



Statsforvalteren i Nordland

County Governor of Nordland

Annual report

High North Cooperation

Annual report 2025



High North Cooperation (HNC) annual report 2025



List of abbreviations

CCN	Crisis Communication Network
HNC	High North Cooperation
HNCPPF	High North Civil Preparedness Forum
ICC	International Cooperation Course
MoU	Memorandum of understanding

Table of contents

List of abbreviations.....	3
1 Introduction	5
2 Action plan and goals 2025	5
3 Events and projects in 2025	6
Governor’s meeting and HNC meeting.....	6
High North Cooperation (HNC) meetings.....	7
Crisis Communication Network (CCN) meetings	8
Interreg Aurora: High North Civil Preparedness Forum (HNCPF)	8
International Cooperation Course 2025 (ICC25).....	9
Communication tests	10
HNC chairmanship hand-over meeting.....	11
Assessment of Northern Nordic collaboration	12
Participation in exercises	12
4 Further planning and cooperation.....	13
Action plan 2026.....	13
5 Summary.....	13



High North Cooperation (HNC)

Front page photo: Line Djernæs Sandbakken/Country Governor of Nordland

1 Introduction

The overall purpose of the High North Cooperation (HNC) is to further strengthen and expand regional cooperation in civil preparedness between the regional governmental authorities in Northern Finland, Lapland, Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Troms and Finnmark, and Nordland.

The objectives are to increase contact across national and county borders, extend existing networks and establish points of contact within civil preparedness units at regional level.

The cooperation is based on a jointly prepared Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) document from 2016, updated in 2024, which states: "Cooperation between the regional authorities in Finland, Sweden and Norway strengthens the ability of crisis management, crisis prevention and crisis communication at the regional level."

This annual report highlights the most important activities that has taken place as part of the cooperation in 2025.

2 Action plan and goals 2025

Nordland held leadership in HNC in 2025, succeeding Northern Finland. The previous leader had prepared a draft action plan for 2025, which was updated and presented at the first meeting in January 2025, then revised and approved at the meeting in February 2025.

We have held monthly digital meetings in HNC in 2025, except from a physical meeting in June (in Bodø) at the same time as the Governors North meeting. In addition, we have worked thoroughly with an application for project funding to Interreg Aurora, we have held two communication tests, as well as prepared and conducted the International Cooperation Course 2025 (ICC25). The crisis communication network (CCN) has also held monthly meetings, and they have worked with the website and the Interreg Aurora application.

The timeline below shows the action plan in a visual format. Each activity will be further described in the next chapter.

High North Cooperation (HNC)

