



The Northern Periphery and Arctic programme in brief

Information about progress in the year 2020



About the programme

The Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme 2014–2020 covers a huge area that corresponds to 75% of EU's area. The Programme comprises a cooperation between 9 Programme partner countries; the EU-Member States of Finland, Ireland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Scotland and Northern Ireland) in cooperation with the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Greenland and Norway. Besides that, Russia and Canada have been offered the status as observers in the Monitoring Committee. This means that the Programme area encompasses the Euro-Arctic zone, parts of the Atlantic zone and parts of the Barents region, with neighbouring areas in Russia. Despite geographical differences, the large Programme area shares several common features, such as low population density, low accessibility, low economic diversity, abundant natural resources, and high impact of climate change. This unique combination of features results in joint challenges and joint opportunities that can best be overcome and realised by transnational cooperation.

The Programme's vision is to help to generate vibrant, competitive and sustainable communities by harnessing innovation, expanding the capacity for entrepreneurship, and seizing the unique growth initiatives and opportunities of the Northern and Arctic regions in a resource-efficient way.

The development needs and potentials of the Programme area, together with the policy and historic context, have resulted in 4 priority axes to achieve the Programme vision:



1. Using innovation to maintain and develop robust and competitive communities.
2. Promoting entrepreneurship to realise the potential of the Programme area's competitive advantage.
3. Fostering energy-secure communities through promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency.
4. Protecting, promoting, and developing cultural and natural heritage.

The sparsely populated communities of the Programme area are the focal point of all 4 priority axes.

The development of the Arctic has had and still has a growing attention at national level as well as in international cooperation, which is also expressed by the EU communication on an integrated European Union policy for the Arctic. Therefore, in addition to the four above mentioned priority axes, the NPA addresses the "Arctic Dimension" as a cross cutting theme. This is done by including partners from the Arctic part from the Programme Area and by supporting cooperation, innovation and transfer of knowledge, and technology within themes of specific significance for the Arctic territories. The overall intention is that NPA projects shall foster changes that are of importance to people, including indigenous peoples, living in the Arctic area.

During the period 2014–2020, the Programme will allocate approximately 56 million Euros of programme funding to a target of 54 projects with a maximum total project budget of 2 million Euros per project including match funding.

In terms of monitoring results at programme level, result indicators, baseline values and targets for the six programme specific objectives were developed and approved by the Monitoring Committee during 2015.

Due to the lack of data covering the programme area, the Programme has decided to work with panels of regional experts, who were asked to describe and assess the regional status-quo in quantitative and qualitative terms in 2015 (baseline values), and then to assess the progress towards the achievement of objectives in 2017, 2019 and 2023. Rather than monitoring the entire programme area, a sample of three regions, defined on NUTS3 level, was selected and an expert panel was constituted for each of the six result indicators.

The baseline assessment provides the NPA Programme with a rich data set covering various quantitative-qualitative dimensions that give a detailed and varied picture of the status quo in the sample regions as a basis for monitoring the impact of the Programme's interventions. The 2019 update the result indicators showed that most of the values have developed in line with the expectations in 2015. Even though three out of 6 values are a little below the expectations, in particular indicator 3, the regional experts were still optimistic with regard to reaching the target values in 2023. For three indicators, the 2019-update is higher than expected.

In terms of output indicators, two common indicators have been selected for priority axis 1 and 2. One common indicator has been selected for Priority axis 3 and a common, and a programme specific output indicator have been selected for Priority axis 4.



