

Interreg



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Northern Periphery and Arctic

YOUTH IN THE NORTHERN PERIPHERY AND

FUTURE

MINDS

ARCTIC

FOR

CHANGE



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INTRO

INTRODUCTION

Fresh perspectives and passion are crucial for building a better future. In 2020, young people from across the continent came together to share their ideas for a greener, more inclusive, and digital future in the Youth Manifesto. This document is packed with concrete proposals addressed to decision-makers at all levels of government, emphasising the need for meaningful youth engagement.

Building upon this momentum, the European Commission designated 2022 as the European Year of Youth, providing young people with a platform to amplify their voices and shape the future they envision. This initiative encouraged active participation and involvement in shaping policies that impact their lives.

The Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme (NPA) joined the movement by hosting the Youth in the NPA conference in Bodø, Norway. This event brought together young people from across the region to collaborate and make an impact on their communities.

By working together, we can transform remote areas into hubs of innovation, creativity, and opportunity. Now is the time for Europe's youth to seize this opportunity and leave their mark on the world. Together, we can shape a future that aligns with the dreams and aspirations of the next generation. Let's make it happen!



LUCIA BRHLÍKOVÁ
Interreg NPA youth engagement officer

Links:

[Youth Manifesto](#) →

[European Year of Youth](#) →

Keep scrolling to explore the lives of young people in remote areas, their problems, and possible solutions.



