The Assessment of need of activities to support Children and Youth at Risk (CYAR) in the Barents Regions

Report to the Joint Working Group of Health and Related Social Issues (JWGHS)
Presented in the 29th Steering Group Meeting, Syktyvkar, September 17, 2019
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1. Framework for cooperation

1.1 The Barents Program

The Barents Program is the framework for the inter-regional Barents cooperation for the period 2019-2023 and succeeds the program for 2014-2018. The inter-regional Barents cooperation was initiated in 1993, at the same time as the Barents Euro Arctic Council, BEAC, was established by signing the Kirkenes Declaration on January 11th 1993. The members of BEAC are: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and European Commission. The member regions of the Barents Regional Council are:

Finland: Kainuu, Lapland, Oulu, Pohjois-Karjala

Norway: Finnmark, Nordland, Troms

Russia: Arkhangelsk, Karelia, Komi, Murmansk, Nenets

Sweden: Norrbotten, Västerbotten
The Barents member regions share a significant number of similarities, most notably the Arctic climate, sparse population, vast natural resources, a globally unique nature, high exposure to the consequences of ongoing climate change and long distances within the region as well as to the markets. These characteristics impose both challenges and opportunities for mutual cooperation. Maintaining and increasing the present level of population is important in order to ensure competence and local knowledge. A depopulation of these areas would be unfortunate in light of the opportunities and challenges ahead.

In the period between 1990 and 2017, the young population of the Barents Region (aged 16-29) has already decreased with more than 500 000 and is now 860 000. See more in Annex 1

**Gaps in knowledge; Understanding the needs of the Arctic Youth**

The 2nd assessment of the state of human development in the Arctic; Arctic Human Development Report (2014):

The future of the Arctic is connected with its youth. While demographic information has for the most part increased in availability and accessibility over the past decade (with exceptions due to changes in national censuses), there remains a need for more analysis of specific demographic cohorts, most notably youth.

**Youth**

The viability of Arctic cultures, languages, traditional activities, communities and settlements will rest on the choices young people make. Thus we need to better understand their aspirations, and the barriers to achieving these. Too many northern youth suffer from social alienation, which in its worst forms incites substance abuse and even suicide. We need to understand how formal education can be made more relevant, especially among Indigenous youth. What role can evolving technologies play in education and in local employment opportunities, including in the knowledge and creative economy? What is, and could be, the role of both education and the adoption of new technologies in shaping youth’s attitudes toward traditional activities and northern settlements, as offering viable and attractive futures? What are the most strategic investments in human capital/capacity building that can be made to guarantee that youth – both male and female – wish to remain in or return to the North?

The 8th Barents Program 2019-2023 Program expresses the common objective and operational framework to strengthen the Barents cooperation, being a joint platform maintaining stable development and people-to-people cooperation in the North.

The Barents Regional Council prioritizes the following areas for the period 2019-2023:

1. International competitiveness and business development
2. Climate and environment
3. Cultural, people-to-people and **youth-related co-operation**
4. Infrastructure, transport and communication

Information and promotion of the Barents cooperation, gender equality, indigenous aspect and traditional knowledge will be mainstreamed as cross-cutting elements in all prioritized areas.
1.2 The Joint Working Group for Health and Related Social Issues (JWGHS)

The Barents Program is implemented and monitored by working groups established by the Barents Regional Council. The working groups are the experts on the regional cooperation in their respective fields.

The Joint Working Group for Health and Related Social Issues (JWGHS) provides a political structure for health and social cooperation, in which representatives of the national and regional health authorities of the Barents countries meet twice a year to discuss relevant issues.

Three specialized programmes have been worked out by specialists on the request of the JWGHS. The three programmes can be seen as sub-programmes under the Barents Health Programme. These are:

1) The Barents TB Programme
2) The Barents CYAR Programme
3) The Barents HIV/AIDS Programme

The prioritized task in the present Barents Program (2019-2023) for Health and Related Social Issues is: The Joint Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues (JWGHS) will in the program period elaborate a new Framework Programme for Cooperation on Health and Related Social Issues including, but not limited to, program areas such as Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and youth at risk. Implementation of joint activities for preserving people’s health and supporting healthy life-styles, and undertaking preventive activities among children and youth are of high importance.

