



## **The Barents Program**

**2019 –2023**



Adopted by the Barents Regional Council 24<sup>th</sup> May 2018

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## **1. Introduction**

The Barents Program is the framework for the inter-regional Barents cooperation for the period 2019-2023 and succeeds the program for 2014-2018. The inter-regional Barents cooperation was initiated in 1993, at the same time as the Barents Euro Arctic Council, hereinafter BEAC, was established by signing the Kirkenes Declaration on January 11<sup>th</sup> 1993. The International Barents Secretariat (IBS) was founded by signing of the agreement on establishment in the 11<sup>th</sup> BEAC Ministerial session on 15<sup>th</sup> of November 2007 in Rovaniemi.

Regional representatives, together with a representative from the indigenous peoples have signed a cooperation protocol that established the Regional Council for the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. The member regions are Oulu Region, Lapland, Kainuu and North-Karelia from Finland, Finnmark, Nordland and Troms from Norway and Norrbotten and Västerbotten from Sweden. The regional members from Russia are Murmansk and Arkhangelsk oblasts, Republics of Karelia and Komi, and Nenets Autonomous Okrug. The Chair of the Barents Regional Council alternates between its 14 member counties or regions every second year. There are also two observing members, which are the Council of Christian Churches in the Barents Region and the Parliamentary Association of North West Russia.

The Barents Region has a strong indigenous peoples' presence, including; the Saami in Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia (Murmansk Oblast), the Nenets in Nenets Autonomous Okrug, and the Vepsians in the Republic of Karelia.

The Barents member regions share a significant number of similarities, most notably the Arctic climate, sparse population, vast natural resources, a globally unique nature, high exposure to the consequences of ongoing climate change and long distances within the region as well as to the markets. These characteristics impose both challenges and opportunities for mutual cooperation. Maintaining and increasing the present level of population is important in order to ensure competence and local knowledge. A depopulation of these areas would be unfortunate in light of the opportunities and challenges ahead.

The Barents Regional Committee (RC) has the overall responsibility for the implementation of the decisions taken by the Barents Regional Council (BRC). In order to deepen and make concrete cooperation, the Regional Council has established Working Groups in priority areas. The IBS assists the biannually rotating governmental and regional Chairs in their tasks and supports the Barents Working Groups.

The Barents Program 2019 –2023 is the eighth Barents Program since the cooperation protocol was signed in 1993.

The aim of the Program is to express our common objective and operational framework to strengthen the Barents cooperation, being a joint platform maintaining stable development and people-to-people cooperation in the North.

## 2. Overall Objective and specific goals of the Barents Cooperation

The Barents Region has a strong potential and opportunities for better and more effective cooperation. Our potential is based on vast natural resources, high-quality education and research, rich culture and a long tradition of mutual cooperation, as identified in the SWOT analysis (Annex 1). Wide growing interest towards the Arctic creates potential to further boost innovations and investments, and facilitates potential to develop and promote the Barents Region jointly as an attractive tourism destination. Highly developed arctic competence creates potential to improve economic and social resilience in the Barents Region.

Sustainable development of the Barents Region is based on a balance between environmental, economic, indigenous and social aspects and well-being of inhabitants. There is a need to increase the competence in the region's labor force in order to ensure availability of highly skilled and educated workforce in perspective of the fast growing fields of economy.

The potential of the Barents Region also requires strong emphasis on transportation and logistics. East-west connections especially must be developed, as well as high speed data connections throughout the Barents Region and across the borders. Smooth communication and connections enhance achieving the objective to make the Barents Region more competitive on the world market.

In a world where more and more actors look to the north, being able to set the premises for further development will be decisive. The multimodal needs of economic and people-to-people cooperation should be fully acknowledged by the central governments, resulting in necessary investments.

Based on the identified strengths and opportunities of the Barents Region, which the close cooperation creates, the overall objective of the Barents Program 2019-2023 is:



The overall objective of the Barents Program is to generate social and economic growth through a knowledge driven economy and the sustainable development of the region's natural and human resources.

