

# Perceived barriers and enablers to outdoor mobility among older adults in the Nordic Arctic Region

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## Background

Little is known how older people move outdoors in the Arctic region, challenged by long and snowy winters, vast distances, underdeveloped transportation systems, and remote community facilities. This presentation examines the perceived barriers and enablers of older persons to engage in outdoor mobility and activities.

## Materials and Methods

A cross-sectional postal questionnaire (2024) collected 811 responses from 70+ year old residents of three regions of Finland (Lapland, Kainuu, Northern Ostrobothnia), two northernmost regions of Sweden (Norrbotten, Västerbotten), and overall Iceland. Of those, 732 respondents (51% women, 49% men) provided data for this presentation. We ensured the compatibility and comparability of national subsets. Ethical permissions were received. The authors applied to the national data registers and obtained addresses of random older adults. Data analysis was conducted through *content analysis* using NVIVO 14 software, focusing on counts, frequencies and percentages as well as interpreting and understanding data.

## Results

For barriers, 595 people provided input (52% women, 48% men). The most popular response was “No barriers” highlighting subjective healthy status of random sample and likely satisfaction with the living outdoor environment. Other outdoor mobility barriers can be divided into three themes: personal (health complications, laziness or loneliness when it comes to go out, fear of falling or lack of time); community driven (maintenance issues with the living environment as well remoteness or absence of infrastructure, services and facilities); and environmental (bad and risky weather conditions during long and snowy arctic winters). The variation and uniqueness

in responses were higher for *enablers* (684 persons, 50% women, 50% men), forming five main themes: activities outdoors; promoting health; infrastructure, roads and public spaces; mobility with aid, including appropriate clothing; nature and weather. The most common response about enablers is to exercise recreational outdoor activities, maintain healthy lifestyle as well as roads and infrastructure well maintained in winter.

### **Conclusion**

By alleviating the effects of the barriers and promoting the enablers, Arctic older residents can be better supported in their paths to age healthily. More longitudinal studies are needed to study how to promote outdoor mobility as key part of healthy ageing in the Arctic conditions and establish the causality of the findings.