

Interreg



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Aurora

# PEOPLE & BEYOND



2027

2021

# GREAT IDEAS KNOW NO BORDERS.

On the cover photo you find Moa, Adrian and Ellinor, three young entrepreneurs that met each other when they studied at Luleå University of Technology. Together, they have started a company that develops an innovative cultivation system for vegetables and herbs, all year round, in an Arctic climate. Their vision is to find new cultivation techniques using waste heat from data centers. By using waste heat from industry, Arctic communities can become more self-sufficient and sustainable. The pilot project is ongoing in collaboration with the RISE ICE data center, which works across borders with tests and research on sustainability, surplus heat recovery and operational optimization.

Do you have an idea for a cross-border project?

[www.interregaurora.eu](http://www.interregaurora.eu)



# INTRODUCTION

The overall goal of the Interreg Aurora Programme 2021-2027 is to encourage cross-border collaboration and thereby strengthening the competitiveness, sustainability and attractiveness of the Programme area through social inclusion, digitalisation and green transition.

This is a summary of the Interreg Aurora Programme, you can find the official Programme document on our website [www.interregaurora.eu](http://www.interregaurora.eu)

# Table of Content

---

Introduction .....	p. 04
What is Interreg Aurora? .....	p. 06
<b>Priority 1 SMART &amp; Beyond - Smart and sustainable growth</b> .....	<b>p. 09</b>
Specific Objective 1.1 Smart specialization, research and innovation .....	p. 13
Specific Objective 1.2 Competitiveness of SMEs .....	p. 16
<b>Priority 2 GREEN &amp; Beyond - Green and sustainable transition</b> .....	<b>p. 18</b>
Specific Objective 2.1 Climate change adaptation .....	p. 23
Specific Objective 2.2 Nature protection and biodiversity .....	p. 26
Specific Objective 2.3 Sustainable mobility .....	p. 29
<b>Priority 3 SOCIAL &amp; Beyond - Education, Culture and Sustainable Tourism</b> .....	<b>p. 30</b>
Specific Objective 3.1 Education and lifelong learning .....	p. 34
Specific Objective 3.2 Culture and sustainable tourism .....	p. 36
<b>Priority 4 COOPERATIONS &amp; Beyond - Better and more sustainable cross-border cooperation</b> .....	<b>p. 38</b>
Specific Objective 4.1 Cross-border capacity building .....	p. 41
CLARIFICATIONS & Beyond .....	p. 43
Interreg Aurora Programme .....	p. 44

# What is Interreg Aurora?

**Interreg Aurora is a Programme in the European Union Interreg community for cross-border cooperation in 2021-2027. The Programme offers great opportunities and enables new and exciting cross-border cooperation in the northernmost parts of Europe and Sápmi. The Programme is unique as it is integrated with Sápmi and the indigenous Sami people.**

## Goals and priorities

The three dimensions of sustainable development, social, ecological and economic sustainability are horizontal principles and an overarching goal in the Interreg Aurora Programme. Climate change, green transition, and sustainable use of natural resources are highly prioritized. Increased globalisation makes regional collaboration even more vital. The Nordic countries have a long tradition of cooperation. The northern parts of Sweden, Norway and the northern and eastern parts of Finland are united by common values, but the linguistic and cultural barriers can stand in the way for further exchange of information and business activities.

The Interreg Aurora Programme strives to minimise both physical and mental barriers in collaborative projects, and to promote cross-border projects that advances the Programme area region in a smart, sustainable and inclusive manner.

Interreg Aurora will strengthen Arbediehtu, that means, transferring the knowledge, which is linked to the traditional Sami livelihoods, culture and languages.

## Programme area

The Interreg Aurora Programme area is divided into two sub areas – Aurora and Sápmi. The area is a world leader in green transition, environmentally friendly technologies, digitalization, and Arctic knowledge. There are also many research institutes and higher education institutes, strong industries, a healthy entrepreneurial community, rich cultural heritage and valuable natural resources.

The area is vast and accommodates a mixture of sparsely populated areas in the north and more densely populated areas in the south. The demographic development in the area will probably see an overall population decrease, although some areas will likely experience growth in the upcoming years. The population is also ageing, causing a smaller proportion to be of working age, especially in rural regions. This leads to challenges in maintaining a satisfactory range of services, achieving critical mass and meeting the business community's need for labour.

The critical mass is crucial for transferring knowledge, influencing people or carrying out certain processes that are important for the social and sustainable development. Another important structural challenge is the highly

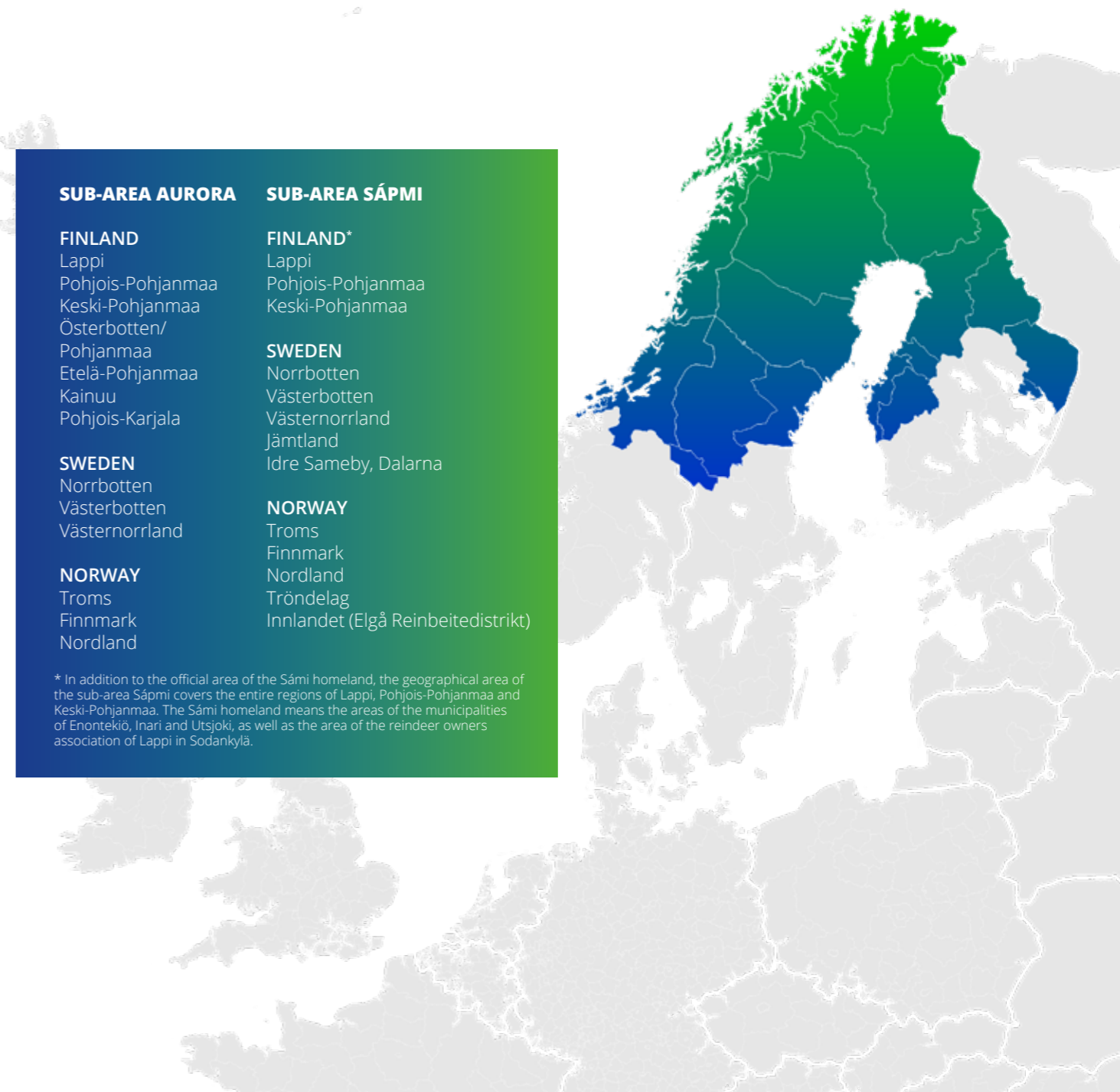
gender-segregated labour market in the Programme area. It is therefore important to have an inclusive approach in Programme activities.

