

STUDY ASSOCIATIONS AND FOLK HIGH SCHOOLS IN FOUR NORDIC COUNTRIES

Overview of definitions and statistics – a research tool

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Videncenter
for Folkeoplysning

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Study associations and folk high schools in four Nordic countries. Overview of definitions and statistics – a research tool.

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Preface

This report is written as a part of the network project 'Den nordiska folkbildningens betydelse för demokrati och kulturliv', which is supported by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet).

First of all, we would like to thank the Swedish Research Council for their financial support and Johan Söderman, University of Gothenburg, for leading the project.

Secondly, thanks to the working group for their valuable contributions throughout the process: Eva Åström and Gabriel Kasto, The Swedish National Council of Adult Education (SE); Jenni Pätäri, Freedom and Responsibility of Liberal Adult Education Research Programme¹; Björn Wallén, Finnish Adult Education Association; Paula Alanen, Tampere University (FI), and Johan Lövgren, University of Southern-Eastern Norway (NO).

Finally, thanks to all partners in the Nordplus-funded project 'Local study associations and study circles in a Nordic perspective – a mapping project'². This project was finalised in 2024, and the chapter on study associations in this report is highly inspired by the mapping project.

We hope the report will provide inspiration and background knowledge for future comparative research projects on popular education in the Nordic countries.

The Danish Institute for Non-Formal Education, December 2025.

¹ <https://www.vapausjavastuu.fi/eng-sve-deu/in-english/>

² <https://www.vifo.dk/udgivelser/local-study-associations-and-study-circles-in-a-nordic-perspective/>

Introduction

Research on popular education has a long history in each of the Nordic countries. However, this research has, to a vast extent, been characterised by a national focus, despite similar activities and organisations in the neighbouring countries. The aim of the network project 'Den nordiska folkbildningens betydelse för demokrati och kulturliv' is to create a sustainable infrastructure for Nordic research collaboration in this field to promote the development of comparative studies across the Nordic countries.

When working on comparative research projects, it is important to be aware of the field's distinct characteristics across countries. Despite the similarities in the tradition of popular education, there are also significant differences in the organisation of the field. Therefore, the specific aim of this report is to create an overview of the existing definitions and statistics on popular education in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark.

However, the report does not cover all organisational types within popular education/folkbildning, since the limits of the field vary across countries and are also not necessarily clear-cut within each country.

In Norway, 'folkeopplysning' is the central concept, and at the institutional level, it covers primarily folk high schools and study associations. The two fields are regulated by two different laws.

In Sweden, the concept of 'folkbildning' is closely related to the fields of study associations and folk high schools, which are both organised through the Swedish National Council of Adult Education and regulated by the same law³.

In Finland, the central concept is 'fritt bildningsarbete', which includes both folk high schools, sports education centres, adult education centres, summer universities and study centres. All these fields are regulated by the same law⁴.

In Denmark, 'folkeoplysning' is a rather broad concept encompassing both study associations (evening schools), leisure associations for children and youth, university extensions, non-residential folk high schools, and folk high schools. While the first four types of organisations are regulated by different sections in the same law, folk high schools have their own law.

Hence, in all four countries, study associations and folk high schools are central parts of the field of popular education. Therefore, these two fields have the greatest comparative potential and are selected for analysis.

³ <https://folkbildningsradet.se/om-folkbildningsradet/translations/english/what-is-folkbildning/>

⁴ [Fritt bildningsarbete - OKM - Undervisnings- och kulturministeriet](#)

However, it is still important to be aware that the definitions of the fields vary across the four countries and that similar activities may be included or excluded depending on these differences⁵.

The hope is that the overview of the fields of study associations and folk high schools can facilitate the planning and design of future comparative studies and shed light on both the potential challenges and possibilities in comparative studies.

As the analysis will show, there are significant differences in the available statistics and information across the countries, which in some cases limit the possibilities for comparisons. However, highlighting these blind spots can potentially support future work with the development of statistics.

Finally, the report is not a thorough or deep analysis of the field, and some aspects of the two fields have been left out. Due to limited resources in the project, the focus will be on descriptions of the main characteristics and available statistics in the fields. The aim is to provide links and sources for further reading to make it possible for the reader to dig deeper into the material. Hence, the report should be seen as a background tool for researchers in the field.

The four countries in focus

In doing comparative research, it is important to be aware of the different structural and demographic characteristics of the four countries in focus (figure 1).

⁵ For instance, some of the activities in the Finnish adult education centres are similar to the activities in Danish evening schools and therefore could be included. However, it was decided not to include them here, because study centres in other ways are more comparable to study associations in Norway and Sweden. For more information on adult education centres, see the Nordic mapping project 'Local study associations and study circles in a Nordic perspective' where adult education centres were included in some of the themes (Thøgersen et al. 2024). Official statistics on adult education centres is provided here: [Trainings in liberal adult education by Type of educational institution, Area, Year and Information. PxWeb](#)

Figure 1: The four countries in focus



One difference in particular is the population density, which varies greatly, with Denmark being the most densely populated country. Also, the administrative structures vary. This is particularly evident in the number of municipalities in each country. Table 1 gives an overview of the main structural and demographic characteristics.

Table 1: Population and demographics in the four countries

	Norway	Sweden	Finland	Denmark
Number of inhabitants (2024)	5.6 million	10.6 million	5.6 million	6.0 million
Population density (2023)	15.2 inhabitants per km ²	25.9 inhabitants per km ²	18.4 inhabitants per km ²	141.6 inhabitants per km ²
Number of municipalities (2024)	357	290	309	98
Counties/regions (2024)	15	21	19	5
Average size of municipalities (number of inhabitants)	15,547	36,385	18,135	60,828
Average size of municipalities (km ²)	1077 km ²	1543 km ²	1095 km ²	438 km ²

Source: Eurostat <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/data/database> + <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/kommuner-og-regioner/kommunestruktur/id751048/> + <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/regional-statistik-och-kartor/regionala-in-delningar/lan-och-kommuner/> + <https://toolbox.finland.fi/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/09/finland-in-figures-2024.pdf> + <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/kommunekort/kommunefakta>

Data and methods

In the data collection process, the focus has been on identifying statistical information and other factual knowledge for each of the two fields across all four countries. At the beginning of the data collection process, a common framework was developed. This framework (table 2) defines the selected themes in focus and was used as a tool in the process. A working group with representatives from each country with knowledge in the field was gathered. The participants in the group helped in different ways: some provided country-specific information and data sources in the table, while others contributed comments and input during online meetings or in written comments. All the country-specific information and feedback were processed and incorporated into the report by Vifo.

Table 2: Framework for data collection

Theme	Study associations	Folk high schools
DEFINITION OF THE FIELDS		
LEGAL FRAMEWORK: Which law regulates the field?		
ECONOMY: The size of the public subsidies		
ORGANISING: The organisation of the field The number of organisational units		
ACTIVITIES: Available knowledge on the activity level as well as the characteristics of the activities.		
PARTICIPANTS Available knowledge on the number of participants and their characteristics (age, gender, etc.)		
Links to central reports and other knowledge sources		

Later in the process, members of the working group commented on draft versions of the report to validate and contribute their understanding of the country-specific characteristics. The preliminary results and the comparative potentials and pitfalls were also discussed at a panel session at a Nordic conference in May 2025. Altogether, the data collection and report were carried out from October 2024 to December 2025.

Throughout the report, it is important to be aware of large differences in data quality and available statistics across the countries. This holds specifically for statistics on activity level and number of participants.

Specifically for the case of Finland, new statistics from Statistics Finland was released on December 15th just before the deadline of the report. Therefore, these statistics have not been fully integrated in the report. However, the main numbers are provided, together with relevant links for further investigation.

Reading guide

The report is divided into two parts: the first focuses on study associations, and the second on folk high schools. Each part contains a short description of the main characteristics of the field in each country, followed by a more detailed description of specific themes. In this description, the following themes will be in focus:

- Laws and regulations
- Economy
- Organisation
- Activities
- Participants

Due to limited resources in the project, some themes have been left out. For instance, it would have been interesting also to include an analysis of the historical background of the two fields in each of the countries.

However, the historical background of the study associations is described in a newly conducted mapping project, which includes country reports for all four countries (Thøgersen et al. 2024). Similar historical descriptions have not been found for folk high schools, but there are some articles and reports describing some of the main points in the historical development of folk high schools across the countries (Lövgren & Nordvall, 2017; Sweco, 2023).

In general, the mapping report (Thøgersen et al. 2024) provides a deeper look at the characteristics of field of study associations in each country through detailed country reports. In this report, it is therefore chosen not to repeat all these details but to focus on the main characteristics and on presenting the relevant sources and statistics in the field.

The main aim of this report is to provide a knowledge tool for future comparative research projects. Therefore, links to available statistics and knowledge will be provided throughout the report to make it easier to get an overview of the field and to find numbers on the different themes. Some of the links provided will inevitably become outdated in the future. But the hope is that the links provided here will, in most cases, make it possible to find updated information.

For each theme, the chapters start with a comparative overview followed by supplementary information for each country when available. The section on folk high schools includes a little more country-specific information than the section on study associations – both because it is not possible to find the information elsewhere (no mapping project), and because more statistics are available.

Finally, the report ends with a chapter discussing the perspectives on the use of the knowledge collected in the report.

PART 1: STUDY ASSOCIATIONS



Part 1: Study associations

Introduction and definition of the field

Although all four countries in focus have study associations, the organisation and characteristics of the field vary across the countries. A common trait is that nonformal adult education is in focus, that national study associations are important actors, and that they are democratic non-profit voluntary organisations⁶, often value-based, and some of them with a political profile.

However, the specific delimitation and definition of the field vary across countries. In both Norway, Finland and Sweden, study associations/study centres are an integrated part of the general voluntary sector, and their members are other national organisations. The study associations/centres provide education independently and in cooperation with their members and other organisations. In Sweden and Finland, study association activities are implemented in different ways: in cooperation with member organisations and other organisations, through free groups/peer circles, and through activities offered for the general public. On the other hand, study associations in Denmark do not have any organisational links to other parts of the voluntary sector; they exist as civil society organisations in their own right, with local study associations as the central actors providing the activities.

In the aforementioned mapping project on study associations in the four Nordic countries, which are also in focus here, a framework defining the field was at play:

“The common definition of the field is the form of popular education characterised in each country as a study circle/evening school/local study association.”

Thøgersen et al. 2024, 14

Furthermore, the definition in the mapping project added that local activities and organisations under national study associations working with non-formal education and learning would be the primary focus, but that activities and organisations that are directly comparable with these organisations and activities, and that receive funding from the same legislation, would also be included (Thøgersen et al. 2024, 14). This last part is particularly relevant for the Danish case, where local study associations (evening schools) both within and outside the national study associations are included⁷.

Table 3 shows the main characteristics of the study associations in each of the four countries, including the number of organisations.

⁶ An exemption from this general picture is that one of the Swedish study associations – Folkuniversitetet – is a foundation.

⁷ As mentioned before, the Finnish adult education centres were also included in many parts of the mapping project but is not included here.

Table 3: Characteristics of study associations – overview

Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 national study associations (2025) • Around 500 member organisations. • A study association is a non-profit organisation with adult education as its main focus and with two or more member organisations. • They provide course activities for adults that align with the goals stated in the law on adult education⁸.
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 national study associations (2025)⁹. • Around 200 member organisations at the national level. • A study association is an organisation conducting ‘folkbildning’ in Sweden. • They provide three forms of activities: study circles, cultural programmes, and ‘other activities’ (annan folkbildningsverksamhet) • Study associations are non-profit organisations and foundations that promote lifelong learning, democracy, and active participation¹⁰.
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 national study centres (2025)¹¹. • 365 member organisations (2023)¹². • Study centres are maintained by educational unions (sivistysliitto). Half of the organisations are affiliated with political parties or labour unions, and the rest are formed by independent non-governmental organisations. • Study centres provide education on their own or in collaboration with their member organisations and other organisations¹³. The study centres organise courses of various lengths, including weekend courses, study circles, and lectures¹⁴.
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Five national study associations (2025)¹⁵. • 1080 local evening schools within and outside national study associations (2018)¹⁶. An evening school is a local association that is either a member of one of the five national study associations or registered in one or more municipalities as a receiver of subsidies for nonformal adult education (‘folkeoplysende voksenundervisning’) (Thøgersen & Bjerrum 2018)¹⁷.

⁸ <https://www.vofo.no/tema/studieforbund#hva-er-et-studieforbund>

⁹ SISU, the study association of the sports movement, left the Swedish Adult Education Association in 2006. Since then, they have received government subsidies directly from the state (Thøgersen et al. 2024). Hence, they are still a part of the national system, but they are not included in the official statistics from the Swedish National Council for Adult Education and are therefore not included here. More information on SISU can be found here: [Idrottsrörelsens folkbildning i siffror - SISU Idrottsutbildarna](#)

¹⁰ [Studieförbund - Folkbildningsrådet](#) (1.12.2025)

¹¹ In Finland, the concept of study associations refers to the providers of study centres, but there are also study associations without study centres. Hence, the concept of study centres is more comparable to the concept of study associations in the other countries.

¹² Kirstinä et al. 2024, 2.

¹³ Their range of educational activities is determined on the basis of the ideologies of the centre’s collaborating affiliations. In 2023, the Finnish study centres organised activities with 1366 partners altogether (Kirstinä et al. 2024, 4).

¹⁴ <https://okm.fi/sv/fritt-bildningsarbete>, Kirstinä, Lithovius & Valanne 2024.

¹⁵ <https://www.vifo.dk/om-folkeoplysning/aftenskoler/>

¹⁶ A new study will be published in 2026, and the ongoing work suggests a large decline in the number of local evening schools <https://www.vifo.dk/projekter/aftenskolerne-hvordan-har-de-det/>

¹⁷ https://www.vifo.dk/media/5wxbrqf4/aftenskolerne-hvordan-har-de-det_final.pdf

The organisation of the field and the characteristics of the activities will be further described later in the report.

The variation in the definition of the field is important to keep in mind when conducting comparative research and comparing the size of the field across countries. For instance, educational activities within the scout movement will be counted as a part of the study association activities in Norway, Sweden and Finland, but in Denmark this will take place in other organisations. Leader training within sports is another example. The Study Associations for Sports is one of the 14 national study associations in Norway, whereas sport is not a part of the national study associations in the rest of the countries¹⁸.

In the following description, there will be many references to the comparative analysis in the recent mapping project, but the descriptions in this report will be kept relatively short. Hence, for deeper analysis and descriptions of the field in the respective countries, references are made to the country reports and the comparative analysis in the mapping project¹⁹.

Laws and regulations

The field of study associations is regulated by different laws and regulations in the respective countries. The table below provides an overview of the central documents. The names of the laws are provided in the original language to make it easier to search for additional information.

¹⁸ In Sweden, The Sports Trainers (SISU) (<https://www.rfsisu.se/sisu-idrottsutbildarna>) was a part of the Swedish Adult Education Associations until 2006, where it became an independent receiver of government subsidies instead. Therefore, it is not included in the official statistics in the field. In Finland, sports training centres are a separate part of the liberal education system, organising training and education in the sports sector (<https://www.urheiluoopistot.fi/eng>). For a more detailed description of the variations in the definition of the field, see Thøgersen et al. 2024.

¹⁹ <https://www.vifo.dk/udgivelser/local-study-associations-and-study-circles-in-a-nordic-perspective/>

Table 4: Law and regulation – central documents and links

	Norway	Sweden	Finland	Denmark
Legal documents	<p>Lov om voksenoppl�ring: https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2009-06-19-95</p> <p>The law regulates the distribution of state subsidies and sets the criteria for approving study associations.</p>	<p>F�rordning om statsbidrag till folkbildningen (2015:218): https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/forordning-2015218-om-statsbidrag-till_sfs-2015-218/</p> <p>This ordinance is the legal framework for state subsidies to study associations and folk high schools – and for the role of ‘Folkbildningsr�det’, which is responsible for distributing these subsidies.</p>	<p>Lag om fritt bildningsarbete (21.8.1998/632): https://www.finlex.fi/sv/laki/ajantasa/1998/19980632)</p> <p>Lag om fritt bildningsarbete is the overall law for all fields within liberal adult education. It defines the different fields covered by the law and describes the overall aims.</p>	<p>Folkeoplysningsloven: https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2018/1115</p> <p>Folkeoplysningsloven is a framework law for municipal support for ‘folkeoplysende aktiviteter’ – both non-formal education (non-formal adult education) and other democratic voluntary activity within associations.</p>
Ministry responsible for the field	Ministry of Education and Research and Ministry of Culture and Equality (depending on the focus of the study association)	Ministry of Education	Ministry of Education and Culture ²⁰	Ministry of Culture

The legal documents provide information on the main purposes of public subsidies for study association activities. Some of the aims and values are common across the countries. This holds for the promotion of democracy and active citizenship, which is explicitly stated as a central value in all four countries. Promotion of equality is mentioned in all countries except Denmark, while culture is mentioned in both Norway and Sweden.

Hence, there are both similarities and differences across the countries. However, looking in the legal documents, the main conclusion is that the arguments for public subsidies for study associations are based on many of the same ideas and values across the four countries.

²⁰ More information on responsibilities in the field: Utbildningssektorns  mbetsverk – vem g r vad?: <https://www.oph.fi/sv/om-oss/utbildningsstyrelsens-uppdrag>. Undervisnings- och kulturministeriet: <https://okm.fi/sv/fritt-bildningsarbete> Utbildningsstyrelsen: <https://www.oph.fi/sv/om-oss/utbildningsstyrelsens-uppdrag>. Utbildningsstyrelsen  r ett sakkunnig mbetsverk underordnat undervisnings- och kulturministeriet.

