



THE BARENTS WORKING GROUPS ANNUAL REPORT 2020

Name of the Working Group: Joint Working Group on Youth, JWGY

The current Chair and the Chairmanship period: Norway 2019-2021

1. Priorities of the Chairmanship

The Norwegian Chairmanship of the Barents Euro Arctic Council 2019-2021 have outlined the following key priorities: health, people-to-people contact and knowledge. The overall priorities of Norway's Chairmanship will also be reflected in the running of JWGY. Furthermore, the JWGY chair will, in close cooperation with the group, consider how to operationalize and implement the youth recommendations from the preceding Swedish Chairmanship, i.e. ensuring that youth issues are a natural part of all aspects of the Barents cooperation and to formalize the role of the BRYC.

During the Swedish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) (October 2017-2019), Sweden have pursued an agenda based on sustainable development, respect for human rights and gender equality. In each of these areas, the emphasis will lie on enhancing people-to-people contacts, especially for the younger generation. For the JWGY, the first year in 2018 had focus on restarting the working group again after a few years of inactivity. In 2019, the focus was on getting the youth recommendations in the Barents cooperation in place, as well as looking at different means of facilitating cooperation between JWGY and BRYC. In 2020, the focus has been on following up the youth recommendations.

2. Meetings (meetings held, main topics and outcomes of the meetings)

JWGY has met twice in 2020. The first meeting was in Oslo on January 16th. The second meeting was a digital status meeting right before the summer.

The working group has worked to implement the "Youth recommendations" which we received when we took over the chairmanship. In the meeting in Oslo in January, the working group discussed how to operationalize these recommendations. Some of the things that was discussed was the election process in BRYC and whether youth representatives should have permanent

"areas" they can assist in (meaning specific working groups). The working group did not come to a clear conclusion in all of these discussions. However, JWGY came to the following suggestions for the way forward:

1. List of members/candidates for BRYC and contact person in the region
2. Each region should have a deputy/stand in member for BRYC
3. Possibly: Guidelines for election - by both regional members and members for the board
4. Norway will look into the founding documents of BRYC to see if they offer any guidance on BRYC's election principles, standardization of procedures, autonomy etc.

The group then worked to follow up these conclusions. In the status meeting right before the summer, we informed the participants that the work has been put on hold due to the shutdown, Covid-19 and urgent matters. The different countries informed each other about the handling of the corona pandemic in their respective countries, and its significance for young people.

3. Other activities (projects, events, programmes etc.)

In the meeting in Oslo in January, the participants shared information about several planned events for the year (see Minutes for Joint working group on youth 2020-16-01). We do not have a full overview of the cancelation and postponement of all these events due to covid-19.

4. Results of the year (decisions, new initiatives, improvements)

The year started out productively with the meeting in January, were the group had fruitful discussions about new initiatives and improvements. The work in the group slowed down after the covid-19 pandemic, and a lot of the work had to be put on hold.

5. Youth involvement (how has the working group included young people or worked with youth issues during the year)

Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY)-youth recommendations.

Goal: *Keep youth issues high on the agenda, ensuring that youth issues become a natural part of all aspects of the Barents cooperation. Formalize the role of the Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC) within the cooperation. Encourage all the working groups to report on their youth-related activities in their annual reports.*

Recommendations

1. Invite a representative from the BRYC to take part in working group meetings on a regular basis, as an advisor.

2. Include a question in the working group annual report template, asking how the working group has included young people or worked with youth issues during the year. (which is this question)

Timeline: *Indefinite.*

JWGY have continued to have representatives from BRYC present at meetings. Three BRYC members was present during the JWGY meeting in Oslo in January 2020. With regards to the working groups' reports, questions have already been included in the reporting template as to whether they have invited youth representatives to the meetings. We also know that the Youth Council has received such invitations.

6. Evaluation of the work (What went well, what needs improvement)

Due to the covid-19 pandemic, some parts of the work of the Joint Working Group on Youth was delayed or put on hold. However, a lot has already happened regarding the follow-up of the youth recommendations. We hope to speed up the work again when the covid-19 situation is more under control. Moving forward, we will especially prioritize the work with one of the youth recommendations, which is to formalize the Youth Council's (BRYC) role within the Barents cooperation.

7. Other

Norway have previously announced that it will finance and host a youth conference. It was originally planned to be held in 2020, but it was moved to 2021 due to the covid-19 pandemic. There is still uncertainty about the possibilities for hosting a physical conference in 2021, but we are looking at alternatives such as webinars and similar solutions.