1.3 The Children and Youth at Risk in the Barents Region (CYAR)

The Children and Youth At Risk in the Barents region is a co-operation programme adopted and owned by the Joint Working Group on Health and related Social Issues (JWGHS) of the Council of the Barents/Euroarctic region and therefore endorsed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Finland, Sweden, and Norway.

The Children and Youth At Risk in the Barents regions (CYAR 2008 - 2015) programme was developed as a result of growing concern regarding marginalized youth and children in the region. The CYAR programme was coordinated by a Steering committee (SC) composed by all Barents partners. The CYAR programme emphasized that all efforts should aim to strengthen the public services and their ability to adequately assist and support children and youth on the individual level. The programme aimed to improve life conditions for the youth and children at risk through cooperative actions in general (creating frameworks for exchange of information) and project activities in particular (building partnerships between public institutions at all levels and non-governmental organizations in the Barents region with responsibility for the well-being of youth and children.
Pål Christian Bergström, Director General, Bufetat, Northern Norway, and Chairman of the CYAR Steering Committee concluded in Murmansk, June 2015 when evaluating 15 years of implementation: “CYAR is an effective and systematic tool for information exchange, cross-cultural understanding and competence sharing on protection of children in the Barents region”

CYAR results 2008-2015:
Over 800 professionals have received training in the Barents region
- Approx. 30 CYAR workshops and seminars per year
- Quality assurance systems in all programs – follow-up activities.
- CYAR have reached over 4,000 children and families among the target groups so far
- Research groups, on effect on behavior change, improvement of social skills (Incredible Years- method, Aggression Replacement Training- ART and Family-ART)
- Over 100 cases of restorative justice, mediation and not prison

CYAR 2016- 2019 programme was developed based on input from all Barents partners and on national and regional strategies regarding vulnerable children, as well as the evaluation and experiences from previous phases of CYAR. There is consensus that the most important and key-word in ongoing realization of the programme is ‘the best interest of the child’.

In the present programme period, the CYAR partners emphasize that special attention is given to;

- improving positive parenting skills;
- improving systems for protection of children`s rights in collaboration with children’s ombudsmen;
- prevention of violence against children;
- sustainability of best practice competence building results from previous phases of CYAR
- utilizing web-based technology and e-learning in best practice dissemination;
- alternative reactions to traditional punishment for children in conflict with the law, and restorative justice;
- prevention of trafficking and sexual exploitation of children and young people

The CYAR status report and activity plan for 2017 were presented in the 24th meeting of the Joint Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues (JWGHS) in Oulu, March 2017 by Marina Zyryanova, project manager from the CYAR secretariat of the Steering Committee for CYAR, Regional Office for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufetat) Northern Norway. Due to lack of funding no activities in competence building had taken place and submitting applications was planned. On March 15 2017, a new project application was submitted to Kolarctic CBC 2014-2020 programme with core activities on violence prevention and protection of the rights of the child. A big role in the project was assigned to closer cooperation with NGOs.
Project partners came from Finland, Norway, the Archangelsk Region and the Republic of Komi. However, no project financing was granted in this round of applications.

CYAR Steering Committee has had its last meeting in June 2017 in Oulu. Since then the issues have been discussed solely as part of the Joint Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues (JWGHS) agenda.

March 2018, in the 26th meeting of JWGHS partners expressed a strong interest in continuing the work with children and youth in the Barents region in some form, and were of the opinion that this field should be included also in the next framework programme, (the 6th Framework Programme for Cooperation on Health and Related Social Issues (JWGHS) in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region 2020-2023).

Most of the representatives expressed that this was a priority of their country/region under the Barents collaboration and decided that a needs assessment should be carried out.

This assessment is based on an analysis of the previous activities of the CYAR-programme, desk studies of data on the current situation, physical meetings with professionals from member regions, with actors at organisations for indigenous peoples, and with organisations with tasks related to vulnerable children and youth. This draft final report gives suggestions for future action to be taken in the Children and Youth at Risk Cooperation Programme.

