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Nordlánda Stáhtaháldadiddje*

Report

# Mapping of Cross-border Cooperation in the High North

The report provides an overview of the scope and characteristics of cross-border cooperation between Northern Norway, Northern Sweden, and Northern Finland.



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<b>Summary</b>	<p>This report provides a comprehensive mapping of cross-border cooperation in the High North, focusing on Northern Norway, Northern Sweden, and Northern Finland. The study examines how regional and transnational collaboration addresses shared challenges such as harsh climate, long distances, sparse populations, and increasing strategic importance following Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO. Cooperation initiatives are sorted according to NATO's seven baseline requirements for societal resilience, covering governance, energy, movement of people, food and water, health crises, communication systems, and transport. The report highlights a wide range of frameworks and projects, from overarching Nordic and EU agreements to operational partnerships at the local level. While activities support all baseline requirements, the study identifies potential for improved coordination, integration, and strategic vision. Key recommendations include harmonizing security regulations, linking industrial policy to resilience goals, and leveraging new EU directives for enhanced cross-border preparedness. The findings serve as a knowledge base for future joint risk and vulnerability analyses in the High North.</p>

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## Introduction

The northern regions of Norway, Sweden, and Finland share common challenges that make cross-border cooperation both necessary and strategically important. Often referred to as the “High North,” these areas are characterized by sparse populations, harsh climate, and long distances. This creates demanding conditions for public services, infrastructure, and economic development. In addition, the regions face demographic changes such as outmigration and an ageing population, while there is a need to attract and retain young, qualified workers. Globalization and climate change further increase pressure on natural resources and drive the need for sustainable transition.

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From a security perspective, the High North has gained increased strategic importance, particularly following Sweden and Finland’s accession to NATO. This reinforces the need for joint investments in infrastructure and strengthened preparedness.

The purpose of this report is to map cooperation initiatives related to NATO’s seven baseline requirements and host nation support in Northern Norway, Northern Sweden, and Northern Finland (referred to in the report as the High North). The report is organized according to these requirements for national resilience and offers an overview of existing cooperation at regional and local levels. The goal is to establish a knowledge base for developing a joint risk analysis for the High North.

## 1 Background

Northern Norway is vital for the security of Norway and Europe. The greatest direct threat stems from its proximity to Russia. On the Russian side of the border, only a few dozen kilometers away, lies the Kola Peninsula, home to the world's highest concentration of nuclear weapons. A significant part of the power base that enables Russia's behavior on the international stage is therefore located just miles from Norway. This makes Northern Norway strategically important, and as a result, it has been a priority area for NATO since the Alliance was established in 1949.

Military operations in Northern Norway have always been demanding. The region is extensive, the climate harsh, the terrain challenging, and population density low. Infrastructure is limited, distances between towns and population centers are great, and communication options are restricted. These factors create vulnerabilities not only for defense but also for society and business.

Just as Northern Norway has long been crucial for Norwegian and allied security, the broader High North has become equally important following Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO in 2023 and 2024. With two new member states, the Alliance is stronger, the border towards Russia in the north is significantly longer, and the number of vulnerabilities has increased. Northern Sweden and Northern Finland share many of the same characteristics as Northern Norway. This means that the High North can approach risk management collectively. Joint efforts will foster shared understanding and enable coordinated action to reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen resilience. Greater resilience reduces the consequences of various incidents - from natural disasters and hybrid threats to armed conflict and war. For small states, key security instruments include cooperation and the mobilization and coordination of all available resources to achieve maximum robustness against larger and stronger powers and unpredictable threats. A resilient society is also better able to support military activity, allied presence, and operations.

### **NATO's seven baseline requirements**

NATO has defined seven baseline requirements for societal functionality in member states. These requirements address governance, population protection, and secure access to critical goods and services. The aim is to ensure sufficient resilience so that societies do not become an additional burden during defense efforts but instead are able to provide the necessary support to the military activity. Systematic work to meet these seven requirements is a useful tool for achieving necessary societal robustness.

### **The invasion of Ukraine**

Russia's unlawful invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 underscored the seriousness of today's security environment. Europe, the United States, and other major powers' reactions to the invasion, along with subsequent political developments, have placed Norway and the Nordic region in a more unpredictable situation. Europe was not adequately prepared for the consequences of the invasion. Overall preparedness was too low, societies were unprepared, and vulnerabilities too numerous and significant. The role of the United States after the outbreak of war has raised significant concerns for Europe and NATO's European members. It is legitimate to question the reliability of security guarantees as historically understood. It is also legitimate to be concerned about the future of a world order grounded in values and rules, an order on which small states depend. If global norms and rules are gradually replaced by power politics, large states grow stronger while small states grow weaker. Cooperation among small states therefore becomes even more critical. This development also underscores the urgency of implementing measures to reduce vulnerabilities and prepare for a complex and demanding threat landscape.

### **Climate challenges**

While proximity to Russia represents the most direct threat to the High North, the region faces additional challenges. Climate change is expected to have significant impacts in northern areas. Global warming is reducing ice cover, gradually increasing access to previously inaccessible land and

sea areas in the Arctic. The environment in this harsh climate is fragile. The High North lies largely within the Arctic region and will be affected by all developments there. Global attention toward the Arctic is growing, including from non-Arctic states. There are many reasons for this. Russia is the largest Arctic state and hosts several strategic military assets in the region. The Arctic likely contains untapped natural resources, including rare earth minerals that are essential for the green transition and the development of future advanced technologies. Technological progress is making resource exploitation increasingly feasible. The region also holds rich marine resources. While these are managed sustainably, many lie in internationally regulated waters and are under pressure. The Arctic may eventually offer shorter shipping routes between major global markets. All of this increases global interest in the Arctic and its strategic importance. The High North will be similarly affected. This complex backdrop means that threats to the region are growing, diverse, and interconnected.

### **Common vulnerabilities call for cross-border cooperation**

A vulnerability and risk analysis is essential for targeted and systematic security efforts to reduce risk. Traditionally, risk is described as a product of probability multiplied by consequence. Unacceptable risk may therefore result from high likelihood even if consequences are moderate, or from severe consequences even if likelihood is low. Increased attention to the High North, whether for security, environmental, or resource reasons, raises the probability of unwanted events. This means risk in the High North has also increased. Identifying the most critical vulnerabilities and implementing necessary measures is therefore crucial in order to reduce consequences and mitigate this heightened risk. Greater robustness means lower risk. Greater robustness is also necessary to face an uncertain and unpredictable future. Reduced vulnerabilities equal increased resilience.

Cross-border cooperation in the Nordic region has long been close and effective, both in civilian and military contexts. This work has intensified following Russia's war against Ukraine and Finland and Sweden's NATO membership. On the military side, armed conflict remains the defining scenario. It is therefore necessary that such a scenario also informs civilian vulnerability and risk assessments. The resource-rich yet fragile environment requires severe climate and environmental events to also be considered in future analyses.

For three small states with limited resources, coordinating this work is essential to achieve maximum effect with minimal resource use. Establishing a shared overview and understanding of previous analyses, ongoing efforts, and existing structures is critical for efficient progress. Equally important is identifying knowledge gaps within societal security and preparedness in the High North. This report therefore provides an overview of these topics to establish a solid knowledge base as a foundation for developing a joint risk and vulnerability analysis for the High North.

## **1.1 Scope and limitations**

This report is part of a study commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and delivered by KPMG on behalf of the County Governor of Troms and Finnmark and County Governor of Nordland. The purpose of the assignment is to provide an overview of cross-border cooperation initiatives in the High North, focusing on Norway, Sweden, and Finland. The study aims to establish a knowledge base that will serve as input to a joint risk and vulnerability analysis planned for 2026-2028, funded by EU under the Interreg Aurora portfolio.

The scope of this report is limited. It does not constitute a full risk and vulnerability analysis but rather a preparatory mapping exercise. The time frame for completion has been short, which has naturally imposed constraints on data collection and the number of stakeholders KPMG have been able to engage with. KPMG's primary focus has been on public-sector actors, which means that cooperation involving private enterprises may appear underrepresented. The findings in this study are based on open sources, and given the nature of the topic, it is reasonable to assume that some information is not publicly available.

The report emphasizes collaborations within the three countries: Norway, Sweden and Finland. While some initiatives include additional countries or broader networks, time constraints have prevented comprehensive mapping of all such partnerships. The findings should therefore be understood as a foundation for further work rather than an exhaustive overview.

## 1.2 Structure of the report

This report is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the background and context of the report, as well as the structure and categorization of cooperation applied in the mapping. Chapter 2 outlines the methodological choices made during the mapping process. Chapter 3 presents the transnational cooperation initiatives identified, while Chapter 4 provides an overview of transregional cooperation structured according to NATO's seven baseline requirements. Finally, Chapters 5 and 6 discuss and analyze the findings from the mapping and explore areas where further cross-border cooperation between Northern Norway, Northern Sweden, and Northern Finland may be required.

## 1.3 Categorization of cooperation

This report distinguishes between two main types of cooperation:

**Nordic and national cooperation:** These are overarching strategic frameworks and initiatives that apply to the entire Nordic region or an entire country. Examples include Nordic Cooperation, the Barents Cooperation, and the Arctic Council. Such frameworks often have broad thematic and geographic coverage and set guidelines for policy, funding, and collaboration across sectors and regions. They are not necessarily linked to a single NATO baseline requirement but may support several requirements simultaneously. These forms of cooperation are reviewed at an overarching level in chapter 3.

**High North-specific cooperation:** These are initiatives, projects, and collaborative structures directly targeting the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, and Finland. They typically have a more operational or regional focus and are often established to address specific challenges in the High North, such as long distances, sparse populations, harsh climate, and the need for cross-border preparedness. These collaborations are structured according to NATO's seven baseline requirements in chapter 4 of this report and assessed based on how they contribute to strengthening societal security in the region.

## 2 Methodology

This mapping is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The chosen approach was selected because it allows for the collection of information from multiple sources and enables the research question to be examined from different perspectives.

Throughout the project, a core group consisting of representatives from the County Governor of Troms and Finnmark, County Governor of Nordland as well as the County Administrative Board in Sweden (Norrbotten and Västerbotten), and the Regional State Administrative Agency in Finland (Northern Finland and Lapland), has supported the data collection process and served as the project's professional advisory group. KPMG have observed that NATO requirements are subject to varying interpretations across countries and, in certain cases, are ascribed different meanings. To ensure conceptual consistency, this report applies NATO's official definitions and descriptions of these requirements<sup>1</sup>.

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### 2.1 Questionnaire survey

A survey was developed in Microsoft Forms (see Appendix 2: Questionnaire Survey) and distributed to selected stakeholders in the Northern Nordic region (see Appendix 2: Respondents). In total, 117 respondents completed the survey. The purpose of the survey was to map cross-border cooperation between Northern Norway, Sweden, and Finland. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed-ended questions to capture an overall picture as well as detailed insights. The selection of recipient organizations was carried out by contact persons in Northern Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

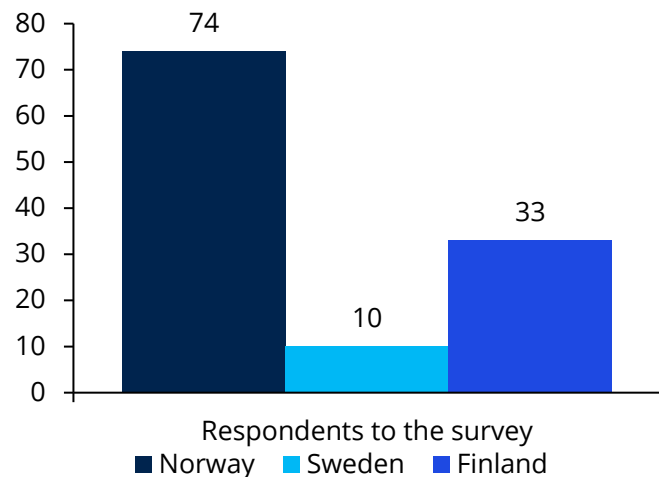


Figure 1 Number of respondents from each country.

