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# **Still building neighbourhood:**

## **Mid-term evaluation of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat's grant programme**

Jørn Holm-Hansen, Aadne Aasland and Elena Dybtsyna

OSLO METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY  
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**Still building neighbourhood:  
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degree to which the Barents grant programme is being  
managed in line with its overall objectives set by the MFA and  
to what extent the objectives have been reached so far. In  
addition, the evaluation gives an account of the programme's  
state now as compared to 2007 when a similar evaluation was  
made. It concludes with a set of recommendations.

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## **Preface**

This report has been written by a team consisting of Jørn Holm-Hansen (team leader), Aadne Aasland and Elena Dybtsyna. Aasland and Holm-Hansen are senior researchers at the Department for International Studies and Migration at the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research at Oslo Metropolitan University. Dybtsyna is associate professor at the Business School and High North Center for Business and Governance at Nord University.

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Oslo, November 2020

Kristian Tronstad  
Research Director

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# Summary

*Jørn Holm-Hansen, Aadne Aasland and Elena Dybtsyna*

## **Still building neighbourhood: Mid-term evaluation of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat's grant programme**

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The Barents Secretariat's grant programme is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in line with the overall aims of building trust and people-to-people cooperation in the Russian and Norwegian regions forming part of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. The programme's thematic fields are culture and sports, education and competence, business and entrepreneurship, media and information, civil society, environmental protection, indigenous peoples, and children and youth. Youth and indigenous peoples are cross-cutting priorities across all thematic fields.

Only Norwegian applicants are invited to apply, but they must have a Russian partner to receive funding. The programme aims at including a wide variety of public and private as well civil society institutions and organizations on both sides of the border. In addition, and in line with the agreements with the MFA, the Barents Secretariat is to be a competence centre for Norwegian-Russian relations in the North, take part in the public debate and call attention to the regional people-to-people cooperation.

This mid-term evaluation covers the first two years of the ongoing programme period (2018-2020) but includes 2020 to account for the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on project implementation.

### **Results – a comparison of the current state of the programme as compared to 2007**

The evaluation team did a similar evaluation of the programme in 2007-8 which has made it possible to do a systematic comparison and identify developments. The context in which the programme is carried out today differs in significant ways from those in 2007-8. The 2014 events in Ukraine have led to a new geopolitical environment that poses a challenge to the idea of cross-border trust and people-to-people cooperation. Moreover, internal political developments in Russia have led to more centralized power structures and control, among others of civil society. Both factors may raise doubts about the prospects of the grant programme. Nonetheless, the number of project applications submitted to the Barents Secretariat has been relatively stable every year since 2013. The approval rate for applications is around 60 per cent. The programme funds relatively small but numerous project activities.

The comparison of the findings from the survey carried out among project leaders in 2007 with those of the survey we carried out in 2020 indicates that the programme has improved. The survey respondents are more likely to assert that their projects have been successful now than in 2007. Moreover, the changes to the positive are most pronounced on some of the issues that directly concern the core programme objectives, which are to develop trust and genuine cooperation.

There is a significant increase in those considering relations between Russian and Norwegian partners to be based on equality and those who hold their project to be successful in reaching lasting Norwegian-Russian networks. Professional differences and diverging views on project implementation have decreased significantly since 2007. Lack of



commitment among Russian and Norwegian partners is mentioned only by a very small number of respondents.

Transfer of knowledge continues to be a recurrent theme in the projects. The direction of transfer, however, has changed. In 2007, most of the transfer went from Norway to Russia, but by 2020 this has been reversed. In 2007 two out of ten projects included material support against one out of ten today.

The inclusion of gender and equal rights has increased from being an element in 15 per cent of the projects in 2007 to 30 per cent in 2020. This increase has taken place in the midst of a culturally conservative turn in Russian politics. Also, more projects include youth perspectives in 2020 than in 2007.

On the downside, more respondents in 2020 believe they will be dependent upon further funding from the programme to uphold activities than in 2007.

The evaluation has analysed around 20 projects in more detail through document studies and in-depth interviews. One major finding is that there is a low threshold for contacting the Barents Secretariat staff and that the staff is helpful in guiding applicants through the process of application, implementation and reporting.

On project level the programme has led to many of the expected outcomes. Initial prejudices have been cured, contacts have been established and are being maintained among individuals in the target groups. Projects based on participants' skills and specialized interests in e.g. music, handicraft, vocational subjects or sports have given mutual inspiration, and in many cases have led to a wish for further specialization. Some of the projects have led to offshoots either in terms of further bilateral or multilateral project cooperation with funding from either the Barents Secretariat or other funders or it has led to local project initiatives at home.

### **Enabling and hindering factors**

Several factors are conducive to programme implementation. One of them is the interaction effect between the programme and other mechanisms and frameworks for cross-border cooperation in the North. A comparative advantage, and a precondition for attracting milieus ready to undertake people-to-people cooperation, is the programme's uncomplicated application and reporting procedures. Also, the Russian diaspora in Northern Norway is conducive to project implementation through their insights in conditions on both sides of the border. They are strongly represented among applicants and project participants on the Norwegian side.

Other factors are barriers to project implementation. Business projects suffer from being confined to enabling the first meetings between potential partners. Actors able to establish and sustain business with Russian partners hardly would be in need of the relatively small sums needed for the first encounters. Also, the programme's geographical restrictions create obstacles because most business initiatives on the Russian side of the Barents Region will have to be anchored in Moscow or St. Petersburg.

As for projects in indigenous issues, the combination of Russian authorities' scepticism to cross border cooperation based on minority ethnicities and the deep cleavages in the Kola Sámi community create hindrances for civil society projects in this field.

Distance from the border is a disincentive for initiating cross border project cooperation. Another disincentive, and in particular for smaller organizations without liquidity, is the requirement that funds must have been concluded and reported on by early December. In

practice, this means that the projects must be completed by mid-November. Combined with the arrival of the letter of assignment only in March, this makes the project year not twelve but less than nine months.

The Covid-19 restrictions has had a negative effect on most of the projects, 70 per cent reported this in the survey. To reduce negative effects many projects have switched to digital meetings. For the purpose of developing closer personal relationships and trust, digital meetings are not on a par with physical meetings but still help the projects avoid a total standstill. The negative effects are probably stronger for newly established projects than for those with a longer past.

To sum up on the evaluation's findings, the grant programme has been managed in line with the overall objectives set by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In other words, the Barents Secretariat has facilitated people-to-people cooperation that strengthen cross-border trust.

## **Recommendations**

Notwithstanding the grant programme's satisfactory achievements, the evaluation identified some aspects that should be considered in order to further improve the Barents Secretariat's capacities in reaching the programme's objectives. The recommendations are as follows:

### *Stayers versus newcomers*

More than one out of two respondents in the survey had started their project cooperation before 2014 and 30 per cent after 2017. The fact that many projects are continuations of long-lasting project sequences is a positive achievement and fully in line with the objectives of the programme. Nonetheless, new applicants bring with them new human resources and perspectives, which helps broaden the impact of the programme. More emphasis should be made on recruiting newcomers through the Secretariat's mass and social media work. Potential newcomers on the Russian side suffer from the fact that they cannot apply for funds and depend upon finding Norwegian partners. A special responsibility lies with the Russian Barents offices in broadening the consolidated "Barents community" in Russia.

### *Business projects*

The niche held by the grant programme in the field of business cooperation is that of enabling the first meetings between potential partners. For the time being it is difficult to achieve sustainable cooperation within this niche. Therefore, the priority field of business cooperation should be reconsidered. One alternative would be to move from cooperation between firms to cooperation between educational institutions with business-related subjects on their curricula, possibly within the format of university-business cooperation. Another solution could be to facilitate broader knowledge transfer and exchange of information on technological developments, and facilitate meeting places on common challenges for business in the Northern parts of Norway and Russia.

### *Projects on indigenous peoples*

In order not to make projects politically sensitive or to interfere in the complex power balances in the Russian Sámi community, it is recommendable that projects that involve young people and people who are not directly involved in old rivalries are given priority. In line with this, a continued priority to "uncontroversial" projects on duodji, gastronomic tourism and the like is recommended. If the "old guard" of Sámi activists on the Russian side are to be involved in projects, it is recommendable that a certain degree of balance is observed in order not to deepen internal divergencies and alienating segments of the Sámi community.

### *Make use of the Covid-19 opportunities*

The period of Covid-19 restrictions should be made use of to develop and systematize digital working methods to be used on a regular basis after the pandemic is over. Digital encounters cannot replace physical meetings but supplement them with the effect that there is more project dynamics in between visits and that more people can take part in activities.

### *Clarification of the to geographical scope*

Although the Secretariat has applied a pragmatic approach to the geographical constraints of the programme when this has been conducive to reach the overall objectives, it is recommended that rules are developed that clarify to what extent and on what pre-conditions actors from outside the Barents Region can initiate projects and participants from outside the region be invited to take part. Flexibility is recommended in this regard.

### *The role of the Secretariat as a competence centre*

Performing its task as a competence centre for Norwegian-Russian cross border cooperation the Secretariat has been confronted with the question of what leeway it should have in voicing its own opinions when they diverge from official Norwegian policies. The recommendation is that the Secretariat continues its practice of facilitating platforms and meetings where discussions can be held and leave the general opinion-building to the external discussants. In return, the MFA should accept to be criticized on these arenas. It is important, however, that the Barents Secretariat remains free to problematize aspects of official Norwegian politics that have an impact on cross border people-to-people cooperation.

### *Critical self-reflection*

In their reporting Barents Secretariat emphasizes success, and there is ample evidence that projects under the grant programme lead to results. For the learning process in order to further improve programming, there is a need for more systematic presentation and analysis of obstacles and failures.

### *The steering structure*

Today the Board is composed of political and administrative leaders from the regions owning the Barents Secretariat. The recommendation is to examine the possibility of including Board members from outside regional politics and administration. Reintroducing the practice of having a representative of the MFA as an observer in the Board should also be considered.

The evaluation's analysis, conclusions and recommendations are based on 53 interviews, a survey and programme and project documents.

# Sammendrag

*Jørn Holm-Hansen, Aadne Aasland and Elena Dybtsyna*

## **Still building neighbourhood: Mid-term evaluation of the Norwegian Barents Secretariat's grant programme**

*NIBR-rapport 2020:24*

Barentssekretariatets prosjektstøtteordning er finansiert av Utenriksdepartementet (UD) i tråd med en overordnet målsetning om å bygge tillit og folk-til-folksamarbeid i de russiske og norske områdene som inngår i Barents Euro-Arktiske Region. De tematiske områdene som dekkes av programmet er kultur og idrett, næring og entreprenørskap, media og informasjon, urfolk, barn og unge. Bare norske søkere godtas, men de må ha russiske partnere. Programmet tar sikte på å få med et bredt utvalg institusjoner og organisasjoner fra offentlig og privat sektor samt fra sivilsamfunnet på begge sider av grensa. I tillegg, og i samsvar med avtalene med UD, skal Barentssekretariatet være et kompetansesenter for norsk-russiske relasjoner i Nord, ta del i den offentlige debatten og skape oppmerksomhet om det regionale folk-til-folkssamarbeidet.

Denne midtveisevalueringen dekker de to første årene av den pågående programperioden (2018-2020), men har med 2020 for å gjøre greie for hvordan Covid-19 har virket inn på prosjektgjennomføringen.

### **Resultater - sammenligning av prosjektstøtteordningen i 2007 og nå**

Evalueringslaget gjorde en tilsvarende evaluering i 2007-8, noe som har gjort det mulig å gjøre en systematisk sammenligning og peke på endring. Den større sammenhengen programmet gjennomføres i nå, skiller seg på vesentlige punkter fra den i 2007-8. Hendelsene i Ukraina i 2014 har ført til en ny geopolitisk situasjon, som utfordrer ideen om tillit og folk-til-samarbeid over grensene. Dertil har indre, politiske utviklingstrekk i Russland ført til mer sentraliserte maktstrukturer og kontroll, blant annet av sivilsamfunnet. Begge de nevnte faktorene kan føre til tvil om utsiktene for prosjektstøtteordningen. Ikke desto mindre har antallet søknader Barentssekretariatet mottar årlig, vært stabilt siden 2013. Om lag 60 prosent av søknaden før tilslag. Programmet finansierer relativt små, men mange, prosjekter.

Sammenligningen av funnene fra spørreundersøkelsen som ble gjennomført med prosjektledere i 2007 med dem fra den tilsvarende undersøkelsen i 2020 peker på at programmet har gjennomgått en forbedring. Respondentene er mer tilbøyelige til å fastslå at prosjektet deres er vellykket nå enn i 2007. Dessuten er endringene til det bedre mest tydelig på en del av de temaene som direkte dreier seg om programmets kjerneformål, som er å utvikle tillit og ekte samarbeid.

Det er en tydelig økning av dem som oppfatter at forholdet mellom russiske og norske partnere er basert på likhet og dem som anser at prosjektet deres fører til varige norsk-russiske nettverk. Siden 2007 er det betydelig færre som oppgir at det har vært faglige forskjeller og avvikende syn på prosjektgjennomføringen. Mangel på engasjement blant russiske og norske partnere blir nevnt av bare en forsvinnende liten andel av respondentene.

Kunnskapsoverføring er fortsatt et tilbakevendende tema i prosjektene. Retningen har imidlertid snudd. I 2007 gikk mesteparten av overføringen fra Norge til Russland, men i 2020 er det omvendt. I 2007 inneholdt to av ti prosjekter materiell støtte mot ett av to i 2020.

Kjønn og likestilling inngikk i 15 prosent av prosjektene i 2007, mot 30 prosent i 2020. Denne økningen har skjedd mens Russland har gjennomgått en kulturkonservativ vending. I tillegg inneholder flere prosjekter ungdomsperspektiver i 2020 enn i 2007.

På minussiden kan nevnes at flere respondenter i 2020 enn i 2007 anser at de er avhengige av fortsatt finansiering fra programmet for å opprettholde aktivitetene.

Evalueringen har analysert rundt 20 prosjekter i detalj gjennom dokumentstudier og dybdeintervjuer. Et hovedfunn er at det er en lav terskel for å kontakte Barentssekretariatets rådgivere og at rådgiverne er til hjelp med å veilede søkerne gjennom søknadsprosessen, gjennomføringen og avrapporteringen.

På prosjektnivå har programmet ført til mange av de forventede virkningene. Fordommer har blitt overvunnet, kontakter er etablert og blir opprettholdt mellom enkeltpersoner i målgruppene. Prosjekter som baserer seg på deltakernes ferdigheter og spesialiserte interesser i for eksempel musikk, håndverk, yrkesfag eller idrett har gitt gjensidig inspirasjon. I mange tilfeller har dette ført til et ønske om ytterligere spesialisering. Noen av prosjektene har ført til avledet virksomhet enten i form av ytterligere bilateralt eller multilateralt prosjektsamarbeid med finansiering enten fra Barentssekretariatet eller fra andre kilder eller det har ført til prosjektinitiativer på hjemmebane.

