



THE
**BARENTS
YOUTH
PROGRAM**

2021-2024

WWW.BARENTSYOUTH.ORG

FOREWORD

The strength of the Barents cooperation lies in the people of the region. Cross-border people-to-people cooperation is the foundation of the Barents Cooperation.

Young people are the most valuable resource and have a beneficial interest in the future development of the Barents Region. An active Youth Policy in the Barents Region is required to secure a sustainable population in the region. The Youth is not only the future of the Barents Region, they are here and now, and their voice must be included in our current policies.

Therefore, the general goal for the Barents Youth Program 2021-24 is to ensure youth involvement on all levels, and in all areas, of the Barents Cooperation. The Program is a concrete follow up to the Youth Recommendations welcomed at the Barents Euro Arctic Council meeting in 2019. At this meeting, the ministers of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council acknowledged the important work to increase youth engagement in all areas of the Barents Cooperation. The Program aims to highlight the quality of life in the High North. Through dialogue and increased cross-border youth cooperation within areas like culture, sport, health, education, environment, entrepreneurship, human rights, equality, community development and indigenous peoples, the new generation will develop skills and competences that will contribute to robust societies and living conditions.

The close interaction between national, regional and local levels together with people-to-people contacts has been the cornerstone of the Barents cooperation since the beginning. Our young play an important part in this and will continue to do so in the future. We urge all the stakeholders of the Barents Cooperation to implement the Program.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

At its meeting on September 5th, 2001, the Barents Regional Council¹ decided to draw up a youth program for the Barents Region. The Barents Regional Council adopted the first *Barents Regional Youth Program* in 2002. The same year, the Norwegian Ministry for Children and Family Affairs decided to allocate funds for multilateral youth projects in the Barents Region as an element in the implementation of the youth program. At first, the funds were given for a period of three years, but due to its success the youth program has been prolonged and is still active. The Norwegian Barents Secretariat administers the funds in accordance with the priorities in the Barents Youth Program.

1.2 About the region

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR) offers some unique qualities for the population in terms of clean water, closeness to nature, vast forests, unique landscape and possibilities for hunting and fishing. Many of the small communities have a diverse offer when it comes to culture and sports activities and are known for the short distances between workplace, home, schools and kindergartens giving families more time together, more leisure time and high quality of life.

Children and young people are the most valuable resource and have a beneficial interest in the future development of the Barents Region. They are crucial for the cooperation, the development and the sustainability of the region. The lives of the young in the Barents Region vary, as do the lives of the young in every corner of Europe.

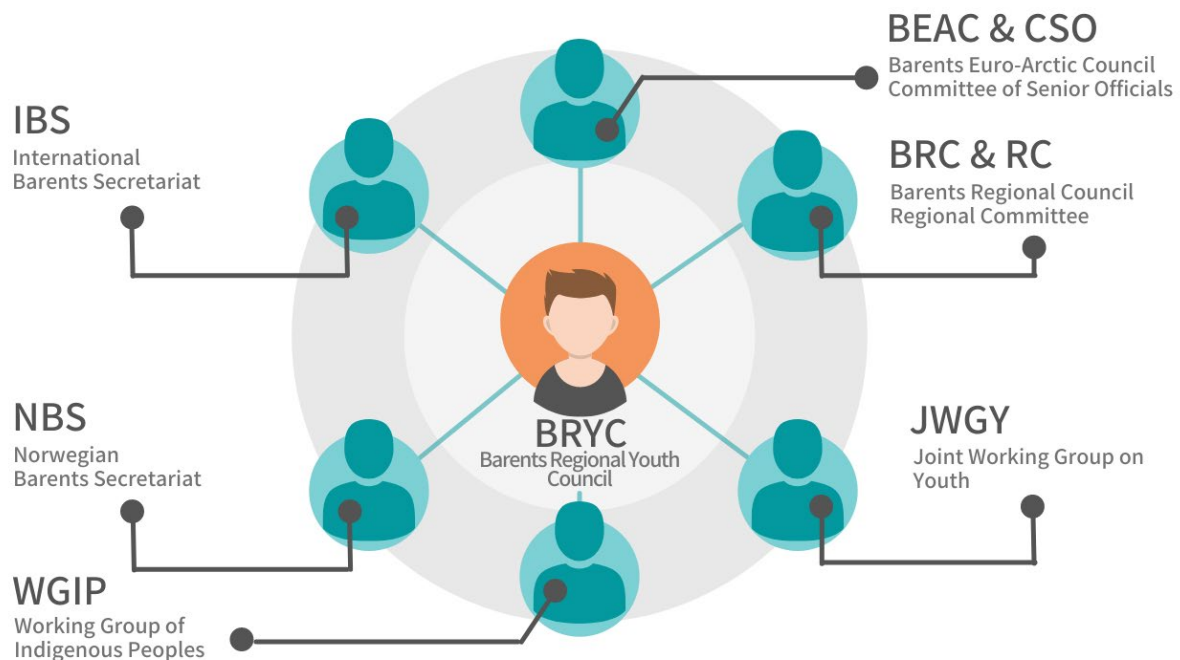
¹ The Barents Regional Council unites (after the merger between Troms and Finnmark) 13 member counties and a representative of the indigenous peoples in the northernmost parts of Finland, Norway and Sweden and North-West Russia.