### 2.2 Document Analysis

In addition to the survey, a review of existing documents and open sources was conducted. The documents reviewed were obtained from publicly available online sources, and KPMG also received documents, including risk assessments, via email from stakeholders in the North Nordic region. This component of the methodology aimed to identify current and previous collaborations, strategies, and frameworks relevant to the topic.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nato.int/en/what-we-do/deterrence-and-defence/resilience-civil-preparedness-and-article-3>

## 2.3 Interviews

To elaborate on the findings from the survey and document analysis, a total of 19 interviews were conducted with key informants. The purpose of these interviews was to gain deeper insights into cross-border cooperation and to identify areas where respondents perceive a need for further collaboration. The selection of informants was carried out by contact persons in Northern Norway, Sweden, and Finland in dialogue with the project team from KPMG to ensure the inclusion of individuals with relevant knowledge and expertise on the topic (see Appendix 3: Interview Participants).

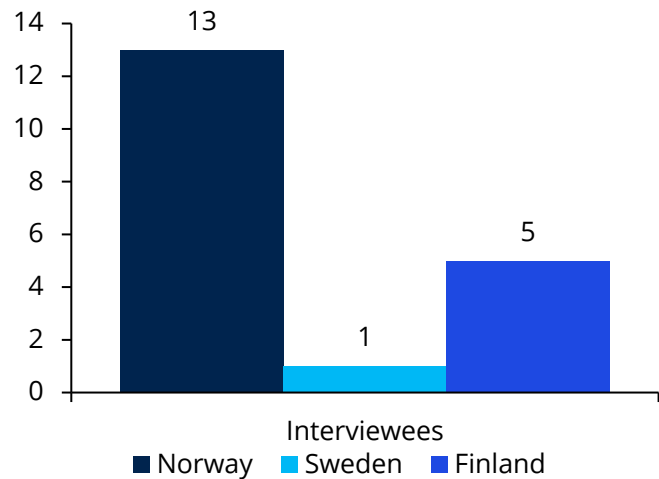


Figure 2 Interviewees from each country

## 2.4 Potential Limitations of the Data

The survey was distributed to organizations in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, with more than 60% of responses coming from Norwegian participants. This indicates a skewed data set, with fewer responses from Sweden and Finland. However, as the purpose was to examine cross-border cooperation, it is assessed that national affiliation does not necessarily influence all responses, particularly those related to identifying existing collaborations. Conversely, it may have an impact on questions asking respondents to identify areas where further cooperation is needed, as local conditions could play a role.

Interviews were primarily conducted with Norwegian and Finnish informants, and only one interview has been carried out with respondents from Sweden. Norway is also represented significantly more than Finland in the interviews. This represents the same limitation as the questionnaire, and a more balanced sample would have strengthened the study.

The document analysis provided context and a comprehensive overview of previous and existing collaborations. This work relied largely on open sources, supplemented by a few documents provided by regional stakeholders. Despite identifying numerous relevant initiatives, there is always a risk that some have not been captured.

Furthermore, the data collection is limited to information that is publically available and not under any distribution restrictions. There may exist significant information that has not been available to this study due to distribution restrictions due to security concerns.

A key strength of the methodology is that the combination of survey, document review, and interviews has produced a broad and holistic understanding of the topic. The mapping has offered both breadth and depth, and the interviews have further elaborated on the findings from the survey and document analysis.

### 3 Transnational strategic cooperations

This chapter provides an overview of key political and legal frameworks that form the foundation for cooperation between Norway, Sweden, and Finland. These arrangements do not directly target operational measures in the High North, but they are essential for understanding the context and prerequisites for transnational collaboration. They establish common rules, political commitment, and institutional mechanisms that enable the development of more concrete projects and initiatives in the northern regions.

Examples include Nordic cooperation, agreements under the Arctic Council, the Huga Declaration, the Helsinki Treaty, Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO), and NORDRED. These frameworks have a broad scope, covering areas such as defense cooperation, crisis preparedness, environmental protection, and transport. While they are not specifically designed for the High North, they play a significant role in how the countries coordinate resources and responses during emergencies.

The purpose of this chapter is therefore to illustrate how these overarching structures provide a foundation for the more operational collaborations presented in Chapter 4. At the same time, they offer insight into the political and institutional architecture underpinning a comprehensive Nordic resilience system.

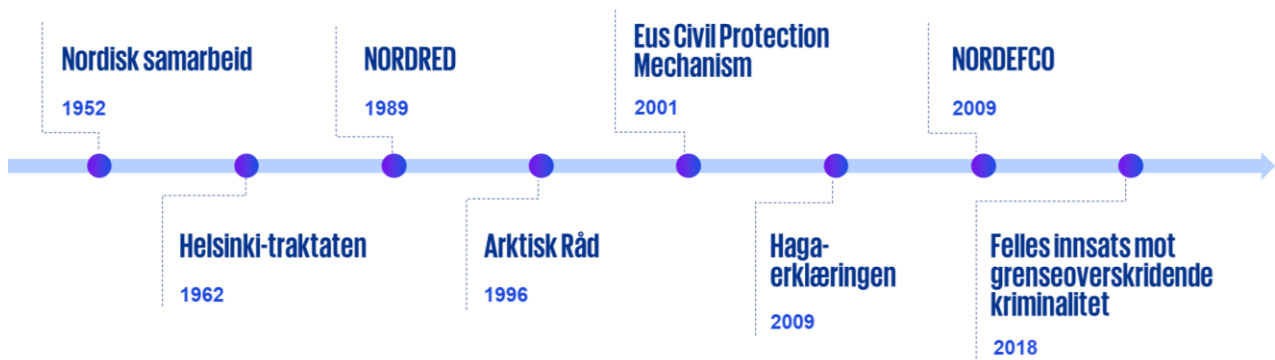


Figure 3 Timeline of transnational strategic cooperations

#### 3.1 Arctic Council

The Arctic Council, established in 1996, is the principal intergovernmental forum for promoting cooperation, coordination, and interaction among Arctic States, Indigenous Peoples, and other inhabitants of the region. Its mandate focuses on addressing shared challenges in the Arctic, particularly sustainable development and environmental protection. The chairmanship of the Council rotates biennially among the eight Arctic States: Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Russia, the United States, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. There have been no ministerial-level meetings since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022; however, technical cooperation within the Council continues<sup>2</sup>.

#### 3.2 EU civil Protection Mechanism

The EU Civil Protection Mechanism, established by the European Commission in 2001, is a collaborative framework designed to strengthen disaster prevention, preparedness, and response among EU Member States and ten additional participating countries, including Norway. The Mechanism enables any country affected by a disaster, within or beyond Europe, to request emergency assistance, which is coordinated by the European Commission. Resources such as rescue teams, medical units, and satellite mapping are mobilized rapidly through the Emergency Response

<sup>2</sup> <https://arctic-council.org/about/>

Coordination Centre (ERCC), ensuring a unified and efficient cross-border response. Since its inception, the Mechanism has been activated more than 820 times.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.3 Judicial and Police Cooperation

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden maintain close cooperation on judicial and police matters, particularly in combating serious crime and developing new criminal provisions. Through the Standing Committee on Legislative Cooperation, experiences are exchanged and joint projects initiated. In 2018, the Nordic Ministers of Justice signed a declaration of intent to strengthen police cooperation, focusing on crime prevention, cross-border patrols, and immediate operational assistance<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, Norway and Sweden have concluded a bilateral agreement on mutual support between special intervention units in crisis situations such as terrorism, hostage-taking, and hijacking<sup>5</sup>.

### 3.4 Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO)

NORDEFECO comprises Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland. Its purpose is to strengthen national defence capabilities, leverage shared synergies, and develop cost-effective solutions<sup>6</sup>. The political level is headed by the Ministers of Defence, who convene twice a year. The cooperation is organized into five areas: capability development, armaments procurement, personnel and education, training and exercises, and operations. These areas facilitate the coordination of capabilities, joint procurement, harmonization of military education, alignment of exercise schedules, and strengthened operational collaboration. The framework is anchored in "Vision 2025", which emphasizes the ambition to cooperate during peacetime, crises, and conflicts<sup>7</sup>.

### 3.5 Nordic Cooperation

Established in 1952, the Nordic cooperation is a multilateral framework involving Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, as well as the autonomous territories of the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and Åland. The Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers are two separate yet closely related bodies that work together to advance the vision of making the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world<sup>8</sup>.

**The Nordic Council** is the official cooperative body between the parliaments of the Nordic countries. The Council consists of 87 elected members from the member states<sup>9</sup>. The Nordic Council is also known for awarding five annual prizes that promote Nordic achievements: one each in literature, music, the environment, film, and children's and young people's literature.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism\\_en](https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/what/civil-protection/eu-civil-protection-mechanism_en)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-23-20182019/id2641580/?ch=3>

<sup>5</sup> <https://lovdata.no/dokument/TRAKTAT/traktat/2018-09-04-16>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fma.no/forsvarsanskaffelser/materiell%20og%20industrisamarbeid/Nordisk%20samarbeid>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nordefco.org/the-basics-about-nordefco>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.stortinget.no/Representanter-og-komiteer/Internasjonalt-arbeid/Nordisk-Rad/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.norden.org/no/nordisk-rad>

**The Nordic Council of Ministers** is the official cooperative body of the Nordic governments. The Council convenes several times a year, with an annual session serving as its largest event. Ten Nordic cross-border regional cooperation organizations are affiliated with the Nordic Council of Ministers<sup>10</sup>. The following aspects are of relevance to this report:

Project	cf. chap.	Norway	Sweden	Finland
North Calotte Council	4.1			
Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA)	4.1			
Nordic Cross-Border Committees (CBC)	4.1			

**Info Norden** (cf. Chap. 4.6) is the Nordic Council of Ministers' information service for individuals who are moving, working, studying, or wish to start a business in the Nordic countries<sup>11</sup>.

### 3.6 NORDRED

NORDRED is a Nordic framework agreement between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden on rescue service cooperation<sup>12</sup>. The agreement facilitates mutual assistance during peacetime emergencies and ensures the rapid deployment of personnel and equipment. Competent authorities meet regularly to exchange information on organizational structures, legislation, and significant developments, and organize conferences every three years<sup>13</sup>.

### 3.7 The Helsinki Treaty

The Helsinki Treaty is a cooperation agreement between Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, committing the countries to preserve and further develop Nordic collaboration in legal, cultural, social, economic, transport, and environmental matters. Signed in 1962, the treaty formalized the work of the Nordic Council and laid the foundation for establishing the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1971. Often referred to as the "Constitution of the Nordic Region," it is commemorated annually on March 23<sup>14</sup>.

### 3.8 The Haga Declaration

The Haga Declaration of 2009<sup>15</sup> formalized Nordic cooperation on societal security and crisis preparedness, later deepened through Haga II and aligned with the Nordic Solidarity Declaration of 2013. Its purpose is to strengthen resilience through cross-border collaboration in areas such as rescue services and emergency communications. Between 2019 and 2021, the focus was on CBRNE, wildfires, and communications<sup>16</sup>. This cooperation operates at the ministerial level. The Haga III Declaration (2024) highlights a changing security environment, NATO membership of all Nordic states, and calls for an all-hazards approach with enhanced civil-military cooperation aligned with NATO and EU policies<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nfk.no/om-fylkeskommunen/internasjonalt-samarbeid/nordisk-samarbeid/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.norden.org/no/information/informasjontjenesten-info-norden>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1993382/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.nordred.org/sv/om-nordred/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/1962-03-23-2>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1993382/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.dsb.no/nodnett/om-nodnett/internasjonalt-samarbeid/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/jd/dokumenter/diverse/haga-declaration-2024.pdf>

## 4 Key findings

This chapter presents the key findings from the mapping of cross-border cooperation and initiatives in Northern Norway, Northern Sweden, and Northern Finland, structured in accordance with NATO's seven baseline requirements for security and preparedness. These seven requirements provide a common reference framework for assessing national and regional resilience and offer a clear basis for analysing how cross-border cooperation strengthens preparedness in the High North.