Moreover, the documents clarify a number of criteria for the organisations to fulfil to be eligible for financial support (Thøgersen et al 2024, 20). A democratic organisation with a board is mentioned in the legal framework in both Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. That activities must be open to all is explicitly mentioned in Norway, Finland and Denmark – and is also normally the case in Sweden. Participation fees are only mentioned as a criterion in the Danish case, but the use of fees is common across the countries. When it comes to age groups, adults are the primary target group for the activities, but the specific age limits vary.

When it comes to the specific content of the activities, a common feature across the countries is that the providers have a relatively high degree of freedom, as long as they fulfil the overall organisational criteria mentioned above.

Looking at the responsible ministry of the field in each of the countries, it is evident that the study associations operate in the fields of education, culture and civil society.

It is important to note that the legal documents above represent the overall legal framework of the field. This framework is, in some of the countries, supplemented by other types of local or national documents. For instance, in Denmark, each municipality formulates specific rules and criteria in relation to its financial support for local evening schools²¹. In Sweden, the latest government's bill on folkbildning formulates four 'purposes' that are supposed to govern the study associations' use of state subsidies and the distribution of those subsidies by the Swedish National Council of Adult Education²². Moreover, a new public subsidy system was implemented in 2024. The new system means the grant is to be allocated based on a quality assessment²³.

Economy

As stated above, the public subsidies for study associations are regulated by law. As table 5 shows, public subsidies are provided at the national level in Norway and Finland. This is also the case for the main part of the subsidies in Sweden, but most Swedish municipalities – 245 out of 290 in 2024 – and some of the regions also provide some support (Folkbildningsrådet 2025, 40). In Denmark, public subsidies for all activities are provided at the municipal level. However, the five national study associations receive subsidies for their own operating cost at the national level from the state.

This section will focus on the level of public funding for study association activities, as well as where to find this information for future studies. But first, when looking at the financial structures in the field from a comparative perspective, there are some important points to note.

²¹ <https://www.vifo.dk/udgivelser/folkeoplysningen-i-kommunerne/>

²² Regeringens proposition

²³ https://folkbildningsradet.se/media/4brepw02/beslutade-villkor-statsbidrag-till-studieforbund-2024_webb.pdf

First, looking at state subsidies for study associations does not provide a full picture of their financial situation. Their financial situation in each country can be affected by different conditions in relation to costs and other types of income. For instance, the legislative documents show differences regarding the premises and facilities for the activities. In both Norway and Denmark, available public facilities should be provided by the municipalities free of charge. In Denmark, municipalities even have to provide a part of the study associations' expenses for premises and facilities if a public facility cannot be provided. On the other hand, there are no such rules in Finland and Sweden, where the study associations themselves are responsible for finding suitable facilities and defraying the expenses (Thøgersen et al. 2024).

Moreover, the total level of financial support must be considered in close relation to the level of activity. And the level of activity must again be considered in relation to the definition of the field and the types of activities included and excluded in the field of study associations in each of the countries (see Thøgersen et al. for more details).

Finally, there are more detailed criteria for the level of support in each country, which will be too complex to describe in this report. In some cases, the level of financial support varies across different types of activities or target groups. In Denmark, each municipality has its own local guidelines within the overall guidelines of the law. Again, more information on the criteria is available in the country reports in the mapping project.

Hence, the following description on the financial levels and structures in a comparative perspective should be used with attention to these factors. The table below provides an overview of public subsidies for activities in the field across all four countries and provides sources for finding more information. The focus is on general grants, while grants for specific projects or assignments are not included²⁴.

²⁴ Across the countries, study associations, in some cases, also receive public funding for special assignments or projects. However, these projects and their funding structure often vary over time. As an example from the Swedish case, see page 61 in this report: <https://folkbildningsradet.se/media/31phvp4y/folkbildningsradets-samlade-bedomning-2024.pdf>. For examples from the Finish case see: <https://www.oph.fi/sites/default/files/documents/My%C3%B6nnetyt%20opintotieteliavustukset%202024.pdf> (integration training for immigrants) and <https://vos.oph.fi/rap/vos/v25/v11yk6l25.html> (study vouchers)

Table 5: Public subsidies for study association activities

	Sources of public subsidies	Total level of public subsidies	Statistical data sources
Norway	National level	180,600,000 kr. (NOK) (2024) From the Ministry of Education: 72,512,000 kr. (NOK) (2024)	https://tilskudd.dfo.no/ordning/DT-0623/2025/studieforbundene-under-kunnskapsdepartementet The statistical information covers the size of public subsidies for each study association.
Sweden	Primarily national level Some from the regional and local levels	From national level: 1,741,023,000 kr. (SEK) (2024) ²⁵ Municipal subsidies: 301,200,000 kr. (SEK) (2021) Regional subsidies: 305,100,000 kr. (SEK) (2021)	https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/proposition/budgetpropositionen-for-2024-utgiftsomrade-17_hb031d18/html/#page_197 No running statistics on subsidies from the regional and local levels – the most recent information: https://folkbildningsradet.se/media/qgei4smo/studieforbundens-ekonomi-2021.pdf
Finland	National level	14,165,021 € (2024)	https://vos.oph.fi/rap/vos/v25/v11yk6l25.html The state contribution to the educational operations of study centres is 65% of the amount calculated according to the Act on Liberal Adult Education, § 8. State subsidies for the different study centres is calculated based on figures from previous years.

²⁵ In 2024 there was a large cut (250 million SEK) in the state subsidies for study associations in Sweden (Folkbildningsrådet 2025, 21). Hence, the amount for 2023 will be higher than the amount in the table.

Denmark	<p>Local level</p> <p>The five national study associations receive subsidies from the national level for their operating costs.</p>	<p>Municipal subsidies for educational activities: 298,393,000 kr. (DKK) 2024</p> <p>State subsidies for operating costs in national study associations: DKK 62,700,000 kr. (DKK) (2024)</p>	<p>An overview of the level of municipal subsidies based on municipal accounts is provided yearly by Statistics Denmark: https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20188 (account number 3.38.72)</p> <p>More detailed descriptions are provided in the publication 'Folkeoplysningen i kommunerne', which is based on a survey of municipalities and is conducted every five years: https://www.vifo.dk/temaer/folkeoplysning-i-kommunerne/</p> <p>Subsidies for national study associations: https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20373 BEVIL01B (Støtte til landsdækkende oplysningsforbund)</p>
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For a more detailed overview of the funding systems in each of the countries, see the country reports in the mapping project (Thøgersen & Bjerrum 2024)²⁶

It is also important to note that public subsidies are not the only source of income for the study associations. Participation fees play an important role in all four countries. In Denmark, there is even a legal requirement to charge participation fees in order to receive public subsidies. This is not the case in the other three countries, but the use of participation fees is widespread – although the level varies – both across countries and within countries across different types of activities (Thøgersen & Bjerrum 2024, 28).

Organisation

As mentioned earlier, all four countries have national study associations, but the way these study associations are integrated into the overall organisation of the field of popular education varies. Table 6 gives an overview and links for further information.

As the table shows, there is an umbrella organisation for national study associations in all four countries. Moreover, in some of the countries, the national study associations are an integrated part of a national organisation for popular education in a broader sense. This is particularly evident in Sweden, where 'Folkbildningsrådet' plays a central role – both as an umbrella organisation and as an institution with authoritative tasks for the government.

²⁶ <https://www.vifo.dk/media/p4gmizbp/local-study-associations-and-study-circles-in-a-nordic-perspective.pdf>

Table 6: Overview of organisations

	Norway	Sweden	Finland	Denmark
Central organisations	<p>11 national study associations (2025).</p> <p>VOFO (Voksenopplæringsforbundet) is the national umbrella organisation for study associations.</p>	<p>8 national study associations (2025).</p> <p>‘Studieförbunden i samverkan’ represents the national study associations and is one of three member organisations in ‘Folkbildningsrådet’.</p> <p>‘Folkbildningsrådet’ has three member organisations and is a non-profit organisation with certain authoritative tasks from the government, e.g. distributing state subsidies to the member organisations.</p>	<p>11 national study centres (2025).</p> <p>‘Studiecentralerna/opintokeskuset’²⁷ is a national umbrella organisation for the study centres.</p> <p>‘Fritt Bildningsarbete’²⁸ is the central organisation for all five educational forms within popular education (medborgarinstitut, folkhögskolor, sommaruniversitet, studiecentraler and idrottsinstitut). In total, the organisation represents 290 educational organisations.</p>	<p>5 national study associations (2025).</p> <p>1080 local evening schools within and outside national study associations (2018)²⁹.</p> <p>‘Oplysningsforbundes Fællesråd’ (OF) is the joint committee for the national study associations.</p> <p>‘Dansk Folkeoplysnings Samråd’ is a national umbrella organisation for both the five national study associations and 33 other national organisations within popular education.</p>
Links for further information	<p>Voksenopplæringsforbundet: https://www.vofo.no/om-vofo</p>	<p>Studieförbunden i samverkan: https://studieforbunden.se/</p> <p>Folkbildningsrådet: https://folkbildningsradet.se/om-folkbildningsradet/</p>	<p>‘Studiecentralerna/opintokeskuset’: https://www.opintokeskuset.fi/svenska/</p> <p>‘Fritt Bildningsarbete’: https://vapaasivistyo.fi</p>	<p>Oplysningsforbundes Fællesråd: No webpage</p> <p>Dansk Folkeoplysnings Samråd: https://dfs.dk/</p>

Activities

The study associations conduct a broad array of activities varying in both form and content. In all countries, classroom teaching is common. Study circles are widespread in Sweden and also play a role in the Finnish study centres, but they are not very common within

²⁷ The Finnish Study Centres

²⁸ Finnish Adult Education Association, FAEA

²⁹ A new national mapping of evening schools is being conducted at the moment and will be available in the summer 2026 at the webpage of Videncenter for Folkeoplysning www.vifo.dk.

study associations in Norway and Denmark. These differences in the pedagogical approaches have historical roots: In Sweden, the study circle tradition stems from self-directed book circles in the temperance movement, and this peer-to-peer pedagogy is still widespread. On the other hand, in Denmark, the teacher and a teacher-centred pedagogy have always been a central part of the evening school activities (Thøgersen & Bjerrum 2024, 36).

The following section will take a closer look at the activity level across the countries as well as the concrete subjects being taught. The focus will be on available statistics in the field and where to find them. The activity level is measured in study hours. One study hour is defined as 45 minutes of teaching – regardless of the number of participants. Table 7 gives an overview of the activity level across the countries and links to the statistical data sources.

Table 7: Comparative overview – activity level in study associations

	Number of study hours	Sources
Norway	Study hours: 1,294,776 (2024)	https://www.ssb.no/utdanning/voksenopplaering/statistik/studieforbundenes-opplaeringsvirksomhet
Sweden	Study circles: 3,355,357 study hours (2024) 'Other popular education activity': 864,128 study hours (2024) Cultural programme activity: 124,200 events (2024)	A yearly report is published by Folkbildningsrådet: https://folkbildningsradet.se/om-folkbildningsradet/publikationer-och-remissvar/samlad-bedomning-folkbildningens-betydelse-for-samhallet/ The most recent numbers: https://folkbildningsradet.se/media/31phvp4y/folkbildningsradets-samlade-bedomning-2024.pdf
Finland³⁰	Yearly report from The Finnish Study Centres: 256,829 study hours (2023) 195,863 study hours (2024) ³¹ (courses + study club hours) Official statistics: 188,449 study hours (2024)	Kirstinä et al. 2025, p. 6-9: https://bin.vhdistysavain.fi/1570020/bofzQ6RctzZG4J3B8dJO0cjdMp/Opintokeskusten%20laatu%20ja%20vaikuttavuus%202024.pdf Similar reports will be released here every year: Opintokeskukset ry:n julkaisut - Opintokeskukset r.y. https://stat.fi/sv/publikation/cm0yymupi7d1f08vzpjcw51k4
Denmark	Study hours: 1,238,181 (2023)	The number of study hours in local study associations within national study associations is reported to Oplysningsforbundenes Fællesråd.

³⁰ Both the numbers from the official statistics and from the yearly reports from the Finnish study centres are provided in the table. There are some minor differences between the numbers, both because study clubs are not included in the official statistics, and because the reports of the Finnish study centres only include state subsidised activities, while the official statistics also include courses with other funding.

³¹ In 2023, there was a 23% cut in the public subsidies for study associations. This resulted in a large drop in the number of study hours. Therefore, both the 2023 and 2024 numbers are presented.

	(only national study associations):	<p>Information from Oplysningsforbundenens Fællesråd is made available here: https://www.vifo.dk/om-folkeoplysning/af-tenskoler/</p> <p>Most municipalities collect information from all local study associations receiving municipal subsidies, but the numbers are not collected systematically on a yearly basis.</p> <p>Every fifth year 'Folkeoplysningen i kommunerne' collects detailed information through the survey 'Folkeoplysningen i kommunerne'</p> <p>https://www.vifo.dk/temaer/folkeoplysning-i-kommunerne/</p>
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There are some interesting geographical patterns in the activity levels in study associations across the countries. Particularly in Sweden, the clear picture is that study circle participation is much more common in smaller municipalities in rural areas than in the larger cities (Folkbildningsrådet 2025, 41; Åberg et al. 2024). In Norway, a similar – but less clear – pattern is seen regarding the number of courses pr. 1,000 inhabitants (Thøgersen et al. 2024, 62). Also in Finland, the activity level is higher in urban municipalities than in semi-urban and rural municipalities³². On the other hand, the opposite pattern is seen in Denmark, where the activity level is much higher in larger cities than in rural areas (Thøgersen et al. 2025, 42).

Types of subjects in study associations

The study associations in the respective countries provide different types of subjects. The subject categories and the statistical information vary between the countries, and therefore, it is challenging to make direct comparisons of the scope of the different subjects across countries. However, the following pages provide an overview of the subjects in each of the countries using the best available statistics.

Norway

In Norway, course subjects can be categorised based on the number of study hours. Table 8 shows that arts and crafts courses account for the highest number of study hours by a wide margin. The second most common subject is health-related, and the third most common is humanities.

³² Measured by the number of inhabitants per lesson on the basis of the following two data sources: Population by Area, Month and Information. PxWeb and Liberal adult education, students and lessons by Year, Area, Type of educational institution and Information. PxWeb.

Table 8: Course subject (main categories) by number of study hours

Course subject	Study hours	Share (%)
Arts and crafts	687.463,75	53
Health, social services, and sports	202.105,50	16
Humanistic, religion, and philosophy of life	119.621,25	9
Organisation and leadership	110.212,50	9
Nature, ecology, environmental protection, and outdoor activities	98.109,00	8
Science, industry, and technical	26.729,50	2
Languages	23.035,75	2
Social sciences	21.152,75	2
Economics and ICT	3.830,00	0
Service	1458,50	0
Transport and communications	1057,00	0
Total	1.294.775,50	100

Source: 07444: Studieförbund. Kurstimer, etter emne, nivå, type eksamen (F) 2011 - 2024. Statistikkbanken. The table shows the number of study hours in 2024

Sweden

The Swedish statistics do not include the number of study hours across subjects but instead provide data on the number of events and participants (table 9). The most common arrangements – and those with the most participants – are focused on art, music, and media. These topics account for 53% of all the arrangements, and 47% of the participants are engaged in them. Humanities are also popular, making up 18% of the arrangements. The third most popular subject is agriculture.

Table 9: Study circles' subject focus – arrangements and participants (2024)

	Arrangements		Participants*	
	Number (N)	Share (%)	Number (N)	Share (%)
Art, music, and media	53,395	57	187,047	49
<i>Visual and performing arts</i>	4,557	5	20,098	5
<i>Music, dance and drama</i>	34,666	37	106,735	28
<i>Media production</i>	634	1	1,601	0
<i>Design</i>	112	0	474	0
<i>Arts and crafts</i>	13,459	14	58,256	15
Humanities (languages, history)	17,525	19	78,167	21
<i>Religion</i>	3,493	4	16,878	4
<i>Foreign languages</i>	7,402	8	28,939	8
<i>Swedish and literary studies (including home languages)</i>	3,784	4	16,254	4
<i>History and archaeology</i>	2,060	2	11,226	3

<i>Philosophy, logic, and ethics</i>	786	1	4,870	1
Social and behavioural sciences	5,299	6	25,311	7
Personal services	2,673	3	13,667	4
Agriculture, horticulture, forestry, and fishing	5,675	6	28,804	8
Data	1,104	1	5,425	1
Health care	1,099	1	4,832	1
Social work and care	1,614	2	6,881	2
Business, trade, and administration	765	1	4,332	1
Engineering and technical industry	399	0	2,039	1
Pedagogy and circle leader training	1,402	1	7,315	2
Learning to read and write for adults	97	0	449	0
Others	2,898	3	15,980	4

*Unique participants within each topic. Source: Folkbildningsrådet (2025). Folkbildningens betydelse för samhället - Folkbildningsrådets samlade bedömning (2025, 68).

Finland

In Finland, there are three relevant sources that provide information on course subjects that suit the purpose of this project. The first is the official statistic 'Vipunen', provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The second is a report by Manninen & Vuorikoski (2024), which is the first study to provide a detailed description of course provision at Finnish study centres. These two sources differ in their categorisation of subjects. Manninen & Vuorikoski use an alternative classification, as they believe the official one is not well-suited to the context of study centres. They criticise the official categorisation for being based on course topics aligned with formal education, making it less applicable to the types of subjects typically offered by study associations (Manninen & Vuorikoski, 2024: 1). As a result, a specific course may be categorised differently depending on which of the two sources is used.

The third relevant source is a newly published release from Statistics Finland. The release was published just before the deadline of the report, and therefore the numbers are not included in the tables below. However, it provides a more detailed categorisation than the other sources and updated numbers for 2024, but not all categories are directly comparable with the other sources³³.

³³ Study centre lessons by the content of education (StatFin 2025): https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin_oaiop/statfin_oaiop_pxt_159h.px/table/tableViewLayout1/

The official statistics from Vipunen show the number of study hours across different course subjects (table 10). The most popular subject is culture, with around 64,000 study hours in 2021. The second- and third-most studied subjects are social studies and humanities.