## **Specific Goals**

In order to generate social and economic growth in the Barents Region, taking into account principles of sustainable development, the following specific goals have been jointly identified to be supported within the frames of the Barents cooperation:

- To continue to create and promote the positive and attractive “Barents identity” within and outside the region taking into account our diversity.
- To promote youth cooperation as a key element of the future development of the Barents cooperation.
- To promote further strengthening of the cooperation by legally formalizing the cooperation as an international organization through establishment of a treaty.
- To consolidate and further develop the cultural ties between the peoples of the region.
- To encourage the establishment of new, and expansion of existing bilateral and multilateral relations in the region, including cross-border mobility.
- To improve geographical and digital connectivity and accessibility.
- To lay the foundation for an environmentally sustainable economic and social development in the region with emphasis on an active and goal-oriented management of natural resources.
- To contribute to development that takes into consideration the interests of the indigenous peoples including their participation.
- To encourage cultural creativity and innovation for the wellbeing of people and economic development.
- To improve public health and social well-being of the people in the Barents Region.
- To use the political influence of the Barents Regional Council to advocate better our common needs and interests on national, European and international arenas.

### **3. Prioritized areas for 2019-2023**

The Barents Regional Council will prioritize the following areas for the period 2019-2023:

1. International competitiveness and business development
2. Climate and environment
3. Cultural, people-to-people and youth-related co-operation
4. Infrastructure, transport and communication

Information and promotion of the Barents cooperation, gender equality, indigenous aspect and traditional knowledge will be mainstreamed as cross-cutting elements in all prioritized areas.



### 3.1. International competitiveness and business development

Large scale resource extraction and industrial processing associated with mining, forestry, oil and gas, fishing and aquaculture, and agriculture are important to the economic base of the Barents Region. There is also a growing market in international tourism based on natural and cultural assets, which is also an important source of creativity and entrepreneurship.

There are also important technological innovations occurring within the region with cutting edge research and innovation linked to the Arctic climate and environment.

The Barents Region has however challenges relating to a low degree of diversification of the industry, as well as long internal and external travel distances and harsh weather conditions. Joint efforts and competence building are needed in order to improve the resilience of the Barents Region facing the global trend of change.

Diversification, specialization, sustainable growth and arctic competence in different fields of industries and culture provide means to increase international competitiveness of the Barents Region and ways to turn challenges into opportunities. Digitisation and utilization of new technologies are crucial for business development in sparsely populated and remote northern regions. Skilled and educated labour forces as well as cultural creativity are preconditions for increased international competitiveness.

The challenges in the northern regions are not of a pure temporary nature, but are more or less permanent. In the least populated regions a lack of profitable projects due to lack of financing is often the case. In addition, without a sufficient population level, the area would not be able to provide, or attract, a work force able to handle the challenges ahead. Maintaining and educating a highly skilled work force is essential to be able to fully benefit from the regions natural resources which are needed for the future growth, while ensuring the technologies and methodologies used are sustainable and equally valuable natural resources are available for future Barents generations.

Promoting youth entrepreneurship is highly relevant for the international competitiveness, business development and its continuity in the Barents Region.

Improving public health and social well-being of the people in the Barents Region is also a prerequisite attaining competence and labour in the Barents region.

**Prioritized tasks:**

*Favourable investment and business climate*

Efforts will be made to mutually build down existing barriers to business establishment in neighboring countries. Of special importance is enabling border crossing investments in the Barents Region.

It is also important to use and further develop existing facilities and communications, for example cooperation offices.

Cooperation between regulatory authorities will be developed in order to establish businesses in the neighboring countries from the country of origin and to promote cross-border trade.

The procedures of national authorities should be unified and a system be established, in order to help establishing business in all neighboring regions participating in the Barents Cooperation.

New economic sectors of enhancing sustainable development, such as bio-economy, renewable energy, cultural and creative industries, circular economy and Clean Tech will be promoted in the Barents Region.

To create preconditions for natural resources to be further processed in the regions in order to get higher up in the value creation chain.

Cooperation and networking between Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) organizations supporting the business development in relevant business sectors should be promoted.

Joint marketing and promotion of tourism, youth entrepreneurship, and projects aimed at preserving indigenous peoples' traditions, but also entrepreneurship within new trades will be supported.

*Fluent border crossings*

The Barents Regional Council fully supports the implementation and further development of a visa free regime in the Barents region. The Regional Council welcomes development decreasing bottlenecks and promoting flexible border crossing transport and diversification of cargo transports (containers).

International labor recruiting and development of a common labor market within the region should be encouraged. In the short term, it is also highly important to ease the visa issuing processes and further develop cooperation between customs, border and rescue authorities.