To ensure a logical structure, each cooperation initiative is placed under the baseline requirement to which it is most directly relevant (primary placement highlighted in grey in the table below). This means that each subsection (4.1–4.7) focuses on one of NATO's requirements and describes the initiatives that primarily address that area. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that many of these initiatives have broader impacts and contribute to the fulfilment of multiple requirements. For example, a project that enhances health preparedness may also influence communication and transport. To highlight this overlap, the chapter begins with an overview table showing how the identified initiatives align with the seven requirements.

Additionally, section 4.8 includes other areas of collaboration that do not fit directly under a single requirement but are still relevant for overall resilience.

Project	Government	Energy supply	Movement of people	Food and water	Health crises	Comm. Systems	Transport systems
Agreement Euro-Arctic Barents Region	✓		✓			✓	
Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF)			✓		✓		
Arctic Rail Organization							✓
BEAC	✓						
BRC	✓						
Barents Cooperation	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
Barents Road International Organization							✓
Biotech North				✓			
Blå Vägen Association (Midtskandia)							✓
ClimateFood				✓			
CoASal				✓			
Cod Cluster				✓			
EPPR					✓		
Fincold		✓					
ISI Project						✓	
Info Norden			✓			✓	
Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020				✓			✓
Local Hospital Collaborations					✓		
NAMCON						✓	✓
NAMRO			✓		✓		
NHAB					✓		
New North (Interreg Aurora)	✓						
Nordic Blood Preparedness Project					✓		
Nordic Grid Development 2025		✓					
Nordic Transport Preparedness Cooperation (NTPC)							✓
Nordic police cooperation agreement			✓				
Nordkalottens border service			✓				
North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum (NACGF)			✓		✓		
Norway-Sweden Border Service			✓			✓	
Norwegian-Finnish Transboundary Water Commission		✓		✓			
Platform North							✓
Port of Narvik & Ofoten Line							✓
Regional Water Management Collaboration		✓		✓			
Rescue Borealis			✓		✓		
Telenor Nordics						✓	
<b>Totalt antall</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>9</b>

**Table 1: Each cooperation initiative is placed under the baseline requirement to which it is most directly relevant (primary placement highlighted in grey).**

## 4.1 Continuity of government

NATO's first baseline requirement is established to ensure that national authorities maintain governance and decision-making capacity under all circumstances. This requires that key institutions, structures, and critical functions such as legislative bodies, the judiciary, and public administration are robust and adequately protected. The ability to make rapid and legitimate decisions is essential for preserving societal stability and public trust.

In the northern regions, this requirement becomes particularly demanding. Long distances, dispersed populations, and a climate that frequently challenges infrastructure and mobility create vulnerabilities that may undermine the ability to uphold legitimate and timely decision-making processes. In addition, demographic constraints and limited resources increase the risk that local institutions may lose capacity during a crisis.

Cross-border cooperation provides significant advantages in addressing these challenges. Harmonizing contingency plans, sharing best practices, and establishing common procedures can reduce the risk of fragmented governance and operational delays. Mutual support enables the preservation of critical functions even if one nation is severely affected. During a crisis, shared situational awareness and coordinated action are decisive for protecting the population and maintaining confidence in government. Continuity of governance is therefore not only a national responsibility but a regional necessity, and cooperation is essential for success.

### **Aurora Cross-border Coalition for Eastern Strategy and Solutions (ACCESS) (Interreg Aurora)**

A project involving Norway (East Finnmark) and Finland (Lapland and Northeast Finland). The project aims to strengthen cooperation and resilience in border areas in response to geopolitical changes following Russia's attack on Ukraine. It focuses on capacity-building for authorities and stakeholders, the development of joint strategies and action plans, as well as visibility and communication. The cooperation encompasses areas such as sustainable development, value chains, clean energy, natural resources, tourism, and supply security. It includes pilot initiatives that connect education, research and development, and business. The project will culminate in a border congress in Kuusamo with the adoption of a joint declaration<sup>18</sup>.

### **Barents Cooperation**

The Barents Cooperation was established in 1993 through the Kirkenes Declaration as a formalized partnership among the northern regions of Russia, Finland, Sweden, and Norway<sup>19</sup>. In 2023, Russia withdrew from the cooperation. Since then, the collaboration has continued among the remaining countries and today comprises the counties and regions that constitute the Barents Region<sup>20</sup>:

- Nordland, Troms and Finnmark in Norway
- Västerbottens län and Norrbottens län in Sweden
- Lapland, Norra Österbotten, Norra Karelen and Kajanaland in Finland

Finland has decided to withdraw from the Barents Council after 2025 to focus on alternative cooperation frameworks in the North.

The Barents cooperation operates at two political tiers: the intergovernmental tier, represented by the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, and the interregional tier, represented by the Barents Regional Council.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.interregaurora.eu/approved-projects/access/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1993382/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <https://folkogforsvar.no/leksikon/barentsregionen/>

### The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC)

constitutes the highest political level within the Barents cooperation framework<sup>21</sup>, comprising the foreign ministers of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, along with the European Commission, the Council focuses on political cooperation and dialogue aimed at promoting sustainable development, environmental protection, and other strategic priorities in the Barents region. BEAC sets the overall direction of the cooperation and initiates political decisions.

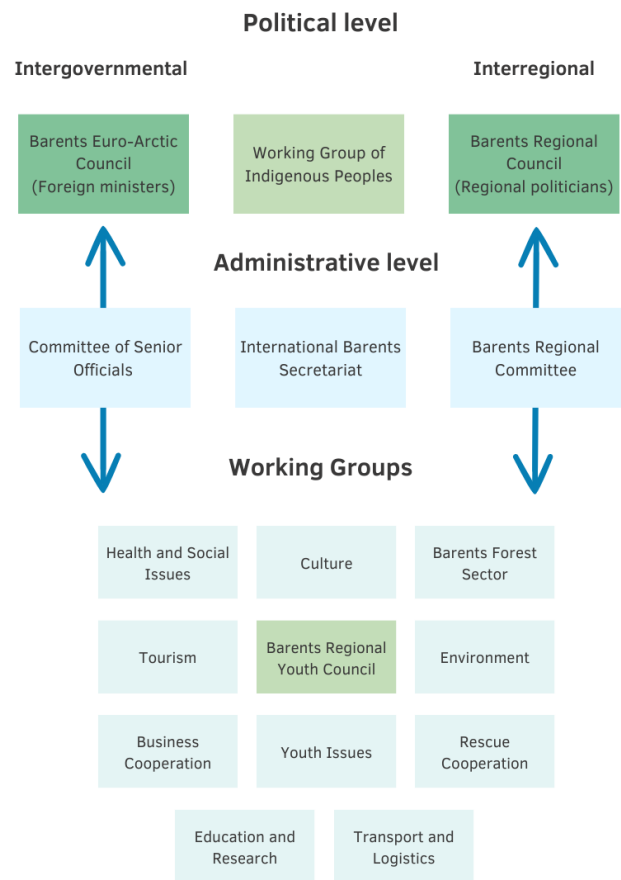
The governments of Finland, Norway, and Sweden have concluded an agreement establishing cross-border cooperation in prevention, preparedness, and response to crisis situations in the Euro-Arctic Barents Region. The agreement emphasizes on early warning, efficient communication, and joint exercises to strengthen the capability to provide mutual assistance. Furthermore, the parties commit to developing measures and methodologies that enhance the effectiveness of international collaboration in crisis management<sup>22</sup>.

**The Barents Regional Council (BRC)** operates at a regional level and comprises representatives from regional authorities in the northern areas of Norway, Sweden, Finland. The Council focuses on direct regional cooperation, aiming to promote economic development, cultural exchange, environmental protection, and infrastructure projects. BRC provides local authorities with a platform to collaborate on issues and development initiatives that directly affect their communities. Most of the practical work within the Barents cooperation takes place in the working groups, and a key responsibility of the leadership is to support and stimulate these activities<sup>23</sup>.

**The International Barents Secretariat (IBS)** was therefore established in 2008. The Secretariat follows up on the work carried out by the working groups under the Barents Council and the Barents Regional Council, and reports on activities during meetings of the two bodies.

**The Norwegian Barents Secretariat** has had a primary focus on bilateral cooperation between Norway and Russia, while also supporting regional initiatives involving Norwegian stakeholders. In 2023, the mandate changed and now focuses on supporting cooperation between the High North region in Norway, Sweden and Finland while at the same time maintaining a link to Russia through stimulating people-to-people exchange and initiatives. The Secretariat provides administrative support and project funding, serving as an important resource for Norwegian regions participating in the BRC.

## Barents Cooperation



**Figure 4: Organization of the Cooperation (barents-council.org)**

<sup>21</sup> <https://barents-council.org/about-us/organisational-chart>

<sup>22</sup> [https://barents-council.org/document/Agreement\\_Emergency\\_Prevention\\_Preparedness\\_and\\_Response\\_Norwegian.pdf](https://barents-council.org/document/Agreement_Emergency_Prevention_Preparedness_and_Response_Norwegian.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.ffk.no/tjenester/internasjonalt/barentssamarbeid/#faqsporsmal-301>

### High North Cooperation

High North Cooperation encompasses the northernmost regions of Norway, Sweden, and Finland. The target group for the project’s activities includes key actors in emergency preparedness, such as municipalities, agencies, and voluntary organizations. The cooperation focuses on societal security and preparedness, emphasizing mutual learning, exchange of experiences, and the establishment of contact points among preparedness stakeholders, including health authorities, rescue services, defence, police, and voluntary organizations. High North Cooperation is based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), most recently updated in 2024. The initiative facilitates increased cross-border contact and network-building<sup>24</sup>.



Figure 5: High North Cooperation

Projects	Norway	Sweden	Finland
High North Civil Preparedness Forum <sup>25</sup>			
A three-year EU-funded initiative focusing on training and networking, host nation support, joint risk assessment, and the management of information influence. The project will conclude with an action plan in 2028.			
Governors North			
Forum for Leaders of the State Administration in the Northernmost Regions of Norway, Sweden, and Finland <sup>26</sup> .			

<sup>24</sup> [https://www.highnorthcooperation.com/about\\_hnc/](https://www.highnorthcooperation.com/about_hnc/)

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.highnorthcooperation.com/high-north-civil-preparedness-forum-hncpf/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.statsforvalteren.no/nb/Nordland/Nyheter/2025/06/styrker-beredskapssamarbeidet-i-nord/>

## Interreg Aurora

Interreg Aurora is part of the European Union's Interreg initiative, focusing on cross-border collaboration from 2021 to 2027. This program provides significant opportunities for fostering innovative partnerships across the northernmost regions of Europe and Sápmi, to strengthen the competitiveness, sustainability and attractiveness of the program area<sup>27</sup>.