Action Plan 2025 Timeline

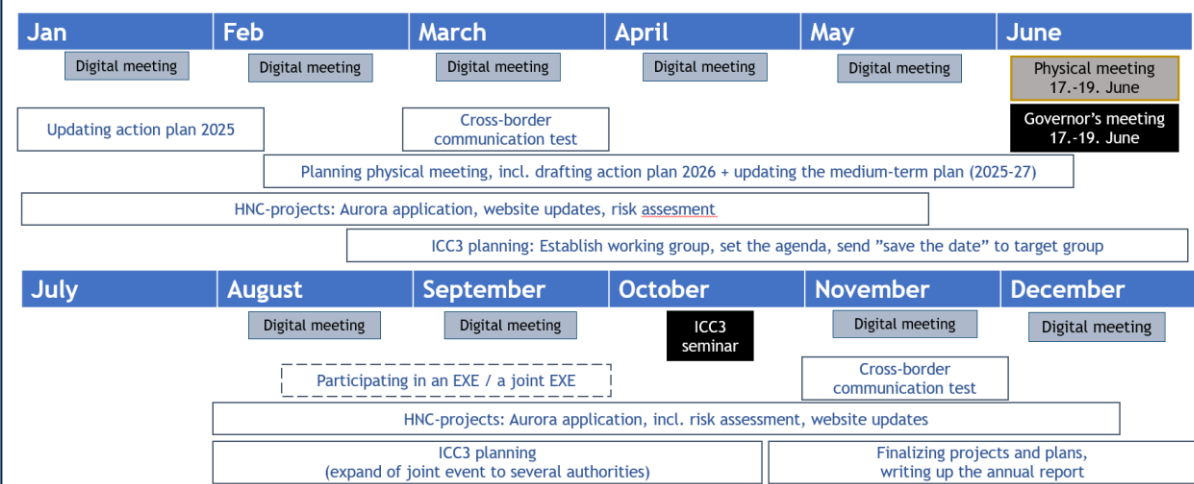


Figure 1: Illustration of HNC action plan for 2025

3 Events and projects in 2025

Governor's meeting and HNC meeting

The Governors in the High North Cooperation has a yearly physical meeting. In 2025, the meeting was held 17.-18. June in Bodø. In addition, the preparedness directors, preparedness advisors and the crisis communication network met on the same dates.



Picture 1: Participants at the Governors North meeting in Bodø, June 2025.

Photo: Emil Harjo Indsetviken, Country Governor of Nordland.

On the first day, each country presented news from their organizations and regional context. In addition, the plans for 2025 including the application for Interreg Aurora funding was discussed.

Programme for Governor's meeting
17. June
Governors North meeting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Updates from each region - Plans for 2025/26 - Interreg Aurora application
Separate meetings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Governors North - High North Cooperation (preparedness) - Crisis Communication Network
Excursion
Visit to the site of the new airport in Bodø
Dinner
18. June
Meeting at the Norwegian Joint Headquarter
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NATO in a Nordic context - Nordic civil-military preparedness - Host nation support
Social programme and dinner

After lunch, the programme was split in three: The Governor's meeting focused on business development in the region with examples from Bodø. The HNC meeting had discussions on preparedness matters, focusing on the follow-up of the action plan and host nation support. In addition, we discussed the ability to share classified information across national borders, as this was a point to follow up from meetings and discussions in 2024. At this time, we lack systems and regulations to facilitate for classified communication, and therefore this issue must be addressed at the national level.

The communication network had discussions related to the development of the HNC-website. The programme for

the day was finished with an excursion to the new airport, which is one element of the large city development project taking place in Bodø.

On the second day, the programme was facilitated by the Norwegian Joint Headquarter. The main topics were NATO in a Nordic context, Nordic civil-military preparedness and host nation support, presented and discussed through interesting briefs given by personnel at the headquarter. The contents of the meeting were classified, and details cannot be accounted for in this report. We finished off with a social programme and dinner in proximity of Bodø.

The general feedback after these two days was that it is meaningful to meet physically once each year, both for substantial professional benefit and for getting to know each other on a personal level.

High North Cooperation (HNC) meetings

We have held monthly digital meetings in the HNC collaboration throughout 2025. In total there have been ten meetings where preparedness directors, preparedness experts and the crisis communication network have been invited. The agenda of these meetings have been twofold: We have given reports from each country, as well as status updates and clarifications on current projects.

These meetings are considered an important forum where we can discuss relevant issues that contribute to shared situational understanding, while also getting to know each other better and facilitating the ability to make contact in crisis situations.

Crisis Communication Network (CCN) meetings

Crisis communicators from each region are part of the HNC. The communicators meet regularly to exchange information and share experiences.

8

In 2025, the network has updated and published news both on the High North Cooperation website¹ and on its own regional websites in Finland, Sweden, and Norway.

The Crisis Communication Network has also been working on the Communication Plan for the High North Civil Preparedness Forum (HNCPPF), Interreg Aurora. In this project, the Crisis Communication Network has focused particularly on package 4 (WP4) – “Counter foreign information influence.”

An important goal for 2026 is to increase knowledge about:

- AI connected to information influence. How can we determine whether something is true or not?
- Different techniques used in information influence campaigns.
- Strategic communication.

The Crisis Communication Network has invited several external speakers to help strengthen our expertise in this area. The first lecture will be held in January 2026.

Interreg Aurora: High North Civil Preparedness Forum (HNCPPF)

Interreg Aurora is a Programme in the European Union Interreg community for cross-border cooperation in 2021-2027. A decision was made in the HNC in the spring 2024 to apply for a 3-year project aimed at cross-border capacity building within civil preparedness. The primary motivation for this was to be able to expand and develop the HNC and to include more stakeholders in our activities.