Table 10: Course subjects by number of study hours – official statistics (Vipunen)

	Study hours	Share (%)
Culture (e.g. arts and crafts, music, theatre, literature)	64.124	37
Social studies, business administration and public administration (e.g. civil activism and organisational activities, social sciences, economics)	38.644	22
Humanities and education (e.g. teaching and education, languages, history)	26.997	15
Social and health care, gymnastics and sports (e.g. health care, sports, social services)	21.338	12
Other education	13.250	8
Natural resources and environment (e.g. agriculture, gardening, fishing)	3.681	2
Technology and transport (e.g. information technology)	2.225	1
Tourism, nutrition and domestic services (e.g. cooking)	2.137	1
Natural science (e.g. computer driving license, astronomy)	1.556	1
General education	1.068	1
Total	175.020	100

Reference: official statistics: https://vipunen.fi/sv-fi/layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/sv-fi/Rapporter/Vapaa%20sivistystyo%20-%20opetustunnit%20-%20koulutusala%20-%20aikasaria_SV.xlsb. The table shows the number of study hours in 2021.

Table 11 shows the results of the analysis of course provision in study centres that was made by Manninen and Vuorikoski (2024). According to this data, subjects with a focus on personal growth account for 40% of all courses, making it the most common subject area. Courses related to citizenship and associations make up 30%, while social and community support represent 11% of the subjects.

Table 11: Categories and course types – number of courses provided

Categories and course types	f	% of category	% of all courses	Course examples
Basic skills	1049		1.4	
Basic language skills	564	53.8	0.7	Learn Finnish by speaking
General skills	335	31.9	0.4	Everyday skills training
Basic literacy skills	108	10.3	0.1	Literacy training
Basic ICT skills	31	3.0	0.0	IT basic course
Basic numeracy skills	11	1.0	0.0	Basics of everyday mathematics
Health and sports	8467		10.9	

Physical education	5386	63.6	6.9	Water workout
Health and well-being	3081	36.4	4.0	Work ergonomics
Personal growth	30,727		39.6	
Handicrafts	7859	25.6	10.1	From clay to ceramics
Singing	4680	15.2	6.0	Choral singing weekend
Dance	3038	9.9	3.9	Polish dance course
Religion	2625	8.5	3.4	Bible course
Information and communication technology	2487	8.1	3.2	Office365 training
Baking and food	2178	7.1	2.8	Sausage course
Theatre and other performing arts	1724	5.6	2.2	Circus group for adults
Arts	1299	4.2	1.7	Classic drawing
Music	1092	3.6	1.4	Getting to know the uku-lele
Languages	913	3.0	1.2	Hungarian conversation course
Nature	709	2.3	0.9	Fell plant course in Lapland
Culture	521	1.7	0.7	Ilya Repin at Ateneum Museum
Special skills	386	1.3	0.5	Braille course
Writing	424	1.4	0.5	Creative writing
History	373	1.2	0.5	Local history in Elimäki
Animals	169	0.6	0.2	Horse course
Science	145	0.5	0.2	Comet study club
Philosophy	105	0.3	0.1	Philosophy cafe
Work & income	5516		7.1	
Career and income-related skills	5516	100.0	7.1	CV workshop
Social and community support	8640		11.1	
Social support	3390	39.2	4.4	Basic course in friendship
First aid and safety	1428	16.5	1.8	First aid course I
Peer support groups	1503	17.4	1.9	ADHD peer group for adults
Parenting	1266	14.7	1.6	Growing into parenthood
Parents with children – courses	329	3.8	0.4	Adult/child dance group
Relationships	301	3.5	0.4	Couples course

Special characteristics and difficulties	242	2.8	0.3	Slitting as a behavioural problem
Interaction skills	108	1.3	0.1	Talk about everyday worries
Communities	73	0.8	0.1	Multiculturalism in a housing association and neighbourhood mediation
Citizenship and associations	23,256		29.9	
Trade union training	8916	38.3	11.5	Active trade union I
NGO and association administration	6083	26.2	7.8	Association accounting
Courses for voluntary NGO actors	5027	21.6	6.5	Basic course of voluntary rescue service
Political party education	1908	8.2	2.5	Marketing training for election candidates
Social policy	651	2.8	0.8	The new winds of municipal politics
Sustainable development	422	1.8	0.5	Low-carbon villages seminar
Housing company activist courses	249	1.1	0.3	A successful general meeting for the housing company's board

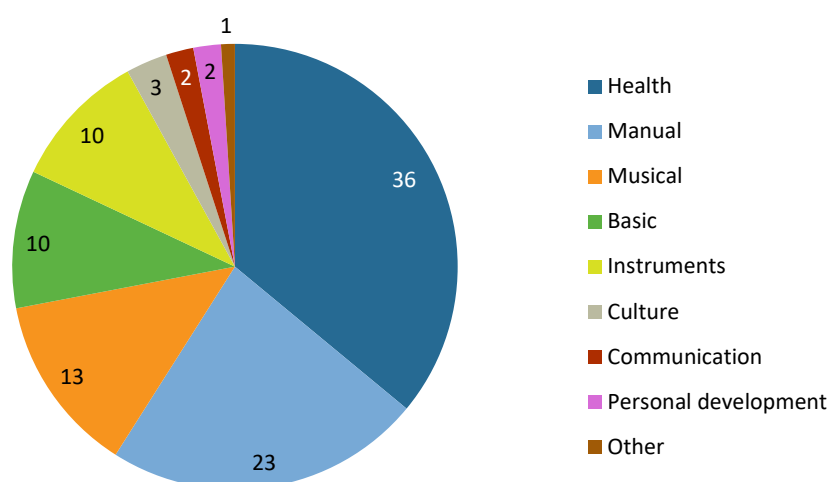
Source: Manninen & Vuorikoski (2024).

Denmark

There are no nationwide statistics on the development of study association subjects over time, nor is it a widespread practice among municipalities to document the distribution of teaching hours by subject.

Hence, figure 2 is based on responses from 11 municipalities and is therefore not necessarily representative of the distribution of subjects nationwide. However, as it is most common among medium-sized and urban municipalities to calculate the distribution of subjects, the distribution in the figure still represents more than a fifth of the total number of teaching hours nationwide and can be assumed to provide a good insight into the trends.

Figure 2: Study hours across subjects – 11 municipalities (pct.)



Based on data from 11 of 98 municipalities comprising 288,095 study hours (Thøgersen et al. 2025).

As the figure shows, health subjects, which include various types of physical activities (e.g. exercise gymnastics, pilates, yoga, etc.), are the largest subject category. More than one-third of the teaching hours belong to this subject group. The other two major categories are manual subjects (creative and crafts subjects) and music (e.g. choir, ensemble, drama), which comprise 23% and 13% of teaching hours, respectively. Basic subjects (language, Danish, arithmetic, etc.) and instrumental subjects also feature prominently, each with 10% of the study hours.

However, looking instead at the proportion of schools offering the different types of subjects, manual subjects (e.g. crafts and creative subjects) and music stand out as the most common subject types – followed by physical activity. Hence, many small study associations offer music and crafts (Bjerrum & Thøgersen 2018).

Comparative overview of subjects

The table below summarises the results, showing the three most common subjects in study associations in each of the countries. As the categories differ across the countries, it is difficult to make detailed comparisons. However, the table gives an overview and shows that the arts and crafts category seems to be a common denominator across all four countries.

Table 12: The three most common subjects in study associations - across countries

	The three most common subjects in study associations	Sources
Norway	Arts and crafts Health, social activities, and sports Humanistic, religion and philosophy of life	07444: Studieforbund. Kurstimer, etter emne, nivå, type eksamen (F) 2011 - 2024. Statistikkbanken
Sweden	Art, music, and media Humanities Agriculture, horticulture, forestry, and fishing	Folkbildningsrådet (2025). Folkbildningens betydelse för samhället 2024. Folkbildningsrådets samlade bedömning. (2025, 68): https://folkbildningsradet.se/media/31phvp4y/folkbildningsradets-samlade-bedomning-2024.pdf
Finland	Official statistics (Vipunen): Culture (e.g. arts and crafts) Social studies, business administration and public administration Humanities and education Manninen & Vuorikoski 2024: Personal growth (e.g. arts and crafts, singing, music) Citizenship and associations Social and community support	Official: https://vipunen.fi/sv-fi/lay-outs/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=sv-fi/Rapporter/Vapaa%20sivistystyo%20-%20opetustunt%20-%20koulutusala%20-%20aikasarja_SV.xlsb Läroanstaltstyp filter: studiecentraler 2024: Manninen & Vuorikoski (2024): Police vs. practice. An analysis of the course provision of Finnish study centres between 2016 and 2021. https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2024.2442625 See also new release from Statistics Finland: https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/sv/StatFin/StatFin_oaiop/statfin_oaiop_pxt_159h.px/table/tableViewLayout1/
Denmark	Health subjects (e.g. yoga and other types of physical activity) Manual subjects (arts and crafts) Music	Report: Thøgersen et al. 2025: "Folkeoplysningen i kommunerne". https://www.vifo.dk/udgivelser/folkeoplysningen-i-kommunerne/ Report: Thøgersen & Bjerrum, 2018: 'Aftenskolerne – hvordan har de det?' https://www.vifo.dk/udgivelser/aftenskolerne-hvordan-har-de-det/

Participants

The following section will look at the available statistics for each country when it comes to participants in study association activities. The focus will be on both the number of participants and patterns across age and gender.

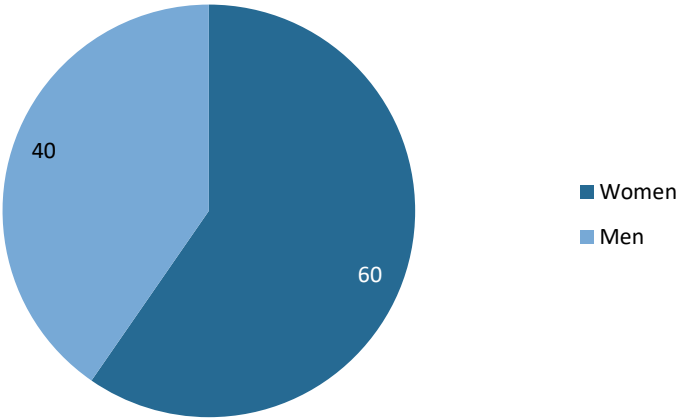
Norway

In Norway, there is detailed statistical information on the number of participants in study association activities. In 2024, 578,804 people participated in study association activities (non-unique participants). The Norwegian statistics also include the possibility of looking

at participants across each of the study associations, across different types of subjects, and across gender and age groups³⁴.

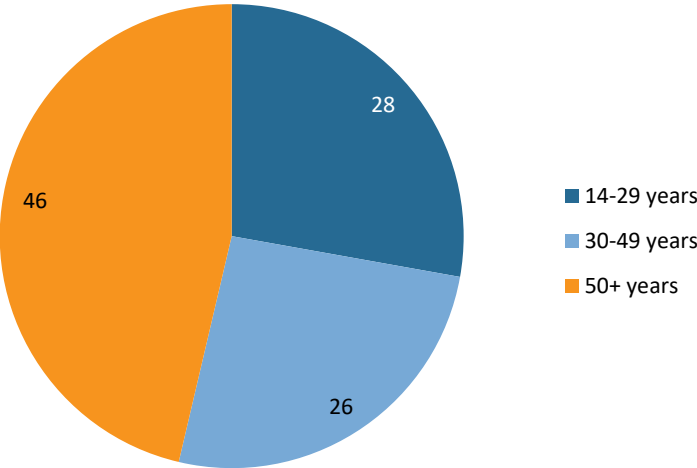
The statistics show that participants’ profiles vary across both subjects and study associations. But the overall picture is an overweight of women (figure 3) and an overweight of participants over the age of 50 (figure 4).

Figure 3: Gender distribution for all participants in Norwegian study associations (%)



Reference: <https://www.ssb.no/utdanning/voksenopplaering/statistikk/studieforbundenes-opplaeringsvirksomhet>. The figure shows the gender distribution in 2024.

Figure 4: Age distribution for all participants in Norwegian study associations (%)



Reference: <https://www.ssb.no/utdanning/voksenopplaering/statistikk/studieforbundenes-opplaeringsvirksomhet>. The figure shows the gender distribution in 2024.

³⁴ 07441: Studieforbund. Deltakere, etter kjønn, alder, emne, nivå og type eksamen (F) 2011 - 2024. Statistikkbanken.

Sweden

Sweden also has detailed statistics on the number of participants. It is available at the SCB database³⁵ but is also published in the yearly publications from Folkbildningsrådet³⁶.

The statistics cover detailed information on several background variables: gender, age groups, educational level, geography, and country of birth. The statistics also allow for analysis by individual study associations.

The number of participants across the three formally approved activity forms in study associations is presented in table 13. It is evident that there is a majority of women in all types of activities, but particularly in study circles and other popular education activities.

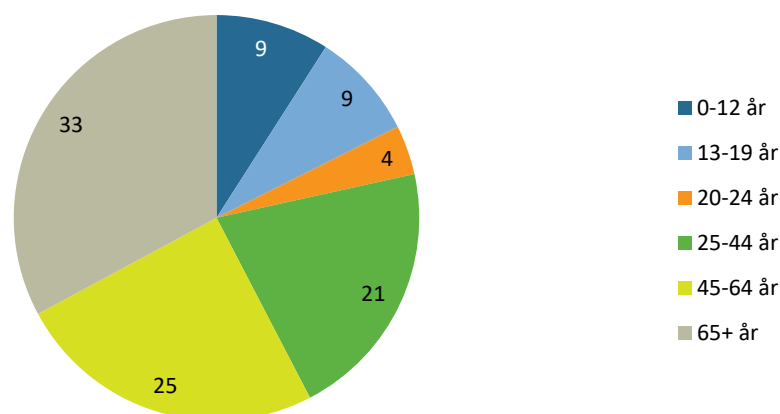
Table 13: Statistics on participants in study association activities (2024)

	Number of participants	Women (%)	Men (%)
Study circles (unique participants)	326,646	65	35
Other popular education activities (unique participants)	364,516	67	33
Cultural programmes (non-unique participants)	6,939,684	58	42

Source: (Folkbildningsrådet 2025, 60). 'Folkbildningens betydelse för samhället 2024. Folkbildningsrådets samlade bedömning'

Figure 5 shows the age distribution of participants in study circles and other popular education activities. It is evident that study association activities attract the mature part of the population: 33% of the participants are 65 years old and above.

Figure 5: Age distribution of participants in study circles and other popular education activities



Reference: https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START_KU_KU0401/StudieforbDeltVregN2/table/tableView-Layout1/ The figure shows the age distribution in 2023. Note: Age limits have an impact on the numbers: To participate in a study circle, you have to be 13 years old. To participate in 'other popular education activities' you have to be 6 years old.

³⁵ https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START_KU_KU0402/

³⁶ <https://folkbildningsradet.se/om-folkbildningsradet/publikationer-och-remissvar/samlad-bedomning-folkbildningens-betydelse-for-samhallet/>

Finland

Finland also provides statistics on the number of participants. It is available at the official statistics but also in a new report on study centres (Kirstinä et al. 2025). The table below shows the number of non-unique participants based on the report mentioned above.

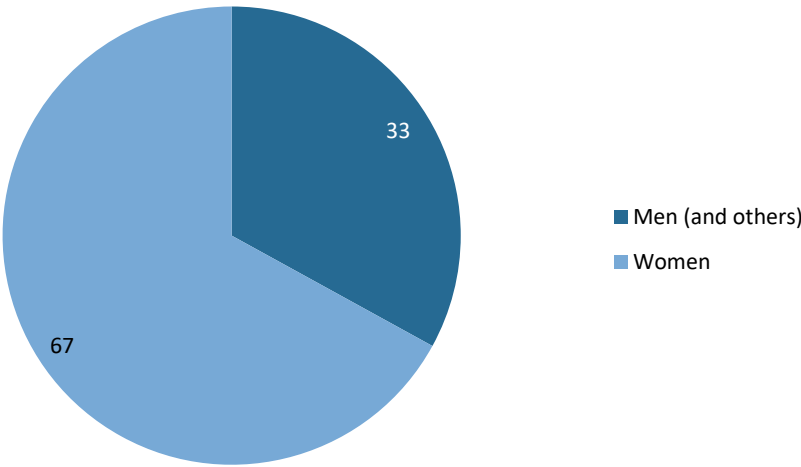
Table 14: Number of participants in study centre activities (2020-2024)

Year	Participants in courses (not unique)	Participants in study clubs (not unique)	Total
2024	262 861	3 647	266 508
2023	492 131	16 156	508 287
2022	472 955	14 939	487 894
2021	436 164	11 792	447 956
2020	308 027	15 253	323 280

Reference: Kirstinä et al. 2025.

In the official statistics, a new release from Statistics Finland shows that the net number of participants in study centre activities in 2024 was 188,336. This data source also provides information on gender distribution. Figure 6 shows that women constitute the majority of participants in the study centre activities.

Figure 6: Gender distribution for participants in study centre activities (2024)

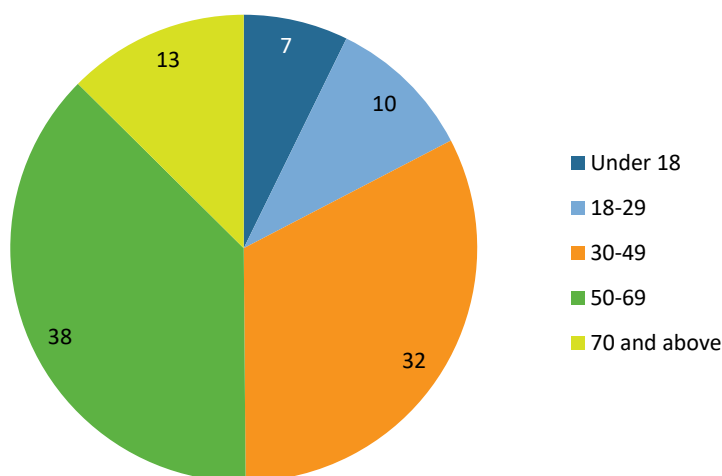


Reference: https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/sv/StatFin/StatFin_oaiop/statfin_oaiop_pxt_159g.px/table/tableViewLayout1/.