Progress in 2020

The Annual Implementation Report 2020 gives an overview of the implementation of the Programme in 2020. The following summarizes some key points in the report:

Project Implementation

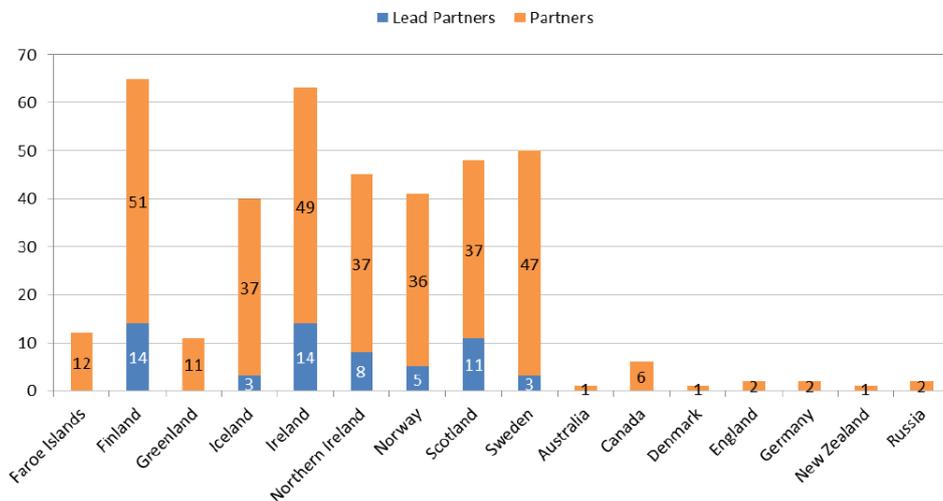
During 2020, 8 new main projects from the 7th Call were contracted, which means 58 main projects were approved in total from the start of the programme reaching above the target of 54. The fifty-eight approved projects are distributed evenly across the four programme priority axes. The most popular theme is Axis 1 (Innovation) where 18 projects are approved. Axis 2 (Entrepreneurship) follows with 16 approved projects while Axis 3 (Energy efficiency) so far only has 10 approved projects and Axis 4 (Sustainability) has 12 approved projects.

Delays in the implementation of projects meant that during 2020 projects from calls 2 to 7 were implementing at the same time. Therefore, in 2020, the number of ongoing projects implementing at the same time reached the peak of 33.

By the end of the year, a total of 53 693 580 Euro or 95,2% of the NPA funding for projects has been allocated, including preparatory project funding and taking into account recent decommitments and COVID-19 project allocations. The allocation is somewhat unevenly distributed across the different funding sources, although converging as the funds are running out overall.

Of the ERDF funding, 95% was committed, whilst 97% of the Norwegian, 100% of the Icelandic, 88% of the Faroese and 88% of the Greenlandic funding to projects was committed.

The 390 project partners are very well divided into the three geographical zones, across the programme area: 156 partners in Finland, Sweden and Norway, 156 partners in Scotland, Ireland and Northern Ireland and 63 partners in Greenland, Iceland and Faroe Islands, and other countries 15. When looking at the geographical distribution of Lead Partners, the distribution between the three zones is more uneven, mainly because Greenlandic and Faroese partners cannot be Lead Partners.



Impact of COVID-19

When in March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic hit Europe, this had significant impacts on ongoing and new projects alike. The programme administration took several immediate actions. Guidance was added to the programme website about the eligibility of costs related to cancelled events. In addition, projects finalising during the spring were offered an extension until the end of 2020, to avoid jeopardising the successful wrapping up of pilot activities and main outputs, as well as final conferences. Seventh Call projects were offered a later start date.

When COVID-19 restrictions were continued after the summer, projects from later calls expressed a need for adjustments to their work plans, and in some cases, budgets. To capture the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on ongoing projects, the JS conducted a survey in October. Projects expressed concerns that the restrictions resulted in fewer face-to-face partner meetings, and less engagement with stakeholders. In some cases, pilots or clinical trials could not be carried out, or at least, not in the original format, or staff was furloughed. Some sectors were also harder hit than other ones, in particular tourism and food related projects. On the other hand, some projects indicated that COVID has increased the need for the project solutions, in particular digital marketing solutions, and business support solutions in general, as well as eHealth solutions.

The majority of projects required a 3-6 month project extension to be able to catch up and finalise their project successfully. The impact for the programme administration is that the workload related to projects will stretch further into the programme lifetime than originally anticipated.

