

Update of the action plan on climate change for the Barents Cooperation

October 2021



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Report Summary

The **Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC)** is the forum for intergovernmental cooperation on issues concerning the Barents region. The Barents Euro-Arctic Council, Barents Regional Council and their working groups provide a good platform for cooperation, policy exchange and joint efforts to support responding to climate change.

The update process was designed to support cross-sectoral thinking and ownership by the entire BEAC. The work was carried out under the guidance of the BEAC Committee of Senior Officials and coordinated by the International Barents Secretariat. The aim was to strengthen action on climate change, launch new activities in the working groups and encourage full implementation of existing plans and on-going projects. Joint efforts in sectors with the largest mitigation capacity, as well as adaptation and awareness raising activities were highly encouraged. The [Webinar on a Climate Smart Barents region](#), organized by the Norwegian Chairmanship of the BEAC (2019-2021) externally to the activities of the working groups, contributed further to these aims.

The climate actions are identified by the working groups based on their own work programs, possible previous climate activities and their own resources to carry out actions. Some working groups have a long experience of working in reference to climate change, others not; this is reflected in the level of ambition and unique plans proposed by each working group. Although more groups are included in this action plan than ever before, better involvement is still needed. Raising awareness on the possibilities for cooperation and concrete action on climate change is a continuous process and the working groups are encouraged to take further initiative including during the implementation of this action plan. Availability of funding instruments, like the Barents Financial Mechanism potentially to be launched by 2022, will contribute to implementation of concrete activities of the working groups. In the current update, actions on environment, forest, transport, rescue, tourism, economy, health, youth, education and research, and Indigenous Peoples are presented, as well as contributions by the International Barents Secretariat.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background for the Updated Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Region

The initial Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents cooperation was endorsed at the 14th Meeting of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and adopted at the 11th Meeting of the Environment Ministers in 2013. It contained a list of projects to be implemented in the period 2013-2015. The second edition was published in 2017 and included activities scheduled for 2017-2020.

In October 2019, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in the BEAC Joint Communiqué stressed the need for all the Working Groups to continue implementation of the Barents Action Plan on Climate Change and encouraged additional activities in this area. The Barents environmental ministers in the Ministerial Declaration from February 2020 called for strengthened climate action beyond 2020 with enhanced contributions from all Barents Working Groups. In December 2020, the BEAC Committee of Senior Officials therefore tasked the Working Group on Environment (WGE) with the update of the Action Plan on Climate Change in cooperation with the International Barents Secretariat.

Previous versions of the Action Plan were structured around mitigation, adaptation, research and outreach. For this edition, the WGE invited all the BEAC Working Groups to provide inputs for climate activities with a focus on the following question:

How can BEAC (and the WGs) support the regions and municipalities of the Barents region in transitioning to low-carbon, climate-smart solutions while enhancing adaptation capacity and awareness?

This new approach based on an overarching guiding question instead of multiple separate aims was chosen to steer activities towards practical actions more relevant for the regions, counties and municipalities of the Barents region. The working groups were advised to consider a multitude of relevant factors including regional vulnerabilities, the respective Climate Strategies of the Barents counties, cities and municipalities, concerns of Indigenous Peoples, and pertinent scientific reports on the Arctic and Barents region.

1.2 Recent developments in climate change relevant to the Barents region

The Arctic environment is changing at a rapid pace, faster than predicted by previous assessments. Between 1971 and 2019, the increase in Arctic annual mean surface temperature was three times higher than the global average during the same period. There has been an increase in both the frequency and intensity of extreme events; extreme high temperatures have increased while extreme cold events have declined ([4.1](#)).

Many environmental changes related to climate change are already visible. Arctic snow cover extent in May and June has declined by 25% from 1971 to 2019 over Eurasia. Arctic rivers are freezing up later in the autumn and their ice is breaking up earlier in springtime ([4.1](#)). Sea ice thickness has declined by 65% between 1975 and 2012, and it is predicted that the Arctic Ocean could be largely free of sea ice in summer by the late 2030s ([4.2](#)).