## Sápmi perspective

The Sami are the indigenous people of Finland, Norway, Sweden and north-western Russia. Although the Sami are divided by national borders, they are one people, united by culture, history, traditions, industries, languages, and visions for the future.

It is important that the Sami culture can develop and thrive. The Nordic countries voted in favour of adapting the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which creates security for Sami culture and genuine influence on the economic, social and cultural development in Sápmi.

The Programme area covers the traditional Sami region - Sápmi - which means that the Programme is an important resource for the safeguarding and development of the Sami culture and livelihood.



All regions in the programme area and the Sami Parliaments in Sweden, Finland and Norway have identified the needs in the area and the best opportunities to work across borders. The following chapters are a description of the 4 priorities and the 8 specific objectives, including a short background description and the desired results within each of them.



**Priority 1 - A smarter Europe**  
**Smart and sustainable growth**

Specific Objective 1.1 Smart specialization, research and innovation  
Specific Objective 1.2 Competitiveness of SMEs



**Priority 2 - A greener Europe**  
**Green and sustainable transition**

Specific Objective 2.1 Climate change adaptation  
Specific Objective 2.2 Nature protection and biodiversity  
Specific Objective 2.3 Sustainable mobility



**Priority 3 - A more social Europe**  
**Education, culture and sustainable tourism**

Specific Objective 3.1 Education and lifelong learning  
Specific Objective 3.2 Culture and sustainable tourism



**Priority 4 - A better Interreg Governance**  
**Better and more sustainable cross-border cooperation**

Specific Objective 4.1 Cross-border capacity building

Please note that it is only possible to select one of the Specific Objective in your application. If your project contributes to more than one Specific Objective, please select the Specific Objective that is most relevant to the main focus of the project.

# SMART & BEYOND

SMART AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH





## Research, development and innovation

The Interreg Aurora Programme has identified seven broad areas that are believed to have the capacity to create overlaps in the smart specialisation strategies and cross-border collaboration. These areas concern both businesses and research institutes and higher education institutes. There are a number of research institutes and higher education institutes in the Programme area. Several of them have positioned themselves in specific areas and are important for the development of the Programme area.

- Industry connected to manufacturing and natural resources such as forestry and hydropower, bio economy and new products, sustainable mining, circular economy and smart food.
- Space technology connected to remote sensing and retrieval of satellite data, drones in both industry and the public sector, services and products.
- Energy technology such as energy storage, hybrid solutions, smart grid and energy production.
- Test activities such as testbeds of know-how and technology in Arctic conditions.

- Health and healthcare, such as e-health and wellness.
- Digitalisation such as digital solutions, service and system solutions.
- Transport such as developing sustainable logistics chains, digital solutions and services and low carbon transport technologies.

### Sápmi perspective

The Sami research institutions are small with limited resources and capacity, though, different national universities conduct research on Sami issues. The dedicated research institutes need to be strengthened for the Sami to have an ownership over the research results.

### Entrepreneurship

The micro-, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) and start-ups in the Interreg Aurora Programme area are key factors in the transition to a green economy, creating jobs, and supporting the community. Although there are some large and important corporations in Programme area, the vast majority of enterprises (99%) are small, with less than 50 employees. To support them in realising their full potential, the Programme area must become an even more attractive place to start and grow a business.

The large proportion of MSMEs means that companies must collaborate across borders to gain access to knowledge and other resources to strengthen their competitiveness on the market. Increased collaboration between both new and established companies is particularly important for increasing profitability and finding new business opportunities.

### Sápmi perspective

Traditional Sami livelihoods like reindeer herding, fishing, duodjii and agriculture are the cornerstones of the Sami culture and important for employment in Sápmi. The Sami area has a low percentage of private businesses, and most of the private businesses are micro companies with one or two employees. Entrepreneurship in the Sami community is encouraged and promoted. Development of arbediehtu means, transferring the knowledge, which is linked to the traditional Sami livelihood, within Sami businesses and livelihoods. The central part in this transformation is also the Sami languages and the interaction with nature. Arbediehtu is the core element for the Sami culture, languages and for the Sami businesses.

*"It is important to create knowledge networks and cooperation between higher education institutes, businesses and the public sector in the Interreg Aurora Programme area."*



Drone collecting weather data



Kajaani Datacenter. Photo: Kainuu Arctic Lakeland



Astrid Vatshaug Kvist is crafting a Southern Sami belt  
Photo: Lena Kuoljok Lind, Ajtte Swedish Mountain and Sami Museum





The strong industrial and research environments in the Programme area, can develop, test and market sustainable solutions in the green transition.

# Smart specialization, research and innovation

Interreg Aurora will promote cooperation between enterprises based on complementary strengths. Cross-border cooperation dealing with research and innovation activities in MSMEs should contribute towards the transition to a Climate neutral and circular economy that takes care of biodiversity and the environment.

There are also high-level universities, research institutes and other knowledge institutions in the Programme area. The Aurora Programme will promote research and innovation activities in public research centres, higher education and centres of competence. The cooperation between universities in Norway, Sweden and Finland is particularly important.

There is a great need for cross-border collaboration within R&I. A joint regional R&I system in which the institutions have complementary competence and knowledge will be established. Many institutions are individually small in an international context and have to compete with large European research and innovation communities for research funding. Interreg Aurora will stimulate the creation of a critical mass in the region that can reach out to European research Programmes such as Horizon Europe.

Businesses in the area have a large import and export dependency and comparatively large distances to their market outlets. To create competitive conditions for the business sector, it is important to focus on finding innovative sustainable solutions to problems related to accessibility and transport efficiency.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

# 1.1

### Sápmi perspective

Interreg Aurora will support activities in Sápmi that contribute to the establishment of a local innovation network at the intersection between business and academia, between science and traditional knowledge, and between tradition and the contemporary. Interreg Aurora aims to help create greater networking between Sami actors, building the structures for R&I in Sami businesses and promoting cooperation.

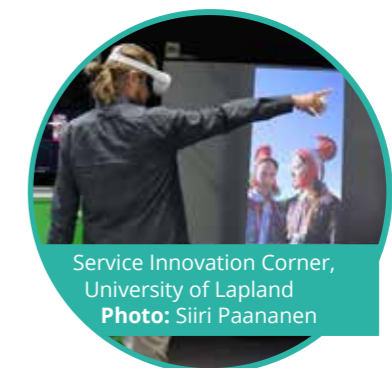
### Main target groups

The main target groups for the activities are MSMEs, higher education, colleges, polytechnics and research institutions, the public sector, and civil society.

The main beneficiaries are universities/ higher education institutes, colleges, polytechnics, and research institutions, along with the public sectors, industries, and civil society.



Energy infrastructure, Vaasa  
Photo: Mikko Lehtimäki



Service Innovation Corner, University of Lapland  
Photo: Siiri Paananen

## Examples of activities

- Cooperation between research institutes, higher education institutes, businesses and/or public sector to create cross-border knowledge networks enhancing the green and digital transitions.
- Usage of shared regional research infrastructures through cross-border cooperation to enhance the uptake of advanced technologies and the development of innovative products, services, and methods as well as new business models and opportunities.
- Cooperation between research institutes, higher education institutes, businesses and/or public sector to strengthen the exploitation of applied research in SMEs and/or public sector.
- Development of arenas, Programmes, tools, and methods for supporting technology transfer, soft knowledge and cooperation between enterprises, research centres and higher education sector.
- Stimulation to create a critical mass in the region that can reach out to EU Programmes such as Horizon Europe.



# GREAT IDEAS KNOW NO BORDERS.

To compete on the international market a strong and competitive business sector focusing on sustainable growth, green transition, and social inclusion is needed. The level of commercialisation and venture capital expertise needs to increase. Today, the business structure consists largely of MSMEs with limited financial and personal resources.



