

THE FINNISH PRESIDENCY  
OF THE BARENTS EURO-ARCTIC  
COUNCIL 2021–2023



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OF THE BARENTS  
EURO-ARCTIC COUNCIL

REGION OF  
OPPORTUNITIES

2021–2023



# DEAR FRIENDS OF THE BARENTS REGION!

Finland is pleased to be chairing the Barents Euro-Arctic Council in 2021-2023. The Barents cooperation has been one of the key cornerstones of regional cooperation in the Arctic since 1993, and remains a high priority for Finland. The year 2023 marks the 30th anniversary of the Barents cooperation with the intention to celebrate it in the highest political level subjected to the circumstances.

***Agenda 2030, the European Green Deal and the Barents Programme 2019–23 all form the basic starting points for Finland's Presidency activities in the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.***

The Barents region is rich in resources, in nature values and in opportunities for good quality life, multidisciplinary studies, multifaceted jobs and sustainable economic growth. Its people are the most important asset for its sustainable future.

It is a region, which is facing rapid climate change with combined and cumulative impacts



Photo by DMITRY BELENIKHIN

from other on-going societal and economic changes. This challenges us to promote the prosperity of the region by taking care of the uniqueness of the fragile northern nature and by enabling responsible, sustainable and environmentally sound economic activities to the area. Therefore, Finnish Presidency will focus especially on the people who live, work and study and who want to build their future in the Barents region.

***We will focus on the areas of sustainable development and healthy environment, people-to-people contact and transport and logistics.***

Sustainable development is a fundamental part of Finland's policy. To achieve this, we must ensure that the future of the Barents region is built on economic, environmental,

social and cultural sustainability, and carbon neutrality. We are committed to the UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris agreement and the UN Biodiversity Convention and we know how to use natural resources sustainably, and we are prepared to adapt to climate change.

We must attract experience and expertise in order to build resilient Barents communities to all of its inhabitants, and we must secure good connectivity by land, sea and air and through digitalisation. This all makes the north an attractive place to live, where communities offer good varied work opportunities, housing, welfare and health and quality education at all levels. We respect the rich cultural heritage and traditional knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples living in the region.



***The regions are key drivers of the people-to-people Barents cooperation.***

The Finnish Presidency will work closely with the Nenets Autonomous Okrug in Russia in its role as chair of the Barents Regional Council, as well as with the other regions to ensure the best possible basis for the further development of the Barents cooperation. We will also engage closely with the Barents working groups, which play a crucial role in feeding material and securing implementation of the strategic goals of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council.

We will also continue to support the active and lively civil society, including non-governmental organisations, and freedom of the press and media, which play a key part in developing and enriching the Barents cooperation.

***In the people-to-people contacts, special focus will be on the young people, who hold the key to the future of the Barents region to maintain it lively and fostering.***

We need also to secure for everyone in the region access to rights and equal opportunities. In the Barents cooperation, Finland will support young people's participation in decision-making in all matters affecting their lives, from environment to culture and from education to active working life. It is imperative to secure regular cross-border mobility opportunities



Photo by ANNA ZIYA GEERLING

for youth to give them the opportunities to contribute to the development of democratic and inclusive societies and understand other people's cultures, upbringing and backgrounds. Through encounters and projects, young people build a common identity, promote respect to diversity and mutual understanding in the region.

***Peace, stability, well-functioning cooperation and low level of tension with our Arctic neighbors has been and remains at the top of Finland's foreign policy agenda.***

At a time when international cooperation is under pressure, we need more than ever strong multilateral platforms like the Barents cooperation to maintain stability. We look forward to fruitful cooperation with the International Barents Secretariat in fulfilling our presidency program. Dialogue with all participants and practical cooperation are vital if we are to find the best solutions for the Barents region.



**Pekka Haavisto**  
**Minister for Foreign Affairs**



# SUSTAINABILITY

Photo by ANU JUURI

Climate sustainability, adaptation and mitigation, food security, sustainable northern bioeconomy, nature-based solutions, health innovations, cooperation against pandemics and infectious diseases, sustainable tourism, SME business promotion, carbon neutral circular economy, pollution prevention and digitalization are all areas where there is significant potential for further cooperation.

We will seek to bring authorities, scientists and NGOs together to find ways for the Barents region to reduce greenhouse gas and black carbon emissions that originates also from outside the Barents region and adapt to climate change without harming nature or hindering traditional land use. The work on the Action Plan on Climate Change for the Barents Region and work with the Barents Environmental Hot Spots continues to be a priority.