### **Fremmende og hemmende faktorer**

Flere faktorer bidrar til prosjektgjennomføringen. Én av dem er samspillseffekten mellom programmet og andre mekanismer og ordninger for samarbeid over landegrensene i Nord. Et komparativt fortrinn, og en forutsetning for å tiltrekke seg miljøer som ønsker å drive folk-til-folksamarbeid, er de ukompliserte søknads- og rapporteringsprosedyrene i programmet. Den russiske diasporaen i Nord-Norge bidrar til prosjektgjennomføringen gjennom deres innsikt i forholdene på begge sider av grensa. Folk med russisk bakgrunn er sterkt representert blant søkerne og prosjektdeltakerne på norsk side.

Atter andre faktorer er til hinder for prosjektgjennomføringen. Næringsprosjekter er hemmet av at de er begrenset til å dreie seg om tilrettelegging av de første møtene mellom potensielle partnere. Aktører som er i stand til å etablere og opprettholde næringssamarbeid med Russland. Vil neppe trenge de relativt små summene som trengs til de innledende møtene. Også programmets geografiske begrensinger skaper hindre ettersom de fleste næringsinitiativer i Russland trenger forankring i Moskva eller Petersburg. Når det gjelder urfolksprosjekter, skaper de russiske myndighetenes skepsis til samarbeid over grensene om etniske minoritetstemaer og de dype splittelsene blant Kolasamene, hindre for sivilsamfunnsprosjekter.

Avstand fra grensa minsker insentivene til å delta i programmet. En annen hemsko er kravet om at prosjektmidlene må være brukt innen desember hvert år. Kombinert med at tilsagnsbrevet først kommer i mars, gjør dette at prosjektåret ikke er tolv, men ni måneder. Særlig for mindre organisasjoner uten likviditet byr dette på utfordringer.

Situasjonen med Covid-19 har hatt en negativ effekt på de feste av prosjektene. I alt 70 prosent oppga dette i spørreundersøkelsen. For å minske de negative virkningene har mange prosjekter gått over til digitale treff. Når man skal utvikle tettere personlige relasjoner og tillit, er digitale møter ikke noe fullgodt alternativ til fysiske møter, men gjør at prosjektene unngår total stillstand. De negative følgene er nok større for nystartede prosjekter enn for de som har vart en stund.

Oppsummert er funnene fra evalueringen at tilskuddsordningen har blitt forvaltet i tråd med de overordnede målsetningene fastsatt av Utenriksdepartementet. Med andre ord har Barentssekretariatet tilrettelagt for folk-til-folksamarbeid som styrker tillitt på tvers av grensa.

## **Anbefalinger**

Selv om prosjektstøtteordningen har oppnådd svært tilfredsstillende resultater har evalueringen pekt på noen aspekter som bør vurderes slik at Barentssekretariatet kan bli enda bedre til å nå programmets mål. Dette er anbefalingene:

### *Stayere versus nykomlinger*

Mer enn én av to respondenter i spørreundersøkelsen hadde startet prosjektsamarbeidet før 2014 og 30 prosent etter 2017. Det at mange prosjekter er fortsettelsen av langvarige prosjektsekvenser er et positivt resultat og helt i tråd med de overordnede målsetningene. Likevel er det sånn at nye søkere bringer med seg nye menneskelige ressurser og perspektiver, noe som bidrar til å utvide effektene av tilskuddsordningen. Mer vekt bør bli lagt på å rekruttere nye søkere i sekretariatets arbeid med massemedier og sosiale medier. Potensielle nykomlinger på russisk side er hemmet av at de ikke kan stå som søkere og derfor blir avhengige av å finne norske partnere. Et spesielt ansvar påhviler derfor de russiske Barentskontorene for å utvide «Barentsfellesskapet» i Russland.

### *Næringsprosjekter*

Nisjen tilskuddsordningen har innen næringssamarbeid er å legge til rette for de første møtene mellom potensielle partnere. For tiden er det vanskelig å oppnå bærekraftig samarbeid innenfor denne nisjen. Derfor bør satsingsområdet næring revurderes. Ett alternativ vil kunne være å gå over fra samarbeid mellom selskaper til samarbeid mellom læresteder som tilbyr undervisning i næringsrelaterte fag, gjerne innenfor en ordning i samarbeid med bedrifter. Et annet alternativ vil være å legge til rette for bredere kunnskaps- og informasjonsutveksling om teknologisk utvikling og å skape møteplasser om felles næringsutfordringer i de nordlige delene av Norge og Russland.

### *Urfolksprosjekter*

For å unngå at prosjektene blir politisk sensitive eller griper inn i den komplekse maktbalansen i det russiske samesamfunnet, er det tilrådelig å prioritere prosjekter med yngre folk og folk som ikke er direkte innblandet i gamle stridigheter. I tråd med dette bør man fortsette å gi støtte til «ukontroversielle» prosjekter med temaer som duodji og matturisme. Dersom «den gamle garde» av sameaktivister på russisk side skal involveres i prosjekter bør det sørges for balanse slik at man ikke utdyper interne splittelser og støter fra seg segmenter i det samiske samfunnet.

### *Gjør bruk av de mulighetene Covid-19 gir*

Tiden med koronarestriksjoner bør utnyttes til å utvikle og systematisere digitale arbeidsmåter slik at de kan brukes på regulær basis også etter at pandemien er tilbakelagt. Digitale møter kan ikke erstatte fysiske møter, men de kan supplere dem slik at det blir mer prosjektdynamikk mellom besøkene og slik at flere mennesker kan delta i aktivitetene.

### *En mer fleksibel tilnærming til geografi*

Selv om Sekretariatet har anlagt en pragmatisk tilnærming til de geografiske begrensningene i tilskuddsordningen når dette har bidratt til å nå de overordnede målene, bør det utarbeides regler som klargjør i hvilket omfang og på hvilke vilkår aktører utenfor Barentsregionen kan ta initiativ til prosjekter og deltakere med hjemstavn utenfor regionen kan inviteres til å delta.

### *Sekretariatets rolle som kompetansesenter*

Når Sekretariatet har utøvd rollen som kompetansesenter for norsk-russisk samarbeid over grensa, har spørsmål oppstått om hvor stort spillerom det skal ha til å gi uttrykk for egne meninger når disse ikke sammenfaller med offisiell, norsk politikk. Anbefalingen er at Sekretariatet fortsetter praksisen med å legge til rette for plattformer og møter der diskusjoner kan foregå og overlater den generelle opinionsdannelsen til de eksterne debattantene. Til gjengjeld bør UD godta kritikk på disse arenaene. Det er likevel viktig at Barentsssekretariatet fortsatt står fritt til å problematisere offisiell, norsk politikk når denne har innvirkning på folk-til-folksamarbeidet.

### *Kritisk selvrefleksjon*

I rapporteringen sin vektlegger Barentsssekretariatet det som lykkes, og det er rikelig med eksempler på at prosjekter under tilskuddordningen fører til resultater. Av hensyn til læringsprosessen og for ytterligere å forbedre arbeidet med programmet er det behov for en mer systematisk presentasjon og analyse av hindre og tings som slår feil.

### *Styringsstrukturen*

I dag består styret politiske og administrative ledere for fylkene som eier Barentsssekretariatet. Anbefalingen er å utrede muligheten for også å ta opp styremedlemmer fra relevante miljøer utenfor fylkespolitikk og -administrasjon. Det bør også vurderes å gjenoppta ordningen med at DU har en observatør i Styret.

Evalueringsanalyse, konklusjoner og anbefalinger baserer seg på 53 intervjuer, en spørreundersøkelse og prosjektdokumenter.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Barents Secretariat's grants programme

Since 1993 the Barents Secretariat's grants programme has facilitated regional international relations between the Northernmost Norwegian regions and Russian regions within the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. When the Barents Secretariat was established in 1993 it was first of all to serve as the secretariat of the Norwegian two-year chairmanship of the Regional Council within the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR). After 1995 it continued as a project under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Since 1998, the Secretariat has been an inter-municipal company owned by the Norwegian regions forming part of BEAR but is funded by the MFA. Since the 1.1. 2020 merging of Troms and Finnmark, the Barents Secretariat is owned 50/50 by the new region and Nordland.

The Secretariat's core function is to facilitate bilateral people-to-people cooperation between the Norwegian and Russian regions forming part of BEAR. These are Nordland, Troms and Finnmark, Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, Nenets Autonomous Okrug, the Komi republic and the Republic of Karelia. Currently, the Barents Secretariat has 11 staff in Norway and six staff in its offices in Russia (Arkhangelsk, Murmansk and Naryan-Mar).

The grants programme is funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in line with the overall aims of building trust and people-to-people cooperation between Norway and Russia in the North. The programme funds relatively small but numerous project activities. Annually between 200 and 300 projects receive funding from the programme. The grants are to be distributed according to a twofold set of criteria. Firstly, the project portfolio should involve a wide variety of public and private as well civil society institutions on both sides of the border. Secondly, in total the projects should cover a wide variety of issues and include all Norwegian regions forming part of the Barents Region. In addition, the Barents Secretariat is to be a competence centre for Norwegian-Russian relations in the North, take part in the public debate and call attention to the regional people-to-people cooperation.

In addition to managing the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme, the Secretariat manages the BarentsKult programme with funds from the MFA, the Ministry of Culture and the two Northern Norwegian regional administrations. It also manages the Regional Youth Programme, which is funded by the Ministry of Children and Families as well as the travel grant scheme for journalists which forms part of the ordinary grants programme.

The Barents Secretariat operates according to two types of agreements with the MFA. Three-year agreements cover operation of the Secretariat and annual agreements cover the project portfolio, according to annual allocation letters. Currently, the three-year agreement is for 2018-2020. The annual allocation from the MFA is around 25 million NOK earmarked for projects and 15 million is for operational purposes. In addition, the owners (Nordland, and Troms and Finnmark) and the Ministry of Culture each contribute with an annual 3 million NOK earmarked for BarentsKult.

## 1.2 Aim of the evaluation

The Terms-of-Reference for the mid-term evaluation asks for an assessment of the degree to which the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme is being managed in line with the overall objectives set by the MFA. Furthermore, it asks to what extent objectives for the three-year period has been achieved during 2018 and 2019. Finally, the Terms-of-Reference calls for recommendations on adjustments and improvements in the Barents Secretariat's work with



the grant programme. In addition, it suggests the evaluation takes a look at the development over time in how objectives have been attained before the evaluation's focus period.

Being made mid-term, the evaluation takes stock of results so far and identify needs for operational adjustments in order to reach the programme's objectives. Attention will be given to the grant programme's compliance with the objectives set by the funding agency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

## 2 Methodology

The grant programme consists of a large number of, often, small projects. For analytical purposes, and in line with the grant programme's priorities, we have clustered them into the thematic fields of culture and sports, business and entrepreneurship, media and information, civil society, indigenous peoples and environmental protection. Several of the projects selected for closer scrutiny have a child and youth profile.

We have included both successful and problematic projects. Problems encountered within projects are not necessarily due to poor project planning and management but may have external causes, or be results of high ambitions. The projects have been selected under consultation with the Barents Secretariat.

Since the main aim of the grant programme is to build trust across the border, we have applied a comparative perspective to account for possible differences in the way Norwegian and Russian project owners experience the grant programme and the projects. To this end, questions of agenda setting, project leadership and relevance of results locally have been asked in the interviews and survey.

The effects of developments in Russia's domestic politics and the geopolitical atmosphere has been accounted for. In this regard, the issue of longer term goal achievement has been addressed. We have gone back to 2010 to account for the effects of the third inauguration of Vladimir Putin as president in 2012 and the 2014 annexation of Crimea. This part of the evaluation has been based on evaluations of the Barents Secretariat and its activities in the period 2010-2017 and a limited number of interviews with Barents Secretariat staff from that period.

We have also looked into whether and how the Covid 19 pandemic has affected project implementation and how projects have managed to adapt to travel restrictions and other major obstacles caused by the pandemic.

### 2.1 Analytical approach

The evaluation will follow an analytical and methodological design based on **Theory of Change (ToC)**. ToC will structure the evaluation's interview guides, analysis, final report and not least its participative process.

The stages in a stylised ToC are:

**input** (the «intervention», the initial activities) → **output** (the immediate results, «deliveries») → **outcome** (what the deliveries make project participants and target groups do as a result of the activities) → **impact** (on society)

In its Letter of Allocation to the Barents Secretariat, the MFA requires the Barents Secretariat to focus on *outcomes on the target groups*. Reporting on the societal impact of each individual project is confined to an analysis on the *probable* effects on society. We find this approach to be wise because it helps avoid spending scarce resources on trying to report on what hardly can be discerned at the time of reporting.

When identifying outcomes, we have concentrated on effects on *cross-border trust* and *readiness to undertake people-to-people cooperation* since these are the main objectives of the grant programme. We have watched out for unintended effects. In some cases, these may be positive, e.g. by inspiring other actors than those involved in the project to initiate

cross-border cooperation. In other cases, unintended effects may be negative, e.g. by triggering off mistrust due to misunderstandings or poor adaptation to context. Developments in high-level politics over the last decade may have increased the risk of distrust even in people-to-people settings.

In addition to Theory of Change, we have applied the **Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO)** approach developed by the Realist School of Evaluation. This, so-called “trio of explanatory components” helps combining a focus on the programme as such with a focus on the pre-existing context of action, in other words balancing between the programme and the context in which it operates, which is one intensified geopolitical rivalries internationally and increased centralization and control of the civil society domestically in Russia. The CMO approach helps identify how the programme activates structural, agential and relational mechanisms to produce the planned outcomes. This has been of use in the development of recommendations on how to adjust programme activities to be more conducive to applicable insights and skills for the programme target groups. Put differently, this is about helping outputs lead to outcomes by identifying contextual obstacles.

## 2.2 Case studies

Around 20 projects have been selected as cases to be studied in detail. People responsible for the project on both sides of the border have been interviewed. Together, the projects selected represent a variety of project types as to actors and regions involved in order to cover the breadth of the programme’s scope.

Project owners are, among others a region, a private firm, sport clubs and small charitable organizations. Projects taking place in the border regions (Kirkenes-Nikel/Zapoliarnyi) as well as those with actors based in regions far from the border, like Nordland and the Komi Republic are included. There are projects with a non-controversial profile as well as potentially more provocative ones (e.g. on LHBT) are included.

