

Public libraries in the Nordics - Summary

In the report *Folkbibliotek i Norden* (Public libraries in the Nordics), key figures, current comparative statistics and trends over time are presented for public libraries in the Nordic Council of Ministers' member countries in 2018.

Public libraries and stocks:

- In total, there were 2,993 public libraries in the Nordic countries in 2018, excluding Iceland. Åland had the most public libraries per capita, while Denmark had the least.
- The number of public libraries has decreased since 2015. The largest decreases have been in Sweden and Finland, where the number has decreased by 36 libraries and 29 libraries, respectively.
- Finland and Sweden have the largest stocks. Books comprised between 82 and 93 per cent of the total stocks in the countries in 2018.
- The numbers for new acquisitions are missing for several countries. New acquisitions for Finland and Sweden amounted to approximately two million units in 2018.
- The statistics for Greenland and the Faroe Islands are not as comprehensive as they are for other countries. Statistics for Greenland are taken from the libraries' own annual reports, and the availability of comparable figures for all libraries may vary. In Iceland, no statistics are available for public libraries. Due to a transition to a new library system, no statistics are available for Denmark in 2016 and 2017 for some areas.

Visits and loans:

- The total number of loans has decreased in the countries over time despite an increase in population.
- In total, the number of loans in Denmark, Finland, Åland, Norway and Sweden decreased by 16 per cent between 2010 and 2018.
- The largest decrease in the number of loans was in Denmark, amounting to a decrease of 35 per cent between 2010 and 2018.
- Finland and Åland had the highest number of visits and loans per capita in 2018. In Finland the average person visited the library nine times and took out twelve loans, in Åland the average person visited the library ten times and took out 13 loans.
- Between 26 and 39 per cent of residents in Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Åland are active users of public libraries.
- No statistics are available on the gender distribution of borrowers in many countries, but in Sweden and Åland, the proportion of borrowers who are women is estimated at 62 and 63 per cent, respectively.
- In 2016, 46 per cent of all Norwegians between the ages of 9 and 79 reported that they had used public library services in the past year.

Staffing, opening hours and finances:

- Statistics on how many hours per week the average public library is open in the Nordic countries are inadequate. In the countries where this information is available, Danish libraries are open the most hours per week and libraries in Greenland the least. On average, libraries in Denmark are open 87 hours per week and 10 hours per week in Greenland.

- Danish public libraries have the most employees per library: approximately eight Full-time equivalents (FTE) per library in 2018. Åland had the lowest number: an average of two FTEs per library.
- Expenses for public libraries in Denmark and Finland were the highest, both in terms of expenditures per capita and expenditures per library.
- Between 2015 and 2018, expenditures per capita decreased slightly in all countries where these statistics were available (except in Norway), while expenditures per library increased.

Recommendations of the Nordic Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis:

Statistics on Nordic public libraries are collected continuously but are collected using different methods and with varying degrees of detailed definitions and ways of making data available. This reduces the possibilities for making comparisons between the countries and over time.

In order to allow for better comparison and follow up on Nordic public library statistics, the Nordic Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis proposes the following:

- It should be ensured that public library statistics are available at the national level in all Nordic countries (especially Iceland and Greenland), that statistics collection is coordinated, and statistics are updated in the Nordic Statistics database.
- If public library statistics are to be comparable at the international level, all Nordic member countries should follow established standards and adapt statistics to ISO standard 2789.
- Nordic countries should clarify and harmonise statistics on stocks, loans and borrowers and report changes in use and supply in their public libraries. For example, statistics on e-book loans should be generated in all countries.
- The Nordic countries should work in consultation to define gender equality data and make it more available for public libraries, mainly relating to borrowers and FTEs.