YOUNG VOICES



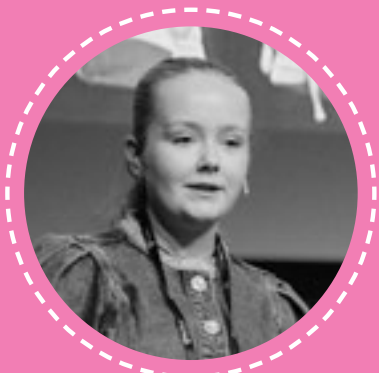
Nils Ándá Baer
Jokkmokk, Sweden



Aisling Maloney
Roscrea, Ireland



Birta Matras Petersen
Klaksvik, Faroe Islands



Leah Sofie Myhre
Bodø, Norway



Kristine Flem
Willassen
Bodø, Norway



Vegard Sem
Trondheim, Norway

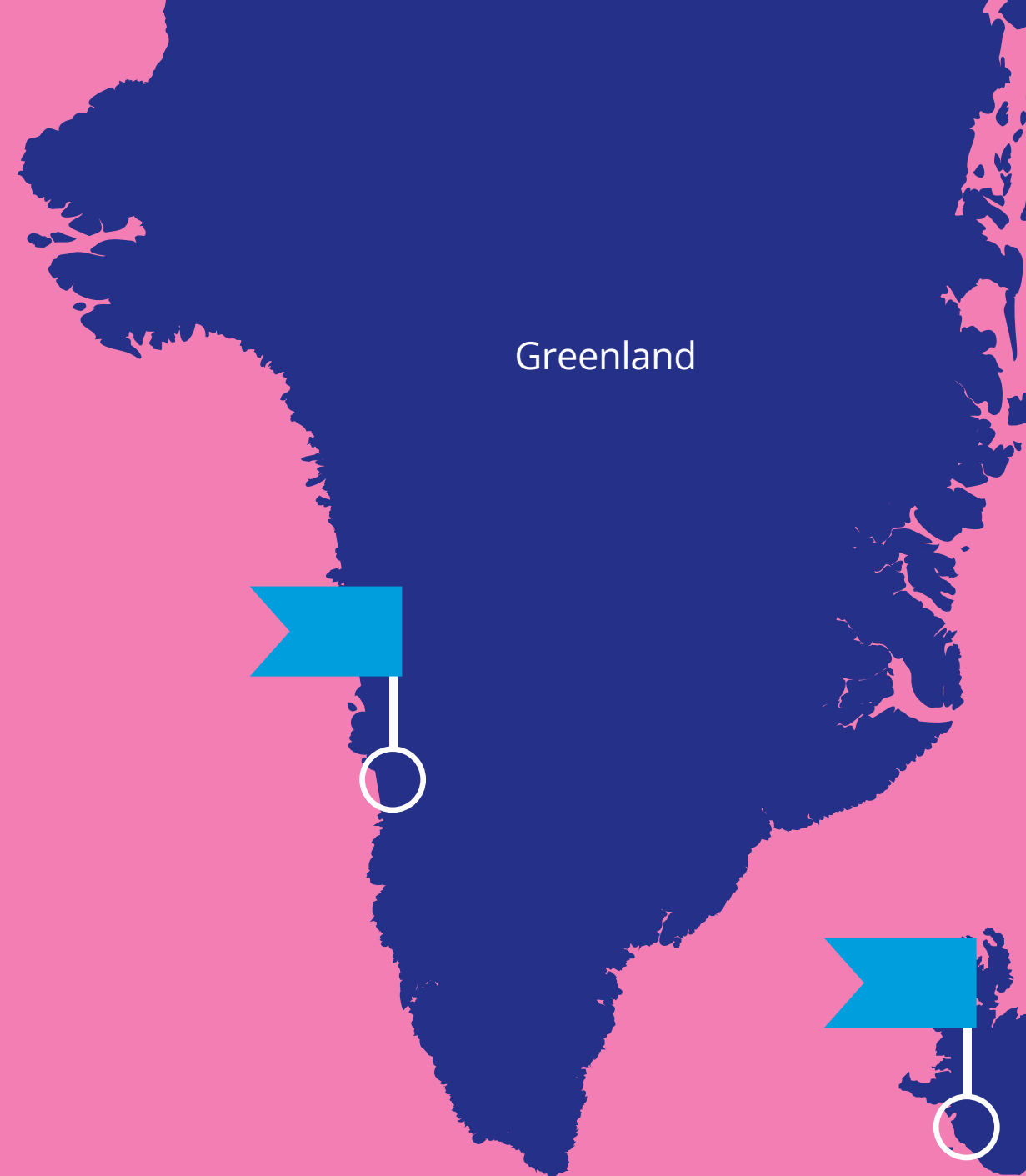


Aviaaja Helene
Barlach Pregaard
Nuuk, Greenland



Esther Jónsdóttir
Reykjavik, Iceland

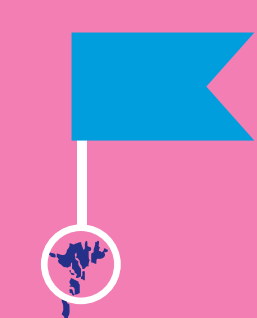
EXAMPLES OF YOUTH INVOLVEMENT



Greenland



Iceland



Faroe Islands



Ireland

GREENING THE WORLD TOGETHER



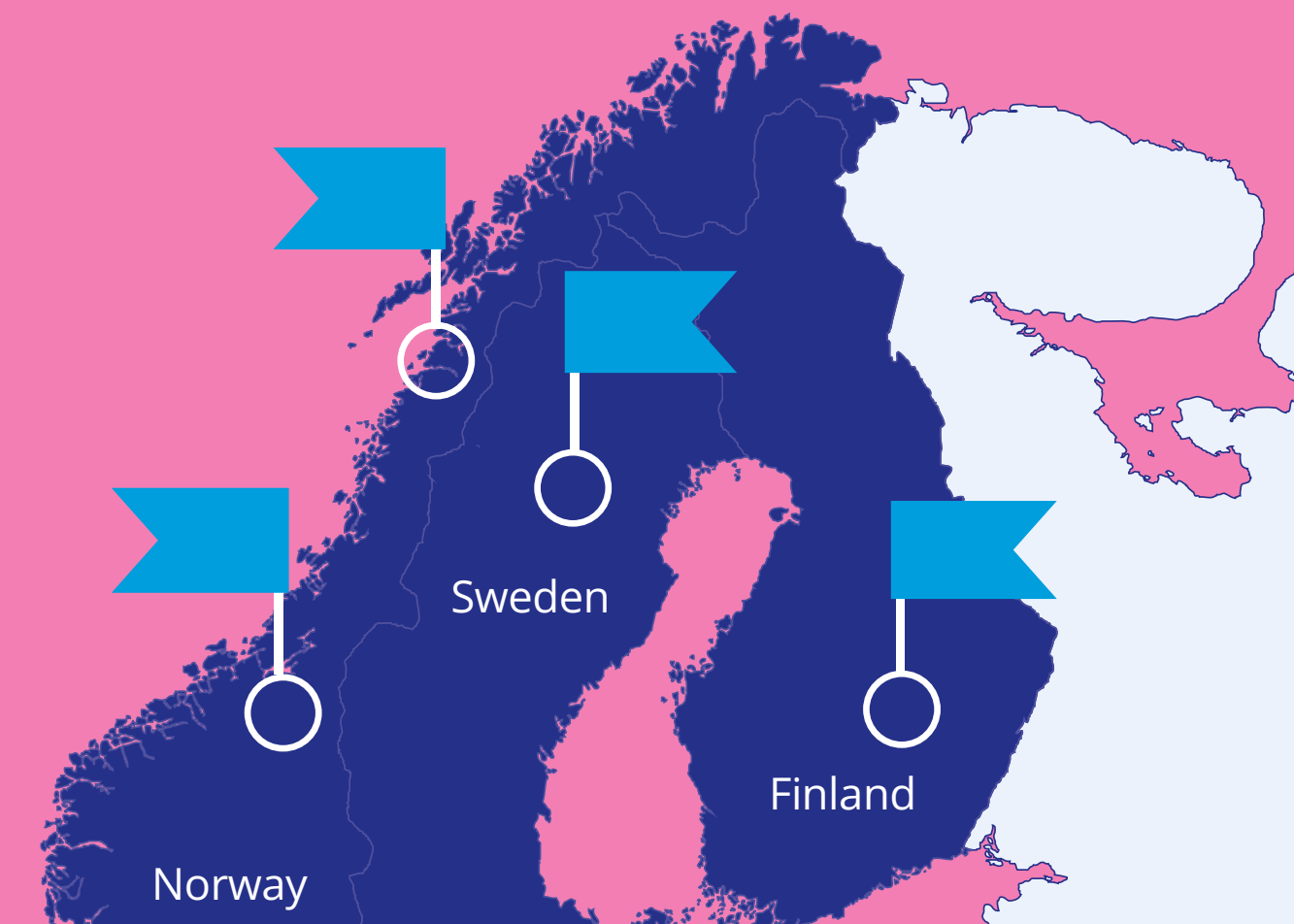
Eimear Manning
Dublin, Ireland



Karen Anne Bøkestad
Andreassen
Bodø, Norway



Ari Pappinen
Joensuu, Finland



Norway

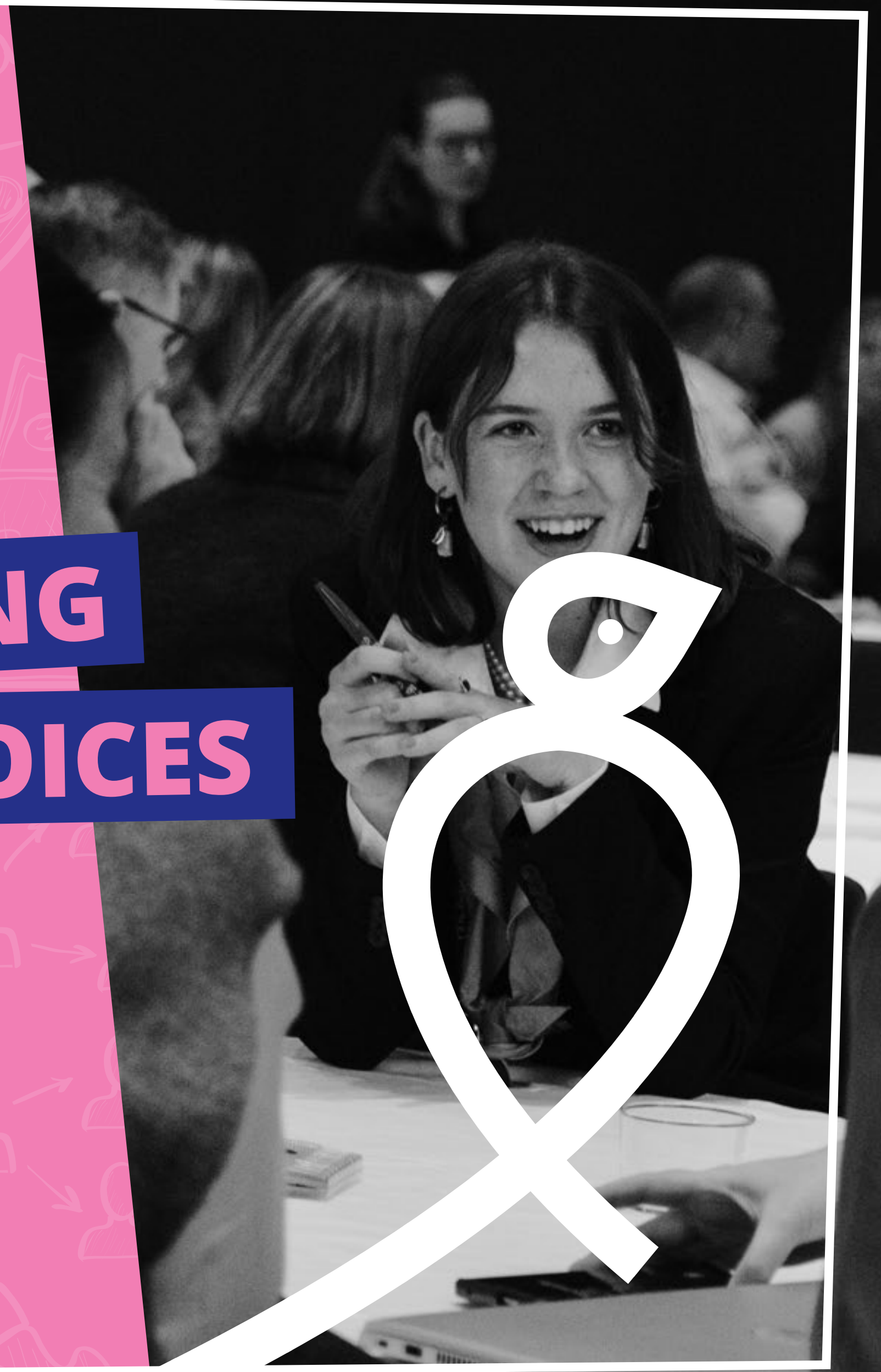
Sweden

Finland

YOUNG VOICES FROM EUROPE'S PERIPHERY

Who is better suited to tell us about life in peripheral areas than people living there? Five young people from Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Ireland, and Norway paint a picture of what it means to be young in the rural areas of northern Europe.

YOUNG
VOICES



SÁMI YOUTH – PART OF THE NORDIC PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Nils Ándá Baer is a young Sámi reindeer herder from Jokkmokk in northern Sweden. He is working as an archivist and research assistant, trying to bridge the Sámi perspective with the culture in more urban areas. *“We are here. Yes, we are proud of the Sámi past, but more importantly, we want to be a visible and acknowledged part of the future Nordic culture,”*

For reindeer herders, the natural world is their livelihood, and any changes to the environment directly affect their daily lives and the overall well-being of Sámi communities across their native land, Sápmi.