The list includes projects where the Norwegian side might be expected to bring new practices to Russian partners, like girls’ football, as well as projects where the Russian side most likely is more advanced (e.g. childrens’ string orchestra and the Covid-19 Marathon). Some projects have just started up, others are follow-ups of projects with the same project owner and partner having cooperated for years.

## 2.3 Written sources

The programme documents, like the letters of allocation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the grant agreement and reports, have been consulted. A large number of project applications, final reports, reports from visits and other project-level documents have been studied in order to select projects for closer scrutiny.

We have also gone through earlier evaluations of the cross-border cooperation in the Barents Region as well as scholarly literature of relevance.

The documents and report consulted, and scholarly literature referred to are listed in chapter 7.

## 2.4 Interviews

In all, 53 interviews have been made with the Barents Secretariat staff, representatives of the Northern Norwegian regional authorities involved as owners, project partners on both sides of the border, representatives of the MFA, the Barents Secretariat's partners and other actors involved in cross-border co-operation.

Interviews have been made both individually and in groups. The interviews have been semi-structured, i.e. following an Interview Guide. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, most of the interviews have been made with the help of video conference tools preferred by the interviewees or on phone. Two team members have travelled to Kirkenes for face-to-face interviews with the Barents Secretariat and project leaders based there.

A caveat could be added to some of the findings from interview (and survey) data. Some of the statement may stem from modes of expression developed within the programme framework. One example of this effect may be the frequent references to demystification through everyday experiences, "Northerners finding together" and other desirable outcomes of the programme.

## 2.5 Survey

We have conducted an electronic survey in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of how project managers and project staff view the implementation of the individual projects, and whether and how the projects are likely to have contributed to achieve the programme goals. To this end, we sent out an email with an invitation to participate in a web-based survey to 95 current project leaders based in Norway and, in the majority of cases, to their main project partner in Russia.

In total, we received 60 answers<sup>1</sup>, 35 from Norwegian project owners and 25 from Russian partners. Responses came from projects that according to the respondents represented the following thematic fields<sup>2</sup>: Business: 11%; Media: 14%; Culture: 77%; Youth: 51%; Civil society: 29%; Indigenous people: 17%; Sports: 14%; Other themes: 11%. Thus, even though we would have desired a higher response rate, the variation in country backgrounds and themes gives reason to assume that responses reflect the major trends among all programme participants.

The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended questions (see Appendix 2 for the questionnaire), and the respondents could choose between versions in English and Russian. Open-ended questions could, in addition to English and Russian, be answered in Norwegian. To enable comparison, we used the majority of questions that had been asked in a similar survey conducted in 2007 (Holm-Hansen, Aasland and Dybtsyna 2008), but a few new themes were introduced, some less relevant questions removed, and more open-ended questions asked in the present survey. The vast majority of respondents filled out the open-ended questions, many with detailed and thorough answers, which has given rich data material complementing our project interviews.

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<sup>1</sup> It is hard to estimate an exact response rate, because a considerable percentage of the email addresses bounced, a few of our emails on the Russian side ended in the spam mail, etc.

<sup>2</sup> The figures include those who indicated that their project involves a certain thematic field 'to a large extent'. The total exceeds 100%, since respondents were allowed to indicate more than one option. Thus, projects with a specific theme, could in addition have for example a strong cultural element.

## 2.6 Management of sensitive issues

The evaluation has paid careful attention to the ethical issues as outlined by the ethical guidelines of the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities. The team members have extensive experience from interviewing a variety of stakeholders and have ensured that the research is undertaken with careful consideration of ethics, including an overarching principle of 'do no harm'. Interviews and the survey have taken place only with informed consent. The data collected have been carefully maintained and secured by the involved research institutions in adherence with internal OsloMet policies on protection and security of data.

The team's three team members have long experience from doing research on controversial issues in conflictual settings and assume a strictly neutral position if controversial issues or opinions are brought forward by interviewees.

### 3 A changing environment

The Norwegian Barents Secretariat's grant programme is bilateral Norwegian-Russian but forms part of a wider cooperation within the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR) including Finnish and Swedish regions. BEAR was established in a period of widespread worries Russia would destabilize and that consequences at the highly militarized Norwegian-Russian border would be disastrous. Also, the dramatic differences in living conditions between the Nordic and Russian regions in the North was considered a challenge. Regional cooperation across the borders was seen as being conducive to bridging the gap and thereby to stabilization. Three key words characterized the approach to cross-border activities: normalization, civilization and regionalization (Hønneland og Jensen 2008:11). The bilateral people-to-people cooperation enabled by the Norwegian Barents Secretariat's grant programme fits into this approach.

People-to-people initiatives were underpinned by historical narratives emphasizing the mutual contacts that once had existed. The pomor trade (exchange of Russian flour with Norwegian fish from around 1740 to around 1920) figured most prominently in this regard. Feelings of a common Northerner lifestyle and mentality were also evoked, and so was pride in living in an internationally important cross-border region. This could be summed up as cross-border "region-building", constructing a regional identity for the inhabitants of the region based on a portrayal of the region as a natural unity with its inhabitants being "insiders" (Hønneland 2017:31). All this was conducive to engaging actors on both sides of the border.

Today, real and contemporary commonalities in the North have partly replaced the pomor rhetoric as a rallying point. This may be challenges of municipal infrastructure under harsh climatic conditions, outmigration and poor infrastructure. Nonetheless, the idea of a special Northerner approach to cross-border cooperation prevails as illustrated by the following statements by project owners interviewed in the evaluation: "When politicians in Oslo make decisions, they do not always understand what we do and the importance of it" and "The fear of Russia hangs on from Trøndelag and southwards".

On the Russian side, the initiative to establish a Barents Euro-Arctic Region in the early 1990s was welcomed by regional authorities who saw an opportunity to get hold of financial and humanitarian support from the Nordic countries during the economic collapse that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Also in academic and cultural circles the opening up for foreign contacts was welcomed. On the other hand, the security apparatus and the military-industrial complex were reluctant (Holtmark 2015: 616-17).

Soon, obstacles to cooperation made their appearance. Some of the obstacles were due to misconceptions of each other. As pointed out by Geir Hønneland (2017:39) the idea that "Northernness alone gave an intuitive feeling of how the others thought" proved to be an over-simplification. The inhabitants on the two sides of the border had for centuries lived in different cultural spheres. Many cross-border projects encountered communicative barriers. Moreover, many Norwegians applied a humanitarian approach long after Russia recovered from the crises of the 1990s. This lag was often taken as condescension by Russian partners.

Later, Norwegian governments have launched High North strategies since 2006 and intensified its efforts in circumpolar cooperation, all of which is of relevance for the regions forming part of the Barents Region and make the region only one of the platforms for cross-border cooperation.

The major challenges to the bilateral cooperation are external to the grant programme. Since its beginning in the 1990s, the Barents Secretariat's grant programme has operated in a context of changing Norwegian-Russian relations, where the idea of building mutual trust through people-to-people projects on low-policy areas have been increasingly challenged by high-policy issues. The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ensuing restrictive measures, or sanctions, that were introduced by the EU and Norway and followed by Russian counter-sanctions, have caused problems for cross-border activities. The Russian counter-sanctions struck Norwegian export of fish in particular.

Norwegian restrictive measures, however, concerned economic and military aspects and had no direct implications for the cooperation funded by the grant scheme. Moreover, state-to-state cooperation between the coastal guards, border guards, search and rescues services as well as warning and handling of incidents at sea, was upheld. The bilateral cooperation on fisheries and environment continued. The Norwegian government's funding of the Barents cooperation has been upheld since 2014 with the argument that it is important to keep meeting-places with Russia in the North.

There is less high-level direct cross-border contact on regional level than prior to 2014. On the other hand, the Barents framework still is turned to for top level meetings. "For us the Barents cooperation is always a pleasant thing in the bilateral setting", as one Norwegian government official told.

Notwithstanding the importance of meeting-places, the 2012 "foreign agents law", the law on undesirable organisations (2015) and the media agent law (2017) pose a challenge to the preconditions upon which the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme builds. These laws reflect increased centralization in Russia combined with strengthening of anti-Western tendencies and control of civil society.

Two events further weakened the enthusiasm for cross-border cooperation, both involving intelligence services. Firstly, Ølen Betong, one of Norway's largest producers of concrete and concrete products, claims to have lost an important contract after attempts at recruiting its Murmansk-based personnel for the Norwegian intelligence services. Secondly, ex-border inspector Frode Berg, who used to be actively involved in cross-border people-to-people activities within the framework of the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme, was arrested in Moscow on charges of espionage in 2017.

A perception has emerged among potential project applicant that initiating projects with Russian partners may be politically sensitive or outright dangerous. The case of Frode Berg made several actors fear people-to-people might bring them in jail. When it became clear that Berg had been involved with the Norwegian intelligence services, this fear reportedly waned however.

Many of the problems for project implementation caused by the internal developments in Russia and the geopolitical rivalries have been minimized through the advice and follow-up offered by the Barents Secretariat to project holders.

## **4 Findings and discussion**

### **4.1 Effects of the geopolitical situation**

#### **4.1.1 Politically controversial projects**

Projects on issues where general opinions and attitudes differ between the Norwegian and Russian mainstream, like on indigenous peoples or LGBT, may encounter specific problems. Civil society cooperation is a potential risk zone as Russian organizations may have to register as “foreign agents”.

A Pride parade was organized in Kirkenes for the first time in 2017 as a part of the Barents Exchange project under the Barents Secretariat’s Grant Programme, that also included a conference on LGBT issues. This has grown into an annual success co-arranged by groups in Murmansk, Arkhangelsk and Kirkenes. Amnesty Nord and FRI Tromsø have been co-organizers.

It started out after the Russian partners did not get a permit to arrange a parade in Murmansk. The Secretariat made a risk analysis and after having obtained information and advice from the MFA and the Barents offices in Russia decided to arrange it in Kirkenes. Later, the Barents Secretariat has received comments from representatives of regional authorities in Russia that this arrangement does not deserve support.

Also projects on indigenous peoples are sensitive due to the alleged danger of “nationalization” of the Saami issues. A project on oral memories among elderly Saamis and ethnic identities on both sides of the border was considered sensitive.

The Barents Secretariat’s policy on projects with a potential for being politically sensitive is to assess them on the basis of the quality of the project application and their compliance with the application criteria. Nonetheless, risk analyses are being carried out. There are signs that project applicants have internalized some of this caution and submit project proposals that avoid potentially sensitive issues and concepts. The head of office told: “There is no climate today for being a Russia-critical organization. That would have negative consequences.”

#### **4.1.2 Changing Russian regulations**

Russian laws and regulations with relevance to the project cooperation as well as the ways they are practiced are changing. The Barents Secretariat, however, considers this not to cause problems for the implementation of projects. One reason for this is the fine-tuned approaches and insights in Russian legislation and practices in the three Russian Barents offices.

The survey carried out as part of this evaluation shows that the deterioration of bilateral political relations between Norway and Russia have not affected project collaboration between partners from the two countries. When asked whether their projects have been affected, only 17% reported a negative impact. Perhaps more surprisingly, 10% have seen a positive impact. About half the respondents (45%) have not been affected at all; the remaining respondents either found it hard to answer (22%) or did not answer (7%) this question.

#### **4.1.3 The role of the Barents Secretariat as an opinion builder**

In line with the allocation letter from the MFA, among the Barents Secretariat’s tasks is to be a competence centre for Norwegian-Russian relations in the North, take part in the public



debate and call attention to the regional people-to-people cooperation the Barents Secretariat. The two former tasks have become more delicate as the general Norwegian-Russian relations have become more complicated. Being funded by the MFA, owned by two Norwegian regions and managing public funds, sets some limits to the Barents Secretariat's role as a competence centre.

In 2015, the Barents Secretariat's information advisers wanted to edit the Secretariat's information outlet, the Barents Observer, on the basis of the Declaration on the Rights and Duties of the Editor. This would have given the editor the personal and full responsibility for the outlet's content. The Secretariat rejected this, on the grounds that editorial autonomy would be incompatible with the role of the Secretariat since it is funded by the MFA and owned by the Northern Norwegian regions. The Secretariat feared publishing critical journalism on Russian affairs in its main publication would lead to misunderstandings and conflicts that in turn would jeopardize people-to-people projects. The information advisers broke out and established the Independent Barents Observer. In the meantime, this web-based newspaper has become a widely read source on critical information about Northern Russia and has received project funding from the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme.

Today, the Barents Secretariat's information advisers concentrate on news about project activities and project opportunities. Throughout the last periods, however, the Heads of Secretariat have taken part in the public debate about the High North as well as Russo-Norwegian relations. Doing this, they have occasionally taken a critical stand on aspects of official Norwegian policies towards Russia and often within the discursive framework of Northerners on both sides of the border being hampered by high politics from the capitals (see chapter 3 above). Most of the around 150 annual presentations and lectures given by the Secretariat's staff is of a purely informational character and around 50 per cent of them are about the grant programme.

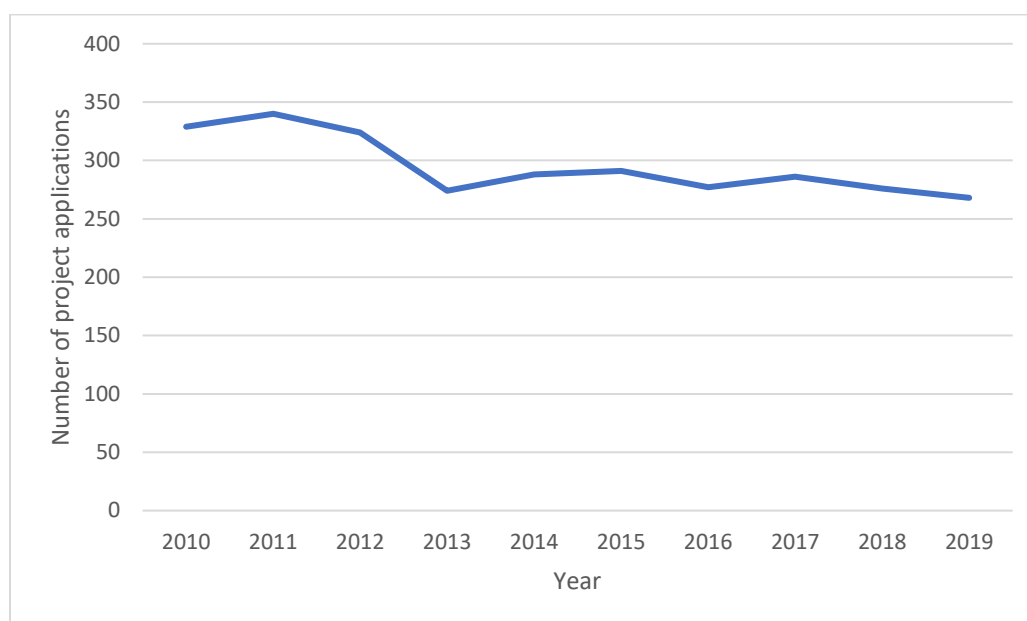
The series of debates under the epithet of Talking Barents have involved experts and debaters with a wide variety of opinions on Norway's policies towards Russia. At times harsh criticism has been voiced against the Norwegian government. When arranging meetings within the Talking Barents format, the Secretariat has become more aware of the need to avoid confusion between debaters' opinions on the one hand and the Secretariat's official positions on the other.