The assessment is financed by Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden and supported by Ministry of Health and Care Services, Norway. The Assessment is conducted by National Institute of Health and Welfare (THL), Finland by project manager Minna Sinkkonen.
2. Issues to be addressed for sustainability and continuation of the programme

The following recommendations are based on the discussions with the stakeholders of the CYAR programme in Oslo June 2019 and in St. Petersburg July 2019. The meetings were arranged in order to ensure that the planned framework programme would be based on the needs of the participating Barents Regions. It was concluded that:

What is needed now, is a **common understanding** and definition on risk factors for children and youth and possible interventions in each of the countries own context. All operations should be based on **Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC**, the perspective and the best interest of the child and child as a subject, as well as **international treaties** (Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and Lanzarote Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, Council of Europe Convention on action against trafficking in human beings and **National Child and Family Strategies**.

**Political support** is needed from all of the states both from national and regional levels and operations should aim at securing political commitment (including financing) and political interest on the subject.

**Universities** and academia should be involved to ensure sustainability and identify research gaps, promote research across borders and find out about existing research results on child welfare in the Barents region (especially Russia).

Ongoing research and development of good practices by universities and other actors should be taken into account and create synergies

National **Ministries of Education** and **Ombudsmen for Children** are also important stakeholders for CYAR and they should be involved.

Cooperation and exchange of experts, trainers and best practices **between regions in Russia** should be supported and encouraged.

**Gender issues** could be monitored in a more structured manner. There are differences between girls and boys life situations and problems and the approach and methods should be gender sensitive.

CYAR should also have a **Steering Committee** of its own.

The following topics were recommended by the representatives from Komi and Arkhangelsk to be added to the present CYAR programme:

- improving positive parenting skills (formation of conflict-free relations with adolescents, establishing and developing parent-child relations of partnership and cooperation; development of parents’ communication skills);
- social work (rehabilitation) with under-aged children who have mental disorders;
- prevention of bullying and cyber-bulling among adolescents; providing support to adolescents and their parents;
- social work (rehabilitation) in families with alcohol abuse problems;
- prevention of suicides among adolescents and young people;
3. **Proposed Activities for the next 6th Framework Programme**

The long-term impact of successful realization of CYAR is defined in the present programme as:

- a strengthened children’s rights perspective in the programme
- a contribution to the democratic development in the Barents region by increasing children and youth participation in service development and distribution a contribution to sustainable social and economic development in the Barents region by supporting a
- positive environment for children and youth, and a successful transition to adult life

The main objectives of the present programme are:

1. To strengthen the perspective of the rights of the individual child through the UN CRC and its operationalization in cross-sectoral service provision.
2. To increase efficiency and quality of services towards target groups through emphasizing a cross-sectoral approach and use of knowledge-based methods
3. To increase information exchange between stakeholders and support effective coordination of efforts in the realm of children and youth at risk in the Barents region

In order to achieve these, and based on the analysis of background data and discussions with the stakeholders: the following activities are proposed for the next framework programme: The 6th Framework Programme for Cooperation on Health and Related Social Issues (JWGHS) in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region 2020-2023).

### 3.1 Establishing CYAR steering committee with Terms of Reference

What is needed now is a stable structure that could facilitate and support the cooperation, especially by securing financing by mapping options and drafting applications. CYAR should have its own Steering Committee with defined Terms of Reference as in the Steering Committee of the Barents HIV/TB Programme. See Annex 2

Representation of indigenous peoples’ should be supported as well as participation of youth; a representative from the Barents Regional Youth Council in an advisory role should be included.

### 3.2 Organising Biennial Barents Regional Conference

Cooperation within regions should be strengthened and discussion should continue between regions, states and other international actors in the region (Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), Nordic Council of Ministers, Arctic Council, Northern Dimension Partnership in Public Health and Social Well-being, NDPHS) on how to best prevent and promote the welfare of children and families in the Barents Region.
Universities and Academia as well as NGOs should be involved more, as multi-stakeholder partnerships that involve NGOs and foundations as well as authorities and research institutes has proven to be an effective way of promoting children’s rights.

