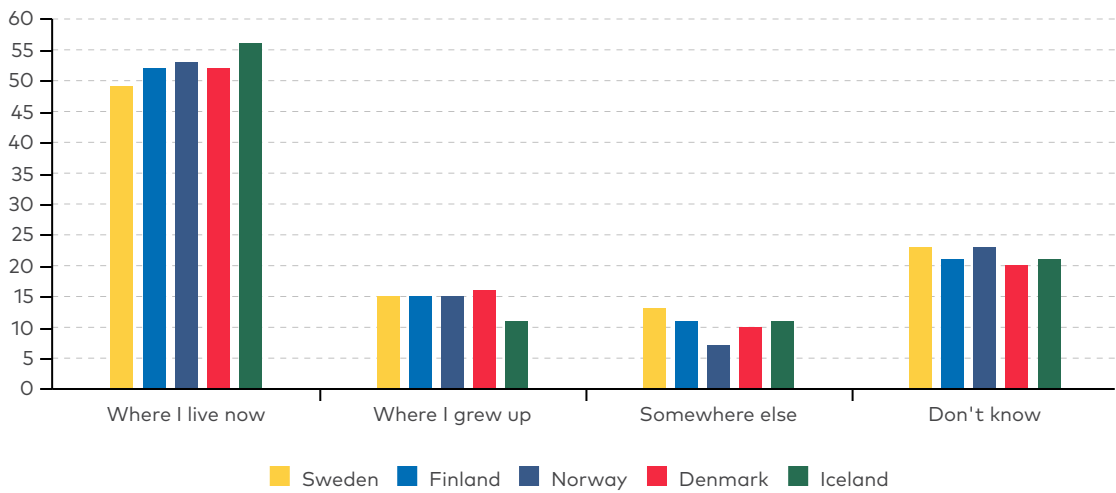
Graph 1. People who have moved out, stayed in, and moved back to their place of origin.

The survey reveals that 44% Swedes who have left their place of origin have no plans to continue moving from where they live now, while 55% are open to it or have some exact plans. In Finland, the distribution is 47% of respondents that are happy where they are and 52% open to move; Denmark shows a split of 48% happy and 51% open to move. In Norway and Iceland, the distribution is in the favour of remaining in place with 57% (Norway) and 54% (Iceland) of respondents happy with their choice and 48% and 45%, respectively, open to move.

Finnish respondents who have remained in their place of origin are most likely to remain content with their choice, 80% happy where they are and only 18% open to move. 73% of Swedish stayers are happy where they are with 25% are open to move, while in Norway the proportions are 68% happy and 22% open to move. The numbers continue to decrease with 62% of Danish respondents happy where they are and 16% are open to move; and lastly, in Iceland, 52% are happy where they are, with 12% open to move.^[1] Overall, however, the most notable fact is that the share of people leaving their place of origin (whether to later return or not) is largely similar across the Nordic neighbours.



Graph 2. Average respondents’ plans to move in the future.

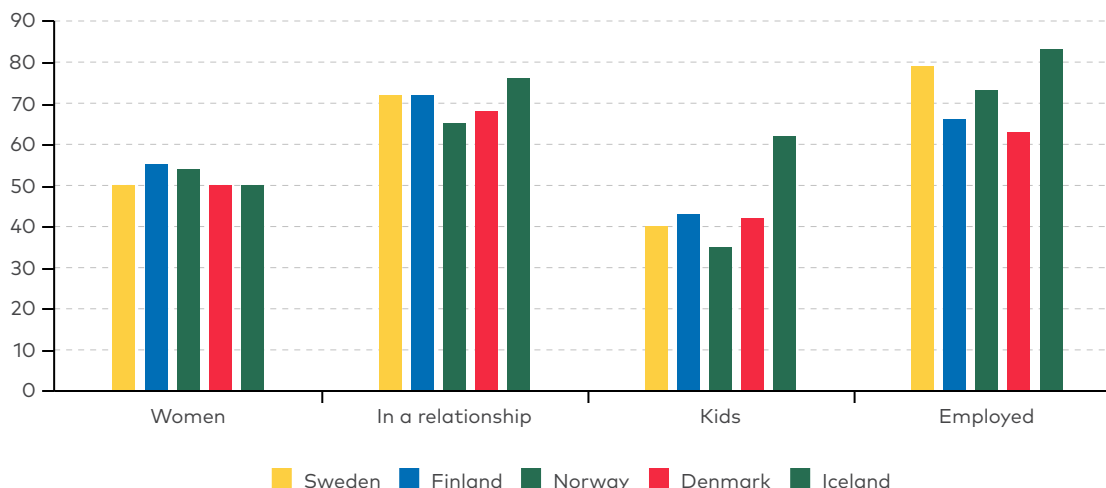


Graph 3. Where the average respondent wishes to settle to live.

1. Note that the numbers do not add up to 100% due to these not being the only two options available to a question.

3.2 Typology of movers: Leavers, returners, and stayers

These average figures are used in the subchapters below to compare the different groups of leavers, returners, and stayers to the average respondent.

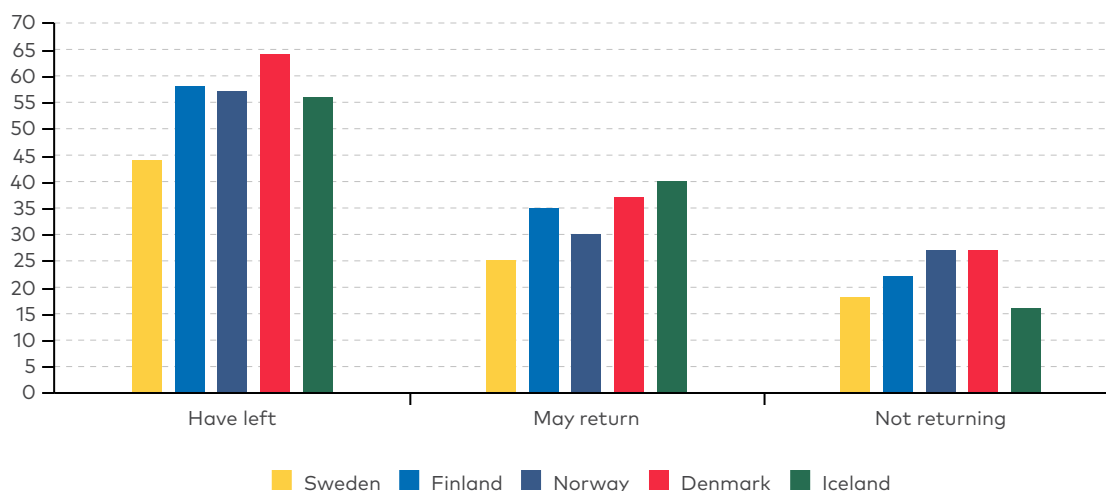


Graph 4. The average profile by certain indicators of all respondents by country.

3.2.1 Leavers

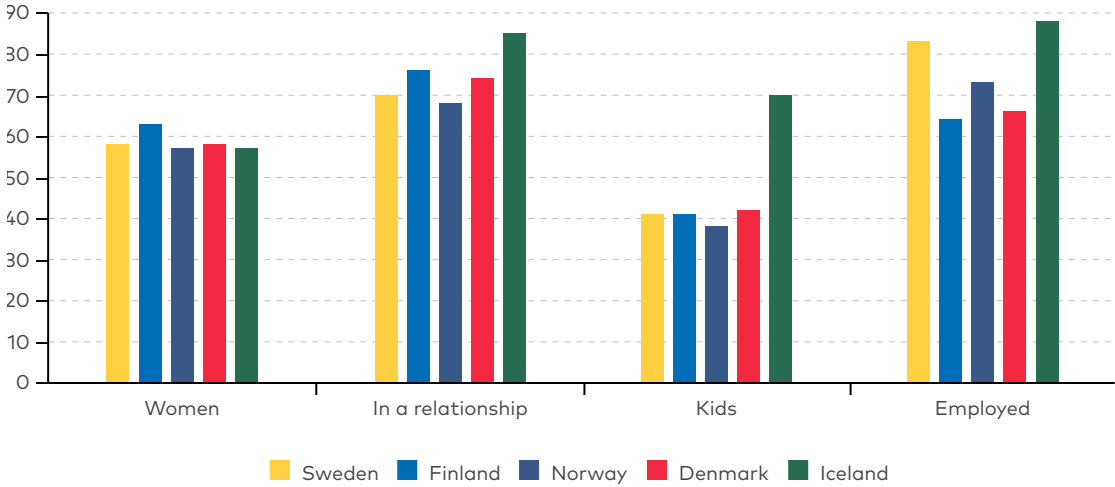
3.2.1.1 Characteristics of leavers

The first group we examine is also the biggest group: people who have left their place of origin, with either no inclination or some inclination to return there in the future. The following graphs illustrate the share of people in this group, as well as some of their characteristics.

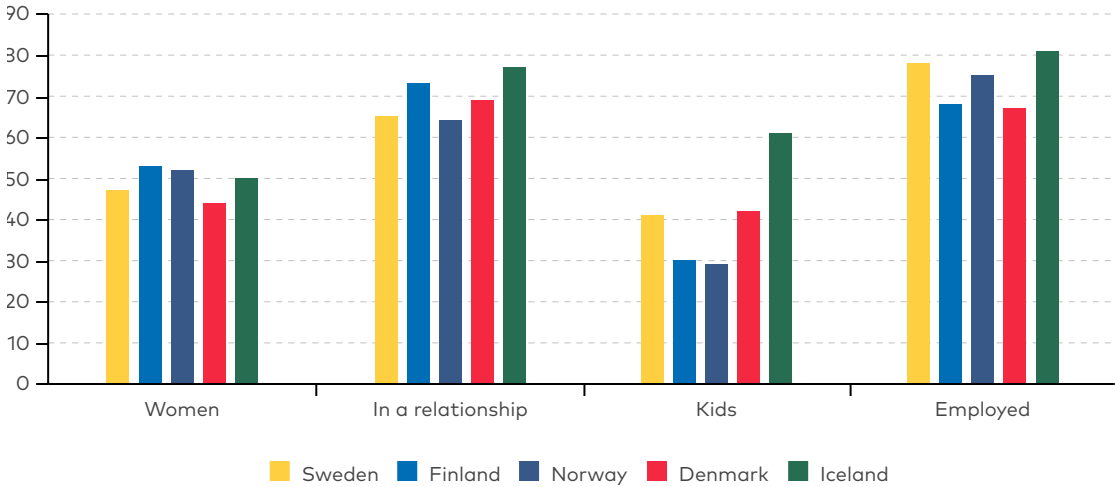


Graph 5. Share of leavers not planning to return.

Most people who have left their place of origin remain somewhat open to returning. Denmark emerges from these statistics as the country with the highest internal mobility in the sense that it contains the highest percentage of people who have left (64%) and also a high percentage of those who may return (37%). Finland follows a similar pattern with slightly smaller shares of 58% leaving and 35% open to return. Norway, on the other hand, has the highest share of people who have left to never return (the “forever leavers”), 47% of leavers. Iceland, on the other hand, has 56% of respondents leaving their places or origin, but only 29% of this group are sure to never return. Finally, Swedish respondents appear as most attached to their place of origin, with the lowest share of people leaving (44%), of which only 41% plan to never return.



Graph 6. Typology of leavers not planning to return by country.

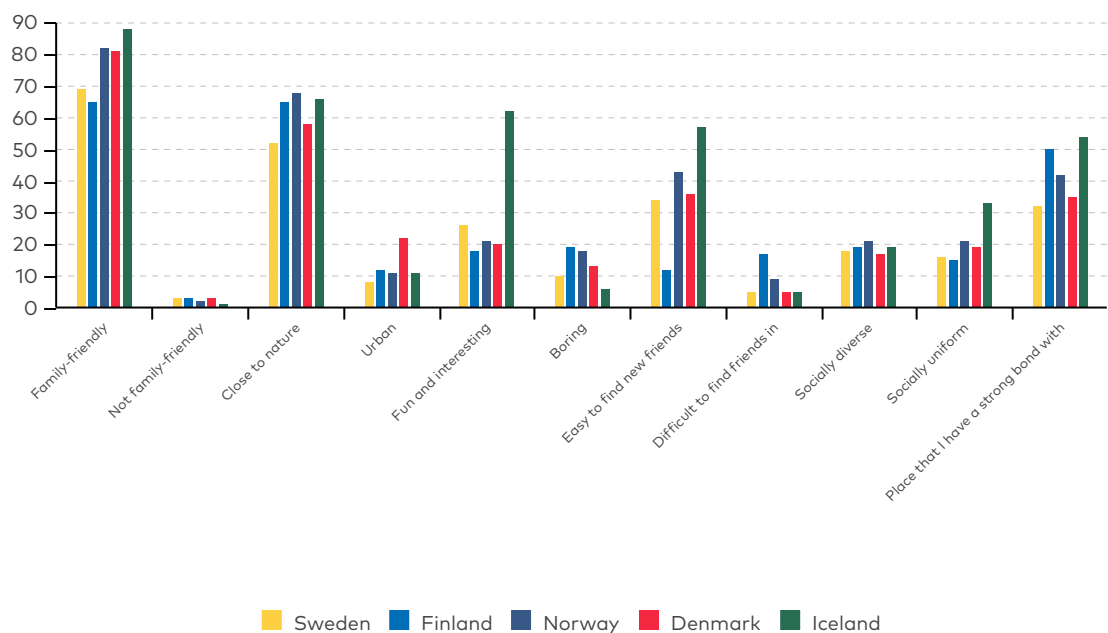


Graph 7. Typology of leavers open to returning by country.

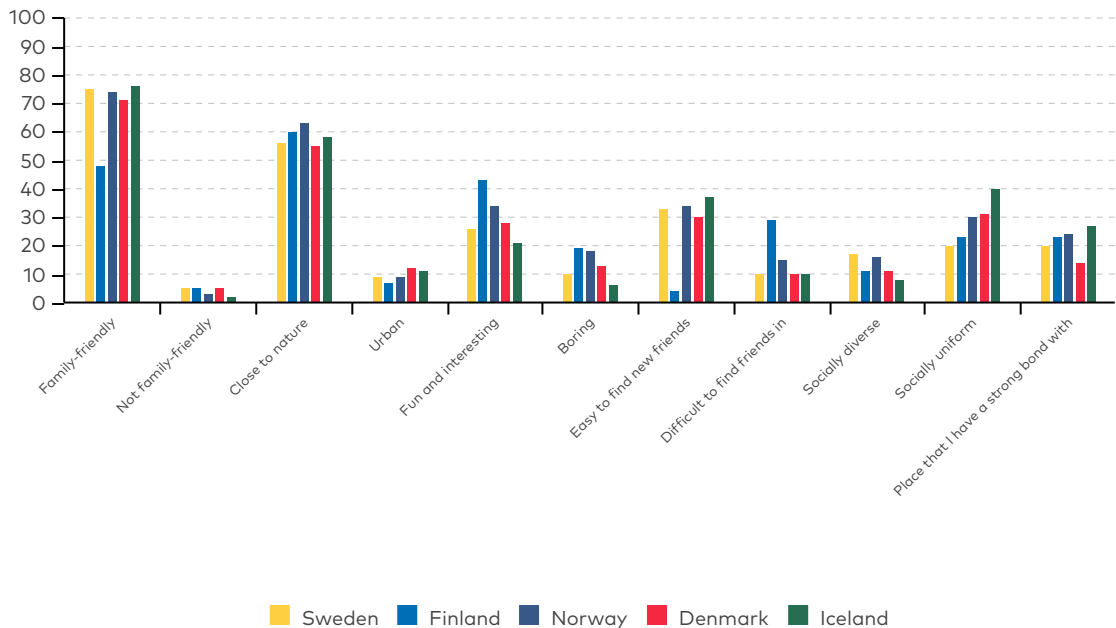
While leavers open to returning mostly correspond to the profile of our average respondent, the forever leavers have more distinct characteristics. First, there is a clear majority of women in this group in all countries but especially in Finland. They are also more likely to be in a romantic relationship and have children than the national average in

all countries, except for Sweden. The employment rate is also somewhat higher among the forever leavers, indicating that they have opportunities in their lives to seek for a more suitable life.

3.2.1.2 Leavers: reasons for past and future migrations

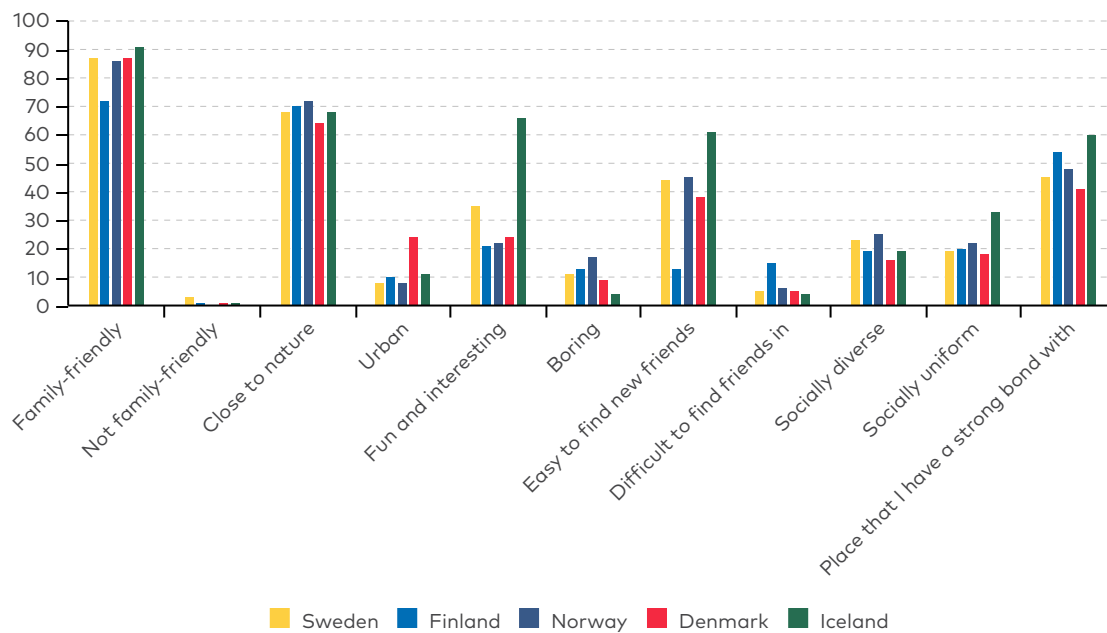


Graph 8. Average respondent opinions on place of origin.^[2]



Graph 9. Opinions on place of origin from people who have left it and do not plan to return.

2. This and following graphs include answers given on a sliding scale of 1-10. To measure the importance of these factors, we counted the sum of answers ranking the choice with the highest numbers (7-10). These graphs show the share of these high rankings compared to the lower ones (1-6).