Small communities in the northern peripheries typically experience a population drain, and especially young people tend to move away. *“If you want to go to university, there is really no other option,”* Nils explains. However, there are a lot of positive sides to small communities as well. You get to be more connected with the land, nature, and calm and quiet living. Nils believes that it is important to break the cycle of young people leaving and not coming back.

“Everything is better than being ignored.”

For this to happen, an environment where young people can have a full and meaningful life – both socially, culturally, and professionally – must be created. *“We need young people to bring back their acquired skills to help their*

communities grow and prosper. If not, the possibility of stagnation and falling into nothingness will be there. We also need to bring higher education into the small Sámi communities. It really shouldn’t be necessary to have to choose between higher education and a full and meaningful life in your hometown.”

Communication between local authorities and communities is crucial to solving future challenges. Despite these two groups having different opinions, or exactly because of it.

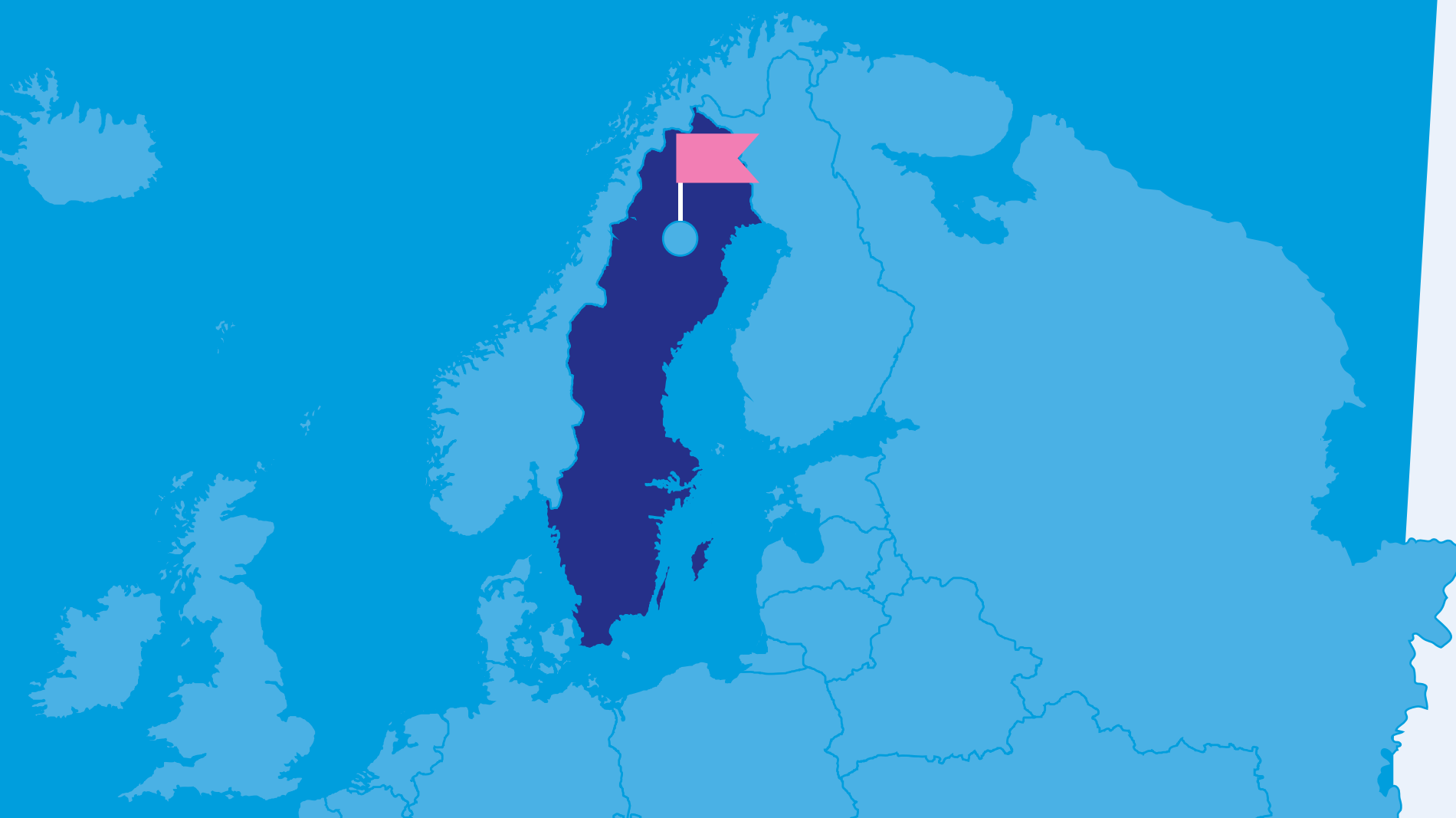
The Saami people, who have been living in the lands for thousands of years, “have a more holistic view on land use and how to use it so it doesn’t get damaged.”