There are many life courses, many ways of constructing identities, many ways of reacting to the possibilities and hindrances offered by adult society. The tensions between moving away and staying, or local traditions and global influences point out the contradiction between established stereotypes of the Barents youth's conditions and the perspectives of the young people themselves.

Youth and regional studies point out that the local cultures and views of the youth often remain hidden and unseen. This problem has consequences to the general impression of the living conditions in Barents, but also more widely to the services provided for the young people in the region. An active youth policy in the Barents Region is required to secure a sustainable population, as it will further contribute to the development of democracy at the regional and local level. This can be achieved through increased youth participation in decision-making processes.

The main aim is to increase the participation of young people in decision-making-processes, in the labor market and in the economic sector. Contribution to the development of the Barents identity, strengthening the attractiveness of the region for young people and improving their living conditions are the core goals for the future of the youth policy. Social inclusion and equal access for all groups is important, as well as enhancing and developing sustainable structures for cooperation among adolescents and young people (Based on the report; "I am fire, but my environment is the lighter", by Tomi Kiilakoski 2016).

1.3 Important structures for youth cooperation in the Barents Region



In order to make sure that young people have an arena to facilitate active participation and realization of youth initiatives, **the Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC)** was established in January 2004. BRYC consists of two youth representatives (a main and a deputy representative) from each member region of the Barents Cooperation, as well as two youth representatives for the indigenous people. The youth council is financed by the member counties of the Barents Region and reports to the Barents Regional Committee.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) is the forum for intergovernmental cooperation on issues concerning the Barents region. The BEAC meets at Foreign Ministers' level in the chairmanship country at the end of each BEAC chairmanship term. Between the ministerial meetings, **The Committee of Senior Officials (CSO)** organizes the work of BEAC. The chairmanship rotates every second year between Norway, Finland, Russia and Sweden. Norway took over the BEAC Chairmanship from Sweden at the 17th

BEAC Ministerial Session in Umeå, Sweden, on October 3, 2019. The next chair of the BEAC will be Finland (2021-2023).

The Barents Regional Council (BRC) unites (after the merger between Troms and Finnmark) 13 member counties and a representative of the indigenous peoples in the northernmost parts of Finland, Norway, Sweden and North-Western Russia. At the same time as the BEAC was established in 1993 by the signing of the Kirkenes Declaration, the regional representatives, together with the indigenous peoples signed a co-operation protocol that established the Regional Council for the Barents Euro-Arctic Region with the same objectives as the BEAC - to support and promote co-operation and development in the Barents Region. The protocol determines the structure and the general aims of the regional co-operation. **The Barents Regional Committee** is a forum for civil servants from the member counties and a representative of the indigenous peoples. The Committee is responsible for preparing the meetings of the BRC.²

The Joint Working Group on Youth (JWGY) was established in 2011 by merging two existing working groups: the Working Group on Youth Policy (WGYP) and the Regional Working Group on Youth Issues. The group consists of representatives from the departments responsible for youth policy in the different member countries. The group consists of representatives from the ministries responsible for youth policy in the different member countries and regional representatives of Norway, Russia, Sweden, Finland and indigenous peoples. BRYC and the Norwegian Barents Secretariat are also members of the JWGY.