Innovative cultivation system for year round farming in arctic climates  
Photo: Patrik Öhman



# Competitiveness of SMEs

To boost competitiveness and the transition towards sustainable development it is important that enterprises integrate diversity, gender equality, circular economy, and sustainable solutions in their business models.

The Programme area faces challenges that have to be solved to be able to participate in the digital transformation. Advanced technology development with industrial applications, new business models, and the ability to change the organisation and develop staff competence are required for the utilisation of new technology to be possible. There is also a need to increase the level of digitalisation in manufacturing MSMEs and actions targeting the uptake and use of new digital technologies related to industry are needed.

The Programme area is experiencing increasing global competition and an accelerating need to adapt, which requires increased competitiveness among the companies in the region. The Interreg Aurora Programme particularly encourages cooperation between clusters to build on complementary strengths. There is great potential in the merging of specific competencies in different clusters in order to create new knowledge networks and areas of strength in the regions.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

# 1.2

### Sápmi perspective

The majority of companies in Sápmi are micro-enterprises, in which Sami culture and árbediehtu (traditional Sami knowledge) form the basis of the Sami businesses. In Sami areas, the tourism industry is contributing to ever greater economic development and experiences based on traditional Sami culture. There are also new areas of business ranging from product processing and translation to design, music, and media production. Companies are often composed of combinations of different seasonal activities. It is therefore important to collaborate in an organised manner across borders to increase the development of different industries. Interreg Aurora will stimulate the cooperation between private and public actors working purposefully to develop Sami businesses.

### Main target groups

The main target groups for the activities are: Public organisations at local, regional, and national levels, universities and colleges, education actors/organisations, business-promoting actors, industry, clusters, industry associations, and NGOs.

The main beneficiaries are the business communities, public sector, business promotion actors, cluster and industry associations, NGOs, and civil society.



## Examples of activities

- B2B cooperation strengthening the uptake and use of technologies and advanced systems related to (e.g., robotics, IoT, open data, cyber security, 3D-printing, data-analytics).
- Knowledge building activities and advice increasing the preparedness of SMEs to internationalize and grow.
- Activities linking companies based on complementarity competencies to enhance the innovation capacity and/or the formation of cross-border value chains.
- Cross-border cooperation between clusters adding complementary competencies.
- Cross-border cooperation between start-up hubs and business accelerators and virtual incubators adding complementary competencies.

# GREEN & BEYOND

GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSITION



## Climate change adaptation and risk prevention

Climate change don't know borders. The green transition, sustainable use of natural resources and adaptation to a different climate are highly prioritised as climate change is affecting all sectors of society. There is a need for broad partnerships that benefits from cross-border cooperation and collaboration. Actors in the Aurora Programme area need to find ways to adapt to the new reality of a rapidly changing climate while still ensuring the survival of their livelihoods.

The industries in the Programme area includes a combination of sustainable utilisation of natural resources and initiatives to promote advanced technology. The sustainable use of natural resources needs to be defined and developed in relation to other livelihoods like tourism and traditional Sami livelihoods.

### Sápmi perspective

The abovementioned impacts of climate change on the Arctic and its environment also affect the Sami society, Sami culture and well-being, and traditional livelihoods such as reindeer herding, fishing and hunting. The consequences of climate change and the challenges they create are experienced here on a daily basis. The climate change results in ice covering grazing lands and tree hanging lichen. The difficulties of finding enough food for the reindeer results in reindeer herding communities having to keep their reindeers fenced in, in order to feed them. This is not in line with traditional reindeer herding methods and increase the risk of disease among the animals as well as having other negative health impacts.

## Protection and preservation of biodiversity and green infrastructure

The Programme area includes substantial terrain which is highly rated on the Wilderness Quality Index. There is a large number of Natura 2000 sites and nationally designated areas of protection, including several important trans-border areas and connected cross-border ecosystems. There are multiple rivers and water courses that flow into either the Baltic Sea or the Barents and Norwegian Seas. Around the Baltic Sea and the border region between Norway and Finland, the rivers have important recreational benefits for the sport fishing and tourism industry. There are also a large number of 'Ramsar' sites (internationally important wetlands), including both coastal and inland sites in all three countries. Changes in vegetation and the presence of invasive species can lead to unforeseen changes in the behaviour and movement patterns of animals. This, in turn, can have negative effects on agriculture, fishery and forestry, as well as outdoor life and the tourism industry.

### Sápmi perspective

A long-term perspective and a sustainable way of life have always been the basis for Sami traditional livelihoods. Through combined use of traditional and modern trades and intergenerational transmission of árbediehtu (traditional Sami knowledge), this is still embedded in the Sami land use and culture. Sami customary sustainable use and árbediehtu are therefore important contributions to land and water biodiversity conservation. Strengthening of inclusive governance models and community-based management as well as safeguarding Sami land rights are key to the protection and preservation of biodiversity and green infrastructure.

Biodiversity and healthy ecosystems are crucial to Sami culture and livelihoods. Fragmentation of green infrastructure, decrease of habitats, flora and fauna and the introduction of invasive species effect all of Sami society.



## Transportation and traffic chains

The Aurora region has the potential to achieve a substantial reduction of CO<sup>2</sup> emissions from the mobility in its cities, towns and hinterland areas by switching to renewable fuels, developing smart solutions and increasing the overall efficiency of the transport system. Ensuring the smooth movement of people and goods in and across urban and hinterland areas while reducing the carbon footprint by increased efficiency, integrated transport modes and digital solutions is essential for the sustainable economic and social development of the Aurora region.

Even though the Aurora Programme area is sparsely populated and has few urban nodes, the region is on the rise and there is a will to develop and prosper. The region is in many ways a frontrunner for the green transition, with its emphasis on environmentally friendly technologies, digitalisation, and Arctic knowledge. To promote this development, there is a need to ensure a green, efficient and intelligent transport system and strong, connected urban areas that are functioning in the context of the vulnerable Arctic region.

# CLIMATE CHANGE KNOWS NO BORDERS.

The green transition, sustainable use of natural resources and adaptation to a different climate are highly prioritised as climate change is affecting all sectors of society.

## Climate change adaptation

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

### 2.1

#### Sápmi perspective

An increased cooperation to study the effects of climate change could result in improved impact assessment methods. Interdisciplinary and cross-border analysis on risks, needs, measures and solutions related to climate change would enhance the effectiveness of plans, strategies, and actions.

The use of technologies, digital solutions and tools for Sami traditional livelihoods could reduce the risks connected to climate change and help reduce negative climate impact and CO<sup>2</sup> emission.

Promoting and increasing the utilisation of árbediehtu relating to climate change and adaptation by collecting and documenting traditional knowledge, trainings and workshops to support intergenerational transmission, producing curricula, education, training and information materials, could also be a valuable asset in the adaptation to the effects of the changing climate.

#### Main target groups

The main target groups are public organizations, NGO's, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the Sami community.

The main beneficiaries are public organizations, academia and other research and education actors, economic associations, and the civil society.

To deal with climate change and to create opportunities to develop sustainable societies in the Programme area, knowledge needs to be increased and actions need to be taken. The Programme will act in accordance with the EU strategy on adaptation to climate change and disaster risk prevention.

Effective implementations of strategies and plans presuppose that those actors and the public gain a greater knowledge of how the climate will be affected and what adaptation measures are needed. Research on how the climate change affects the Programme area and how the management need to adapt, are important activities. Exchanging knowledge and best practices can result in common solutions. Sharing best practices and developing new methodologies and scenarios for adapting regional and urban spatial planning to rising water levels, more frequent heavy downpours and droughts will be important.

The use of new technologies and digital tools such as drones, virtual and augmented reality sensors, artificial intelligence, big data, and Internet of Things will be of great importance, especially for monitoring the effects of climate change. The development and testing of these tools will also be important projects.

Through the work on national and regional climate adaptation plans and strategies, there is an opportunity for collaboration to find common challenges and solutions.

## Examples of activities

- Awareness raising and communication about climate change in the Programme area.
- Designing, adapting methods and methodologies.
- Experience exchange and learning as result of joint implementation.
- Exchange of best practises.
- Development of climate adaptation strategies and plans, risk, and vulnerability analyses.
- Increased cooperation between research and locally based monitoring.
- Implementation of technologies, digital solutions, tools to cope with climate change and reduce climate impact and carbon emission.
- Involvement and engagement of local and regional stakeholders in policy work, decision-making processes (on national and regional level).
- Measures on Nature based solutions such as of e.g., wetlands, peatlands, mires, rivers.