There are two lines in how the Barents Secretariat can fulfil its role as a competence centre: 1) Voice its own opinions. 2) To share its networks and bring competent people together and then leave it to them to voice their opinions. Both lines are represented and debated in the Secretariat.

#### **4.1.4 Effects on number of applications**

Despite the deterioration of the general political climate between Russia and Norway, the number of project application do not seem to have been affected. As the following numbers indicate, the number of applications received has been stable:

Figure 4.1: Number of project applications received per year.



(Figures provided by the Barents Secretariat on the basis of the project portal.)

## 4.2 Organization

### 4.2.1 Ownership and supervision structure

The Barents Secretariat is an inter-municipal company owned by the two Norwegian regions forming part of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region and the Board (Styret) and Council (Representantskapet) are composed of representatives from these two regions. Until 2008, the MFA had one observer in the Board. The funding and letter of assignment, however, come from the MFA. The dialogue between the Secretariat and the MFA takes place, among others, on bi-annual meetings. Two of the MFA's departments are involved, the Section for the High North, polar affairs and marine resources and the Section for Eastern Europe, Central Asia and regional organizations.

The structure makes the Secretariat operate according to an allocation letter from the national ministry implementing Norwegian foreign policies and under supervision by regional authorities. This reflects the core, multilevel ideas of the Barents cooperation, but makes for complex manoeuvring.

The close links between the Board, Council and owners is problematic. Political and administrative leaders are involved on all sides. In critical or conflictual situations this may lead to confusion of roles. An alternative model could be to base the grant programme on a post in the central government budget. This has been suggested by the Board and could potentially give the Secretariat more autonomy but also make the programme more vulnerable to shifting political priorities.

### 4.2.2 The Secretariat

The Kirkenes-based Secretariat is composed of a head and vice-head of office and advisers on business, sports, culture, youth, indigenous peoples and communication. In addition, the

Secretariat has one financial manager and a secretary. The team is a mix of experienced and newly employed staff.

The Secretariat has three offices in Russia. The Arkhangelsk has two staff, Murmansk three (including the leader of the Barents Indigenous Peoples Office) and one staff in Naryan-Mar). These are experienced people with a long track-record in the Secretariat. They keep in touch with the Russian project partners and have a hands-on insight in changes of Russian legislation and practices of relevance for the project implementation. They are also in close contact with regional administrations.

#### **4.2.3 The Barents Secretariat's involvement beyond grant programme management**

Most of the Secretariat's time is spent on managing the grants programme. In addition, undertakes tasks within a broader cross-border framework, mainly to support the Norwegian participation in the multilateral Barents cooperation, to some extent to unburden the International Barents Secretariat.

Thus, the Murmansk-based Barents Indigenous Peoples Office is administered by the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, funded by the Sámi Parliament in Norway and serves a Secretariat for the Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) under the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC). The secretary functions are carried out by the Secretariat through the adviser on indigenous issues in Kirkenes and the head of the Barents Indigenous Peoples' Office in Murmansk. The Secretariat estimates that it spends 350-400 man hours a year on this.

The Barents Secretariat's youth adviser is a member of the Barents Youth Council and works closely with the BEAC working group on youth. The Secretariat's business adviser sits on the BEAC working group on regional development, in the latter case in cooperation with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries and on request from the then Finnmark regional administration. The adviser has served as chairman of the working group. The business adviser also manages the Innovate Cool Experiences that brings Russian and Kirkenes-based milieus as well as participants from other countries together to co-create solutions on challenges presented by an enterprise.

The Barents Secretariat is a particularly close partner with the MFA and undertakes tasks beyond those of grant programme management. e.g. in periods of Norwegian chairmanship in the Barents Council, like 2019-2021. The Secretariat took active part in the meetings in Norway for UN ambassadors as part of the Norwegian positioning before the election to the UN Security Council in 2020.

The Secretariat has been assigned a role by the MFA regarding cooperation between Norway and Russia on indigenous issues. In this field of activity, the Secretariat may support activities beyond the Barents Region, e.g. involving reindeer herding as a nomadic lifestyle among indigenous peoples in Northern Siberia. The Secretariat was invited to send a representative to the 8th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in New York in 2020. (More on indigenous issues in chapter 5.2.2.)

The Secretariat provides assistance to Norwegian, Russian and international delegations visiting the region. It is actively involved in the implementation of the Kirkenes Conference and Arctic Frontiers.

The Barents Secretariat has been invited in as partner in two EEA projects with partners in Slovakia and Bulgaria on cross-border cooperation. Costs, including man-hours, have been covered by the EEA grants.

In all, through its “extra-programme” activities the Secretariat is producing considerable added value to the wider cross-border cooperation and gains insights that strengthens its own capacities as a competence centre.

This, however, has so far not been quantified in terms of man hours contributed in a systematic way. Such quantification would have to be tentative.

## 4.3 Results

This section shows to what extent the objectives for the three-year period been achieved during 2018 and 2019, and to what extent they are in line with the overall objectives set by the MFA. This includes the results of the individual projects and the impact they have on participating organisations as well as multiplier effects at local, regional, national or international levels. The outline of the section follows the framework outlined in 2.1 above.

### 4.3.1 Inputs

Inputs are the “intervention”, the initial activities, that are funded because they are expected to lead towards the fulfilment of the programme’s primary objectives. In our case this is mutual trust and people-to-people cooperation between Norway and Russia in the North.

#### **Scope**

To minimize legal and economic complications, only Norwegian partners are allowed to apply. Individual grants over 400 000 NOK are submitted to the Board for approval.

In 2018, 103 projects for a total sum of 14 507 million NOK were granted under the Barents Secretariat’s Grant Programme. In addition, 27 projects were funded under BarentsKult. In all 283 applications were processed, of which 203 by the Barents Secretariat and 40 by the Board (because they amounted to 400 000 NOK or more). Among the 283 applications, 40 were under BarentsKult.

In 2019, 146 projects for a total sum of 23 535 900 NOK were funded. In addition, 27 projects under BarentsKult. The Barents Secretariat received 283 applications, of which 40 to BarentsKult. In 2019, 19 project applications were sent to the Board for approval.

The percentage of applications that were approved went from 33 per cent in 2018 to 66 per cent in 2019. The latter year’s percentage of approval is closer to the ordinary. The dip in 2018 is due to a change in MFA’s allocation practices. Until 2018, allocation letters were for three years, which allowed for granting funds over the calendar year. As a result, funds that were allocated for specific projects in 2017 by the Barents Secretariat were deducted from the 2018 allocation.

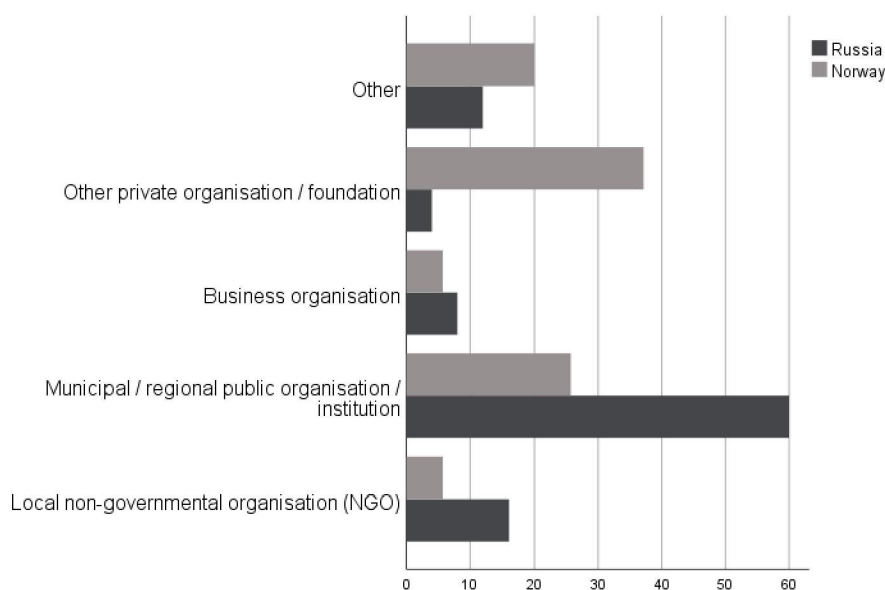
There is an average of four complaints annually from applicants. The MFA serves as administrative appeal body in these cases. Complaints come from applicants who have used to have their applications approved and from applicants whose activities do not fall under the criteria, e.g. by being too close to research activities.

### ***Types of actors involved***

The Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme is characterized by its large variety of activity types and large diversity of actors involved, aptly described by one of the interviewees in the Secretariat as "many a little makes a mickle". It is the sum of the many interfaces that counts.

The survey carried out as part of this evaluation indicates that while in Russia public organisations dominate (six out of ten), in Norway there is more variation with private organisations/foundations being the largest, and public organisations and institutions coming second. It is worth noticing that the percentage represented by local NGOs is larger in Russia than in Norway. Figure 4.2 shows the type of organisations involved in the collaboration on respectively the Norwegian and the Russian side.

*Figure 4.2: Organisations involved in the collaboration in Norway and Russia. Percent.*



Payments to Russian partners requires that they are registered as organizations, i.e. with an organization number, e.g. as an individual entrepreneur. The Barents Secretariat shows caution when paying fees in order not to make Russian partners "foreign agents". Especially the journalists taking part in projects are vulnerable to this. The Barents office in Arkhangelsk coordinates these transactions in accordance with Russian regulations.

### ***Types of projects involved***

Inputs vary from small scale activities, like joint football trainings and matches between neighbouring football clubs in Kirkenes and Pechenga and exchange of handicraft skills to the largescale Barents Games. Involved actors vary from groups of people involved in handicraft and school student to municipal agencies and businesspeople. Inputs also vary from the uncontroversial to potentially controversial activities like indigenous rights and LGBT issues.

How inputs are distributed among thematic fields and activity types is crucial to the overall goal achievement. Therefore, the Secretariat's efforts to stimulate and cultivate project proposals and follow up funded projects is of utmost importance. The Secretariat receives considerably more applications for funds within the fields of culture and sports than for business projects. The advisers in the Secretariat make efforts to compensate by giving special attention to the development of business applications and by providing indirect input

through follow-up of Norwegian holders of business projects. The actual distribution of types of projects as compared to the 2007 situation will be presented in chapter 5.

Geographically, the Barents region is huge and includes populations centres far from the Norwegian-Russian border. Distributing inputs to these areas, e.g. Southern Nordland and the Komi Republic poses a challenge. As one interviewee from Nordland told: "We are somewhat at a distance from the epicentre of the Barents activities." Nonetheless, e.g. Sortland and Mo i Rana have long-standing and vibrant cooperation. The advisors on communication in the Kirkenes office and the staff in the three Russian offices inform about the opportunities offered through the programme in communities far from the border. As a side effect of the Covid-19 pandemic the project leader conference in 2020 was cancelled. Instead, the Kirkenes staff went to four different places in Northern Norway which may have a positive effect on geographical diversification.

Another challenge is to make a balance between continuity and recruitment of new milieus. Given the overriding aim of the programme, the fact that project owners continuously come back with new projects is both a sign that the programme achieves results (a wish for cross-border contacts) and a pre-condition for goal achievement (building trust takes time). On the other hand, there is also a need for newcomers to the project portfolio.

From the interviews and survey, it appears that the three Barents offices in Russia are good at servicing and maintaining the consolidated community of experienced project partners on the Russian side. It is, however, less clear to what extent they emphasize recruitment of newcomers and assistance in finding Norwegian partners.

The survey shows that many of the respondents had long experience with Barents project collaboration: 7% had started their project activities before 2000; and more than half the respondents had started project collaboration before 2014. There are, however, also newcomers in the collaboration: 30% had started activities after 2017. Similar variation is found when it comes to the length of the projects; a few last for less than a month, while the longest has lasted for 12 years. The median length of a project is six months; one quarter lasts for 2 months or less, while less than a quarter lasts for more than a year. Summed up, this means that projects are short, but project leaders are experienced.

Creating pride and a feeling of community among project participants as well as recruitment of newcomers is a major task of the two communication advisers in the Secretariat. Doing this, they concentrate on the method of storytelling, using photo and video to arouse interest among potential project applicants. Information is channelled through social media, Facebook in Norwegian and Instagram in Russian and English. The three offices in Russia inform in Russian through V Kontakte.

### ***The Secretariat's processing of applications***

The Secretariat holds project meetings to process applications, if needed for up to two days. Each and one of the advisers present applications within their field of responsibility followed by a plenary discussion. The close follow-up and hands-on approach of the advisers also means attempts at including pro forma Russian partners for a project that de facto is Norwegian only, will be detected and applicants recommended to do more efforts to find real partners. This is possible because of the, often close, dialogue between adviser and applicant during the preparation of applications. Moreover, the advisers are allowed to obtain additional information from applicants after the deadline for applications.

### 4.3.2 Project participants assessment of the programme administration

Almost in complete unison, the interviewed project participants as well as respondents in the survey praise the Barents Secretariat's performance in providing guidance to applicants and facilitating and following up projects. One of the advisers told: "Sometimes I just ask applicants to delete their applications and write a new one from scratch. We are there to guide them through the process, not to stop them on the grounds that they have made an initial mistake".

The survey shows that the Barents Secretariat is reviewed highly positively by the respondents, as illustrated in **Feil! Fant ikke referansekilden.**, which gives the level of respondents' satisfaction with various aspects of the programme administration. The administration gets a particularly good rating when it comes to its accessibility, provision of information and application procedures. Compared to 2007 (not shown in the figure), we observe an improved rating on all items except for the staff's flexibility which has gone slightly down from 94% rather or very satisfied in 2007 to 87% in 2020; thus from a very high to a still very high level.

*Figure 4.3: Respondents' assessment of the programme administration. Percentage indicating different levels of satisfaction with the Barents Secretariat.*



\*'Do not know' and 'No answer' (from 5% to 22% of the respondents) have been removed. This in particular concerns Russian respondents who have not necessarily been in direct contact with the Secretariat themselves.

### 4.3.3 Outputs

Outputs are the immediate results, «deliveries», of project activities, like trainings held, concerts arranged, visits carried out. Outputs is what project owners get funding to produce.