These changes have many economic, social, and cultural consequences. Thawing permafrost is already causing significant damage to Arctic infrastructure such as buildings and roads. Transportation over snow, ice and permafrost has been affected, especially in remote settlements ([4.1](#)). Infrastructure in the northernmost parts is usually less robust and less developed and is therefore more vulnerable to these types of changes. This thawing also causes storage problems. For instance, ice cellars are one of the most common methods of storing food in the Arctic regions, but these are rapidly becoming unusable due to melting.

Climate change also poses substantial risks to human health. Thawing permafrost can also release contaminants, such as mercury, that pollute aquatic ecosystems and pose health risks ([4.1](#)). Another significant effect of climate change in the Barents region is an increase in climate-sensitive infections such as zoonotic diseases (spread from animals to humans). The incidence of tick-borne diseases (Lyme, tick-borne encephalitis and others), tularemia and mosquito-borne diseases has risen sharply in most of the Barents regions since the 1980s. Climate change impacts on water can result in waterborne infections, injuries and mortality. Floods can affect water treatment, infrastructure and other related services as well as lead to the contamination of water with bacteria from affected sewage systems. Rainfall and rapid snowmelt may further transport pathogens and contaminate drinking water. Ensuring access to clean and healthy water prevents diseases that are transmitted through drinking water.

These changes present additional threats to socio-cultural wellbeing. Especially among Indigenous Peoples, these changes in livelihoods cannot be separated from changes to culture. Changes in the natural environment have affected the availability of traditional foods through changes in wildlife. The natural environment is becoming more unpredictable, which means that hunting and fish has become a riskier and less reliable source of nutrition. For instance, reindeer herders in the Barents region have suffered from major losses in their herds due to extreme snowfall and rain-on-snow events. (4.1) Climate change also compromises the sustainability and security of food systems. Hotter and more humid weather exposes fish and meat to mould during the drying processes typically practiced during traditional food preservation. Consequent impacts can result in increases in foodborne diseases, zoonosis, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and overall higher mortality rates. For instance, several studies on pollution in the Arctic regions show that lead, mercury and POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants) are accumulating in foods often consumed among Arctic cultures. This presents particularly severe consequences for Arctic communities due to the accumulation of these substances in the fetus during pregnancy. The security of reliable food resources is evidently essential to Arctic welfare, but this is significantly affected by climate change, especially in the many areas dependent on traditional lifestyles. In addition, it is mentioned by some researchers that risk of losing traditional livelihoods and culture may also increase risk of mental health issues (4.5).

The coming decades will continue to see many changes in the Barents region – not only related to climate and environment, but also in the economy and population. These changes are undeniably interlinked. Driving factors include growth in the global demand for energy and mineral resources, industrial and infrastructure development, and changes in demographic patterns and land use (4.2). Projected changes in natural environment, social and economic development play an essential role in shaping the future.

The intensity of the effects of climate change will depend on future emissions trajectories and adaptation actions. The Arctic's annual mean surface air temperature will rise to 3.3–10.0°C above the 1985–2014 average by the end of this century, depending on the course of future emissions (4.1). However, according to IPCC, limiting global warming to 1.5°C rather than 2°C could prevent the thawing of a permafrost area in the range of 1.5 to 2.5 million km² (4.4). Climate change affects every aspect of society: ecosystems, human and animal health, Indigenous communities, food security, livelihoods, infrastructure and culture, thus

raising new demands for research and education. Challenges and opportunities in climate change mitigation and adaptation have similarities throughout the Barents region. The region is characterized by long distances, sparse population, extreme weather conditions and vast natural resources that are of growing interest to global markets. To mitigate the effects of climate change, effective policy responses are clearly needed – on local, regional, national and global level.

2. Actions proposed by the Barents Working Groups

2.1 Environment (Working Group on Environment, WGE)

Climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution are serious challenges for the environment and communities of the Barents region. The responsibility of the **Working Group on Environment (WGE)** is to promote environmental cooperation in the region to deal with these challenges.