Sufficient and modern infrastructure and procedures in the border crossing points, as well as efficient customs clearance procedures, are essential.

*Health and Related Social Issues*

The Joint Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues will in the program period elaborate a new Framework Programme for Cooperation on Health and Related Social Issues including, but not limited to, program areas such as Tuberculosis, HIV/Aids and youth at risk. Implementation of joint

activities for preserving people's health and supporting healthy life-styles, and undertaking preventive activities among children and youth are of high importance.

With the continuous increase in contacts across borders and more integrated labour markets, cooperation and coordination between health institutions and authorities need to be further strengthened.

### **3.2. Climate and Environment**

The Barents Region is vast in size covering approx. 1,75 million km<sup>2</sup>, yet it is inhabited by approximately 5 million people only. Compared with other Arctic regions, the Barents Region is a highly developed area socio-economically and politically. Ecologically, the Barents Region largely comprises boreal forests (taiga) and has abundant and wide-ranging freshwater ecosystems. Climatically, the Barents Region is heavily influenced by proximity to the ice-free sea and its latitude, as the Gulf Stream makes it warmer than comparable circumpolar areas.

The nature in the Barents Region is globally unique, while at the same time very vulnerable. The Barents Region is a hot-spot in terms of warming, and climate change impacts on flora and fauna which are already noticeable. Joint efforts for raising environmental awareness and mitigation of climate change effects are prerequisites for sustainable development in our region.

Due to an increasing number of tourists in the Barents Region, increasing oil and gas activity, as well as future opportunities for increased traffic through the Northern Sea Route, Safety and Emergency response is of major importance for the development of our region and its environment.

#### **Prioritized tasks:**

##### *Reducing Environmental Impacts*

The Barents Regional Council supports the development of regional climate and environmental strategies, as well as supports and promotes environmental awareness activities among people and industry leaders.

Corporate social responsibility is encouraged in all economic activities. Low-carbon energy production, energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy are supported.

Black carbon, more commonly known as soot, expedites global warming and melting of glaciers, and has been estimated to be a more significant threat than greenhouse gas emission. Existing technologies which enable reduction of emissions should be employed more actively. Reduction of carbon-based emissions in the Barents Region through cross-border cooperation and thematic networks is promoted.

Exclusion of "hot spots" from the Barents Region is supported. Barents environmental hot spots are major polluters or ecological risk issues. The goal is to launch investment projects in all of the 42 Barents environmental hot spots with the aim of eliminating the risks to the environment. Members of the Barents Regional Council take active part in the hot spot work.

Maintaining biodiversity is crucial for ecosystem resilience, the capability of an ecosystem to tolerate disturbance and to recover. Biodiversity is the foundation of ecosystem services of high importance



in the Barents Region. Healthy ecosystems contribute to rich biodiversity and provide services which mitigate climate change and sustain human health. This benefits local economies, enhances social well-being and raises the quality of life of the inhabitants.

Ecological and nature based tourism is enhanced in a sustainable way with active participation by local and national level actors. Development of Tourism Management activities in connection with increased tourism in vulnerable areas is supported, as well as joint efforts to develop Safety and Emergency response in the Barents Region.

### **3.3 Cultural, people-to-people and youth-related co-operation**

Active support of cultural co-operation and people-to-people activities contributes to regional development in many ways. Accessibility to a rich and developed cultural life is essential for equal and good living and this can serve as an important tool in the branding and marketing of the region to the outside world. Cultural activities and business based on culture has potential to make the region more creative and dynamic, which again can attract other investments and create more working-places. Children and young people are the most valuable resource and have an interest in developing the Barents Region, also in the future. They are therefore crucial for the cooperation, the development and the sustainability of the region.

The important role of culture and youth in the development of civil society in the Barents Region must continue to be prioritized.

#### **Prioritized tasks**

The cultural dimension is emphasized, people-to-people cooperation and active work will be carried out for the development of international cultural cooperation. Contribution is given to strengthening partnerships between cultural institutions and facilitating exchanges, as well as creating additional concrete ways of cooperation and promotion of the Barents Region by means of art and culture. Barents cultural cooperation scholarship will be awarded every second year (once every chairmanship).

Bilateral people-to-people cooperation is fairly well developed, although some regions are more active than others. The multilateral people-to-people and youth cooperation will be supported and further developed during the next program period.