In parallel, another development took place. A group of experts from the NPA programme area and the Joint Secretariat decided to work together to better understand what can be done in response to the Covid-19 pandemic in the NPA area. The NPA COVID-19 response group was created as an informal group of experts who have participated in, or led an NPP or NPA e-health project. The group was established by Dr. David Heaney, Lead Partner of several NPP and NPA healthcare projects, and quickly gathered a large group of interested health experts based in the Northern Periphery and Arctic programme area and beyond. The group currently has 139 experts from almost all NPA regions, Canada, the USA and New Zealand. (Sadly, on 16th July 2020, Dr. David Heaney suddenly passed away).



In response to this spontaneous initiative, the NPA Secretariat designed a call to provide a modest amount of funding for the group to explore these topics further and combine the information. The MC agreed to earmark 300 000 EUR with a lump sum funding mechanism to be able to act fast. The COVID-19 Call was open as an ongoing call from April until 30th September. The programme received 19 applications in total. Of these, 7 have been approved covering all themes identified by the response group, plus an "Emerging theme" for project ideas that fit in the rationale of the call, but do not fall within the themes outlined at the time the Call announcement. In addition, an overarching umbrella project "CoRE" has been funded, to coordinate the work of the thematic projects and collate the information and learnings produced by the projects. It is intended that this collaboration will detail all new knowledge obtained through the thematic projects, which will in turn inform our target groups, and the future NPA projects, as well as the new NPA programme.

Arctic Cooperation

The NPA addresses the "Arctic Dimension" as a cross cutting theme, and the integrated European Union policy for the Arctic mandated the NPA to have a leading role in bringing together a network of managing authorities and stakeholders from cooperation programmes in the European Arctic.

The highlight of 2020 was the organisation of a joint Q&A session during the EU Regions Week in October, entitled "*Programme Cooperation in the Arctic - How to cooperate across programmes: experience from the Interreg-ENI CBC Arctic collaboration*". Due to COVID-19, this became a virtual session, giving a brief history of the Cooperation, and presenting the benefits and success factors of the cooperation from a programme's perspective, Arctic clustering project's perspective, and finally an evaluator's perspective. The session was attended by approximately 44 participants, including participants from DG Regio and other Interreg programmes. A post-event survey showed positive interest in the session topic, and appreciation for its quality. In addition, the Arctic Cooperation had a stand in the EU Region Week's virtual exhibition.

The fourth edition of the Arctic Awards project competition was launched in April, with a deadline late May. The 2020 categories were "Arctic Entrepreneurial Spirit" and "Overcoming Critical Mass". The category winners have been selected by a jury representing all programmes.

Due to COVID-19, it was not possible to organise a physical award ceremony. Instead, all 15 participating projects were promoted on the Arctic Cooperation's social media channels one-by-one as a campaign. At the end of this campaign, which ran until early December, the winning projects were announced online. For this purpose, the NPA developed a [short video](#) about each winning project with a thank you message from the projects.

In the category *Arctic Entrepreneurial Spirit*, the winner of the 2020 Arctic Award was the project BRIDGE, Barents Region Initiative for Development Growth and Employability, funded by the [Kolarctic ENI CBC programme](#). In the category *Overcoming Critical Mass*, the winner of the 2020 Arctic Award was the project FUTURE CLEANTECH SOLUTIONS, funded by the [Interreg Botnia-Atlantica](#) programme.

On behalf of the network, the NPA was invited to present the Arctic Cooperation during the plenary session of DG Regio's Interreg annual event on 16th October. The purpose was to provide inspiration about cross-programme coordination. Besides this, the Arctic Cooperation was mentioned at a recent NSPA virtual round table webinar organised in cooperation with 2 MEPs, Elsi Katainen (FI) and Erik Bergqvist (SE), as well as at a Scottish Arctic Connections webinar by Michael Mann, the new EU Arctic Ambassador participated.