National Ministries of Education and Ombudsmen for Children should also be involved. All children go to school and preventive measures as well as support to children and young people should be done in close cooperation with schools. Ombudsmen for Children are significant and influential political actors and they also monitor the realization of children’s rights in their respective countries.

A Barents regional conference is proposed to involve all partners, reach a common understanding and definition on risk factors for children and youth and possible interventions in each of the countries own context and gain political support. The organizing of the Regional Conference every other year could be the responsibility of the Chair country, Sweden in 2021, and Finland 2023.

There was also a suggestion in the Oslo stakeholder meeting that the upcoming Conference 15.-20.6.2020 in Arkhangelsk in Arctic Social Sciences “ICASS” could also serve this purpose. Series of topics could include: Domestic violence – definition, Sami populations, Children with disabilities, Alcohol abuse, Poverty and Mental health, suicides/suicidal behavior. More info on the upcoming conference can be found here: https://iassa.org/news-archive/72-dates-for-icass-x

Either way, it would be beneficial to cooperate with the Academia; present and evaluate results in conferences, organize side-events and follow-up on research.

3.3 Drafting a Barents Regional Child Strategy

The proposed outcome of the regional conference could be Barents Regional Child Strategy based on CRC and other international treaties (Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and Lanzarote Convention on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse) including the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This strategy could bring together the national strategies as well as other international actors programmes and activities including also strengthened cooperation between Barents Working Groups.

The strategy would cover all children under 18 in the Barents Region to target effective preventive measures to families, children and young people.

The Concluding observations on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of the Russian Federation by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, 31 January 2014 gives a comprehensive picture of the situation in Russia.

The Strategy should monitored and updated biannually as part of the Conference

The Proposed Barents Regional Child Strategy should take into account different gender impacts. It is necessary to take into account the different needs and interests of women and men, to identify gender inequalities in access to and control of resources, to consider the impact of gender based stereotypes and traditional gender roles, to anticipate different effects on women/girls and men/boys, and to ensure gender equality.

The Barents Region also has a strong indigenous peoples’ presence, including; the Saami in Norway, Finland, Sweden and Russia (Murmansk Oblast), the Nenets in Nenets Autonomous Okrug, and the
Vepsians in the Republic of Karelia. Mainstreaming the indigenous aspect and traditional knowledge should be supported.

The materials of and cooperation with Arctic Council: Gender Equality Arctic 1 and 2, the Indigenous Peoples’ Secretariat and Arctic Human Health Expert Group (AHHEG) could serve these purposes well.

3.4 Including Child and Youth participation as a cross cutting issue

Youth Recommendations from the Barents Cooperation Working Groups

The Swedish BEAC Chairmanship 2017-2019 is currently drafting Youth Recommendations from the working groups of the Barents cooperation, and JWGHS has proposed the following:

Goal
Through CRIA assessment increase young people’s engagement in policy making and advocacy of their rights at all levels to improve health and social related issues. Consider their best interest in services for adults.

Recommendations
The working groups should systematically conduct Child rights impact assessment (CRIA) on their strategies, policies and activities, including the results in their annual report.

The Youth Recommendations cover all working groups and promote the use of CRIA and the voice of the youth to be heard.

Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA)

Child participation is one of the core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which asserts that children and young people have the right to freely express their views and that there is an obligation to listen to children’s views and to facilitate their participation in all matters affecting them within their families, schools, local communities, public services, institutions, government policies and judicial procedures.

Public policy is stronger when children’s best interests are a priority and the impacts on children are specifically considered in policy development processes. Child rights impact assessment is a systematic process to assess the potential impacts of decisions on children and their rights and promote policy coherence.