Activities aiming to enhance the youth cooperation by stimulating co-operation between the governments and regions within the Barents region, with a view to developing youth policies which are likely to ensure young people's successful integration into society. This means activities to enhance the cross-sectorial youth policy and to promote and support cooperation between youth groups and non-governmental youth organizations in the region.

Supporting cooperation between schools, especially related to culture, language and environment, are seen as important, as well as encouraging the development of new and strengthen the existing student exchange programs.

Activities aiming to facilitate gender equality and mainstreaming the indigenous aspect and traditional knowledge are supported.

Barents Winter/Summer Games, an arena for both sporting and cultural exchange involving more than 1000 youth from the whole Barents region, will be supported.

### **3.4 Infrastructure, transport and communication**

In the northernmost parts of the area, temperatures are below 0°C for approximately 200 days a year, and two months a year the region is exposed to the polar night. The transport of goods during winter time can often be delayed for days when roads and railroads are closed due to weather conditions.

The transport systems in the Barents Region are developed primarily for north-south transport within each country. Increased transport east-west is limited by an underdeveloped infrastructure. The future opportunities for industries to be located and operating in the Barents Region are dependent on how the transport and logistic systems are developed. Proper flight connections inside and between the Barents regions are a prerequisite for increased economic cooperation. Also the maritime activities, both in the Barents Sea and in the Gulf of Bothnia, as well as development of railway connections and cargo transportation are a vital part of region's economic activities and future growth.

Broadband is becoming a prerequisite to economic, cultural and social development, since digital connectivity is necessary for the sustainable development of the region. Development of a broadband plays a crucial role for regional development and businesses in the sparsely populated areas of the Barents Region.

#### **Prioritized tasks**

Continuation of the Barents Joint Transport Plan will be a priority in the program period, strengthening east-west transport connections (cargo and passenger traffic) in the Barents Region and studying the effects of the logistics development caused by increased transport needs. Also promotion of solutions for intelligent transportation systems is important, in order to reduce environmental impact of transportation. Development of digital infrastructure and a high speed broadband is supported. Enhancing the joint strategic planning, for instance drafting a joint master plan concerning large infrastructure investments in the Barents Region is seen as important.

#### **4 Information and promotion of the Barents cooperation**

There is an increased global interest towards the Arctic and the Barents Region in a number of policy areas including energy, minerals, transport, environmental protection, climate change, research, regional development and security. The Barents Region is unique in the Arctic as it has a high number of inhabitants compared to other Arctic regions.

The participants of Barents cooperation will give priority to actively inform about the Barents Cooperation and to participate in the larger discussion about Arctic. The Barents Region should be present where decisions concerning our region are made nationally and internationally. Special attention must be given to increasing the visibility of Barents issues internationally. The initiative to organize Barents Davos conference will therefore be supported. More attention and dialogue with different European institutions will be promoted together with the regional EU-offices. Also an annual Barents seminar will be organized in Brussels. The Barents Regional Council (BRC) will prepare relevant common issues to be raised at the national political level.

In order to further strengthen the network between the regional administrations and the Barents Regional Council, programs of exchange of employees in the respective regional administrations are supported.

Page [www.barentscooperation.org](http://www.barentscooperation.org) contains general information for the public and also serves as a platform where Barents member regions and Barents related projects could find and publish information. The IBS will have the overall responsibility for an active and always up-to-date website with the support of Barents member regions.