Figure 6: Areas involved in Interreg Aurora

Relevant projects funded by Interreg Aurora	cf. chap.	Norway	Sweden	Finland
ACCESS	4.1			
ClimateFood	4.4			
High North Civil Preparedness forum	4.1			
New North	4.7			
Nordic Bridge	4.8			
Nordic Health Data Spaces	4.5			
Resilient Botnia	4.1			
Stay In North	4.8			

## North Calotte Council (Nordic Cooperation)

The North Calotte Council has existed for 50 years and comprises representatives from government authorities and the business sector in the northernmost regions of Norway (Finnmark, Troms, Nordland), Sweden (Norrbotten), and Finland (Lapland). The cooperation focuses on regional development, societal security, and emergency preparedness, emphasizing the alignment of local efforts with the EU's objectives to reduce economic and social disparities between regions. The Council works to improve adaptation to EU strategic priorities, foster local community engagement, build capacity, and strengthen long-term competitiveness through innovation and partnerships. The collaboration is organized as a council that promotes common positions towards national and EU stakeholders<sup>28</sup>.

## Nordkalotten Border Service

The Nordkalotten Border Service works to facilitate cross-border activities for individuals, businesses, organizations, and public authorities. Its efforts aim to increase mobility between Norway, Sweden, and Finland. This includes providing guidance and information to individuals seeking to study across national borders, as well as ensuring easy access to essential resources such as application forms, visa procedures, and housing information. The primary objective is to facilitate a seamless relocation process for individuals moving to another country. Furthermore, the Nordkalotten Border Service serves as an intermediary between authorities and institutions by fostering interpersonal connections and promoting cross-border cooperation<sup>29</sup>.

## Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA)

Through the NSPA, political leadership from 13 regions in Northern Norway, Northern Sweden, and Northern Finland convenes. The cooperation is organized through established political and administrative bodies and focuses on promoting regional development, strengthening influence on

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.interregaurora.eu/wp-content/uploads/NEW-GET-TO-KNOW-INTERREG-AURORA.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.ffk.no/f/p1/i40d16db0-ea0d-4758-8019-d3a80e9d860b/statement-cohesion-policy-north-calotte-council-24062025.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.nfr.no/post/sterkt-samarbeid-mellom-norge-sverige-og-finland>

EU policy, and creating a platform for the exchange of experience. The network consists of a steering committee composed of political leaders and a coordination group representing three EU offices in Brussels. For the 2023-2025 period, the network is chaired by East and North Finland<sup>30</sup>.

**Nordic Cross-Border Committees (CBC)**

Cross-border cooperation in the Nordic countries relies on 12 cross-border committees (CBCs), which work in the border areas between Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway. The CBCs are membership organizations that bring together local and regional actors to work on integration across national borders<sup>31</sup>. The following paragraphs will introduce the few relevant for this study.

**Bothnian Arc**

Bothnian Arc strives to promote co-operation between Finland and Sweden along the Bothnian Bay coastal line. The association enhances sustainable and borderless development with respect to regional diversity. The annual meeting is the highest authority of the Bothnian Arc and is held once a year in Sweden and Finland respectively. The Bothnian Arc is funded by The Nordic Council of Ministers<sup>32</sup>.

**Kvarken Council**

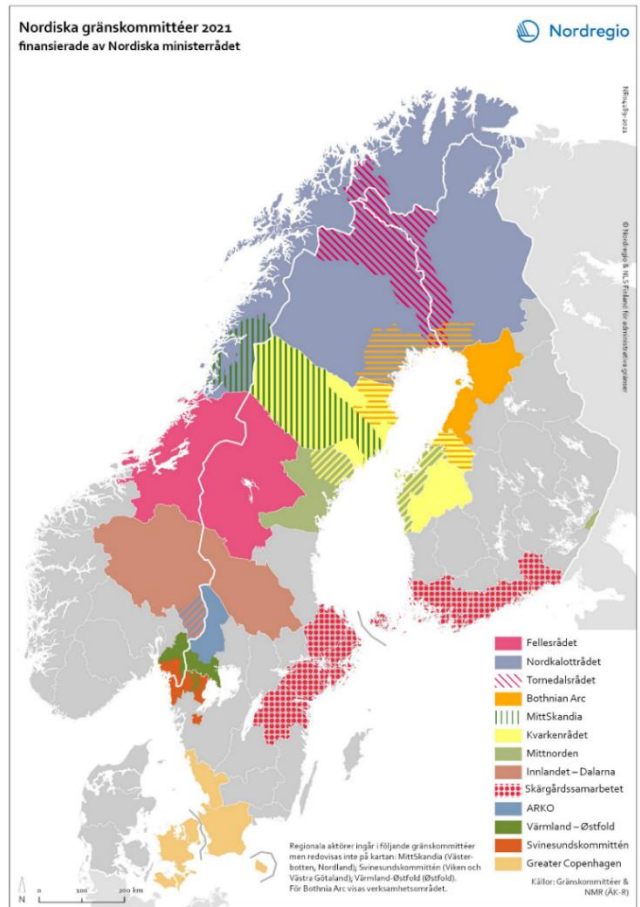
The Kvarken Council was founded in 1972 and strives to promote and develop a strong and viable region with the help of cross-border cooperation. The Kvarken Council is funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers<sup>33</sup>.

**The Torndedals Council**

The Torndedals Council is a cross-border cooperation and advocacy organization for municipalities in Norway, Sweden, and Finland. The Council receives most of its funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers<sup>34</sup>. The organization focuses on infrastructure development, strengthening business sector competencies, cultural and tourism collaboration, and educational initiatives, including minority languages. These efforts are supported by a council, a board, a secretariat, and cross-border working groups aligned with these thematic areas. The work of the Torndedals Council is carried out through these permanent bodies and working groups<sup>35</sup>.

**Midtskandia**

Midtskandia encompasses Norway and Sweden and works to remove border obstacles between Nordland and Västerbotten. The cooperation focuses on cross-border development, including business, transport, infrastructure, and culture. The organization identifies and reports border



**Figure 7: Nordic Cross-Border Committees**

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.nspa-network.eu/about-us/>

<sup>31</sup> <https://nordregio.org/maps/nordic-cross-border-co-operation-committees-2021/>

<sup>32</sup> <https://bothnianarc.eu/about-us>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.kvarken.org/en/the-kvarken-council/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.tromsfylke.no/tjenester/internasjonalt/tornedalsradet/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://tornedalen.org/sv/edunvalvonta/>

obstacles to the Nordic Council of Ministers and implements cross-border development projects to establish joint solutions<sup>36</sup>. Midtskandia has two strategic priorities: (1) advancing cross-border development initiatives and (2) improving east-west transport and logistics solutions<sup>37</sup>.

### **Resilient Botnia**

The Interreg Aurora funded Resilient Botnia project seeks to enhance crisis preparedness in the Botnia region, covering areas in northern Sweden and western Finland. By assessing current systems, pinpointing structural deficiencies, and gathering best practices, the initiative aims to bolster and unify emergency readiness across borders. This collaborative effort between Region Västerbotten in Sweden and Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences in Finland focuses on strengthening the region's resilience to future challenges. Key outcomes include a comparative analysis of preparedness systems, stakeholder engagement activities, and a joint Resilience Report outlining recommendations and a roadmap for future collaboration and investments<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> <https://midtskandia.org/om-midtskandia/>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.midtskandia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/midtskandia-faktaark-20140424.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.interregaurora.eu/approved-projects/resilient-botnia/>

## 4.2 Resilient energy supply

Energy is a fundamental prerequisite for the functioning of society. NATO requires member states to maintain systems that ensure a stable supply of electricity, fuel, and heating. This is not merely a matter of comfort, but of life and health. Without energy, hospitals, transportation, communications, and critical services come to a halt.

In the north, energy supply is particularly vulnerable. Long transport routes, challenging topography, and a harsh climate make infrastructure susceptible to disruptions. Redundancy is limited, and extreme weather conditions can amplify the risk. Collaboration in material sharing and deployment of essential resources are areas where cooperation can strengthen energy supply. In a crisis, cooperation can mean keeping the power running - not only for households but for critical societal functions.

Energy supply in the High North is therefore a shared responsibility, and collaboration is essential to success. Through joint efforts in these areas, necessary equipment and expertise can be ensured to be available when needed, thereby contributing to maintaining the stability of energy supply.

### Fincold

Fincold is a Nordic collaboration between dam owners and dam engineering experts in Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland. The cooperation focuses on dam safety and emergency preparedness and is organized through two forums: one for watercourse dams and another for mine tailings dams.

### Nordic Grid Development Perspective 2025

The cooperation involves Norway, Sweden, and Finland through Statnett, Svenska kraftnät, and Fingrid, as well as Energinet in Denmark. Its purpose is to develop a robust Nordic transmission network to ensure security of supply and efficient operations. Key focus areas include grid development, upgrading interconnections, integrating renewable energy, and maintaining system stability.

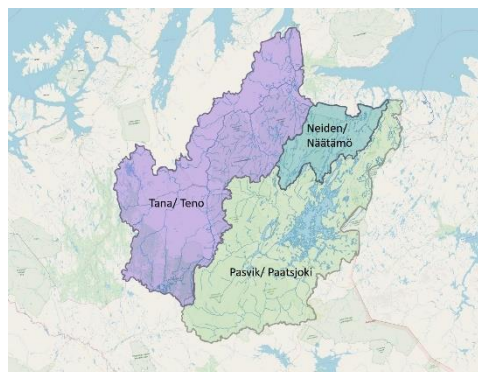
Studies are currently underway regarding reinforcements between Norway and Sweden, alongside collaboration with Finland and Denmark.

The work is carried out through joint analyses and reports, and the project serves as a framework for coordinating measures<sup>39</sup>.

### Norwegian – Finnish Transboundary Watercourse Commission

Established in 1980 to coordinate interests and measures in transboundary watercourses between Norway and Finland, the Commission provides recommendations on environmental status, water quality, and watershed construction, and may initiate joint projects such as multipurpose plans and monitoring programs<sup>40</sup>.

The main watercourses shared by Norway and Finland are the Tana, Neiden, and Pasvik watercourses. The Pasvik watercourse is also shared with Russia<sup>41</sup>.



**Figure 8: Norwegian-Finnish Transboundary Water Commission**

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.statnett.no/for-aktorer-i-kraftbransjen/nyhetsarkiv/felles-rapport-om-utviklingen-av-det-nordiske-kraftsystemet/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://prosjekt.statsforvalteren.no/nb/GVK/den-norsk-finske-grensevassdragskomisjon/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://prosjekt.statsforvalteren.no/nb/GVK/>

### 4.3 Ability to deal effectively with uncontrolled movement of people

This requirement addresses the management of large and unforeseen movements of people resulting from war, natural disasters, or other crises. In the High North, migration flows can develop rapidly, and challenges are intensified by long borders, limited crossing points, small local communities, and dispersed infrastructure.

Effective cooperation facilitates the development of common procedures, resource sharing, and coordinated responses. Joint planning and exercises reduce the risk of disorder and criminal activity while safeguarding humanitarian principles. In a context where geopolitical tensions and climate change may trigger sudden migration flows, collaboration is not only desirable but essential for maintaining stability and security in the region.

#### **Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF)**

ACGF is an operational organization that promotes safe, secure, and environmentally responsible maritime activity in the Arctic. Its members include all Arctic states, and the chairmanship rotates every two years in alignment with the Arctic Council. The organization maintains working groups dedicated to developing joint solutions and facilitating information sharing<sup>42</sup>.

#### **Nordkalotten border service**

Nordkalotten border Service aims to facilitate cross-border activities for individuals, businesses, organizations, and public authorities, actively promoting increased mobility across the borders of Finland, Sweden, and Norway. This includes providing guidance, information, practical support, and networking opportunities to ensure that stakeholders are better equipped to operate on both sides of the borders. They offer advice on key considerations and directions to the appropriate authorities. In addition, the Border Service works to remove barriers to cross-border interaction<sup>43</sup>.