Children with disabilities enjoy all of the rights stipulated under the CRC. Children and young people with disabilities can enrich policymaking and service provision with their daily experiences and are uniquely qualified to provide information on whether their needs are being met and their contributions utilized across the full spectrum of issues and interventions: from health and nutrition to sexual and reproductive health, education and services for the transition to adulthood. Participation also allows children (with disabilities) to make decisions which they are often times limited to in their everyday choices- thus empowering them.
**Children’ best interest in services for adults.**

Effective Child and Family method’s goal is to make the adult services accept and take responsibility for the children of a patient, to produce to the services evidence-based methods for this work, to build trans-sectoral co-operation and service structures for the benefit of families and children and to strengthen general knowhow and operations, regarding prevention in mental health work. On the level of families, the goal is to reduce or break the spiral extending over generations.

At the beginning of the development work focus was on psychiatric services but basic services were involved already from the beginning. Quickly, the work extended also to substance abuse services, somatic healthcare and social services and during the last few years, also to probation services.

On the level of services, the Effective Child & Family work is focused on changing both the system/the service system and on developing and researching the needed working tools. Previous experience from many projects is that even good, new practices and methods will not take root after the initial enthusiasm, but will wither away within a few years. The problem is, that the service system into which the new method has been planted, does not work on same principles and thus, does not support the use of the method.

The project always includes both concrete methods for client service and at the same time, a change in the service system, which both support each other. Change of the service system means changes in the service system’s or municipality’s strategic thinking and operative goals, which will then be implemented as concrete structures, obligations and activities on all levels of the organisation.

“The Functional Families –Evidence based Models for Family Work in Finland and the Republic of Karelia”, a project funded by the ENPI CBC Karelia Programme during 2013—2014 prepared a book that includes a chapter “Effective Child and Family”-method and its development. Several manuals guide the work based on this method and they have been translated into Russian by the project.

Promoting this method in the implementation of the Barents Program as well as in the work of international partners such as NDPHS Expert Group on Alcohol and Substance Abuse (EG ASA) could prove to prevent problems in families early on as well as create sustainable changes in the services system.

**3.5 Establishing Further Cooperation with the Barents Youth Programme (BRYC)**

Sexual health has for several years been a topic of discussions in the Barents Regional Youth Council (BRYC) meetings. The main idea to host a conference for youth leaders and youth in general arise with anecdotal stories of youths trying to get an appointment at the local youth health clinic in order to get tested for Sexually Transmitted Infections and Diseases. Early on in the planning work of the conference it was clear that this project would benefit the most if this was to be an exploratory conference where youth themselves are empowered to take charge in a question that is of importance to them specifically.

BRYC Sexual Health Conference was organized by the Barents Regional Youth Council between the 21th to 24th of May in Kiruna. In total 13 youth leaders from Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia attended with the main goal of improving the situation for three topics in Sexual Health in the Barents Region, Sexually transmitted diseases, Sexual Education and Sexual conduct. The two-day conference resulted in the report “Findings and recommendations on improving Sexual Health among youth in the Barents Region”.

Early in the planning work there was also an outspoken will to include other relevant working groups of the Barents Cooperation such as the Joint Working Group on Health and Related Social Issues (JWGHS) and Joint Working Group on Education and Research (JWGER). These groups were contacted several times both in person and by email – however with little effect and interest to take part in the planning process. In the
end neither group was part of part of the conference. The author of this report did observe the discussions during the 2nd day of the conference.

The goal was to be a push for change and improvement in the raised issues and problems. It was itself a goal for youth to meet with youth to try to come up with solutions to issues and problems mostly affecting youth. These recommendations should be carefully considered. See Annex 3 for full report.

Furthermore, concerning sexual health, the use Child Right’s Impact Assessment (CRIA) and considering children’s best interest in services for adults would be essential for the Working Group on HIV/AIDS.

3.6 Implementing evidence-based practices and ensuring political support

The further planning of the implementation/competence building of the evidence based practices in CYAR could benefit from the guide developed to shed lights on the principles of implementing and managing evidence-based practices in child and family services and provides concrete tips on how to develop one’s own skills and competencies as well as to ensure policy level support and change; i.e. evidence informed policies.