The Geranium Argus butterfly in the Torne River Valley.

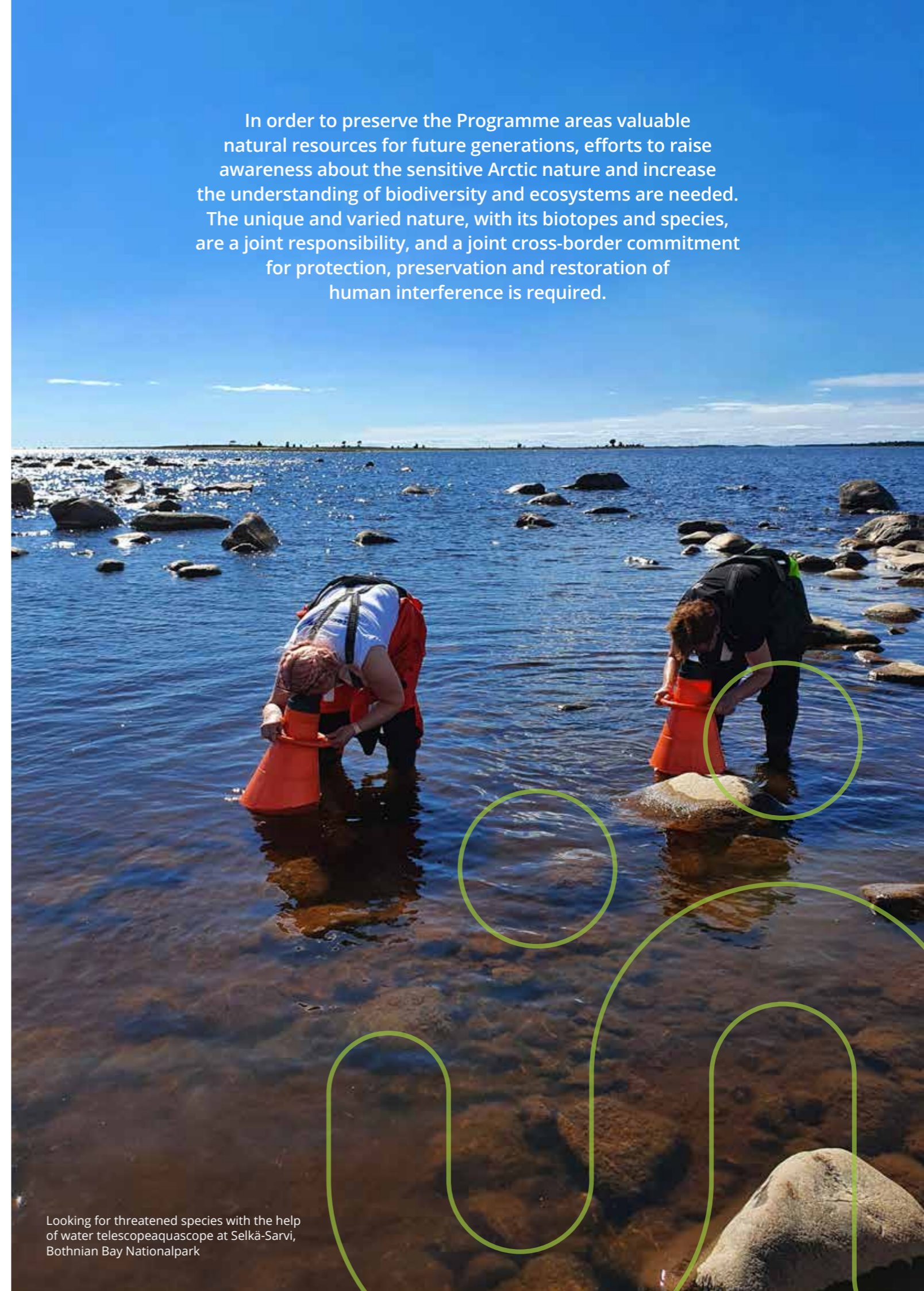


Temperature measurements in the Skeppsvik archipelago, north of Umeå  
Photo: Anniina Saarinen



Supplementary feeding of reindeer  
Photo: Heidi Rautiainen

In order to preserve the Programme areas valuable natural resources for future generations, efforts to raise awareness about the sensitive Arctic nature and increase the understanding of biodiversity and ecosystems are needed. The unique and varied nature, with its biotopes and species, are a joint responsibility, and a joint cross-border commitment for protection, preservation and restoration of human interference is required.



Looking for threatened species with the help of water telescope/aquascope at Selkä-Sarvi, Bothnian Bay Nationalpark

# Nature protection and biodiversity

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

# 2.2

Healthy ecosystems provide the Programme area with a variety of valuable, economically important goods and ecosystem services such as clean water and air, carbon storage, re-creation, and food, as well as being a major factor for the tourism industry. Functioning ecosystems play a central role in fighting climate change impacts by protecting against floods and other environmental disasters. The climate change is also affecting movement patterns and habitats of different animals.

Cross-border cooperation within nature management needs to be strengthened as joint preparedness is essential for reducing the vulnerability of existing ecosystems and dealing with future environmental challenges. When planning biodiversity conservation or restoration efforts it is important that livelihoods such as forestry, agriculture, fishing and reindeer herding are taken into consideration in order to reduce the risk for potential conflicts.

By promoting restoration of key habitats and nature types such as wetlands, damage to the ecosystem can be reversed. Water management in the Bothnian Bay, including rivers and lakes, is a common cross-border concern that requires a joint commitment. Pollution from mining, agriculture, and leakage from acidic soils are contributing negative factors. The biodiversity of the water areas is an important cross-border theme, which also affects tourism, fishing, and agriculture. Waterways connected to the big rivers are important when it comes to reducing leakage into the rivers and sea. Also, reduction of air pollution is an important tool for sustaining the biodiversity in the sensitive Arctic nature.

Green infrastructure, based on the protection, conservation and restoration of nature, is a tool for achieving positive ecologic, economic and social effects. Developing green infrastructure is one approach for responding to challenges such as reducing the ecological and carbon footprint, introducing measures for carbon sequestration, improving human health and well-being, and adapting to climate change.

### Sápmi Perspective

A harmonious relationship with nature is the basis for the Sami traditional way of life, livelihood and business development. Incorporating árbediehtu (traditional Sami knowledge) and involving Sami knowledge holders in decision-making concerning nature management can contribute to an increased understanding and appreciation of nature and its valuable resources. This includes an adaptive ecosystem-based management of natural resources, habitats and species.

### Main target groups

The main target groups are public organisations, NGO's, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the Sami community.

The main beneficiaries are public organisations, academia and other research and education actors, economic associations and the civil society.

### Examples of activities

- Data collection, surveys, inventory.
- Analysis, scenarios, plans.
- Designing and adapting methods.
- Joint plans and strategies.
- Knowledge and best practice building and exchange, joint implementation.
- Harmonisation of working methods, guidelines.
- Development of joint sustainable management strategies.
- Restoration, conservation, and increased connectivity.
- Methods for including stakeholders with traditional knowledge in nature management and decision-making.

Measures to reduce the carbon dioxide emissions from mobility and transports are needed in order to reduce the Programme areas carbon footprint. It is important to protect the fragile environment by making the mobility and logistics systems more sustainable.



The ferry Aurora Botnia operating the route between Vaasa and Umeå

## Sustainable mobility

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

# 2.3

Sustainable low-carbon mobility is not only about transportation between different geographic points. It's also a question of attractiveness and competitiveness for the Programme area. Hence, a well-functioning system for multi-modality means an ability to participate in society and to have a better functioning area. In order to increase competitiveness and continue to create growth, while contributing to the green transformation, businesses must be able to solve their logistical needs in a cost-effective and climate friendly way. Cross-border cooperation regarding the development of green multimodal solutions for goods and passenger traffic is a necessity, especially to promote less carbon intense transports in urban areas and hinterlands.

