



THE BARENTS WORKING GROUPS  
ANNUAL REPORT 2019

**Name of the Working Group:**

Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC)

**The current Chair and the Chairmanship period:**

Sweden and the Finnmark County, 2017-2019

**1. Priorities of the Chairmanship**

The priorities of the Swedish BEAC Chairmanship 2017-2019 has a specific emphasis on youth:

*“The future of the Barents region relies on continued efforts and investments in youth, culture, health and social issues, education and research. During the Swedish Chairmanship, attention will be given to the younger generation and promotion of gender equality in all the areas of the Council’s work.”*

This also includes the aim to “promote youth engagement in all areas of Barents cooperation.”

Finnmark County also mentions youth as a priority for their Chairmanship of the Barents Regional Council (BRC):

*“The Barents Regional Youth Council will play an important part in the implementation of the Youth Program.”*

Based on these priorities, the Barents Regional Youth Council in the accounting year focused on the following aims:

- Continue to strengthen the youth cooperation in the Barents Region and empower young people to be active participants of the societies in which they live.
- Discuss key youth issues in the Barents Region, and jointly develop ideas for new project initiatives that involve youth.
- Actively promote the voice and interests of Barents youth at various events – including youth events, education events, political events, BRC and JWGY meetings, as well as other events involving regional and/or national decision-makers.

- Secure funding from the Barents Regional Council for BRYC's activities in the upcoming years.
- Strengthen the cooperation with the JWGY, as well as other BEAC working groups and stakeholders.
- Organize the BRYC Annual Meeting and the BRYC Annual Event, with a particular focus on cultural diversity.
- Contribute to the organization of the anniversary conference in Luleå: "25 years of Barents Cooperation – Youth perspective for the future" (hosted by the Swedish BEAC Chairmanship).

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

BRYC met two times this year: in February during the BRYC Annual Meeting and in August during the BRYC Annual Event. In addition, the BRYC board held several meetings throughout the year, including one physical board meeting in April in Tromsø and four video meetings.

The BRYC Annual Meeting 2019 was held on 14-16 February in Joensuu, Finland, back-to-back with the conference "Northern Potential in the Barents Region". The meeting elected a new Board and Chair for 2018-19. Also, a total of six new members were added to the Council. Regional reports on the youth situation were presented by each representative, and several project ideas for 2019 were presented. A total of six project ideas were supported by the council members and put up for implementation in 2019. Further details can be found in the protocol from the annual meeting.

The BRYC Annual Event 2019 was held 15-18 August in Vuokatti, Finland (Kainuu region). BRYC received financial support from the Norwegian Barents Secretariat to organize the event. The region of Kainuu also provided good help with practical issues. Around 30 youths from Norway, Russia, Sweden and Finland participated in this year's event. 2019 was the UN's international year of Indigenous languages, while global warming is rapidly changing the environment and the field of technology is making steady progress. In the light of the current development, BRYC wanted to host a big youth event looking at how these changes affect us and whether we could learn something from the Indigenous philosophy of "living with the nature, and not off it". The theme of this year's annual event was therefore "nature vs technology", and the event title was "Switch", which referred to "switching on the technology versus switching it off". A large part of the event took place in the outdoors, and focused on teambuilding through physical activities such as orienteering. The event also included more educational workshops and group discussions. A more detailed report is available on BRYC's website ([barentsyouth.org](http://barentsyouth.org)).

Throughout 2019, BRYC has maintained a good cooperation with the Barents Regional Council (BRC), Regional Committee (RC), and the Joint working Group on Youth (JWGY). BRYC's International Secretary participated in most of their meetings. Good relations were also maintained with the Swedish BEAC Chairmanship. In June, BRYC helped organize the Youth Follow-Up conference in Luleå by recommending panelists and youth participants. Through this work, BRYC contributed to the involvement of youth in new areas of the Barents Cooperation.

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

2019 was a busy and eventful year for BRYC. The youth council managed to be involved in a high number of activities, extending its visibility to new audiences across the Barents region.

The project “BRYC Sexual Health Conference”, held in May, aimed to help improve the situation regarding sexually transmitted diseases, sexual education and sexual conduct among youth in the Barents Region. During the two-day conference held in Kiruna, Sweden, youths from across the region with personal, political or other knowledge about the subject had plenary discussions in order to create concrete and viable solutions to problems regarding sexual health in the Barents Region.

In July, BRYC teamed up with the Murmansk-based nongovernmental feminist organization Koster to implement the project “Glitter”, devoted to female empowerment and gender equality issues among youth in the Barents Region. During the three-day summer camp in Tromsdalen, BRYC gathered around 20 youths from across the Barents Region interested in supporting gender equality, female solidarity and an understanding of the human rights paradigm. Together, the participants took part in panel discussions and workshops devoted to these issues, as well as social and teambuilding activities.

In October, BRYC and Fridaymilk organized the fifth annual Uncapitals project. "Uncapitals: Time Shift!" was a digital art camp for youth in High North, which gathered 45 young people from the Nordic countries. Participants of the camp did research on the post-industrial community of a small Swedish town (Haparanda) in the most northern counties of Norrbotten and presented the research results on a digital web platform.

In addition to BRYC’s own projects, the council members also attended several other Barents-related events, where they took part in plenary discussions and promoted youth’s interests. Among these events were the “Workshop on digitalization of the culture sector” in Umeå, hosted by the Joint Working Group on Culture, the “Barents Forest Forum” in Umeå, hosted by the Swedish Forest Agency, and the II International Session "Cooperation in the Arctic" in Murmansk, organized by the Government of the Murmansk region with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Another important event of 2019 was the XVII BEAC Foreign Ministers’ Session in October, which concluded the Swedish Chairmanship period and launched the Norwegian Chairmanship period.

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

2019 has been an interesting year for BRYC. With events being held in Norway, Sweden and Finland, dealing with various themes such as environment, female empowerment and sexual health. The engagement and passion from youths discussing these issues has demonstrated a will for a better future in the Barents Region among the youths.

One important result in 2019 was the implementation of four new youth projects (also mentioned above). Moreover, total of 33 different partners (organizations and stakeholders) were involved in BRYC’s activities.

In addition to these projects, BRYC representatives attended a total of 21 meetings or events in the Barents Region in 2019. Another important result of this year's work has been the BRYC policy recommendations regarding sexual health in the Barents Region, developed during the BRYC Sexual Health Conference in May. BRYC collaborated closely with the JWGY and the Swedish BEAC Chairmanship in their work to involve more youth in the Barents Cooperation structure and decision-making process. In 2019, BRYC created the new temporary position "BRYC International Secretary" to help alleviate the Board members from some of their tasks (e.g. representation at international forums such as the RC/BRC) in order to create more time to focus on projects and other important tasks. The experience from this initiative have been very positive, making BRYC more effective and visible. Regarding communication, BRYC strengthened its presence on social media by reaching 1000 followers on Facebook and 460 followers on Instagram.

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

The working group has involved youths in all parts of its work and activities.

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

Looking back at BRYC's work in 2019, the youth council managed increase its level of activity and strengthen its project work. Important youth issues have been highlighted and new people have been introduced to BRYC's work.

One challenge BRYC has seen is that not all members are equally involved in its work. Traditionally, the majority of the tasks have been delegated to the BRYC board. Therefore, the youth council could benefit from further strengthening its core by meeting more frequently and ensuring that each member feel like they are involved in the work.

#### **7. Other**

For more details, please see the separate document "BRYC Annual Report 2019".