Given the requirements for getting funded all project outputs in the programme are joint activities carried out by Russians and Norwegians. Although the Covid-19 pandemic occurred only in 2020 and the mid-term evaluation covers 2018-19, we have included a subsection here on how it has affected project outputs.

The funds allocated to project owners to produce output are firmly controlled by the Secretariat. The evaluation has not identified systemic bottlenecks in the realization of outputs. Visa regulations create some practical obstacles, but the Barents Secretariat provides assistance in an efficient way, quite many project holders tell.

## **Covid-19**

The survey shows that the Covid-19 epidemic has had negative impact on project implementation. Only 15% reported that they had not experienced any effect on their project of the pandemic. More than two thirds (70%) had experienced a negative effect. A few (7%) had seen mainly positive effects on their project, and a similar percentage was undecided (5% found it hard to answer and 3% did not answer this question).

Physical meetings, that are central to the very idea of the programme, have become impossible due to the Covid-19 restrictions, but many projects have flexibly adapted their original plans to the new situation. Just to mention a few examples, ceramic workshops have been carried out, young people have had digital club evenings and handicraft amateurs have shown each other techniques digitally. The first project to be planned as a digital undertaking from the outset has been carried out (The Covid-19 Marathon). The downside is that the restrictions make the spontaneous establishment of contacts (outcomes) difficult to achieve. Business projects suffer particularly due to Covid-19 since they mainly consist in facilitating the first meetings between potential partners. The potential effects of a first meeting on the wish to follow up ideas are hard to achieve through digital means.

A side-effect of the need to switch to digital meetings is that more actors can be involved. Travel costs is no longer an argument to keep number of participants low. Especially on the Russian side this can allow more potential actors to get a first impression of the grant programme and opportunities offered.

### **4.3.4 Outcomes**

Outcomes are the “proof of the pudding” in the result chain beginning with inputs (what the deliveries make project participants and target groups do as a result of the activities).

The survey shows that a vast majority of projects have taken steps to continue the collaboration and follow up on project activities. Almost three quarters (73%) have made concrete plans to follow up (in addition to 18% who say ‘a little’). The same percentage have anchored their project in own institution. More than half the respondents (52%) have made documentation available to others and 50% of the respondents have already applied for additional funding.

Only 3% of the respondents are certain that they are able to follow up the activities without further support from the Barents Secretariat; in 2007 10% were certain of this. An additional 15% would be able to ‘some extent’ (16% in 2007), 21% ‘to a minor extent’ (34% in 2007) while as many as 47% (only 23% in 2007) would not be able to follow up the activities without such support. The remaining 13% (17% in 2007) found it hard to answer.

It is no surprise, therefore, that virtually all respondents (97%) agree that the funding of Norwegian-Russian collaboration projects through the Barents Secretariat should be continued, either exactly as today (70%), or with slight changes (27%). It is also worth noting that 88% of the respondents believe it is ‘very likely’ that they will apply for funding again, while an additional 7% consider it to be ‘quite likely’. Thus, the grant scheme appears to fill a need among societal actors on both sides of the border in the north, a need which according to the survey data has grown even further since 2007. In other words, projects will be followed up – if funded.

The fact that many project owners keep applying every year is an outcome, and given the fact that projects take time to produce outcomes, this is promising.



Even though the programme is not political, there are some political outcomes. Regional politicians meet at events organised through the programme. The 75 anniversary of the liberation of Eastern Finnmark in 2019 is one example. Many of the events then were projects under the programme. As told by one government official interviewed: “This gives the politicians talking points they would not have had if it were not for the programme”.

An illustrative example of the outcome of people-to-people cooperation is offered by one of the sports projects under the programme. Norwegian sport leaders taking part in the project engaged themselves in the debate on excluding Russia from international sports due to doping. They warned against using the expression “all sport” because that would include children’s sports and grass-roots sports.

Barents Games is an illustrative example of programming for outcomes. The games in themselves are sports events but as a follow up the project Young Leaders in the Barents creates a network of young leaders across borders in the region.

### ***Curing prejudices***

Many project holders report that Norwegian project participants have re-considered their ideas about Russia and the Russians after having taken part in project activities. Particularly in projects involving children and young people project leaders make sure participants socialize, e.g. over a pizza after having played a football match. During training teams are mixed Russian/Norwegian to make participants interact as teams. Teenagers who live in the homes of peers during visits to Russia tell about nice flats and a cosy home atmosphere that stand in contrast to the, often, unfamiliar looks of the residential neighbourhood. This contributes to de-mystifying the peers on the other side of the border and as such is in line with the overall objectives of the programme by breaking down stereotypes. A project leader told: “We have an idea of Russia being a much more sinister place than what we experience when we are over there.”

The Barents Press project has contributed to better understanding among journalists about each others’ societies and politics.

Particularly, in the case of cultural projects Norwegian project leaders report that visits to Russia gave a boost thanks to the interest they were met with from the audience.

### ***Contacts***

Most of the projects involves facilitating social meeting places and in the survey and interviews project partners often refer to their efforts in enabling informal contacts, to “make sure participants do not leave early to go to their hotel rooms”, as one of them told. Among younger target groups curiosity in each other is conducive to the establishment of informal contact. Another project owner told: “It is not enough to facilitate social meeting places, we must meet for concrete activities”. This may be taken as a reminder that the driving force behind coming together is not necessarily a wish to contribute to the development of cross-border trust but to improve one’s skills in culture or sports, or to expand one’s business activities. Therefore, the quality of the project content is decisive.

### ***Improving skills***

During the Arctic Skills, Russian and Norwegian students of health work have proved to differ as to what tasks they excel in. The Russian students are better at technical skills whereas the Norwegian ones are better at communicating with patients. After having realised this, at the following year’s competition both teams had improved their skills in what they lost out on in the first place.

Young Norwegian musicians got a wakeup call seeing their Russian counterpart and the level they were on, according to a project leader, who told that this inspired the Norwegian children increase their efforts. Instructors learnt didactic skill from their Russian counterparts. Russians have come to Norway to study, and have settled, which strengthens links between the two countries

The wrestling milieu in Tana, Norway, have experienced that having Russian wrestlers taking part in their competitions makes wrestlers from other European countries, like Poland, Germany and France, join. This has made Tana a place to be reckoned with among wrestlers internationally. The higher level of this sport in Russia has given a boost to the local wrestling community in Tana. The Bodø-Murmansk judo project has had a similar outcome.

This type of outcomes is important for the sustainability of the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme because, most likely, most potential project owners are primarily driven by their interest in their sphere of activity and only secondarily in creating trust across borders. The latter comes as a side-effect of shared interest, e.g. choreography in the Sound of Silence project.

Journalists on both sides of the border have got in touch and keep contacts after having taken part in arrangements organized through the Barents Press project.

### **Offshoots**

In the interviews and survey project leaders on both sides of the border told about spinoffs resulting from the interfaces enabled by the projects have led to spin-offs. For instance, sport clubs that have got in touch through the Barents Games or other Barents projects keep contact on a bilateral basis outside the Barents framework, like in the case of the tennis circles in Arkhangelsk and Bodø.

To facilitate spinoffs, timing is important. With good timing, relatively small projects may have wide ripple effects. One example of good timing is offered by the media project on waste management where Russian journalists reported from Tromsø about the city's waste management systems. Waste management was a highly topical issue in Russian cities at the time – and still is (Holm-Hansen 2020 10-14). The project on water and sewerage involving the same two cities was equally well timed due to the recent reorganization of Russia's urban water and sewerage organizations and technologies.

Many respondents in the survey as well as interviewees refer to inspiration from joint project activities that have led to new initiatives at home. One example of this kind is Russian volunteers at Norwegian events who pick up ideas on how to organize volunteering during their own events at home. The Murmansk-based Barents Ptitsa festival is inspired by the annual Barents Spektakel in Kirkenes.

Although not always leading to joint activities directly, such spin-offs contribute to the overall aims of the grant programme. They are results of mutual inspiration.

### **Long term outcomes**

Several among the people who have taken part in youth projects are now in important positions, e.g. in the Murmansk oblast administration. They have grown up with close ties to Norway and may be expected to be positively inclined to further cooperation. Likewise, on the Norwegian side, young sport leaders who have met during Barents Games and Young Leaders in Barents Sports now hold high positions in the regional sports associations. These young people on both sides of the border are referred to as "The Barents Generation".

Several examples of long-term outcomes could be mentioned. A lot of people from the Russian side have been involved as voluntary staff at e.g. festivals in Northern Norway. They go back to Russia and arrange festivals. Sport projects have strengthened girls' football on both sides of the border. Several projects have led to other, joint activities outside the programme's framework (e.g. Toppenkurset).

A number of young people who have taken part in activities organized through the projects have chosen to study Norwegian/Russian which means that people from the Barents Generation most likely will be engaged in Russian/Norwegian activities in the future.

The Barents Press project reports that it has helped journalists write more fact-based articles. The project has no preferences as to the articles' political colouring, only that they are based on facts. There is a tendency that articles in Northwest Russia about Norway are more fact-based than those in Moscow.

On the Russian side, the project cooperation has resulted in a stable group of people and groups with longstanding cooperation with counterparts in Norway, a community of people from different sectors who are not afraid of cooperating with Norway. The same tendency is seen in Norway.

## **5 Enabling and hindering factors**

### **5.1 Success factors**

#### **5.1.1 Interaction effects**

The Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme interacts with other mechanisms and frameworks for cross-border cooperation in the North. Since only Norwegian partners can be formal applicants for funds from the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme, most of the initiatives come from the Norwegian side. The Norwegian Consulate General in Murmansk complements this by allowing for initiative from the Russian side. The Consulate General identifies potential partners in Russia and find Norwegian partners in the fields of business, culture, information and the High North. There is a difference, however, in the volume of funding. The Consulate General disposes of a much smaller sum, 600 000 NOK (2020).

The Barents House in Kirkenes co-locates several institutions that work cross-border. In addition to the Norwegian Barents Secretariat, the International Barents Secretariat, the Investment Fund for North-West Russia and Eastern Europe (Kirkenes Fondsforvaltning), and the Barents Institute have their offices in the building, centrally located in the town. This lowers the threshold for contacting each other and carrying out joint communication activities for the public at large.

Also, on the funding side, there are several examples of interaction. The large scale, flagship project, Barents Spektakel, is co-funded by ordinary funds and funds from BarentsKult. Arctic Skills has got additional funding from Kolarctic. The Barents Indigenous Peoples' Office is located in Murmansk, funded by the Saami Parliament in Norway, and administrated by the Norwegian Barents Secretariat.

Friendship agreements between Norwegian and Russian municipalities within the Barents Region have proved to be conducive to the establishment of projects within the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme, e.g. between Vardø, Rana and Nordkapp and their Russian friendship municipalities. The wave of "smart city" initiatives in Northern Norway could be a stepping stone in this regard (Dybtsyna and Aleksandrov 2020).

In addition to the interaction effects here, there are interaction effects from the tasks carried out by the Secretariat beyond stricto sensu grant programme management (see chapter 4.2.3).

#### **5.1.2 Uncomplicated application and reporting procedures**

Experienced project owners tell that the formalities are less extensive for the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme than for many other funds. Some experienced applicants, or applicants from smaller organizations, complain about formalities though. One project owner said: "The strict requirements in auditing all expenditures in Russia, especially through an auditor for a medium size grant, adds a great burden of work and added costs to our work." Others complained about the time-consuming requirement that all participants' gender, region, age and nationality have to be listed in the application form. One project owner of a school exchange project told that the requirements for a relatively detailed project report for the Barents Secretariat come in useful when s/he is explaining the contents and importance of the project to the local authorities.

The general feedback from project owners is that the Secretariat does a good job in explaining and assisting through a hand-on approach and accessibility of the advisers.

### **5.1.3 Diaspora**

Migration has been conducive to results. Among project holders, Norwegian citizens with a Russian background and Russians living in Norway, are frequent. This is particularly the case in projects in the fields of sports and culture. Their projects benefit from the project holders' high competence in sport and culture that they bring with them from Russia and not least their inter-cultural and inter-institutional competence.

## **5.2 Obstacles**

The obstacles caused by the sharpening of geopolitical rivalries and differences in mainstream positions on issues pertaining to lifestyle and cultural issues are discussed above, in chapter 4.1.

### **5.2.1 Business projects**

Throughout the years the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme has helped several business initiatives succeed. Lately, this has become more difficult. At times optimism has been high, especially in the mid-1990s. Then 100-120 enterprises in Kirkenes were engaged in cooperation with Russia, most of them one-person firms though. Expectations proved to be unrealistic and very few of these initiatives succeeded. Centred on the opportunities offered by the development of the Shtokman field, one of the world's biggest known offshore natural gas fields, optimism peaked again around 2005. An economic boom was expected and Norwegian Statoil and Norsk Hydro were involved. Due to the expansion of shale gas and other major changes in the global gas markets, however, the Shtokman development plans were put on hold in 2012. Despite the cold showers to the business euphoria, there is still interest among Norwegian companies to cooperate with Russian partners. No less than 30-40 Norwegian companies took part in the Team Norway meeting arranged by the Norwegian Consulate General (Murmansk) during the 2019 Kirkenes Conference to get an update on recent developments within working conditions and regulations relevant for Norwegian business in Russia. As of 2020, in all 13 Norwegian companies are registered in Murmansk and four are represented by Russian one-person businesses.

Nonetheless, several factors contribute to making the Barents Region less of a hub for economic development that many have hoped for. In addition to Shtokman no longer being a driving force, no petroleum resources have been found along the Norwegian-Russian boundary line in the Barents Sea, the rouble exchange rate and the Covid-19 recession are among those. In addition, Russia has become more centralized, which has a direct impact on projects based on regionally driven cross-border projects. This impact is likely to be more noticeable for business projects that involve potential profitability than, e.g. cultural projects that have a more ideational character. This is illustrated in one of the business projects studied in this evaluation. Otherwise impeccably planned, involving an experienced consultant on the Russian side and generously followed up by the Barents Secretariat, the Norwegian project owner in agreement with the Secretariat decided to break off his tour of the Russian side of the Barents Region. Instead he went to Moscow for initial meetings with counterparts recommended during meetings in Murmansk. This latter leg of the trip could not be funded by the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme.

Business projects also struggle with the imbalance between firms on the two sides of the border. A small firm in Finmark normally have from one to five employees whereas the counterparts in Murmansk would have 3-500. Russia is increasingly protectionist, and Norwegian business initiatives that are direct competition to Russian firms must expect counteraction. Successful firms, like e.g. Barel, have avoided direct competition and offer

products that are unique in terms of price and quality. In general, the firms that have succeeded are the ones that can afford to run at a loss for a while and afford the competence needed to work long-term in Russia.