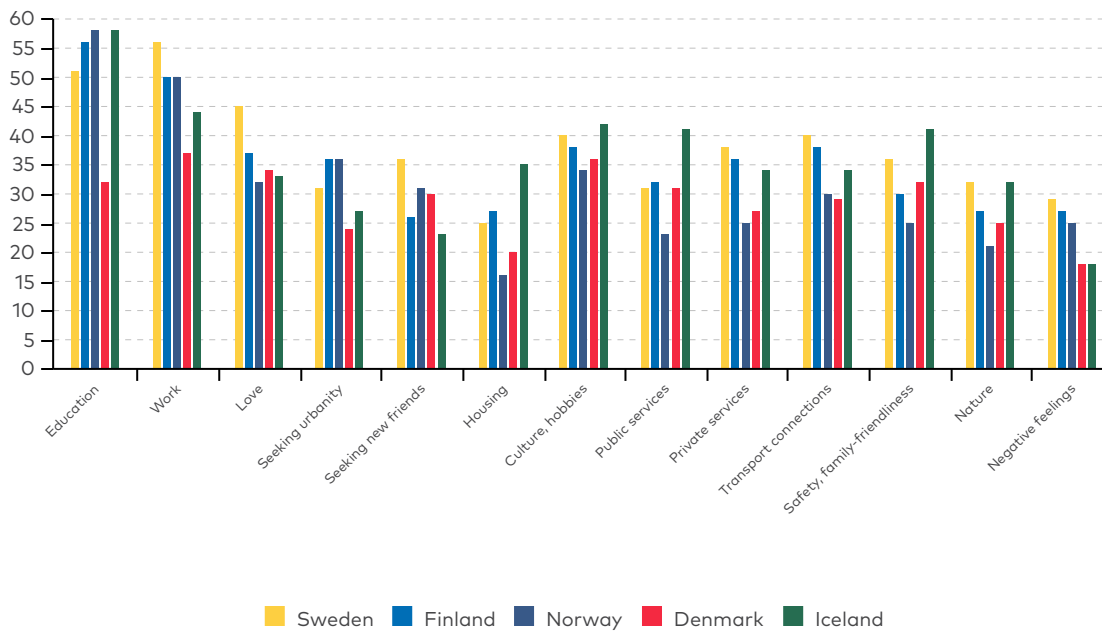
Graph 10. Opinions on place of origin from people who have left it but may return.

As one might expect, people who have left their place of origin to never return harbour distinctively more negative opinions towards it. This is especially true regarding the more subjective points about finding the place interesting, or how easy people make new friendships there. There are, however, notable national differences at play here.

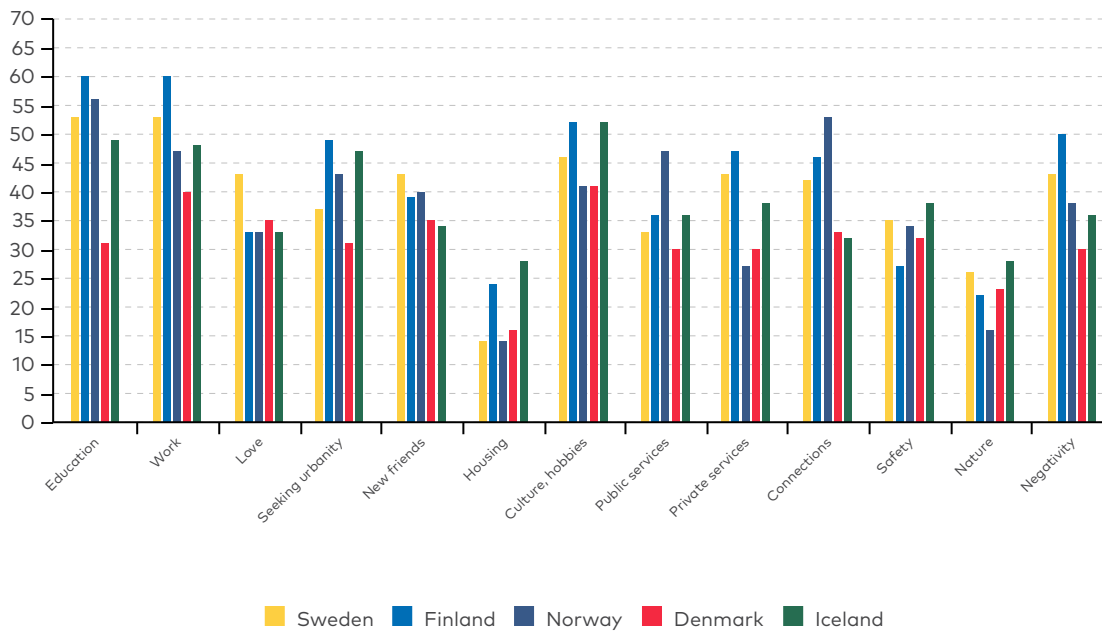
Interestingly, the forever leavers are also less inclined to describe their place of origin as family-friendly, urban or close to nature, perhaps indicating a broader sense of detachment to the place they have left behind. The only characteristic that scores higher in this group is that this group views their original homestead as more socially uniform than other groups.

In comparison, leavers who remain open to returning to their place of origin have a more positive view on this place, not only compared to people not planning to return but also compared to the average score. For example, they tend to view the place as more family-friendly, closer to nature, more fun and easier to make new friends in than the average respondent. They also come from places that they see as more socially diverse than the forever leavers. Finally, people open to return have a much stronger personal bond to the place, likely explaining the possible wish to return there.

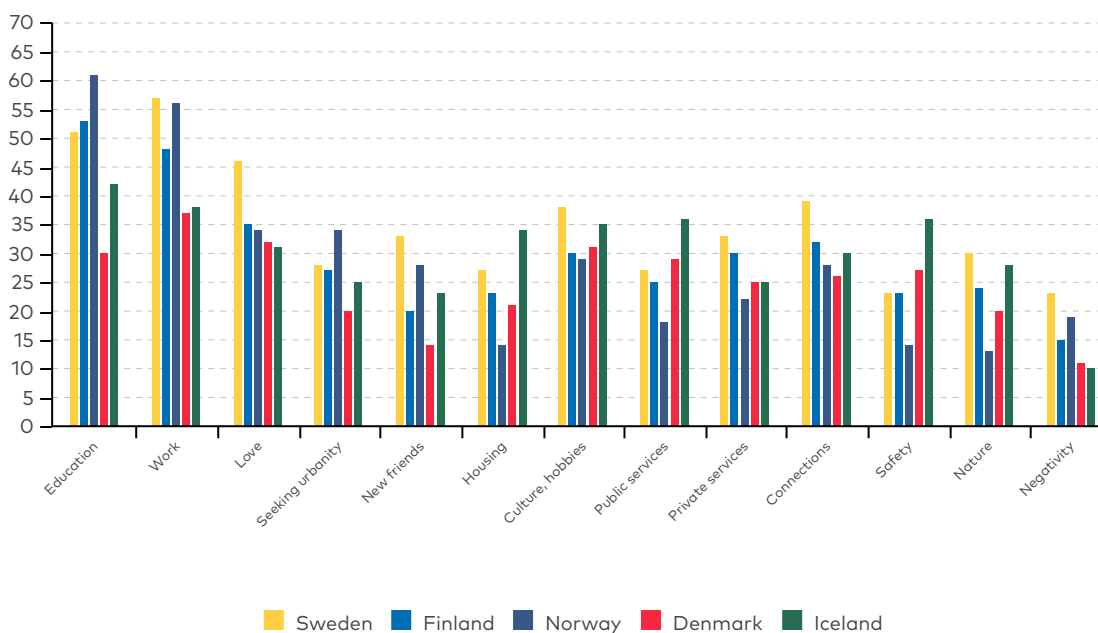
As noted, there are notable differences among the Nordic neighbours in how the leavers view their places of origin, regardless of their possible return plans. Finns appear most critical of their origins, especially in the group of forever leavers, and give especially low scores when it comes to finding new friends or finding the place fun and interesting. Despite these views, they have almost the strongest bond to their place of origin (after Iceland) in both groups. Iceland represents the other opposite here, as even people not planning a return may view their old homestead as more fun and interesting than boring. They also have the strongest personal bond with the place and view it as socially uniform. Most countries agree that the place of origin was family-friendly (except for Finland), close to nature, and more easy than difficult to find new friends in (except for Finland). Denmark scores the lowest when it comes to having a strong personal bond with a place, with only 14% in the forever leavers' group.



Graph 11. Main reasons why the average respondent has left their place of origin.



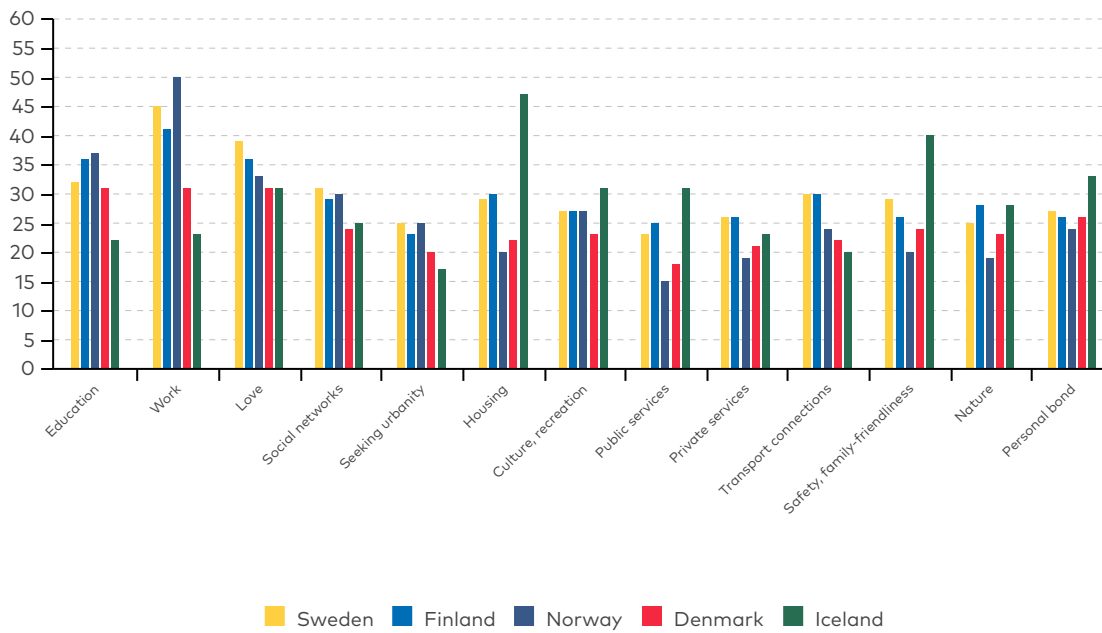
Graph 12. Main reasons why the forever leavers moved for the first time.



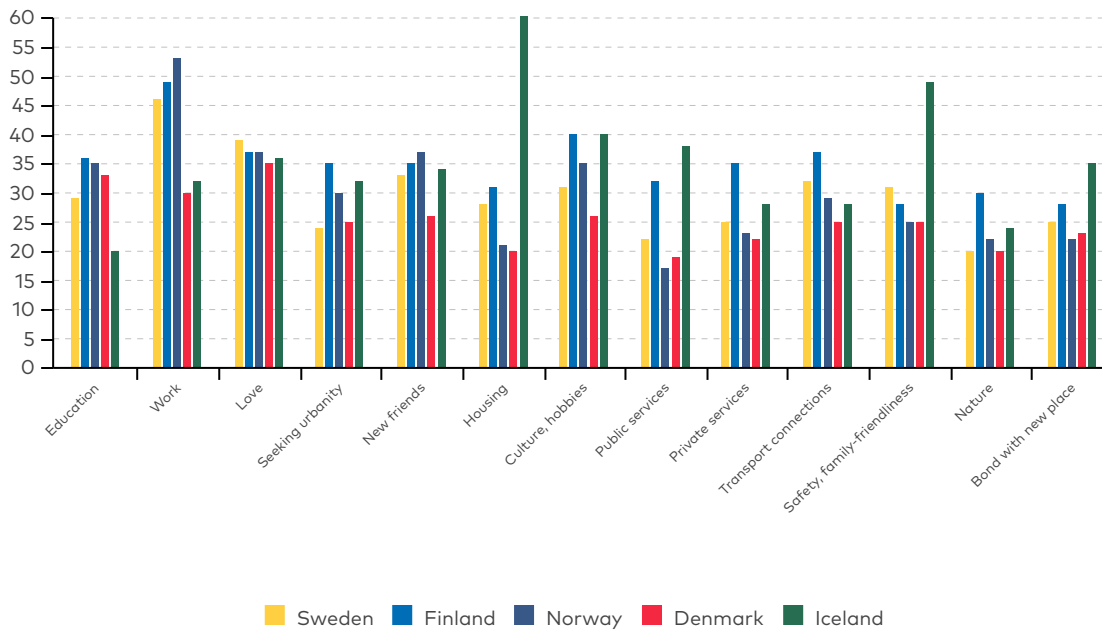
Graph 13. Main reasons why people, who have left their origin but might move back, moved for the first time.

When we look at what people were seeking when they decided to move out from their place of origin, practical reasons such as seeking education or work opportunities naturally stand out, whether the respondent moved out to never return or possibly temporarily. Comparing the group of forever leavers and those open to returning, the former stands out by clearly seeking not only work or education, but a different, more urban way of life with richer culture and leisure activities and more possibilities to broaden one's social network. This indicates that certain people would not wish to live in a more rural or suburban place regardless of the opportunities that it might offer. People leaving their place of origin for good were also keener to improve their access to public and private services. As a final statement, a notable share also wished to move because of the negative view they had on their place of origin. In contrast, people who have left but remain open to returning, reported negative emotions to a much lesser extent as a reason .

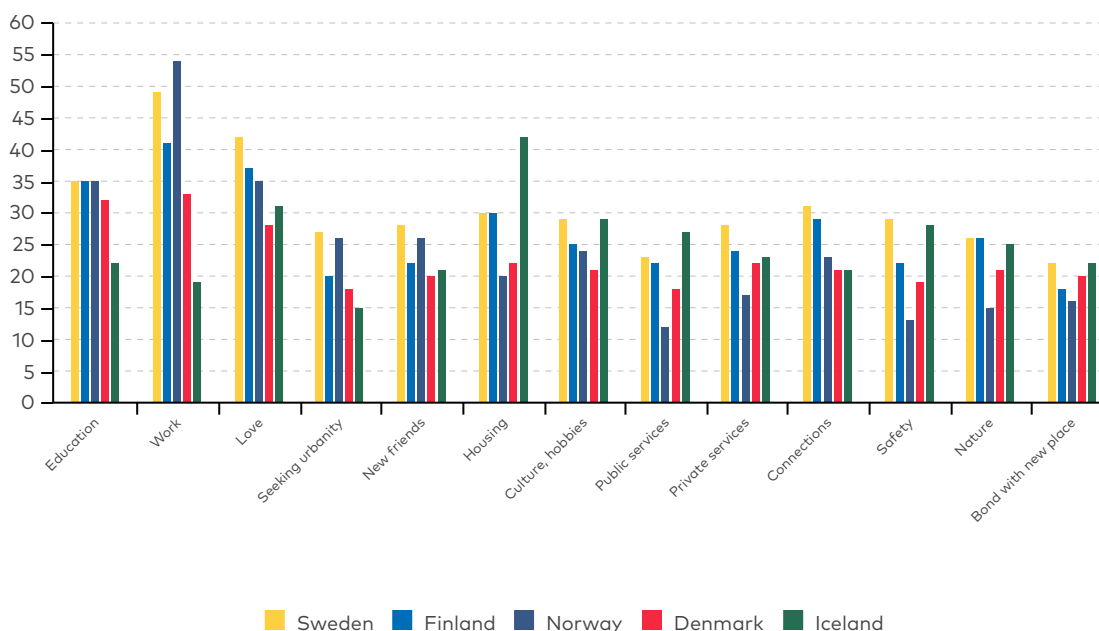
Education and work act as important catalysts especially in Finland, Sweden, and Norway, while in Denmark and Iceland other reasons may play a more prominent role. The Danish respondents not wishing to return to their place of origin put as much emphasis on culture and hobby opportunities as education and work, while those open to return mainly moved out for these practical reasons. As for Iceland, the reasons for leaving the place of origin behind are rather similar with other Nordic forever leavers. Furthermore housing has somewhat more emphasis in both groups.



Graph 14. Main reasons for the most recent move for average respondent.



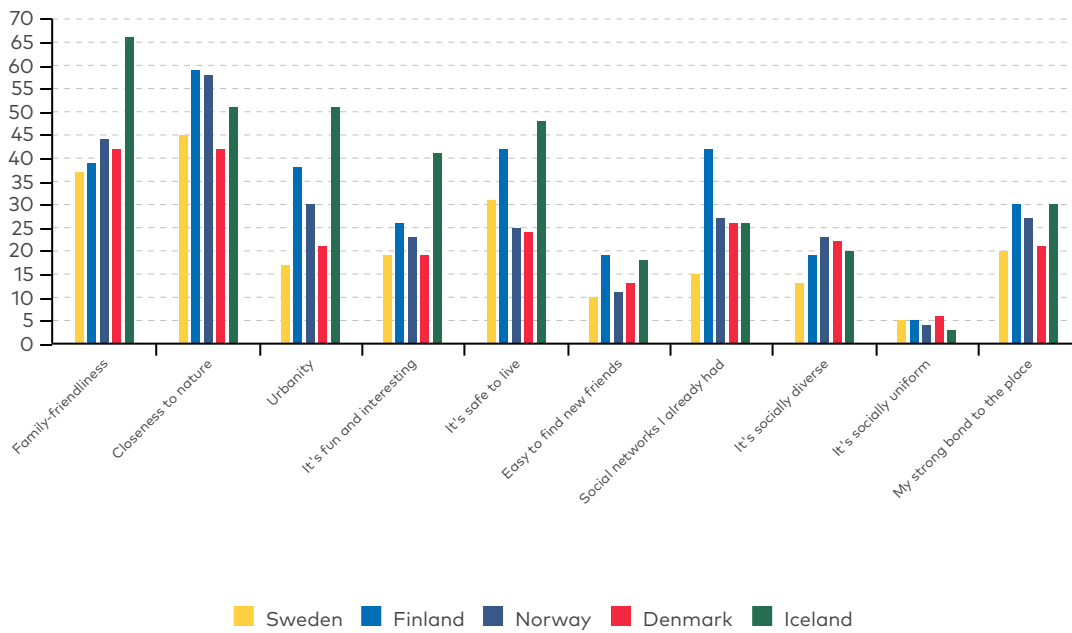
Graph 15. Main reasons for the most recent move for forever leavers.