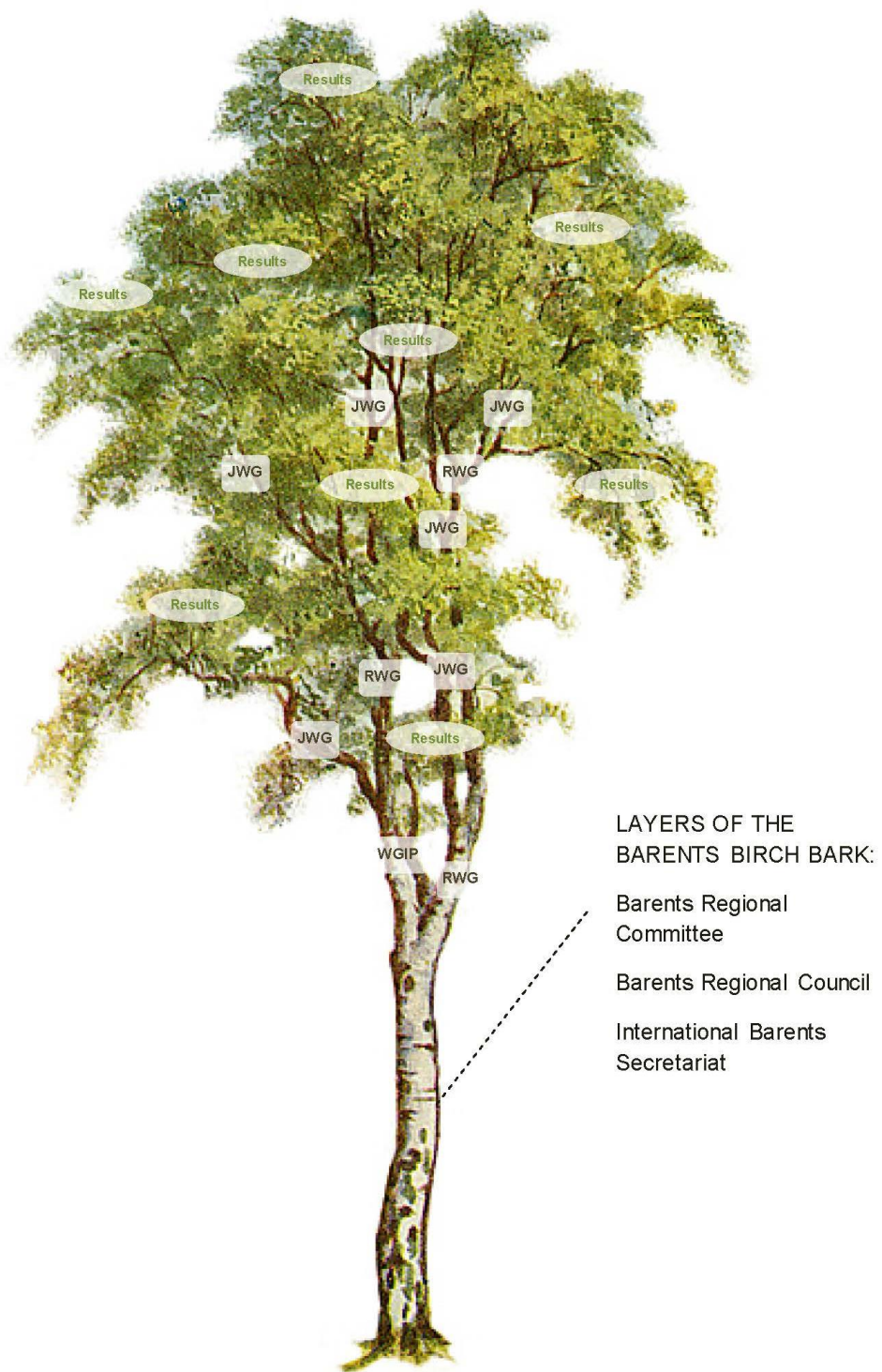
## **5 Implementation and responsibilities**

### **5.1. The Barents Regional Committee and Regional Council**

The Barents Regional Committee is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Barents Program 2019-2023 with help of the International Barents Secretariat and based on the decisions taken by the Barents Regional Council. The Barents regional cooperation is based upon the principle of biennially rotating chairmanship in both the BRC and the RC. The chairmanship rotates between the participating regions in Norway, Sweden, the Russian Federation and Finland. The same country cannot hold chairmanship on both the intergovernmental (BEAC) and the interregional levels simultaneously. The continuation and exchange of gained experience should be ensured by intensive cooperation between the previous, incumbent and incoming chair ("Troika-system"). Order of the chairs is enclosed as an appendix 3. The responsibilities of the RC and BRC are outlined in their Terms of Reference<sup>1</sup>. The Barents program is evaluated by the Regional Council every second year, in the end of each chairmanship.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.barentsinfo.fi/beac/docs/Regional-Council-Terms-of-Reference-2012.pdf.pdf>



Picture 1. Barents Birch of Regional Cooperation with roots in the member regions.

