

DEVELOPING TOGETHER REPORT



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INTRODUCTION

The vast project area of the northern parts of Sweden, Norway and Finland represents a region with unique challenges. We share common labor markets, but have different laws and regulations. We have similar main industries, which all suffer from labor shortage. We are a relatively small region in the world, but a large region in the north, with long distances, and not easily accessible, with no or inadequate public transportation.

Although previous projects have reached good results in joint labor market initiatives and have increased access to networks and knowledge within several areas and industries, there is still need for further work with better connectivity, harmonization of education and certificates and attracting skilled labor in the region. To achieve an accessible and attractive region, regional and national authorities from all three countries also need to be involved. There is a great need for cross-border collaboration in which the organizations have complementary competences and knowledge.

The aim of cross-border cooperation is to shift from cooperation to cocreation, therefore joint strategies and joint planning are needed to fulfil the missing links and create synergies.

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MESSAGE FROM THE REGION

The past years have been very different and challenging for the Sweden-Finland-Norway Cross-Border Advice Service. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, borderlessness of the North Calotte region was taken for granted, and cross-border trade and working on the other side of the border were very common for the people and companies in the region. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the borders were closed, the regulations for crossing the borders changed several times a day, and citizens of different countries could be subject to different regulations. After the pandemic broke out, the Sweden-Finland-Norway Cross-Border Advice Service began to be flooded with contacts, and the number of contacts and questions increased by more than 400% on an annual basis. Suddenly, we were in a completely new situation at the Sweden-Finland-Norway Cross Border Advice Service, compared with previous years, both in terms of the number of questions and the content.

Although Cross-Border Advice Service already had good cooperation networks with authorities of different countries, at the latest during the pandemic the cooperation intensified, developed and we were able to create new models of cooperation. However, after the pandemic subsided, the number of contacts received by the Cross-Border Advice Service has remained at a fairly high level. In our studies, we have found out that border crossers and companies who needed our services during the pandemic did not necessarily know that such advisory service existed at all. However, the need for access to information has not disappeared from the North Calotte area's residents and businesses even after the pandemic, and now they know how to rely on the services of the Cross-Border Advice Service again.

**The vision of the Nordic prime ministers:
The Nordic region will become the most sustainable and
integrated region in the world by 2030**

MESSAGE FROM THE REGION

We are currently living in a time of a geopolitical change. Finland's and Sweden's NATO memberships create completely new needs and opportunities for the North Calotte region, for example through the development and construction of infrastructure. These investments come after investments and government decisions, but without employees these projects will not be successful. At the moment, there are no indications that the need for the Sweden-Finland-Norway Cross-Border Advice Service will decrease in the future. Recently, the northern region has started to be discussed in a completely new way, and the countries' NATO memberships also bring new people, opportunities, needs and responsibilities to the region. The Sweden-Finland-Norway Cross-Border Advice Service wants to continue to be actively involved in helping and advising both people and companies in questions related to crossing borders and making the Nordic region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world.

- Markus Lyyra, the Sweden-Finland-Norway Cross-Border Information Service



The Sweden-Finland-Norway Cross-Border Information Service:
Päivi Koivupalo, Markus Lyyra and
Birgitta Tamminen

**Det ska vara lätt
att göra rätt!**

PRESTUDY IMPLEMENTATION

Actors and stakeholders from all three countries, Finland, Sweden and Norway, in the project area, have participated in the prestudy process through different events, workshops, interviews, and meetings. The project partners gathered the most important themes for cross-border collaboration and all stakeholders have had an opportunity to comment on their general concerns regarding the future of the project consortium and other future initiatives and cooperation schemes. Therefore, the results present opinions from a wide-ranging cooperation network of several organizations in the Aurora region. By involving and consulting relevant stakeholder, project partners were able to ensure the allocation of information and created synergies between different organizations. By joint effort, it was possible to avoid overlapping work and use each organization's resources effectively and efficiently.

Main target group of the prestudy included educational institutions, employers both in public and private sectors, business development agencies, cities and municipalities, employment agencies, cross-border advice services, chambers of commerce as well as third sector organizations in Finland, Sweden and Norway. Although the main target group of the project was the public sector, secondary target groups included both the private sector and civil society. The project outcomes will benefit jobseekers, employees, and employers both in public and private sector as well other public sector actors.

Close cross-border cooperation with the target groups were crucial for the implementation of the DeTo project. One cannot exist without the other. Discussions with some of the key actors took place already during the DeTo project preparation. Results, and cooperation, from different previous and ongoing projects were utilized (e.g., Arbets tillsammans, Arctic Labour, Interreg Battery Region).

