



## THE BARENTS WORKING GROUPS

### ANNUAL REPORT

Name of the Working Group: Working Group on Economic Cooperation

The current Chair and the Chairmanship period: Finland took over from Norway 26 October 2021

#### 1. Priorities of the Chairmanship

Due to the continued travel restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, plans to hold physical meetings during the Norwegian Chairmanship period have been replaced with digital interaction. The working groups has managed to keep the constructive Barents dialogue. The priorities of the Norwegian Chairmanship continued to be to meet and remain active in information-sharing throughout the Chairmanship period. In particular, the WG went through the merger process with the Regional Working Group on Investments and Economic Cooperation, based on the decision made by the BEAC CSO. Similar process has been initiated and carried through in the sectors of the Environment and Transport. The proposed name for the Working Group following the merger process is Working Group on Business Cooperation.

#### 2. Meetings (meetings held, main topics and outcomes of the meetings)

In 2021 the group held one Working Group meeting digitally in February and the chairs attended a joint meeting with other WG chairs on the merger of the WGs held in June. In addition, the Chairs and other members of the WGEC and RWGIEC took part in several meetings with the CSO, the Regional Committee and attended several thematic webinars, organized by the Norwegian and Västerbotten chairmanships.

#### 3. Other activities (projects, events, programmes etc.)

The BEAC WGEC continued to gather feedback for a potential report on the entrepreneurship ecosystems in the Barents region. We received good input on the proposal, but we decided to

not move forward with the report The reason for this being that there are many reports and initiatives in the Barents region, and we do not want to just replicate other initiatives (one to mention, the Business Index North).

In March, the Norwegian-Russian Chamber of Commerce (NRCC) organized digitally event “Networking Arena Murmansk” on perspective of business cooperation with Russia.

In October, the Norwegian Barents Secretariat in cooperation with the Norwegian-Russian Chamber of Commerce organized a Business Breakfast in Kirkenes for the local companies interested in finding partners in Russia. The meeting gathered several participants, who showed their interest in services, events and projects provided by the NBS and the NRCC.

In the end of the Norwegian Chairmanship on 20-21 October the Working Group on Barents Forest Sector, which used to be a sub-group of the WGEC until February 2021, successfully organized biennial Barents Forest Forum in a format of a webinar.

#### 4. Results of the year (decisions, new initiatives, improvements)

The main outcome for the WGEC in 2021 was go through and finalize the process together with the Regional Working Group on Investments and Economic Cooperation to merge the groups. This process was initiated by the CSO aiming at improved cooperation between the national and the regional level. Both national and regional working groups reached an overall agreement, based on discussions at a joint meeting of the chairs of the Working Groups.

#### 5. Youth involvement (how has the working group included young people or worked with youth issues during the year)

The Norwegian Barents Secretariat in cooperation with Sør-Varanger Utvikling among other events organized in November ICE (Innovate Cool Experiences) Hybrid Release Party to boost innovation and entrepreneurship in the Barents region. The event targeted young entrepreneurs and took place in a hybrid format at five locations: Kirkenes, Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, Rovaniemi and Luleå.

#### 6. Evaluation of the work (What went well, what needs improvement)

The digital meetings seem to work smoothly, providing an opportunity for a wider participation in the Working Groups activities. In terms of challenges, we still consider it challenging to have a continued dialogue within the group outside of the meetings, only using digital platforms. The groups will continue to find common ground and interesting topics for the meetings during the Finnish Presidency. The proposed priorities are within the sector of circular economy and extended cooperation with other Working Groups for instance in sustainable tourism.

#### 7. Other