## 5.2. Working Groups

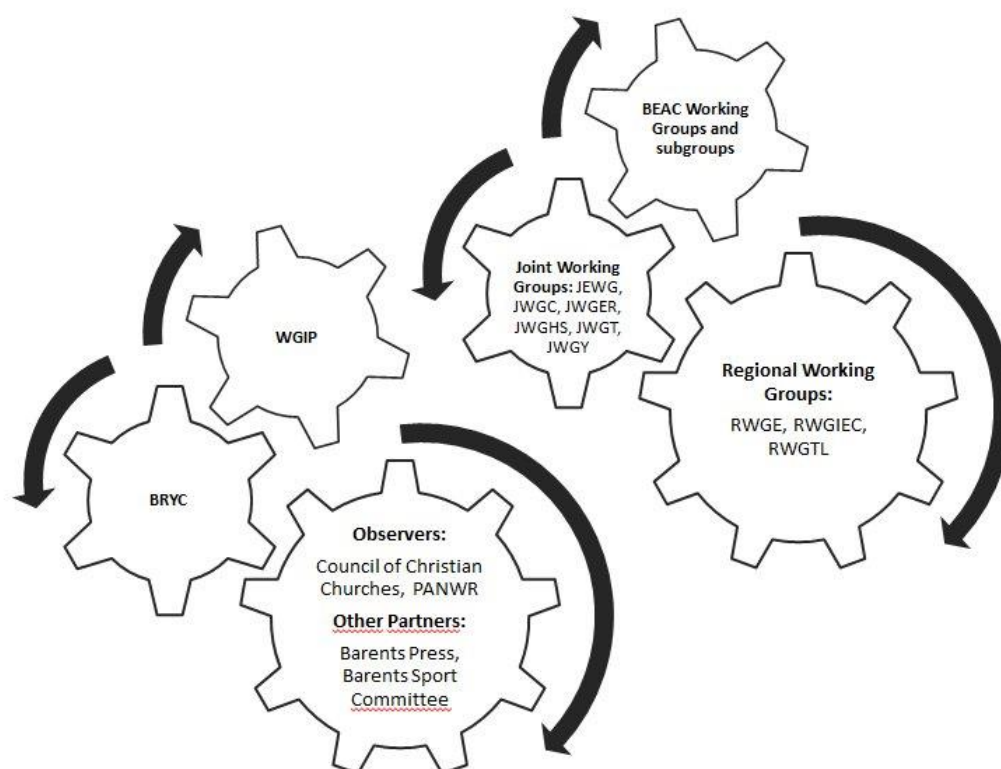
The Working Groups (WG) are experts on regional cooperation in their respective fields. They should be seen as a tool for the implementation of the Barents Program. The International Barents Secretariat (IBS) contributes with its expert advice, administrative and technical support. The Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC) and Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY) act as an important facilitator in the implementation of youth cooperation, and thus support from all Barents regions to the BRYC shall be ensured.

The primary task of the WGs is to create a network within their respective fields of expertise. In addition to that, cross-sectorial cooperation between the WGs is encouraged. These cross-sectorial networks should aim at creating ideas, projects and policies for the Barents Region.

The WGs, acting as an expert group in their given field of activity, will help the regional authorities and other relevant actors in bringing the priorities of this program into action. The WGs will play an important role in implementing the prioritized tasks of this program. The responsibilities of each WG are defined in their mandate.

The members of the Regional Committee are responsible for ensuring the regional participation in the WGs. In annex 2 the organizational structure of the Barents Regional Cooperation is described. The working groups shall regularly report to the Regional Council in a centralized way via the IBS.

The concrete results of Barents cooperation are realized via grass root level actions on the local level, in other words, via activities implemented by various actors functioning in the member regions and their collaborative organs, including the WGs.



Picture 2. Barents Working Groups and other Cooperation structures.

## **6 Financing instruments**

Various sources at regional, national, EU and international levels will finance the implementation of the Barents Program. Reference is made to the 2015 report of the BEAC Ad Hoc Working Group on Financial Mechanism Study, outlining the financing mechanisms available in the Barents Region.

The main international instruments will be the EU programs (ENI CBC Programs Kolarctic and Karelia, Interreg programs –Interreg Baltic Sea Region -with ENI component, Northern Periphery and Arctic, and Interreg Europe etc.). In this regard it should be noted that Kolarctic CBC program area geographically covers almost the whole Barents Region.