It was crucial for the implementation of the project, and for the building of the project consortium, that different perspectives and partners were represented to address their interests and ambitions to deepen their cross-border collaboration. In addition, the aim was to find suitable Norwegian partners for the project consortium.

PRESTUDY IMPLEMENTATION

The prestudy was divided into 5 different steps.

-  First, project partners contacted their main stakeholders for discussions either face to face or via Teams to gather information on main challenges and future initiatives.
-  Next, project partners gathered to discuss the findings in a workshop and based on the outcomes, divided challenges into three main themes; business cooperation, regional attractiveness and education.
-  In the third step, project partners arranged a workshop for stakeholder and other interested actors in Haparanda, Sweden and a networking event in Tornio, Finland. Participants from Finland, Sweden and Norway, were divided into three working groups on business cooperation, regional attractiveness and education, according to participants' own interests.
-  In the fourth step, project partners analyzed the results of the workshop, and once again, divided the results into 8 main themes. The themes were labor shortage; attractiveness; education and training; language and culture; networks; connectivity; attitude, trust and competition; and laws and regulations
-  In step five, these 8 themes were then further developed into project ideas in another workshop in Luleå, Sweden. After the workshop, interested organizations continued to further develop the project ideas into project applications in different working groups.

PRIORITY THEMES

After the prestudy was done, the project staff gathered to share and process the collected information. It was soon discovered that the challenges discussed were very similar in all regions. The project personnel worked on the challenges and gathered them under three main themes. The themes were business cooperation, regional attractiveness and education. The summary of the challenges can be found in Attachment 1.



01 Business cooperation

This main theme is related for example to labor shortage, the challenges of companies and accessibility issues. The challenges of the companies are pretty similar in Finland and Sweden and the northern parts of both countries suffer from labor shortages in certain sectors. The challenging issues discussed in municipalities are also similar - accessibility, mobility and housing shortage.



02 Regional attractiveness

Regional attractiveness affects all organisations in the northern regions. It would be important to have easy access to knowledge regarding e.g. for travelling, moving, working and living in the area. The one thing that came up in many situations was the need for joint events and thereby gain more visibility for the area in whole. The northern region has many interesting special features - perhaps the most well-known being the topics related to the green transition and the nature.



03 Education

The Border Barrier Council has called for closer co-operation within the Nordic countries and for the unification of requirements and regulations. In many discussions, there came up the need for the identification and recognition of expertise across national borders. The language issue is usually brought up in relation to education but it is more important to focus on training future experts who are ready for the life-long training.

WORKSHOP I

The first workshop was arranged in June 2023, in Haparanda, Sweden. Members from 29 different organizations participated in the workshop and the following networking event in Tornio, Finland. Participants were divided into groups of three, working on the priority themes of business cooperation, regional attractiveness and education. By utilizing a problem tree method, identified challenges were turned into objectives. Some of the key findings in each theme are explained in more detail below. The summary of the objectives of the themes can be found in Attachment 2.



01 — Labor shortage

Labor markets are facing a new situation from unemployment to a vast labor shortage. This no longer affects only the Nordic countries, instead it is already a challenge for the whole of Europe. Aging and decreasing population, challenges with matching skills and jobs, unattractive professions, seasonal work, together with a housing shortage have caused labor shortages in all sectors. Today, the young don't choose their education based on the labor market needs, instead their choices are based on their personal interests. These interests do not always match the needs of the working life. Some professions have bad reputation and therefore do not attract workers, nor students.

In addition, many employers seem to have rather high expectations for the workforce, expecting fully trained professionals after graduation.

Labor market services are spread in several organizations, and units, which causes services and information to be fragmented and more difficult to find.



02 — Regional attractiveness

The main questions seems to be: who are we attracting and how? The northern parts of Finland, Sweden and Norway needs a common communication and marketing strategy to make the whole region attractive. Regional attractiveness is a joint effort of municipalities and cities, education organizations, businesses, regional development agencies, tourism organizations, local population and so forth. In order to build an attractive region, all actors need to work together, not separately.

Without attractive municipalities there are no residents, without attractive employers there are no employees, without attractive education possibilities there are no students. All actors need each other.

Vocational training that would lead to work in the region does not attract applicants.



03 — Education and training

Differences in education systems in Finland, Sweden and Norway hinder the building of a common labor markets. There is also a lack of knowledge and understanding of the differences in professional qualifications. This can lead to employers not hiring labor from the neighboring countries. Many education organizations also report decreasing number of applicants in the fields of education that are in most demand in the labor markets. This is especially alarming in the vocational education and training. However, the labor shortage affects all education levels. Hence, harmonization of education and certificates, as well as raised awareness on education and training opportunities in the Nordics is needed.