Examples of funded projects

Two examples of funded projects from the 7th Call and Covid-19 response call are listed below. These examples address core themes within the NPA Programme:

COAST - Sustainable Resilient Coasts

The project addresses Priority Axis 4, Specific Objective 4, Increased capacity of remote and sparsely populated communities for sustainable environmental management. The project will run from March 2020 until February 2022.



The project brings together five partners and six associate partners from Iceland, Finland, Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland. It came about in response to the shared challenges faced by our coastal communities, including climate change, loss of biodiversity and cultural heritage, and the sustainable exploitation of natural resources such as fisheries. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA). The coast is one of the most significant unifying habitats in the region.

The COAST project seeks to establish the NPA region as a demonstration of how to deliver the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) for the coast. COAST will take a new approach to these challenges with a focus on local authorities as a target audience.

The project aligns with, extends and operationalizes [Our Coastal Futures](#) the open source method designed by [Future Earth Coasts](#) to facilitate coastal resilience and capability building. The approach will be applied to four demonstration cases across the partner regions and will address specific challenges associated with sparsely populated, remote coastal communities.

The project will provide a roadmap for protecting, promoting and developing the cultural and natural heritage of sparsely populated and remote coastal communities. In addition, the project will produce a COAST Toolbox for local authorities, focusing on SMART Blue Growth, which is based on principles of sustainability, mitigation, planning, adaptation, resilience and transition. The Toolbox will include practical guidance to support local authorities in the protection, promotion and development of the unique natural and cultural heritage of the coastal zone within and beyond the NPA.

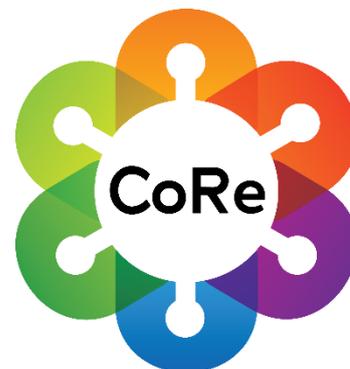
Main achievements:

- The development and circulation of an online survey in all countries on the usage of drone technology by local authorities for sustainable development and ICZM.
- In addition, the publication of a report on the applications of drone technologies for the sustainable development of the coastal zone: A literature review.
- The submission of an academic paper to the open access journal 'Anthropocene' on the research undertaken. Besides this, the project was featured in an article in the Icelandic Agricultural Newspaper.
- In November 2020, the project organised an online seminar to share knowledge and experiences in building sustainable resilient coasts, focusing on SMART Blue Growth.
- In March 2021, the COAST project published its 2nd Deliverable Report titled "Drone Surveying for the Protection of Natural and Built Heritage Sites". The report describes a six-step process that guides local authorities through the considerations that need to be taken before, during, and after conducting drone surveys.