The application processes started in October of 2024 when a working group, consisting of at least one expert from each country, was formed. The working group looked at needs identified from previous HNC activities, as well as national strategies and planning documents, to identify suitable areas for the project.

In the end, the working group identified four areas and several activities that seemed particularly relevant. These were:

¹ [Home - High North - Regional civil preparedness cooperation](https://sign.visma.net/fi/document-check/4e3b4923-797a-483b-8e62-fb2fb934bad3)

- Courses and networks to support interorganizational learning and networking, including international cooperation courses, a network for Mass Casualty Incidents, and a Cross-border Rescue Council.
- Harmonizing methods for risk assessment and conducting a joint risk assessment for the High North area.
- Sharing experiences, increasing knowledge, and looking at opportunities for interregional cooperation in relation to Host Nation Support.
- Sharing experiences, increasing knowledge, and developing a joint strategy for managing information influence.



Figure 2: Overview of work packages in the HNCPF project

The application was presented to the HNC directors (the proposed Steering committee for the project) and approved in March of 2025. The project, titled *The High North Civil Preparedness Forum*, was approved by the Interreg Aurora Programme in June, and work began in September.

International Cooperation Course 2025 (ICC25)

The International cooperation course (ICC) is a concept developed within the High North Cooperation to facilitate interorganizational learning, knowledge building and interregional cooperation. The course brings together stakeholders from Finland, Sweden, and Norway, for two days of networking, briefs, and workshops. It is a participant-driven course where all participants are experts in their respective fields and expected to actively contribute with their knowledge and perspectives.

ICC25 had a special focus on NATO's third baseline requirement: Ability to deal effectively with the uncontrolled movement of people. The aim of the course was to:

- Increase participants' understanding of the High North from a civil preparedness perspective.
- Provide an opportunity for networking among regional and national stakeholders in the High North.
- Increase knowledge about Finland, Sweden, and Norway from a civil preparedness perspective with a special focus on the ability to deal effectively with the uncontrolled movement of people as well as coordinating mass evacuations and caring for refugees.

ICC25 also constituted an integral part of the ongoing Swedish - Finnish joint advance planning for ability to deal with cross-border population movements and the ability to deal effectively with uncontrolled movement of people.

The course had 80 participants from 56 different organisations in Finland, Sweden and Norway, and all countries participated with local, regional and national stakeholders. Participants were divided into groups according to subtopics identified as relevant to the course theme. Two scenarios were used to facilitate discussions during the course: 1) Uncontrolled movement of people and 2) Planning for cross-border evacuations.

The main takeaways are that effective management of uncontrolled population movements and organized evacuations in a scenario with high tension requires strong international coordination, including civilian-military cooperation, cross-border communication, and logistical planning under challenging conditions. Authorities must ensure safe transit, maintain vital societal functions, and collaborate with NGOs and the private sector while addressing legal issues, security, and communication challenges across Finland, Sweden, and Norway.

Communication tests

The HNC-network have conducted two communication tests in 2025, led by the County Governor of Nordland.

The first communication test took place at 19.03.2025. It was an internal exercise for HNC members, more specifically a functional test of the Nordic talking groups in Virve/Nødnett/Rakel. In addition, the exercise tested the use of direct calls between countries. Some points of improvement were identified, which have been reported to national agencies responsible for emergency communication.



Figure 3: Cross-border communication in practice. Photo: Stian Olberg/DSB

The second test was conducted 25.11.2025, with 24 participants from rescue services, emergency medical services, police, healthcare administration, regional emergency coordination, regional governance, social services administration and national providers. This was a functional test, meaning there were radio calls to check the functions of the chosen talk groups. The participants met in Teams, where information and coordination about the communication on Virve/Nødnett/Rakel were given by the group leaders.

