



Umeå  
Ministerial

Summary of the priorities and achievements of the  
**Swedish Chairmanship of the  
Barents Euro-Arctic Council  
2017–2019**

3 October 2019, Umeå, Sweden





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# **Swedish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council**

## **2017–2019**

3 October 2019, Umeå, Sweden

# Introduction

Sweden took over the two-year chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council at the ministerial meeting in Arkhangelsk on 19 October 2017. Since its inception, the Barents cooperation has aimed to promote peace, stability and the development of the Barents region, through cross-border collaboration and people-to-people contacts.

The Swedish chairmanship programme, with the title '**Regional sustainable development for the future**', was formed with a view to advancing cooperation and deepening collaboration in key areas of common interest.

Activities were guided by the four priority areas set out in the chairmanship programme: **environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development**, together with **stronger and more visible Barents cooperation**. Activities were carried out in areas such as climate change, the bioeconomy, tourism, transport and culture, and visibility. Promoting gender equality and enhancing people-to-people contacts with a special focus on young people were cross-sectoral ambitions.

Following is a summary of activities and achievements during the two years of the Chairmanship.





# Activities and accomplishments of the Chairmanship

- + The 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference – '25 Years of Barents Cooperation: Youth Perspective for the Future' – was held in Luleå in April 2018.
- + A documentary book about young people in the Barents region, #Barents #BeingYoungHere, was published in 2019.
- + A youth educational project – 'Applying Best Practices and Building Capacity in Arctic Indigenous Education' – was conducted by the Sámi Education Institute to facilitate cross-border knowledge-sharing between indigenous communities.
- + The second Barents Scholarship for Cultural Cooperation was awarded. The scholarship is awarded to one recipient from Norway, Finland, Russia and Sweden, and was instituted at the ministerial meeting in Arkhangelsk in 2017.
- + A pre-study on artistic network cooperation in the Barents region was conducted to further stimulate cultural exchange across borders.
- + An External Communications Strategy was adopted to increase the outreach and visibility of the Barents cooperation and highlight this cooperation as a role model of successful regional collaboration.
- + A Barents day in Brussels was held in June 2018, together with the regional chair, Finnmark, to emphasise the importance and potential of the Barents Euro-Arctic region.
- + An Indigenous Peoples Congress and Summit was held in Lycksele in May 2019.
- + A transport ministerial meeting was held in Umeå in September 2019. A revision of the draft Joint Barents Transport Plan was welcomed and a declaration adopted.
- + Implementation of the Barents Action Plan on Climate Change continued.
- + The 10<sup>th</sup> Habitat Contact Forum was held in Murmansk in June 2019.
- + The Barents Rescue Event Week took place in Kiruna in September 2019, with the participation of about 400 rescue workers.
- + The biannual Barents Parliamentary Conference was hosted in Haparanda in September 2019. A resolution was adopted.
- + A wide range of other high-level meetings, seminars and conferences were organised (see below).



## Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)

The CSO, which directs the daily work of the Council, with the support of the International Barents Secretariat (IBS), located in Kirkenes, Norway, convened seven times during Sweden's Chairmanship.

Each meeting had a thematic focus, for example sustainability, indigenous peoples and tourism. New mandates were approved for most of the working groups and the Terms of Reference of the International Barents Secretariat were updated.

# Working group activities

## Working Group on Environment (WGE)

The WGE held four meetings during the Swedish Chairmanship of the group. The priorities were based on the declaration adopted by the Ministers for Environment at their meeting in Vadsø in November 2017.

**Climate change** was an overarching priority. The study Barents 2050, launched in 2017, assesses risks and opportunities for the main economic sectors in the Barents region from policies consistent with the goals of the Paris Agreement. An updated Action Plan on Climate Change was adopted by Ministers for Environment in 2017. The WGE continued to implement the activities in the plan, with a special focus on regional cooperation. The WGE also followed the implementation of the plan by other working groups and tasked the IBS with presenting a status update in early 2020.

At the ministerial meeting in Vadsø, 2 ½ hot spots were excluded from the **Barents Environmental Hot Spot list**. The WGE strives to enhance environmental performance so that additional hot spots can be excluded. Supporting activities, such as seminars and study tours, were successfully arranged relating work on the hot spots to the introduction of the new Russian 'best available technology' legislation.

Cooperation on **biodiversity preservation, wetlands and water protection** and the facilitation of knowledge exchange on tourism's impact on Barents ecosystems are other priorities. The 10th Habitat Contact Forum was held in Murmansk in June 2019. The forum gathers representatives of the management authorities, scientific institutions and civil society (NGOs) to discuss current themes concerning forest and wetland conservation.

A new **mandate** for the WGE was adopted. The number of subgroups was reduced to two – Nature and Water (SNW) and Hot Spot Exclusion (SHE). The order of rotation of the chairmanship was changed to be in line with the BEAC, with a transitional period until 2025. The WGE actively cooperated with other BEAC working groups – primarily the Barents Forest Sector Network (BFSN), the Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY), the Joint Working Group on Tourism (JWGT), the Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC) and the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) – as well as with other regional actors, such as the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Arctic Council. Since 2014, work in the WGE has been supported by the Climate, Environment and Hot Spot Advisor at the IBS, financed by Finland, Sweden and NEFCO.

