



Notes from the 32nd Meeting of the
Joint Working Group for Health and related Social Issues (JWGHS)
of the Barents Euro Arctic Council (BEAC)
6 May 2021, VC

Meeting chairs: Mr. Jörgen Gyllenblad, Deputy Director, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden and Mr. Mikhail Ohlopkov, Minister of Health, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Karelia

Introduction and opening of the meeting

Mr. Jörgen Gyllenblad, co-chair, welcomed all participants to the meeting, following of a short round of presentation from all participants.

Information from the BEAC Chair (Norway)

Ms. Gøril Johansen, Committee of Senior Officials, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, gave a brief update and information from the BEAC Chair. Even though the pandemic has forced the work and meetings to be digital, BEAC has tried its very best and have identified important areas of work. A successful high-level meeting, together with Västerbotten, was carried out on the 26th of October 2020. In June the BEAC will have an indigenous summit where topics such as mental illness will be discussed.

Presentation of the International Barents Secretariat

Mr. Markus Karlsen, presents the International Barents Secretariat (IBS) and its staff. The aim for the Secretariat is to support the multilateral activities within the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council. The Secretariat has the knowledge of what funding opportunities there are and can therefore help to allocate funding's within the Barents area.

The main question is how the International Barents Secretariat, in best possible way, can support the work in the Barents area. There has been a survey carried out how the Secretariat in a better way can promote the Barents cooperation.

Action Plan on Climate Change

Update of the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation

Ms. Henna Haapala, Chair of BEAC Working Group on Environment, Ministry of the Environment of Finland and Ms. Maria Dianova, Adviser, International Barents Secretariat informs about the update of the Action plan on Climate Change in the Barents.

Ms. Haapala emphasized the need for a new action plan; changes are taking place in ecosystems and ecosystem services. We will, in the Arctic area, experience both an economic, health and social impact. The aim is to adopt the new plan in October when the next Barents meeting will take place.

Input and comments from the regions and countries on the update of the Action Plan

Mr. Olli Kuukasjärvi, Ministerial Adviser, Finnish Ministry for Social Affairs and Health, reflects upon the subprograms within our JWGHS framework program. Access to healthcare in sparsely populated areas is one of the main issues. Sparsely populated regions experience difficulties with transport and communication because of large distances. Digitalisation and E-health services reduces these problems. More attention must be given to young people and families in the sparsely populated areas in the Barents region so that they stay inhabited also in the future.

Ms. Annika Nordström, Head of R&D in Social welfare, Regional Council of Västerbotten emphasises that climate change influences the permafrost, landscapes, and ecosystems, this has a further effect on water and sanitation which is a big issue. The climate change has a negative impact on reindeer herding as the winters are changing, this most certainly effects people's livelihood and mental health.

Mr. Oddvar Larsen, Head of Cooperation and Preparedness, Northern Norway Regional Health Authority points out the need for the JWGHS to track/follow the effect of the climate change in public health, regarding both mental and physical health. There is a need to discuss the importance of organisation and priorities within health services.

Mr. Mikhail Ohlopkov (Co-Chair), Minister of Health of the Republic of Karelia, points out the increasing social and mental health issues, as an effect of climate change. We should have a comprehensive approach when dealing with these issues.

Mr. Dmitry Panychev, Minister of Health of the Murmansk Region points out that the expert programs in the JWGHS are not well adapted to the changing needs or issues. There are health affects because of the climate change. The spread of for example tics to the north has much to do with climate change. It could be a good idea to collect data on the spread of tics.

Barents expert programmes

Health Care in sparsely populated areas

Dr. Zaza Tsereteli, Ministry of Health and Care Services, Norway, inform about the progress of the program on new technologies in healthcare in sparsely populated areas.

Despite the differences in our Barents regions, we all experience the same key problems in sparsely populated areas. Since the last meeting of the joint working group in November several activities have taken place, for example an E-health conference in December, a fourth meeting of the Steering Committee in February and the continuing cooperation with the Northern Dimension Partnership on Health and Social Wellbeing etc. The plan is to assess digital governance, and the SC has initiated such an assessment to find out the status of E-health in the Barents region.

As an effect of the pandemic, it has been more common to use video consultations, more remote working monitoring in the Barents Region, however the differences within the region are significant. Because of the pandemic the digital solutions have increased in every way possible.

HIV/TB

Mr. Dmitry Titkov, Institute of Welfare and Health, Finland, informs about the progress of the program since that last online meeting in November last year. The main attention has been of the pandemic, but also issues that have to do with how HIV and TB services are provided for and the access to healthcare.

In December last year there was a large zoom conference where the implications of covid-19 regarding HIV and TB services in the Baltic sea region and north western Russia were discussed. A couple of weeks ago there was a meeting with the Steering Committee of the Barents HIV and TB program. The WHO have made estimations of covid-19 effects with respect to HIV and TB control; but it has been noticed that these estimations and consequences are not relevant or applicable in the Barents region. There has however been a large decrease of identified HIV infections.

Children and Youth at Risk

Mr. Jörgen Gyllenblad, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden, informs the participants of the meeting that representatives from further regions in this program would be advisable in order to put together the Steering Committee.

Ms. Karin Blomgren, The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare, gives a brief update of the program. The aim is to, together with other representatives from the regions of the Barents, identify areas of need but also relevant issues to focus on. Together we will work for a safe environment for children at risk. The overall mission of the group will be to keep children protected and safeguarded from actions that place them at risk of violence, abuse, exploitation, injuries or any other harm as well as promoting a good physical and mental health now and in the long run.

Regional reporting

Mr. Jörgen Gyllenblad informs that no request for regional reporting was sent in on beforehand.

Next meeting and any other business

Mr. Mikhail Ohlopkov, co-chair, thanks the representatives and leaders of the regional programs for their presentations. Co-operation remain an essential issue for the development of the Barents health systems of our countries. Mr Milhail Ohlopkov also informs about vaccination which he sees as the most pressing task.

IBS informs that from the Murmansk region they have been asked to create a webpage about the overall situation of covid-19 in the Barents region. The information is now available on the IBS webpage.

Mr. Mikhail Ohlopkov, thanks all participants for joining the meeting. We must be aware of the looming problems of the potential threats and take preventing measures to face these challenges. Republic of Karelia have booth preventing measures and mitigating measures going on.

Mr. Imants Gross, The Northern Dimension Partnership for Health and Social Wellbeing, stressed the importance to have an arena where issues related to climate change can be discussed to create better cooperation. The mental health issue and the problems of tics spreading but also the contingency issues are important. There are several contingency issues in the region related to health that could be discussed to get better prepared or meet not only problems regarding pandemics, but also nature catastrophises that are an effect of climate change.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be organised by Karelia this autumn. The hope is to have a physical meeting in Karelia.

End of meeting