Both parties need to consider each other’s perspective and engage in a respectful dialogue, adding, “Everything is better than being ignored.”



YOUNG VOICES

NILS ÁNDÁ BAER





**YOUNG
VOICES**

BIRITA MATRAS PETERSEN

YOUNG FAROESE MOVING BACK

Birita Matras Petersen lives in the small Faroese town of Klaksvik while studying and working in the capital city of Tórshavn. Commuting through the pristine nature of the Faroe Islands by bus takes her about 1.5 hours. For some, this would be a lot of commuting. But as Birita explained, this is already faster than just a few years ago, and an example of how a well-functioning public transport system and good infrastructure make it possible for Faroese people to reach the capital *“it is possible to be young in the Faroe Islands, to study and work there.”*

Like other areas in Europe’s periphery, the Faroe Islands face challenges with depopulation. *“Young people move to the capital, Tórshavn, or Denmark to get an education. Few return” Birita states.*

**“There can be great benefits
to living in small places.”**

But the trend here is shifting, and more young people are choosing to return. Better access to education, improved infrastructure, and more jobs are some of the driving factors. Birita was living abroad but decided to come back and continue her studies in the Faroe Islands. *She explains, “I chose to go against the flow. There can be great benefits to living in small places. It’s a quieter pace with less noise and pollution. It is also less competitive, and last, but not least, it’s fantastic, untouched nature.”*

Birita also believes another reason why more young people are returning is the good quality of life on the islands. *“In this community, people help each other and are closer to nature, their family, and friends.”*

A remaining challenge to overcome is housing. There are more young people who want to move back, but they cannot find a place to stay. Low-cost housing is vital for young people, as is inclusivity in higher education. Today, students’ mobility is present even in small countries, such as the Faroe Islands. For younger generations, it is easy to travel abroad; therefore, the Faroe Islands should, in her opinion, be more competitive, creative, and innovative in the jobs they are offering to people who want to live there.





**YOUNG
VOICES**

**AISLING
MALONEY**

RURAL VS. URBAN IRELAND

Aisling Maloney, a 19-year-old woman from a small village in rural Ireland, is the first in her family to attend higher education. After moving to Dublin, she understood how big the gap between rural and urban life really is.

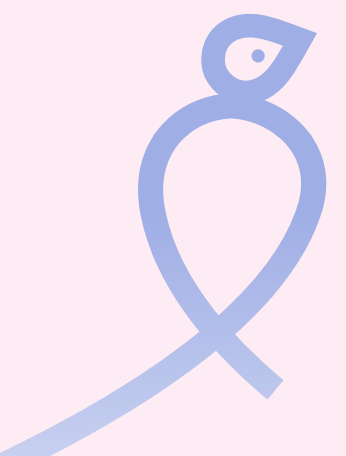
One of the main challenges for rural youths in Ireland is the inadequate public transport system. Commuting back and forth to school would take Aisling up to 12 hours a day. During the summer break, when the usual bus routes changed her father had to drive her to a neighbouring village to take the bus to Dublin.

She emphasises the lack of local events in her own village and highlights this situation as one of the major reasons for the difference between rural and urban youth participating in activism. ***“When there are no movements, networks, or meeting places in your hometown, it is difficult to get involved and develop an interest in important issues.”***

The regional cities, towns, and villages are left behind. Some remote areas have experienced poor access to wi-fi, whereas Aisling illustrates: ***“In my area, we weren’t bailed any wi-fi service at home until 2018, which was 4 years later than people living 50 metres down the street.”*** It is examples like this that make people in rural areas feel left behind and isolated.

“When there are no movements, networks, or meeting places in your hometown, it is difficult to get involved and develop an interest in important issues.”

Ireland’s rural areas are also facing depopulation. Today, it is not unusual to find once-busy main streets not far from Dublin with empty shop windows. Aisling elaborates ***“In the next 20 years, I hope the trend of generation-immigration will stop, because it is heart-breaking to see so many young people moving from their homes out of necessity rather than from choice.”*** Adding that ***“when young people move away from rural areas, they are leaving behind their homes, their culture, and their heritage, I don’t want to leave anything behind, but if nothing is changed, I might be left without a choice.”***

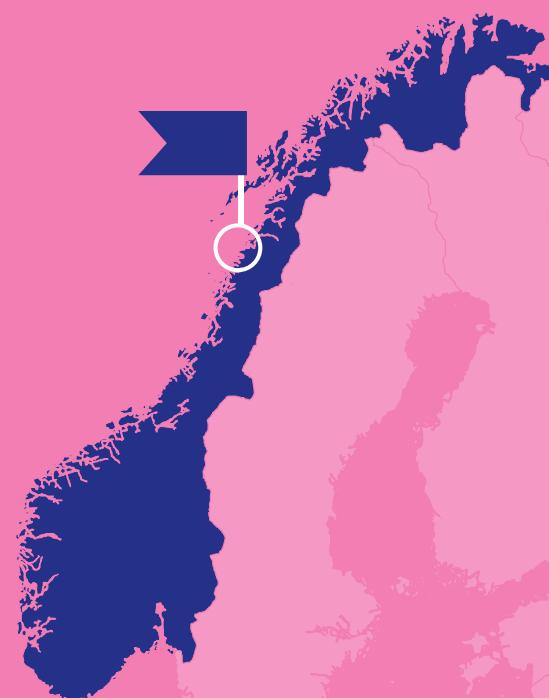




YOUNG VOICES

"Giving the youth a bit more responsibility is not a bad thing."