For further details: <https://coast.interreg-npa.eu>

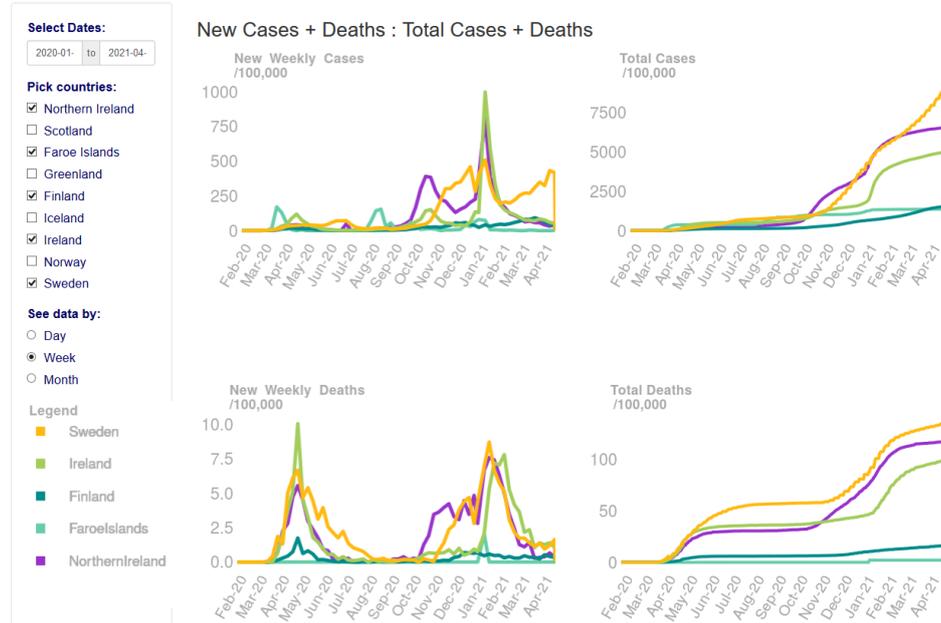
COVIDWATCHEU-NPA

Increasingly, Open Data approaches are being utilised by countries to ensure transparency and accountability. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has caused huge disruption globally, yet some countries have fared better than others, both economically and from the population health perspective. Using Open Data, and input from clinicians and non-clinicians based in the Northern Periphery and Arctic (NPA) Programme 2014-2020 countries, the project **COVIDWATCH EU NPA sought to learn lessons from national responses to this virus over the past year and contribute to the public health response against COVID-19 across the region.**



This project formed a representative team of clinicians and policy experts from across the NPA regions and beyond and designed, delivered and launched a purpose-built interactive **website updated in real-time of weekly comparative COVID-19 case, death and testing data from across EU and NPA regions:** <https://covidwatchnpa-eu.shinyapps.io/covid/>

Home || Countries || Cases+Deaths || Fatality % || Testing || % Positivity



This combined clinical, technical, academic and policy expertise has allowed COVIDWATCH EU NPA to publish weekly comparative data across EU and NPA countries since the beginning of the project on the project website updated in real-time and across social media. The reach of the project in terms of the general public has averaged 50,000 per week and a total of over 700,000 across all dissemination platforms (website, Twitter, Facebook) for the 6-month lifetime of the project.

In addition, the project has mapped the public health responses and interventions used by different NPA regions and countries in the first wave of the COVID-19 and explored how these measures have influenced the individual pandemic curves and economic outlook of these countries.

Main achievements

COVIDWATCH EU NPA has made a significant contribution to the public health effort in terms of **individual behaviour change across the NPA regions** and has provided learnings and recommendations to **inform countries and regions** as they try to navigate their way through the next phases of the COVID-19 pandemic including the following:

- High COVID-19 cases correlate with societal restrictions, economic damage and COVID-19 deaths. When examined at a regional level, NPA designated-regions within larger countries, which tend to be more sparsely populated, experienced approximately half the COVID-19 deaths that more urbanised non-NPA regions within the same countries.
- Countries in the NPA programme can be largely based into 2 groups - countries that achieved near-elimination between smaller outbreaks, and those that did not. When COVID-19 activity



is high, which is more likely in larger and more connected countries, overall negative consequences for the region will be more severe.

- Important aspects of a country's response include the rapidity of that response, the establishment of an adequate testing and tracing system, control of borders, involvement of regional health authorities and clear communication about the ongoing pandemic to the general public.

As countries struggle to plot the best way forward, COVIDWATCH EU NPA has provided a mechanism for transnational working and cooperation and the sharing of data and learnings from the pandemic. With a large team of partners across NPA regions the project has engaged with, and fed back to, relevant health, public health and government stakeholders. Perhaps most strikingly, **COVIDWATCH EU NPA provided evidence how due to a variety of protective factors, NPA regions have often fared better in public health and economic terms during the COVID-19 pandemic.** This provides much hope for the future and an opportunity to re-imagine lives and livelihoods in such rural and remote regions.

For more information : <https://core.interreg-npa.eu/>