#### **North Atlantic Coast Guard Forum (NACGF)**

NACGF is an informal, voluntary, and non-binding forum established in 2007 to strengthen cooperation among coast guard organizations from 20 member states, including Norway, Sweden, and Finland<sup>44</sup>. It has six working groups covering search and rescue, environmental response, maritime security, drug smuggling, illegal migration, and fisheries control. The forum provides opportunities to share experiences, best practices, and technology, and conducts exercises such as GuardEX<sup>45</sup>.

#### **Nordic police cooperation agreement**

Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden have strengthened police cooperation to combat cross-border crime. A new joint police station being constructed on the Norway-Sweden border symbolizes this collaboration, which also includes customs authorities and coordinated legal adjustments<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.arcticcoastguardforum.com/about-acgf>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.grensetjeneste.no/fri-mobilitet-grenseloes-vekst.6648542-605481.html>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.emsa.europa.eu/european-international-cooperation.html>

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.defensemecanetwork.com/stories/north-atlantic-coast-guard-forum/>

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.nordiclbourjournal.org/nordic-police-cooperation-from-policy-to-reality/>

## 4.4 Resilient food and water resources

Food and water are fundamental resources for life and health. NATO emphasizes that member states must ensure supply and quality, even during crises. In the High North, this is particularly challenging due to long transport routes, vulnerable ecosystems, and limited local production. Climate change exacerbates these challenges by affecting both water quality and food production.

Cooperation enhances systemic resilience. Through joint monitoring, contingency planning, and knowledge exchange, states can mitigate risks related to scarcity and contamination. Reliable access to food and water constitutes not only a public health imperative but also a prerequisite for societal stability and institutional trust. Coordinated efforts enable the safeguarding of supply chains, the development of climate-adaptive solutions, and the reinforcement of capacities to withstand natural hazards. In contexts characterized by narrow margins and high import dependency, collaborative governance is essential to ensure safety and sustain quality of life.

### **Conserving our Atlantic salmon (CoSal)**

CoASal is a trilateral initiative between Norway, Sweden, and Finland that addresses the management of shared water resources and environmental sustainability in northern border areas through monitoring, conservation, and sustainable use. The project aims to preserve Atlantic salmon as a sustainable resource by examining fishery regulations, population dynamics, and emerging threats such as climate change and disease. Activities include updating genetic mapping, documenting the decline of Tana salmon, and assessing parasite and virus risks. Data collection is supported by local fishermen, thereby strengthening communication and collaboration between researchers, management authorities, and northern communities<sup>47</sup>.

### **ClimateFood (Interreg Aurora)**

The ClimateFood project seeks to enhance climate-smart practices among small and medium-sized food enterprises in Northern Finland and Northern Sweden. Despite challenges such as harsh climatic conditions and extended transport distances, these regions offer advantages including pristine environments and raw materials produced with minimal pesticide and pharmaceutical use. The project fosters research, dissemination of best practices, and cross-border collaboration to improve self-sufficiency and sustainability in food production. Its overarching aim is to identify solutions that strengthen resilience and competitiveness while leveraging the Arctic's unique value in product development and branding<sup>48</sup>.

### **Regional Water Management Collaboration**

The Regional Water Management Collaboration adopts an approach based on natural hydrological boundaries rather than national borders. Nordland Water Region cooperates with the Bottenviken and Bottenhavet Water Districts to manage shared water resources and achieve common environmental objectives. Within this partnership, Bottenviken serves as Sweden's representative entity.

### **Biotech North**

Biotech North focuses on projects within marine biotechnology, bioactive ingredients, and sustainable food production. Typical initiatives include Horizon Europe projects aimed at developing innovative solutions for marine resources, BlueBio ERA-NET collaborations on utilizing marine resources for food and feed, and NordForsk programs that foster R&D partnerships with Sweden and Finland in biotechnology and health.

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<sup>47</sup> [https://www.statsforvalteren.no/siteassets/fm-troms-og-finnmark/miljo-og-klima/internasjonalt-samarbeid/coasal/coasal-report\\_en\\_web.pdf](https://www.statsforvalteren.no/siteassets/fm-troms-og-finnmark/miljo-og-klima/internasjonalt-samarbeid/coasal/coasal-report_en_web.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.proagria.fi/en/hankkeet/climatefood>

These projects contribute by developing new ingredients and preservation methods to extend shelf life and improve safety. They also explore biotechnological solutions to reduce food waste and ensure consistent quality.

### **Cod Cluster**

Cod Cluster places a strong emphasis on innovation within fish value chains and processing technologies. Key initiatives include Interreg Nord, which fosters collaboration with Sweden and Finland on cod-related value chains, and Horizon Europe - Food Systems, which focuses on advancements in processing and traceability. Enhanced traceability and control within the cod industry contribute to improved food safety, while emerging technologies further strengthen hygiene and quality standards during processing.

## 4.5 Ability to deal with mass casualties and disruptive health crises

This requirement encompasses the ability to manage large-scale damage and health crises, such as pandemics, natural disasters and catastrophes and civilian mass casualties in armed conflict or war. It demands the capacity to rapidly and efficiently mobilize healthcare personnel, equipment, and logistics.

In the northern regions, the challenges are particularly significant: long distances, limited hospital infrastructure, and severe weather conditions make response times critical. Local communities have constrained capacity, and specialist resources are often located far away. At the same time, extreme events can have severe impacts, ranging from major accidents to disease outbreaks.

Collaboration enables resource sharing, harmonization of procedures, and joint exercises. When countries coordinate their efforts, the likelihood of saving lives and reducing damage increases.

### Emergency Prevention, Preparedness and Response (EPPR)

EPPR is a working group under the Arctic Council mandated to strengthen preparedness and response within the Arctic environment. The group consists of three expert subgroups addressing search and rescue, marine environmental response, and radiological issues. Its core responsibilities encompass the development of guidance documents, the conduct of risk assessments, the facilitation of information exchange, the organization of exercises, and the oversight of implementing legally binding agreements on Search and Rescue (SAR) and Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response (MOSPA)<sup>49</sup>. Search and rescue activities operate at the same level, particularly regarding cross-border areas and the exchange of SAR capabilities. The same applies to fire and rescue services at the local level.

### Local hospital collaborations

This collaboration involves the University Hospital of Northern Norway in Tromsø, Länssjukhuset in Luleå, and Lapland Central Hospital. The initiatives encompass resource sharing, joint exercises, and the development of pandemic planning frameworks. This partnership enhances preparedness in the northern regions and facilitates a rapid and coordinated response to health crises.

### Nordic Blood Preparedness Project

Nordic healthcare stakeholders are collaborating to develop a cross-border blood preparedness system for Northern Norway, Lapland, and Norrbotten. The project is led by the Norwegian Centre for Blood Preparedness (Nokblod) in partnership with Helse Nord, Lapland Wellbeing Service County, Region Norrbotten, the Finnish Red Cross Blood Service, and the Swedish Blood Alliance<sup>50</sup>. Its primary objective is to ensure access to blood at all levels of the healthcare system, including emergency whole blood retrieval, and to strengthen preparedness for life-threatening haemorrhages, disasters, and crises. The project aims to establish interoperability between the countries and create a platform for future cooperation<sup>51</sup>.

### Nordic Health Across Borders (NHAB)

NHAB strengthens cross-border collaboration among health authorities in Northern Finland, Northern Norway, and Northern Sweden<sup>52</sup>. The countries maintain mutual assistance agreements for crises and collaborate on exercises, pandemic preparedness, and resilience measures, guided by ministerial

<sup>49</sup> <https://arctic-council.org/about/working-groups/eppr/>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.helse-bergen.no/en/departments/laboratorieklinikken/nokblod/nordic-blood-preparedness-project/#:~:text=The%20Nordic%20Blood%20Preparedness%20Project%20aims%20to%20develop,the%20Northern%20regions%20of%20Norway%2C%20Sweden%20and%20Finland>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.helse-bergen.no/4a967f/contentassets/d6952e24fe4e48e2bcbc6027f8273e3b/project-directive---nordic-blood-preparedness-project.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/a6106c2b8a1f4b1ebd74a1bf407414f9/7th-framework-programme-for-cooperation-on-health-and-related-issues-in-the-barents-region.pdf>

declarations and the 2025–2030 program toward a sustainable, integrated Nordic region. Supported by Nordic council of ministries and other<sup>53</sup>.

### **Nordic Health Data Spaces (Interreg Aurora)**

An Interreg Aurora project aiming to enhance cross-border health data sharing in the Nordic region, addressing challenges posed by sparse populations. The project assesses readiness for European Health Data Space (EHDS) policies, fostering innovation and sustainable societies<sup>54</sup>. It leverages shared Nordic values in health data management, ensuring existing efforts inform EHDS decisions. Objectives include strengthening governance, increasing cross-border capacity, and minimizing data sharing obstacles.

### **North Atlantic Mass Rescue Operation Guidelines (NAMRO)**

The project aims to develop a handbook for mass rescue operations (MRO) in the North Atlantic region<sup>55</sup>, in collaboration with relevant Search and Rescue (SAR) authorities. Its objective is to establish harmonized guidelines and procedures for both the provision and reception of international assistance. The project includes working meetings, workshops, and an exercise to test these processes. The outcome is intended to enhance predictability and support the development of national guidelines.

### **Rescue Borealis**

Rescue Borealis is a Nordic preparedness exercise focused on cross-border cooperation in the Euro-Arctic region. The exercise involves rescue services from Finland, Sweden, and Norway. It builds on the previous Barents Rescue exercise series; however, due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia is no longer participating<sup>56</sup>. Rescue Borealis 2025 concentrated on managing CBRN threats and testing procedures for cross-border assistance, in close collaboration with health and social services, authorities, and other partners<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/helse-og-omsorg/internasjonalt-helsesamarbeid/innsikt/nordisk-helsesamarbeid/id437514/>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.interregaurora.eu/approved-projects/nordic-health-data-spaces/>

<sup>55</sup> <https://interreg.no/prosjektbank/arctic-and-north-atlantic-mass-rescue-operation-guidelines-namro/>

<sup>56</sup> <https://barents-council.org/events/rescue-borealis-exercise>

<sup>57</sup> <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/1410869/finland-to-host-nordic-rescue-exercise-in-oulu-in-september#:~:text=Finland%20will%20host%20Rescue%20Borealis%202025%2C%20a%20Nordic,Oulu%20between%2029%20September%20and%203%20October%202025>

## 4.6 Resilient civil communication systems

Effective communication constitutes a fundamental component of crisis management. NATO requires member states to maintain robust civil communication systems, encompassing emergency networks, digital platforms, and mechanisms for information exchange. These systems must remain operational even under conditions of cyberattack or physical infrastructure damage.

Communication infrastructure is inherently vulnerable. Physical components such as fiber-optic cables and relay stations can be disrupted by severe weather *and* environmental disturbances *or from deliberate sabotage*. Moreover, supporting elements such as local substations represent single points of failure, and in remote regions, limited redundancy exacerbates these risks.

Cross-border cooperation facilitates system interconnection and ensures interoperability, thereby strengthening the capacity to coordinate efforts and establish a shared situational understanding. While most collaborations referenced in this chapter are primarily transnational initiatives, they are particularly relevant within this category.

### Telenor Nordics

Manages critical digital infrastructure in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark, and collaborates closely with authorities to ensure national security and preparedness<sup>58</sup>.

### Inter System Interface (ISI) Project

The ISI Project is a collaboration between DSB and its counterparts in Finland (Erillisverkot) and Sweden (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB)). Norway, Sweden, and Finland have interconnected their national emergency networks through the ISI project, enabling secure and efficient communication among emergency responders.

The trilateral ISI project has resulted in bilateral agreements between Norway and Sweden (NOSE), Finland and Norway (FINO), and Finland and Sweden (FISE). In September 2019, the three-way connection between Finland's Virve, Norway's Nødnett, and Sweden's Rakel was launched (FINOSE)<sup>59</sup>. Annual preparedness exercises are conducted for regional FINOSE users. The most recent exercise took place at the end of November with 24 participants.