KRISTINE FLEM WILLASSEN & LEAH SOFIE MYHRE



YOUTH WANTS TO PUT BODØ ON THE MAP

Kristine Flem Willassen, 17, and Leah Sofie Myhre, 15, are both from the city of Bodø in northern Norway, a city that has been chosen as the European Capital of Culture for 2024. They are members of the Youth Steering Board that decides which cultural events will be organized. ***"In our work within the YOUNG2024 we want to put Bodø on the map and include the smaller peripheries and youth from all over Nordland in the decision-making processes."***

Kristine says.

Both Leah and Kristine are visibly proud of their city as they talk about the year that lies ahead. They project a passion for being a part of its future development and creating more meeting places for young people.

Many years ago, Kristine would have said that Bodø was boring. But lately, the city has been thriving. ***"Maybe Bodø is not the funniest city to live in, because you don't get the big city vibes, but what we have is good. Everyone should see how beautiful the Arctic is. We have the midnight sun, the northern light, the amazing mountains, and we live close to nature."***

There is an increased interest in culture in the city, which calls for events, concert venues, and other activities. ***"Bodø is developing into a more beautiful and interesting place with each passing day,"*** Kristine says proudly.

Like many rural cities, Bodø has a problem with depopulation, especially among the young. Therefore, Bodø2024 decided to give the youth the responsibility and resources to organise the events and activities that are meaningful

for them. ***"We are the future, and we need to take the future into our own hands and work together to solve some of the issues we experience in Bodø."***

Kristine states.

Leah explained the need to develop both the academic and cultural offers with a wider perspective of interest so that young people know they have a place where they can grow up, get educated, and develop their interests, stating that ***"if young people had access to higher education in Nordland, many more would choose to stay where they come from and feel at home,"***

They both hope that Bodø2024 will serve as inspiration to other cities on how to better engage with young people and let them be heard. ***"Giving the youth a bit more responsibility is not a bad thing. When we have it in our hands, we understand how important it is. The youth need to get the responsibility to make something."***

Links:

[Bodø 2024](#)



WATCH THE WHOLE INTERVIEW



**WE'RE IN
THIS
TOGETHER**

Interreg North
Periphery and
Arctic Program
2021-2027



GREENING THE WORLD TOGETHER

EIMEAR MANNING
Youth & Climate Justice Development
Officer at National Youth Council of
Ireland.



CLIMATE JUSTICE ENSURES NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND

Eimear Manning is one of the few people who hopes to wake up one day to discover that her job is no longer needed. She works as a Climate Justice Officer. *“What is climate justice? As we shift to a greener economy, climate justice is to ensure that this transition is fair and that no one affected by this change is left behind.”*

How to more meaningfully involve youth?

Youth are a group that shouldn't be left behind when politicians are deciding how cities and jobs will look in

the future. Eimear and her colleagues worked with youth across Ireland to identify two ways for young people to create change.

“Let the young come up with solutions on how to create the necessary changes. We should be the facilitators and let the young take the lead.” Eimear Manning

The first is through meaningful political engagement. This includes understanding how local-level politics work in the first place, finding contacts, and then getting involved in these political systems. The second way of creating change is “do-it-ourselves’ activism.”

Both ways of creating change are described in “How to Create Change at the Local Level”.

Links:

[How to Create Change at the Local Level](#) →

[Climate Justice Charter](#) →

ARI PAPPINEN
Professor at Faculty of Science and Forestry
at University of Eastern Finland.



THE OLD GENERATION SHOULD START MENDING CLIMATE DAMAGES

With regards to climate change, climate justice, and giving the younger generation more responsibility, Ari Pappinen, a professor at the University of Eastern Finland, trusts young people can find solutions. In his daily work, he empowers the young generation to take responsibility for a sustainable future. At the same time, he recognises that the older generation cannot just ask the youth to solve the climate problems:

“The younger generations feel that it is not fair to ask them to solve the problems that we, the older generation, have caused. We should start working on solving these issues and show the way. Then the younger generation can continue and point out their own way. But we, the responsible party, should at least start it.”

“We need to let the youth take a bigger part in the decision-making. We need to give them resources and challenge them to solve the problems. I know that they have better solutions than we do.”



KARI ANNE BØKESTAD ANDREASSEN
Mayor of Nordland County council since 2019.

HOW TO ENSURE AN INCLUSIVE TRANSITION

Climate change and the green transition impact everyone. Some more than others. How can we ensure that the voices of under-represented groups, such as the young and/or indigenous people, are heard and that these groups have more control over the developments that are directly affecting them?