In 2020-2023, under the Finnish Chairmanship, the WGE focuses on three thematic priorities: carbon neutral circular economy, biodiversity protection and climate change. The Working Group on Environment has two Subgroups: the **Subgroup on Nature and Water (SNW)** and the **Subgroup on Hot Spots Exclusion (SHE)**.

Action 1

Capacity building and awareness raising on black carbon reduction

This activity will be based on the results of on-going projects, especially [Capacity Building for Black Carbon mitigation efforts: a roadmap for cross-border activities](#) and [EU-funded action on Black Carbon in the Arctic](#). WGE will follow up the results of the projects and promote the use and practical application of the results in the Barents region.

Action 2

Webinar series for the Barents regions

WGE will produce a webinar series targeted to regions and municipalities focusing on their role in climate change mitigation and adaptation, based on good cases and expert presentations. The webinars will give room for policy discussions, enabling to learn from other regions' experiences and to map

possible cooperation projects to support the regions and municipalities in their climate work. Proposed timeline for the webinar series: 2021/2022 – beginning of 2023; a webinar per quarter.

Tentative topics (to be chosen by the regions):

- Municipal and regional climate strategies and approaches
- Role of leadership in climate policy
- Public procurement guidelines
- Carbon sinks as nature-based solutions and do no harm principle
- Wetlands, including in the context of other ongoing work (CAFF project ['Resilience and management of Arctic wetlands'](#) and cooperation under North Calotte)
- Adaptation. e.g. risk and vulnerability analysis of a changing climate for Indigenous Peoples; analysis of the effects of a changing precipitation patterns and snow cover, possibly in cooperation with the Barents Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP)
- Fossil-free transportation in the North, possibly together with the Barents Working Group on Transport and Logistics (WGTL), with a focus on methods to support the transition in regions/municipalities.

Action 3

Regional Climate Strategies

The existing network of regional climate strategies could be activated depending on the interest from regions as a platform for regional climate cooperation. Inventories of greenhouse gases emissions and climate strategies may be strengthened.

2.1.1 WGE Subgroup on Nature and Water (WGE SNW)

The Subgroup on Nature and Water of the Working Group on Environment (WGE SNW) promotes, follows and develops projects on nature and water issues in the Barents region. As climate change heavily affects aquatic ecosystems, climate change is usually addressed in all activities. One of the priority areas of the Subgroup on Nature and Water during 2020-2023 is "biodiversity in the changing climate", including adaption to and mitigation of climate change, with the focus on following, promoting and learning from ongoing projects. All municipalities and regions in the Barents region can use the results of this work.

Action 1

Supporting protection of biodiversity in a changing climate

Adaptation of species and habitats to climate change is crucial in preserving biodiversity. Developing an ecologically representative network of protected areas covering valuable intact ecosystems, and improving their connectivity supports adaptation to climate change. Restoration of degraded ecosystems and mainstreaming biodiversity to economic activities is also of especially high importance to improve nature's resilience.

Activities: SNW projects, such as [Restoration of Arctic Rivers](#); [Forest Biodiversity protection in the Barents region in 2020 and beyond](#); following and promoting the development of the Green Belt of Fennoscandia.

Action 2

Supporting studies and awareness of climate change effects on ecosystems

Supporting studies on hydrology of water systems and their regulation as well as development of water ecological regulatory practices taking into consideration years of extraordinary water conditions. Raising awareness of the pressure on transboundary water systems, especially in changing climate conditions, and encouraging pressure reduction measures. Cross-border ecological education is also an effective way of raising knowledge on climate.

Activities: SNW project Impacts of the climate change on the biodiversity in the Barents region ([BARIMS](#)); biannually arranged Habitat Contact Forum.

Action 3

Studying invasive species

Collecting easily accessible information sources on invasive species in the Barents region, including which species are projected to be invasive in a warmer climate. Information sources can be used by regions in predicting needed adaptation measures to protect biodiversity.

Activities: SNW project Data Sources for Species in the Barents region & Invasive Species in the Barents region; potential co-ordination with the Barents Working Group on Health and Social Issues on zoonotic infections (including tick-borne diseases).