Notes: Net number of students means that the same person is counted as a student in one educational institution only once, even if they participated in more than one education in the educational institution concerned during the calendar year. The category men and others includes men, non-binary persons, and those reported as unknown in the data collection.

The official statistics also provide information on participants by age group. Figure 7 shows the age distribution. 51% of the participants are 50 years old and above, but there is also a relatively large proportion of younger age groups.

Figure 7: Age distribution – study centre activities (2024)



Reference: Students in liberal adult education by Type of educational institution, Area, Age, Year and Information. PxWeb. Note: Notes: Net number of students means that the same person is counted as a student in one educational institution only once, even if they participated in more than one education in the educational institution concerned during the calendar year.

Apart from the official statistics, in 2019, a study was conducted on participant profiles, focusing on their age, education level, main activity, and native language³⁷. Hence, this publication includes more background variables.

Denmark

In Denmark, there are no official statistics on the number of participants in study associations and their characteristics.

However, some municipalities count the number of participants. In a recent survey, 29 out of 98 municipalities were able to report the numbers. Based on this information, a very cautious estimate suggests a little more than 500,000 participants nationwide (Thøgersen et al. 2025, 46).

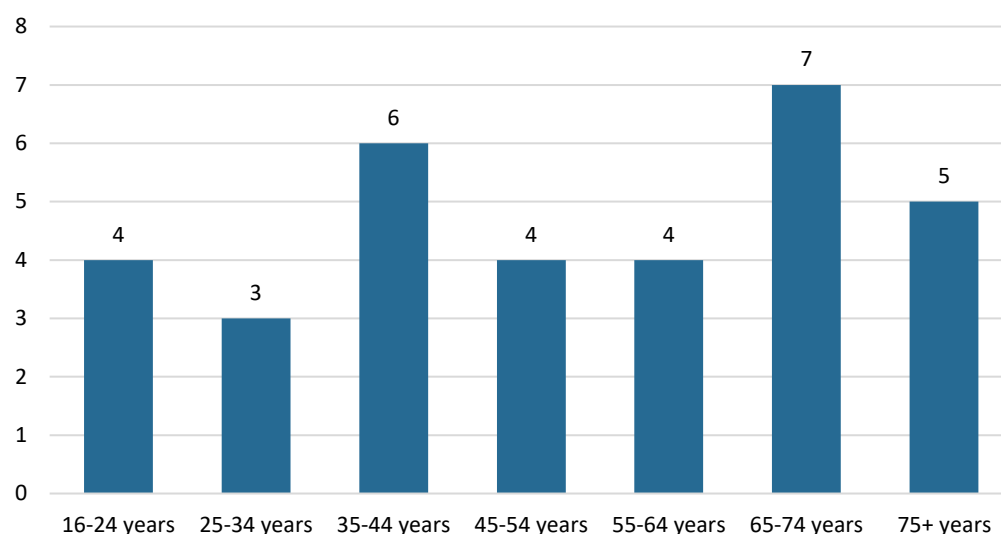
However, a more valid way to look at the participation in evening school activities is to look at statistics on the percentage of the general population participating in study association activities. In 2024, 5% of the Danish population had participated in study associations over the past 12 months. For women, the share was 6%; for men, 3%³⁸.

Figure 8 shows the percentage of each age group in the population that takes part in study association activities. The highest participation rate is found in the 65-74-year age group.

³⁷ https://stat.fi/til/oaiop/2019/oaiop_2019_2020-12-10_kat_001_fi.html

³⁸ <https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20071>

Figure 8: Percentage of the population participating in study association activities – divided by age groups



Reference: <https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20071>. The figure shows the age distribution of participants in 2024.

Apart from the national statistics, a number of other reports and surveys take a deeper look at the participants' profiles, showing an overweight of participants with higher education (Ibsen et al. 2015; Thøgersen & Bjerrum 2016, Thøgersen & Bjerrum 2018).

Comparative overview across countries

Table 15 summarises the number of participants across the countries. It is evident that the available statistics vary, and particularly in Denmark, the official statistics are very limited. Furthermore, it varies whether the numbers include unique or non-unique participants, and Sweden and Finland are the only countries with updated numbers on unique participants.

Table 15: Comparative overview – number of participants in study association activities

	Number of participants in study association activities	Sources
Norway	578,804 (2024)	https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/07441
Sweden	<p>326,646 participants in study circles (unique participants)</p> <p>364,516 participants in other popular education (unique participants)</p> <p>6,939,684 in culture programmes (non-unique participants)</p>	<p>Yearly statistical overview from Folkbildningsrådet (Folkbildningsrådet 2025, 60)³⁹:</p> <p>https://folkbildningsradet.se/media/31phvp4y/folk-bildningsradets-samlade-bedomning-2024.pdf</p>
Finland	188,336 unique participants (2024)	<p>Official statistics:</p> <p>https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/sv/StatFin/StatFin_oaiop/statfin_oaiop_pxt_159g.px/table/tableViewLayout1/</p>
Denmark	<p>No official statistics available on numbers of participants</p> <p>5% of the adult population has participated in study association activities within the last 12 months (2024).</p> <p>More knowledge on the profiles of participants can be found in other survey studies.</p>	<p>Statistics:</p> <p>https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20071</p> <p>Relevant reports on survey studies:</p> <p>https://www.sdu.dk/-/media/files/om_sdu/centre/c_isc/movements/2015/movements2015nr6.pdf</p> <p>https://www.vifo.dk/udgivelser/mental-sundhed-og-oeget-trivsel-aftenskolernes-betydning-for-borgere-i-aalborg-kommune/</p> <p>https://www.vifo.dk/udgivelser/aftenskoleomraadet-i-vordingborg-kommune-en-analyse-af-aftenskolernes-roller-og-potentialer/</p>

When it comes to the profiles of the participants, the general picture across the countries is an overweight of women. However, in countries with detailed statistics, it is evident that gender distribution varies across subjects. It is also a common trait that there are many participants among the older age groups, but with some variation across the countries, which also reflects different age limits for participation.

³⁹ For information on participants in special projects, see p. 61 in the same report.

PART 2: FOLK HIGH SCHOOLS



Part 2: Folk high schools

Introduction and definition of the field

Folk high schools in the four Nordic countries have many things in common. They are mainly for young people and adults, their main activities are non-formal education, and they aim at active participation and community. But they also differ on a number of issues.

One of the main differences is that folk high schools in Sweden and Finland have a closer affiliation with the formal education system, as some courses can qualify for both upper secondary school and higher education. Moreover, it is not mandatory to live at the schools in Sweden and Finland as it is in Denmark and Norway (SWEKO 2023, 8). Finally, some of the folk high schools in Sweden and Finland are run by public actors, while all schools in Denmark and most schools in Norway are run by non-profit organisations.

Across the countries, there are more available statistics on folk high schools than on study associations. This holds particularly for Denmark, where the participants of the folk high schools are very well described, while the opposite is the case for participants in study associations.

Table 16 summarises the main characteristics of the field in the four countries and provides links for further reading. More detailed information will be provided in a later section on the legal framework.

The number of folk high schools varies across the countries. Sweden has the most, with 154 folk high schools nationwide. Norway has 81, Finland has 73⁴⁰, and Denmark has 72 folk high schools (2025).

⁴⁰ 73 folk high schools, but 81 campuses. This means that some of the folk high schools have more than one campus.

Table 16: Comparative overview – main characteristics of the field of folk high schools

	Definition	Source
Norway	<p>Folk high schools provide non-formal learning for adults in schools where the students live.</p> <p>Most students are between 18 and 25 years old, but a few schools also have younger students.</p> <p>The schools are non-profit organisations with various values and ideological backgrounds.</p> <p>The length of the courses is 9 months, from August to May – with the possibility of half year attendance.</p>	<p>https://www.folkehogskole.no/om-folkehogskole</p>
Sweden	<p>Folk high schools are a form of adult education and are primarily aimed at adults aged 18 and above. Education at folk high schools is free and voluntary.</p> <p>This means that the participants themselves choose to attend folk high schools and that the courses are independent of central curricula and municipal adult education.</p> <p>Some folk high schools are run by non-profit value-based organisations and some by counties.</p> <p>Some, but not all, schools offer opportunities for students to live at the school, but it is not mandatory.</p> <p>The courses cover both general courses – aimed at those who have not completed compulsory or upper secondary education – and specialised courses for those who wish to specialise in a particular interest.</p>	<p>https://folkbildningsradet.se/folkhogskola</p> <p>https://folkbildningsradet.se/folkhogskola/kurstyper-a-folkhogskolan/</p> <p>https://www.sverigesfolkhogskolor.se/om-folkhogskola/#section-0</p>
Finland	<p>Folk high schools offer both liberal adult education, general education and vocational education and training. A large part of the schools is run by non-profit value-based organisations, and some are run by the local governments.</p> <p>They are targeted at young people and adults, and the respective schools are free to decide the content of the courses. It is possible, but not mandatory, for the students to live at the school.</p> <p>The long-term programmes in folk high schools usually last one academic year. In addition, they organise courses of various lengths, including summer and weekend courses.</p> <p>Teaching at folk high schools is usually general education, i.e. it has an open focus and includes, for example, languages, arts and culture subjects and communication.</p> <p>The courses include both popular education and educational programmes at the primary and secondary school</p>	<p>https://www.folkhogskolor.fi/att-studera-pa-folkhogskola/vad-ar-en-folkhogskola/</p> <p>Fritt bildningsarbete - OKM - Undervisnings- och kulturministeriet</p> <p>https://en.kansanopistot.fi/front-page/folk-high-schools-in-finland/</p> <p>https://www.folkhogskolor.fi/finlands-folkhogskolforening/vi-pa-verkar/info-om-folkhogskolor/</p>

	levels, as well as open university and vocational training and continuing vocational education.	
Denmark	<p>The Danish folk high schools are self-governing institutions conducting non-formal education.</p> <p>A central characteristic is that the students live at the schools, and that the teaching does not address formal qualifications.</p> <p>Long courses of 4-6 months are most common, but many schools also offer short courses with a duration of one-two weeks.</p> <p>The schools can be specialised in specific activities, but general liberal education must also be prioritised.</p> <p>Folk high schools are typically attended by young people taking a break from the formal education system. Students must be at least 18 years old – except at two youth folk high schools.</p>	<p>https://www.hojskolerne.dk/om-hoejskole/hvad-er-en-hoejskole</p> <p>https://www.vifo.dk/om-folkeoplysning/folkehoejskoler/</p>

Laws and regulations

Folk high schools and the public subsidies for folk high schools are regulated in different ways in each of the countries. Table 17 provides an overview of the central legal documents in each country and provides direct links to the documents.

In all countries, the main purpose of the folk high schools is to provide general education and edification/enlightenment. The folk high schools are also aware of their interplay with society and aim to educate people to be informed and actively engaged citizens.

All folk high schools focus on the individual's development throughout the course. In all four countries, discussion and collaboration are central aspects of education, and students are expected to take an active role in their learning, with personal growth as the primary focus. However, the role these courses play within the broader education system varies from country to country.

The Danish, Norwegian and Swedish folk high schools do not use grades, which is a key characteristic of their educational model⁴¹. Finland stands out by offering courses aimed at improving students' grades and providing academically oriented programmes, rather than solely focusing on popular education. The Swedish folk high schools are also somewhat unique, since they do not use grades, but the students get a study opinion, which is the folk

⁴¹ <https://www.folkehogskole.no/en/about>; <https://www.hojskolerne.dk/om-hoejskole/hvad-er-en-hoejskole>; <https://www.sverigesfolkhogskolor.se/om-folkhogskola/bildning-och-larande/>

high schools' own rating of the participants' ability to carry through further studies⁴². This study opinion can be beneficial for the participant's future education opportunities (Folkbildningsrådet, 2022). This places Sweden slightly closer to the Finnish case, where the folk high schools are integrated into the education system. In contrast, Danish and Norwegian folk high schools function primarily as a supplement to the formal education system (NOU 2022, 30; Thøgersen et al. 2018).

Table 17: Folk high schools' laws and purposes

	Law	Purpose of the folk high schools
Norway	'Folkehøgskoleloven' ⁴³ https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2025-06-20-99	The purpose of the folk high schools is to promote general education, civic enlightenment, active citizenship, and respect for human dignity. The folk high school shall contribute to diversity and be open to all. It is the responsibility of each school to establish their own value foundation within this broader framework.
Sweden	'Förordning (2015:218) om statsbidrag til folkbildningen' https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/forordning-2015218-om-statsbidrag-till_sfs-2015-218/	Folk high schools are tasked with supporting and contributing to the development of democracy. In addition, they aim to empower students to actively engage in and influence society. They also strive to foster greater interest in cultural life and to raise the general level of education and knowledge among the population.
Finland	'Lag om fritt bildningsarbete 632/1998' https://www.finlex.fi/en/legislation/1998/632?language=swe	The aim is to promote diverse development, well-being and welfare of individuals, as well as to foster democracy, pluralism, sustainable development, cultural diversity, and internationalism. The Finnish folk high schools offer both young people and adults opportunities for voluntary studies, helping students improve their study skills and develop as individuals and members of society.
Denmark	'Højskoleloven' https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lt/2019/280	The law applies to folk high schools that provide education and social engagement through courses primarily aimed at fostering life enlightenment, popular education, and democratic formation. The schools may offer specialised courses with a prominent role, but these must never come at the expense of the broad general education, which is the schools' main purpose.

Economy

This section focuses on the different forms of government subsidies for folk high schools in each country. As it was mentioned in the section on study associations, it is important to

⁴³ A new law was implemented in 2025. More information on the original proposal and background can be found here: [Innstilling](#)

note that state subsidies for folk high schools do not provide the full picture of the financial situation of the schools.

Their financial situation in each country can be affected by different conditions regarding costs and other types of income. For instance, the level of participant fees varies across the countries. In Norway, the average price is 140,807 NOK for 10 months (2025/26)⁴⁴, however, it is possible to apply for student finance, which is a combination of a loan and a grant from the state⁴⁵. In Denmark, the average price for a long course is 1,700 DKK per week (2025)⁴⁶. In Sweden, there are no tuition fees, but there are fees for course literature, materials, food, and housing⁴⁷. In Finland, it is free to attend qualification studies at folk high schools, while tuition fees vary in other types of courses⁴⁸. Both in Finland and Sweden, it is possible for students to apply for student aid from the state, while this is not the case in Denmark⁴⁹.

Hence, the following description of the financial levels and structures in a comparative perspective should be used with attention to these factors. Moreover, it is important to note that the focus is on the general grant while grants for specific projects or assignments are not included.

The table below provides an overview of public subsidies in the field across all four countries, along with sources for further information, while the following sections offer a more detailed explanation for each country.

⁴⁴ <https://www.folkehogskole.no/en/prices-and-visa?>

⁴⁵ Until 154 875 NOK in the school year 2025-26 - 60% loan and 40% grant. More information here: [Pris, lån og stipend | Folkehøgskole](#)

⁴⁶ <https://www.hojskolerne.dk/hoejskolekurser/lange-kurser-8-40-uger>

⁴⁷ <https://www.studera.nu/startpage/road-to-studies/other-ways/folk-high-school/>

⁴⁸ <https://en.kansanopistot.fi/frontpage/the-practicalities-of-studying-at-a-folk-high-school/>

⁴⁹ <https://slks.dk/omraader/kulturinstitutioner/folkehoejskoler/stoette-til-hoejskoler-og-hoejskoleophold>

Table 18: Comparative overview of public subsidies for folk high schools

	Norway	Sweden	Finland	Denmark
Subsidies	Basic subsidy Subsidy per student Subsidy for rent	General subsidy Supplementary subsidy	Government subsidy Supplementary subsidy	Basic subsidy Activity-based subsidy
Total government subsidy	1,103,288,321 NOK (2024)	2447 million SEK (2024)	118,765,435 € (2025) ⁵⁰	750 million DKK (2025)
References to information sides	https://www.udir.no/om-udir/tilskudd-og-prosjektmidler/tilskuddssatser/2024/tilskuddssatser-for-folkehoyskoler/ https://www.udir.no/contentassets/ec0b0a73ff2c4af0a916d81f35a0368a/prinsippnota-arsrapport-2024.pdf	https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/proposition/budgetpropositionen-for-2024-utgiftsomrade-17_hb031d18/html/	https://www.folkhogskolor.fi/finlands-folkhogskolforening/vi-paverkar/statistik/	https://slks.dk/omraader/kulturinstitutioner/folkehoejskoler/tilskud-til-hoejskoler
References to statistical sides	Yearly reports from 'Utdanningsdirektoratet' can be found through this page: https://kudos.dfo.no/	Published in yearly reports from Folkbildningsrådet: https://folkbildningsradet.se/om-oss/publikationer-och-remissvar/samlad-bedomning-folkbildningens-betydelse-for-samhallet/	Budget portal: https://budjetti.vm.fi/indox/si-salto.jsp?year=2025&lang=fi&maindoc=/2025/aky/aky.xml&id=/2025/aky/YksityiskohtaisetPerustelut/29/10/31/31.html Finance reports for the individual folk high schools: https://vos.oph.fi/rap/	The Danish Finance Act Database: https://www.oes-cs.dk/olapdatabase/finanslov/index.cgi Finance reports for the individual folk high schools: https://regnskabsportal.uvm.dk/

Norway

All folk high schools in Norway receive government subsidy when they are approved under 'Folkehøgskoleloven'. The folk high schools receive three forms of subsidies⁵¹:

- basic subsidy
- subsidy per student
- subsidy for rent

⁵⁰ The amount includes subsidies for popular education, basic education and VET. The amount for popular education was 67,792,718 EUR in 2025.