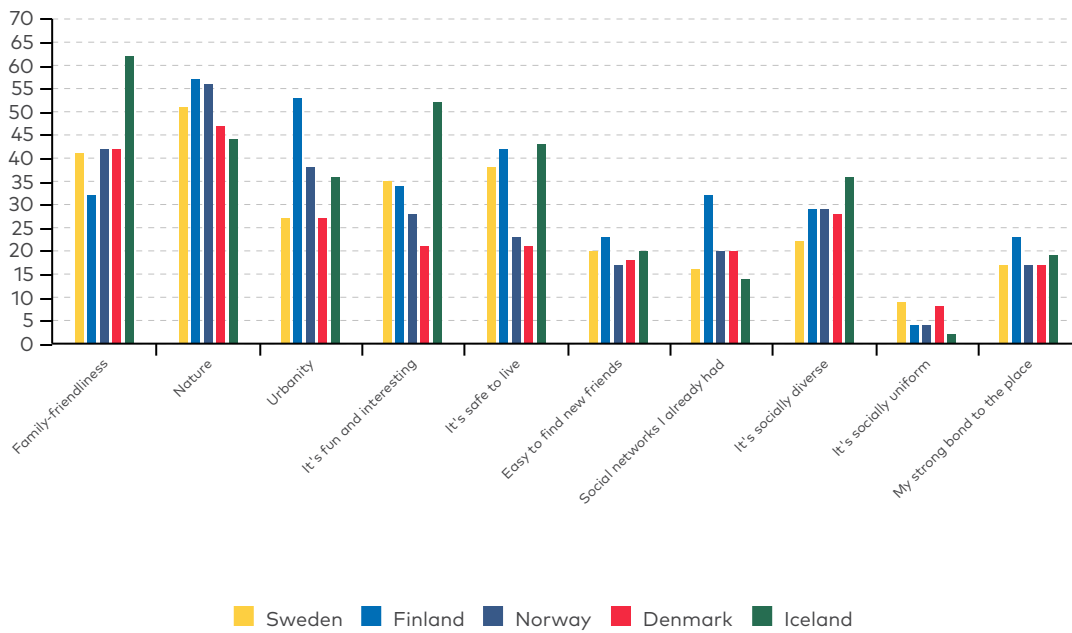
Graph 16. Main reasons for the most recent move for people who have left their place of origin and might return.

Besides the respondents' reasons for leaving their place of origin, we were interested in knowing the reasons behind their latest move (of a distance of over 50 km). When it comes to this decision, the two groups have a similar emphasis on the range of factors offered, with work (especially in Norway) and a romantic relationship (especially in Sweden) coming up as dominant reasons for a move. The group of forever leavers stands out slightly from those open to returning by emphasising a wider variety of factors in their decision to move, among them the urban characters of the new place (except for Sweden), forming new friendships, and seeking more culture and leisure opportunities (especially for Finland and Iceland). People not willing to return also put more emphasis on the availability of public and private services.

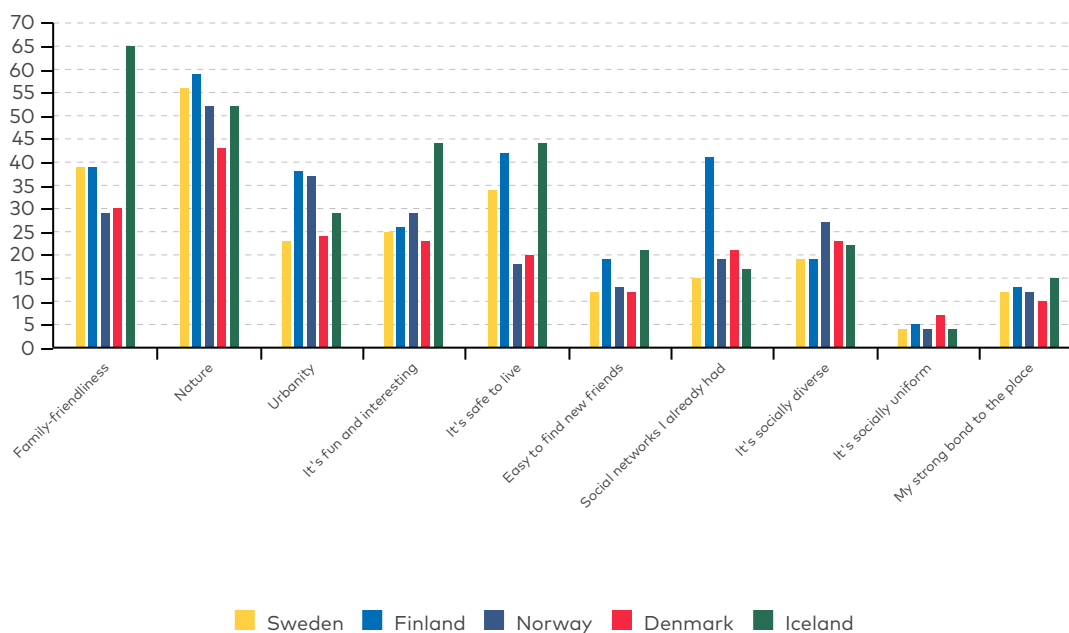
When it comes to a personal bond with the new place, people who remain open to returning to their place of origin reported this as a factor to a much lesser extent than the average respondent; and much less compared to the personal bond they continue to have with their place of origin. As for the forever leavers, they have a stronger bond with the place where they live now but the difference is not very significant.



Graph 17. What the average respondent most values in their current home.



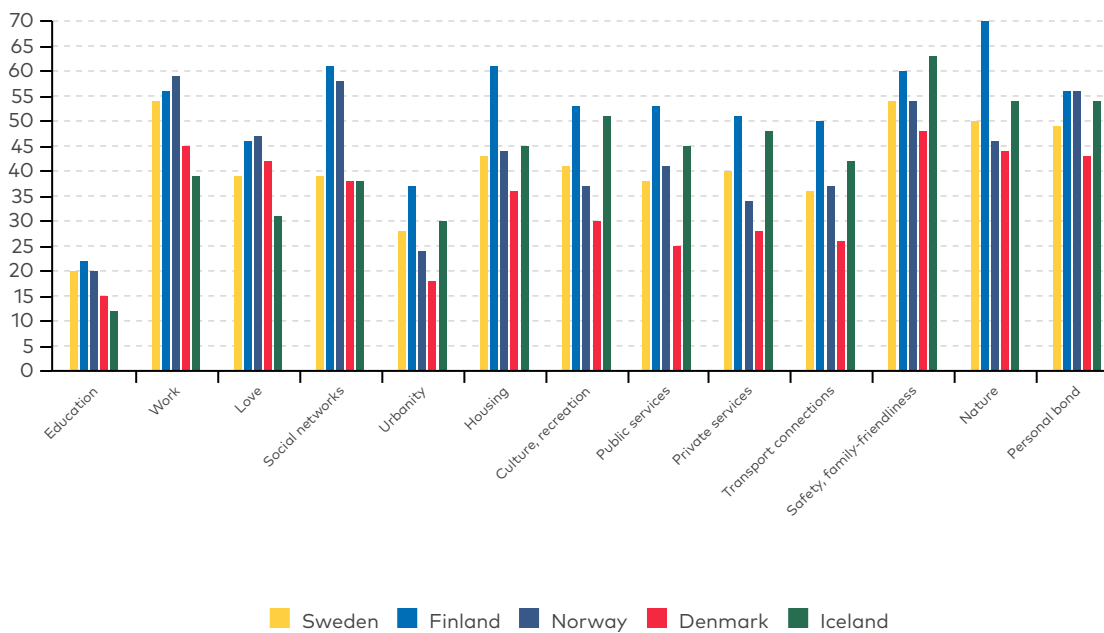
Graph 18. What forever leavers most value about their current home.



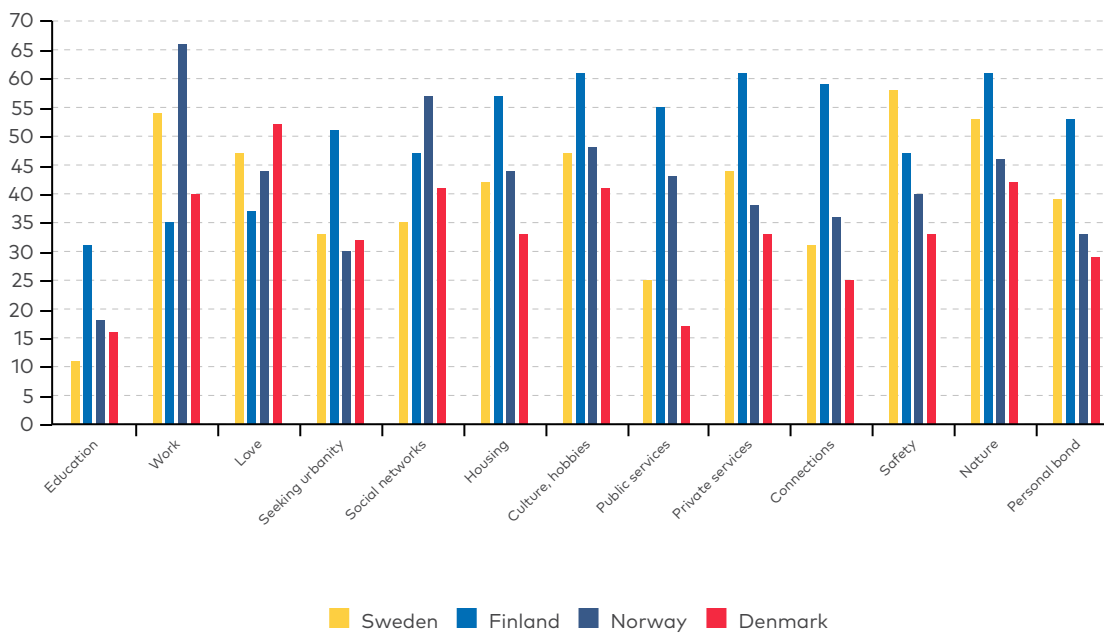
Graph 19. What leavers (open to return) most value about their current home.

This question set out to discover how people view their current place of residence after having moved at least once in their lives. Family-friendliness and closeness to nature are most appreciated factors across both groups. When it comes to Finland, however, urbanity emerges as a strong positive among the group of forever leavers. People not willing to return seem to have also had more luck in forming new relationships where they live now, and they value social diversity more than the average respondent. Nonetheless, their bond with the new place of residence is not much stronger than within the group of potential returners.

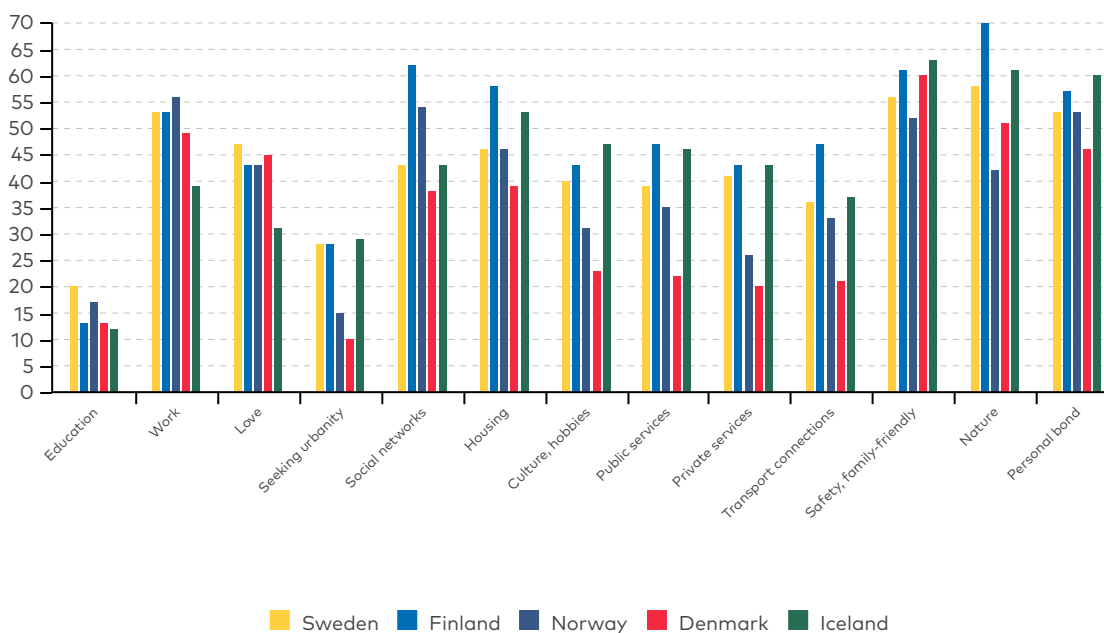
If we compare this data to peoples' views on their place of origin, we notice that both groups view their place of origin more positively in some respects. In their view, the place they left behind was more family-friendly, closer to nature and easy to find new friends in (except for Finland). To balance these shortcomings, people (again, especially Finns) appreciate the urban and interesting characteristics of their current place of residence. Interestingly, only Danish respondents in the "forever leavers" group report having a (slightly) stronger bond with their current home than with their place of origin.



Graph 20. Main possible reasons for a future move for the average respondent.



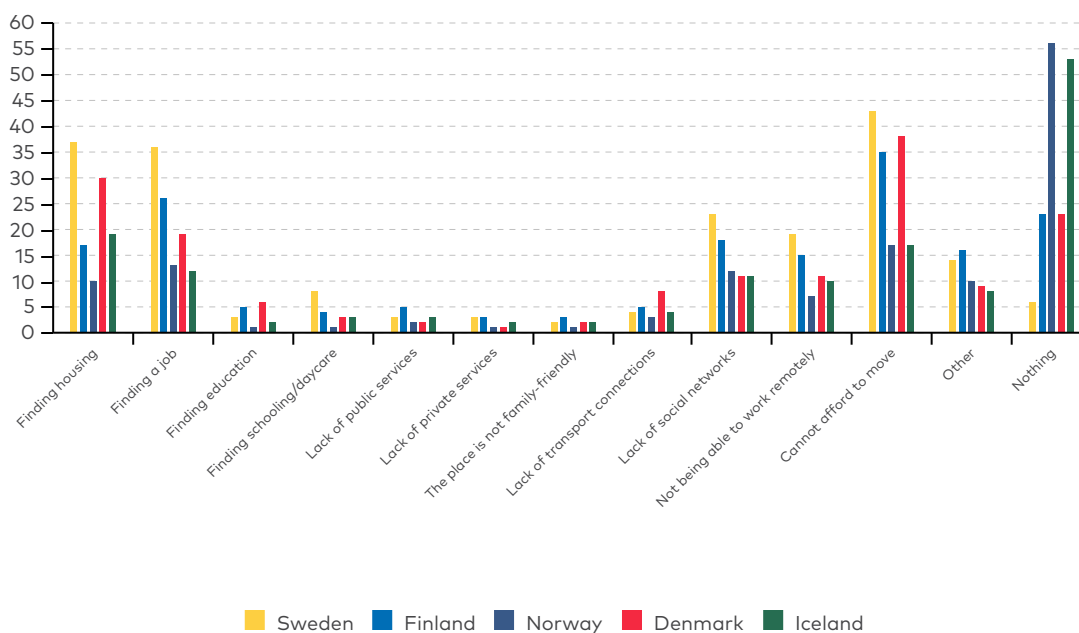
Graph 21. Main possible reasons for a future move for forever leavers. Iceland is not included due to the lack of data in this group.



Graph 22. Main possible reasons for a future move for people who have left their place of origin but are open to return.

Finally, respondents were asked about the reasons that could drive them to move again in the future. Here, we see some differences between those not willing to return to their place of origin and those open to the possibility when it comes to their future needs and preferences. Work and career opportunities remain an important factor for both groups. The forever leavers continue to prefer an urban setting compared to the average respondent and especially compared to the other group. They also put more emphasis on the availability of public and private services and culture and recreation opportunities. As for those open to returning, they might move in the future to seek stronger social networks, and especially a safer, more family-friendly area near nature, possibly pointing to potential reasons for considering a return to the place of origin.

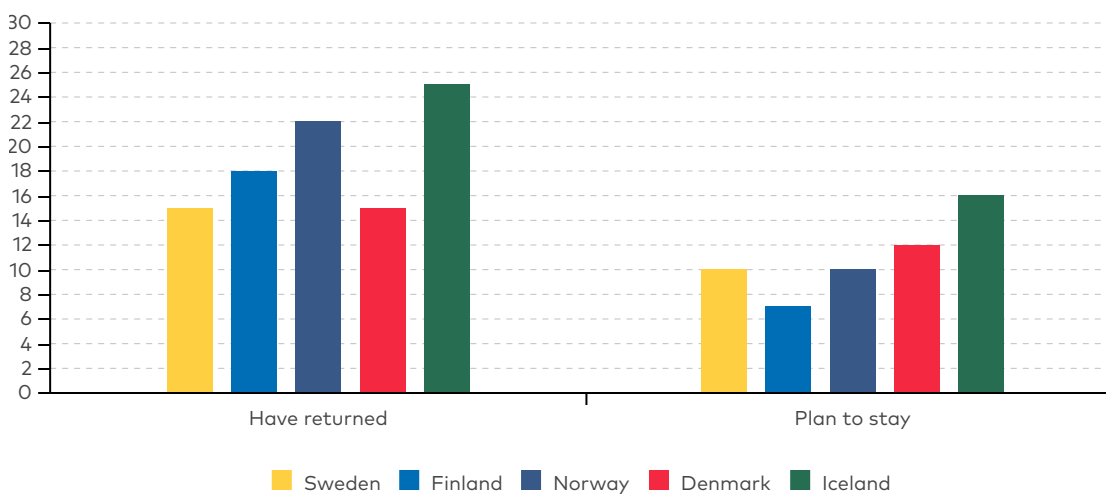
Some national differences also emerge. Danish respondents stand out in their lesser need for better housing, public or private services or transport connections compared to their Nordic neighbours. They are also less moved by a personal bond to a new place or the wish to leave a more urban lifestyle. Finnish respondents, on the other hand, consider these factors to a considerable extent, while also putting a special emphasis on culture, leisure opportunities and access to nature. Norwegians are especially prepared to move for career opportunities.



Graph 23. Main reasons preventing all respondents from moving where they would wish to move.

3.2.2 Returners: People who have returned or are planning to return to their place of origin

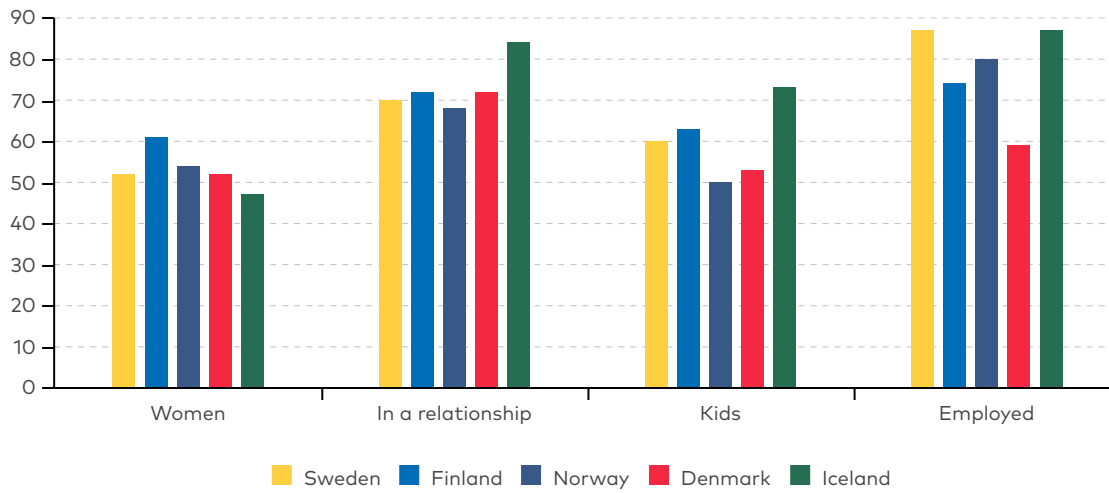
3.2.2.1 Characteristics of returners



Graph 24. People who have returned to their place of origin and plan to stay.