The exercise was a success – almost all participants were able to connect to almost all the talk groups. There were some exceptions: some were technical problems, while others are a result of which talk groups are programmed to be accessible by each participant. Although the exercise was successful there are several steps that can be taken by both exercise planners and the participants to ensure better communication, both in future exercises and real events. These findings are outlined in the evaluation of the exercise.

HNC chairmanship hand-over meeting

After the ICC in Skellefteå, we held an in-person handover meeting between Nordland, which held the leadership of the collaboration in 2025, and Norrbotten, which will assume leadership in 2026. In the meeting, we agreed on several measures to ensure that the collaboration remains valuable and effective, among others that the outgoing and incoming chairs will work together to prepare the annual plan for the coming year. For 2026, the action plan will contain both HNC activities and HNC PF activities.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to exchange experiences on, for example, meeting routines for the coming year and ideas for structuring agendas. These inputs were subsequently addressed during working sessions involving all HNC-organizations as part of the continued planning for 2026.

The meeting is considered a key success in facilitating the transition and ensuring effective transfer of knowledge and experience. We recommend that this format is replicated for future transitions of HNC chairmanship.

12

Assessment of Northern Nordic collaboration

During the summer, the Norwegian HNC-partners received funding from national authorities to assess existing cooperation agreements related to civil preparedness in the High North. The aim with this assessment is to provide a foundation for the in-depth work we will commence within the HNCPF-project, particularly with the risk- and vulnerability analysis.

There were two main aims with the project: 1) Map and provide an overview of the cooperation between the various actors at the regional and local levels in Norway, Sweden and Finland, both bilateral and trilateral cooperation. 2) Provide an overview of risk and vulnerability analyses or infrastructure assessments, etc., that have been conducted at the sector level between the countries. These may be linked to NATO's seven baseline requirements.

The consultancy agency KPMG was hired to lead the work by conducting the assessment, in close cooperation with a working group consisting of representatives from the HNC network. The report was finalized by the end of 2025 and is publicly available at the HNC website.

Participation in exercises

We have organized two table-top exercises as part of the International Cooperation Course in Skellefteå. Also, participants from some of the HNC organizations participated in Rescue Borealis as observers.

In the action plan for 2025 we had an intention to participate in a joint exercise with other actors and planned that a working group should discuss this issue further. Due to time constraints, we have not had time or capacity to delve into this matter. It seems like several exercises involving all three countries and the High North is in planning for 2026 and 2027, and we will investigate possibilities for joining these exercises. At the end of 2025, this is still in planning.

4 Further planning and cooperation

Action plan 2026

The action plan for 2026 will consist of activities in the HNC-collaboration as well as the HNCPF-project. A working group consisting of members from Nordland (HNC-leader in 2025), Norrbotten (HNC-leader in 2026) and Västerbotten (leader of the HNCPF-project) made a draft action plan that was presented for the HNC-group at the end of 2025. The HNC members are given the chance to come with input, and the action plan will be revised in the beginning of 2026 before it is approved.

Some activities that have previously been part of HNC will now be part of the HNCPF-project, such as the International Cooperation Courses (ICC). However, the same people will work with both the traditional HNC-collaboration and activities in HNCPF, and therefore it makes sense to combine these two activities that are closely interlinked. New structures to ensure efficient organization will be put in place.

13

5 Summary

2025 have been active for the High North Cooperation (HNC) network. We have held monthly digital meetings to exchange information, establish a shared situational awareness, and to coordinate activities in the network. The crisis communication network (CCN) has had additional monthly meetings. In addition, we have held two communication exercises, testing the tetra net communication across national borders.

We had a physical meeting in June in Bodø, Norway, where the Governors, HNC and CCN gathered to go more in-depth on issues related to societal security and emergency preparedness. In October, we gathered 80 participants from the three countries for discussions, learning and exchange at the International Cooperation Course in Skellefteå.

We have also finalized a project application to Interreg Aurora, which was granted during the summer. The High North Civil Preparedness Forum (HNCPF) project started in September 2025 and will be developed over the next three years. This project will allow the HNC to work more closely together on both existing and new topics related to comprehensive security and preparedness. As part of this development, the organization of HNC is also professionalised step by step.



High North Cooperation (HNC)

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