⁵¹ Apart from this, four folk high schools are approved for students with special needs, for whom they can receive higher grants (478,824 NOK in 2024).

All folk high schools receive the same basic subsidy, which was 2,069,000 NOK in 2024. The subsidy per student is calculated based on the average number of students three years prior to the subsidy year. For the first 75 students, each student is multiplied by 2.4, while each additional student beyond 75 is multiplied by 1.7. This calculation determines the number of students at the folk high school, which is then multiplied by the subsidy rate per student. In 2024, the subsidy rate per student was 43,529. The subsidy for rent is calculated for each individual school based on a recommendation from 'Folkehøgskolerådet'⁵². In total, the Norwegian folk high schools received 1,1 billion NOK in government subsidy in 2024⁵³. Moreover, it is important to notice that students have the option to apply for student finance from the state. The student finance is a combination of a grant (40%) and a loan (60%). The grant part accounts for around 400 million NOK a year and is thereby indirectly a considerable part of the total state support for folk high schools⁵⁴.

In 2022, the basic subsidy accounted for 16% of the total subsidy, while the student subsidy and the rent subsidy accounted for 77% and 7.5%, respectively. In 2022, each school received approximately 1,9 million NOK in basic subsidy. Additionally, folk high schools generate income from student fees, facility rentals, and events (NOU 2022, 81-86).

Sweden

The Swedish folk high schools receive four different forms of government subsidies:

- Organisational grant (8%)
- Operational grant (84%)
- Reinforcement grant (6%)
- Grant for language support (2%)

The organisational grant is the same for all folk high schools and covers, for example, administration costs. In 2025, the organisational grant is 1,400,000 SEK. The operational grant represents the largest share of the government subsidy and is based on the total number of student-weeks at each school⁵⁵. In 2025, the operational grant is 1768 SEK per student-week⁵⁶.

The schools can apply for a reinforcement grant and a language support grant if they have students with disabilities or language-related challenges. In 2025, the language support grant is 270 SEK per student-week⁵⁷.

⁵² Tilskuddssatser for folkehøgskoler 2024 | [udir.no](https://www.udir.no)

⁵³ <https://www.udir.no/contentassets/ec0b0a73ff2c4af0a916d81f35a0368a/prinsippnota-arsrapport-2024.pdf>

⁵⁴ Pris, lån og stipend | Folkehøgskole

⁵⁵ <https://folkbildningsradet.se/folkhogskola/statsbidrag/>

⁵⁶ <https://folkbildningsradet.se/for-folkbildare/jag-jobbar-pa-folkhogskola/statsbidrag/om-statsbidrag-2025/>

⁵⁷ <https://folkbildningsradet.se/for-folkbildare/jag-jobbar-pa-folkhogskola/statsbidrag/om-statsbidrag-2025/>

In 2024, the total government subsidy for the Swedish folk high schools was proposed to be 2447 million SEK⁵⁸

Besides these, the state also supports special folk education initiatives, for example the initiative 'svenska från dag ett', which is a programme at the folk high schools for asylum seekers (Folkbildningsrådet 2025, 78).

It is also possible for students to apply for student financial aid through the Swedish Board of Student Finance. Students at the folk high schools can get a 'studiemedel', which consists of both a subsidy and a loan. The amount of money is based on their income and study time (length and strength)⁵⁹.

Finland

The Finnish folk high schools receive government funding, and the government covers 57% of the folk high schools' operating costs within liberal adult education. The government subsidy is based on a unit price and a performance-based revenue, which is measured in student weeks. A student-week is defined as a five-day period in which a student receives at least five hours of education per day. The Ministry of Education and Culture determines the unit price per student-week⁶⁰.

Folk high schools can also receive supplementary subsidies. There are two general types of subsidies: for integration training and study vouchers. The folk high schools receive a 100% subsidy for the education of immigrants during the period in which the immigrant has a valid integration plan or within one year after the expiration of the last integration plan. Otherwise, the folk high schools can also get special subsidies for persons belonging to specific target groups, e.g. unemployed, pensioners and people with special needs⁶¹.

In 2025, the folk high schools received a total government subsidy of 118,765,435 € for all fields of education⁶². The figure below shows the distribution of government subsidies for folk high schools divided by different fields in which the folk high schools can provide education. Popular education receives the largest subsidy and accounts for the majority of educational provision. However, the level of subsidy for popular education is lower (57%) than for the other fields of education, which covers 100%.

⁵⁸ https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/proposition/budgetpropositionen-for-2024-utgiftsomrade-17_hb031d18/html/ p. 10.

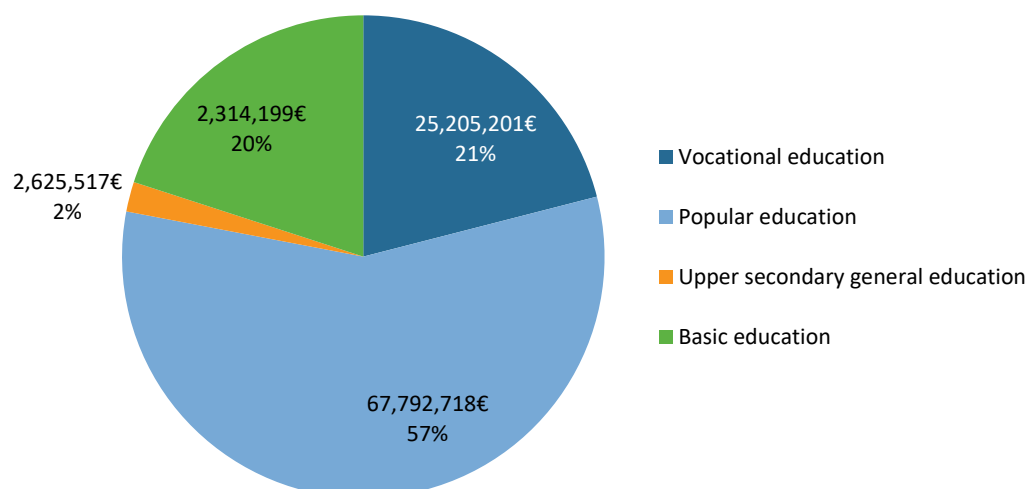
⁵⁹ <https://www.csn.se/bidrag-och-lan/for-din-situation/studera-pa-en-utbildning-i-sverige/folkhogskola.html> and <https://www.csn.se/bidrag-och-lan/studiemedel.html>.

⁶⁰ <https://www.folkhogskolor.fi/finlands-folkhogskolforening/vi-paverkar/info-om-folkhogskolor/>.

⁶¹ https://www.finlex.fi/en/legislation/1998/632?language=swe#chp_4_sec_8v20150579_heading_§9

⁶² <https://www.folkhogskolor.fi/finlands-folkhogskolforening/vi-paverkar/statistik/>

Figure 9: Government subsidies for Finnish folk high schools (2025)



Reference: <https://www.folkhogskolor.fi/finlands-folkhogskolforening/vi-paverkar/statistik/>. The figure shows the government subsidy in 2025.

As in Sweden, it is also possible for students to apply for financial aid for full-time studies in a folk high school. Student financial aid consists of the study grant, student loan, and housing supplement⁶³.

Denmark

The Danish folk high schools receive two government subsidies:

- Basic subsidy
- Activity-based subsidy

All folk high schools receive a basic subsidy. In 2024, the basic subsidy was 809,810 DKK for each folk high school⁶⁴. However, this accounts for only about 10% of the total government subsidy for folk high schools.

Around 90% of the folk high schools' subsidy is activity-based. The amount of the activity-based subsidy is calculated based on the number of students at the schools and whether they participate in short, medium-length or long courses. The number of students is measured as full-time equivalent students ('årselever'). One full-time equivalent student is defined as one participant in 40 weeks, or two participants in 20 weeks or 40 participants in one week⁶⁵.

⁶³ [Kansanopistossa opiskelusta käytännössä | www.kansanopistot.fi](https://www.kansanopistot.fi) and <https://www.kela.fi/upper-secondary-school-and-vocational-education>

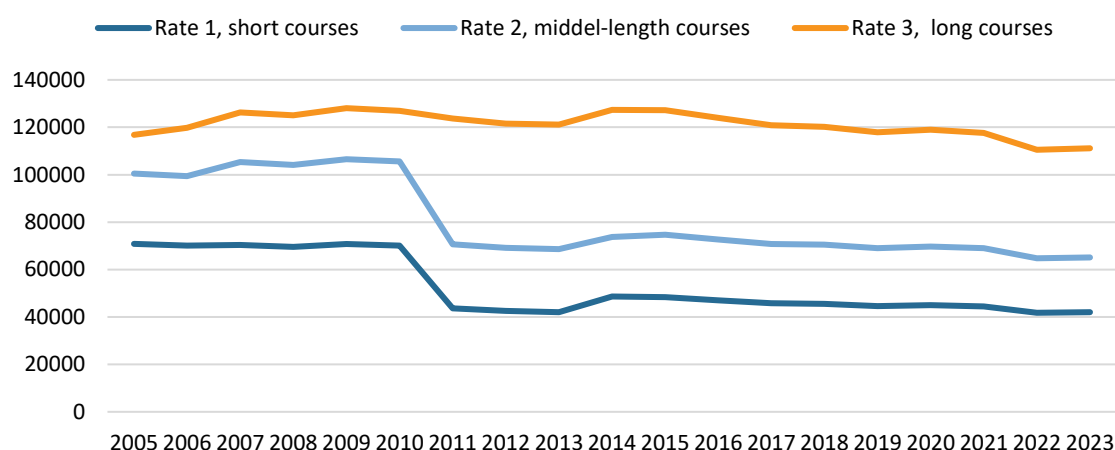
⁶⁴ [Takstkatalog for Folkehoejskoler 2024.pdf](https://www.folkhogskolor.fi/finlands-folkhogskolforening/vi-paverkar/statistik/)

⁶⁵ <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2019/280> §12).

Folk high schools receive the largest subsidy for students who participate in long courses lasting more than 12 weeks. In 2025, the subsidy for these courses is approximately 3000 DKK per student per week. For middle-length courses lasting 2-12 weeks, the subsidy is 1,750 DKK per student per week. For short courses lasting less than two weeks, they receive 1,100 DKK per student per week⁶⁶.

Figure 10 shows that the subsidy for long courses has remained stable over time, while there has been more variation in the subsidies for medium-length and short courses. The development and amounts for these subsidies can be found in the Danish Finance Act Database⁶⁷.

Figure 10: Danish folk high schools' activity-based subsidies per full-time equivalent student (2023 prices)



Reference: The Danish Finance Act Database: <https://www.oes-cs.dk/olapdatabase/finanslov/index.cgi>. The numbers are from the annotations to the respective Finance Acts and have been converted to fixed 2023 prices using the consumer price index.

The total government subsidy in 2025 is 750 million DKK, accounting for around 50% of the folk high schools' revenue⁶⁸. Apart from the general subsidies presented above, it is possible for the folk high schools to get extra subsidies for students with special needs⁶⁹.

Organisation

The number of folk high schools vary across countries. Norway, Finland and Denmark have roughly the same number of schools, while Sweden has more. In all the countries, most folk high schools are private – typically non-profit – and each country has a national association that represents its folk high schools. The countries also differ according to the number of folk high schools with broad general profiles and the number of schools based

⁶⁶ <https://slks.dk/omraader/kulturinstitutioner/folkehoejskoler/tilskud-til-hoejskoler>.

⁶⁷ <https://www.oes-cs.dk/olapdatabase/finanslov/index.cgi>

⁶⁸ <https://slks.dk/omraader/kulturinstitutioner/folkehoejskoler/tilskud-til-hoejskoler>

⁶⁹ <https://ffd.dk/puljer-stipendier-og-elevstoette/elevstoette/specialpaedagogisk-stoette-sps>

on a particular value orientation. Table 19 presents an overview of the organisational structures across the countries, while the following section will outline key characteristics for each country.

Table 19: Comparative overview – organisational structures of folk high schools

	Norway	Sweden	Finland	Denmark
Number of folk high schools	81	154	73	72
Private/public	88% private / 12% public	73% private / 27% public	89% private / 11% public	Only private nonprofit
National association	Folkehøgskolerådet https://www.folkehogskoleradet.no/	Rörelsesfolkhögskolornas Intresseorganisation (RIO) and Sveriges Kommuner och Regioner (SKR) ⁷⁰ are two out of three members of Folkbildningsrådet ⁷¹ RIO: https://www.sverigesfolkhogskolor.se/rio SKR: https://skr.se/Folkbildningsrådet : https://folkbildningsradet.se/	Finlands Folkhögskolförening https://www.folkhogskolor.fi/finlands-folkhogskolforening/	Folkehøjskolerne Forening i Danmark https://ffd.dk/
Value orientation	60% based on free values, 40% based on Christian values	73% idea-based, 27% public	47% based on Christian values, 38% with no ideological or religious affiliation, and 12% maintained by political organisations/NGOs ⁷²	48% general schools

Norway

In 2025, there were 81 folk high schools in Norway⁷³. On average, the schools have 99 students in the long courses (NOU 2022, 34).

⁷⁰ SKR represents the public folk high schools in Folkbildningsrådet.

⁷¹ The two organisations also have a common organisation: Folkhögskolornas Serviceorganisation: <https://www.sverigesfolkhogskolor.se/fso>

⁷² <https://oulurepo.oulu.fi/handle/10024/34263>

⁷³ <https://www.folkehogskole.no/skoler>

Most folk high schools are private, with only a few being public (12%). 65% of the folk high schools are associations or foundations (NOU 2022, 30-31). In most cases, a single association owns and operates a specific folk high school. However, the mission organisations also own some folk high schools. 'Folkehøgskolerådet' is a school policy cooperation body for folk high schools, representing all the Norwegian folk high schools (NOU 2022, 31)⁷⁴.

The Norwegian folk high schools can be divided into two groups depending on their value orientation. 40% of the schools are based on Christian values, and 60% of the schools are based on free values⁷⁵. In addition to 'folkehøgskolerådet', both the Christian schools and free schools have their own associations and an information office. The free schools are organised under 'Folkehøgskoleforbundet'⁷⁶, while the Christian schools are organised under 'Noregs Kristelige Folkehøgskolelag'⁷⁷.

The schools are distributed all over the country, but there are more in the East (39%) and West (30%) (NOU 2022, 32). The folk high schools offer different programmes the students can follow. The ten most popular programmes the students applied for in 2023 are as follows⁷⁸:

- Outdoor
- Theatre and musical
- Travelling
- Music
- Sport
- Art
- Data and esports
- Skiing and snowboarding
- TV, film, and video
- Extreme sport

Sweden

In Sweden, there are 154 folk high schools in 2025⁷⁹. Of these, 113 are run by idea-based organisations, while the rest are run by the regions. The idea-based folk high schools are organised and represented by RIO (Rörelsefolkhögskolornas Interesseorganisation), while the public folk high schools are represented by OFI (Offentligägda Folkhögskolors Interesseorganisation⁸⁰). These two organisations have together formed FSO (Folkehögskolornas Serviceorganisation⁸¹), which aims to promote activities of all folk high schools through

⁷⁴ <https://www.folkehogskoleradet.no/>

⁷⁵ <https://www.folkehogskole.no/skoler>

⁷⁶ <https://www.friylntfolkehogskole.no/fhf/>

⁷⁷ <https://nkf.folkehogskole.no/>

⁷⁸ <https://www.folkehogskole.no/nyheter/dette-er-de-10-mest-populaere-linjene-pa-folkehogskole>

⁷⁹ <https://folkbildningsradet.se/folkhogskola/>

⁸⁰ <https://www.sverigesfolkhogskolor.se/vara-organisationer/ofi/det-har-ar-ofi/>

⁸¹ <https://www.sverigesfolkhogskolor.se/vara-organisationer/>

support and service. Both RIO and Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting (SKR) (representing the public schools) are members of Folkbildningsrådet⁸².

Both the idea-based and the public folk high schools originate from the same core values. However, folk high schools operated by associations typically have a strong connection to civil society⁸³. These schools can develop their own unique, idea-driven approach that reflects the values of their founding organisation. In contrast, public folk high schools often have a broader and less specific profile.

Finland

In Finland, there are 73 folk high schools and 81 campuses (2025)⁸⁴. Most of these are private (89%), and three schools are maintained by the municipalities, while five are run by joint municipalities. The maintainers of the private folk high schools are mainly foundations or interest associations⁸⁵.

The national association representing all 73 folk high schools are called The Finnish Folk High School Association/‘Finlands Folkhögskolforening’⁸⁶. Besides this organisation, there is also an umbrella organisation called the Finnish Adult Education Association/‘Fritt Bildningsarbete’, which is a central organisation for the five types of liberal adult education in Finland: adult education centres, folk high schools, study centres, sports training centres, and summer universities. The Finnish Folk High School Association is a member of this organisation together with four other organisations⁸⁷.

Apart from liberal adult education, five folk high schools provide secondary education, and 31 offer vocational education⁸⁸.

A paper from 2018 shows that 47% of the folk high schools were based on Christian values, 38% have no ideological or religious affiliation, and 12% of the folk high schools were maintained by political movements, labour unions, or NGOs. Three folk high schools have special education (Tuomisto, 2018; 15)⁸⁹. There is no running statistics on the specific characteristics of the schools, but in Oiva, the steering and regulatory service provided by the Finnish National Agency for Education, it is possible to find information on each individual folk high school and their license to operate⁹⁰.

⁸² Folkbildningsrådet consists of three members: RIO, Sweden’s municipalities and regions (SKR) and Studieförbunden i Samverkan

⁸³ https://sverigefolkhogskolor.se/globalassets/dokument_rio/rorelsefolkhogskolornas-idegrund.pdf

⁸⁴ <https://oiva.okm.fi/sv/jarjestamis-ja-yllapitamisluvat/vapaa-sivistystyo>; <https://en.kansanopistot.fi/frontpage/folk-high-schools-in-finland/>.