Kari Anne Bøkestad Andreassen, a mayor of Nordland County Council in Northern Norway, admits that the system might not be well-suited for minorities, such as young Saami people, and that changes should be made to ensure better and more equal representation of the people involved. ***“We need to let the youth take a bigger part in the decision-making. We need to give them resources and challenge them to solve the problems. I know that they have better solutions than we do.”***

Eimear adds that ***“no citizens in any locality should feel like they have no control over what happens in that locality.”*** If engaging in the political system is not opening the policymaker’s door, it comes down to “do-it-yourself activism” and knocking on the door together.

“If the door is shut, knock on the door. If it stays shut, knock louder.”



EXAMPLES OF YOUTH INVOLVEMENT



THE NORWEGIAN MODEL FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

In Norway, youth councils have been mandatory in all municipalities and counties since 2018. Vegard Sem, has been a member since age 13 and was the leader of the Youth County Council of Trøndelag between 2020–2022. *“Established politicians are obliged to listen to young people and their wishes, dreams, and hopes for the future. It is not an unreasonable demand from the large group of people who will take over all roles in society in the future.”* Vegard explains from his personal experience.

The Norwegian legislation on youth involvement is crucial to ensuring that young people have platforms, tools, and spaces to voice their opinions and improve the political system; *“involving as many people as possible, and certainly the young, will strengthen the democracy.”*

However, throughout his early school years, Vegard never heard about the youth councils or the opportunity to participate. He points out that if young people are to be heard, they have to be aware of the possibility. He also argues that the message should be brought into school curricula.

“It is schools that should teach students about the youth councils and children’s rights to participate in our democracy. It is a problem for our democracy if you have a democratic institution that few or no one is aware of.”

“It is a problem for our democracy if you have a democratic institution that few or no one is aware of.”

WATCH THE INTERVIEW WITH VEGARD SEM



FACT:

85% of municipal mayors in Trøndelag county says that they find it useful to listen to youth council members and their views.



THE YOUNG VOICES OF GREENLAND

Aviaaja Helene Barlach Pregaard leads a NAKUUSA project, which translates to “let’s be strong” in Greenlandic. This joint effort between UNICEF Denmark and the Greenlandic government aims to provide the best possible environment for children growing up in Greenland.

The project focuses on empowering children to participate and influence matters that impact them, and the project is behind the creation of the National Children’s Council, a platform for young people to connect with decision-makers. The overarching goal is to raise awareness of child protection laws and enhance the well-being of all children across Greenland.

“We’re working to amplify the voices of as many young people as possible,” Aviaaja emphasises. “Not just those who are great communicators, align with the majority, or have privileged backgrounds. We need to attract more participants, especially those from less fortunate circumstances.”

The National Children’s Council stands as the collective voice of Greenland’s youth. Every year, its members convene to compile a list of recommendations that are presented to decision-makers – mayors and ministers. In a closing ceremony, the Prime Minister reviews the implementation of the youth’s recommendations.

“Ultimately, Greenlandic children share the same aspiration as kids everywhere: to grow up in safe, secure homes,” she concludes.



Photo: Aviaaja Helene Barlach Pregaard

AVIAAJA HELENE BARLACH PREGAARD

“Ultimately, Greenlandic children share the same wish as kids everywhere: to grow up in safe, secure homes”



GIVING CLIMATE CHANGE A VOICE

Esther Jónsdóttir is a member of the Icelandic Youth Environmentalist Association and one of the people behind the initiative to create SÓLIN, a grading system that evaluated the environmental impact of political parties' manifestos for the 2021 Icelandic parliamentary elections.

Fuelled by a desire to prioritise climate change and other environmental issues during elections, Esther and the youth association developed SÓLIN to put pressure on political parties and their environmental policies.