It is important that the implementation of change takes place at all levels of the organisation. Key groups include employees, their immediate supervisors, middle management, top management, decision-makers, administration and support functions. There is a need at every level for a clear division of responsibilities and a predetermined strategic way of moving forward if an effective outcome is to be achieved. Supporting children’s growth by evidence-based practices – how to manage implementation-guide https://kasvuntuki.fi/en/implementationguide/ is intended to serve as:

- a process tool that provides local and regional governments with information on the preconditions for implementing and managing evidence-based practices.
- a checklist of the essential actions in the implementation process to ensure that the benefits and scientifically proven effects of evidence-based practice are achieved in practice.

3.7 Building stronger links of cooperation and dialogue with European Commission

European Commission is a member of Barents Euro-Arctic Council as well as Barents Regional Council. Barents Euro-Arctic Council has active cooperation and high level dialogue with the European Commission, e.g. the upcoming event of the Swedish Presidency.

In parallel with the BEAC Ministerial Meeting in Umeå, the European Commission, the European External Action Service, and the Government of Sweden will jointly organise the EU Arctic Forum in Umeå, Sweden, on 3-4 October 2019. The EU Arctic Forum will include several keynote addresses and five panel sessions on 3 October. Foreign Ministers from EU member states as well as the Arctic Council countries will be invited to participate. The Annual Arctic Indigenous Peoples’ Dialogue with interactive panel discussions will be held on 4 October https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/eu-arctic-forum-2019-oct-03_en

It would be beneficial to discuss, how to actively promote dialogue and cooperation between the European Commission and Barents Regional Council and working groups. Maybe the upcoming 1st ministerial meeting of Ministers of Health and social affairs could serve as a starting point.

Also, national dialogue between the ministries of health and ministries of foreign affairs would give an opportunity to bring health and social issues into the agenda and promote financing for future activities
4. **Approach of Collaboration**

In the report: “Finnish and Russian Civil Society Actors Working Towards Common Global Goals – In search of sustainable practices of collaboration”, relevant remarks about collaboration were made.

Cooperation needs to be based on genuine collaboration so that it is fruitful for both partners, instead of being based on assumptions that good practices good could be imported elsewhere as they are. Ongoing research and development of good practices by universities and other actors should be taken into account and create synergies (e.g. meta-analysis of current research in Russia on the subject matter).

Also, the value of personal encounters between partners still remains vital and cannot be underestimated. It is important to keep up regular meetings with different parties and involve everyone in planning joint activities. Projects should not be initiated just for the sake of initiating a project, but that they should be based on a deeper idea of the change we want to see in the society and reflect the goals we want to achieve in the long run.

Different trends of cooperation come and go, but the connections between people last if they are based on shared history and close bonds that are created over a longer period of time. In an ideal world, the resources needed for sustaining infrastructure would be recognized.

There is no escaping the fact that funding structures have always created the framework for the cooperation and will do so in the future. Creating sustainable cooperation thus requires a balancing act between being able to adapt to the prevailing and often rapidly changing conditions and yet not giving up the long-term vision of the direction where the work should be targeted at. We should fight against the creation of divisions and, instead, work towards common values and goals. Everything that creates connections and understanding between people, and enables to build something new together is good.

> “What this cooperation has really been about is mutual evaluation of our work and developing it further together.”

Kirsi-Maria Manninen, executive director, Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association

As the 8th Barents Program 2019-2023 Program expressed, the common objective and operational framework to strengthen the Barents cooperation, is being a joint platform maintaining stable development and people-to-people cooperation in the North.

In order to achieve this, the work should continue at all levels: between professionals and local, regional and national and international policy makers for the realisation of the rights of the child in the Barents Region.
List of References

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3. Families and family work in Finland and the Republic of Karelia, Edited by Simo Mannila and Dmitry Titkov, Petrozavodsk 2014


List of Annexes

Annex 1
The Future of Youth Cooperation in the Barents Region, Barents Regional Youth Council, Tim Andersson presentation in Joensuu 2019

Annex 2
Terms of Reference for the Steering Committee of the Barents HIV/TB Programme

Annex 3
Findings and recommendations on improving Sexual Health among youth in the Barents Region, May 2019, Kiruna