### Info Norden (Nordic Co-Operation)

Info Norden is the Nordic Council of Ministers' information service for individuals relocating, working, or studying in the Nordic region. The service contributes to identifying and resolving cross-border barriers related to communication and mobility. Info Norden operates in Denmark, Finland, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Åland<sup>60</sup>.

### The Norway-Sweden Border Service (Grensetjänsten)

The Norway-Sweden Border Service constitutes a cross-border cooperation initiative within the broader Nordic collaborative framework. It involves key authorities and organizations, including the Nordic Council of Ministers, NAV, Arbetsförmedlingen, the tax administrations, and customs authorities. The partnership facilitates information exchange and provides guidance to individuals and businesses engaged in cross-border activities. Established in 1997, the Norway-Sweden Border Service has evolved into a national information and competence center serving both countries<sup>61</sup>.

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.telenor.com/who-we-are/our-companies/nordics/digitalsecurity/2024/theres-no-time-to-waste/>

<sup>59</sup> [https://www.dsb.no/en/nodnett/About-N\\_84dnett/Cross-border-communication2/](https://www.dsb.no/en/nodnett/About-N_84dnett/Cross-border-communication2/)

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.norden.org/no/information/informasjontjenesten-info-norden>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.grensetjansten.com/download/18.445aa4fb184a85b6b112755/1669297968316/Folder-norska.pdf>

## 4.7 Resilient transport systems

In the northern regions, infrastructure remains vulnerable to harsh climatic conditions, extended distances, and limited capacity. Severe weather events, including snow, ice, and storms, may compromise connectivity, while small communities often rely on a limited number of transport routes. Cross-border cooperation facilitates the development of more robust solutions, the harmonization of standards, and the provision of mutual assistance.

*Overview of some of the most important transport infrastructures in the High North.*

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Road	<p><b>E6:</b> Runs along the entire length of Northern Norway from south to north and is the main road artery in the region.</p> <p><b>E8 (Tromsø–Kilpisjärvi–Tornio):</b> Connects Tromsø and Northern Norway to Northern Finland via Kilpisjärvi and onward to Tornio. Important for commercial transport and passenger traffic.</p> <p><b>E10 (Narvik–Kiruna–Luleå):</b> Runs from Narvik in Norway via Kiruna to Luleå in Sweden. This is a key east-west axis for both freight and passenger traffic between Norway and Sweden.</p> <p><b>E12 (Mo i Rana via Umeå to Vaasa):</b> Forms a strategic corridor for transport and communication in the region.</p> <p><b>E45 (Alta–Kautokeino–Enontekiö–Rovaniemi):</b> Links Alta in Finnmark with Kautokeino and onward to Enontekiö and Rovaniemi in Finland. This road is important for cross-border transport between Northern Norway and Northern Finland and is being upgraded to meet both civilian and military needs.</p> <p><b>E75 (Vardø–Keminmaa)</b> Important border crossing between Norway and Finland. Only corridor in Eastern Finnmark which is a part of EU's TEN-T comprehensive netw</p>
Rail	<p><b>Ofoten Line (Narvik–Kiruna–Luleå):</b> Connects the port of Narvik in Norway to Kiruna and onward to Luleå in Sweden. This is the only rail link between Norway and Sweden north of Trondheim and is critical for industry, exports (especially ore and seafood), and military mobility. The Ofoten Line is connected to the Swedish rail network (Malmbanan) and further to Finland via the Haparanda–Tornio line.</p> <p><b>Haparanda–Tornio Line:</b> Links the Swedish and Finnish rail networks in the north, enabling transport between Northern Sweden and Northern Finland. Important for freight and passenger transport and for interoperability.</p>
Air	<p>Northern Norway, Northern Sweden, and Northern Finland have a network of regional airports that ensure mobility for the population, businesses, and emergency preparedness. This is crucial for reducing distance disadvantages and ensuring accessibility in the region.</p>
Sea / Ports	<p><b>Port of Narvik:</b> Port with direct rail connection to Sweden and onward to Finland. Important for the export of ore, seafood, and other industries, as well as for military logistics.</p> <p><b>Port of Tromsø:</b> A key hub for sea transport and logistics in the north, with connections to both national and international routes.</p>

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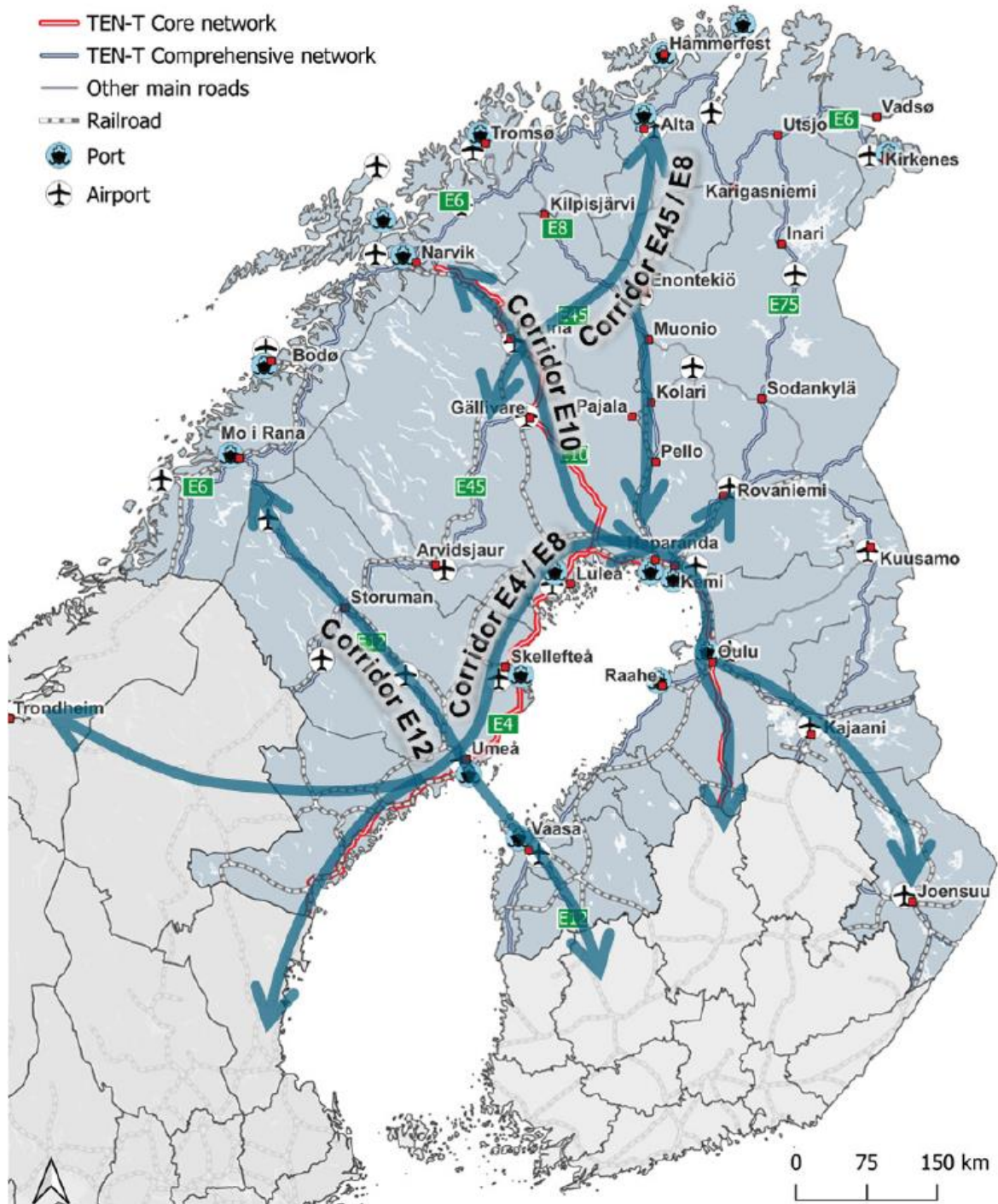


Figure 9: Main supply corridors in the New North area

### Arctic Rail Organization

An international advocacy organization dedicated to enhancing railway connectivity in the Nordic region, with a primary focus on the Narvik–Luleå–Tornio route, which is part of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). The organization seeks to increase investments in the railway infrastructure and improve operational efficiency through better coordination among authorities, municipalities, regions, and businesses<sup>62</sup>.

### Barents road International Organization

The Barents Road International Organization, established in 1997, aims to promote dialogue, cooperation, and development within the Barents region. Its membership includes Norway, Sweden, and Finland, and its vision is to foster cross-border relationships and advance collaborative activities along the Barents Road<sup>63</sup>.

### Blå Vägen Association (Midtskandia)

Five municipalities in Sweden are collaborating with partners in Norway and Finland to develop the historic Blue Road corridor. The cooperation has evolved from a primary focus on tourism to encompass infrastructure, transport, and business development. The objective is to strengthen the east–west connection through integrated development of road and rail, emphasizing quality of life, accessibility, and sustainable growth<sup>64</sup>.

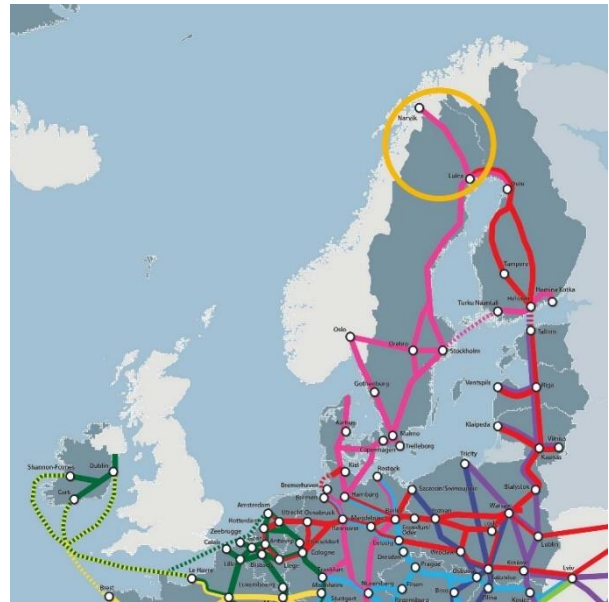


Figure 10: Trans-European transport network (TEN-T).

Projects	Norway	Sweden	Finland
Projekt Västerbotniabanan <sup>65</sup>			
Rebuild the Blue Way Network <sup>66</sup>			

### Kolarctic BCB 2014- 2020

Kolarctic was a cross-border cooperation program between regions in the Barents area and northwestern Russia, supported by the EU. The program funded projects in business development, environmental protection, climate adaptation, transport, and effective border management. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian participation was terminated, and the remaining projects with partners from Finland, Sweden, and Norway were completed in 2023. The program is now concluded<sup>67</sup>.

### New North (Interreg Aurora)

A project focused on transport, logistics, and supply security in Northern Norway, Northern Sweden, and Northern Finland. The project consists of four work packages<sup>68 69</sup>:

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.arcticrail.org/agenda>

<sup>63</sup> <https://en.barentsroad.org/om-oss>

<sup>64</sup> <https://blavagen.se/om-oss/#Bl%C3%A5-v%C3%A4gen-idag>

<sup>65</sup> <https://blavagen.se/projekt/projekt-v-sterbotniabanan>

<sup>66</sup> <https://blavagen.se/projekt/>

<sup>67</sup> <https://interreg.no/programmer-v2/kolarctic-next/>

<sup>68</sup> [https://www.tromsfylke.no/f/p1/i86955e2c-ac28-4221-aece-46540d63eca1/rapport-new-north\\_wp1-market\\_final-april-2025.pdf#:~:text=The%20project%20is%20co-funded%20by%20the%20EU%27s%20Interreg,various%20transportation%20examples%20and%20transport%20issues%20in%20general.](https://www.tromsfylke.no/f/p1/i86955e2c-ac28-4221-aece-46540d63eca1/rapport-new-north_wp1-market_final-april-2025.pdf#:~:text=The%20project%20is%20co-funded%20by%20the%20EU%27s%20Interreg,various%20transportation%20examples%20and%20transport%20issues%20in%20general.)