Studies and strategic plans for developed access to alternative fuels such as hydrogen, biogas, and electricity is a key to developing a more carbon dioxide efficient transport system. Additionally, decentralised production of alternative fuels needs to be tested and developed.

The Aurora Programme area needs to invest in the development and testing of technologies and plans that contribute to reducing carbon dioxide emissions. This needs to be done jointly in the area through coordination of competence and resources because the emissions do not stop regionally. The much-needed technological solutions for a greener transport system requires networking, knowledge exchange and cross-border cooperation in order to solve the problems that are unique for our Arctic region.

### Main target groups

The main target groups are public organizations, NGO's, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and the Sami community.

The main beneficiaries are public organizations, academia and other research and education actors, economic associations and the civil society.



Cycling route in Seinäjoki

### Examples of activities

- Cross-border analysis, simulations, and surveys on CO<sup>2</sup> reduction measures and modal shifts.
- Green and multimodal cross-border mobility roadmap development.
- Plans, drawings, and designs for green and smart mobility solutions.
- Coordination of smart mobility plans and transport services for cross border functional regions.
- Planning and implementation of digital solutions and processes for decreased CO<sup>2</sup> emissions.
- Small-scale pilot actions enabling lower CO<sup>2</sup> emissions transport systems, electrification solutions, renewable fuel solutions, more efficient vehicles etc.
- Experience exchange activities as joint seminars, study visits, surveys, and trainings.

# SOCIAL & BEYOND

## EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



Arrival to the lighthouse island of Tankar  
Photo: Visit Kokkola



### Education and lifelong learning

The regions in the Programme area lag behind the rest of their respective countries when it comes to people with higher education. There is also a large difference in the educational level between rural and urban municipalities, where institutions for higher education are located. The labour market needs to adapt in order to meet future opportunities and challenges. The transition to a low carbon and circular economy means creating and adapting to new business models and job profiles.

The Programme area is characterised by long distances to education centres. Activities should encourage the educational providers to focus on improving access to digital learning environments. The business, public sector, labour market, education and integration stakeholders must also work together to ensure that the right skills are available.

#### Sápmi perspective

According to experiences from previous Interreg Nord Programmes the educational cross-border cooperation within Sápmi is needed. This is in part to enhance and sustain the quality of Sami educations and partly to find out the cross-border synergies and increase efficiency for Sami educational organisations.

The Sami languages are identity markers and carriers of attitudes, knowledge and experiences, and are therefore an important area of development for Sami society. Sami languages are not constrained by national borders and they have common challenges for survival. The Sami areas are in huge need of competence in the different Sami languages and cultures, particularly in the public sector like »

» healthcare and education for all ages. The possibilities to receive higher education taught in different Sami languages and adapt to the needs of the labour market are limited.

### Culture and sustainable tourism

The attractive but fragile Arctic environment, natural phenomena and cultural diversity are the key factors that attract tourists to the region. The tourism industry contributes to maintaining important infrastructure and to the development of viable and attractive local societies. The industry is also an important engine for job creation, services and housing in many of the regions in the Aurora Programme area.

Culture and arts support social development in communities, increasing the feeling of belonging and the social identity in many kinds of associations and networks. In additions to increasing employment, arts and culture have a non-economic integral value to human beings. The Programme area needs to work towards finding new cross-border solutions which highlight and utilise the region's rich culture and heritage and ensure that these are passed on to future generations. The creative industries generate jobs and demonstrate above-average growth-particularly for young people. Cultural creative cross-border partnerships and networks also strengthen the sector and supports export initiatives.

#### Sápmi perspective

It is important to strengthen and develop the Sami culture, cultural heritage, and Sami languages, and also preserve what is unique for the Sami community.

The Sami tourism and experience industry is growing and has great development potential. There is generally a strong will for an increased Sami involvement in tourism of high quality and with sustainability and consideration for nature's resources in focus. It is important to ensure the quality of Sami tourism and its products.





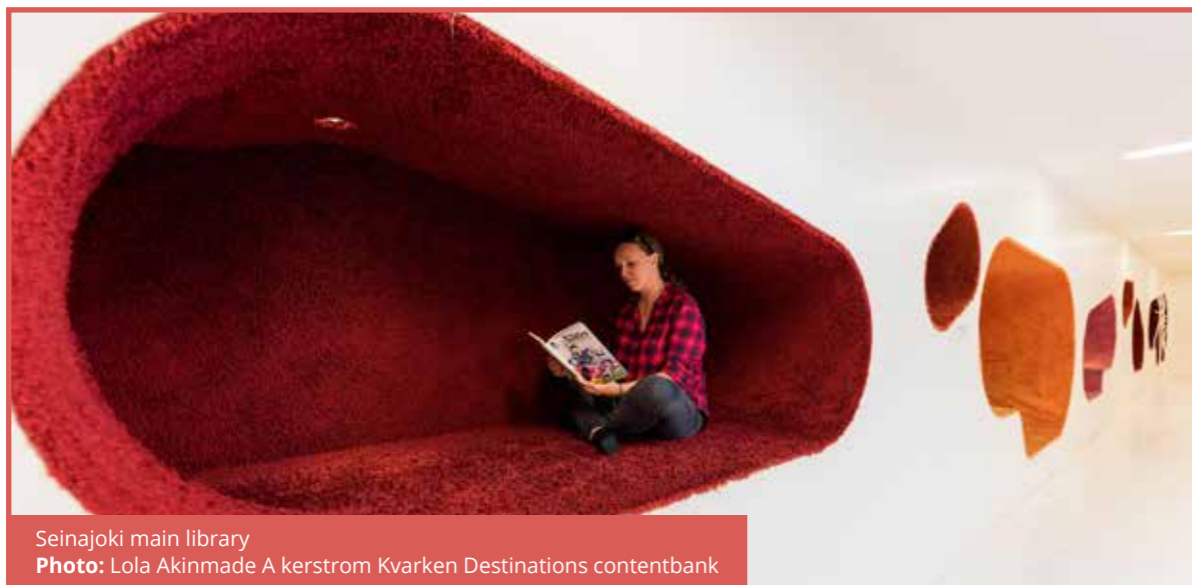
Folk music students of Centria University of Applied Sciences and Central Osthrobothnia Conservatory



Nils Johan Labbas archive, Arctic Indigenous Design Archives  
Photo: Lena Kuoljok Lind, Ajtte Svenskt fjäll- och samemuseum



