

Barents region

The area of the Barents Euro-Arctic region is approximately 1 755 800 square kilometres. With a population of five million, it is the most densely populated area above the Arctic Circle. The region is characterised by its harsh climate and

vast natural resources. It is one of the world's most vulnerable regions in terms of environmental degradation and climate change impacts.

Barents cooperation structure

Barents cooperation was launched on 11 January 1993 in Kirkenes, Norway, at a conference of foreign ministers who signed a declaration establishing the intergovernmental Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC). At the same time the county governors, together with representatives of the indigenous peoples, signed a protocol that established the Barents Regional Council (BRC). The objective of Barents cooperation is to strengthen peace, stability and sustainable development by improving opportunities for cooperation across the region's borders.

Members of the BEAC: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russian Federation, Sweden and the European Commission.

Members of the BRC: Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Kainuu, Lapland, Oulu, North Karelia, Finnmark, Troms, Nordland, Arkhangelsk, Republics of Karelia and Komi, Murmansk and

Nenets Autonomous Okrug. Finnmark is Chair of the BRC in 2017–2019.

Observer states: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The International Barents Secretariat (IBS) in Kirkenes, Norway, established in 2008, serves both governmental and regional level.

The Working Group of Indigenous Peoples has an advisory role to both Councils and cooperates closely with them.

Between the biannual foreign ministers meetings, the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO) organises and leads the work. Practical cooperation takes place in one of the 15 working groups, which are intergovernmental, regional and joint working groups.

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Swedish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council 2017–2019

Regional sustainable development
for the future



Swedish
Chairmanship
2017–2019



Government Offices of Sweden
Ministry for Foreign Affairs

“Keep all pathways open for potential encounters”

I believe that this Sami saying encapsulates the spirit of life in the Barents region: how positive interactions between humans and nature make life better.

These interactions in our Nordic region and between our countries have persisted for centuries. The current challenge of climate change is making such interactions and cooperation more necessary than ever.

During the Swedish Chairmanship of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), we will pursue an agenda based on sustainable development, respect for human rights and gender equality. In each of these areas, the emphasis will lie on enhancing people-to-people contacts, especially for the younger generation. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement will provide the basis for our work.

Barents cooperation is unique, with stakeholders at national, regional and local levels, including societies of indigenous peoples. The Swedish Chairmanship will work with stakeholders at all levels to achieve the best possible results.

In 2018 Barents cooperation will celebrate its 25th anniversary. This provides an excellent opportunity to take stock of previous achievements while looking at the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. The Swedish Chairmanship will seek to create a joint

vision and define future strategic priorities for Barents cooperation.

In 2018 Sweden will also take over the Presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Nordic Council of Ministers, and will coordinate informal Nordic and Nordic-Baltic foreign and security policy cooperation. Our ambition is to find points of contact between these forums and all countries of the Barents and Baltic Sea regions to strengthen overall regional cooperation.

I grew up in the Barents region, in a town in Västerbotten in Northern Sweden. Perhaps this experience makes Barents cooperation a little dearer to me. I look forward to welcoming you to Sweden during our Chairmanship, and to productive cooperation.



Margot Wallström

Margot Wallström,
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Priorities for the Swedish Chairmanship 2017–2019

A positive future agenda for the people of the Barents region must be broad-based. At the United Nations summit on 25 September 2015, the countries of the world adopted a set of goals and made commitments to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all, as part of a new sustainable development agenda. During the Swedish Chairmanship of the BEAC, the focus will be on implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement at regional level. We will highlight the most relevant Sustainable Development Goals for Barents cooperation and work to achieve a sustainable and equitable future for the Barents region.

Environmental dimension

Climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution, unsustainable production patterns and use of resources, and ecosystems services are major concerns for the Barents region. Climate change is already putting great strain on local communities and ecosystems. We need to increase mitigation measures, adaptive capacity and resilience building in all areas of Barents cooperation. During the Swedish Chairmanship, special emphasis will be placed on the following Sustainable Development Goals: ‘Climate action’ (SDG 13) and ‘Life on land’ (SDG 15).

- Progress in environmental performance from, and further elimination of, environmental ‘hot spots’ in the Barents region

- Pursue climate action, i.e. through implementation of the BEAC Action Plan on Climate Change in all areas of Barents cooperation and beyond
- Develop networks for regional climate strategies
- Exchange best practices for continued conservation and sustainable use of wetlands
- Take action to preserve biodiversity and ensure the conservation of ecosystems through knowledge exchange and increased transboundary cooperation
- Promote sustainable use of forest resources
- Continue and strengthen cooperation on management of transboundary river basins and restoration of degraded water basins

Economic dimension

A sustainable future is not possible without research, innovation and the development of new and green technologies. The business sector has a key role in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement. Reliable, sustainable and resilient regional and transborder infrastructure is essential for economic development. An integrated and efficient transport system in the Barents region, through initiatives in the fields of transport, infrastructure and logistics can strengthen existing cross-border cooperation and promote more environmentally friendly transportation solutions. Local and regional levels of Barents cooperation also have a significant role in collabo-

rating with business and civil society. Strengthened and enhanced exchanges between universities in the region, and between academia and industry, remain a priority. The Swedish Chairmanship will focus on ‘Industry, innovation and infrastructure’ (SDG 9), ‘Sustainable cities and communities’ (SDG 11), and ‘Responsible consumption and production’ (SDG 12).

- Continue emergency and rescue cooperation
- Host the Barents Rescue Exercise in 2019
- Strengthen cooperation in the field of the bio economy in the Barents region
- Revise the Joint Barents Transport Plan
- Host the Barents Forest Forum in 2019
- Promote sustainable tourism in the Barents region

Social dimension

The strength of Barents cooperation lies in the people of the region, their knowledge, experience, cultural expressions, diversity and heritage. 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.

Representation of the indigenous peoples – the Sami, the Nenets and the Veps – in all Barents Euro-Arctic Council bodies plays a unique and valuable role

in shaping the activities of the Council. The Swedish Chairmanship will focus on ‘Good health and well-being’ (SDG 3), ‘Quality education’ (SDG 4), ‘Gender equality’ (SDG 5), and ‘Partnerships’ (SDG 17).

- Promote youth engagement in all areas of Barents cooperation
- Continue to implement the Barents Cooperation Programme on health and social issues
- Promote a Barents identity characterised by openness and diversity
- Award the Barents Scholarship for Cultural Cooperation
- Further strengthen academic cooperation and mobility

Stronger and more visible Barents cooperation

Interaction between the national and regional levels is a unique feature of Barents cooperation. Sweden intends to cooperate closely with Finnmark, Chair of the Barents Regional Council (BRC). The International Barents Secretariat (IBS) will play a crucial role in coordinating work in the BEAC and, together with the Chairmanship, coordinating with other regional bodies.

It is important that the Barents Euro-Arctic Council successfully communicates its work to demonstrate the relevance of the organisation. During its Chairmanship, Sweden will prioritise communication and structural issues.