Other notable financial sources are the Nordic Council of Ministers, NEFCO, Norwegian Barents secretariat etc. The Northern Dimension, with its focus on the Barents Region, is also a potential financial source.

The main task is to activate the organizations to project activities and thereby to launch concrete cross-border cooperation (partly through organizations that are involved in the Barents cooperation).

Financial possibilities should be taken into account when making program implementation plans.

A crucial, common task for the Barents cooperation is to ensure continuation of existing financing instruments and availability of suitable funding for joint projects in the Barents Region in the future. Establishing a special program for developing Barents cooperation is promoted.

The IBS will update and maintain on their website a list/database of financing instruments suitable for financing projects supporting the Barents Cooperation.

- Globally unique nature with boreal forests, clean oceans, lakes and rivers, northern lights, four seasons
- Rich natural resources and renewable energy sources
- Rich and diverse cultural heritage, rich culture and arts
- Long experience for regional cooperation
- High quality education and research
- Sustainable basic industry (forestry, fishery, oil, mining etc.)
- Joint interest to raise environmental awareness and mitigate effects of climate change
- Prerequisites for developing smooth border crossings
- Several financing sources available for financing Barents cooperation

## Strengths



- Inadequate east-west transport and ICT-connections
- The environmental Hot Spots
- Low economic resilience
- Aging of inhabitants and work force
- Youth migration, problem of finding skilled and educated workforce in some fields
- High unemployment rates in some regions
- Different level of environmental awareness and sustainable way of life
- Inadequate capacity or infrastructure at border-crossing points
- Inadequate capacities to utilize cross-border business and project opportunities

## Weaknesses



- Growing interest towards the Arctic
- Potential to improve resilience via diversification and developed arctic competence
- Potential for innovations and investments
- Potential to develop culture life, events
- Potential to develop Barents Region jointly as an attractive nature and cultural heritage tourism destination
- Joint interest to develop emergency preparedness and rescue services
- Reduction of environmental Hot Spots
- Promote a positive and versatile Barents identity as a joint success factor
- Mainstreaming the indigenous aspect and traditional knowledge
- Promote smooth border-crossings and visa free regime in the Barents Region
- Potential to ensure availability of financing sources suitable for Barents cooperation