<sup>69</sup> <https://interreg.no/prosjektbank/new-north/>

- 1) Future seamless freight transport (led by regional municipality in Finnmark, with Troms County Municipality and Nordland County Municipality as partners)
- 2) transport security (led by Lapland)
- 3) electric aviation (led by Västerbotten)
- 4) green railway transport (led by North Karelia)

### **Nordic Transport Preparedness Cooperation (NTPC)**

The Nordic countries, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland have established a transnational collaboration on transport preparedness. The aim is to strengthen land, sea, and air transport in crisis situations through the sharing of resources, knowledge, and experiences<sup>70</sup>. The collaboration focuses on developing common models and practices for transport systems to ensure robust infrastructure and accessible services under critical conditions.

### **Northern Europe Aviation Meteorology Consortium (NAMCON)**

Transnational consortium of the National Meteorological Services of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden providing aviation weather services to airspace users in Northern Europe. NAMCON ensures reliable forecasting and strengthened resilience for airspace users<sup>71</sup>.

### **Platform North**

Platform North is a collaborative initiative between the transport authorities of Norway, Sweden, and Finland. The initiative aims to strengthen transport infrastructure in the High North to support industrial development, the green transition, and military mobility. The work includes a joint transport plan, coordinated financing, and an information platform. Its objective is to reduce barriers, ensure seamless cross-border connections, and facilitate early-stage planning<sup>72</sup>. The platform serves as a forum for stakeholders and infrastructure managers to align strategies and coordinate development efforts.

### **Port of Narvik and the Ofoten Line**

The Ofoten Line connects the Port of Narvik with Sweden and constitutes a critical transport artery for both commercial and defense purposes. Norway cooperates closely with Sweden and Finland to ensure capacity and preparedness, emphasizing double-track development within the TEN-T core network and the EU's ScanMed corridor. This highlights the line's strategic importance for trade and security. The collaboration covers the transport of ore, industrial goods, seafood, groceries, and military equipment, alongside efforts to develop intermodal solutions. Increasing demands from industry, exports, and defense sectors necessitate enhanced civil-military cooperation to strengthen infrastructure, improve accessibility, and ensure supply security<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>70</sup> <https://www.luftfartstilsynet.no/om-oss/nyheter/nyheter-2025/noreg-og-danmark-vert-del-av-nordisk-samarbeid-innan-transportberedskap/>

<sup>71</sup> <http://www.namcon.aero/>

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.vegvesen.no/om-oss/om-organisasjonen/internasjonalt-arbeid/platform-north/about-platform-north/>

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.narvikhavn.no/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Faktaark-Ofotbanen-ensidig.pdf>

## 4.8 Other Relevant Areas of Cooperation

### Arctic Six

Arctic Six is an alliance of six universities: Luleå University of Technology, Umeå University, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, Nord University, the University of Lapland, and the University of Oulu. The partnership aims to advance research, education, and innovation to foster sustainable development in the Arctic region. Key priorities include knowledge exchange, the establishment of joint research infrastructure, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the responsible management of Arctic resources. Furthermore, the alliance engages in initiatives related to business development, societal progress, and dialogue with governmental authorities and Indigenous communities<sup>74</sup>.

### Arctic Strike

Norway, Sweden, and Finland collaborate through Arctic Strike, an annual technology experiment for the Army. The initiative involves research institutions and the defence industry, aiming to test new methods and develop combat capabilities and interoperability in sub-Arctic conditions<sup>75</sup>. The primary focus is to strengthen Nordic cooperation and accelerate Sweden's integration with allied forces.

### Cross-Border training (CBT)

CBT North is an initiative involving Sweden, Norway, and Finland, in which fighter squadrons based in Luleå, Bodø, and Rovaniemi conduct recurring joint training exercises. These activities are designed to enhance interoperability and establish procedures that facilitate simplified airspace access. Moreover, the exercises have strengthened the capability to execute joint missions and provided a basis for potential expansion toward integrated air defence cooperation<sup>76</sup>.

### Digital Arctic Twin (DART)

DART is a network funded by UArctic (2024–2026) with partners from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The participating universities collaborate to develop digital twins aimed at analyzing and supporting just transitions to net zero in the Arctic. The project integrates legal, economic, environmental, and health expertise to model complex climate and market mechanisms<sup>77</sup>.

### MetCoOp

MetCoOp is a transnational collaboration on numerical weather prediction (NWP) between FMI (Finland), MET Norway, and SMHI (Sweden). Its objective is to develop and operate shared weather models to improve short-term forecasts and strengthen preparedness for extreme weather events. Since 2022, ten northern countries have cooperated through United Weather Centres (UWC) to implement a common forecasting model. This partnership provides access to advanced computing power and technology that individual countries could not achieve on their own<sup>78</sup>.

### New Nordic AI

New Nordics AI is a joint initiative among the Nordic-Baltic countries aimed at strengthening collaboration on artificial intelligence. The centre connects national AI ecosystems to develop common structures, remove barriers, and build strategic partnerships across countries and sectors. Its work focuses on knowledge sharing, joint projects, and accelerating AI adoption to enhance competitiveness. The overarching goal is to leverage the region's strengths and values to promote responsible and sustainable AI development-achieving outcomes that no single nation could accomplish alone<sup>79</sup>.

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.arcticsix.org/arctic-six/about>

<sup>75</sup> <https://www.ffi.no/aktuelt/nyheter/arctic-strike-norge-sverige-og-finland-samarbeider-om-ny-teknologi-for-haeren>

<sup>76</sup> <https://fhs.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:739838/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

<sup>77</sup> <https://ebjohnsen.org/project/dart/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.met.no/en/projects/metcoop>

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.newnordics.ai/about>

### **Nordic Bridge (Interreg Aurora)**

Nordic Bridge functions as a digital platform that connects public, private, and voluntary-sector stakeholders with academic institutions across the NPA region (Norway, Iceland, Ireland, and Finland). The collaboration seeks to address practical societal and economic challenges through mechanisms such as student assignments, collaborative research initiatives, internships, and innovation-driven projects. Moreover, the platform facilitates cross-border knowledge exchange and contributes to regional development while enhancing societal resilience<sup>80</sup>.



**Figure 11: The NPA-region**

### **Nordregio**

A Nordic research institute focused on regional development and planning, established by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1997. Nordregio enhances Nordic cooperation by identifying regional solutions and providing comparative research. The institute's expertise includes applied research in areas such as regional and rural development, urban planning, demography, and governance<sup>81</sup>.

### **Preparedness Exercises**

Military national, tri-lateral and alliance exercises are conducted on a regular basis in the region. The main purpose of these exercises is to strengthen military capability and cooperation. They do however also provide scenarios and opportunities relevant for the further development and improvement of civilian capabilities required to meet the baseline requirements.

### ***Nordic Response 2024***

More than 20,000 soldiers from 13 NATO member states, including Norway, Sweden, and Finland, participated in the Nordic Response 2024 exercise in Northern Norway. The exercise focused on joint defense operations under demanding winter conditions to strengthen preparedness and enhance Nordic cooperation<sup>82</sup>.

### ***Cold Response (2026)***

Led by Norway, the Cold Response exercise will involve the U.S. Marine Corps alongside NATO allies and partners<sup>83</sup>. The training will emphasize interoperability in challenging climates and include both offensive and defensive tactical operations. In March 2026, troops from more than ten allied countries will train under harsh Arctic conditions in Norway's largest military exercise of the year<sup>84</sup>.

### ***Joint Viking 2025***

Joint Viking brought together approximately 10,000 soldiers from nine countries: Norway, Canada, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The exercise focused on protecting NATO's northern flank, improving interoperability, and testing Norway's ability to receive allied reinforcements under winter conditions<sup>85</sup>.

### **Stay in North (Interreg Aurora)**

Stay in North is a collaborative project involving university cities in Northern Norway, Northern Sweden, and Northern Finland, aimed at retaining educated youth in the region. The project focuses on developing strategies for student retention through systematic identification of challenges, exchange of best practices, and the establishment of cross-border networks. Its objective is to

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.interreg-npa.eu/projects/nordic-bridge/home/about-the-project/>

<sup>81</sup> <https://nordregio.org/about/>

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.forsvaret.no/en/exercises-and-operations/exercises/nr24>

<sup>83</sup> [DVIDS - Cold Response 26](#)

<sup>84</sup> <https://www.forsvaret.no/en/exercises-and-operations/exercises/cr26>

<sup>85</sup> <https://www.forsvaret.no/en/exercises-and-operations/exercises/jv25>

strengthen organizational capacity to implement student-oriented solutions and mitigate outmigration. Moreover, the cooperation emphasizes initiatives that enhance regional attractiveness and foster new opportunities for highly skilled young professionals in the northern regions<sup>86</sup>.

### **Team Nordic Arctic**

Team Nordic Arctic is a project funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Arctic 2030 program and led by ProTromsø. It aims to strengthen Nordic cooperation in the Arctic by promoting sustainable business development, facilitating youth recruitment, and ensuring the inclusion of Indigenous peoples and minority groups. The initiative brings together key stakeholders from Norway, Sweden, and Finland, with core activities such as Arctic Business Matchmaking, Thinking Together, and the Nordic Youth Summit. Its overarching goal is to enhance Nordic collaboration and attract businesses and young talent to the region<sup>87</sup>.

### **Informal Cooperation**

Through the data collection, several forms of cooperation have been identified that are not specifically linked to projects or initiatives. Many of these collaborations have been reported by border municipalities that cooperate across the border. Below is a summary of these collaborations.

#### *Cooperation on Fire and Rescue Resources*

Several border municipalities cooperate on fire and rescue services, where municipalities work together in connection with specific assignments. This applies to cooperation between Norway and Sweden, Norway and Finland, and Sweden and Finland. Sweden and Norway have a specific collaboration related to fire and rescue in connection with the development of the E10 highway and the Ofoten railway.

#### *Cooperation on Crime Prevention*

Finnish and Swedish police have extensive cooperation on crime prevention in border areas. There is an ongoing project between the Oulu Police Station and the Lapland Police Station regarding cross-border patrolling. Similar cooperation has not been reported with Norway.

#### *Flood and Dam Safety*

On the border between Sweden and Finland, joint efforts are underway to protect against flooding. In addition, Norway, Sweden, and Finland cooperate on dam safety and dam preparedness through Fincold, Swedcold, Nncold, and Iscold (Iceland).

#### *Cooperation on Infrastructure between Sweden and Finland*

Border municipalities in Sweden and Finland cooperate on sewage management between Haparanda and Tornio, as well as joint heating in rural districts.

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<sup>86</sup> <https://www.interregaurora.eu/approved-projects/stayinnorth/>

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.protromso.com/team-nordic-arctic/>

## 5 Overall Assessment of Findings

The strategic significance of the Arctic and the High North has long been considerable. This is reflected in the extensive forms of cooperation between the Nordic countries at local, regional, and national strategic levels, which have been ongoing for many years. The High North has traditionally collaborated on resource management, research and higher education, health services, and rescue operations. Changes in security policy have contributed to this development, and over the past decade, both the number of such collaborations and the funding allocated to them have increased substantially.