Today, tasks are divided between the Barents Secretariat and Innovasjon Norge, the Norwegian government's agency for innovation and development of enterprises and industry. The Barents Secretariat's niche is facilitating meeting places and networks whereas Innovasjon Norge and the Kirkenes-based Investment Fund for North-West Russia and Eastern Europe may support the establishment of businesses. Given the obstacles briefly referred to above, the question remains whether small-scale facilitation of meeting places (input) stand a chance of leading to joint business plans (outcomes) under the current circumstances.

### **5.2.2 Projects on indigenous issues**

As reported in 4.2.3 the Barents Secretariat has an extended role on issues pertaining to indigenous peoples. Indigenous issues are potentially controversial in both countries involved, especially when rights to use natural resources are involved. On the Russian side, the institutional representation of indigenous peoples is still quite controversial, illustrated by the many rivalries in and around the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North (RAIPON). Likewise, the representation of the Kola Sámi has been conflictual over a long period of time (Berg-Nordlie 2017).

Rivalries between different groups within the Sámi community of 1700 people at the Kola Peninsula are still prevalent in 2020. The rivalries have their roots in a variety of factors, among them old contentions over how to standardize Kildin Sámi, spoken at most by a few hundred people, form one of the backbones of the debate. The generous foreign funding of Sámi activities in the 1990s enabled "gatekeepers" to position themselves, which led to long-lasting wounds among those who lost out. A tendency among foreign funding agencies to see the recipients of funds as the only Sámi representatives may have further deepened this cleavage.

Another division line follows the involved activists' degree of readiness to cooperate with government-sponsored institutions for indigenous policies, like the consultative council for indigenous affairs under the oblast authorities. Also here, foreign funders may have contributed to deepening cleavages. Some Sámi activists who have been ready to join government-supported platforms have got the impression that this was tantamount to losing prestige among funders and potential partners in the Nordic countries.

Nordic actors may be criticized for failing to acknowledge the nuances in the ways Russian Sámi activists relate to official Russian Sámi policies. The approach of those activists is not either total rejection or uncritical compliance. Neither do the authorities exclude more critical voices entirely from being appointed to platforms and representative tasks.

Most of the project applications, however, are non-controversial and focus on language, duodji, reindeer herding and gastronomic tourism. Applications within the field of civil society, however, are more controversial since they often consist in participation at conferences that are regarded as political by Russian authorities.

### **5.2.3 Regional imbalance**

Cross-border cooperation naturally is at its most intensive in the border areas. The Barents Region includes territories far from the border and project initiatives from these areas are less frequent. Besides, since 1987, Nordland has had a friendship agreement with Leningrad

oblast, that does not form part of the Barents Region. There is, nonetheless, an increase in project applications from Nordland and the former Troms region.

The survey further indicates a considerable variation in the geographical location of the project activities. Respondents were asked to indicate which area(s) of Norway their project involved. In Norway the activities take place in Nordland (40%); Troms (43%); Western Finnmark (40%) and Eastern Finnmark (57%), 9% implement activities also in other parts of Norway, while 26% stated that their project takes place in Russia only. In Russia the two dominating areas of project activities are Murmansk (70%) and Arkhangelsk (45%), but there are also projects with activities in the Republic of Karelia (28%); Komi Republic (8%), Nenets Autonomous Okrug (7%); and other parts of Russia (20%). The fact that the total percentage exceeds 100 in both countries is a reflexion of many projects being cross-regional also on a domestic level.

#### **5.2.4 “Short project year”**

Each year, all projects must have spent their funds by the end of December, and final reports and financial statements, including all vouchers and audit must be submitted by 1 December. The Secretariat usually receives the letter of assignment only in February-March, which “makes the year short”. Since many projects are continuous and have been ongoing over years, this creates a situation with no activities for three to four of the year’s 12 months. The exception is projects run by larger organizations with a liquidity that allows them to lay out in the meantime. BarentsKult, funded by the Ministry of Culture and the regional administrations allows for budget transfers over New Year.

There is also a concern among project participants that if one doesn’t come early enough in the calendar year with a project application, they risk not getting funded since funds have already been distributed.

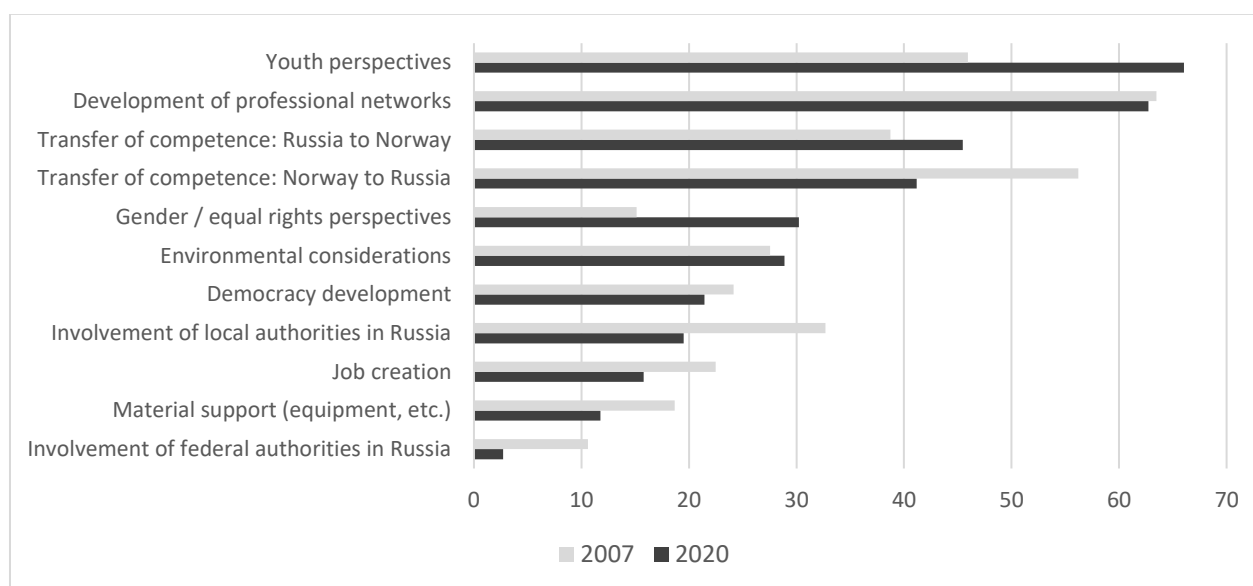
In interviews and open-ended questions in the survey some project owners mentioned the practical difficulties in obtaining receipts and invoices from partners for projects that e.g end in November and documentation has to be submitted in early December. One project owner called attention to the fact that obtaining the necessary documents required for reporting usually takes a long time when municipal organizations are involved. Projects with a municipal affiliation therefore has particular problems in complying with the Secretariat’s administrative requirements.

## 6 Comparing the current programme with that of 2007

### 6.1 More competence transfer from Russia to Norway than the other way around

When comparing the profiles of the projects in 2020 with those from 2007 (see Figure 6.1), we find that certain characteristics are more or less similar, while others have changed considerably during this period. Youth perspectives have become more prevalent in the projects and are now characteristic of two thirds of the projects 'to a large extent', while the same was true of less than half the projects in 2007. Development of professional networks remain a key component in 2020, and at the same level as in 2007. Transfer of competence is also high on the list, but it is worth noting that while the most common direction of such transfers in 2007 was from Norway to Russia, now it has been reversed so that transfer of competence from Russia to Norway has become the most prevalent. Gender and equal rights perspectives appear to have been strengthened since 2007; now one third of the projects include such perspectives 'to a large extent'. Another important finding is that Russian authorities are to a lesser extent involved in the projects than they were in 2007, and involvement of federal authorities has virtually disappeared. Environmental considerations and democracy development remain important features in between 20% and 30% of the projects, while material support is a key component in only about one out of ten projects, reduced from almost two out of ten in 2007.

*Figure 6.1: Profile of projects in 2020 compared to 2007. Percentage of projects involving various components 'to a large extent'.*

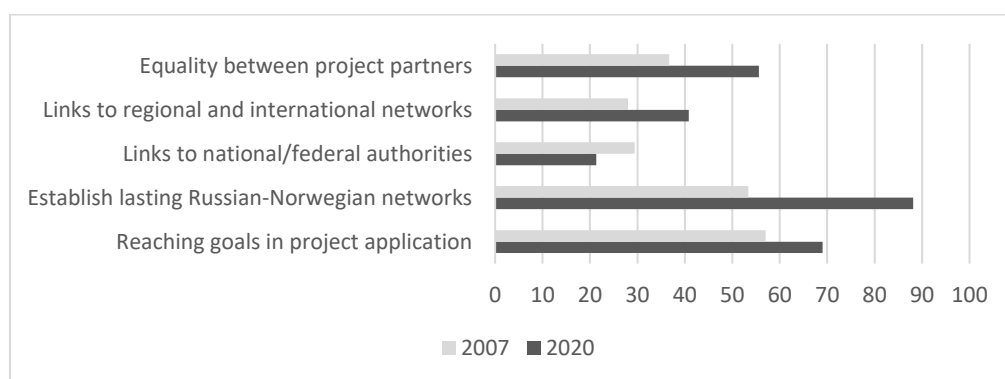




## 6.2 Projects have become more successful in reaching their goals

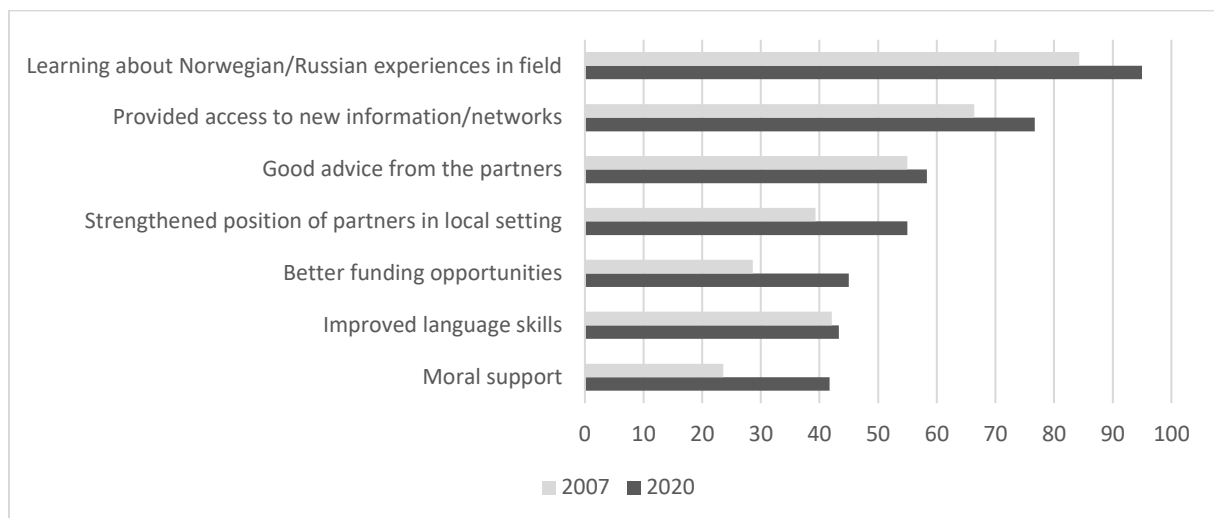
There are many ways of measuring success of a project. Some characteristics are, however, very likely to be considered important success criteria across different types of projects. We listed some of these, and asked respondents to what extent they consider their own project to be successful on each of them. As can be seen from Figure 6.2, with one exception, the respondents report greater success levels now than they did in 2007. One could, perhaps, expect project owners to exaggerate the success of their projects, but we see no reason why they would be more inclined to do so in 2020 than they were back then. The projects appear especially successful in establishing lasting contacts and networks between Russian and Norwegian partners. It is also noteworthy that equality between project partners has improved since the previous evaluation. The only exception to the trend of more successful projects relates to how they link up with national and federal authorities; only one in five projects report success in this regard, and down from almost 30% in 2007. This corresponds also to the finding above that federal authorities in Russia rarely collaborate with or are involved in these projects.

*Figure 6.2: Percentage asserting that their project has been 'very successful' along specific criteria.*



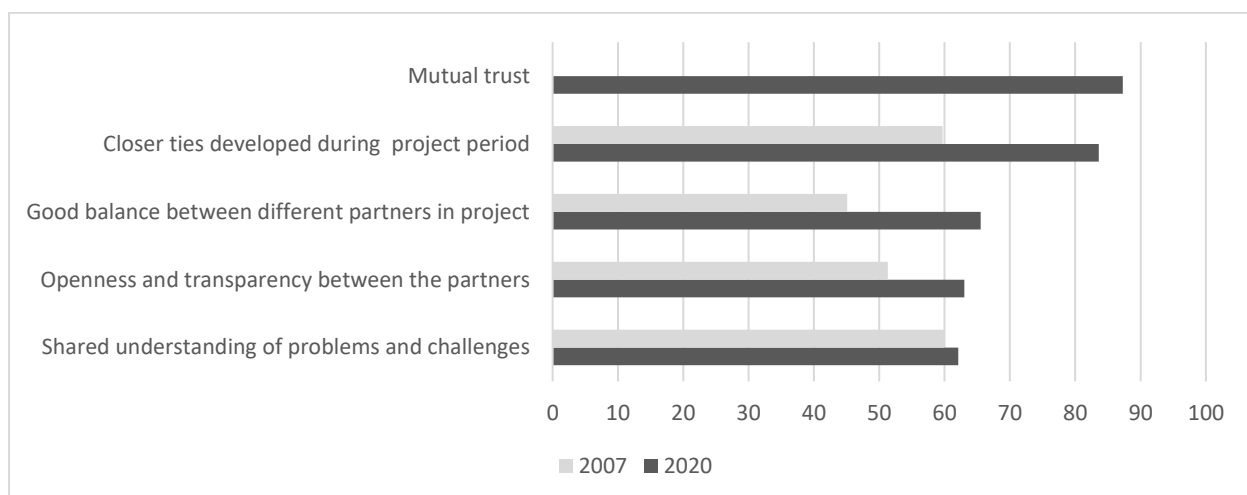
Respondents were also asked what they believe have been the most important positive impacts of their project (Figure 6.3), and again we see a larger percentage reporting positive impacts than was the case in 2007. Considerably higher scores than in 2007 are observed for such items as competence development, access to networks, strengthened position of partners in the local setting, funding opportunities and moral support. There is no reduction of reported positive impact for any of the items in the 2007 – 2020 period.

Figure 6.3: Reported most important positive impacts of project. Percent.