In addition, different ways and channels for education and training are needed as needs of individuals differ. There are issues with placements for immigrants, language issues, new requirements with upskilling and reskilling, customized work tasks and education for people with precise work abilities as well as differences in the generations.



04 — Language and culture

As globalization has affected the status of minority languages and cultures, it also seems that the young are less committed to the culture of the region, although it would be important to be proud of one's culture and heritage. Language is an integral part of the culture and differences in the Nordic languages can affect the interest and building of the common labor markets. English is slowly taking over as the primary working language in certain industries, however there are occupations where the native language skills are crucial for safety reasons, such as health care. A balance between preserving and cherishing the local languages and cultures and responding to labor needs needs to be found. Good examples of education cooperation already exist, however they are not widely known or exploited. It's important to know and respect different kinds of cultures and find ways to solve language and culture obstacles.



05 — Networks

Building networks takes time and effort and it requires face-to-face meetings. Although there are well established organizations and programs working on the cross-border cooperation, there are still a large number of actors that don't know about each other and their work. Information is scattered, making it more difficult to find the right organizations and persons.

After the pandemic, a need for face-to-face meetings has increased. Despite all the online and social media channels, personal contacts have become more and more important. An essential part of building networks is building trust, and that is not possible merely via online channels. Therefore, different kinds of networking events, seminars, meetings etc. are needed. However, arranging events requires adequate resources and clear administrators to ensure continuation.



06 — Connectivity

Finland, Sweden and Norway are all characterized by long distances and sparsely populated northern parts of the countries. In addition, capital cities of each country are located in the south. However, connectivity challenges are not merely physical. Mental connectivity issues were also address in the Mental border obstacles report commissioned in the previous Arbets- och tillämningsprojekt.

Physical connectivity challenges were left to less attention in the DeTo project as there are already several development initiatives ongoing. In addition, physical connectivity challenges were seen to be better solved by political influence work than by cross-border project collaboration



07 — Attitude, trust, competition

One of the key challenges in any cooperation is trust. This is perhaps most clearly seen in business cooperation. However, trust issues affect the cooperation in other fields too, such as education, tourism and even municipal administration. In order to succeed, the large investments in the north require cooperation between companies. In addition, deeper cooperation requires organizations to trust each other and to work towards common goals. Working in silos prevents people from seeing the bigger picture and leads to staying only in a familiar and safe environments.

Distance learning and remote work during and after the pandemic have alienated people from each other. It seems that people are more comfortable staying at home, which can rather easily lead to social exclusion, especially with the young.



08 — Laws and regulations

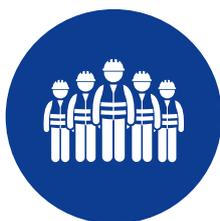
There is no history of coordinating national legislation with neighboring countries, however for the efficient Nordic cooperation it would be crucial to do so. It is vital that both local and national politicians and officials are committed to improve cross-border cooperation. At the moment, there is a concern that decisions are made in the south without the knowledge of the local characteristics of the north.

Although laws and regulations were widely discussed in all groups and themes, they were seen best to be left for the political influence work. In addition, many of the issues regarding the differences in legislation are already address by the Freedom of Movement Council.

WORKSHOP II

The second workshop was arranged in August 2023, in Luleå, Sweden. Participants from 23 different organizations worked on the eight identified themes by utilizing a learning café method. The participants went through the objectives of all the eight themes from the perspective of their own organization and defined suitable activities to achieve those objectives. The participants were also asked to choose those objectives and activities their organization could help with and to name organizations that they would need to work with to reach the objectives. The participants then chose the most important objectives and activities for potential cross-border cooperation projects.

As the amount of materials is so extensive, 3-4 most important ones are listed below from each eight themes. Summaries of the themes can be found in Attachment 3. Separate working groups will continue the work and prepare projects in the project consortium for the following open calls of project funding.



01 — Labour shortage

- Reskill and upkill
- Recruiting from foreign countries
- Language and education
- Improve reputation of different professions



02 — Attractiveness

- Cooperation and networking between industries
- Common communication & marketing strategy
- Cooperation despite the different working cultures by building trust



03 — Education and training

- Harmonization/recognition of training/education
- Increase the awareness of training opportunities
- Creating smooth and quick education channels for immigrants
- Attracting more students to the area



04 — Language and culture

- Awareness of different business cultures & multinational labor forces
- Language training (non-native speakers, when FI-SWE-NOR not an option)
- Increase the interest of the younger generations in the region's culture?
- Encourage people to use another language



05 — Networks

- Collaboration with businesses, municipalities, education providers etc.
- Learn from each other
- Cross-border events for networking and understanding cultures



06 — Connectivity

- Networking
- Collaboration
- Accessibility of information, language etc.