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Particularly within search and rescue, fire services, police, and health, cooperation between the countries extends from a political and strategic level all the way down to the operational level in the execution of concrete activities and incidents. At the operational level, collaboration includes competence exchange, resource allocation, and preparedness. As an example, the police in Northern Sweden and Northern Finland are currently exploring a concept where they patrol across jurisdictions in border areas (Swedish police in Finland and vice versa). A similar exploration is underway in border control, where border authorities are examining how to cooperate more closely on Schengen border control, exchange information, and strengthen border crossings through operational collaboration.

In the energy and transport sectors, extensive studies and exchanges are also taking place across borders. The investments are so large that completing the major projects will take time. In many other areas, cooperation is more project-based and tends to be exploratory in nature. This is not surprising, as several of these areas have only become relevant in recent years.

Activities are underway that support all of NATO's seven baseline requirements. Thus, there do not appear to be any fundamental knowledge gaps. However, KPMG questions whether the individual areas are sufficiently familiar with each other, also from an extended cooperation and synergy perspective. Many collaborations seem to have significant overlap. Interviews conducted during data collection also revealed that very few had an overview of all relevant activities and cooperation arenas, even within their own sector. There is great potential for efficiency and better resource utilization through coordination of initiatives and projects.

This study assesses cross-border cooperation related to NATO's seven baseline expectations and Host Nation Support in connection with a Nordic defense concept. Although Sweden and Finland have long cooperated with NATO, major changes have occurred for both countries in defense and security policy since they signed their membership agreements in 2024 and 2023, respectively. Sweden and Finland are still working hard to integrate into NATO's structure within defense, total defense, and society at large. Both countries must address legal adjustments (such as security classification and information sharing), investments in technology for interoperability, competence development and training in NATO procedures, and ensuring national control while meeting NATO requirements. It is possible that the three countries still have somewhat different focuses in their work on NATO's seven baseline expectations and Host Nation Support, where Sweden and Finland can be expected to have a more national focus on meeting requirements, expectations, and national adaptations and operationalization related to their NATO membership.

## 6 Need for Enhanced Cooperation in the High North

KPMG's data collection did not yield substantial input regarding areas where cooperation should be further developed. The proposals KPMG received suggest that respondents lacked a comprehensive overview of existing collaborations, resulting in recommendations for initiatives that are already in progress.

There does not appear to be an urgent need to expand cooperation or projects into several additional or new areas. There are a substantial number of cooperation mechanisms across the borders and between the countries in the High North. There are ongoing activities in support of all the seven baseline requirements. A further risk and vulnerability analysis could potentially identify the need to either change or strengthen the existing structures. One short term key priority could be to evaluate and ensure that existing areas of cooperation are integrated effectively.

Two potential measures to support this are: 1) To assess the need for a civilian type of "Command and Control (C2)" to enable comprehensive oversight, identify synergies, support holistic decision-making, and optimize resource utilization. 2) Furthermore, exploring and developing technical solutions that can support a civilian type of command and control of all relevant national and cross border activities in support of the fulfillment of the baseline requirements.

Promoting cross-border cooperation can be supported through a mix of governmental instruments. Institutional frameworks, such as dedicated agencies and coordination bodies, strengthen continuity and accountability, though they require resources and may reduce flexibility. Regulatory measures, including clear requirements and harmonized standards, create predictability but can impose burdens on smaller actors. Standards and certifications help align practices, though their effectiveness depends on broad adoption and regular updates.

Economic instruments, such as financial incentives or sanctions, can motivate compliance, but overly punitive approaches risk adversarial dynamics, and incentives alone rarely overcome cultural or structural barriers. Finally, competence and awareness are critical. Capacity-building and information sharing improve trust and situational awareness, though these require sustained investment and willingness to share sensitive data.

Overall, a balanced mix of institutional, regulatory, economic, and capacity-building measures is essential to foster resilience and effective cross-border cooperation.

So far, much of the progress toward achieving cross-border cooperation has been driven by national or international project funding, combined with the development of intentions and ambitions at political and policy levels. For these activities to survive a halt in project financing, they must be supported by state instruments that ensure cross-border cooperation at local and regional levels is perceived as enriching with minimal administrative burden, rather than as a complicating and costly endeavor.

Three areas are identified in this study, where there may be a need for additional cooperations and initiatives, or where further investigation will discover that there is in fact fruitful cooperation:

First, there is a need to develop state regulatory instruments to promote cooperation in the field of security. There is a need to share classified information and security-cleared personnel seamlessly between countries in certain areas. This is currently not possible due to regulatory barriers. Furthermore bi- and trilateral classified communication is very limited for the same reason. National security regulations should be harmonized as much as possible between the Nordic countries to further increase and improve cross-border cooperation.

Secondly, KPMG's study has mapped numerous funding sources for projects and research, financed either by the EU or by national authorities. However, we have not gained insight into whether industrial policy interests and incentives in the High North support NATO's seven baseline expectations. This may be due to the fact that KPMG did not engage with the relevant respondents. If there were a deliberate industrial policy intention linked to business development in the High North that aligns with the scope of this study, it would be striking that none of the individuals KPMG consulted were aware of it. KPMG's conclusion, therefore, is that this dimension should be more closely connected to the types of initiatives mapped in our study, to ensure that business opportunities are identified early and that all three countries can leverage support from local and regional levels to realize the full potential for cooperation in the High North.

Third, Norway, Sweden and Finland are currently implementing the NIS 2 and CER EU directives. Sweden and Finland have already incorporated it into their legal framework, and Norway will do the same within a few years. Both directives require structured cooperation forums, harmonized procedures, and mutual information sharing to address cross-border threats. NIS 2 focuses on cyber resilience, CER on physical resilience - but both include EU-level groups for coordination. There may be a potential in looking at how the implementation of NIS 2 and CER can give synergies to other similar areas where there is a need for cross-border cooperation.

Many of the recommendations proposed in this report are national measures that will have a regional impact. This also means that, to a large extent, it is national authorities that hold the mandate and legal authority to initiate relevant activities. Nevertheless, there are some measures that can be implemented at the regional level as contributions to the national level decisions and management of strategic initiatives. At the regional level, initiatives should be taken to propose a mechanism for coordinating between various initiatives, projects, and organizations to ensure efficient resource utilization and a high pace of development. Furthermore, the work appears to lack a strategic end-state vision. Although the backdrop for nearly all initiatives discussed in this report has a clear strategic purpose-climate change, a shifting security landscape, the increasing strategic importance of the Arctic, and Swedish and Finnish NATO membership, there is no strategic framework that answers questions such as: What does the end-state look like? What indicators do we have for improved cooperation? How do we measure maturity? At the regional level, an effort addressing these two parameters would strengthen the ability to govern and manage this area of responsibility going forward at national, regional, and local levels.

Finally, exercise Cold Response 2026 will provide a very good opportunity to exercise the high north total defense and host nation support concept. Efforts should be made to include all relevant parties on local and regional level to take part in the exercise. Further initiatives in the High north with regards to NATO's seven baseline requirements should be derived from the evaluation of such exercise.

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## Appendix 1: Respondents on the survey

Avinor Tromsø  
Bodens kommun  
Bodø Havn Kf  
Bodø municipality  
Bufetat Northern Norway  
Church of Norway  
City of Tornio  
Civil Defence Norway  
County Governor of Nordland  
County Governor of Troms and Finnmark  
Direktoratet for strålevern og atomsikkerhet  
Fauske kommune  
FINCOLD  
Finnish Border Guard  
Finnish Red Cross Lapland District  
Finnish Red Cross Lapland District / Volunteer Rescue Service  
Finnmark County Council  
Finnmark politidistrikt  
Guovdageainnu suohkan  
Gällivare kommun  
Hamarøy kommune  
Haparanda stad  
Hattfjelldal kommune  
Helse Nord RHF  
Herman Andersson Oy  
Homeguard 17  
Jaeger Brigade, Finnish Defence Forces  
Joint Rescue Coordination Centre Norway  
Kainuu Rescue Department  
Kaisanet Oy  
KDS Troms  
Kuhmo Oy  
Lapland police department  
Lapland Wellbeing Services County  
Lapland's centre for economic development, transport and infrastructure  
Linea  
LO Nordland  
Met Norway  
Midtskandia  
Municipality of Muonio  
Narvik kommune  
Nordland Bondelag  
Nordland fylkeskommune  
Nordland Police District  
Nordland Røde Kors  
Nordlandssykehuset HF  
Norges bondelag

Norges vassdrags- og energidirektorat (NVE)  
Norsjö kommun  
Norske Kvinners Sanitetsforening  
North Ostrobothnia Rescue Department  
Norwegian Directorate of Immigration  
Norwegian food safety  
Norwegian Home Guard  
Norwegian Meteorological institute  
Norwegian Public Roads Administration  
Norwegian SAR Agency (Hovedredningsentralen)  
Ofoten brann og redning IKS  
Osuuskauppa KPO/KPO-Konserni  
Oulu Police Department  
Police department of Lapland (Rovaniemi)  
Posten Bring AS  
ProAgria Northern Finland  
Rakennusklusteri  
Rana kommune  
Red Cross  
Redningsselskapet  
Regional Health Authority  
Robertsfors kommun  
Safartica  
Saltdal kommune  
Sanitetskvinnene  
Sivilforsvaret  
Sorsele kommun  
ST1 Suomi Oy/NEOT Oy  
Statens vegvesen  
Stora Enso Oulu Business Unit  
Sumijäte Oy  
Tana commune  
Telenor  
The Finnish Border Guard  
The Norwegian Coastal Administration  
The regional council of Kainuu  
Tornion Energia Oy  
Troms County Council  
Troms police district  
Tomsø kommune  
Universitetssykehuset Nord-Norge  
University of Lapland  
Utsjoki  
Vindelns kommun  
Voimatel Oy  
Wellbeing Service County of North Ostrobothnia, Fire & Rescue Department of North Ostrobothnia  
Överkalix kommun  
Övertorneå kommun

## Appendix 2: Survey Questionnaire

1. What is the name of the organisation you represent?
2. What type of organisation do you represent?
3. From which country does your organisation originate?
4. Which sector is your organisation involved in? (Select all that apply)
  - Climate / Environment
  - Defence
  - Education / Research
  - Energy / Power
  - Governance
  - Health
  - Search and Rescue
  - Security / Police / Border control
  - Telecom
  - Transport / Ports
5. Is your organisation currently involved in cross-border collaboration or initiatives?
  - Yes
  - No
  - No, but we have been involved previously
  - Uncertain
6. How many ongoing cross-border collaborations or initiatives does your organisation have?
  - 0
  - 1-3
  - 4 or more
  - Uncertain
7. To what extent do your collaborations or initiatives relate to the following areas? (select all that apply)
  - Assured continuity of government and critical government services
  - Resilient energy supplies
  - Ability to manage uncontrolled movement of people
  - Resilient food and water resources
  - Ability to handle mass casualties and disruptive health crises
  - Resilient civil communications systems
  - Resilient transport systems
  - None of the above
8. Please briefly describe the most important cross-border collaborations or initiatives your organization is or has been involved in. If possible, mention specific names and/or include a link to more information.
9. Are there any areas where you see a need for more collaboration or new initiatives?
10. Do you have any additional comments or input for the survey?

## Appendix 3: Interview Participants

Avinor

Barents Network

Contact Persons for the National Supply Agency in Northern Finland and Lapland

Directorate for Civil Protection (DSB)

Finnmark County Municipality

Fire Chief, Lapland Fire Department

Northern Norway Regional Health Authority (Helse Nord)

Joint Rescue Coordination Centre of Norway (Hovedredningsentralen)

Lapland Police

University of Lapland

Linea

Confederation of Norwegian Enterprise (NHO)

Nordland County Municipality

Norwegian Police Service

Norwegian Public Roads Administration

Swedish Police Service

Technical Director, City of Tornio

Troms County Municipality

Troms Kraft

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