The International Barents Secretariat (IBS) is the secretariat for BRYC through a dedicated advisor. The secretariat also supports the multilateral activities within the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Barents Regional Council. The IBS aims to increase and secure the coherence and efficiency of

² Source: Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation (<https://www.barentscooperation.org/en>).

the Barents cooperation. To this end, the IBS assists the biennially rotating governmental and regional Chairs in their tasks and thus guarantees the seamless continuity of the cooperation. Also, the IBS supports the Barents Working Groups, including the JWGY and BRYC. As from 2021, the IBS shall act as the main administrative body of BRYC, a task previously managed by the Norwegian Barents Secretariat. Over the course of this program period (2021-24) the IBS shall, in cooperation with the NBS, provide BRYC with administrative support and help lift the youth council's position in the Barents structure, in line with other working groups, as a part of the administrative reform under the chairmanships of Norway and Västerbotten.

The Norwegian Barents Secretariat (NBS) used to be the secretariat for BRYC until 2021. The main mission of the NBS is to administer the Norwegian grants for people-to-people cooperation – including multilateral youth cooperation – in the Barents Region on behalf of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families. In this program period (2021-24), the NBS shall assist the IBS with tasks related to BRYC and act as a resource center on youth cooperation.

The Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) was established by the Barents Regional Council in 1995. The overall goal for the WGIP in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region is to secure indigenous peoples' rights, foundation for trade, society, culture and language through the implementation of the Action Plan of Indigenous Peoples of the BEAR. This goal is also interlinked with youth cooperation. The WGIP is responsible for electing the indigenous youth representative in BRYC. This representative normally attends meetings in both BRYC and the WGIP.

2. AIMS AND PERSPECTIVES

2.1 The purpose of the program

The purpose of the program is to provide a framework for a more attractive Barents Region to young people by:

- Improving the living conditions for youth in the region
- Increasing youth participation in general activities of the BEAR networks
- Having more focus on the youth dimension in all priority areas within the cooperation
- Ensuring youth involvement in strategic thinking and policy making within the Barents Cooperation
- Strengthening Barents identity among youth in the Barents Region by establishing contact across cultural and geographical borders

2.2 Target group

The Barents Youth Program primarily addresses young people who are legally residents in one of the administrative units being considered a part in the Barents regional cooperation. This includes groups like youth organizations, youth leaders, youth workers, regional and local administrations, project managers, NGOs, associations or other structures working with or for youth.

The program aims to offer young people opportunities:

- to realize their project ideas
- to be an active part in the Barents cooperation
- to develop the Barents Region
- to make sure young voices are heard in the policies for the BEAR

2.3 Focus areas

The program focuses on the following areas of youth cooperation³:

1. Culture, sports and health
2. Education and entrepreneurship
3. Human rights and democracy
4. Environment
5. Community development and volunteer work
6. Transport and infrastructure
7. Indigenous peoples

This program was written during the time when the Covid-19 pandemic halted parts of the Barents cooperation. Due to the pandemic, there is a risk that the level of activities (particularly in the physical format) in the upcoming years will be lower than under normal circumstances. However, it is strongly encouraged to maintain cross-border contact electronically and have activities online until the situation improves and it is possible to meet physically again.

2.4 Strategy for youth involvement

As stated in the Umeå Declaration of 2019, and the program for the chairmanships of Norway and Västerbotten 2019-2021 to follow up the youth recommendations, the ministers of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council acknowledged the important work to increase youth engagement in all areas of the Barents Cooperation, endorsed the youth recommendations formed during the Swedish chairmanship period (2017-19) and requested the BEAC to further monitor progress and implement activities in all areas of cooperation. Based on this decision, a general goal for the Barents Youth Program 2021-24 is to ensure youth involvement on all levels, and in all areas, of the Barents cooperation, including the structures already mentioned in chapter 1.3, as well as the different working groups.

³ The focus/priority areas are further explained in Chapter 4.

2.5 Yearly priorities 2021-2024

Within the framework of the general objectives and priorities, the Barents Youth Program shall focus on specific priorities each year. The following yearly priorities have been chosen based on the priorities of the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Barents Regional Council and BRYC.

In **2021** priority will be given to projects and initiatives dealing with:

- Mental health
- Physical health and sports
- Gender equality

In **2022** priority will be given to projects and initiatives dealing with:

- Volunteering
- Barents cooperation with other Arctic regions
- Indigenous culture and traditions

In **2023** priority will be given to projects and initiatives dealing with:

- Business development and entrepreneurship
- Arctic skills⁴
- Attractive living environment

In **2024** priority will be given to projects and initiatives dealing with:

- Mobility, education and research
- Sustainable development and dialogue

The Barents Youth Program underlines the importance of promoting synergies with other regions in the Arctic. Involving a wider range of Arctic stakeholders and networks in the above-mentioned initiatives will help enhance the results and strengthen the dialogue on shared challenges concerning youth.