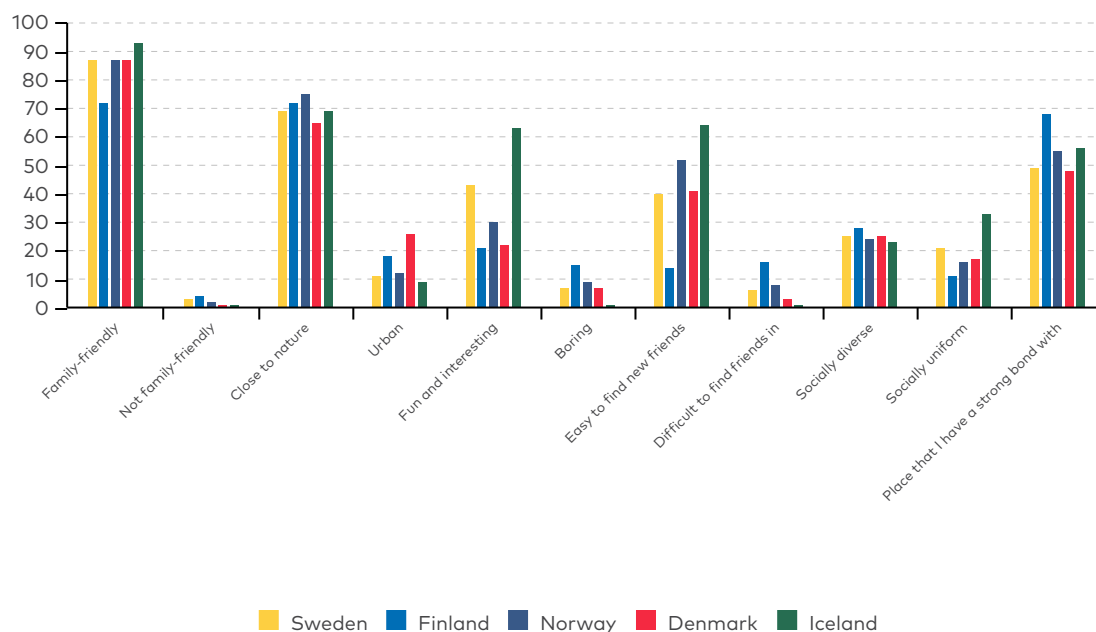
We have chosen not to analyse in more detail the people who may have returned but are open to moving away in the future, as they do not differ from the average respondent as a group to a significant extent.

Icelandic respondents are most likely to move back to their place of origin: 25% of respondents, with 64% of those returning planning to remain there. In contrast, only 15% of Swedish and Danish respondents have moved back but of them, 66% and 80% plan to remain there indefinitely.



Graph 25. Typology of people who have returned and are planning to stay.

As with forever leavers, returners are somewhat more likely to be women, again especially in Finland. Icelandic returners stand out from the rest as they are significantly more likely to be in a relationship. As for having children, however, the returners are definitely more likely to be parents than the average respondent. In Sweden and Finland, the likelihood of having children in the returners' group is up to 20 percentage units higher than the average (see graph 4). Returners are also notably more likely to be employed than the average respondent, except in Denmark.

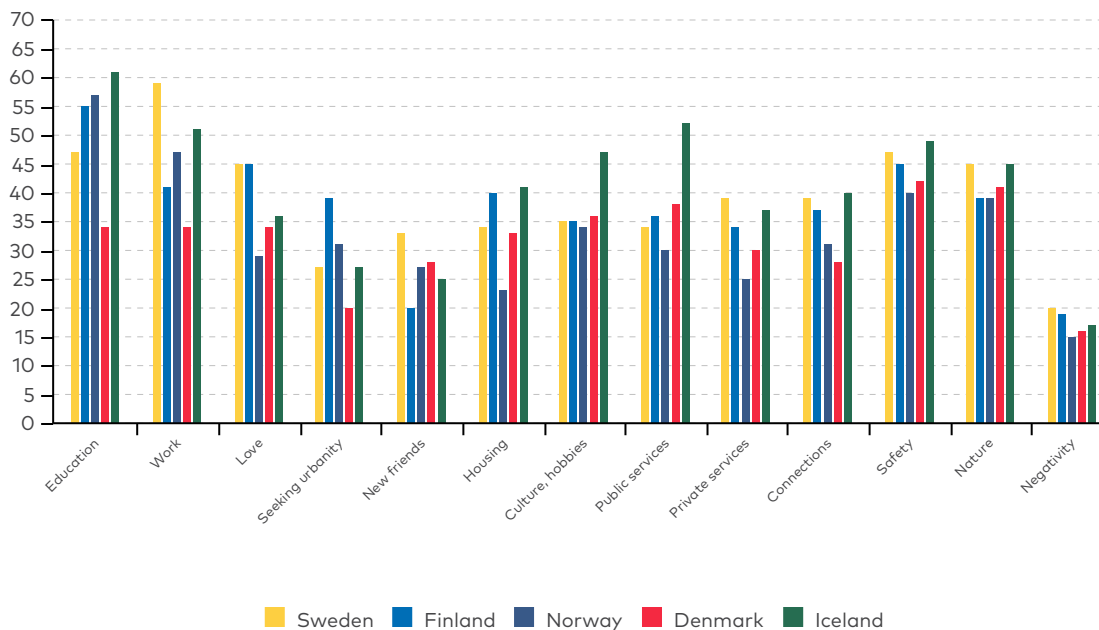


Graph 26. Opinions on place of origin from people who have returned or plan to return there.

Unsurprisingly, people who have or are planning to return to their place of origin have a significantly higher opinion of the place than people who have left it for good (or the average respondent). But why is that? These differences are especially high when it comes to more social reasons such as finding the place fun and interesting or easy to find new friends in. Conversely, they are lower regarding family-friendliness (except in Finland) and closeness to nature, which typically score high in all groups, as well as urbanity, which scores low overall. Finally, the difference is highest when it comes to having a personal bond with the place, and returners score especially high in this regard.

As within the leavers' group, Finnish respondents continue to hold a distinctively negative stance towards their place of origin compared to other Nordics, despite having the strongest personal bond by far. The trend of Icelandic respondents viewing their place of origin especially positively also continues within this group. They are also the only ones viewing their place as more socially uniform than diverse, which may help explain their strong belief in finding new friends there.

3.2.2.2 Returners: reasons for past and future migrations

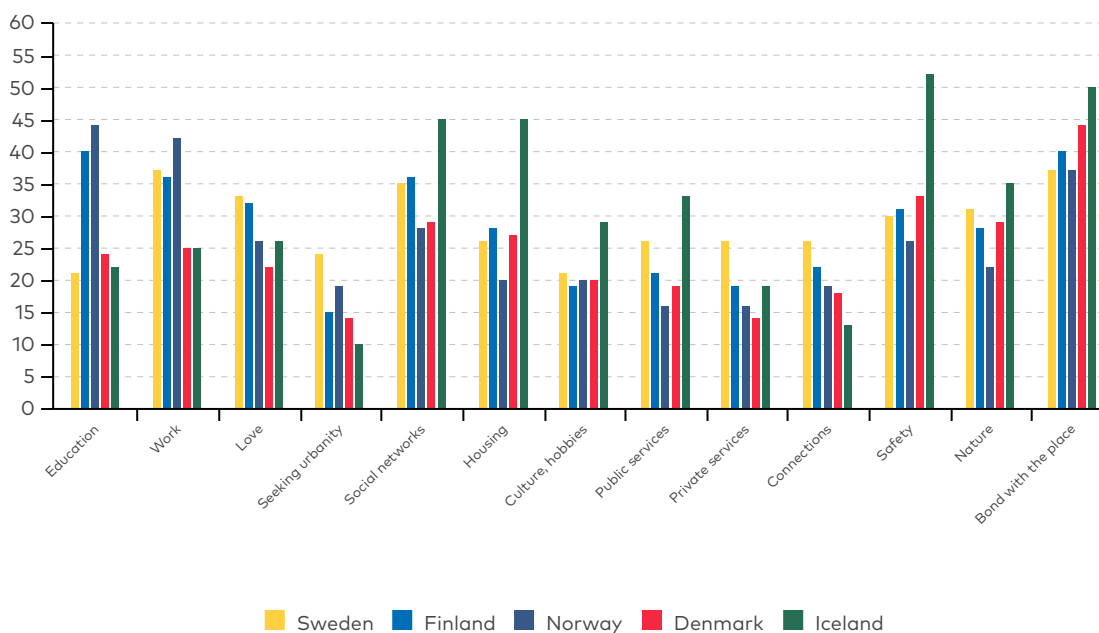


Graph 27. Main reasons why people, who have left their origin but moved or plan to move back, moved for the first time.

People who moved out of their place of origin to (potentially) return later, either left for education or for work reasons, although romantic relationships and housing or seeking a safer or more nature-friendly environment are also featured relatively highly as

motivations. There are some differences compared to the forever leavers' group: work has a slightly lower importance and seeking a different way of life (seeking urbanity or new friends) clearly rank lower as reasons for moving out. Maybe most notable, however, is the lack of a clear driver for the first move in this group, suggesting that it may have happened at a later age and, therefore, for a wider variety of reasons.

A cross-comparison between the Nordic countries reveals that education plays a bigger role as a first move driver in Iceland, Norway and Finland than elsewhere, while for Sweden, work is the biggest factor. Iceland sets itself apart from others regarding seeking better housing, culture or leisure opportunities, or public services. In comparison, Danish respondents have much weaker drivers behind this first move.

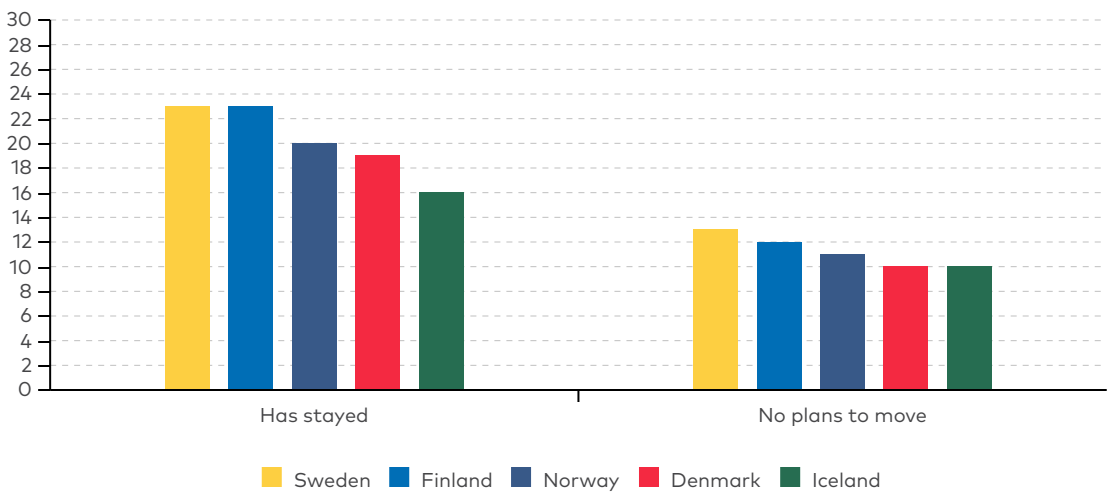


Graph 28. Main reasons for the most recent move for people who have returned or are planning to return to their place of origin.

The moves depicted in this data include people who moved back to their place of origin. However, there are unfortunately no singular data of this specific move. We can, however, note the factors that the returns view as important in their subsequent moves. Compared to the forever leavers, we notice that several factors decrease in importance, among them work, romantic relationship, housing (except for Denmark), culture and leisure opportunities, public and private services and transport connections. A strong bond with the place features as a noticeably more important reason for moving (back), as well as education when it comes to Finland and Norway. Iceland continues to differ from others by having a larger emphasis on social relations, housing and public services, while the Swedish respondents put more emphasis on private services and transport connections.

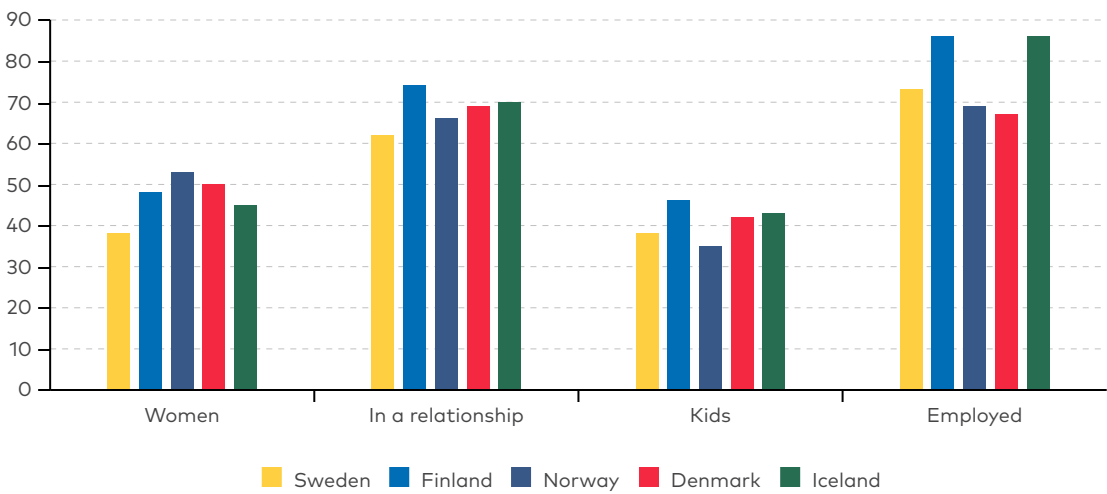
3.2.3 Stayers: people who have stayed in their place of origin and are not planning to move

3.2.3.1 Characteristics of stayers

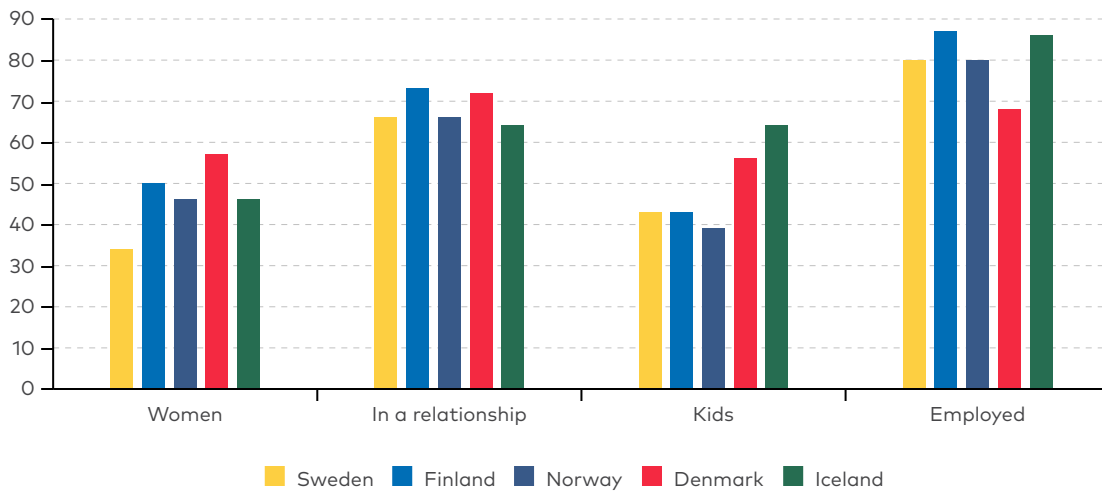


Graph 29. People who have stayed in their place of origin by country.

Sweden has the least amount of leavers and returners, but the largest share of stayers (together with Finland). Most people who have stayed in their place of origin plan to remain there. On average 55% of stayers. In Iceland, only 16% of people choose to remain in their place of origin but of them, 63% plan to remain indefinitely.



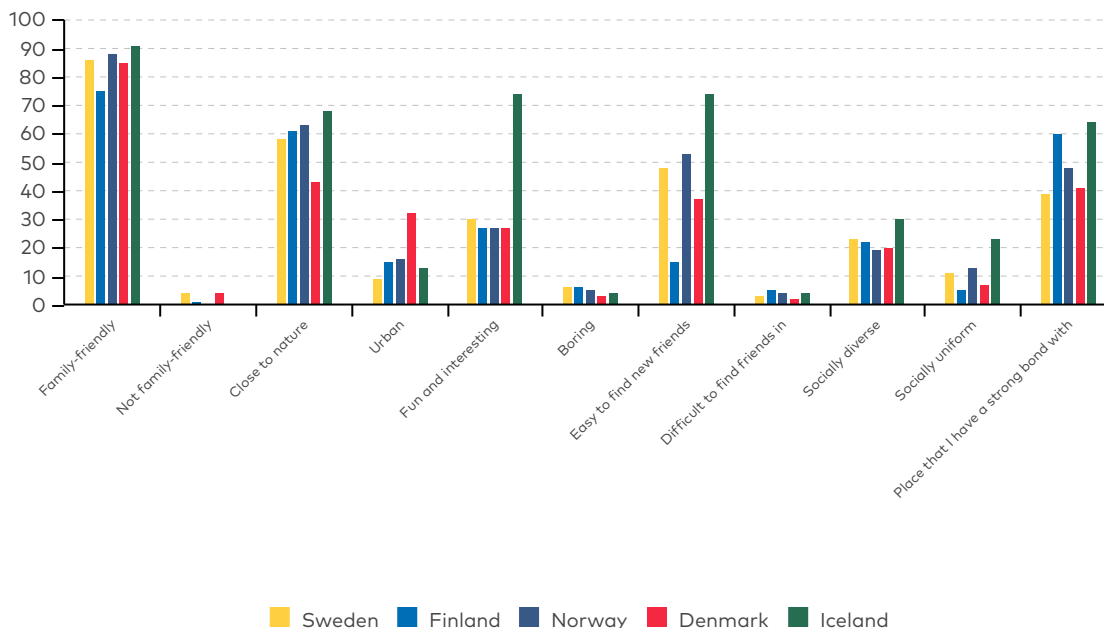
Graph 30. People who have stayed in their place of origin by country.



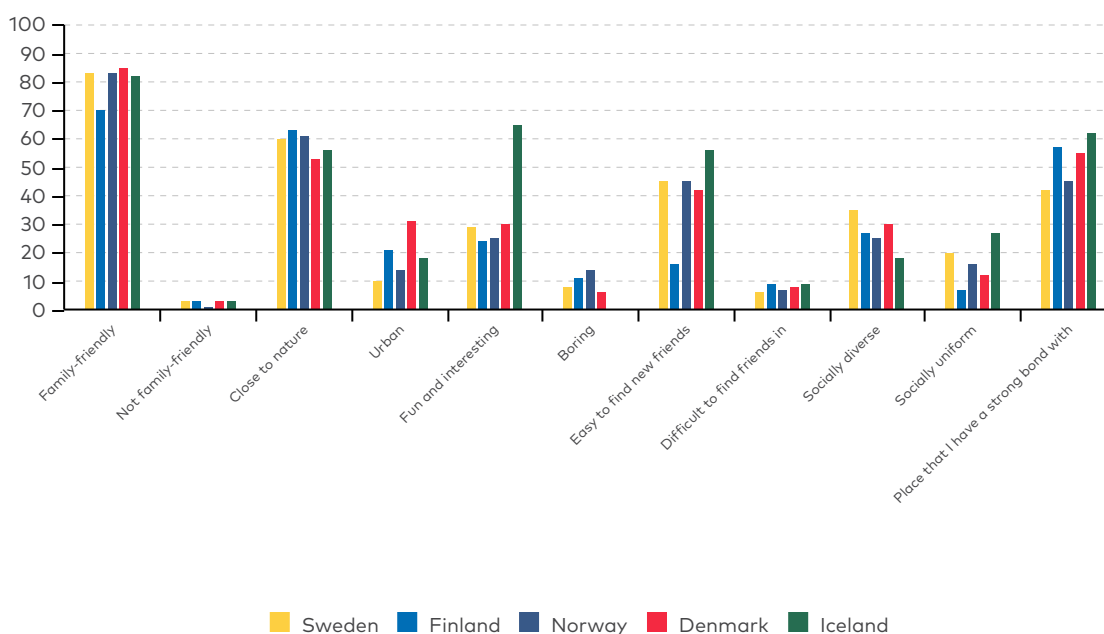
Graph 31. People who have stayed in their place of origin and have no plans to move by country.