⁸⁵ <https://www.folkhogskolor.fi/finlands-folkhogskolforening/vi-paverkar/statistik/>

⁸⁶ <https://en.kansanopistot.fi/frontpage/the-finnish-folk-high-school-association/>

⁸⁷ <https://peda.net/yhdistykset/vst/in-english>

⁸⁸ <https://www.folkhogskolor.fi/finlands-folkhogskolforening/vi-paverkar/statistik/>

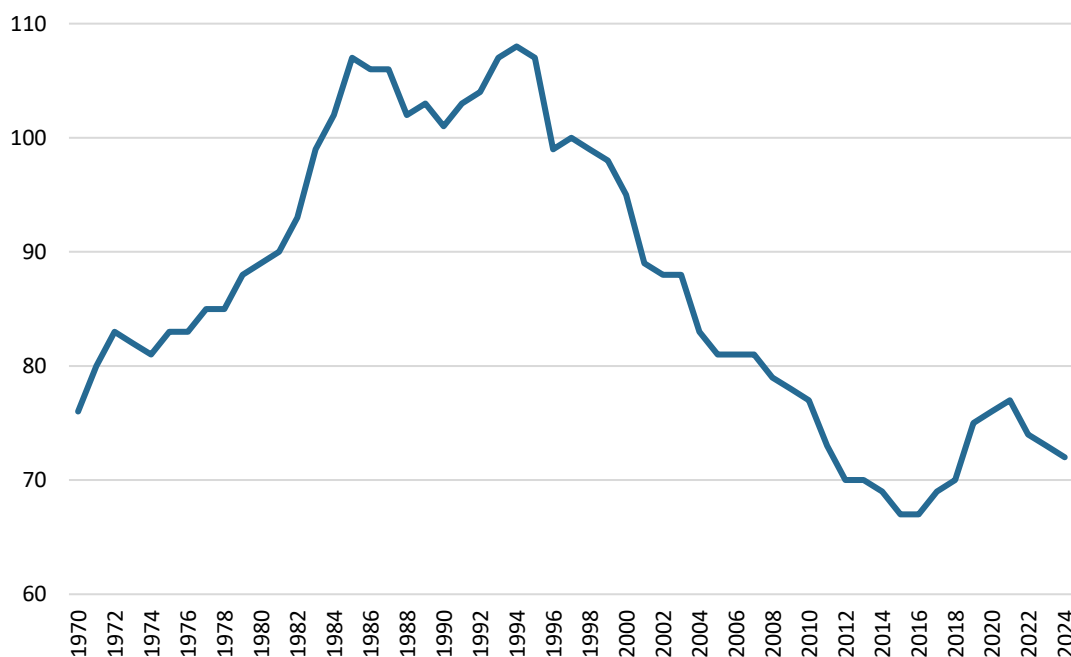
⁸⁹ <https://oulurepo.oulu.fi/handle/10024/34263>

⁹⁰ <https://oiva.okm.fi/sv/jarjestamis-ja-yllapitamisluvat/vapaa-sivistystyo>

Denmark

In 2024, there are 72 folk high schools in Denmark, and the development over time can be seen in figure 11.

Figure 11: Development in the number of Danish high schools in the period 1970-2024



Reference: <https://ffd.dk/raadgivning/statistik-og-analyse/antal-hoejskoler>. There is no data for 2003, so it is assumed that the number of folk high schools in 2003 was the same as in 2002 (88). Both Jaruplund Højskole, south of the Danish-Germany border, Nordiska Folkhögskolan i Kungälv, two schools in the Faroe Islands and one in Greenland are included.

The Danish folk high schools are organised as private independent institutions, and they work on a non-profit basis⁹¹. All the Danish folk high schools are organised under the national association 'Folkehøjskolernes Forening i Danmark'.

The folk high schools can be divided into seven different types⁹²:

- General folk high schools with a broad range of subjects
- Vocationally specialised folk high schools
- Gymnastics, sports, and physical education folk high schools
- Christian or spiritual folk high schools
- Lifestyle folk high schools
- Senior folk high schools
- Youth folk high schools

⁹¹ <https://slks.dk/omraader/kulturinstitutioner/folkehoejskoler/ny-hoejskole>

⁹² <https://www.hojskolerne.dk/hoejskoler/hoejskoletyper>

Most folk high schools are general schools (48%), while 20% are vocationally specialised, and 17% are focused on gymnastics/sports. Only a few folk high schools fall into the other categories.

Activities

The activities of folk high schools are best described through the courses they offer. However, the available statistics on courses vary across the four countries. Statistics on the number of teaching hours are only available in Finland. In Sweden, 'participant weeks'⁹³ is a central concept, but this concept is not at play in the other countries. Therefore, to get a picture of the activity level, the most comparable measure across the countries is to look at the number of participants.

Measurement of the number of participants

However, when looking at the number of participants, there are still different ways to count. Especially, it is relevant to distinguish between measuring the number of participants as full-time equivalent students and measuring the number of participants at a given time. Besides these measurement methods, it is important to be aware of the country's definitions of the course types, as these also affect the comparability between the countries. The following two tables provide a summary of the measurement methods in each country and their definitions of course types.

Table 20: Comparative overview - measurement of participants

	Norway	Sweden	Finland	Denmark
Definition of a participant	<p>The number of participants in year-long courses on 1 October each year.</p> <p>This means that the measure includes the number of participants who participate in 38 weeks of education.</p>	<p>Participants in short and long courses in the given year.</p> <p>Measured as either full-time participants, part-time participants or unique students.</p> <p>It is also possible to get the number of participant weeks.</p>	<p>Participants in a given year. Not possible to distinguish between course types</p>	<p>Full-time equivalent students in long, middle-length and short courses. One full-time student is participating in 40 weeks of education.</p> <p>Also possible to get the number of participants in a given year.</p>

⁹³ A participant week is calculated by multiplying the number of participants by the number of course days and then dividing by five.

Table 21: Comparative overview: Definition of different course types

	Norway	Sweden	Finland	Denmark
Short course	Half-year courses	Under two weeks	Two days to eight weeks	Less than two weeks
Middle-length course				Between 2-12 weeks
Long course	Year-courses. 190 course days, 38 weeks	From 2 weeks to 4 years	A study-year (190 course days)	Above 12 weeks

The Norwegian and Danish measures of participants are the most comparable. In Denmark, participants are measured as full-time equivalent students, defined as one participant attending for 40 weeks⁹⁴. In Norway, statistics are available for participation in year-long courses. A long course is defined as 190 course days, which corresponds to 38 weeks. The statistics show the number of participants enrolled in long courses on 1 October each year. This is highly comparable to the Danish full-time equivalent measure, because the duration of a year-long course in Norway is almost identical to the duration of a full-time equivalent student in Denmark. However, the Norwegian measure does not account for students who drop out of folk high schools after 1 October, whereas the Danish measure would take this into account.

The Swedish and Finnish measurements differ from the above, as they do not operate with the concept of 'full-time equivalent students'. Both countries measure the number of participants in a given year, which does not take the number of weeks/the activity level into account. However, the Finnish and Swedish measures can be compared with each other, and the Danish statistics also provide the possibility to look at the number of participants at a given time. Moreover, Sweden and Finland use the concept of 'participant weeks'/'student weeks', which also accounts for the level of activity, but in a different way than in Norway and Denmark.

Hence, it is important to be aware of the different types of measurement and course types in the different countries when looking at the number of participants. Table 22 gives an overview of the available statistics. After that, the next section takes a deeper look at each of the countries.

⁹⁴ <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2019/280>

Table 22: Comparative overview of available statistics

	Norway	Sweden	Finland	Denmark
Source	SSB: https://www.ssb.no/statbank/list/vgu/	SCB: https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/ https://folkbildningsradet.se/om-folkbildningsradet/publikationer-och-remissvar/samlad-bedomning-folkbildningens-betydelse-for-samhallet/	StatFin: https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin_oaiop/statfin_oaiop_pxt_159g.px/ https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin_oaiop/statfin_oaiop_pxt_15bk.px	Danmarks Statistik: https://www.statistikbanken.dk/statbank5a/SelectTable/Omrade0.asp?SubjectCode=5&ShowNews=OFF&PLanguage=0
Possibilities	Participants in long courses	Participants in general long courses Participants in special long courses Participants in short courses	Total number of participants Gross and net number of students Education directed at immigrants (gross and net) Students in compulsory education organised as popular education.	Participants in long courses Participants in middle-length courses Participants in short courses

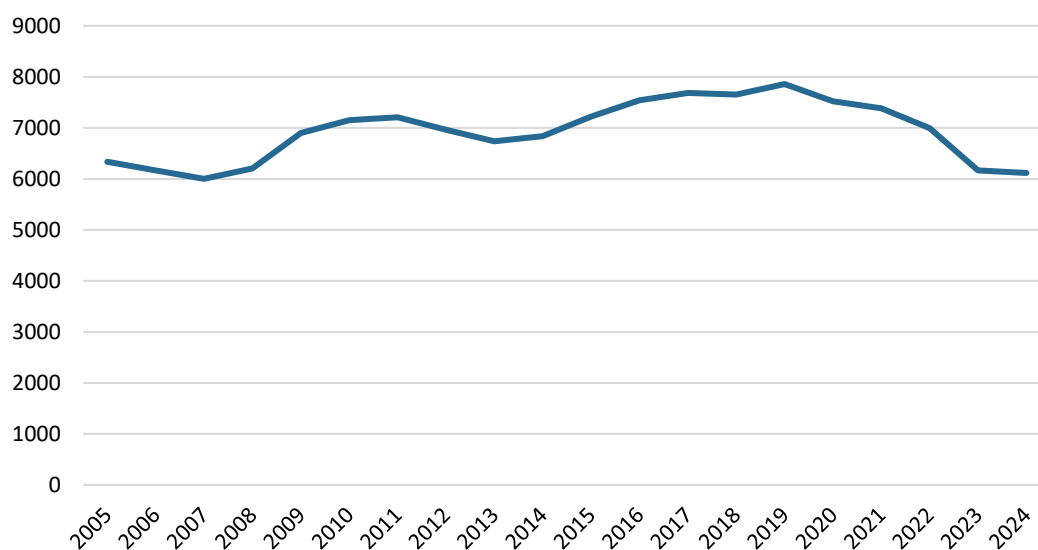
Norway

The Norwegian folk high schools offer both year-long and half-year courses, with most being year-long. A year-long course is defined as 190 course days, which is equivalent to nine months. According to regulations, students must receive at least 24 hours of education per week. Saturdays are considered school days, and students will typically have four hours of education per day. The schools' timetables include a combination of main courses, elective courses and common subjects, with each school determining the distribution of these components (NOU 2022, 29).

In Norway, it is possible to find statistics about the number of participants in year-long courses⁹⁵. The number of participants is measured as the total number of participants who are registered at the folk high schools on 1 October each year. Figure 12 illustrates this, and in 2024, approximately 6000 students participated in a year-long course at a Norwegian folk high school.

⁹⁵ <https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/04556/>

Figure 12: Number of participants in the Norwegian long courses



Reference: <https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/04556/tableViewLayout1/>

Sweden

The Swedish folk high schools offer both long and short courses. The long courses last from two weeks to four years, while the short courses are shorter than two weeks⁹⁶.

There are two types of long courses: general courses and special courses. General courses are qualification studies that can grant access to upper secondary school and the university. They include subjects common to upper secondary school, often supplemented with a special focus, such as sports, health or philosophy of life. In contrast, special courses focus on a specific subject area⁹⁷.

The Swedish folk high schools are required to offer general courses, which must make up at least 15% of the schools' activities. The general courses are primarily aimed at students who have not completed primary or secondary school⁹⁸. In addition, the folk high schools also offer cultural courses, which provide cultural programmes to the public in cooperation with the folk high schools (Folkbildningsrådet 2025, 50).

Furthermore, students at Swedish folk high schools can choose to study either full-time or part-time. Full-time study requires an average of four 60-minute lessons per day. There are three different levels of part-time study:

⁹⁶ <https://www.sverigesfolkhogskolor.se/om-folkhogskola/folkhogskolans-utbud/>

⁹⁷ <https://www.sverigesfolkhogskolor.se/om-folkhogskola/folkhogskolans-utbud/>

⁹⁸ https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/forordning-2015218-om-statsbidrag-till_sfs-2015-218/ (§11)

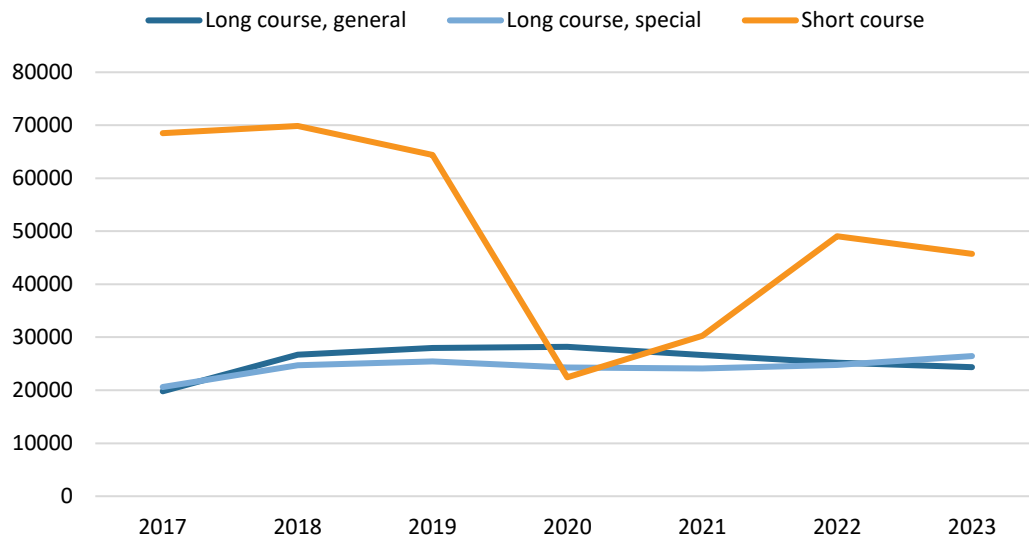
- 75% corresponds to three hours of education per day.
- 50% equals two hours per day, and
- 25% means one hour of education per day.

In Sweden, it is possible to obtain statistics about the number of participants from the official statistics portal SCB⁹⁹. The SCB database counts participants as the total number of individuals who participated in a given year. This means that the data do not account for the number of weeks each participant spend at the folk high school. It is possible to distinguish between the number of participants in short courses and the two types of long courses¹⁰⁰, but because of the very broad definition of a long course, the statistics do not tell us whether the student has been participating in two weeks of education or many months.

In the SCB statistics, it is possible to choose whether to examine full-time or part-time participants according to the division above. To ensure the most comparable measure to the other countries, we have chosen to include full-time participants in figure 13.

Figure 13 shows that there were 96,529 participants in total in 2023. The majority of participants are engaged in a short course, while the number of participants is equal in the general and specific long courses.

Figure 13: Participants in the Swedish folk high schools' long and short courses



Reference: https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START_UF_UF0601_UF0601A/UF0601T01a/ The figure include full-time participants. There are a lot of missing data for the short course.

⁹⁹ Folk High School statistics; <https://folkbildningsradet.se/>

¹⁰⁰ https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START_UF_UF0601_UF0601A/UF0601T01a/

There are also additional sources that provide information on participant activity at the folk high schools. The annual reports from Folkbildningsrådet include statistics on both the number of participants and the total number of 'participant weeks'. In 2024, short courses accounted for 35,488 'participant-weeks', long general courses for 480,118 'participant-weeks', and long special courses for 640,435 'participant-weeks' (Folkbildningsrådet 2025, 77). On average, this corresponds to approximately one week per participant in short courses, 26 weeks per student on long general courses, and 17 weeks per student on long special courses. For some types of courses (preparatory courses and establishment courses, it is also possible to find information on unique participants in SCB¹⁰¹.

Finland

In Finland, the most common course is the long courses, which last for a study year¹⁰². There are also shorter courses ranging from two days to eight weeks¹⁰³. The students must have at least 25 hours of education per week, or five hours per day¹⁰⁴

Statistics Finland and the Finnish statistical portal, Vipunen, provide statistics about the participants in the Finnish folk high schools. They report the number of participants in each year. It is not possible to distinguish between the short and long courses, which means that we don't know how many weeks the students have participated for. However, this type of data can be obtained by request from the Finnish Folk High School Association.

Statistics Finland distinguishes gross and net numbers of students in popular education and education directed at immigrants, as well as the net number of students in compulsory education organised as popular education. Vipunen statistics portal distinguishes between the overall number of students in popular education, the number of students attending a learning opportunity at a folk high school only intended for children and young people, and the number of students participating in a learning opportunity lasting less than six hours.

Figure 14 shows the number of participants in the Finnish folk high schools from 2010-2021. In 2021, Finnish folk high schools had a total of 68,893 participants. This number is not based on unique participants, but unique numbers are also available in the statistics.