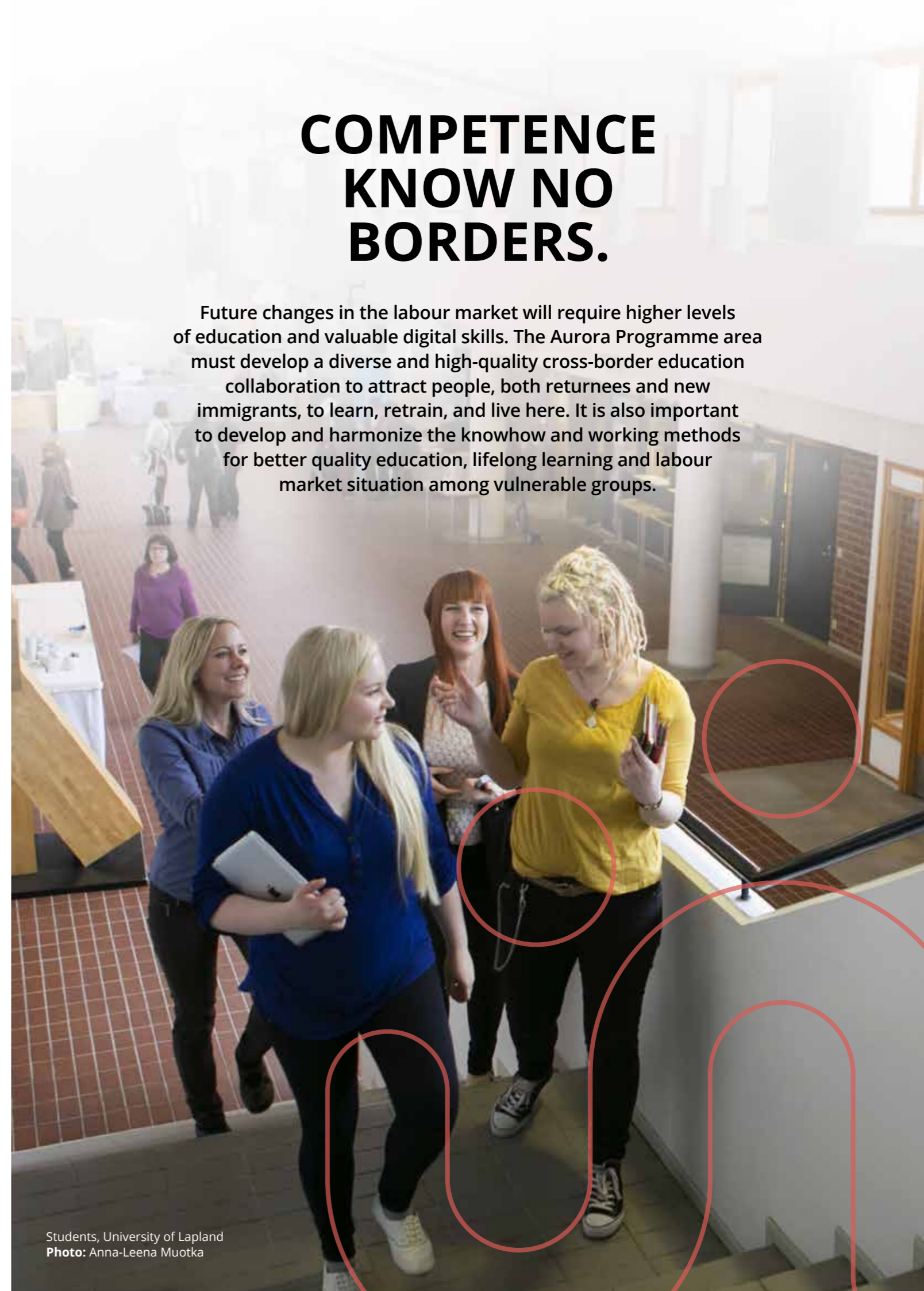
The High Coast  
Photo: Höga Kusten Destinationsutveckling



Seinajoki main library  
Photo: Lola Akinmade A kerstrom Kvarken Destinations contentbank

# COMPETENCE KNOW NO BORDERS.

Future changes in the labour market will require higher levels of education and valuable digital skills. The Aurora Programme area must develop a diverse and high-quality cross-border education collaboration to attract people, both returnees and new immigrants, to learn, retrain, and live here. It is also important to develop and harmonize the knowhow and working methods for better quality education, lifelong learning and labour market situation among vulnerable groups.



Students, University of Lapland  
Photo: Anna-Leena Muotka

# Education and lifelong learning

Authentic, cultural, and ecologically sustainable tourism are unique selling points for the Interreg Aurora Programme area. Culture and tourism have a mutually beneficial relationship where tourism provides important means of valorising culture and creating income that can support and strengthen cultural heritage, cultural production, and creativity.

Future changes in the labour market will require higher levels of education and valuable digital skills. There should be strengthened cross-sectoral collaboration and dialogue between educational providers, MSMEs, the public sector, civil society and educational actors to improve skills supply, onsite or online education, lifelong learning and joint marketing of career opportunities for all in the Interreg Aurora Programme area. Exchange of knowhow and harmonisations of working methods for distance learning and use of digitalisation in education in the remote areas is also encouraged.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

# 3.1

skills or career counselling, minority language groups and vulnerable groups like young people entering in the labour market or young people in particular with different background, cultures and ethnicities, people with foreign background and ageing population. The secondary target group could be policy makers, decision makers and individuals taking part in actions.

The main beneficiaries are private, public, and civil society organisations linked to and/or providing educational services and/or learning opportunities, which can include public actors, academia, research and education actors, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, economic associations and non-governmental organisations.

### Main target groups

The main target groups are the ones benefitting from the results of the projects like job seekers and unemployed looking for new

### Sápmi perspective

In Sápmi there is a need for diverse education, such as Sami languages, traditional food culture, duodji, and interpretation. Cross-border actions for Sami languages should be broadly varied to cover all Sami languages, ages, and sectors.

The Sami educational institutions and other Sami organisations are important when imparting knowledge and culture as well as developing skills.

For further development of the Sami education, it is important to collaborate with other educational institutions in the Interreg Aurora Programme area. A continued dialogue and cooperation between the countries can be established through cross-border training Programmes, workshops, exchange of experience and networking.



### Examples of activities

- Diversifying, updating, or harmonising the different types of training provision and qualifications.
- Benchmarking and improving services and methods of career counselling.
- Joint efforts in the event of rapid changes in the labour market.
- Encourage companies, workers, and educational institutions to participate in lifelong learning.
- Common efforts to attract a diversity of labour to choose the region as a place to work, study and live in.
- Developing new or transforming previous training to virtual format.
- Develop cross-border education and training supporting entrepreneurship and business skills.
- Language nests / baths, including Sami languages.

# Culture and sustainable tourism

Tourism and culture can make places more attractive as well as increase their competitiveness as locations to live, visit, work, and invest in. The tourism industry has potential for development, and the region's nature, culture, and history provide good opportunities to create high-quality products and experiences. Actions should also be taken to make the region's culture, cultural heritage and intangible cultural heritage more visible.

The Nordic nature and the natural phenomena in the area attract various tourist segments to several destinations which are situated in different countries. Local entrepreneurs together with the community have a key position in developing the tourism eco-system.

This requires joint cross-border marketing and strengthened cross-border accessibility and mobility solutions. Cross-border partnerships and networks can strengthen the sector and support export initiatives. The Aurora Programme area needs to broaden its cross-border business structure and investments in cultural, creative and tourism industries to develop diversification. It is also important to recognize that the citizens in the community are equally important for the tourism as the place that is promoted. By increased collaboration between culture, business, academia, and society the region will be strengthened and provide development and growth.

## SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE 3.2

### Sápmi perspective

For the Sami, it is important to strengthen and develop the Sami culture, cultural heritage, and also preserve what is unique for the Sami community. To contribute to the strengthening, development, and progression of the Sami culture, there are needs for documentation and protection of Sami cultural monuments and Sami cultural landscapes, as well as the continuation of traditions and customs. Using digitalisation and AI will make Sami culture more visible and easier to access for users, with respect for environmental aspects.

The Sápmi region supports to safeguard the Sami languages also through árbediehtu (traditional Sami knowledge), Sami culture, and Sami traditional industries. Sami tourism has to be based on authenticity and genuine Sami values. A great potential for growth lies in the development of Sami products and experiences, for example in Sami food and duodji.

### Main target groups

The main target groups are the ones benefitting from the results of the projects actions like local communities, policy makers, decision makers, and individuals taking part in actions.

The main beneficiaries are local and regional public actors, academia and other educational actors, regional tourism, culture and creative clusters and platforms, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, economic associations, civil society and NGOs.

## Examples of activities

### Support:

- cross-border collaboration, partnerships, knowledge exchange and joint solution and competence-enhancing initiatives.
- joint cross-border products, services, and marketing.
- joint cross-border accessibility and mobility solutions.
- cross-border activities to reinforce the resilience and diversification of tourism and culture sectors.
- SMEs cross-border activities, which will strengthen social enterprises and social innovation.
- Diversification of the tourism sub-sectors.
- Cross-border activities, which are contributing to the livelihoods of local and regional communities.
- Cross-border collaboration in research, development and innovation for the tourism and culture sector.
- Cultural clusters that contribute to the development of creative industries.
- Strengthen the development of cultural tourism by making available and / or visible the culture and cultural heritages.
- Develop culture and creative industries through refined or new cross-border products, methods, services, and networks.
- Development of nature-based tourism by enhancing common and cross-border solutions.