Compared to the other leavers and returners, the stayers' group includes more men, especially in Sweden. In Sweden, stayers are also noticeably less likely to be in a relationship, have children or to be employed, which is also true for Iceland regarding a relationship and children but not employment. In Norway and Denmark, stayers are more likely to lack these characteristics only when compared to the returners' group. Finally, the Finnish stayers are actually slightly more likely to have children or be employed than the average or leavers, and most likely to be employed of all groups.

When we compare all stayers to those certain to remain in their place of origin, the share of men increases in Sweden and Norway, the likelihood to have children increases in all countries except for Finland to even surpass the national average (except in Denmark), and the respondents are increasingly likely to be employed especially in Sweden and Norway. In other words, respondents have further reasons keeping them satisfied where they live now.



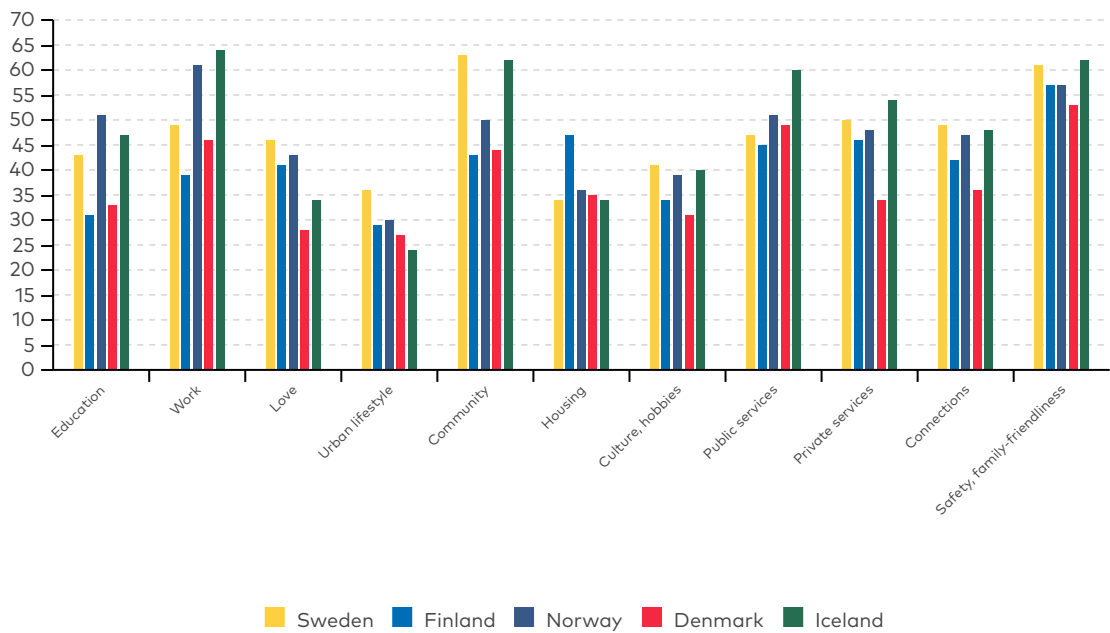
Graph 32. Opinions on place of origin from people who have remained there and plan to stay.



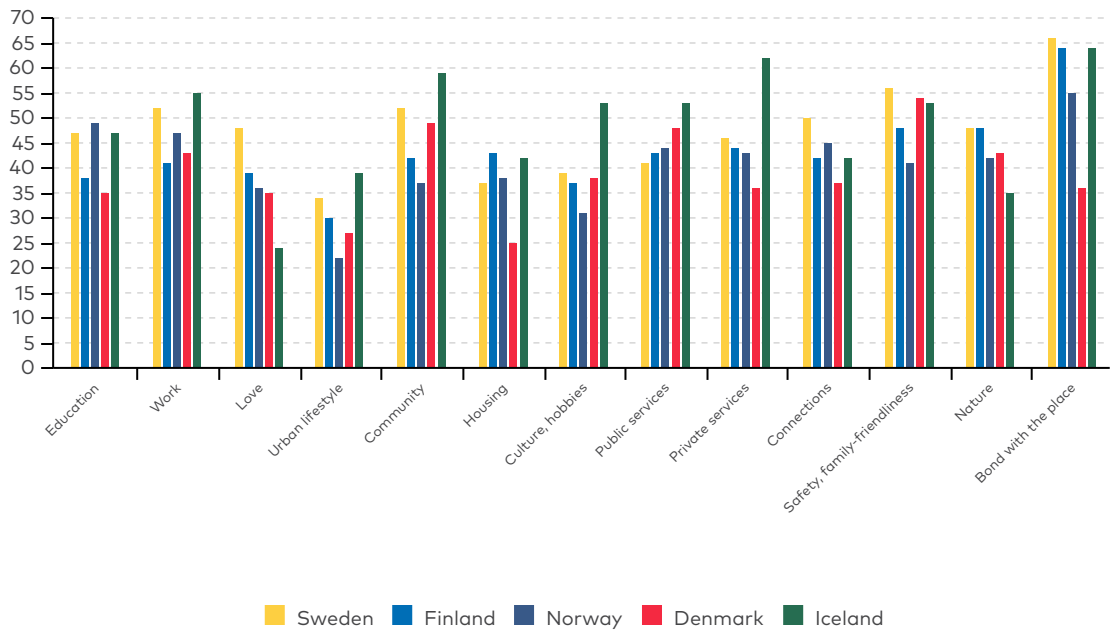
Graph 33. Opinions on place of origin from people who have remained but are open to move in the future.

As with other groups, people who have made the decision to stay view their home in a more positive light than people who are open to move, who answer more positively (although not radically so) than the average respondent. Interestingly, stayers do not reach the level of positive views that the returners feel towards their place of origin, especially when it comes to it being close to nature or a fun and interesting place. The returners also reported having the closest personal bond with the place in most countries, except for Denmark and Iceland, where the stayers feel the strongest bond.

3.2.3.2 Stayers: reasons for staying



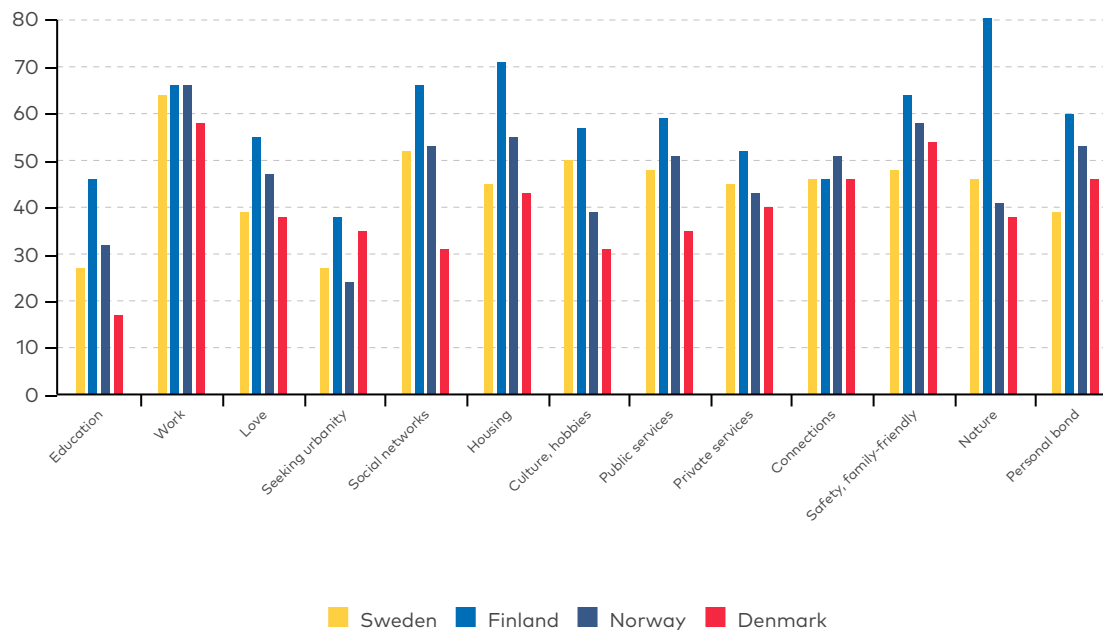
Graph 34. Main reasons to remain living in the place of origin for people who have no plans to move.



Graph 35. Main reasons to remain living in the place of origin for people who have some plans to move in the future.

People's reasons for staying in their place of origin are different to those who are ready to move in the sense that education and work overall play a smaller role (especially for those committed to staying). Instead, a sense of a strong community plays a bigger role as a keeping factor than the wish to seek new friends does for people leaving.

Housing (especially in Finland), access to public and private services and transport connections (especially in Sweden) also feature more strongly as a factor here than for people who have left, especially for those without any plans to move out. Stayers appreciate also being close to nature and in a family-friendly environment as reasons to stay more than leavers view them as something they seek out. The importance of these reasons, however, grows in significance during later moves. Finally, having a personal bond with the place emerges as the most important reason to stay here, matching the bond that returners have with the place (except in Denmark).

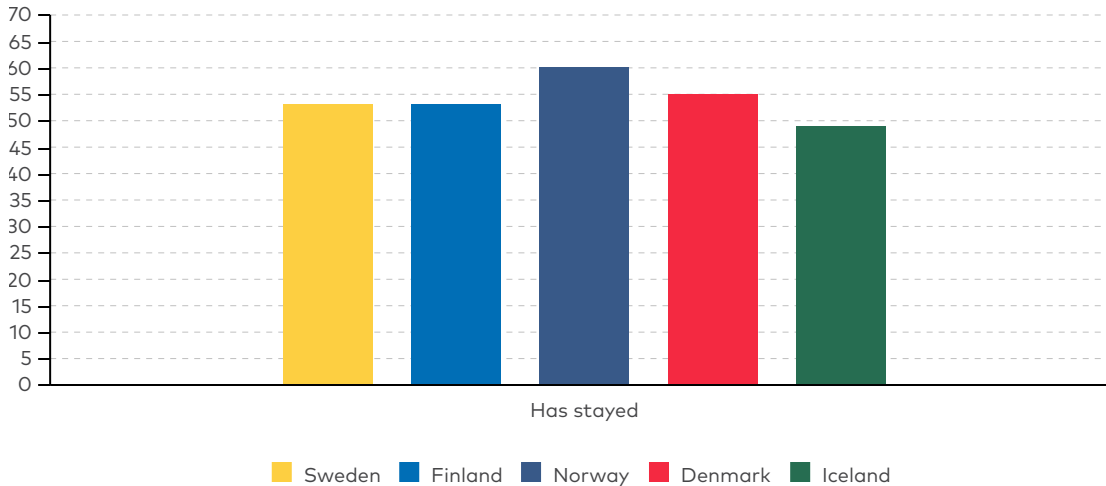


Graph 36. Main reasons to possibly move from place of origin for people who have remained there but have some plans to move in the future. Iceland not included due to lack of data.

People who have remained in their place of origin but are open to move in the future would primarily move for career opportunities, or especially in the case of Finland, also to seek more suitable housing or a more family-friendly place closer to nature. Compared to the average respondent, education and a romantic relationship have a more prevalent role as a possible reason. This is especially true for Finland, where respondents are also much more likely to leave their place of origin to seek out better housing or a more nature-rich area.

Overall, people who have remained in their place of origin list more possible reasons to move in the future than the average respondent, possibly suggesting that they have had to compromise more when it comes to their overall life satisfaction.

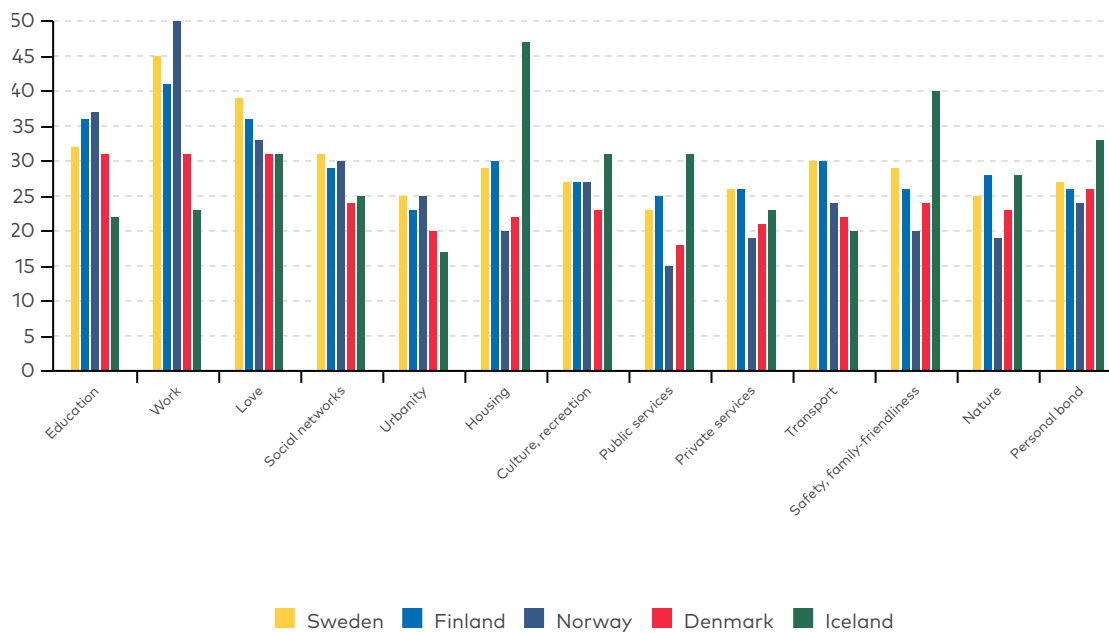
3.2.4 Other typologies



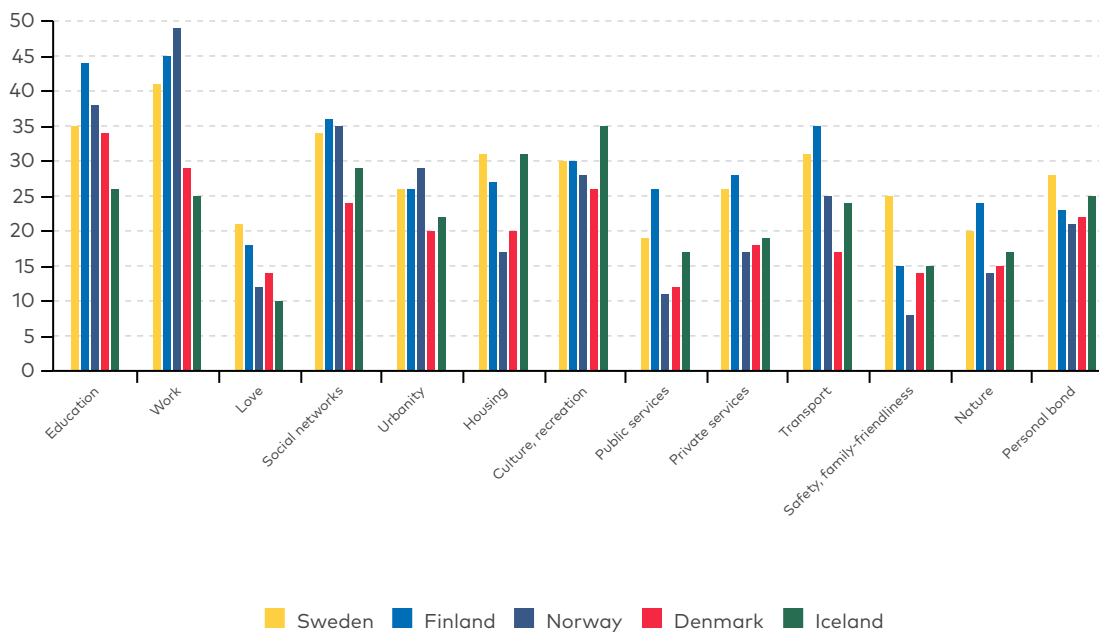
Graph 37. The share of people in each Nordic country with some plans to move in the near or more distant future.

Taking a closer look at the migration patterns of people divided into other typologies (marital status and number of children, education and employment) allows us to extract more possible indicators for increased mobility or place attachment.

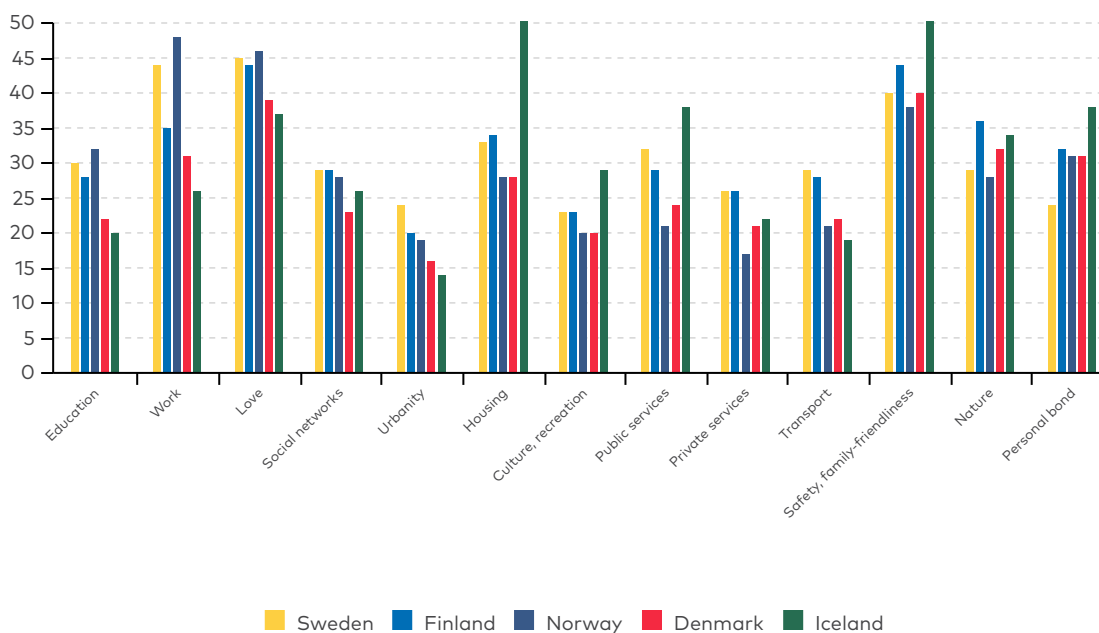
On average, 54% of respondents have some plans to continue moving in the future (for more details, see graph 37). Compared to this, **unemployed** people are most likely to continue moving in the future, with an average of 62% having some plans (Sweden 56%, Finland 67%, Norway 62%, Denmark 60%, Iceland 65%). Mobility is also relatively high for people with a **higher academic degree**, with an average of 59% with some plans. In this group, there are the most national differences, with Icelanders least and Finns most likely to move. (Sweden 57%, Finland 70%, Norway 59%, Denmark 59%, Iceland 49%). Regarding **relationship status**, single people are only slightly more likely to move than people in relationships, with an average of 58% having some plans (Sweden 57%, Finland 65%, Norway 54%, Denmark 58% and Iceland 56%). Finally, having **children** makes one less inclined to plan a move for the future, as only 45% of respondents with children to raise are planning a move. This figure is the lowest in Denmark and Iceland. (Sweden 46%, Finland 50%, Norway 42%, Denmark 43%, Iceland 42%).