## Working Group on Economic Cooperation (WGEC)

The WGEC focused on highlighting the **bioeconomy**. A strengthened bioeconomy sector contributes to several of the SDGs (7, 9, 13 and 15, among others). The Swedish Chairmanship also prioritised discussions about the role and working methods of the group. Three meetings were held during the Chairmanship, two in Stockholm and one in Haparanda. A mandate was adopted to serve as a basis for future work. The understanding of the value and role of the bioeconomy and a sustainable economic approach in the Barents was highlighted and concrete action was taken to work more closely with the Regional Working Group on Investments and Economic Cooperation (RWGIEC).



## Steering Committee for the Barents Euro-Arctic Transport Area (BEATA)

The main focus of BEATA was to **revise the draft Joint Barents Transport Plan (JBTP)**. The revised draft plan includes updates on climate change and green transport solutions, such as Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS). Efficient and sustainable transport systems in connection with the development of the tourism industry were also highlighted in the revised JBTP.

The revised draft plan was welcomed at the BEAC transport ministers meeting in Umeå on 11–12 September 2019. The theme of the ministerial meeting was sustainable transport solutions, with discussions focusing on climate-friendly transport and regional east-west cross-border transport cooperation. A declaration was adopted directing the future work of BEATA.

**Synergies** were attained with other regional transport cooperation formats, such as the Barents Regional Working Group on Transport and Logistics (BRWGTL) and the Northern Dimension Partnership on Transport and Logistics (NDPTL). In addition to increased coordination of meetings, one concrete result was the agreement between the BRWGTL and BEATA on how to collaborate in the Kolarctic CBC Programme on green transport solutions. Information was exchanged with the Joint Working Group on Tourism, the Joint Working Group on Youth and the NDPTL.

BEATA held five meetings, including **study visits and discussions**, where examples of Swedish sustainable and innovative transport solutions were presented, such as the Vision Zero strategy on road safety, sustainable planning of transport infrastructure, autonomous vehicles and heavy transport for the mining industry, and solutions for maritime transports.

## Barents Forest Sector Network (BFSN)

The BFSN conducted three meetings and one telephone conference in connection with the planning of the Barents Forest Forum, held in Umeå on 15–17 October, which was the final event of the BFSN during Sweden's Chairmanship. A report from the Barents Forest Forum will follow.

The BFSN **focused on sharing experiences** to increase common knowledge about the development of the bioeconomy as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The **emphasis** was on identifying common overall themes and focus areas, which could also be continued by subsequent chairmanships, such as climate change adaptation and mitigation, the forest-based bioeconomy, youth perspectives and efforts to strengthen cooperation at regional level.

The objectives and activities in the regional Action Plan on Climate Change were achieved and **implemented**. The working group obtained more knowledge of policies on climate change mitigation and adaptation in the forest sector, and cooperation increased to address climate change and forest sector competitiveness.

A new **mandate** for the BFSN was approved by the CSO. The BFSN has also contributed to the development of youth-oriented recommendations.

## Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY)

The JWGY convened four times under the chairmanship of the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society, with the support of the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten and the co-chair of Troms region. The working group **restarted activities in 2018**. The terms of reference were updated. The group now includes members from all of the 14 Barents regions.

The working group focused on **enhancing cross-sectoral youth policy** and young people's opportunities to participate in society. Moreover, it strengthened dialogue between young people and decision-makers and promoted multilateral cooperation between youth groups and non-governmental youth organisations in the region. A key actor in the field of youth is the Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC), which enjoyed fruitful cooperation with the working group.

The conference '25 Years of Barents Cooperation: Youth Perspective for the Future', held in April 2018 in Luleå, gathered 60 young people from Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden. The outcome of the conference formed the tasks and priorities of the working group. The JWGY primarily worked on the **incorporation of youth perspectives in all the Barents working groups**, based on the areas the working groups had identified. A second seminar was held in Luleå in June 2019 to receive further input from young people in the region, before the recommendations were finalised.

A **survey** was conducted among the regional representatives on recruitment, involvement and communication between the BRYC members and the regional representatives.

## Joint Working Group on Culture (JWGC)

The JWGC convened four times during the Finnmark-Sweden co-chairmanship.

A new mandate was approved by the CSO and a strategy (2019–2023) was drawn up to promote the role of culture and cultural policies with a special focus on culture and sustainable development, considering that culture offers a powerful mechanism to address social, economic, environmental and other challenges.

The JWGC evaluated the process of awarding the first ever Barents Scholarship for Cultural Cooperation and **awarded the second round of scholarships to artists and cultural actors** from Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden, thus recognising and encouraging artistic excellence and cooperation across borders. The scholarship recipients from both the first and the second round were invited to the award ceremony in Umeå to share their experiences and discuss possibilities for digitalising cultural life in the Barents region. The discussion fed into future digitalisation ventures. The JWGC is committed to continuing to involve young people in the Barents region in future Barents Scholarship activities.

Financial support was granted to a venture by Konstnärsguppen i Luleå to conduct a pre-study on artistic network cooperation in the Barents region to further stimulate cultural exchange across borders.

## Working Group on Indigenous Peoples (WGIP)

The WGIP conducted seven meetings, two of them by Skype. They were held in Murmansk, Brussels, Kautokeino in Norway, Inari in Finland, and Alta in Norway. The main priority was to prepare and conduct the IV Barents Indigenous Peoples Congress and the II Barents Indigenous Peoples' Summit, held in Lycksele in May 2019. Topics discussed included the UN International Year of Indigenous Languages, regional politics, and the truth and reconciliation process. The Congress and Summit were arranged in cooperation with the Swedish Chairmanship.

Representatives of the working group also took part in the CSO and the Barents Regional Committee and Council meetings, as well as meetings of the Working Group on Tourism, the Working Group on Economic Cooperation and the Joint Working Group on Youth. The WGIP is currently chair of the Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC).



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