07 — Attitude, trust, competition

- Focus on collaboration instead of competing
- Building trust between countries at different levels
- Changing attitudes of students and teachers about the possibilities in other countries



08 — Laws and regulations

- Making information easier to access
- Guide and help to find the right persons and services
- Commitment of politician and city officials

NETWORKS

The Nordic Council of Ministers and the Nordic Council are the main forums for official Nordic co-operation. The Nordic co-operation is one of the most extensive forms of regional co-operation anywhere in the world. It involves Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden as well as the Faroe Islands, Greenland and the Åland Islands. The vision of the Nordic prime ministers is that the Nordic region will become the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030. The cooperation in the Nordic Council of Ministers must serve this purpose. In general, the Nordic co-operation focuses on areas where a Nordic approach generates added value for the Nordic countries and people.

The crises of recent years have affected mobility and created challenges, especially for people in border areas. The Freedom of Movement Council identifies and prioritizes border barriers and proposes concrete solutions to them. The priority areas of the Freedom of Movement Council in 2023 were related to areas in six themes: mobility and integration: industry-specific recognition of professional qualifications, digitalization, population register cooperation, taxation border barriers and pension issues and border area statistics.

Listed below are the most important and well-established cross-border cooperation organizations that support the Nordic cooperation through their own activities.

REGION	ORGANIZATION	MAIN TASKS
The Nordics	The Nordic Council of Ministers	The official body for inter-governmental co-operation in the Nordic Region. https://www.norden.org/en/nordic-council-ministers
The Nordics	The Nordic Council	The official body for formal inter-parliamentary co-operation. https://www.norden.org/en/nordic-council
The Nordics	Info Norden	Information service of the Nordic Council of Ministers https://www.norden.org/en/info-norden

NETWORKS

REGION	ORGANIZATION	MAIN TASKS
The Nordics	The Freedom of Movement Council	The Freedom of Movement Council is a politically appointed but independent body, which promotes the free movement of individuals and companies in the Nordic countries. https://www.norden.org/en/organisation/freedom-movement-council
The Nordics	Föreningen Nordens Ungdomsförbund	Foreningerne Nordens Ungdomsförbund is an umbrella organization that consists of the Association of Nordic Youth Organizations or an equivalent body in the Nordic countries and self-governing areas. https://fnuf.fnfnorden.org/
The Nordics	Youth League of the Finnish Norden Association (PNN)	A non-partisan youth organization which aims to promote Nordic cooperation and create encounters between young people from all over the Nordic region https://pnn.fi/en/
The Nordics	Nordjobb	A separate entity administered by the PNN, works to increase mobility in the Nordic labor market and to improve language and cultural knowledge in the Nordic countries, by offering seasonal jobs, apartments and a cultural and leisure program for young people aged 18–30. https://www.nordjobb.org/sv/

NETWORKS

REGION	ORGANIZATION	MAIN TASKS
Sweden-Norway	The Border Service	A border and cross-agency co-operation between Sweden and Norway. The main task is to receive and deal with questions from people and companies that take part in some form of cross-border activities. https://www.grensetjansten.com
Sweden-Finland-Norway	The Sweden-Finland-Norway Cross-Border Information Service	Provides specific advice on border problems, provides information and guidance to individuals, businesses and organisations that have cross-border activities in the North Calotte area of Sweden-Finland-Norway. In addition, the cross-border service aims to improve freedom of movement. https://granstjanst.se/
Øresund region (Sweden-Denmark)	Øresunddirekt	Provides public service information from the authorities to citizens and businesses in the Øresund region. https://www.oresunddirekt.com
The North Calotte	The North Calotte Council	Supports with its activities both economic, social and environmentally compatible development in the North Calotte region. Cooperation builds a strong European cooperation area and solutions to common problems. https://nordkalottradet.org

NETWORKS

REGION	ORGANIZATION	MAIN TASKS
Torne Valley	Torne Valley Council	A cooperation body between the municipalities of Torne Valley in Finland and Sweden, and the Norwegian neighboring municipalities of Torne Valley. https://tornedalen.org
Haparanda-Tornio	HaparandaTornio crossborder cooperation	Primary mission is to develop, deepen and increase the cooperation between the cities and their inhabitants. https://www.tornio.fi/en/city-of-tornio/information-on-tornio/cross-border-development/
Finland-Sweden-Norway	Interreg Aurora	Interreg Aurora is a brand new programme in the European Interreg community for cross-border cooperation in 2021-2027. The programme offers great opportunities and enables cross-border cooperation in the northernmost part of Europe and Sápmi.
EU	Border Focal Point Network	An EU-wide professional network bringing together experts on cross-border issues. The network aims to promote easier cross-border interaction, address existing legal and administrative barriers, and encourage the pooling of cross-border services. https://futurium.ec.europa.eu/en/border-focal-point-network