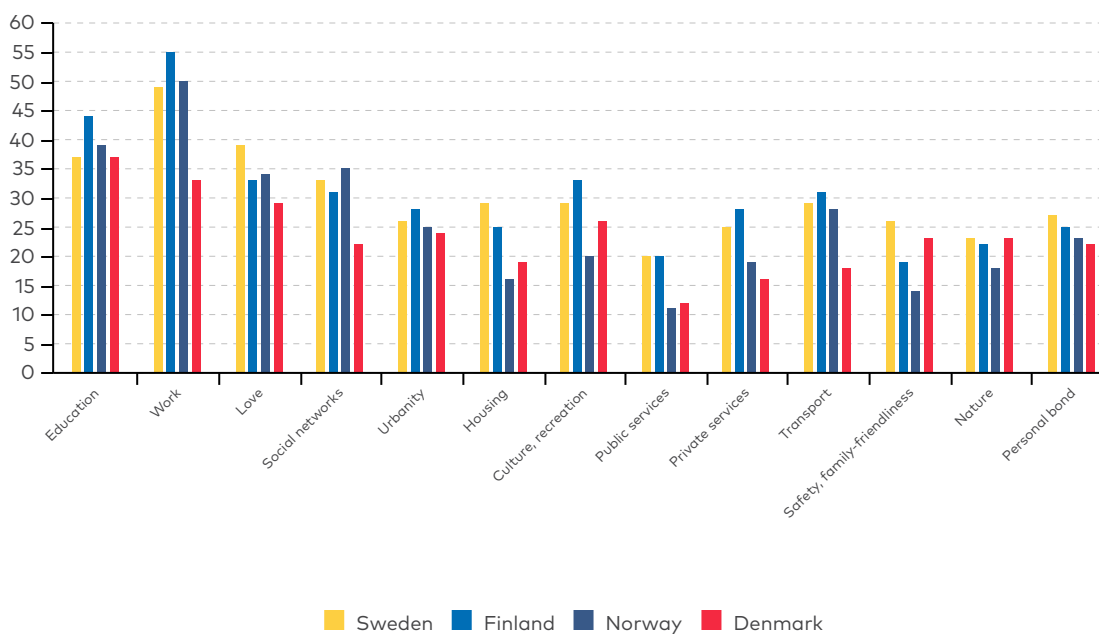
Graph 38. Average reasons for most recent move.



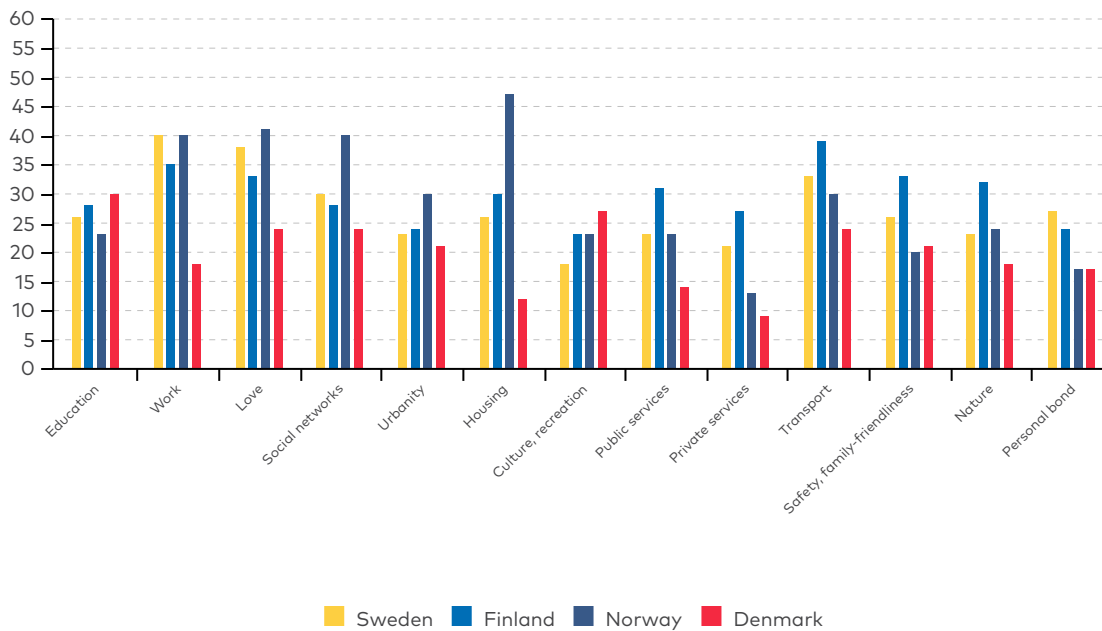
Graph 39. Reasons why people who are single moved the previous time.



Graph 40. Reasons why people who are single moved the previous time.



Graph 41. Reasons why people with a higher academic degree moved the previous time. Iceland is not included due to the lack of data.



Graph 42. Reasons why unemployed people moved the previous time. Iceland is not included due to the lack of data.

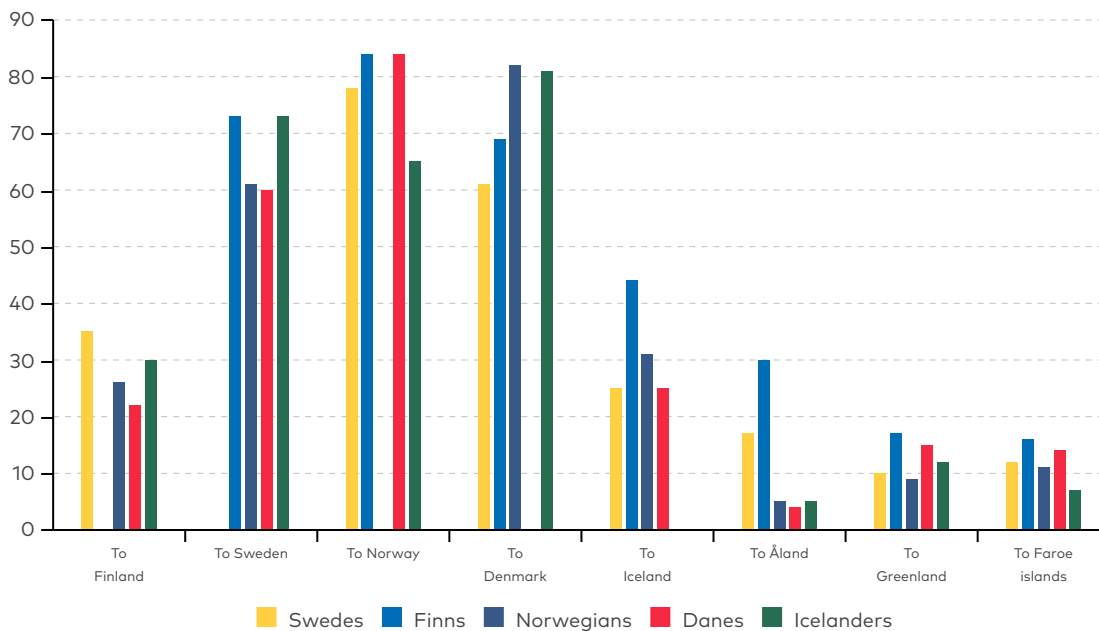
Single people move for a variety of reasons, with the most notable being career (for Sweden, Finland, and Norway), education (for Finland and Denmark), and seeking a place with more culture and leisure opportunities (for all but especially Iceland, Sweden, and Finland). Not surprisingly, people with children prioritise more family-friendly and safe environments rather than vibrant ones. In addition to this, they also move for career reasons, romantic relationships and to seek more suitable or affordable housing, especially in Iceland.

Regarding economic factors, having a higher education may make people more prone to move for career or education in all Nordic countries. In comparison, unemployed people have also moved for work, as well as in search of housing (Norway), for better transport connections, or for their social networks. These results further support the findings of a similar analysis by Niedomysl (2011a) and its conclusion that socio-economic characteristics of different groups have an important role to play in their migration decisions.

3.3 Other drivers to move

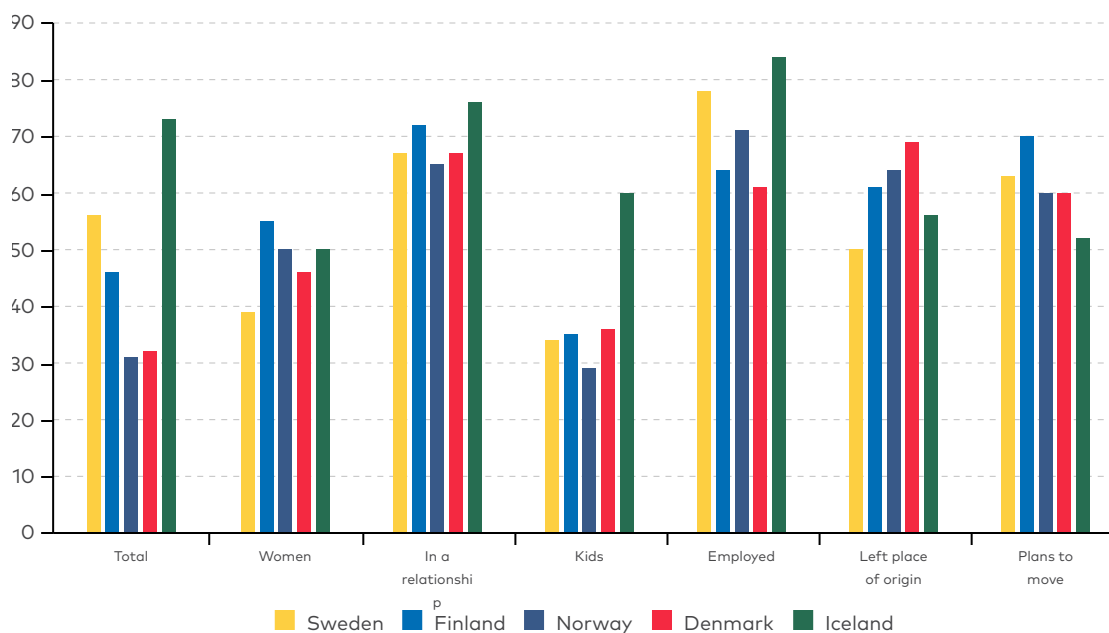
3.3.1 Move to another Nordic country

There is a large variety among the Nordic neighbours regarding their willingness to migrate between the Nordic countries, ranging from very willing Icelanders to reluctant Norwegians and Danes. To be precise, 46% of Finns, 56% of Swedes, 31% of Norwegians, 32% of Danes, and 73% of Icelanders would consider a move to another Nordic country. These figures mirror the findings of a 2024 study on the Common Nordic labour market, which found out that Icelandic people are most likely to move around all the Nordic countries for various reasons (Lundgren et al. 2024). Below are more detailed graphs about their characteristics and preferred destinations.



Graph 43. Where in the Nordics would people, who are open to moving to another Nordic country, migrate.

Norway is by far the most favoured destination for a potential move within the Nordics, followed by Denmark and Sweden. As for moving motivations, Icelanders are most open towards all destinations, except for the autonomous regions. Compared to others, Finnish respondents also have broader preferences for a potential move than their neighbours, as they are most likely to consider a move to Iceland, (Åland), Greenland, or Faroe islands. The historical migration trend from Finland to Sweden is still somewhat visible here, and Swedes are also more likely than other nationalities to consider Finland as a destination.

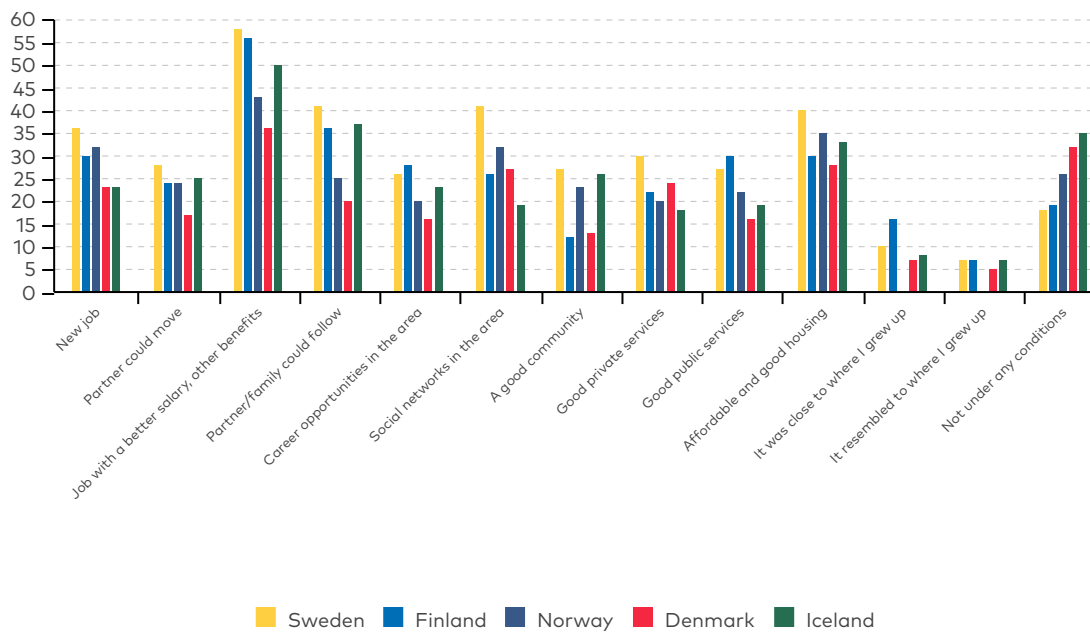


Graph 44. Characteristics of people open to moving to another Nordic country.

Compared with the average respondent, people open to move to another Nordic country are more likely to be men (except in Finland) that do not have children. They are also slightly more likely to be looking for a job, while relationship status does not seem to have an impact on this factor. Finnish, Norwegian and Danish respondents are more likely to have led an overall mobile life thus far, having left their place of origin behind. Respondents from all countries are also more likely than average to continue moving in the future.

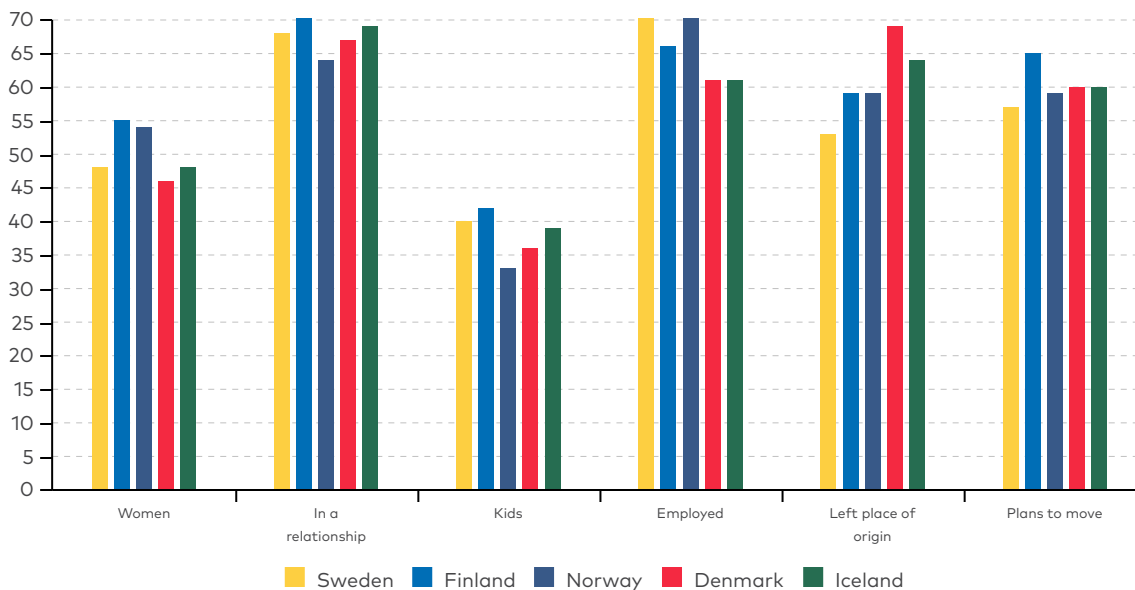
3.3.2 Move to a rural place for added benefits

When asking the respondents if they were open to moving to a rural place (defined as a place an hour away from a regional centre) for additional benefits such as a better salary, better working benefits, improved housing conditions, etc. 65% of Swedes, 55% of Finns, 50% of Icelanders, 43% of Norwegians, and only 36% of Danes would be open to considering this possibility. Below are more details about their characteristics and desired benefits.



Graph 45. Benefits, that might make respondents consider moving to a rural area.

These results demonstrate that although finding a job from a rural area may constitute an important factor to move there (especially in Sweden), it's likely that there needs to be other benefits as well to persuade people to consider this option. The most important factor is that the new job would come with a better salary or other benefits; this applies to all countries. Furthermore, being able to have one's partner or family follow without trouble is an important point (especially for Finland, Sweden and Iceland), as well as other social networks in the area (especially for Sweden. Affordable and suitable housing also rises in importance for most countries, again especially in Sweden. Icelandic respondents are most likely to reject the idea under any circumstances, closely followed by Danes.

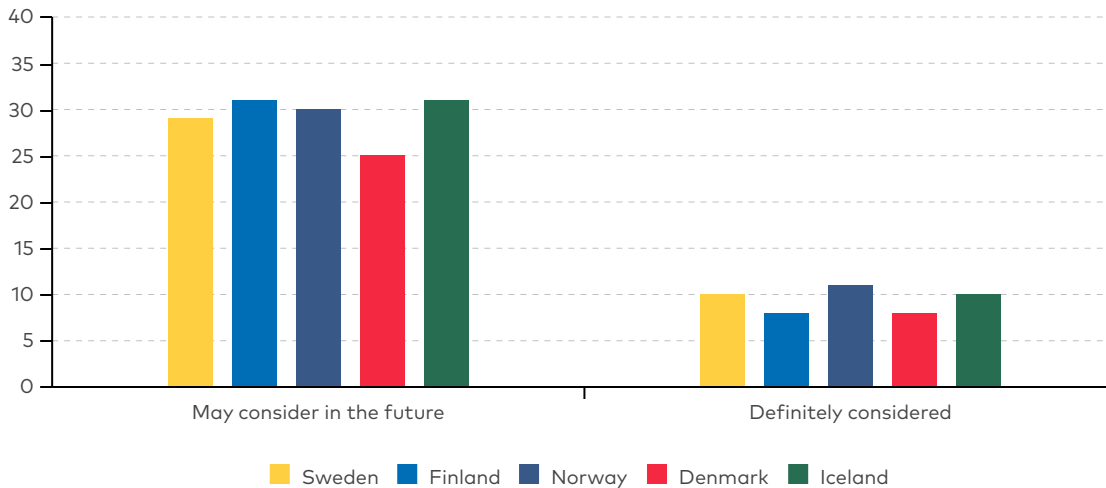


Graph 46. Characteristics of people who might consider moving to a rural area for added benefits.