2.1.2 WGE Subgroup on Hot Spots Exclusion (WGE SHE)

The Subgroup on Hot Spots Exclusion of the Working Group on Environment (WGE SHE) was established in 2010. It serves as a driving force and coordinator in the work to launch action projects aimed at the exclusion of the 42 Barents Environmental Hot Spots listed in 2003. The operative work for exclusion of the environmental hot spots from the list requires thorough effort from hot spots owners, regional authorities and other stakeholders. In 2020-2023, SHE thrives to attract more interest from the Barents regions for Supporting Activity 9 on Voluntary Climate Inventories. In doing so, SHE will try to find ways of more actively working with climate change mitigation.

Action 1

Voluntary climate inventories

Russian regional Hot Spots Exclusion Groups, with the assistance from the SHE and sectorial Task Force groups carry out regional inventories of greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions from different sectors to form the base for regional action planning and trainings on climate change mitigation. Energy efficiency inventories, energy efficiency plans and BAT comparisons at industrial facilities are to be used to develop actions in reducing GHG emissions at hot spots. This may result in improved environmental performance, reduction of CO₂ and black carbon (e.g. heat and power plants) and/or methane (e.g. waste management, mining sector) in many of the hot spots.

Action 2

Webinars on energy savings and methane emissions

As a follow up on the sector-wise climate inventory on regional level, actions for minimizing the need for heat and optimize generation and distribution of heat have significant potential for reduction of GHG emissions in the Barents region. [Webinar on Energy Savings in Housing Sector](#) is proposed as one of the steps. Another webinar will focus on energy and climate inventory in industries, energy leakages and emission reduction in production lines, as well as different tools for analysis. Webinars may act as a platform for experience exchange and joint pilot action projects. To be organized in cooperation with the Sweden-Russia bilateral project. In addition, SHE Task Force on Heat and Power sector will organize a webinar on methane emissions, their reduction and management (2021). The webinar is seen as an introductory event providing the necessary background for

the future intensive training in the field of methane leakage and will contribute to improved knowledge of cost-effective and climate smart management of methane leakages among the authorities and industrial operators within the Barents regions. Based on the outcome and the evaluation of webinar 1, further webinars on methane targeting different sectors/audiences are planned in 2022.

Action 3

Improving waste management

SHE Task Force on Waste Management focuses on **improving the waste management** in the Barents regions: promoting waste sorting and recycling, reducing landfilling and production of landfill gas and establishing collection systems and recovery of landfill gas generated. Activities are already going on in the Republic of Komi, where plans include closure of several outdated landfills resulting in reduction of methane emissions. Webinars on waste management are organized for regions in cooperation with bilateral projects (Norway-Russia, Finland-Russia).

2.2 Forests (Working Group on Barents Forest Sector, WGBFS)

The aim of the **Working Group on Barents Forest Sector (WGBFS)** is to promote sustainable management and utilization of forest resources and ecosystem services in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Strategic Plan for Forests, as well as the Paris Agreement. This entails the timely contribution to BEAC activities in order to advocate a balanced and coherent view on forests as well as on products and services they provide. Activities of the WGBFS facilitate knowledge transfer and sharing on scientific results and best practices. In its climate-related activities, the WGBFS aims at increased knowledge of policies on climate change mitigation and adaptation for the forest sector.

WGBFS has recently initiated and participated in the completion of two reports also relevant as background information for the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Cooperation. These are [The Forest in Northern Europe's Emerging Bioeconomy](#) (December 2020) and [Pilot Study of UNESCO Biosphere Reserves within the Barents Region](#) (January 2021).

Action 1

Exchange of experiences and awareness raising

Building on work within each country and regions e.g. national and regional work in progress for climate adaptation of forests and forestry. Compile and disseminate information on national and regional work for climate mitigation and adaptation in forests and forestry in the Barents region.

Action 2

Enhancing regional forest programmes

Building on climate aspect within the regional forest programmes, or similar, in member countries. Cooperate with local and regional actors in identifying and showcase relevant examples of best practices of climate action in forests and forestry in the Barents region.