We also want to highlight the Barents region as an important showcase in biodiversity management, link regional work to the global work on biodiversity and encourage ambitious action for nature.

We promote the protection of biodiversity in the Barents region and support the implementation of the new global goals of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in the region. The UN Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the European Green Deal are the basis for these actions. Particular emphasis will be placed on freshwater ecosystems and the fight against invasive species.

Sustainable cross-border economy and innovations are instrumental in ensuring long-term value creation throughout the Barents region and in safeguarding jobs and livelihoods. The Finnish Presidency will highlight the potential for closer economic cooperation across borders.

Circular economy reduce environmental footprint of human activities, provide jobs and economic growth and enhance food safety. The Finnish Presidency supports initiatives for collaboration towards circular economy and sustainable waste management

systems in the Barents region. Specific interest is also on the awareness raising on the black carbon emissions.

Finland will focus on the sustainable forest-based bioeconomy in the Barents region. Forest-based new products are expected to replace non-renewables, and new nature-based services are being created. This will help us to identify potential challenges relating to the transition to a low-carbon society while maintaining healthy ecosystems. The Finnish Presidency will seek to engage with relevant organizations in the forestry sector at the regional level. Sustainability will be the main focus of Finnish Presidency's high level Forest Forum.

*The protection of biodiversity and the implementation of the new global goals of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity will be promoted.*



# PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONTACT

The day-to-day interaction between our countries, regions and people is at the heart of Barents cooperation. The Finnish Presidency intends to highlight success stories in this regard.

Our goal is to support the exchange of information between all key players and between entrepreneurs, students and researchers working in the priority areas. To support young people's commitment to the future of the Barents region and helping their plans to study and work there, Finnish Presidency will launch an interactive digital platform as part of these activities and to mark the 30th anniversary of the Barents cooperation. In the Barents education cooperation, we promote the goals of sustainable development.

The promotion of culture and the arts sees many positive effects on the attractiveness of regions as work and living environments. In terms of connections, it is important to raise the profile of creativity, culture and the arts as a cross-cutting theme as a promoter

*An interactive digital platform will be created to help young people in finding places of study and work in the Barents region.*

of competitiveness, inclusion, comfort, attractiveness and well-being in the Barents region. This aspect is emphasized, for example, in the Barents Cultural Prize.

We pay special attention to ensuring meaningful engagement of the Region's indigenous peoples, and look forward to working closely with the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples. The Finnish Presidency supports the Fourth Indigenous Peoples Summit that is planned to take place in 2023 for the first time in Brussels focusing on the



Photo by KIRA ZYAPAEVA

Photo by ANDREY SHALYOV

cooperation with the EU institutions. In its role as chair, Finland will continue to work for well-functioning cross-border cooperation. The uninterrupted continuation and adequate funding of the EU-Russia CBC programmes and Northern Dimension partnerships are of major importance to cooperation in the Barents region. The Barents Financial Mechanism (BFM) that will be operational in the beginning of the 2022 will be key instrument in supporting micro project.

Rescue cooperation has been one of the success stories in the Barents region and this will be highlighted during the Finnish Presidency in 2022 with the next Barents Rescue exercise in Norway. This cooperation makes a valuable contribution to the security, efficiency and friendly relations between the people and authorities in the Barents region. Due to climate change and increasing extreme weather conditions the cooperation in detecting and extinguishing forest fires will be one of the key priorities.

Finland will encourage the Working Groups to combine their meetings to secure better synergy and coherence in their work. During the Finnish Presidency, the working groups will be encouraged to make a better use of virtual meeting opportunities with the support of the IBS to reduce the carbon footprint and be more efficient and engaging.



*Cooperation in transport and logistics will be strengthened using, for example digitalisation.*

# TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS

A well-functioning infrastructure is vital for connecting the people living and working in the Barents region, whether this means road, rail, sea or air connections, or connections through digital means. The future development of the region depends on sustainable, green and smart transport and logistics.

Finland will seek to strengthen cooperation in transport and logistics with an emphasis on digitalisation, transport corridor development and climate-friendly transport, including the use of alternative fuels. The aim is to serve local communities as well as business and industry in building a sustainable future for all.

We will use the recommendations of the Joint Barents Transport Plan (JBTP) to develop our work programme and take forward the work under the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area. Closer cooperation with the Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics will help in adopting intelligent transport and connectivity solutions and developing transport systems in the Barents region.