⁴ In this context, “Arctic skills” is referring to the most demanded jobs, professions for youth in the Arctic.

3. GUIDELINES FOR THE REALIZATION OF THE PROGRAM

Factors to ensure implementation of the Barents Youth Program 2021-24:

- Cooperation between structures
- Youth participation
- Networks and dialogue
- Information
- Funding
- Projects and volunteer work

3.1 Cooperation between structures – *In the field of youth*

In order to build a good foundation for the implementation of the program, it is crucial that all Barents structures working with youth issues are involved in the development of the program and its implementation. The Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Barents Regional Committee and all the working groups within the Barents Cooperation must continue to develop their cooperation in the field of youth. Also, the involvement of the Norwegian and the International Barents Secretariat in this cooperation is important to ensure a good flow of information and institutional memory regarding the Barents youth cooperation.

3.2 Youth participation – *Including young people in the Barents Cooperation structure*

An important step towards the active involvement of young people in the Barents Youth Program and the Barents Cooperation have been the establishment of BRYC. The youth council has an important role and has initiated and implemented many multilateral youth projects since its establishment.

In order to secure the participation of youth and the legitimacy of the program the involvement of BRYC is of high importance for the implementation. BRYC has the status of a working group under the BEAC.

During the Swedish BEAC Chairmanship a decision was made to encourage all working groups in the Barents Cooperation structure to involve youth representatives in their meetings. The purpose of this is to ensure that the youth perspective was taken into account in all areas of the cooperation. Norway and Västerbotten have been working on implementing this, by ensuring youth participation in all events under their chairmanship, and by hosting a youth summit back-to-back with the BEAC Ministerial Meeting on October 26th, 2021.

Support from all regions to their respective representative in BRYC is crucial for the future of this youth forum.

3.3 Networks and dialogue – *Facilitating contact and dialogue between youth in the Barents Region*

It is important to continue creating platforms where youth from all four countries can meet, connect and exchange experience. This includes members of youth councils, youth organizations, as well as youth coordinators and senior officials in this field. Such platforms can be created through meetings, forums, seminars, workshops, projects or public events that give room to discuss relevant issues. Giving the Barents youth an opportunity to network and express themselves will help create a mutual understanding, break stereotypes, raise awareness around important issues concerning youth, and potentially give birth to new project ideas that will benefit the region.

It is also important to raise awareness around the concept of the Barents cooperation, including a clear common vision, mission and common future goals. The idea is to show young people that their voices really matter and that they have the power to make a positive impact on society as residents of the Barents Region.

3.4 Information

In order for the Barents youth cooperation to be effective, and to have real impact on the target group, it is important to spread information about the cooperation. This includes spreading information about the purpose of the cooperation – emphasizing key aspects like youth empowerment, active citizenship, community development, project management and the opportunity to become a youth ambassador. youth projects and events, grant programs it is important to use, develop and update the website for youth cooperation in the Barents Region. More information can be found at www.barentsyouth.org.

3.5 Funding

In order to ensure that the Barents Youth Program is properly implemented, financial support for youth projects should be given from the member regions. The Barents Regional Council must agree upon a good solution for a non-bureaucratic managing of the fund.

Each of the 8 Nordic member regions shall contribute with 5 000 euros annually to finance BRYC's activities. In addition to this, all member regions, including the Russian regions, shall contribute in the form of "in-kind contribution" agreed beforehand with the region in question.

In-kind contribution for the member regions may include covering costs for:

- Local transports for all BRYC members when events are organized in the region
- Hotel accommodation for all BRYC members when events are organized in the region
- Meals (including breakfast, lunch and dinner) for all BRYC members when events are organized in the region
- Venues when a specific event is taking place in the region
- Travelling costs for the regional BRYC members attending BRYC meetings and events

- Administration costs for regional BRYC members (e.g. remuneration for project coordination, workshop moderation or similar)

Other possible sources of funding may include:

- Barents Financial Mechanism
- The Norwegian Barents Secretariat
- Regional funding (in addition to the annual funds)
- Nordic Council of Ministers
- Interreg NEXT Aurora
- Cross-border cooperation programs Karelia and Kolarctic
- Erasmus + (The Youth Program of the European Commission)
- European Youth Foundation (The Youth Program of the Council of Europe)
- National funding

3.6 Projects and volunteer work

People-to-people projects continue to be one of the main pillars of the Barents Cooperation, something that also applies to youth. Cross-border cooperation projects is an essential part of the youth empowerment process, because it gives not only the opportunity to connect, but also to jointly work towards common goals and developing the region. Through projects and practical work, young people can develop new skills related to project management, international relations and leadership. This experience gives them a better understanding not only of the Barents Cooperation, but also of how they themselves can make a positive impact on their local society through.