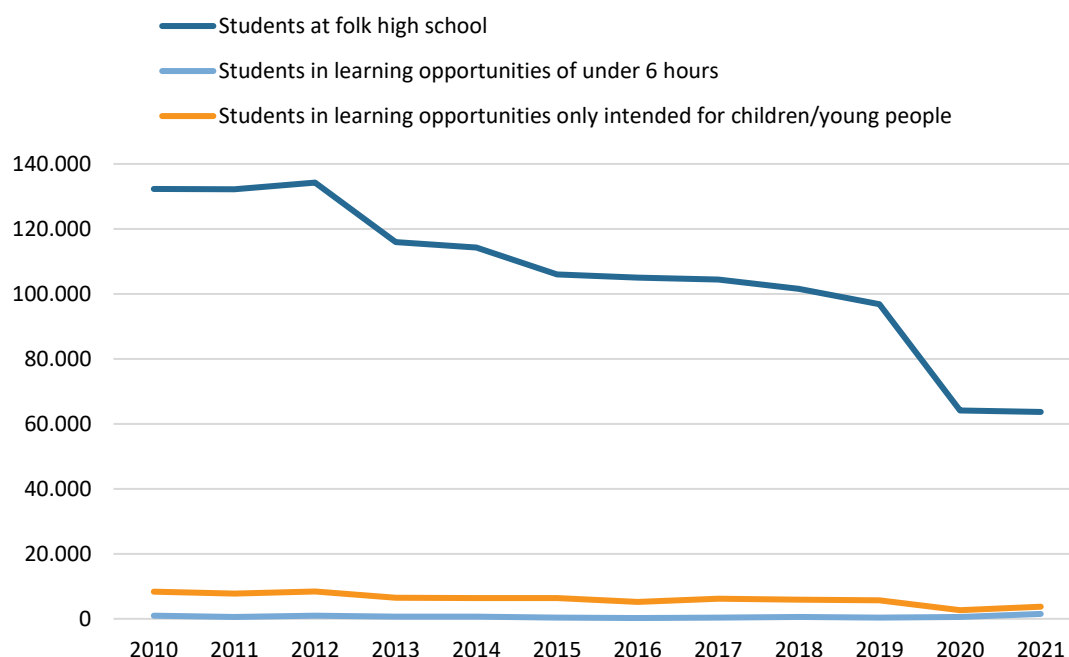
¹⁰¹ [https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/education-and-research-in-the-higher-education-sector/folk-education/folkhogskolestatik-en/#_TablesInTheStatisticalDatabase](https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/education-and-research-in-the-higher-education-sector/folk-education/folkhogskolestistik-en/#_TablesInTheStatisticalDatabase)

¹⁰² <https://www.folkhogskolor.fi/att-studera-pa-folkhogskola/vad-kan-man-studera-vid-en-folkhogskola/folkhogskollinjer/>

¹⁰³ <https://www.folkhogskolor.fi/att-studera-pa-folkhogskola/vad-kan-man-studera-vid-en-folkhogskola/kortkurser/>

¹⁰⁴ [https://www.finlex.fi/sv/lagstiftning/forfattningssamling/1993/1219#OT1_OT0 \(§3\)](https://www.finlex.fi/sv/lagstiftning/forfattningssamling/1993/1219#OT1_OT0 (§3))

Figure 14: Participants in the Finnish folk high schools (Vipunen)



Reference: https://vipunen.fi/sv-fi/_layouts/15/xlviewer.aspx?id=/sv-fi/Rapporter/Vapaa%20sivistystyo%20-%20koulu-tukset%20ja%20osallistuneet%20-%20aikasaria_SV.xlsb + https://vipunen.fi/en-gb/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc={c2bd6f3f-3e22-42df-a604-ddc821d0fca8}&action=view

New statistics from Statistics Finland show the numbers for 2024, where 55,916 students participated in popular education and 6,000 in education directed at immigrants (net numbers)¹⁰⁵.

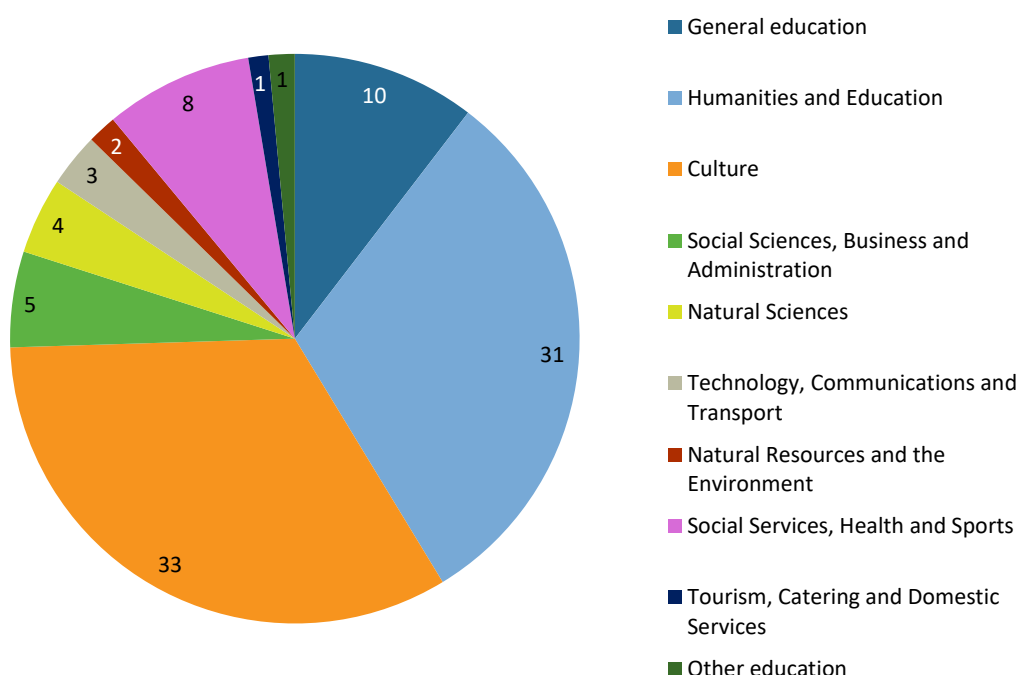
The Finnish statistics also show the number of teaching hours¹⁰⁶. In total, there were 397,119 hours of education in the Finnish folk high schools in 2021, and figure 15 illustrates the distribution of teaching hours across various interest areas. This indicates that Finnish folk high schools allocate the most teaching hours to culture and humanities and education. If we add the number of teaching hours of those attending the folk high schools intended for children and young people or participating in a learning opportunity lasting less than six hours, the total number of teaching hours is 405,697¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁵ Students in liberal adult education by Type of educational institution, Area, Gender, Year and Information. PxWeb

¹⁰⁶ https://vipunen.fi/en-gb/_layouts/15/WopiFrame2.aspx?sourcedoc={87b78b84-530c-4c66-bccf-2eac8b576cfc}&action=view. New statistics from Statistics Finland her: https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin_oaiop/statfin_oaiop_pxt_159h.px/table/tableViewLayout1/

¹⁰⁷ https://vipunen.fi/en-gb/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc={c2bd6f3f-3e22-42df-a604-ddc821d0fca8}&action=view

Figure 15: The distribution of teaching hours across interest areas in 2021



Reference: <https://vipunen.fi/en-gb/layouts/15/WopiFrame2.aspx?sourcedoc={87b78b84-530c-4c66-bccf-2eac8b576cfc}&action=view>

New statistics from Statistics Finland also provide the number of teaching hours in popular education (404,085 in 2024) and their distribution across different subjects¹⁰⁸. As this information was released just before the deadline of the report, and includes a very detailed list of different subjects, it has not been possible to group them into meaningful categories for presentation in the report.

Denmark

The Danish folk high schools have both long, middle-length and short courses. The long courses are more than 12 weeks, the short courses are less than two weeks, and the middle-length courses are between 2 and 12 weeks¹⁰⁹. By law, folk high schools are required to offer at least one course lasting at least four weeks. The students must receive at least 28 hours of education per week, and at least half of these must have a broad general nature¹¹⁰.

In Denmark, it is possible to get statistics on both full-time equivalent students, which take into account the number of weeks students are at the school, and the number of

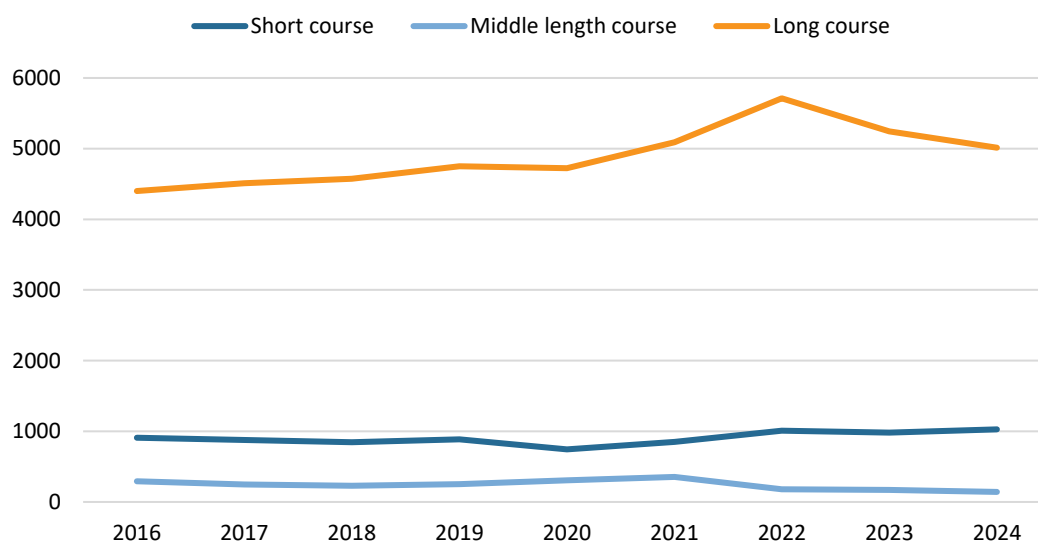
¹⁰⁸ StatFin https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin_oaiop/statfin_oaiop_pxt_159h.px/table/tableViewLayout1/

¹⁰⁹ <https://silks.dk/omraader/kulturinstitutioner/folkehoejskoler/tilskud-til-hoejskoler>

¹¹⁰ <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2019/280> (§ 9 stk.5 and § 13)

participants in a given year¹¹¹. Figure 16 shows the number of full-time equivalent students at the short, middle-length, and long courses.

Figure 16: The number of full-time equivalent students across course types



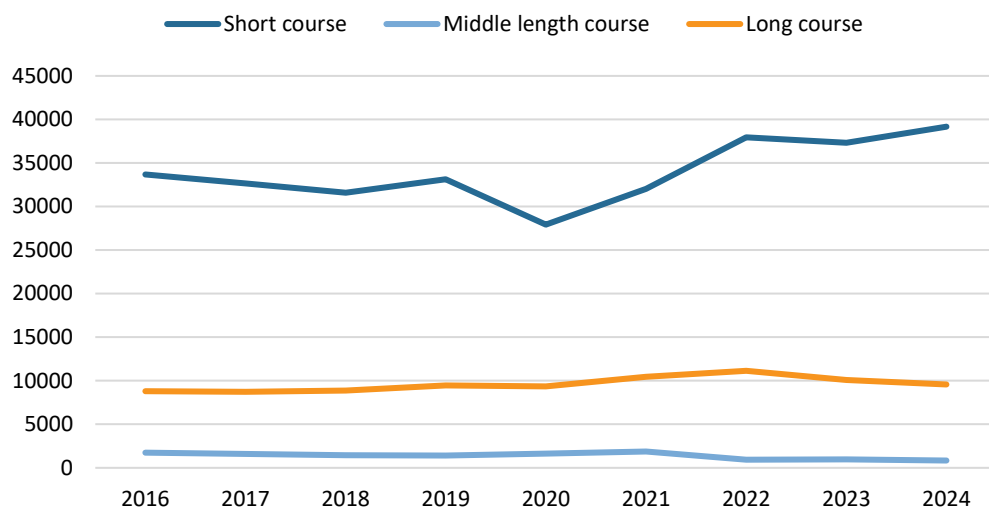
Reference: <https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20122> table FOHOJ01

The main activity of Danish folk high schools is the long courses, with 5,014 full-time equivalent students in 2024. In total, there were 6,183 full-time equivalent students in 2024.

Figure 17 below shows the number of participants in a given year, a measure that is more comparable to Sweden and Finland. The figure illustrates that there are many participants in the short courses, with around 40,000 in 2024. In total, there were 49,586 participants in 2024.

¹¹¹ <https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20122>

Figure 17: Number of participants in short, middle-length and long courses



Reference: <https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20122> table FOHOJ01

Comparative perspectives

As stated at the beginning of the section, Norway and Denmark differ from Sweden and Finland with regard to measurements; therefore, the highest level of comparability is achieved when comparing Sweden and Finland, as well as Norway and Denmark.

The statistics show that the Swedish folk high schools have more participants than the Finnish. In 2021, Swedish folk high schools had a total of 81,031 non-unique participants, while Finnish folk high schools had 68,893. Compared to Denmark, which also lists the number of participants, both Finland and Sweden have a higher level of participation than the Danish folk high schools, with 44,371 participants in 2021.

If we compare Norway and Denmark, Danish folk high schools had fewer participants than the Norwegian schools when measured by full-time equivalent students participating in the long courses. In 2024, the number was 5,014 in Denmark and 6,119 in Norway.

Table 23: Participants in folk high schools by country

	Norway	Sweden	Finland	Denmark
Full-time equivalent students in 2024	6,119			5,014
Participants in 2021 (non-unique)		81,031	68,893	44,371
Links to statistics	https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/04556/	https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START_UF_UF0601_UF0601A/UF0601T01a/	https://vipunen.fi/sv-fi/layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?source={c5c0e951-a45e-4435-a678-fdc4ddcb9800}&action=view	https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20122

Profiles of the participants

In this section, the focus will be on the profiles of the participants attending folk high schools. The focus will primarily be on age and gender, but some countries also provide more detailed information about the participants. The main points of the section and links to relevant statistics are presented in the table below.

Table 24: Comparative overview – profiles of the participants in folk high schools

	Norway	Sweden	Finland	Denmark
Percentage of women in long courses	59	59	62 (all courses)	64
Modal age in the long courses	19	20-24		20-29
Mode of age in the short courses		45-64		50+
Links to statistics	https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/09014/tableViewLayout1/ https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/04556/	https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START_UF_UF0601_UF0601A/	https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin_oa_iop/statfin_oa_iop_pxt_159g.px/table/tableViewLayout1/ (net numbers 2024)	https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20122

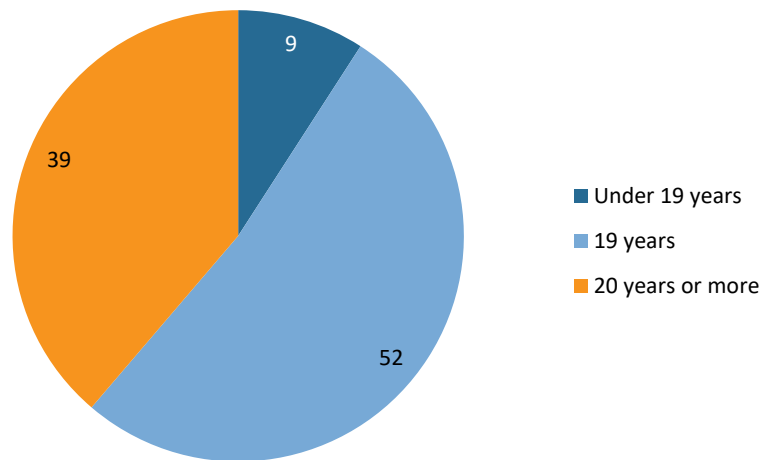
As the table shows, there is a majority of women across the four countries. Moreover, it is primarily young people who participate in the long courses. However, in Sweden and Denmark, where it is possible to look at participant profiles across different course types, it is evident that short courses attract older age groups.

In the following section, more detailed information on participant profiles in each country will be provided.

Norway

Most students attending Norwegian folk high schools are between 18 and 25 years old, and a few schools also include younger students. There is no upper age limit for the participants¹¹². Figure 18 shows that 52% of the participants in the long courses are 19 years old, 9% are younger, and 39% are older.

Figure 18: Age distribution of participants in long courses at Norwegian folk high schools (%)

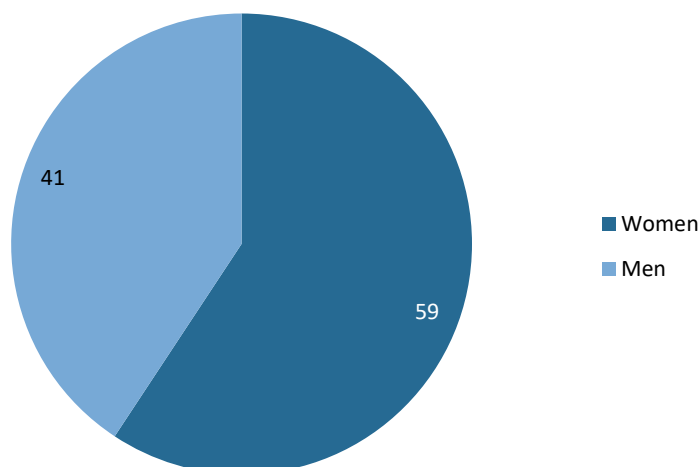


Reference: <https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/09014/tableViewLayout1/>. The figure shows the age distribution for students participating in long courses in the school year 2023/2024.

As figure 19 shows, there is a majority of women – 59% – attending the long courses. This distribution has remained stable over time.

¹¹² <https://www.folkehogskole.no/om-folkehogskole>

Figure 19: The distribution of women and men at the Norwegian folk high schools (%)



Reference: <https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/09014/tableViewLayout1/>. The figure shows the gender distribution for students participating in long courses in the 2023/2024 school year.

In the Norwegian statistics, it is also possible to distinguish between geographic units and to get the total number of participants in each¹¹³. Additionally, publications are available that describe participants' characteristics and backgrounds, e.g. their parents' education and income level¹¹⁴.