Action 3

Barents Forest Forum, October 2021 and subsequent forums

Highlight relations between forests and climate change in the Barents region aiming for recommendations from the upcoming Barents Forest Forum, and subsequent forums, for further work and collaborative efforts.

2.3 Transport (Working Group on Transport and Logistics, WGTL)

The aim of the **Working Group on Transport and Logistics (WGTL)** is to strengthen cooperation for the creation of an efficient transport system in the Barents region that integrates different means of transport. The cooperation includes border-crossing points, customs cooperation, maintenance and reconstruction, as well as new projects to improve infrastructure. The Working Group on Transport and Logistics gathers national and regional representatives from the transport authorities in Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden together with experts from the transport administrations and agencies. Its purpose is to improve the connectivity and cross-border connections in the region, bring people together, and provide access to and from the world markets for goods and people while ensuring this is done according to the Paris agreement and the UN Sustainable Development goals. The ambition, as expressed by the transport ministers in 2019, is "to develop an efficient transport system in the Barents Region in order to reduce carbon footprint."

The Ministerial Declaration from 2019 underlines the need to reduce the carbon footprint of the transport sector. WGTL is a tool for cooperation and can act as a meeting platform joining stakeholders for sharing and dissemination of knowledge and best practices. Policies for mitigating the climate change is formed nationally based on global objectives. The best way to do this is to develop and spread relevant knowledge and inspire the stakeholders involved in the cooperation.

Action 1

Promotion of smart and green transport

Smart and green are the key words. By developing smarter ways of transporting goods and people we will be able to improve the performance of the transport system. Taking up new technologies, electrification of transport where possible, supporting low and zero emission solutions for long distance transports as aviation, maritime transport and for heavy goods vehicles, we will be able to make major improvements. Substantial progress have been achieved in some areas; electrification of the private car fleet in Norway or stimulating development of electrification of aviation are the examples, which could be shared with others. Development of intelligent transport systems (ITS) is making transport more efficient, these are important elements of needed measures to fulfil the objectives. This is valid on the national as well as the regional level.

Action 2

Implementation of the Barents Regional Transport and Logistics Project

This is a flagship project of the former Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics, which made a study on [Green Transport in the Barents Region](#) to be further promoted and followed. The transport sector accounts for about 23% of world greenhouse gas emissions. In order to achieve the climate mitigation targets set in relation to the Paris agreement and keep global warming below 2°C, the transport sector needs to become greener. The report that came out of the study aims to increase the understanding of green transport as a concept, and how transport planning in the Barents Region can support the development of green road transports.

The low traffic volumes, vast distances, often difficult terrain and highly variable environmental conditions make it challenging to find cost-effective solutions which enable growth. This is especially valid in a cross-border

context, where there are multiple jurisdictions. However, the extreme climate and terrain which influence accessibility also mean that the Region's transport system is a perfect arena for large-scale testing of emerging mobility concepts. These include, amongst others Intelligent Transport Systems. Implementing ITS and smart mobility thinking in the Barents region overall is of great benefit to national and regional transport planning. Improvements in knowledge, innovation and use of solutions will be universal. Therefore, a report on ITS has been conducted that describes cross-border opportunities and concrete actions to follow up.

Action 3

Networking and Awareness raising

Barents cooperation on transport and logistics has a good potential for gathering people and contributing to dissemination of knowledge and inspire involved stakeholders to act. The policies to address the climate challenge are developed on a global/European as well as a national level, based on the global objectives. Bringing national representatives and experts together in a regional context as the Barents Region is fruitful because this region has some specific and joint issues. By organizing events like the series of webinars, WGTL can highlight these questions, seek common solutions and inspire the participants to follow up.

2.4 Rescue Cooperation (Barents Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation, JCRC)

The aim of **Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation (JCRC)** is to improve the possibilities of the rescue service agencies to cooperate across the national, federal and regional borders on emergency and rescue issues in the Barents Region. Risk scenarios for major accidents, natural disasters, and man-made emergencies show many similarities in the Barents region. There are long distances between economic centers, sparsely populated rural communities, limited rescue personnel and equipment, and restricted means for transport and hospital resources available in case of larger accidents. In this environment, the Joint Committee on Rescue Cooperation works to make the most of the widely dispersed resources in the region.