4. AREAS OF PRIORITY

Seven areas of priority have been chosen for this program due to the challenges for youth in the BEAR: (1) Culture, sports and health; (2) Education and entrepreneurship; (3) Human rights and equality; (4) Environment; (5) Community development; (6) Transport and infrastructure and (7) Indigenous peoples.

4.1 Culture, sports and health

Culture is a good arena for young people to meet and establish contacts, and thereby lay the foundation for extended co-operation within all the fields of the Barents Co-operation. Young people need to have knowledge of the cultures in BEAR and possibilities to participate in cultural exchanges. The traditional cultures of both minorities and majorities must be kept alive and the traditional livelihoods must be supported for youth to study, as well as the possibilities to study, live, and work in their native areas. It is a good idea to use the knowledge and art of youth on pointing out problems in our society, but their ideas must be heard, understood, and taken into consideration.

In 2024, Bodø and Nordland (Norway) will be the very first European Capital of Culture in the Arctic (Bodø2024), and the project has defined youth and young people as their number one priority. This can be used as an opportunity for young people in the whole Barents area to connect and create even more visibility and attractive local societies.

Within sports, the efforts should be appointed towards increased activities on a multilateral level. Networks between different organisations and exchange are measures to be used in this process.

Alcohol- and drug abuse and health -problems like sexual transmittable diseases exist among youth in the Barents region and need to be handled.

In light of the COVID-19 situation, special attention should be given to maintaining youth cooperation in times of a pandemic. This also includes an emphasis on issues like mental health among youth in the Barents Region.

Possible activities in this field:

- networking events, seminars and workshops;
- cooperation and exchange of experience on culture, sports and health-related issues;
- exchange programs for health workers in the Barents region;
- initiatives aimed at improving mental health in the Barents region
- youth projects in the field of culture, sports and health.

4.2 Education and entrepreneurship

Education is one of the priorities of the Barents program and a field relevant to most young people. So far, this is an area where the Barents Co-operation has been very successful. Therefore, one has every reason to increase the activity. Entrepreneurship is an important tool to enhance economic development in the BEAR and must therefore be considered an investment in the future.

Non-formal education is a great tool to involve young people in activities and deliver important messages to them. Non-formal education attracts not only active and social persons, who are willing to stay on a stage, but those who prefer to stay in a shadow. Often these "shadow persons" need more support and help. Active collaboration between formal and non-formal education, as well as the use of new creative learning methodologies, is a good way to bring some visible and fast results.

Young people emphasize that they need good study and scholarship opportunities, which will add to the diversity of education. Both are important factors in shaping a local society that attracts more youth, boosts population growth, builds regional competence and promotes regional development in

general. Decentralization of foreign policy jobs is also a way to create attractive workplaces in the North.

A global pandemic has put the Barents Cooperation on the spot and forced us to embrace digital technology as an important communication tool. As we are witnessing a rapid development in this sector, we also see the need to focus on digital knowledge and digital skills as a priority area for the youth cooperation.

Possible activities in this field:

- networking events, seminars and workshops;
- cooperation and exchange of experience within the research and education sector;
- more opportunities for young people in the Barents Region to learn foreign languages (from another Barents country);
- cooperation between universities and schools;
- establishing a joint trainee scheme in the Barents Region;
- activities and training courses that promote business and innovation;
- youth projects in the field of education and entrepreneurship.

4.3 Human rights and equality

Human rights and democracy are an important priority area for the Barents youth cooperation. In order to combat various forms of inequality and discrimination, it is important that topics like anthropology, communication, human rights and the internet, environment and society, indigenous peoples and minorities, and children's rights are brought to attention of today's youth. One of our goals is to help shape a generation that understands and values cooperation, tolerance, reliability, fairness and respect. This includes raising awareness around important human rights and democracy issues in our region and develop policy recommendations aimed at improving the situation. By strengthening the network of young professionals in the Barents Region, we can

help develop our human resources in the field of human rights and democracy, while inspiring young generations to bring new ideas to a more sustainable cooperation.