Koli nationalpark. Photo: Mitja Piiipponen



Kayaking in the archipelago

# COOPERATIONS & BEYOND

BETTER AND MORE SUSTAINABLE  
CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION



## Building the fundamentals for cross-border cooperation

Cross-border cooperation cannot be done in isolation. There is a need for dedicated cross-border strategies based on reliable data for cross-border regions. According to the socio-economic analyses, the structure of the institutional capacity in the Programme area is varied. Due to the long distances, lack of critical mass, and ageing population, cross-border cooperation is the key element to strengthen the institutional capacity in the area.

In the sparsely populated Aurora Programme area with its long distances, cross-border connectivity is not yet sufficiently developed. Legal and administrative frameworks from both sides of the borders make the creation of joint solutions for improving mobility across national borders a challenging task. There is also a need for increased cooperation between regional and national authorities in order to achieve an accessible and attractive area.

Through the experiences from the previous Programmes, it has proved challenging to make real changes in the cross-border cooperation concerning, for instance, the labour market and health care. This is largely

(but not exclusively) due to administrative and legal obstacles and a lack of common understanding. Previous Programme and stakeholder analyses have also shown that there is a high threshold between educational systems where for example curriculums and certificates are not transferrable between countries.

### Sápmi perspective

According to the socioeconomic study there is a need to strengthen the institutional capacity among the Sami institutions. The limited resources of Sami organisations are a significant obstacle towards increasing involvement in different political, economic and administrative processes at all levels.

Furthermore, there are differences between the countries which might limit cross-border cooperation even in traditional areas of cooperation. Ongoing barriers such as administrative and legal obstacles persist in the cross-border cooperation between Finland, Norway and Sweden on the matters affecting Sami groups, e.g., with traditional livelihoods, education and social and health care services. There is also no sufficient data about Sami well-being or fulfilment of rights and there is a lack of statistics on the educational level of the Sami population.

**MOTIVATION  
KNOWS NO  
BORDERS.**



**Local and regional cross-border governance needs to be strengthened, border obstacles minimised and regional cross-border capacity increased.**

## Cross-border capacity building

Activities must stimulate common understanding and mutual agreement to further sustainable development. The thematic focus areas in this priority include building capacity, producing coherent development strategies, reducing administrative and legal obstacles, establishing reliable datasets, and building relations and trust within Arctic cooperation through institutional collaboration and people-to-people actions. The keyword is to strengthen the institutional capacity in the Programme area. It could be made by feasibility studies, finding out common data and statistics, make a sectorial cross-border strategies, and or make actions to minimise border obstacles. To strengthen capacity in the Programme area could also be made through the Arctic Cooperation or by people to people actions which are encouraging trust building.

There is also a need to identify the areas where the important cross-border statistics are missing, and it's important to fill the gaps. There is a need for further cross border regional strategies on the level of functional areas. Those regional strategies and action plans can present common guidelines for further development, including during the implementation of the Aurora Programme. Cross-border cooperation between authorities, such as environmental management, search and rescue, and security, could be supported through the Programme. Interreg Aurora can support actions for better regional functionality in sectors such as wellbeing and mental health, elderly and health care, and other common challenging areas. The key element for better functionality in the Programme area is improved east-west connectivity.

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

# 4.1

Experiences from previous Programmes have shown successful results through the various feasibility studies, which have led to tangible investments and actions. There is still need for further work with coherent planning of better connectivity in the region. It has to be based on reliable data and the corresponding authorities have to be involved. Joint strategies and joint planning are needed to fulfil missing links in the value chain like transport and mobility.

### Sápmi perspective

The Sami people have made significant efforts to maintain and strengthen their self-governance and bonds across the national boundaries and to advance their interests as one people.

There is a need for capacity-building in Sami institutions and organisations to improve their performance. Since the Sami are one people in four countries, divided by state borders, cross-border perspectives and joint efforts such as joint management strategies and models (for different thematic areas; cultural heritage, nature management) and activities to strengthen Sami governing institutions are needed. Moreover, it is necessary to tackle cross-border tax obstacles and increase and enable cross-border cooperation on Sami health care and social affairs, including child welfare and education.

## Main target groups

The main target groups are national, regional and local authorities, cross-border entities, public- and non- governmental organisations (NGO), the Sami community, civil society, and intermediate bodies.

The main beneficiaries are national, regional and local authorities, cross-border entities, public- and non- governmental organisations (NGO), academia, civil society, and intermediate bodies.

## Examples of activities

- Cross-border strategies that strengthen regional capacity.
- Feasibility studies for large cross-border regional investments.
- Action plans.
- Cross-border governance projects for better regional functionality and enhancing capacity.
- Initiatives on identifying and eliminating legal and administrative obstacles and implementing recommendations of these initiatives.
- Clustering participation and find synergies within the Arctic Cooperation, by cooperation with ongoing projects in other Arctic Cooperation Programmes.
- Data and statistics related to the regions and Sami groups.
- Long term statistical solutions.
- People to people projects in trust building.
- Institutional capacity building.



Partner Search event  
Interreg Aurora



Arctic Award



Kvarkenfest  
Photo: Tilda OlofsgårdKvarkenrådet

# CLARIFICATIONS & BEYOND

# The Interreg Aurora Programme 2021-2027

**The overall goal of the Interreg Aurora Programme is to encourage cross-border collaboration, thereby strengthening the Programme area competitiveness, sustainability and attractiveness through social inclusion, digitalisation and green transition.**

## Sustainable development

Sustainable development is an overarching goal in Interreg Aurora. The Programme has an important function in pursuing objectives and encouraging projects in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals in Agenda 2030 and The Green Deal strategy. It is essential that sustainable development is viewed as a whole, the transition to a sustainable society requires new forms of cooperation and practices.

The three dimensions of sustainable development – social, ecological and economic sustainability – will therefore be taken into account as horizontal principles. The aspects are equally important and mutually reinforcing.



## Programme bodies

**Monitoring Committee:** The Monitoring Committee (MC) is the central decision-making body for the Programme and its overall task is to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the implementation of the Programme.

The MC consists of representatives of central, regional and local representatives, the Sami Parliaments, business organisations, social partners and other relevant organisations. The MC will, together with the Managing Authority, ensure the quality and effectiveness of the implementation and the reporting of the implementation.

**Steering Committees:** The Programme has established two Steering Committees (SC), one for sub-area Aurora and one for sub-area Sápmi. The SCs consist of representatives from the regional and local levels in the Programme area. The main role of SC is to prioritize project applications and assess them on the basis of the Programme's objectives and priorities.

**YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT INTERREG AURORA AND FIND OUR PROGRAMME MANUAL WITH SELECTION CRITERIAS AND INDICATORS FOR PROJECTS ON OUR WEBSITE:**

**INTERREGAURORA.EU**

**Managing Authority:** The County Administrative Board of Norrbotten is the Managing Authority (MA) for the Programme. The Managing Authority is the formally responsible body for managing the Aurora Programme on behalf of the participating partner countries. The MA shall ensure a sound management and implementation

of the Programme. The MA makes the formal decisions of the EU-support to projects, based on the Steering Committees' priorities.

The MA makes the payments to the beneficiaries when the expenditures have been checked by the Controllers and the Joint Secretariat has approved the progress/final report. The MA is also responsible for the request of payments from the European Commission.

**Norwegian Managing organisation:** In Norway, it is Troms County Council who is responsible for the management of the Norwegian Interreg funds. The Norwegian Managing organisation (NMO) makes the formal decisions of the IR-support to projects, based on the Steering Committees' priorities. The NMO makes the payments to the beneficiaries for the Norwegian partners of the projects.

**Joint Secretariat:** The role of the Joint Secretariat (JS) is to assist the MA, the SC, as well as the MC in carrying out their respective duties. The JS is located in all three participating countries. The offices are placed at the County Administrative Board of Norrbotten and Västerbotten in Sweden, the Regional Council of Lapland, Oulu and Ostrobothnia in Finland and Troms County Council in Norway, as well as the Sami Parliaments in Norway, Sweden and Finland.

It is mainly the JS that has direct contact with the projects. The JS provide information to potential beneficiaries regarding the Programme opportunities and prepare the applications before the prioritization by the Steering Committees. The JS also assist the beneficiaries in their implementation of the projects.