Furthermore, in a bloc of questions respondents were asked to what extent some important features are prevalent in their collaboration with partners in respectively Russia and Norway. Figure 6.4 gives the impression of a very good collaboration climate and high level of mutual trust between partners, and confirms the trend of improvements from an already high level in 2007. In particular it can be observed that more respondents think that closer ties have developed during the project period. Also, the balance between different partners in the project appears to have improved.

Figure 6.4: The extent to which positive features are present in project collaboration. Percentage reporting 'to a large extent'\*



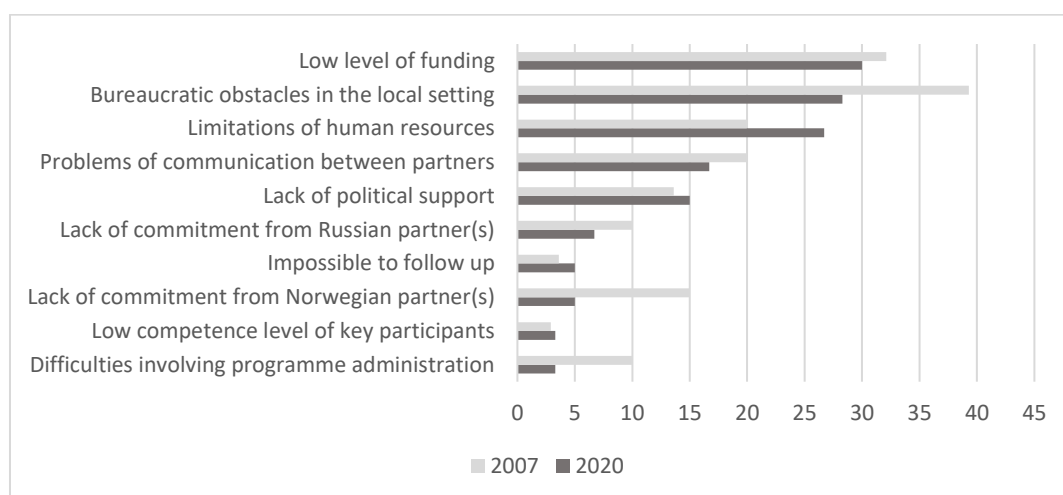
\*Other answer categories were 'to some extent' 'to a minor extent' and 'not at all'. 'Do not know' and 'No answer' have been removed. 'Mutual trust' was not asked in 2007.

### 6.3 Obstacles: Low level of funding, local bureaucracy, and lack of human resources

Of major obstacles mentioned by the respondents, low level of funding came out first, followed by bureaucratic obstacles in the local setting and limitations of human resources

(see Figure 6.5). The latter was the only obstacle that had seen a major increase in the 2007 – 2020 period. Other obstacles were either reduced or stable. In 2007 it was mainly Russian project owners who complained about lack of commitment from Norwegian partners, and the fact that the project owner is now always Norwegian is likely to be a reason for the lower score for this item. It is worth noting that virtually no respondents report difficulties with project administration, something which we have already seen was confirmed in respondents' assessment of the Barents Secretariat.

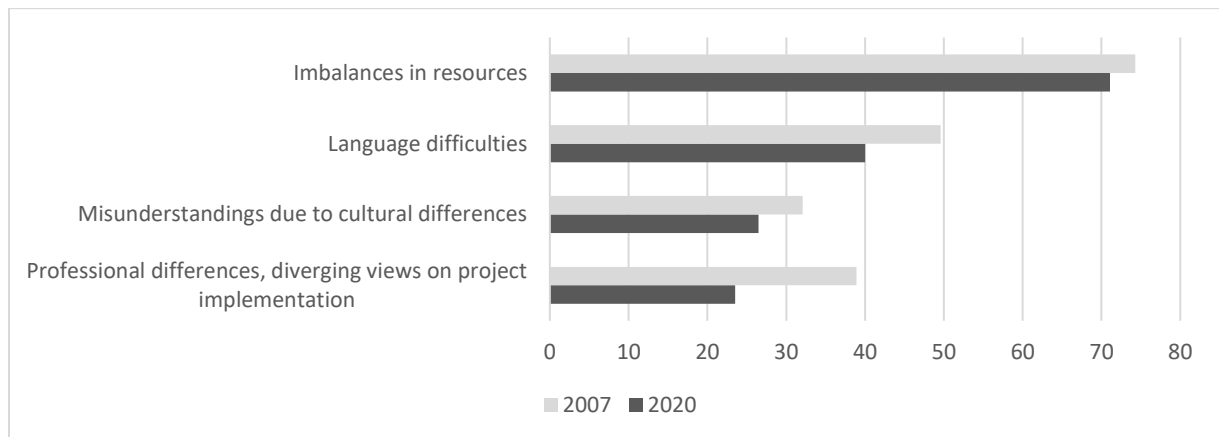
*Figure 6.5. Major obstacles reported by respondents. Percent.*



When asked “Have you ever had situations where you feel there is lack of progress or inaction on the other side of the border, and you do not completely understand why?”, only 3% claimed that this had happened often, while 37% had experienced it, but rarely. The majority (52%) had not had this experience, while the rest, 8%, found it hard to answer the question. In 2007 more people had experienced this; 13% often, 39% rarely, 42% never and 6% could not answer. Between two thirds (2007) and three quarters (2020) of respondents who had experienced such lack of progress reported that they had asked the reason for such inaction. While in 2007 only 31% of those having asked were satisfied with the answers given; in 2020 the corresponding figure was 47%, confirming the trend towards improved communication between partners.

Figure 6.6 shows the percentage of respondents who report some negative features with their project collaboration. The most prevalent is ‘imbalances in resources’ which is characteristic, at least ‘to some extent’ of nearly three quarters of the projects. However, all such negative features have been reduced in the 2007 – 2020 period, and particularly noteworthy is the drop in respondents reporting professional differences and diverging views on project implementation.

Figure 6.6. The extent to which positive features are present in project collaboration. Percentage reporting 'to a large extent' or 'to some extent'.\*



\*Other answer categories were 'to a minor extent' and 'not at all'. 'Do not know' and 'No answer' have been removed.

## 7 Conclusions and recommendations

Being a mid-term evaluation of the programme period 2018-2021, this evaluation takes stock of results so far and identifies needs for adjustments.

It has been able to uphold a broad project portfolio covering all the programmes priority areas. Given the developments on the international scene and internally in Russia this could not be taken for granted, and surely some priority areas have encountered more problems than others. Applications for projects within culture and sports dominate and are implemented most easily. More caution must be shown for projects on potentially controversial issues like LGBT and indigenous peoples.

The programme covers all of the Norwegian and Russian territories within the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. Naturally, the inducement to undertake cross-border cooperation is stronger in communities to the border than in regions at a distance. Nonetheless, the Barents Secretariat has been able to include enthusiast project holders from communities within the Barents region that are far from the border.

The broad profile of the project portfolio as to priority areas and geographical scope is a result of the Secretariat's work with project applicants. This work is characterized by high accessibility and close follow-up during the application process, implementation and reporting, according to interviewees and survey respondents.

The evaluation has taken a closer look at outputs ("deliveries") from the projects as well as outcomes, i.e. what the concrete project activities make participants do in the aftermath. Outputs are produced, that is project activities are being carried out, without major bottlenecks.

On the outcome side, many project leaders report in quite general terms that prejudices have been brought down among participants after having visited each other but there are also concrete examples of the effects of staying in the homes of peers on the other side of the border. For projects that involve amateurs of specialized skills, joint activities in which one learns from each other seem to have a particular effect in this regard. In most cases, people do not take part in a project to build trust but to practice favourite activities with interesting people. Trust and normalized people-to-people relations are side-effects.

Establishing viable business projects has proved to be difficult with the instrument at the Secretariat's disposal, which is to facilitate the first meetings.

Follow-up activities are important outcomes. A basic type of follow-up would be continued cooperation between project partners. The grant programme has a stable group of almost permanent project applicants who have been carrying out projects from year to year over a long period of time. Given the assumption that building trust through deep people-to-people cooperation, this is a significant outcome and a basis for further outcomes. A too consolidated group of Barents project actors, may nonetheless, be problematic because it may create obstacles for newcomers to enter the field. Since only the Norwegian partner can submit applications this problem is more prevalent at the Russian side.

Inspiration from project participation have led to longer-term outcomes or spinoffs both as joint projects funded by other sources than the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme and as new projects and activities at home. Such cases are both an indication of sustainability and relevance of the projects carried out in the grant programme.

The Barents Secretariat is owned by Norway's two Northernmost regions and primarily funded by the MFA from which it gets its allocation letter for the grant programme management. The formalized dialogue between the Secretariat and the MFA takes place on bi-annual meetings but the MFA is not represented on the Secretariat's Board and Council. Among the tasks assigned to the Secretariat is that of a competence centre for Norwegian-Russian relations in the North and to take part in the public debate. The Secretariat's degree of autonomy in fulfilling these tasks has caused some frictions with the MFA.

In its encounters with the Barents Secretariat leaders and advisers the evaluation team observed a lively and open workplace that allows for diversity of opinions and approaches.

In addition to programme management, the Secretariat's advisers take part in broader cross-border activities within the Barents framework and also takes on additional tasks from the MFA, among others on indigenous affairs. Many of these activities are of particular value in building the capabilities needed for the Secretariat to fulfil its role as a competence centre.

The mid-term evaluation covers 2018-19 but questions on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic were included in the interview guide and survey. Findings from the survey indicated that the pandemic has had a larger impact on project implementation than the worsened geopolitical situation and internal political developments in Russia. Nonetheless, a large number of project leaders have been inventive in adapting project activities to digital formats. These formats, however, are more suited for partners who already have established mutual contacts than for newcomers, who hardly can be expected to develop trust digitally from scratch. On the other hand, digital activities allow for broader participation since no travel costs accrue.

The mid-term evaluation includes a comparison of the state of the current programme with that of 2007 when a similar evaluation was made (NIBR Report 2008:4). Comparing the almost identical surveys carried out as part of the two evaluations, several significant changes come into sight. The transfer of knowledge remains high on the list of project profiles, but the direction of transfer has changed. Whereas in 2007 most of the transfer went from Norway to Russia, this has been reversed by 2020. In 2007 two out of ten projects included material support against one out of ten today. The involvement of Russian authorities in projects has decreased and there is virtually no involvement of federal authorities.

Gender and equal rights are more prevalent among project profiles now than in 2007. While 15 per cent of respondents in the 2007 survey report these issues as part of their project, the percentage today is 30 per cent. Also, the inclusion of youth perspectives in projects has increased.

The survey respondents are more likely to assert that their projects have been successful now than in 2007. In particular, this is the case when referring to equality between partners and establishing long lasting Russian-Norwegian networks.

Regarding obstacles to project implementation, bureaucratic factors have decreased significantly. Likewise, lack of commitment among Russian and Norwegian partners has decreased and is now an insignificant factor. Also, professional differences and diverging views on project implementation is significantly less an obstacle now than in 2007.

In sum, the comparison gives evidence of a grant programme that has improved its performance in facilitating meaningful projects between equal partners eager to continue cooperation.

The evaluation's overall positive assessment of the state of the grant programme, does not mean that it did not find room for improvements.

## **Recommendations**

The following suggestions for operational adjustments and improvements aim to further improve the Barents Secretariat's work to reach the programme's objectives.

### *Stayers versus newcomers*

The fact that many projects are continuations of long-lasting project sequences is a positive achievement and fully in line with the objectives of the programme. Continuation should be encouraged. Nonetheless, there is always a need for recruitment to bring in new human resources and perspectives and to broaden the impact of the programme. The number of applications has been stable over the last decade and the approval rate is around 60 per cent.

The good work made by the Secretariat to create a "Barents project community", among others through social media should be complemented with a stronger emphasis on reaching out to potential project applicants. The fact that only Norwegian partners can apply for funds creates a risk that potential project initiatives from newcomers on the Russian side fail to materialize simply because they do not find Norwegian partners. A special responsibility lies on the three Russian Barents offices to combine cultivation of the consolidated Barents community with encouraging newcomers and assisting them in finding Norwegian partners.

### *Business projects*

Business projects encounter specific problems and the Secretariat concentrate much efforts in facilitating them. The niche held by the grant programme is that of enabling the first meetings between potential partners. As of 2020, the prospects of small Norwegian enterprises establishing cooperation with counterparts in Russia are bleak. Actors able to establish and sustain business with Russian partners hardly would be in need of the relatively small sums needed for the first encounters. Moreover, they have access to other and bigger external funds for establishing joint business. The grant programme's geographical restrictions also create obstacles. Entering the Russian market only "through Kirkenes" is difficult. In general, one must be anchored in Moscow or St. Petersburg.

All this leads to the recommendation that the priority field of business cooperation be reconsidered. One alternative would be to move from cooperation between firms to cooperation between educational institutions with business-related subjects on their curricula. Such cooperation already exists with the grant programme. Integrating this cooperation in the relevant curriculums both in Norway and Russia has the potential to provide long-term effects of educating young people with competences and skills relevant for neighbouring countries. Individual firms could be partners in the educational cooperation (university-business cooperation). Another solution could be to facilitate broader knowledge transfer and exchange of information on technological developments, and facilitate meeting places in the areas of common challenges for Northern parts of Norway and Russia, e.g. waste management, harsh climate conditions, agriculture (incl. aquaculture), infrastructure and others. This will make it possible to include competences from both sides to transfer knowledge about current developments in the relevant industry fields and mutually improve qualifications.

### *Projects on indigenous peoples*

Projects on indigenous issues carry with them a potential for conflict. This is partly due to domestic conflicts between indigenous groups and business over the right to use land and water in both countries involved. Partly it is due to Russian central authorities' sensitivity to ethnic identity-building that involves ethnic kin groups in neighbouring countries. A non-negligible factor, however, is the deep-rooted rivalry between personalities and groups in the small Sámi community in Murmansk oblast.

In order not to make projects politically sensitive or to interfere in the complex power balances in the Russian Sámi community, it is recommendable that project that involve young people and people who are not directly involved old rivalries are given priority. In line with this, a continued priority to "uncontroversial" projects on duodji, gastronomic tourism and the like is recommended. If the "old guard" of Sámi activists on the Russian side are to be involved in project it is recommendable that a certain degree of balance is observed in order not to deepen internal divergencies and alienating segments of the Sámi community.

### *Make use of the Covid-19 opportunities*

Whereas the pandemic has created serious obstacles to project implementation in many cases, many projects have swiftly switched to digital arenas. In the long run, the grant programme's objectives will not be reached only through digital meetings, but the lessons learnt during the crisis should be built on in the future for more frequent encounters between project target groups on both sides of the border. A combination of joint activities in time and space on the one hand and follow-up digital meetings on the other, most likely will help bring forth new dynamics in the projects. Therefore, future application forms should require information on how digital platforms will be used in the projects.