Possible activities in this field:

- networking events, seminars and workshops;
- youth events aimed at raising awareness around human rights and democracy issues in the region;
- activities aimed at promoting equality in the Barents region;
- youth projects in the field of human rights and equality;
- cooperation between stakeholders/organizations in the field of human rights;
- exchange of experience on human rights and equality.

4.4 Environment

Environment is an area of special concern to young people as it is part of our heritage. Additionally, the nature of the BEAR needs special concern as it is both rich of resources and vulnerable. The Barents Euro Arctic Region is the most densely populated and industrialized part of Arctic-Subarctic. The region is also the one with the largest environmental problems. It is an important task to develop knowledge, competence and consciousness on the local level in order to make each society able to help itself in smaller environment questions. In this work, youth can make an important contribution.

Development in the Barents region must be sustainable. Sustainable urban development and cultural development is very important for youth in the region.

Possible activities in this field:

- networking events, seminars and workshops;

- cooperation between environmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders;
- youth events aimed at raising awareness around environmental issues
- projects and initiatives focusing on environment and climate change;
- exchange of experience on environmental topics.

4.5 Community development

Throughout history, youth around the world have demonstrated the passion and the energy to trigger social movements. Experience demonstrates that young people in general are eager to participate in activities that improve their communities and their own lives. What is missing in many cases is not motivation and interest from young people, but rather structured opportunities that help young people to develop their skills, knowledge and values necessary to build strong communities and democratic and participatory cultures. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the civil society through promotion of active citizenship, volunteer work and establishment of NGOs.

The participatory aspect of membership in NGOs contributes to a heightened understanding of the forces that shape governments and societies, leading to greater transparency, accountability, and improved governance. Empowering young people to play an active role in community development allows democracy to evolve according to the needs and traditions of diverse political cultures.

Furthermore, young people need to be given the possibility to study, live, and work in the areas where they grew up. Young people should also be consulted when local problems are being identified, and their views must be listened to, understood, and taken into consideration.

Possible activities in this field:

- promotion of Volunteer work;
- cooperation and exchange of experience between NGOs;

- contact making seminars and youth expos for NGOs;
- initiatives aimed at building a stronger Barents network for youth;
- creating a platform (a website or an app) to inform about upcoming youth activities in the Barents Region;
- training courses;
- methodology development.

4.6 Transport and infrastructure

Infrastructure and transport are also mentioned as an important aspect for youth in the Barents Region. Here, new solutions are needed, and maybe one can find some good solutions together. Young people particularly underline the following needs:

- better mobility to get to where you want within the Barents region,
- network or system for carpooling
- environmentally friendly infrastructure
- shorter distances
- improved social life for youth in the community
- an easier way to visit neighbouring municipalities and neighbouring countries
- more opportunities for youth exchanges in the region

Possible activities in this field (networking events, seminars and workshops) should focus on these needs. Cooperation and the exchange of experiences between stakeholders in the field of transport and infrastructure should be included in this work.

4.7 Indigenous peoples

Focus on indigenous peoples is very important within the Barents Cooperation. The aim is to create a strong self-esteem for every minority group in the area. There is a need to spread information about the indigenous population also to the majority and to, establish youth information centers. There is also a need for support and more projects and actions to be done to remove prejudice and negative attitudes towards the indigenous people. A close cooperation between youth (represented by BRYC) and the indigenous peoples (represented by the WGIP) is considered as an important means to meet these aims.

Possible activities in this field:

- networking events, seminars and workshops;
- exchange of experience on issues concerning indigenous people;
- cooperation between indigenous organizations, and indigenous youth in particular;
- projects and initiatives aimed at promoting the indigenous communities in the Barents Region (Sami, Veps and Nenets), including fields like culture, languages, traditional livelihoods, business and education;

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we would like to thank everyone who has contributed with their time and effort to help prepare this edition of the Barents Youth Program 2021-24. A special thanks to BRYC, the Committee of Senior Officials, the Barents Regional Council, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, the International Barents Secretariat, the Joint Working Group on Youth, as well as others who has been involved in the preparation of this program.

Working together has never been more important than right now. As we are all trying to cope with the effects of a global pandemic – where cross-border contact is limited, new forms of communication are replacing the established ones, and social isolation is impacting our mental health – it is even more important that the Barents Cooperation can provide a platform for young voices to be heard, included and supported. We believe that having a shared vision, common goals and more youth participation will help strengthen the Barents Cooperation as a whole and create a more attractive region for our future generations.