Sweden

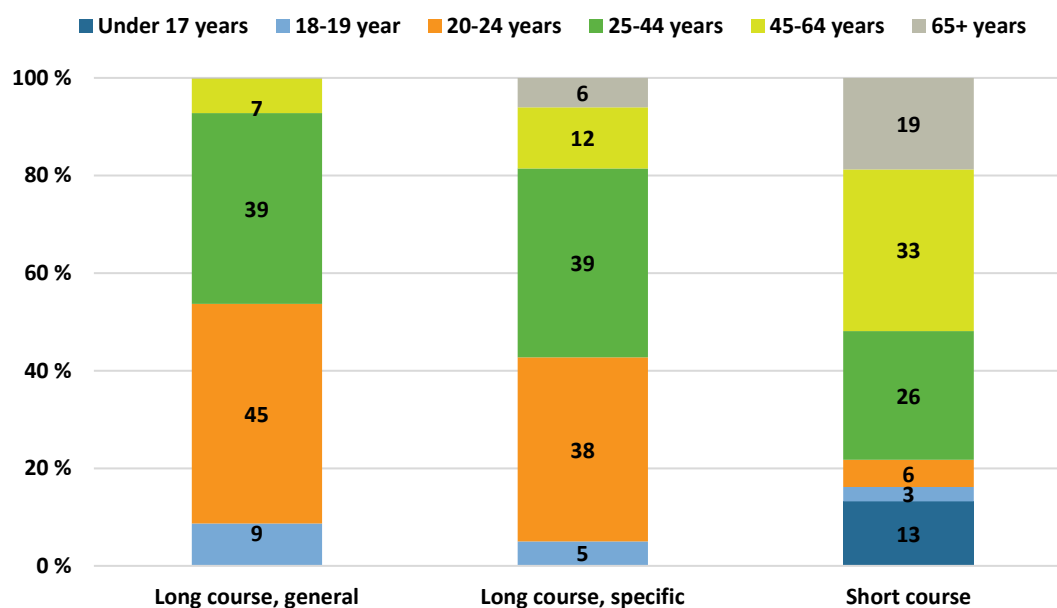
In Sweden, it is possible to attend a long course at a folk high school from the year you turn 18¹¹⁵. As figure 20 shows, most of the participants in long courses – across general and specific courses – are between 20 and 44 years old. In contrast, the age distribution for short courses is more evenly spread across various age groups.

¹¹³ <https://www.ssb.no/statbank/table/04556/>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/e1bd219b875741e4a0dd879b75dce258/no/sved/01.pdf>

¹¹⁵ <https://utbildningsguiden.skolverket.se/utbildning-for-vuxna/om-utbildningar-for-vuxna/om-folkhogskola/folk-high-school>

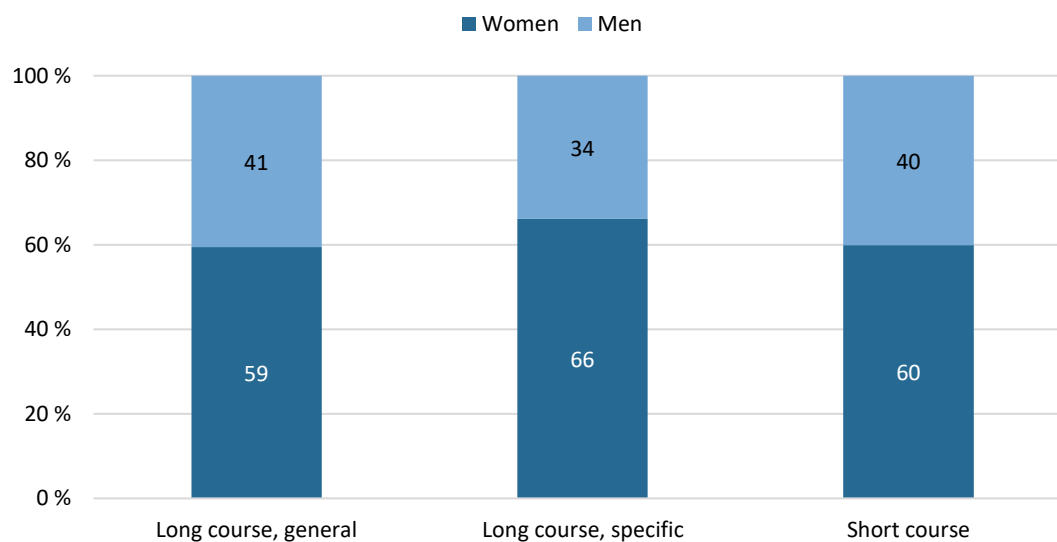
Figure 20: Age distribution across different course types at the Swedish folk high schools (%)



Reference: https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START_UF_UF0601_UF0601A/UF0601T01a/ The figure shows the distribution in 2023.

When it comes to gender, there is an overweight of women attending the folk high schools. As shown in figure 21, this gender disparity is evident across all course types.

Figure 21: Gender distribution across different course types



Reference: https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START_UF_UF0601_UF0601A/UF0601T01a/ The figure shows the distribution in 2023.

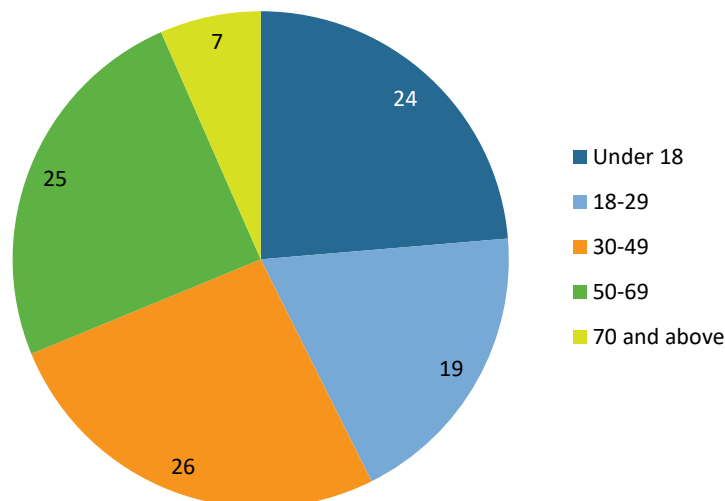
In the Swedish statistics, it is possible to delve deeper into participants' characteristics, including national background, educational level, and region of origin¹¹⁶.

Finland

In Finland, there are no upper or lower age limits, meaning that you can participate in folk high schools at various stages of your life¹¹⁷. However, there might be age limits in relation to the specific type of education provided by the folk high schools. For instance, there are folk high schools only for youth of compulsory education age¹¹⁸.

Figure 22 shows the age distribution of the participants in popular education in Finnish folk high schools. It is evident that there are participants across many different age groups: 24% are below 18, while 32% are 50 years old and above.

Figure 22: Age distribution for participants in Finnish folk high schools (2024)



Reference: https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin_oaiop/statfin_oaiop_pxt_159i.px/table/tableViewLayout1/ (net numbers in popular education).

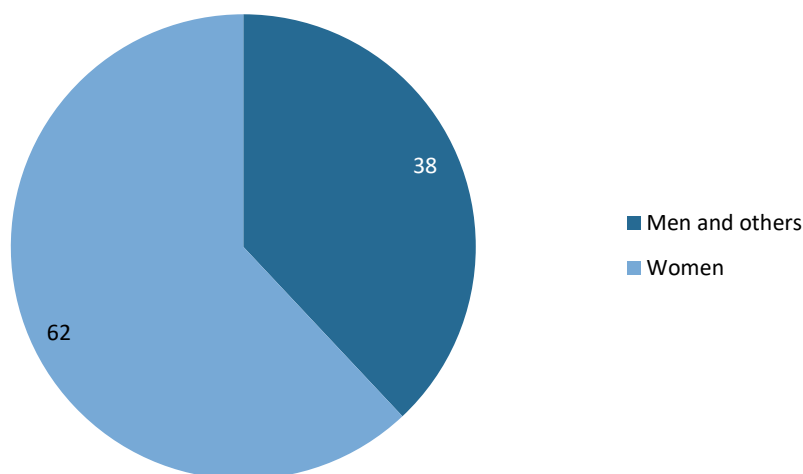
Statistics on gender distribution are also available. Figure 23 shows that there is a majority of women attending the folk high schools. 62% of the participants are women, while 38% are men.

¹¹⁶ https://www.statistikdatabasen.scb.se/pxweb/sv/ssd/START_UF_UF0601_UF0601A/

¹¹⁷ <https://en.kansanopistot.fi/frontpage/who-are-the-folk-high-schools-for/>

¹¹⁸ <https://en.kansanopistot.fi/frontpage/what-can-you-study-at-a-folk-high-school/folk-high-school-year-for-youth-of-compulsory-education-age/>

Figure 23: Gender distribution at the Finnish folk high schools in 2024 (%)



Reference: https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin_oaiop/stat-fin_oaiop_pxt_159g.px/table/tableViewLayout1/ (liberal adult education - net numbers).

Data on gender distribution is also available for education directed at immigrants¹¹⁹. Apart from the official statistics, a report on student profiles is available online¹²⁰.

Denmark

In Denmark, the participants must be at least 17,5 years old to attend a folk high school, and there is no upper age limit. However, young people aged 16,5 to 19 can attend one of the two youth folk high schools¹²¹.

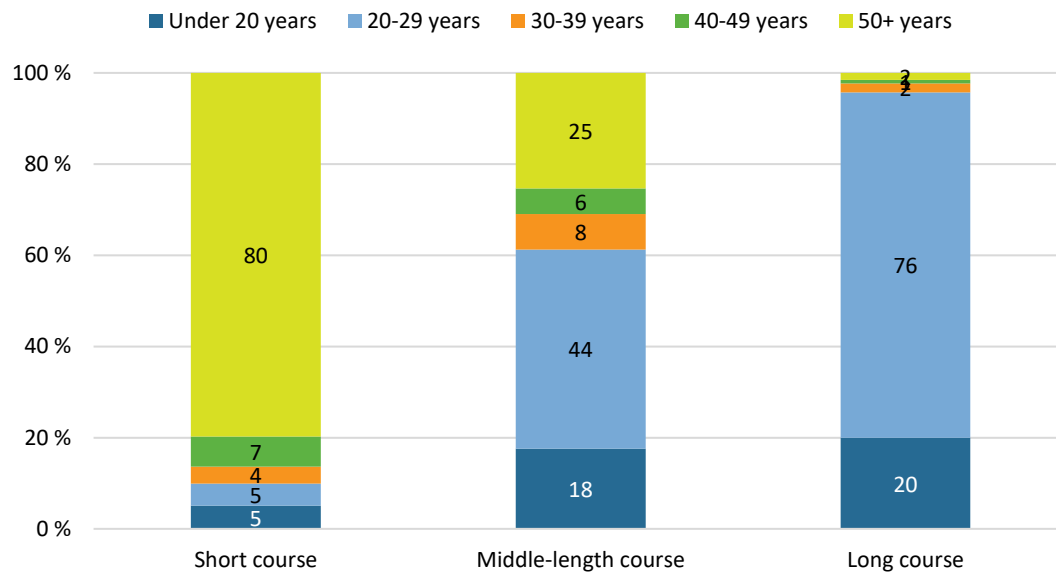
Figure 24 shows that the majority of participants in long courses, which are the main activity at Danish folk high schools, are young people. 76% of participants are between 20 and 29 years old and 20% are under 20 years old. In contrast, the short courses primarily attract older individuals, particularly those aged 50 and above.

¹¹⁹ https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/en/StatFin/StatFin_oaiop/statfin_oaiop_pxt_159g.px/table/tableViewLayout1/

¹²⁰ Tilastokeskus - Opiskelijaprofiili 2019 – an updated version is in the making.

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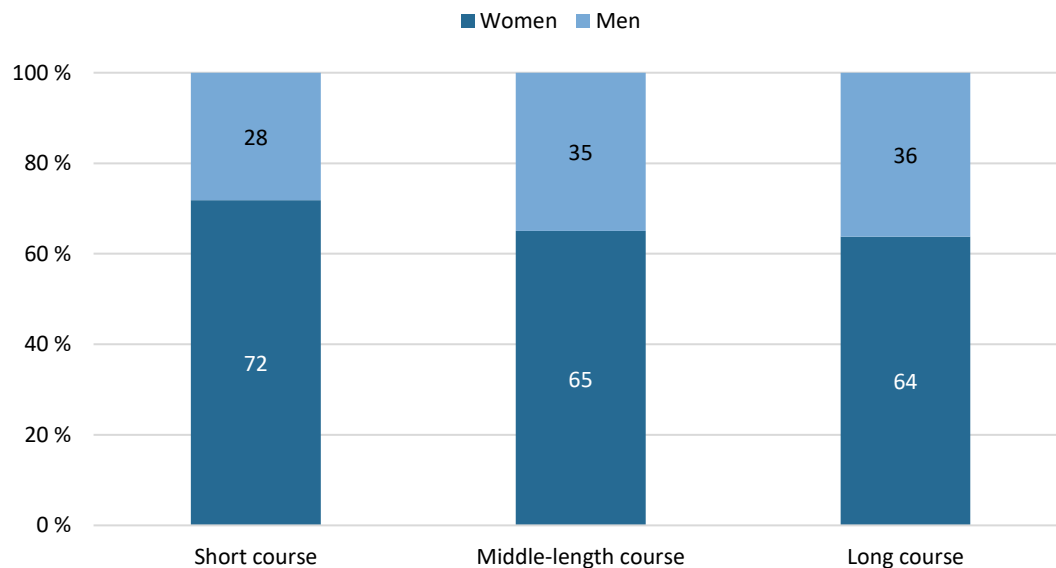
Figure 24: Age distribution across different course types (%)



Reference: <https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20122>. Table FOHOJ01. The figure shows the age distribution in 2024. It is measured as full-time equivalent students.

As figure 25 shows, there is a majority of women across all course types in the Danish folk high schools – specifically at the short courses, the share of women is high.

Figure 25: Gender distribution across different course types (%)



Reference: <https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20122>. Table FOHOJ01. The figure shows the gender distribution in 2024. It is measured as full-time equivalent students.

It is possible to dig deeper into the characteristics of participants in the official statistics, where information on the participants' heritage, residence and family's education and income level is available¹²².

¹²² <https://www.statistikbanken.dk/20122>

Concluding perspectives

Based on the analysis above, this final chapter of the report will discuss some of the potentials and possible pitfalls of future comparative studies in the field of study associations and folk high schools in Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Denmark.

Potentials for meaningful comparisons

The analysis of the two fields across the four Nordic countries has revealed both similarities and differences.

When it comes to similarities, it is evident in the legal documents that the countries share many of the same values and goals. The promotion of democracy and active citizenship are some of the main arguments for state subsidies across all countries. It is also evident that the countries share some of the same historical roots and traditions, although this has not been an explicit focus of this report.

However, at the same time, it is evident that there are significant differences in the organisation of the fields, on the level and characteristics of state subsidies, and on the characteristics of the activities.

It can be argued that this combination of similarities and differences is one of the reasons why comparative studies across countries can be meaningful. The common understanding of the main goals, combined with the different structures, creates an environment with significant potential for learning and inspiration across countries, both in research and practice.

Potential challenges in future comparative research

However, despite the significant learning potential, the analysis also reveals potential challenges for future comparative research in the two fields and some specific points to pay attention to.

First, it is important to be aware of the different characteristics of the fields across the four countries when doing comparative research. This is particularly important when comparing statistics.

For instance, when comparing the activity level of study associations across countries, it is important to be aware of the different definitions of the field. For example, some of the activities taking place in study associations in Sweden will typically take place in other types of associations in Denmark. Furthermore, the Finnish adult education centers – which are not included in this report – will provide activities which are similar to activities in Danish study associations. Finally, it may be more relevant to compare some of the Finnish folk high schools with Danish boarding schools (efterskoler) than with Danish folk high schools, given their younger target groups.

These examples make it evident that it is important to handle statistical information with care when making comparisons. The numbers in the statistical information are valuable, but understanding the context is important to interpret them. This means that statistical information cannot stand alone. However, when used together, numbers and context can provide important insights into similarities and differences across countries. These points underscore that mixed-methods studies, combining quantitative and qualitative data, can be a fruitful way to combine numbers and context.

Secondly, the analysis shows that there are significant variations in the available data and statistics in the two fields across the countries, which in some cases limit the possibility for comparison. For instance, in Denmark, the statistics on study associations are very limited – particularly when it comes to participant data.

It also varies between the four countries whether there is a collection of participants' personal IDs, making it possible to combine the data with register data. This is possible in Sweden for both study associations and folk high schools, while it varies between the other countries. In Finland, it is not possible, and in Denmark, it is only possible for participants in folk high schools¹²³.

Moreover, in cases where statistics are available across countries, they are not always measured through the same units. As an example, when looking at the number of participants in folk high schools to describe the activity level, it is important to know the number of weeks of participation. However, it is not possible to find statistical information on full-time equivalent students ('årselever') – which could be a more comparable measure – across all the countries. These differences reveal the importance of being very explicit and transparent regarding definitions and data sources in comparative studies. It also reveals the potential of working for more comparability in the development of future statistics in the fields.

Final remarks

Despite the potential challenges mentioned above, there are many interesting topics that could be addressed in future comparative research projects.

It could be studies on specific types of courses or activities across countries, studies on specific target groups, studies on differences between rural areas and larger cities, studies on premises and facilities, studies on different pedagogical approaches, studies on the consequences of various legal environments, studies on the role of popular education in relation to societal challenges, and many more.

However, no matter which topic is addressed, the central learning point from this report is that it is important to be explicitly aware of the similarities and differences across countries,

¹²³ In Norway, it has not been possible to validate whether personal ID is collected or not, but the statistical information indicates that it is collected for folk high schools and not for study associations.

to describe the context, to use statistical information with care, and to be transparent about the data sources and definitions used.

The hope is that this report can be a useful tool in this process by making it possible to find information on the definitions and characteristics of the fields in each country. The descriptions might also inspire case selection for comparative studies, as some countries or themes may be more comparable than others.

However, despite this first step toward facilitating future comparative research projects in popular education across the Nordic countries, there are still unresolved potentials in developing more comparable measures and concepts across the countries.

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Videncenter

for Folkeoplysning