Action 1

Enhancing preparedness through joint training

The combination of climate change and increased human business activity will increase the hazards and vulnerabilities that can contribute to emergency events in the northern regions. Therefore, it is important that the preparedness to a changing risk landscape will be strengthened. The change in risk landscape has been recognized and the challenges are more or less common to all countries in the region. These challenges will be addressed in the joint Barents Rescue exercises through seminars, table top and live exercises etc. The next exercise will take place in Northern Norway in autumn 2022.

Action 2

Expediting Border Crossing

The climate change related emergencies may be large scale and demand resources that are not readily available in the country. This calls for support from the neighboring countries. In order to have the much-needed assets on the scene as fast as possible the routines when bringing people and equipment over the border should be smooth and fast. This issue is one of the major concerns of the Joint Committee and will be looked upon regularly.

2.5 Tourism (Working Group on Tourism, WGT)

The aim of the **Working Group on Tourism (WGT)** is to maintain the Barents Region as a leading sustainable Arctic Tourism Destination, particularly through the exchange of good practices and excellent working plans. One of the development goals of the WGT is increasing sustainable tourism demand by delivering experiences that meet the client's expectations and motivations for travelling.

Action 1

Promoting Ecotourism

Contribute to sustainable tourism ([UN sustainability goals](#)) by promoting knowledge about and facilitating on ecotourism, sustainability and responsible traveling in cooperation with tourism actors in the Barents Region through digital marketing, highlighting best practices, joint marketing on sustainable tourism in the Barents area etc.

Action 2

Awareness Raising Contribute to sustainable tourism by aiming visitors staying longer in the region by facilitating cross-border cooperation between tourism actors and supporting the development of accessible itineraries, connections and sustainable cross-border transport through further development of projects such as the [Visit Arctic Europe project](#); [Arctic Route](#), [Botniabananen](#) etc.

Action 3

Management Good cooperation and collaboration between the public administration and the tourism industry is a prerequisite for success with sustainable destination development. By contributing knowledge on the topic, facilitating increased focus on sustainable visitor development and destination management for the benefit of the local community.

Action 4

Cross-border cooperation national parks Facilitate increased Cross-border cooperation on management of national parks and biosphere reserve areas.

Action 5

Action Planning The WGT will include and update a separate chapter on Sustainability and Climate in the third edition of the Barents Tourism Action Plan (initially published in [2013](#)).

2.6 Business Cooperation (Working Group on Business Cooperation, WGBC)

The **Working Group on Business Cooperation (WGBC)** seeks to promote sustainable and long-term economic development of the Barents Region through enhanced cooperation between the BEAC member states. The economic development in the region should be in line with Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals as well as the Paris

Agreement. WGBC works closely together with the regional business life, the Chambers of Commerce and the [Barents Business Advisory Group](#) (BBAG).

Action 1

Promotion of sustainable economic development

The WGBC will strive to promote climate-friendly sustainable economic activity in the Barents Region through interaction between economic operators, national, regional working groups and other groups of relevance. WGBC will strive to increase cooperation and dialogue with regional business life on sustainable business development.

Action 2

Support entrepreneurship

Explore the possibility to support climate-friendly entrepreneurship in the Barents Region through facilitation of meetings, exchange of information, best practices and cooperation with relevant organizations.

2.7 Health and Social Issues (Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues, WGHS)

The Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues (WGHS) brings together governments, regions, organizations and experts in health and related social issues with the aim to improve public health and social well-being of the people in the Barents Region. The WGHS works closely with organizations such as the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Climate-sensitive infections, drinking water supply and food security can be relevant for the health sector in connection with climate change, therefore, activities on some of these issues may be considered for inclusion in the next Framework Program 2024-onwards for the WGHS. Coordination with the BEAC Working Group on Environment and its Subgroup on Nature and Water, as well as Northern Dimension Partnership on Health and Social Issues (NDPHS) are expected.

