

ANNEX — Euro-Arctic Assembly 2025

Supporting Background for the Policy Brief

Introduction

This Annex provides supporting context and evidence for the policy brief and is intended for readers seeking deeper insight beyond the two-page core document.

The document is based exclusively on the workshops, panel sessions, and plenary debates of the **first Euro-Arctic Assembly**, held in Bodø on **12–13 November 2025**. Over two days, **regional policymakers, national authorities, EU and Nordic institutions, civil servants, cross-border networks, private businesses, and academic experts** discussed how to move Euro-Arctic cooperation **from reaction to action**, to ensure political relevance, operational feasibility, and policy uptake.

The Assembly aligned with the outcomes of the **February 2025 workshop in Oslo** and represents a continuing, structured process of regional dialogue and policy development.

1. Background and Structural Challenges

The Euro-Arctic region is experiencing a convergence of pressures that together create a more demanding operating environment for national and regional authorities. Assembly discussions underscored that **geopolitical uncertainty, demographic decline, climate acceleration, and institutional fragmentation** reinforce each other and make coordinated action more urgent, particularly at the civil and societal level.

Geopolitically, Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO have reshaped the security architecture of the North and increased the strategic relevance of the region. Combined with the long-term consequences of war in Ukraine, the Euro-Arctic now sits at the centre of new preparedness and resilience requirements. This shift also brings the principles of **NATO Article 3, societal resilience and civil preparedness**, closer to local and regional practice, strengthening the need for coordinated cross-border efforts.

Climate change compounds these pressures. Warming in the European Arctic is occurring **four to five times faster** than the global average in some areas, undermining infrastructure, transport reliability, supply security, and emergency response capacity. Panels and workshops stressed that climate-related disruptions—landslides, storms, icing patterns, and changing sea conditions—are increasingly cross-border in nature, requiring aligned risk assessments and coordinated preparedness measures that are understandable and actionable for decision-makers.

Across the Nordic countries and the EU, recent policy strategies reflect this new environment. While the documents differ in scope, they converge around three shared priorities:

- **strengthening cross-border cooperation,**
- **enhancing civil protection and preparedness, and**
- **supporting resilient, sustainable Arctic and northern communities.**

Participants repeatedly noted that this policy convergence provides an important mandate for deeper cooperation, but that regions still struggle to translate this mandate into operational capacity.

The most persistent structural challenge remains **demography**. Population decline, ageing societies, and workforce shortages directly weaken administrative capacity. Small municipalities struggle to maintain statutory services, let alone engage in cross-border initiatives or long-term planning. This administrative overload is amplified by **long distances, dispersed settlements, limited transport connectivity, and uneven digital infrastructure**, all of which increase the cost and complexity of service delivery.

Institutional fragmentation further constrains action. Differences in tax systems, work-permit regimes, education standards, procurement rules, and planning mandates continue to slow or block cross-border solutions. Even when cooperation is encouraged politically, practical implementation often falls on overstretched local and regional actors without adequate staffing, financial resources, or administrative support.

Participants also pointed to a **lack of shared strategic direction** across actors. Several long-standing frameworks remain active, including Barents cooperation, Nordic Cooperation, NSPA, CPMR, and other Arctic networks. Yet there is still no unified understanding of Euro-Arctic priorities and goals, or of how regional needs should systematically feed into national and EU processes in a predictable and sustained manner. This makes cooperation highly dependent on individual leadership, short project funding, and shifting political attention. In practice, this lack of alignment leads to overlapping initiatives and duplicated efforts, reducing efficiency and continuity.

Finally, several speakers highlighted the funding challenge. **National co-financing levels are too low**, preventing many municipalities, universities, and civil society organisations from participating in cross-border initiatives. Since ministries cannot ask Parliament for increased allocations on their own, **regions must articulate this need directly**, or risk losing one of the few stable cross-border tools available.

Taken together, these challenges reinforce the Assembly's core conclusion: the **Euro-Arctic requires predictable, long-term cooperation mechanisms that strengthen regional capacity, align national and EU policy priorities, and ensure that cross-border preparedness, mobility, and community viability are embedded in northern development strategies**.

2. Workshop Outcomes (Technical Level)

Workshops addressed four priority areas identified at the Oslo workshop in February 2025 (environment, youth, and Indigenous matters were identified as cross-cutting across all areas):

- Comprehensive Security, Civil Emergency Preparedness and Response
- Business, Industry, Education and Workforce
- Infrastructure and Security of Supply
- Attractive and Competitive Local Communities

Across all themes, participants described mounting structural pressures that limit the region's ability to sustain services or plan long term.

Key workshop outcomes included:

- **Cross-border cooperation enhances preparedness.** Joint situational awareness, shared risk assessments, and compatible emergency systems were repeatedly highlighted as essential under current security conditions.

- **Workforce shortages are a critical bottleneck.** Participants noted that demographic decline and limited labour mobility threaten both public services and business development.
- **Infrastructure gaps, especially east–west hinder resilience.** Roads, digital systems, and logistics infrastructure are often insufficient for emergency response, economic exchanges, or daily mobility.
- **Institutional fragmentation persists.** Differences in tax regimes, education standards, and procurement rules remain major obstacles to shared labour markets, coordinated planning, and service development.
- **Youth and Indigenous perspectives strengthen legitimacy.** Their inclusion is essential for long-term relevance and continuity.

Workshops underlined that **cross-border cooperation is not optional**; it is a prerequisite for resilience, mobility, and viable communities.

3. Panel Discussion Outcomes (Political Level)

Panelists provided a broader strategic perspective on the changes required to sustain Euro-Arctic cooperation in the current environment.

Key outcomes included:

- **Existing cooperation structures need recalibration.** While long-standing frameworks remain valuable, they require stronger alignment and clearer strategic direction to address today's geopolitical and societal challenges.
- **Regional leadership must be strengthened.** Regions were consistently described as the operational level where cooperation happens and where continuity is maintained, but they lack the tools, funding, and administrative capacity needed.
- **Structured and regular dialogue between regional, national, and EU actors** is essential, particularly on civil preparedness, hybrid threats, and infrastructure security. Panellists stressed that regional experience and local knowledge must be included in national and EU strategic processes.
- **Barents cooperation remains important but must adapt** to changing participation patterns, especially Finland's withdrawal. This requires reviewing frameworks that preserve the cooperation and maintain youth and Indigenous involvement.
- **Cross-border cooperation must move beyond projects.** Over-reliance on short-term funding undermines institutional memory and weakens resilience. Predictable, long-term mechanisms are needed.

Panel discussions reinforced the workshops' technical findings but also emphasized the political necessity of empowering regional actors, the need to move from fragmented initiatives toward coherent, multi-level cooperation, and aligning efforts across all levels of governance.

4. Conclusion

Across all sessions of the Euro-Arctic Assembly 2025, a consistent message emerged: **the structural challenges facing the region are long-term, cross-border, and cannot be solved by isolated national measures**. Regional actors must remain at the centre of cooperation, but they require **predictable support, clearer strategic alignment, and stronger multi-level and multi-national coordination**.

The Euro-Arctic is entering a new strategic era. Strengthening cooperation now, while geopolitical and environmental pressures intensify, will be critical for safeguarding preparedness, mobility, and thriving communities across the region.

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