People who were open to moving to a rural area under certain circumstances are more likely to be men (except in Finland and Norway, where gender does not appear to play a role). They are somewhat less likely to be in a relationship or have children, considerably so in Iceland. Iceland is also the only place where unemployment and willingness to migrate to rural areas clearly correlate. Potential rural movers may still live in their place of origin (more likely to have moved out only in Denmark and Iceland), but they are overall more likely to plan a move somewhere in the near or more distant future.

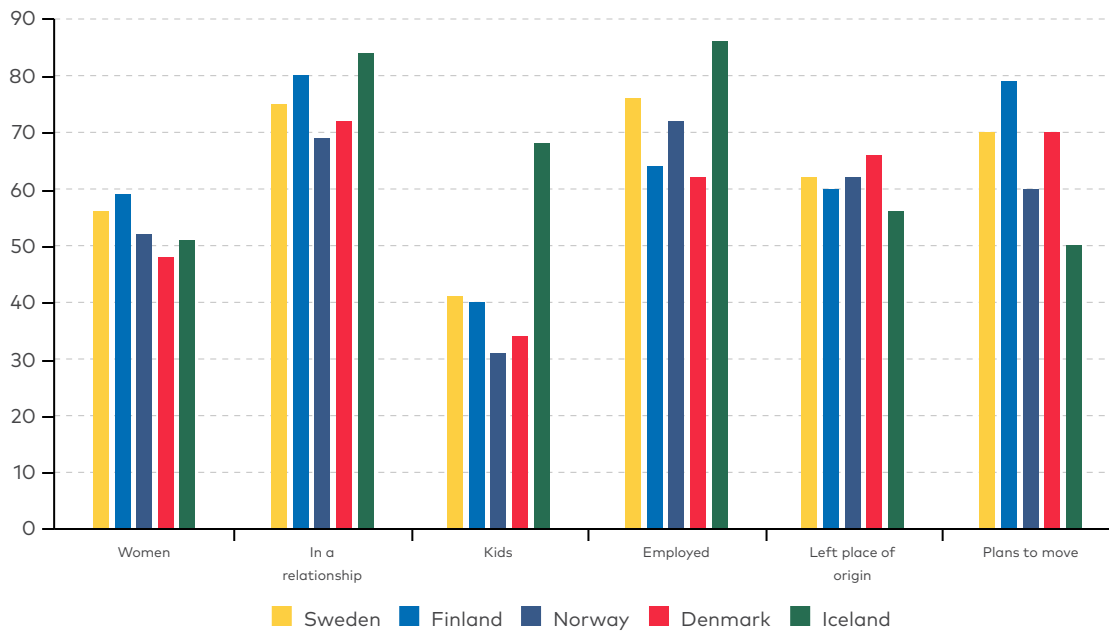
3.3.3 Move and work remotely

To explore the impact of remote work on people’s migration plans, we asked whether they would consider moving to another place if it was possible for them to continue working remotely from there.



Graph 47. People who have considered moving to another place to continue working remotely or who may consider it in the future.

The share of people open to using remote work as an enabler for moving is rather similar throughout the Nordics. Danes are the least interested in remote work and Icelandic people the most interested, possibly reflecting their state’s strategy to support remote work for example by offering all state positions as “site-less” unless otherwise specified (Rohrer & Granath Hansson 2024).



Graph 48. Characteristics of people who would definitely or possibly consider moving and working remotely.

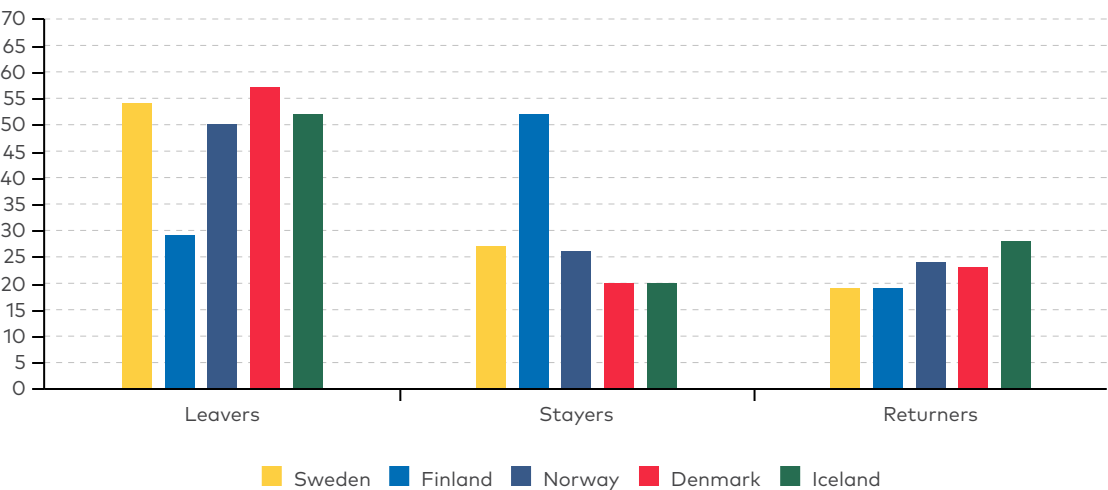
People who have considered remote work (or are able to do so) are most likely to be women (except in Denmark) and in a relationship, not necessarily with children. They are also more likely to have left their place of origin. These indicators may imply that they belong to the group of people considering a return to their place of origin, as this group consists of a similar demography. Compared to the average, they are much more likely to already have plans to move in the future, especially in Finland, Sweden, and Denmark.

3.4 The impact of geographic background on migration preference

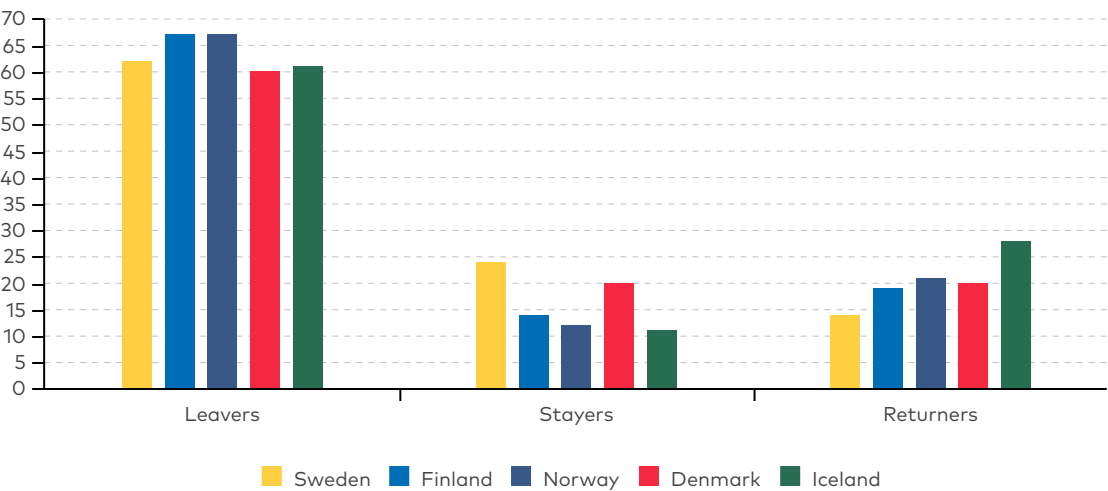
3.4.1 Geographic background and past migration choices

These answers are, to some extent, affected by the geographic bias towards urban areas discussed under the section 2.1, showing up as a clear minority of rural residents here. Despite this fact, it is possible to deduct certain representative findings from this data when examining the relative shares instead of total numbers.

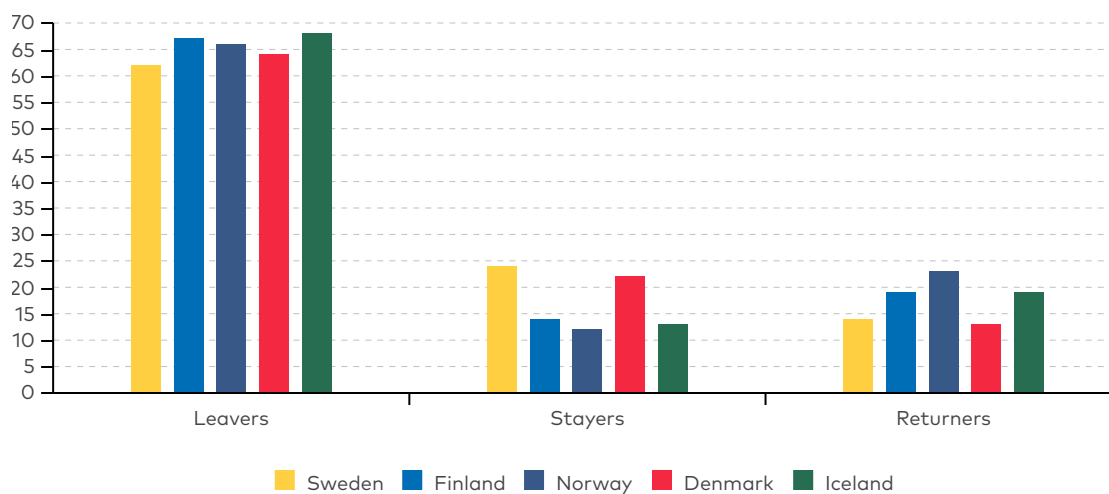
The tables below demonstrate how the geographic background (how urban or rural the respondents' place of origin was) correlates with their migration history. "Semiurban" refers to the more less condensed settlements surrounding urban centers (suburbs), smaller centers in rural areas, or more rural areas that are however well connected to a nearby urban center. This definition is based on Nordregio's Nordic urban-rural typology (Stjernberg et al. 2024).



Graph 49. Migration choices that people from urban places of origin have made.



Graph 50. Migration choices that people from semiurban places of origin have made.



Graph 51. Migration choices that people from rural places of origin have made.

These graphs tell us that people from urban places of origin are less inclined to leave them behind, while rural places tend to correlate with people leaving them either indefinitely or for some time. This phenomenon is especially pronounced in Finland and, in contrast, reversed in Sweden, where people are more likely to leave an urban place of origin and least likely to pack their bags in a rural area. Norwegian and Swedish respondents are even more likely to leave from a semiurban area than a rural one, although this difference is less pronounced. In Denmark, people are roughly as likely to leave, stay or return despite the geographic characteristics of their place of origin.

As can be deduced from the choices of leavers, people with an urban background are generally most likely to stay in their place of origin, again, especially in Finland but also in Norway and Iceland. Sweden sets itself apart from the rest by having more rural than urban stayers.

When it comes to returning to one's place of origin, geography appears to have a lesser impact. Norwegians are most likely to return to their rural place of origin later, while Finns and Danes are the most reluctant. As for urban and semi-urban areas, Icelandic respondents are considerably more eager to travel back there than to a rural area.

3.4.2 Geographic background and future migration choices

The tables below categorise the respondents further, based on, first, whether their place of origin can be classified as urban, semiurban, or rural, and secondly, their migration history, and finally how these factors correlate with their future migration preferences.

SWEDEN

Place of origin	Urban	Semiurban	Rural
Leavers	334	94	30
Happy to stay	24%	24%	29%
Want to move back	4%	7%	2%
Someplace else	9%	9%	5%
Unsure	17%	21%	11%
Stayers	167	37	22
Happy to stay	14%	17%	23%
Want to move back	6%	0%	5%
Someplace else	3%	4%	3%
Unsure	4%	3%	3%
Returners	114	21	13
Happy to stay	8%	6%	14%
Want to move back	5%	4%	5%
Someplace else	2%	0%	0%
Unsure	3%	3%	2%
Total respondents	615	152	65

Graph 52. Geographic background and migration preferences of respondents from Sweden.

FINLAND

Place of origin	Urban	Semiurban	Rural
Leavers	332	151	175
Unsure	14%	18%	22%
Wish to remain here	23%	33%	39%
Wish to return	9%	5%	9%
Someplace else	7%	11%	8%
Stayers	185	31	25
Unsure	4%	1%	0%
Wish to remain here	19%	8%	6%
Wish to return	4%	4%	4%
Someplace else	2%	0%	0%
Returners	125	42	25
Unsure	4%	3%	1%
Wish to remain here	11%	17%	6%
Wish to return	3%	2%	3%
Someplace else	2%	2%	0%
Total respondents	642	224	225

Graph 53. Geographic background and migration preferences of respondents from Finland.

NORWAY

Place of origin	Urban	Semiurban	Rural
Leavers	275	138	105
Wish to move somewhere	5%	5%	7%
Wish to remain here	25%	35%	33%
Wish to return	4%	9%	6%
Unsure	16%	17%	20%
Stayers	144	24	18
Wish to move somewhere	2%	0%	0%
Wish to remain here	15%	9%	8%
Wish to return	5%	2%	0%
Unsure	4%	0%	3%
Returners	131	43	36
Wish to move somewhere	1%	1%	0%
Wish to remain here	13%	12%	12%
Wish to return	7%	5%	8%
Unsure	3%	3%	3%
Grand Total	550	205	159

Graph 54. Geographic background and migration preferences of respondents from Norway.

DENMARK

Place of origin	Urban	Semiurban	Rural
Leavers	327	203	49
Wish to move somewhere	5%	7%	1%
Wish to remain here	29%	30%	39%
Wish to return	5%	5%	11%
Unsure	18%	18%	13%
Stayers	117	69	17
Wish to move somewhere	1%	1%	1%
Wish to remain here	11%	12%	14%
Wish to return	4%	4%	3%
Unsure	4%	4%	4%
Returners	134	69	10
Wish to move somewhere	1%	1%	0%
Wish to remain here	12%	11%	8%
Wish to return	8%	5%	1%
Unsure	2%	3%	4%
Grand Total	578	341	76

Graph 55. Geographic background and migration preferences of respondents from Denmark.

ICELAND

Place of origin	Urban	Semiurban	Rural
Leavers	144	28	73
I wish to move somewhere	7%	7%	6%
Unsure	13%	11%	19%
I wish to remain here	28%	39%	38%
I wish to return	4%	4%	6%
Stayers	56	5	14
I wish to move somewhere	0%	2%	1%
Unsure	3%	2%	1%
I wish to remain here	13%	4%	9%
I wish to return	4%	2%	2%
Returners	77	13	20
I wish to move somewhere	3%	9%	2%
Unsure	6%	7%	3%
I wish to remain here	17%	13%	12%
I wish to return	3%	0%	2%
Grand Total	277	46	107

Graph 56. Geographic background and migration preferences of respondents from Iceland.

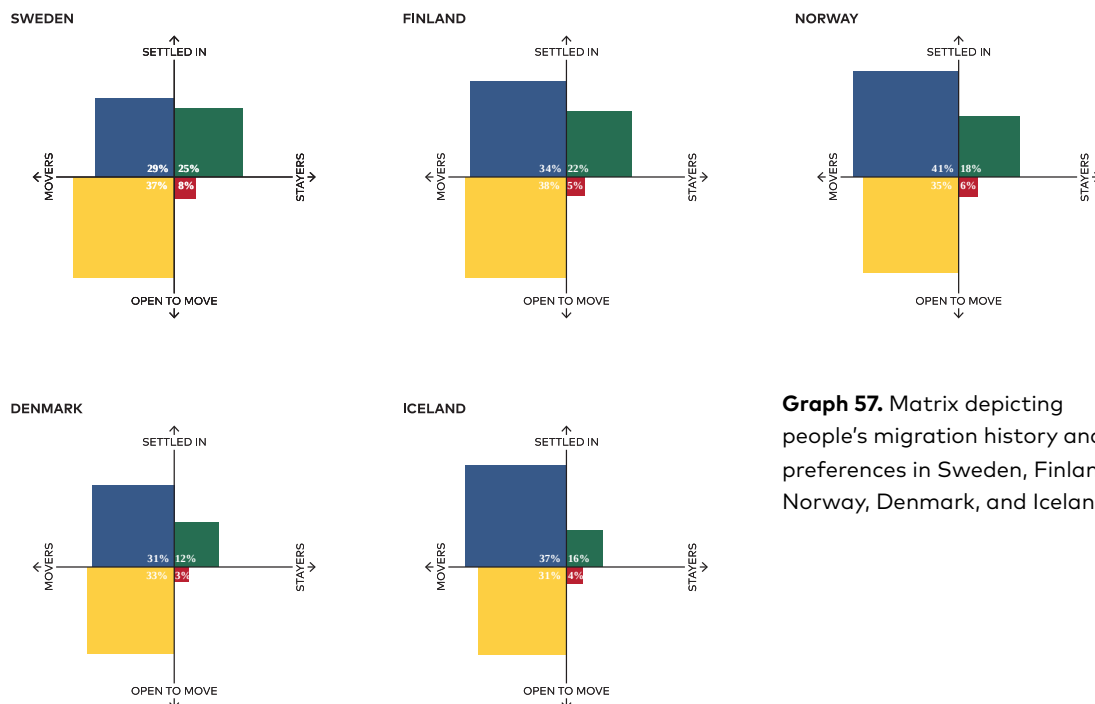
In all countries, people who have left a rural place of origin and settled into a new area are most content to remain living there. In contrast, people from semiurban or urban places appear to live more mobile lives in the sense that since leaving their place of origin, a relatively large share of them are unsure about where to settle. This trend is especially visible in Denmark and Sweden. Finland and Iceland have the most clear majority of rural respondents leaving their place of origin, and this group also shows more variety when it comes to future choices.

The place of origin also correlates to some extent with the stayers' future migration preferences. These results further cement the finding that Finnish respondents are clearly more likely to remain in their place of origin if they come from an urban area. This also applies, to lesser extent, to Norway, while in Sweden, it is the rural stayers who are most content to remain. In Denmark and Iceland, the answers are more mixed regarding this point.

As for those planning or having already returned, they are not necessarily more certain of their choice to remain living there compared to those who have stayed. In Finland, people returning to semiurban places and in Sweden, people returning to rural places emerge as particularly content to remain living there.

3.5 Four main typologies of Nordic people

Finally, we may organise our data based on two major migration indicators along a matrix. These two indicators are based on the questions pertaining to whether people have left their place of origin ("leavers") or not ("stayers") and whether they have some plans to move in the future. Here below are the matrixes by country.



Graph 57. Matrix depicting people's migration history and preferences in Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland.

These matrixes allow us to narrow down the complexities of migration patterns to the most core decisions, dividing them into four groups accordingly. They demonstrate that in the case of Finland, Sweden, and Denmark, people's decisions to either remain in their place of origin or leave it characterises the mobility of their later life, as well: the leavers are more inclined to continue moving in the future while the stayers are inclined to remain settled in their place of origin. This development is most visible in Sweden. In the case of Iceland and Norway, people are more likely to feel settled in after leaving their place of origin. These numbers do not cover the people who have returned to their place of origin. As for the minority of stayers, a considerably smaller share of them is planning to move out in later life. This is especially true for Finland, Denmark, and Iceland, and to a lesser extent Sweden and Norway, where 33% of stayers remain open to move in the future.