Action 1

Planning and awareness raising

Explore possibilities and actions to strengthen cooperation and awareness raising on health and climate (e.g. on climate-sensitive infections, drinking water supply and food security) and introduce climate change in the next Framework Program 2024-onwards.

2.8 Education and Research (Working Group on Education and Research, WGER)

The aim of the **Working Group on Education and Research (WGER)** is to further strengthen academic cooperation in the Barents Region in response to the growing international challenges and needs in the field of human resources, research and innovation.

Action 1

Planning and awareness raising

Use education and research as important tools to increase knowledge and competence on climate change and to find new sustainable solutions for the Barents region.

2.9 Youth (Working Group on Youth, WGY; Barents Regional Youth Council, BRYC)

The aim of the **Working Group on Youth (WGY)** is to strengthen youth cooperation in the Barents Region. Youth are strongly affected by climate change and youth action against climate change is a prime example how young people can contribute to the political agenda. Inclusion of youth in decision making and deliberation in the Barents region concerning climate change is paramount.

Action 1

Encourage youth participation and the role

WGY will enhance youth participation in activities promoting the goals of the action plan on climate change. The perspectives of youth will be highlighted in issues concerning environmental issues and climate change

**of youth work in
environmental issues**

in the Barents region. Youth voices must be included and heard to ensure meaningful participation. The role of youth work in strengthening young people's climate activism will be promoted. The IBS and the Norwegian Barents Secretariats' youth advisers will provide BRYC with relevant information and opportunity to participate in meetings of other working groups, where appropriate.

Action 2

**Co-host events with BRYC
on climate change**

WGY will cooperate with BRYC in hosting conferences, webinars and other events concerning climate change. Youth will play a central part in planning and organizing the events.

Action 3

**Implement the Barents
Youth Program**

The Barents Youth Program defines young people's participation in the Barents cooperation. Environment is one of the priority areas. Developing knowledge, competence and consciousness on the local level is an important part of combatting climate change in the Barents region. Each community must be able to contribute to solving environmental problems, and youth can make important contributions on the local level.

Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC) is a multinational youth council consisting of youth representatives from the Northern regions of Norway, Russia, Finland and Sweden. BRYC was established in February 2004 to promote the interests of young people living in the Barents Region. Its mission is to strengthen people-to-people cooperation among youth and empower young people to be active participants of their societies. BRYC's five core values are: cooperation, tolerance, reliability, fairness and respect.

One of the key focus areas of the Barents Regional Youth Council is environmental protection and climate change. BRYC includes the climate agenda in every council's meeting, and touches upon this issue in every project targeted at youth in the Barents region.

Action 1

Series of Webinars on Climate and Environment

Execution of a series of webinars with environmental agencies and organizations BRYC has encountered during the long-term collaboration ([Natur og Ungdom](#), [APECS](#), [CAFF](#)) focused on environmental legislation of the countries of the BEAR and social readjustment to consumption. Action is relevant up to 2030 and can be shaped into full-time seminars that will include fieldwork and studies on-site.

2.10 Indigenous Peoples (Working Group of Indigenous Peoples, WGIP)

The overall goal for the **Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP)** is to secure Indigenous peoples' rights, foundation for trade, society, culture and language. The Indigenous Peoples cooperation is based on equality, coexistence and tolerance between the peoples of the region. In the light of Nenets, Saami and Veps' status as Indigenous Peoples of the north, the cooperation aims to secure solid health and living conditions as well as cultural continuity in the future.

Climate change affects the traditional use of nature of Indigenous Peoples of the Arctic region. Indigenous Peoples have not only accumulated a rich experience of survival in the Arctic, but have maintained a peaceful coexistence for centuries. Economic activities based on the observation of natural processes means that Indigenous Peoples are harmoniously integrated with nature. However, keeping this traditional way of life for Indigenous Peoples is possible only in undamaged or slightly damaged areas, where the main condition for their existence is maintaining biological diversity and productivity of land.

