

The Joint Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues (JWGHS) Activity report for 2016

During the period 2016–2017, the chairmanship in the JWGHS is shared between Finland and the Arkhangelsk Region, co-chairs being *Mr. Pasi Korhonen*, Director of International Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland, and *Mr. Anton Karpunov*, Minister of Health of the Arkhangelsk Region, Russia.

Members of the Joint Working Group are Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Both the central government level and the Barents regions in all four countries are represented. The Working Group is open to representatives of indigenous peoples and representatives of the WHO, the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being (NDPHS), the European Commission, and other bodies upon invitation.

In its activities the JWGHS is guided by the Programme for Cooperation on health and related social issues, which is accepted for a four-year period. The new program (5th Framework Programme for Cooperation on Health and Related Social Issues in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region) is in force and covers the period 2016–2019. With reference to the public health and related social situation in the Barents region, the JWGHS has identified the following main priority areas for cooperation:

1. Prevention of non-communicable diseases, including reduction of lifestyle-related risk factors, environmental factors and new emerging risks
2. Prevention and control of communicable diseases
3. Strengthening of health systems and social services with relevance for health.

The following perspectives serve as guidance in implementing the current cooperation programme:

- Health equity and social cohesion in all actions, including gender equality
- Active involvement of the patient and users
- A patient and user oriented approach and active involvement of those when applicable
- Interdisciplinary methods and participatory approaches
- Promotion of innovative approaches and technologies
- The 'Health and Well-being in All Policies' approach
- Inclusion and involvement of vulnerable groups in all actions of relevance

The JWGHS oversees three expert programmes, namely:

- **Barents HIV / AIDS Programme**, adopted in 2015. The programme aims to secure HIV prevention and care, reduce the morbidity and mortality caused by HIV and to minimize the impact of HIV and AIDS on individuals and society as a whole within the Barents Region.
- **Barents Programme on Tuberculosis**, adopted in 2012. The aim of the programme is to strengthen the fight against TB and HIV/TB co-infection in the Barents Region by means of international cooperation.
- **Barents Programme on Children and Youth at Risk (CYAR)**, adopted in 2016. The CYAR programme aims at protecting children's rights, developing and improving the services

for children and families, preventing violence against children. In this way CYAR continues its work towards improving the life conditions of the most vulnerable groups of children and families in the Barents region.

In accordance to the chairmanship of Finland and the Arkhangelsk Region, two meetings of the JWGHS were held in 2016. The 22nd meeting of JWGHS on April 14-15 was organized in Rovaniemi, Finland, with participation of 27 representatives from central and regional levels in Finland, Norway and Sweden and from regional levels in Arkhangelsk, Murmansk and Karelia. The 23rd meeting of JWGHS took place on October 6-7 in Solovki archipelago in Arkhangelsk, Russia, with participation of 24 national and regional representatives from Finland, Norway, Sweden, Arkhangelsk and Murmansk.

Topics discussed during the JWGHS meetings were mainly related to the implementation and results of the three on-going expert programmes. The new Barents HIV/AIDS Programme 2015–2019 is in place and a new Chairman of the Steering Committee, Prof. Nikolai Belyakov, Director of the Russian Northwest AIDS Centre, nominated. For the time being coordination of the Barents HIV/AIDS Programme is included into the tasks of the ITAs of the NDPHS Expert Group on HIV, TB&AI – Ms. Paula Tanhuanpää and Mr. Dmitry Titkov from the National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), Finland. There were no SC meetings of the Barents HIV/AIDS Programme organized in 2016. Coordination of the Barents TB Programme is supported by Norway. The TB Programme coordinator is Dr. Zaza Tsereteli from the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services, acting also as an ITA for the NDPHS Expert Group on Alcohol and Substance Abuse. The SC meeting of the TB Programme was held on November 18-19, 2019 in St. Petersburg and a new Chair of the SC, Ms. Liudmila Archakova from the Federal State Research Institute of Phtisiopulmonology appointed. Norway also supports the Barents Programme on Children and Youth at Risk (CYAR). The new CYAR Programme (CYAR III) was adopted in 2016 and it covers the period 2016–2019. The CYAR Programme is run by the Steering Committee which is supported by the CYAR Programme Secretariat. The Chairman of the CYAR Programme is Mr. Pål Christian Bergstrøm, Director General of the Regional Office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufetat), Northern Norway.

The JWGHS members have been committed to the objectives of the cooperation programme and the attendance at the meetings has been active. In addition to presentations of the progress of the three thematic programmes, participants have shared a lot of interesting and useful information about health care and social service reforms presently going on in the region. Issues relating to migration of refugees and asylum seekers have been actively discussed in the meetings. During site visits participants were also offered possibility to learn some best practices on eHealth solutions and simulation teaching methods in social and health care.

The BEAC Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) met on March 22nd, 2016 in Arkhangelsk and Mr. Anton Karpunov, co-chair of the JWGHS, attended the meeting. Barents Cooperation Forum was organized in Helsinki on December 8th, 2016. The Forum offered the latest information on the activities and funding opportunities within the region. Mr. Dmitry Titkov and Ms. Sirje Vaittinen from the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) took part in the Forum.

There are many challenges in current cooperation arising from lack of resources; also rotating chairmanship of the BEAC working groups creates some difficulties.