Another side-effect of switch to digital meetings is that more actors can be involved. Travel costs is no longer an argument to keep number of participants low. Especially on the Russian, side this can allow more potential actors to get a first impression of project cooperation before they possibly come back with project initiatives. The inclusion of wider target groups in the digital components of the projects should, therefore, be considered as a criterion in the appraisals of applications.

### *Clarification of the geographical scope*

The Barents grants programme naturally has to take place in the Russian and Norwegian member regions of the Barents Euro-Arctic Region. The Secretariat has applied a flexible approach when projects invite in participants from outside the region if that is conducive to the project's ends. It is advisable that the Secretariat goes through its practices and needs and develop rules that clarifies to what extent and on what pre-conditions actors from outside the Barents Region can initiate projects and participants from outside the region be invited to take part. Flexibility is recommended in this regard. Project applicants may have contacts outside the Barents Region who could contribute. Actors in Nordland might for instance include some of their partners in Leningrad oblast for activities within the Barents Region.

### *The role of the Secretariat as a competence centre*

Managing the grant programme, the Secretariat operates according to an allocation letter from the national ministry implementing Norwegian foreign policies but under supervision by its owners, two regional authorities. The role of the Secretariat, therefore, is complex. This is most clearly felt in its role as a competence centre for Norwegian-Russian cross border cooperation. The question is what leeway the Secretariat can have, given its formal status, in voicing its own opinions when they diverge from official Norwegian policies. The



recommendation here would be to continue the practice that has already been introduced of facilitating platforms and meetings where discussions can be held and leave the opinion-building to the external discussants. In return, the MFA should accept to be criticized on these arenas. It is important, however, that the Barents Secretariat remains free to problematize aspects of official Norwegian politics that have an impact on cross border people-to-people cooperation.

#### *Critical self-reflection*

In their reporting Barents Secretariat emphasizes success, and there is ample evidence that many projects under the grant programme lead to results. For the learning process in order to further improve programming, there is a need for more systematic presentation and analysis of obstacles and failures.

#### *The steering structure*

Today the Board is composed of political and administrative leaders from the regions owning the Barents Secretariat. Insight in the challenges of the regions on the Norwegian side of the border is of value but the Board would probably gain from including members with their primary competence on Russia, business or civil society and also members from the Northern Norwegian universities. The recommendation is, therefore, to examine the possibility of including Board members from outside regional politics and administration. Reintroducing the practice of having a representative of the MFA as an observer in the Board should also be considered.

## 8 Written sources

### 8.1 Documents

- Oppdragsbrev for forvaltning av Barents regionale prosjekt 2018
- Oppdragsbrev for forvaltning av Barents regionale prosjekt 2019
- Oppdragsbrev for forvaltning av Barents regionale prosjekt 2020
- Tilskuddsavtale 2015-2017
- Tilskuddsavtale 2018-2020
- Rapport for avtaleperioden 1.12.2015 – 31.12.2018
- Project documents (applications, final reports, report from visits and other)

### 8.2 Literature

Berg-Nordlie, Mikkel (2017): Fighting to be Heard – in Russia and in Sápmi. Russian Sámi representation in Russian and pan-Sámi politics, 1992 -2014, A dissertation for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor – February 2017, UiT -The Arctic University of Norway.

Dybtsyna, Elena og Evgenii Aleksandrov (2020): Smarte byer i nordområdene: samhandling med innbyggerne, Magma 5/2020.

Holm-Hansen, Jørn, Aadne Aasland and Elena Dybtsyna (2008): Building Neighbourhood: Evaluation of the Barents Secretariat's Grant Programme, NIBR Report 2008:4

Holm-Hansen, Jørn (2020): 'NU, PiM and 42 – An evaluation of a Russian-Norwegian environmentalist youth partnership' NIBR Report 2020:3.

Holtmark, Svein G., ed. 2015. Naboer i frykt og forventning, Norge og Russland. Oslo: Pax.

Hønneland, Geir. 2017. Arctic Euphoria and International High North Politics. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hønneland, Geir og Leif Christian Jensen (2008) Den nye nordområdepolitikken- Barentsbilder etter årtusenskiftet. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

# Appendix I Interviews

*Names of individual representatives of the projects have been anonymized. NO = Norwegian partner, RU = Russian partner, NO/RU = both NO and RU interviewed*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>
<i>Group interview:</i> Lars Georg Fordal, Margrethe Alnes, Hilde Aleksandersen, Ksenia Novikova, Jonas Karlsbakk, Kim Stenersen, Stine Jørgensen, Elizaveta Vassilieva, Ann Iren Martinussen	the Barents Secretariat team
<i>Individual interviews with:</i> — Hilde Alexandersen, administration — Ann Iren Martinussen, financial manager — Ksenia Novikova and Jonas Karlsbakk, communication — Elizaveta Vassilieva, youth — Kim Stenersen, sports — Margrethe Alnes, culture and grant programme coordinator — Stine Jørgensen, business	the Barents Secretariat team
<i>Group interview with:</i> Lars Georg Fordal and Marit Jacobsen	Head of Secretariat and deputy head of Secretariat
Stig Olsen	Chairperson of the Board
Tomas Nordvoll	Member of the supervisory board
Bjørn Inge Mo	Member of the supervisory board
Andrey Vokuev	Barents Secretariat's Nenets Office

Maria Goman and Maria Ershova	Barents Secretariat's Murmansk Office
Andrey Shalev	Barents Secretariat's Arkhangelsk Office
<i>Group interview with:</i> Astrid Nærum, consul general Håkon Kristensen Mo, deputy head of mission Torunn Hasler, consul Oleksia Nonka, cultural adviser Svetlana Konopleva, business adviser	Norwegian Consulate General, Murmansk
<i>Individual interview with:</i> Torunn Hasler	Norwegian Consulate General, Murmansk
Gøril Johansen, Barents adviser	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Section for the High North, Polar Affairs and Marine Resources
Snøfrid Byrløkken Emterud, Marianne Kvan, Marte Lauvhjell	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Section for Eastern Europe, Central Asia and regional organizations
Rune Rautio,	Orinor Kirkenes

### ***Interviews with project representatives***

Barents Playmakers	NO/RU
Barents Games	NO/RU
Sound of Silence	NO/RU
Toppenkurset	NO/RU
Barents Press	NO/RU
Separate Waste Collection in Tromsø as a Pattern for Northern Russia	NO/RU
ÁIGI i Russland	NO/RU
Algae cultivation in the Barents Region	NO/RU

Water and sewerage cooperation Tromsø-Arkhangelsk	NO/RU
Digital club evenings	NO
Barents pride exchange 2019	NO/RU
Covid 19-marathon	NO/RU
Climate and environment in the Arctic	NO/RU
Bodø Barents Judo Cup	NO
Riddu Nuorat 2019	NO
Power of Diversity	NO/3RU interviewees
Big Changes	RU
Mu muitalus dáruiduhttin-suomaiduhttin-ruoššaiduhttin	RU

## Appendix II The questionnaire

**Which country do you live in?**

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- ☐ Russia
- ☐ Norway
- ☐ Other (please specify)

--- sideskift ---

**What kind of organisation do/did you represent in the collaboration project?**

*Several options possible*

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- ☐ National (federal) / international non-governmental organisation (NGO)
- ☐ Local non-governmental organisation (NGO)
- ☐ Municipal / regional public organisation / institution
- ☐ Business organisation
- ☐ Other private organisation / foundation
- ☐ Other (please specify)

--- sideskift ---

**Which area(s) of Norway did your project involve?**

*Include own location. Several options possible*

---

- ☐ It only took place in Russia
- ☐ Nordland
- ☐ Troms
- ☐ Vest-Finnmark (Western Finnmark)
- ☐ Øst-Finnmark (Eastern Finnmark)
- ☐ Other part(s) of Norway (please specify)

**Which area(s) of Russia did your project involve?***Several options possible*

- ☐ Murmansk oblast'  
☐ Arkhangelsk oblast'  
☐ Republic of Karelia  
☐ Nenets Autonomous Okrug  
☐ Komi Republic  
☐ Other parts of Russia (please specify)

--- sideskift ---

**Which thematic area(s) has your project involved?**

	To a large extent	To some extent	To a minor extent	Not at all
Business	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Civil society	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Indigenous people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Health / social welfare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

--- sideskift ---

**How successful would you say that the project you have been involved in has been in terms of:**

	Very successful	Rather successful	Rather un-successful	Very un-successful	Not relevant / do not know
Reaching the goals stipulated in the original project application	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Establishing lasting Russian-Norwegian contacts and networks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Linking up with relevant local and national/federal authorities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Linking up with relevant regional and international networks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Equality between project partners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Which year did you first receive funding from the Barents Secretariat?**

*Write years in full - f.ex 2016*

Year

--- sideskift ---

**How long did your project last / is it planned to last for (all together)?**

Months

--- sideskift ---

**Has your project received any funding in addition to the funding from the Barents Secretariat?**

*Several answers possible*

- ☐ No other funding
- ☐ Monetary funding from own organisation / institution
- ☐ In kind support from own organisation (cover salary, office premises, etc.)
- ☐ Local / regional authorities
- ☐ Private donors
- ☐ National funding agencies
- ☐ International donors
- ☐ Others
- ☐ Don't know, don't remember, hard to say



**What share (in per cent) of the total funding of your project did you receive from the Barents Secretariat?**

*If you are not sure of the exact answer, please make an approximate estimate.*

Per cent

--- sideskift ---

**To what extent has your project involved the following components?**

	To a large extent	To some extent	To a minor extent	Not at all	Do not know / not relevant
Environmental considerations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Gender / equal rights perspectives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth perspectives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Democracy development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Job creation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Material support (equipment, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Development of professional networks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transfer of competence from Norway to Russia	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transfer of competence from Russia to Norway	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cooperation with / involvement of local authorities in Russia	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cooperation with / involvement of federal authorities in Russia	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Have you taken any of the following measures regarding the follow up of your project?**

	Yes	A little	No	Not relevant
Anchored the project in own institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Made documentation that is available to others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Applied for additional funding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Made concrete plans for follow-up, continuation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

--- sideskift ---

**What of the following would you say are the most important positive impact(s) of the project?**

*Several answers possible*

- ☐ Learning about Norwegian/Russian experiences in the field
- ☐ Good advice from the partners
- ☐ Improved language skills
- ☐ Strengthened the position of the partners in the local setting
- ☐ Provided access to new information / networks
- ☐ Better funding opportunities
- ☐ Moral support
- ☐ No positive impact

--- sideskift ---

**What of the following would you say have been the most important obstacles for your project?**

*Several answers possible*

- ☐ Low level of funding
- ☐ Lack of political support
- ☐ Problems of communication between Russian and Norwegian partners
- ☐ Bureaucratic obstacles in the local setting
- ☐ Difficulties involving programme administration
- ☐ Lack of commitment from Norwegian partner(s)
- ☐ Lack of commitment from Russian partner(s)
- ☐ Limitations of human resources involved in the project
- ☐ Low competence level of key participants
- ☐ Impossible to follow up
- ☐ Other (please specify)

**To what extent has the collaboration between Russian and Norwegian partners in the project been characterised by the following?**

	To a large extent	To some extent	To a minor extent	Not at all	Not relevant / Don't know
Shared understanding of problems and challenges	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Imbalances in resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Openness and transparency between the partners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Misunderstandings due to cultural differences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A good balance between the different partners in the project	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Language difficulties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mutual trust	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Development of closer relations throughout the project period	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional differences, diverging views on project implementation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

--- sideskift ---

**Would you have been able to carry out the activity without the support from the Barents Secretariat?**

- ☐ Yes, fully  
☐ Yes, almost at the same level  
☐ Yes, but at a reduced level  
☐ Perhaps, with great difficulty  
☐ No, that would have been impossible  
☐ Don't know

--- sideskift ---

**In general, how satisfied have you been with the following aspects of the Barents Secretariat's administration?**

	Very satisfied	Rather satisfied	Rather dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Hard to say / Do not know / Not relevant
Information about the funding opportunities and requirements	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accessibility of Secretariat staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Application procedures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level of funding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Level of bureaucracy in the Secretariat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Flexibility of Secretariat staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Are you - or will you be - able to follow up the project activities without the further support of the Barents Secretariat?**

---

- ☐ Yes, certainly
  - ☐ Yes, to some extent
  - ☐ Yes, to a minor extent
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ Hard to say / don't know
- 

--- sideskift ---

**Do you think that the funding of Norwegian-Russian collaboration projects through the Barents Secretariat should be continued?**

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- ☐ Yes, definitely, the way it is today
  - ☐ Yes, but it should be changed slightly
  - ☐ Yes, but with major changes
  - ☐ Probably not
  - ☐ No, definitely not
  - ☐ Hard to say / do not know
- 

--- sideskift ---

**How likely is it that you will apply to the Barents Secretariat for funding in the future?**

---

- ☐ Very likely
  - ☐ Quite likely
  - ☐ Not so likely
  - ☐ Very unlikely
  - ☐ Hard to say / don't know
  - ☐ I do not work with relevant issues anymore
- 

--- sideskift ---

**Please write your opinion (positive and / or negative) about the application procedures of the Barents Secretariat. (In this and other open questions, feel free to answer in Norwegian)**

*Max 500 characters*

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**Have you asked your partners in Russia / Norway about the reasons for this?**

---

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No  
☐ Don't know / hard to say
- 

**What would you say are the most important results (in concrete terms) from your project?**

*Max 500 characters*

---

--- sideskift ---

**Have you any examples that the project has inspired new activities or adjustments of ways of doing things locally?**

*Max 500 characters*

---

--- sideskift ---

**Would you say that it has become easier or more difficult to carry out Barents projects since you started this type of activity? For example as regards the requirements to applications and reporting. And as regards the collaboration between Norwegian and Russian partners. What do such changes consist in?**

*Max 500 characters*

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--- sideskift ---

**Have you ever had situations where you feel there is lack of progress or inaction on the other side of the border, and you do not completely understand why?**

---

- ☐ Yes, often  
☐ Yes, but rarely  
☐ No, hardly ever / never  
☐ Don't know / hard to say
-

**Were you satisfied with the answers given?**

- ☐ Yes, fully  
☐ Only partly  
☐ No  
☐ Don't know / hard to say

--- sideskift ---

**Have any of the following factors affected project implementation?**

	Positive impact	Little or no impact	Negative impact	Do not know / not relevant
Bilateral political relations between Norway and Russia	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The COVID-19 pandemic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

--- sideskift ---

**In what ways has your project been affected, and what have you done to overcome it?**

*Max 500 characters*

--- sideskift ---

**Any other external factors that have had a major positive or negative effect on your project implementation?**

*Which? Please explain (max 500 characters)*

Submit answer