## Opportunities

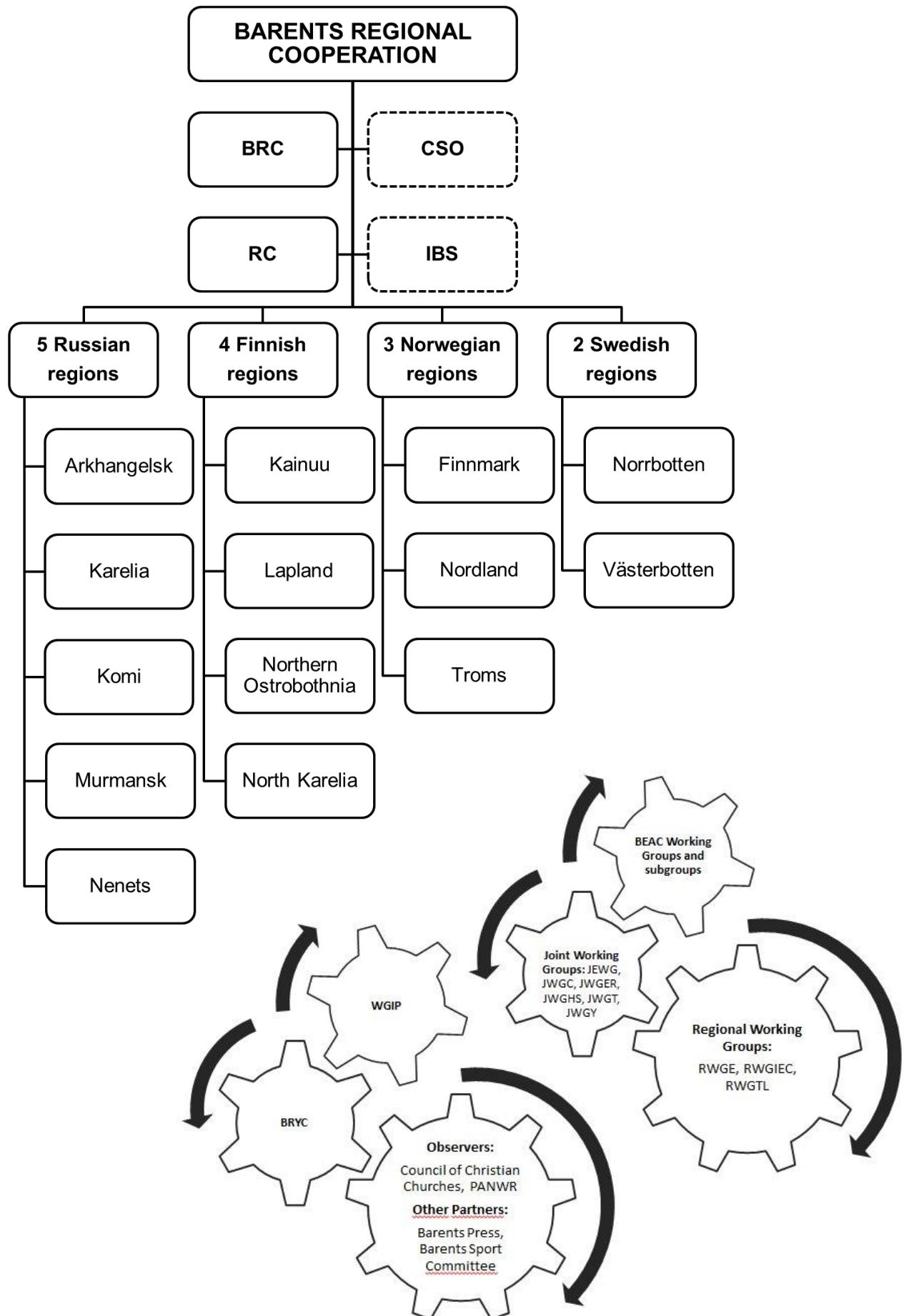


- Economic and social regression of remote and sparsely populated areas
- Growing global insecurity reaches the Barents Region
- Competition for natural resources
- Fading of indigenous cultures and their traditional way of life
- Negative effects of climate change, melting of permafrost, loss of biodiversity

## Threats







	<b>Barents Euro-Arctic Council, BEAC</b>	<b>Barents Regional Council BRC and Regional Committee RC</b>
<b>2019-2021</b>	Norway	Västerbotten, Sweden
<b>2017-2019</b>	Sweden	Finnmark, Norway
<b>2015-2017</b>	Russia	Kainuu region, Finland
<b>2013-2015</b>	Finland	Arkhangelsk region, Russia
<b>2011-2013</b>	Norway	Norrbottn County, Sweden
<b>2009-2011</b>	Sweden	Troms County, Norway
<b>2007-2009</b>	Russia	Oulu Region, Finland
<b>2005-2007</b>	Finland	Republic of Karelia, Russia
<b>2003-2005</b>	Norway	
<b>2001-2003</b>	Sweden	Nordland County, Norway
<b>2000-2001</b>	Russia	
<b>1999-2000</b>	Finland	Murmansk region, Russia
<b>1998-1999</b>	Norway	Lapland, Finland
<b>1997-1998</b>	Sweden	
<b>1996-1997</b>	Russia	
<b>1995-1996</b>	Finland	
<b>1994-1995</b>	Norway	Finnmark, Norway
<b>1993</b>	<b>1st Foreign Ministers Meeting, 11 January 1993, Kirkenes, Norway</b> Barents Euro-Arctic cooperation was initiated	

Abbreviation	
BEAC	Barents Euro-Arctic Council
BRC	Barents Regional Council
BRYC	Barents Regional Youth Council
CBC	Cross-border cooperation
CSO	Committee of Senior Officials
IBS	International Barents Secretariat
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
EU	European Union
JEWG	Joint Working Group on Energy
JWGC	Joint Working Group on Culture
JWGER	Joint Working Group on Education and Research
JWGHS	Joint Working Group on Health and Social Issues
JWGT	Joint Working Group on Tourism
JWGY	Joint Working Group on Youth
NEFCO	Nordic Environment Finance Corporation
PANWR	Parliamentary Association of North West Russia
RC	(Barents) Regional Committee
RDI	Research, Development and Innovation
RWGE	Regional Working Group on Environment
RWGIEC	Regional Working Group on Investments and Economic Cooperation
RWGTL	Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
WGIP	Working Group of Indigenous Peoples