**Controllers:** A national control system is established in order to verify the legality and correctness of the expenditures declared by each beneficiary in Sweden and Finland. The Controllers check that the declared expenditures by the beneficiaries are eligible by verifying that the expenditures comply with applicable laws, have been paid and products and services have been delivered. In Sweden, it is the County Administrative Board of

Norrbottnen who is responsible of the control regarding Swedish beneficiaries. In Finland, the Regional Council of Lapland is responsible of the controllers regarding the Finnish beneficiaries. The Norwegian Managing organisation is responsible for the financial control of the Norwegian project partners.

**Audit Authority:** The Swedish National Financial Management Authority (ESV) is the responsible Audit Authority for the Programme. ESV is responsible for audits of Swedish project partners. The Audit Authority shall also establish a group of auditors with representatives from the other EU-countries participating in the Programme. Finland is represented by the Ministry of Finance, which is responsible for the audits of project partners in Finland.

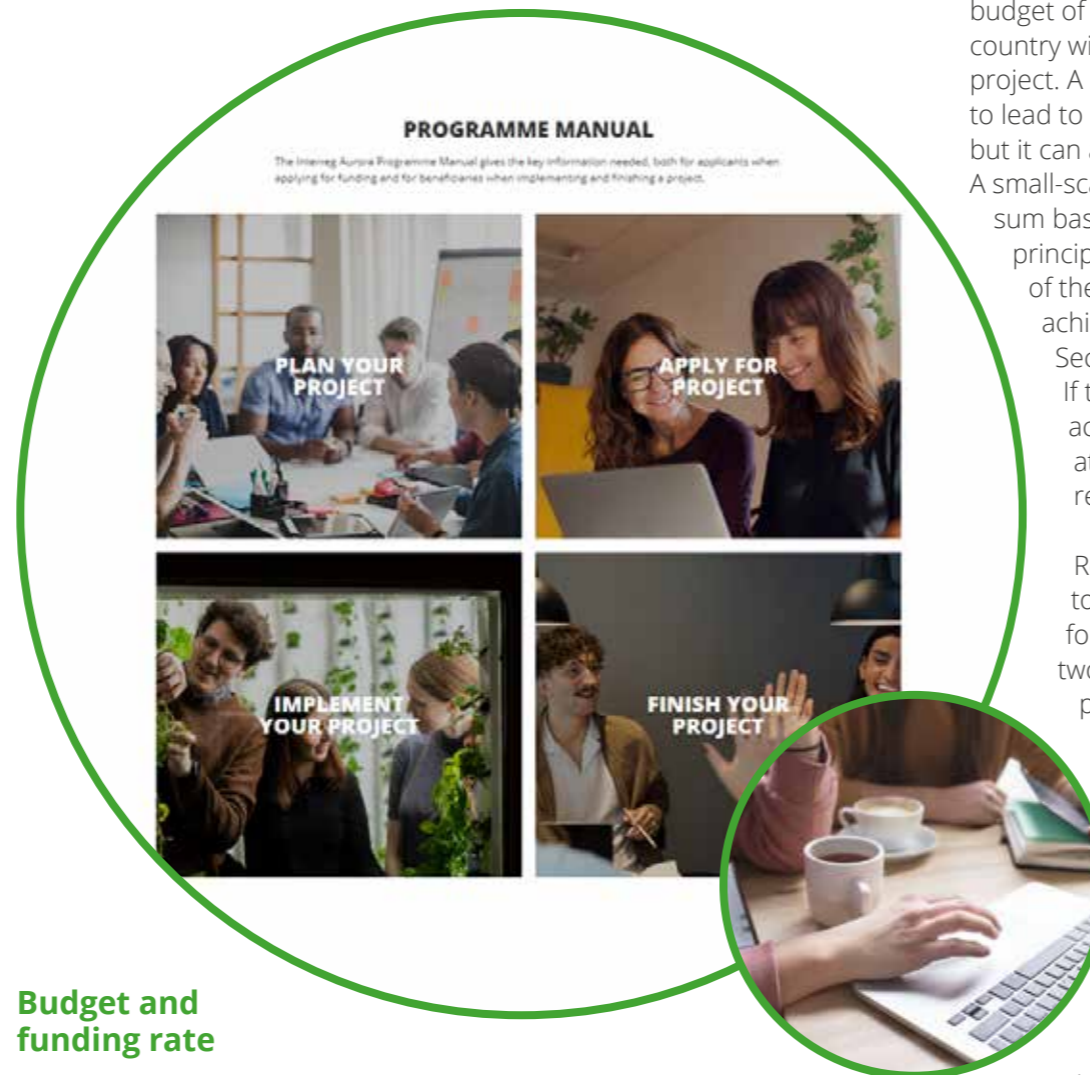
### Communication

The Programme will use communication and visibility actions as a tool to achieve the Programme objectives and the overall vision by:

- making sure that the Programme and its funding opportunities is known as attractive and easily approachable to potential applicants from the whole Programme area in order to enable innovative cross-border cooperation and new collaborative constellations.
- making sure that the Programme funds projects that contributes to development of the Sami culture, livelihood, industries, and the Sami languages. The Programme is unique as it is the one specific EU Programme that is integrated with Sápmi and the indigenous Sami people.
- providing efficient support to beneficiaries in their implementation and communication of activities and results for a sustainable development, and the added value of the EU funding to their target audiences and the public.
- dissemination of the Programme results to the public/the end users, the vision of the Programme is to improve life of the EU

citizens through cross-border cooperation.

- contributing to raising awareness about the Programme role within the EU Arctic Policy.



### Budget and funding rate

Interreg Aurora will support 65% of Swedish and Finnish costs. The project partners need to finance 35% of their costs through own or other external sources. In addition, the Programme will support 50% of the Norwegian costs Norwegian partners need to finance 50% of their project costs through own or other external sources. The grant will be reimbursed based on actually incurred costs, flat-rates or lump sums.

### Type of projects

A small-scale project could be defined as a preparatory project or a pre-study but can also be a normal implementation project with a limited budget. A project with a maximum budget of 20 000 euros per participating country will be considered as a small-scale project. A small-scale project can be intended to lead to an application for a regular project, but it can also have other expected results. A small-scale project is granted with a lump sum based on a draft budget. The lump sum principle means that there is no checking of the actual spending. If the result is achieved and approved by the Joint Secretariat, the payment will be made. If the result/outcome should not be achieved, there will be no payment at all. Note that it is not possible to receive a partial payment.

Regular projects are projects with a total budget higher than the limits for small-scale projects. There are two reporting methods for regular projects. The easiest one is the so called 40%-method where the budget consists of real staff costs and a flat rate of 40% to cover all the other costs in the project. When applying for payment the projects only need to report on staff costs. All regular projects can use this method and it is even mandatory for regular projects with a total budget of up to 200 000 euros.

Larger regular projects, with a budget above 200 000 euros and not using the 40%-method can calculate their budget with several cost categories but nevertheless there is a 15% flat rate for travel and accommodation and a 15% flat rate for office and administrations costs. Both those flat rates are based on staff costs.

### From application to decision

Organisations applying for funding need to plan and organise the upcoming project. For example, it is important to evaluate which partners should participate in the project. The Programme requires partners from at least two of the countries in the Programme area. Projects must also have a clear cross-border added value and contribute to the overall goals of the Programme.

When it is time to apply for funding, the applicants use the electronic system "Min ansökan", which can be accessed from the Aurora Programme webpage. The "Min ansökan"-system is divided into different parts where the applicants must fill in the information requested. When all the fields have been filled in, the application must be saved, signed and sent in. The application is a joint application and covers both EU-funding as well as IR-funding. When the application has been submitted in the system, it is considered to have been received by the Programme.

The application will be processed by the Joint Secretariat and thereafter, the Steering Committees for sub-area Aurora and sub-area Sápmi select the best projects.

Applications not meeting the formal requirements are rejected by the Managing Authority and cannot be selected by the Steering Committees. An application can be withdrawn by the applicant during the processing period.

The Steering Committees meet approximately 10 weeks after the call for proposals has closed, and about twice a year.

Thereafter, the applicant will receive the legally binding funding decision on EU funds and Norwegian IR funds from the MA and the NMO respectively.



# Interreg Aurora



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the European Union

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