Action 1

Awareness raising and improved co-ordination

Traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples who continue to live in direct contact with nature is an important source of information for studying climate change processes and developing strategies to minimize the negative consequences of these changes for the entire population of the Earth. It is necessary to have more indicators while monitoring the Arctic zone on the territory of traditional residence of Indigenous Peoples. An ecological expertise is needed to identify the impact of changes in the original habitats of Indigenous

Peoples and the socio-cultural situation on the development of the peoples in the Arctic zone. Further events on awareness raising and co-ordination of activities with other bodies are to be developed.

Action 2

Cooperation on reindeer husbandry in changing climate

Reindeer are a key resource in the northerners' lives: it is a transport, the main source of meat and skins, and reindeer husbandry remains the main type of activity of the Indigenous Peoples. The reindeer cannot live without the reindeer moss, as the animal's digestive enzyme system requires this type of food. Sudden temperature changes cause ice crusts formation under the snow, so the reindeer cannot reach their food, get injured and may die. Anomalous behavior of animals can also be associated with global climate changes in the Arctic.

Cooperation on reindeer husbandry in the Barents (and Arctic) Region and further research will contribute to smoother adaptation of the Indigenous Peoples to changing climate. Joint projects with other international institutions, such as World Association of Reindeer Herders or the Arctic Council, can be strengthened.

2.11 International Barents Secretariat, IBS

The purpose of the **International Barents Secretariat (IBS)** is to support the multilateral activities within the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council. The IBS aims at increasing and securing the coherence and efficiency of the Barents cooperation. To this end, the IBS assists the biennially rotating governmental and regional Chairs in their tasks and thus guarantees the seamless continuity of the cooperation. In addition, the IBS supports the Barents Working Groups. The IBS serves as an information database and maintains contacts with other organizations and stakeholders operating in the Barents and Arctic regions, the national and regional authorities of the Member States and the media.

Action 1

Digitalization of the Barents cooperation	Providing access to digital platforms and other technical solutions to the official structures of the Barents cooperation (including governing bodies; Barents working groups and Barents-related projects) enabling digital meetings, webinars and conferences in addition to physical events. Digitalization reduces the number of travels and use of natural resources, which contributes to reduction of GHG emissions and makes cooperation more inclusive.
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Action 2

Information dissemination	Maintaining information pages on climate change activities of the Barents Working Groups at Barents-council.org publishing climate-related news and reports on the homepage and social media accounts. Keeping contacts with other international bodies both inside and outside of the Barents Region on climate-related activities. Facilitating climate activities of the Barents Working Groups.
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3 Follow-up and reporting

The Action Plan covers activities for mainly 2021-2025. An additional update as well as review of this plan is suggested to be done in 2025.

The implementation of this Action Plan will be overseen by the BEAC Committee of Senior Officials and the Working Group on the Environment with the support of the International Barents Secretariat.

BEAC Working Groups will be invited to report on the implementation in connection to the annual reports. Chapter on implementation of the action plan on climate change will be included in BEAC reports to the biannual Ministerial Meetings.

4 References

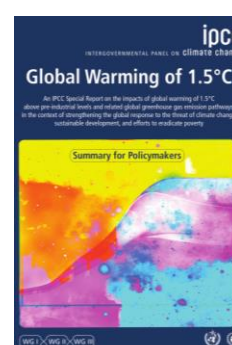
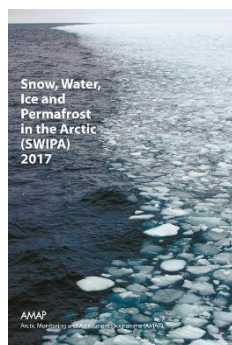
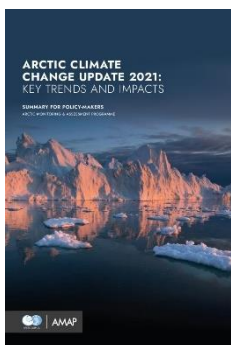
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5 Organization of the Barents Cooperation