Photo: Julia Kivela / Visit Finland

4. Conclusion

4.1 National characteristics

Sweden

Swedes are the happiest to settle in and not move around in search of something new. They are the least likely to leave their place of origin and the least likely to move back once they have left. Correspondingly, the Swedish group also has the largest number of stayers. Swedes are especially likely to stay in their place of origin if it is a rural area. They were also most willing to move to a rural area in case some added benefits were involved.

The views in Sweden towards the place of origin are somewhat divided, as Swedes are also most likely to move away from this place because of negative emotions towards it. Compared to other Nordic countries, the Swedish stayer group stands out in that it consists mostly of men. Male stayers are somewhat worse off than their Nordic peers because unlike in other Nordic countries, they are less likely to be in relationships, have children, or be employed.

Finland

Finnish respondents are first and foremost characterised by being the most mobile group when it comes to women. Finnish women are the most likely group in all different groups examined to plan a move in the future, whether they are single, parents, unemployed, or with a higher academic degree. Respondents leaving their place of origin behind were also more dominantly women in Finland than elsewhere in the Nordics. Interestingly, despite reporting having a relatively strong personal bond with the place of origin, Finnish respondents were also very critical towards it, agreeing that it was a boring place where it was close to impossible to make new friends. There is a certain divide within the Finnish respondents, however, as the country ties with Sweden in having the largest share of people staying in their places of origin (despite still viewing it negatively in some respects).

Compared to their Nordic peers, these stayers were more likely to be well established in their lives, if that is measured by their likelihood to have a partner, children, or a job.

Finally, Finnish respondents have a clear preference towards urban areas: they are much less likely to leave an urban place than a rural one, and people living their place of origin behind are much more likely to say goodbye to a rural area. Despite this, the wish to live close to nature is an important driver especially for later moves, accompanied by housing needs.

Norway

Norway distinguishes itself from its neighbours by having the most people leaving their place of origin and never returning. They are, however, somewhat more likely to return to a rural area than an urban one. When looking at migration drivers, we notice that Norwegians are especially motivated to move for work or education throughout their lives, not only for their first move, possibly indicating that they are more prepared to move greater distances. Despite this, however, Norwegians are the least likely to move to another Nordic country.

Denmark

The Danish group sets itself apart from its neighbours as the most mobile one. According to the results of this study, Danes are most likely to leave their place of origin. Many of them remain open to returning in the future, although few have yet done so. They are most driven by the wish to live a different type of life: less likely to move for better services, amenities or housing and more likely to appreciate culture and leisure opportunities or the overall (urban) characteristics of their new residence. Perhaps as a result of this mobile lifestyle, Danes also report the weakest personal bond to their place of origin or to their current home.

Iceland

While Iceland has the largest share of people leaving their place of origin, a significant portion of them remain at least open to returning – especially if they come from a rural area. This is probably at least partially explained by the fact that Icelandic respondents have the overall strongest personal bond to their place of origin. In addition, they view it more positively all around, especially when it comes to reasons related to social networks. Regarding migration drivers, Icelandic people search for closeness with nature much less than their Nordic neighbours, instead being more drawn towards affordable or suitable housing.

Icelanders are mobile actors also in the sense that they are most likely to move to another Nordic country or to use remote work as an enabler for a move. Despite feeling a close bond with their (possibly) rural place of origin, they are the least likely to move to another rural area for any added benefits.

4.2 Personal preferences as migration drivers

Previous studies on the potential of rural migration (Niedomysl 2011) have already discovered that there is not much that can be done to turn the tide of rural out-migration since most people appear to leave rural regions behind willingly and are content with their choice. The results of this study point to the same conclusion: we notice that especially people who have left their place of origin to never return are looking for a different way of life in addition to filling their basic needs and demands (as represented by their wish to seek for more culture and leisure opportunities or a more urban way of life). This phenomenon becomes clearer still when we compare this group to those who are open to return and notice that in this group, practical reasons such as job seeking or education are more prevalent drivers for the first move. As one might expect, people also stay for more personal than practical reasons, the strongest of which are the personal bond with the place and a sense of community.

Literature and these results point to the fact the personal preference behind the rural out-migration (especially in the case of Finland) is so strong that it cannot be overturned by policy measures or advertisement campaigns. Indeed, it is well known that it is wisest to focus on people with a pre-existing personal bond with the place and build venues for them to return as this constitutes a main migration driver (Fabre et al. 2015; Pedersen 2018). Here, it is worth remembering that the respondents are all under 40 years of age, which likely explains some of the strong urban drive in most respondent groups. The rural migration in search of a higher quality of life that Hanell and Mattila (2024) discovered is likely to happen later, as we notice that the importance of safety and closeness to nature increases with later moves. The older we get and the more established the basic building blocks of our lives are, the more important is the life beyond work and studies, whether rural or urban.

This study reinforces the concept of return-migration as something that is most clearly based on a strong personal bond and social ties with a place, embodied by an overall positive outlook on the place. In addition, the results expand on the concept of an attachment to a place by noting that people feel a very strong personal bond towards their place of origin in all groups. Only the 'forever leavers' feel more strongly towards their current home. However, this group has a relatively weak personal bond towards both places. All respondents, independent of their migration history or future plans, also view their place of origin overall more positively than their current home.

New hybrid working and living patterns have shown that the distinction between a workplace and a home can be flexible (Rohrer & Granath Hansson 2024). This project's findings indicate that other aspects of our daily lives may also be fluid, such as the distinction between our origins and our current locations. The next question is whether policy and planning tools can assist municipalities and regions in leveraging this phenomenon for their benefit.

References

Faber, S. T, Nielsen, H. P., Bennike, K. B., 2015. Place, (in)equality and gender. A mapping of challenges and best practices in relation to gender, education and population flows in nordic peripheral areas (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers.

Guðmundsdóttir, H., Brynteson, M., Jessen, S., 2024. Should I stay or should I go? Early career mobility and migration drivers. Nordregio working paper 2023: 7.

Hanell, T. & Mattila, M., 2024. Koetun elämänlaadun alueelliset erot ja Suomen sisäinen muuttoliike: Siirtolaisuusinstituutin alueellisen elämänlaatu- ja muuttokyselyn keskeiset havainnot. Siirtolaisinstituutti Raportit: 7.

Ilovan, O. R., Markuszewska, I., 2022. Introduction: Place Attachment – Theory and Practice. In: Ilovan, O. R., Markuszewska, I. (eds) Preserving and Constructing Place Attachment in Europe. GeoJournal Library, vol 131. Springer, Cham.

Jensen, T. & Randall, L. (2022). Typology of internal net migration 2020-2021. Available at: <https://nordregio.org/maps/typology-of-internal-net-migration-2020-2021/>

Johannesdottir, G. B., Bjarnason, T., Stockdale, A., & Haartsen, T. (2021). What's love got to do with it? Love-life gossip and migration intentions in rural Iceland. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 87, 236-242.

Lapland Chamber of Commerce. (2023). Setting the steps for accelerating the green transition in the Northern region. <https://www.lapland.chamber.fi/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Setting-the-steps-for-accelerating-the-green-transition-in-the-Northern-region.pdf>

Lundgren, A., Birgier, D. B., Sánchez Gassen, N., and Norlén, G., 2024. The Common Nordic Labour Market – 70 Years and Beyond. Nordregio report 2024: 14.

Niedomysl, T., 2010. Towards a conceptual framework of place attractiveness: a migration perspective. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 92 (1): 97–109.

Niedomysl, T., 2011a. How Migration Motives Change over Migration Distance: Evidence on Variation across Socioeconomic and Demographic Groups. *Regional Studies*, 45:6, 843–855.

Niedomysl, T., 2011b. Is there hidden potential for rural population growth in Sweden? *Rural Sociology* 76 (2), 257–279.

Nordregio, 2024. State of the Nordic Region. Editors: Gustaf Norlén, Timothy Heleniak, Karen Refsgaard.

Perdersen, H. D., 2018. Touched by Place: Identity construction, place attachment and place attractiveness from a life course perspective in the context of migration. PhD thesis, Aalborg Universitetsforlag.

Rauhut, D., & Littke, H. (2016). 'A one way ticket to the city, please!' on young women leaving the Swedish peripheral region Västernorrland. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 43, 301–310. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.05.003>.

Rohrer, L. & Granath Hansson, A., 2024. Planning around remote work: Latest research and implications for planners and policymakers. Nordregio report 2024: 24.

Slätmo, E. (ed.), Norlén, G., Dzhavatova, K., Carstensen, M. B., Vihinen, H., Hammeken, B., Kristjánsson, A. S., Aarsæther, N., Eriksson, R. H., Johansson, L., and Lundberg, T., 2024. Strategies to address rural labour shortage. Nordregio report 2024:23.

Stjernberg, M., Vasilevskaya, A., Penje, O., 2024. Towards a grid-based Nordic territorial typology: A new tool for analysis across the urban-rural continuum. Nordregio report 2024. 9. Available at: [Towards a grid-based Nordic territorial typology – a new tool for analysis across the urban–rural continuum](#)

Annex I: Survey questions (English translation)

Motivations and aspirations for settling down in the Nordics

Where do young adults wish to settle down and why?

The aim of the study is to understand the migration motives and drivers of young people in the Nordic countries, focusing on the 25-39 year olds, which we call the household-forming ages.

We want to understand people's migration histories and aspirations to better understand future migration patterns and how regions and municipalities can adapt their policies accordingly. Understanding the factors that influence people's willingness to move or stay put can help policy makers identify the strengths and weaknesses of different communities, as well as understand young adults' priorities when choosing where to settle. Your responses will provide us with invaluable information on how regions can anticipate, manage and adapt to the current challenges of population decline and labour shortages.

The survey is divided into three parts:

- a) Migration history: where you grew up and whether you have moved between municipalities, regions or countries in the past.
- b) Migration motivations: here we are interested in the reasons behind the move(s) outside your home municipality (if you have ever moved between municipalities).
- c) Migration aspirations: We would like to know more about your future plans and wishes in terms of where you would like to settle and why.

The survey takes about 10 minutes to complete.

Background information

To which gender identity do you most identify?

Male

Female

Non-binary

I prefer not to answer

How old are you?

I prefer not to answer

What is the most fitting description of your marital or social status?

Single

In a cohabiting partnership or marriage

In partnership or marriage without cohabitation

Divorced

Widowed

I prefer not to answer

Are you an active caregiver to any children or in other capacity (e.g. taking care of family members)?

No

Yes, to one child

Yes, to two children

Yes, to three or more children

Yes, to other people

I prefer not to answer

What is your highest degree of education?

List of education system levels according to each Nordic country

Where did you obtain your highest education or vocational training?^[3]

Not applicable (I have not received vocational or higher education)

In the same municipality where I grew up

In a major city in my region

In a major city outside my region

In the capital city

In a smaller town or village near a larger city

In the countryside

Remotely / hybrid

Abroad in the Nordic countries

Abroad outside the Nordic region

3. Questions 6 and 7 served primarily the needs of another research project.

(When you chose the place where you want/wanted to study, what were your priorities?)

It was the closest place to study from my place of origin

It offered hybrid/online learning opportunities

It was possible for me to find affordable and suitable accommodation there

I have friends/networks nearby or in the locality

The location had a good reputation for youth/student life

The location had a good reputation for family life

The place had good transport connections

It was the only place that offered the education I wanted

Other information

What is the highest level of education of one or both of your parents? Select one or two options.

List of education system levels according to each Nordic country

What is your current employment status? Choose what applies best.

I am employed

I am unemployed

I am self-employed or a freelancer

I am a student

I am unable to work

I prefer not to answer

(What is your occupation?)

I am:

Are you building or wishing to build a career in one of the following sectors?

List of fields according to international NACE codes

Which is your country of birth?

Finland

Sweden

Denmark

Norway

Iceland

A self-governing territory (Åland, Faroe islands, Greenland)

Other country in EU

Other country outside of EU

I prefer not to answer

Where were your parents born? Choose one or two options.

One or both in same country as I was

One or both in a different Nordic country
One or both in other country in EU
One or both in other country outside of EU
I don't know

What is your monthly income before tax? Answer in numbers.

What is the monthly income of the whole household?

What is your current housing situation? Choose what applies best to your situation.

I own/co-own my own apartment/house

I rent an apartment/house

I sublet a room/apartment/house

I live with my parents/family

I lived in a shared household

I live in student housing

I prefer not to say

Migration History

These questions are about where you are from and how you have (or have not) moved in your life. By 'place of origin', we refer to a place you first think about as an answer to the question „where did you grow up?“

Where is your place of origin? Tell us the country, name of municipality and/or town/village that you are from.

How would you describe your place of origin? Choose all options that apply.

Family-friendly

Not suitable for families

Close to nature

Urban

Fun and interesting

Boring and uninteresting

Easy to find new friends in

Difficult to find new friends in

Socially diverse

Socially uniform

A place that I have a strong personal bond with

A place that I feel detached to

Which statement(s) describe your moving history the best?

I have not moved out of my place of origin

I have moved back or am going to move back after previously leaving my place of origin

I have moved out of my place of origin

(Would you ever move back to your place of origin?)

Yes

Maybe

No

How important were job prospects as a reason for you to move out or stay in your place of origin? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

How important was finding education as a reason for you to move out or stay in your place of origin? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

How important was a romantic relationship as a reason for you to move out or stay in your place of origin? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

(How important was a strong sense of community as a reason for you to stay in your place of origin?) 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

(How important was seeking a stronger social network as a reason for you to move out of your place of origin?) 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

How important was seeking for a more urban lifestyle as a reason for you to move out of or stay in your place of origin? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

How important was lack of affordable or suitable housing where you lived as a reason for you to move out of or stay in your place of origin? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

How important was seeking more culture, entertainment, hobby opportunities as a reason for you to move out of or stay in your place of origin? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

How important was seeking a more family-friendly or safer area as a reason for you to move out of or stay in your place of origin? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

How important was the wish for better public services (health care, daycare, schooling, social services) as a reason for you to move out of or stay in your place of origin? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

How important was the wish for better access to private services (shops, gas stations, restaurants etc.) as a reason for you to move out of or stay in your place of origin? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

How important was the wish for better transport connections as a reason for you to move out of or stay in your place of origin? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

How important was the wish to get closer to nature as a reason for you to move out of or stay in your place of origin? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

(How important were negative feelings towards your place of origin as a reason for you to move out of your place of origin?) 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

(How important was a strong personal bond as a reason for you to stay in your place of origin?) 1: not important, 10: very important (scale)

Was there another important reason for your decision to move out or stay in your place of origin?

Where do you live now?

What do you appreciate most about where you live now? Choose all that apply.

Its family-friendliness

Its closeness to nature

Its urban character

Its fun and interesting aspects

Its safety

That it is easy to make new friends here

That I knew many people from here already before moving in

That it is socially diverse with a lot of people from different backgrounds

That it is socially uniform

That I have a strong personal bond with the place

(When did you last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km?)

Less than a year ago

1-2 years ago

3-5 years ago
Over five years ago

(How important was finding education as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important were job prospects as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important was a romantic relationship as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important was seeking a stronger social network as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important was seeking a more urban lifestyle as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important was finding more affordable or suitable housing as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important was culture, leisure or hobby alternatives as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important was seeking better access to public services as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important was seeking better access to private services as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important was seeking better transport connections as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important was seeking a more safe or family-friendly area as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important was getting closer to nature as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important was a strong personal bond as a reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(Was there another reason for your last move between municipalities or a distance of over 50 km?)

Migration Aspirations

The next questions regard your plans for moving places in the future and your ideal place to settle down for a longer time.

Where would you like to live for the majority of your adult life?

Where I live now

Where I grew up or nearby area

Elsewhere

I don't know or in several places

(Where would you like to live the majority of your adult life? Place a pin on the map.)

[Map]

(Instead of using the map, you can also write the name of the region/place where you would like to live for the majority of your adult life:)

(How important is seeking education as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important are job prospects as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important is a romantic relationship as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important is seeking a stronger social network as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important is seeking a more urban lifestyle as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important is seeking a more affordable or suitable housing as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important is seeking better access to culture, leisure, or hobby opportunities as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important is seeking better public services as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important is seeking better private services as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important is seeking better transport connections as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important is getting closer to nature as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important is seeking a more family-friendly or safer environment as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(How important is a strong personal bond as a reason to wish to move to this place where you would like to settle in? 1: not important, 10: very important (scale))

(Is there another reason why you would like to move to this place to settle in?)

(Is there something preventing you from moving there? If yes, what? Choose 1-3 most suitable options.)

Difficulty to find housing there

Difficulty to find employment / career development opportunities there

Difficulty to find education opportunities there

Difficulty to find childcare aid / schooling there

The place does not have good public services
The area does not have good everyday services
The area is not family-friendly
The place does not have good transport connections
Family or other social networks in current place of residence
My current job does not allow remote working
I don't have the financial means to move
Other

What are your plans considering moving in the near future? Mark the option that describes your situation the best

I have no plans to move
I am considering to move within the next three years
I am certain to move within the next three years
I am considering to move within the next ten years
I am certain to move within the next ten years

Would you move to a rural area (over 1 hour travel time from a regional center), IF...

You got offered a job
Your partner got offered a job
The salary was better
The job had better benefits
My partner/family could easily follow me
There was good and affordable housing options there
There were good public services
There were good transport connections
There were good (private) everyday services
I already had friends/social networks in the area
The rural area was nearby where I grew up in
The rural area was similar as where I grew up in
I would not

Would you consider moving to another Nordic country?

Yes
No
Maybe
I don't know

(Which Nordic autonomous area or country would you consider moving in? Choose all relevant)

Denmark
Finland
Iceland

Norway
Sweden
Greenland
Faroe Islands
Åland

Has the increased possibility to work remote made you consider moving to a place further away from your current place of work?

Yes

Maybe in the future

No

I cannot work remotely

Thank you for attending! Your answers are very valuable to us.

About this publication

Wherever I lay my hat: Early career migration drivers and preferences

Authors: Hilma Salonen, Maria Bobrinskaya

Contributors: Hjördís Guðmundsdóttir, Maja Brynteson, Anna Berlina, Eva Maersk

Nordregio working paper 2025:1

ISBN 978-91-8001-149-5 (ONLINE)

ISBN 978-91-8001-150-1 (PDF)

ISSN 1403-2511

DOI <http://doi.org/10.6027/WP2025:1.1403-2511>

© Nordregio 2025

Layout: Kotryna Juškaite

Cover Photo: Per Pixel Petersson/imagebank.sweden.se

Nordregio

Nordregio is a leading Nordic and European research centre for regional development and planning, established by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1997. We conduct solution-oriented and applied research, addressing current issues from both a research perspective and the viewpoint of policymakers and practitioners. Operating at the international, national, regional and local levels, Nordregio's research covers a wide geographic scope, emphasising the Nordic and Baltic Sea Regions, Europe and the Arctic.

Nordregio

Holmamiralens Väg 10

Skeppsholmen

Stockholm, Sweden

www.nordregio.org