GOOD PRACTICES

For sharing the good practices in cross-border cooperation, an open Wanted! board was created in Padlet. Wanted! board can be accessed via [DeTo project website](#) and via a direct link in [Padlet](#). Wanted! board includes information on project ideas, past and ongoing projects, examples on good practices as well as other information deemed important for the cross-border cooperation, such as links to reports and events. Below are some practical examples of good practices in the cross-border cooperation.



01 — Trilingual training

Since 1970, Utbildning Nord has offered adult students from Finland, Norway and Sweden vocational training, in three different languages, in professions that are in demand on the labor market.



02 — Education cooperation

Vocational College Lappia has organized Swedish construction education for Tornedaskolan for several years. Vocational College Lappia conducts teaching in its own premises in Tornio, Finland, in Swedish. The students follow the Swedish study plan and the diploma is awarded by Tornedaskolan, in Haparanda, Sweden.



03 — Dittgransproblem.com

The three Nordic cross-border information services have jointly developed a digital tool to facilitate the reporting and handling of border interferences. The tool, available at dittgransproblem.com, offers a simple digital way for both individuals and entrepreneurs to report problems they have encountered when crossing a Sweden-Denmark, Norway-Denmark, Sweden-Finland or Norway-Finland border. The tool can be used to report on experiences, give solution suggestions, and monitor the process after reporting.



04 — Border database

A database for known cross-border obstacles between the Nordic countries. <https://www.norden.org/en/border-database>

MESSAGE FROM THE PARTNERS



Kemi-Tornionlaakso Education and Training Consortium Lappia is located on the Swedish border. With the vocational education reform, cross-border cooperation and regional internationalization play an increasingly important role and are one of the top priorities of Lappia's strategy. We take advantage of the proximity of the Swedish border by organizing joint education and training, which emphasize international and professional skills between the two countries. The different operational cultures of the future require international competence; language skills and knowledge and appreciation of cultures.

Director of Competence Development Services, Anne Tryyki

OSAO

Educational Consortium OSAO is a vocational education provider in several fields and in a wide geographical area. OSAO has been an active partner in previous cross-border projects and the organization wants to continue this cooperation. It has been learned that cross border networks weaken as the distance from the border increases. That is one of the reasons why it's important to ensure that the organizations of Northern Ostrobothnia also participate in the development of northern cooperation.

Vice principal / pedagogical director, Raija Näppä



For us at **Utbildning Nord**, cross-border cooperation is a central part of our identity. For over fifty years, we have worked towards collaboration across borders, and thanks to this cooperation, over 30,000 people have received vocational training through us. Discovering the possibilities of cross-border cooperation and making the most of it is a strength for the entire border region and its residents. Without cross-border cooperation, the border remains merely a physical limitation. Considering the direction the world seems to be taking today, cross-border collaboration is a necessary counterforce to the nationalism spreading in our surroundings.

Direktör, Leif Lahti

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Advertising Agency Crea	Lyngen municipality
Bothnian Arc	Muonio municipality
Business Tornio	Norbotten Chamber of Commerce
BusinessOulu	Norrbottnens kommuner
Centria University of Applied Sciences	North Calotte Council
City of Haparanda	Nyföretagarcentrum Nord
City of Oulu	Oulu University of Applied Sciences
City of Tornio	Övertorneå municipality
Council of Lapland	Pajala municipality
Council of North Ostrobothnia	REDU Edu Oy
County Administrative Board of Norrbotten	Region Norrbotten
EURES Finland	Skellefteå municipality
EURES Sweden	Svenskt näringsliv, Västerbotten
Fell Lapland Development	Sverigefinska folkhögskolan
Heart of Lapland	Sweden-Finland-Norway Cross-Border
Kolari municipality	Information Service
Lapland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment	Swedish Public Employment Services
Lapland University of Applied Sciences	Information Service
Lappia-Education Ltd.	TE services Lapland
Luleå business	TE services North Ostrobothnia
Luleå municipality	Team Finland
Luleå tekniska universitet	Tornedalsrådet
Luovi Vocational College	University of Lapland
	Youth League of the Finnish Norden Association

**We thank you for your continued support
in the efforts to contribute to the cross-
border cooperation**

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