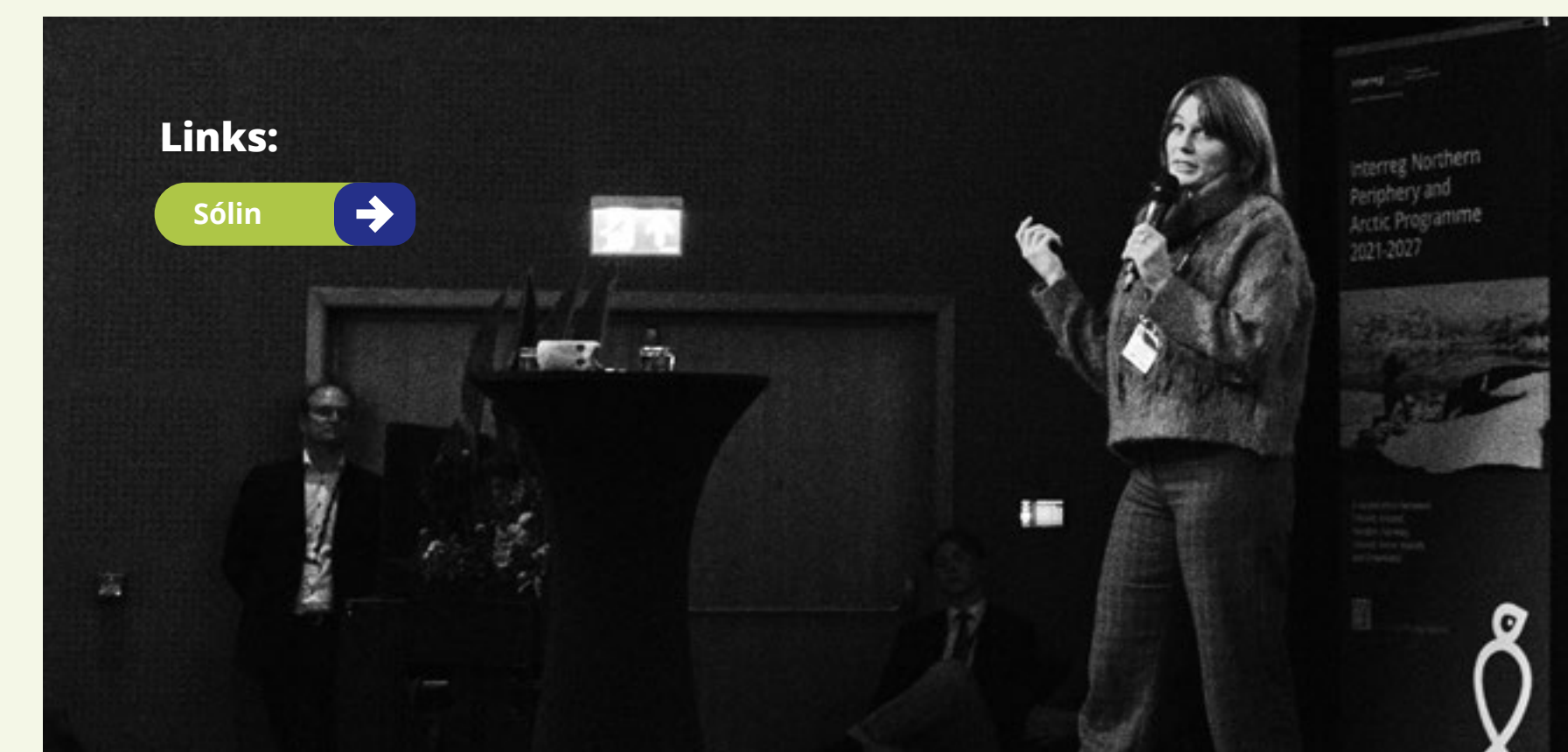
The rating system assessed the strengths and weaknesses of each party's manifestos, particularly in terms of climate change, nature conservation, and the circular economy. It also highlighted areas of agreement and disagreement among the parties.

SÓLIN's findings were unveiled in a public event in Reykjavik, drawing both political representatives, the media, and the public. The project gained significant traction, with

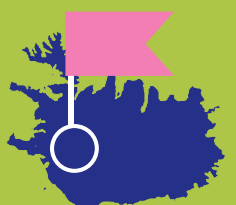
Iceland's national TV station covering the gradings two weeks before the election and incorporating them into their preelection political debates.

The parties with the highest scores effectively utilised the results in their campaigns. Post-election, the SÓLIN system aided the newly formed government in identifying common solutions and ideas, enabling them to expedite their implementation.

"We genuinely felt that the political parties had listened to our concerns and incorporated our categories and possible scores into their manifestos," Esther Jónsdóttir remarks. ***"Many parties did so almost verbatim."***



ESTHER JÓNSDÓTTIR



YOUTH, WE ARE LISTENING!

We've heard from youth across 7 regions that they want more inclusion and responsibility. Here is how Interreg NPA Programme has addressed some of the youth's wishes.



1

YOUTH SHAPING NPA REGIONS – JOIN THE PROJECTS

The NPA Programme is making it easier for young people to engage in their projects through its Priority 3. This option is specifically tailored to cater to the needs of younger and less experienced participants, making it a great steppingstone for those eager to make a difference.

With reduced requirements and a more manageable duration of 18 months (compared to the standard 36 months in main projects), Priority 3 projects are designed to empower youth organisations and those working with youth engagement.

The focus of these projects is on sharing experiences, building capacity, and exploring various themes related to youth empowerment and engagement, such as:

- Increasing youth participation in regional development processes.
- Establishing valuable youth networks/ initiatives in view of impacting on regional and local development.
- Connecting youth councils/indigenous youth organisations across peripheral areas.

2

YOUTH VOLUNTEERS ENGAGING IN INTERREG NPA PROJECTS

Interreg Volunteer Youth offers a new way for young people to engage with Interreg programmes and projects. One NPA project has welcomed two volunteers to participate in its endeavours. These young people will have the chance to delve into laboratory work while also engaging in communication and project promotion activities.

INGRID HOWES

The Arctic University of Norway,

Lead Partner:

“The IVY programme offers a good opportunity to involve young, enthusiastic people who bring new spirit and motivation to an academic environment. Both the project team and the volunteers will benefit from this cooperation.”

Links:

Interreg Volunteer Youth



3

MORE RESPONSIBILITY AND INCLUSION FOR YOUTH

Following the Youth Manifesto, in an effort to reflect the needs and perspectives of as many groups living in the NPA area as possible, the Interreg programme have opted to include representatives from underrepresented groups and other relevant stakeholders as observers in their Monitoring Committees.

By joining the Monitoring Committee meetings, two youth organisations get an opportunity to represent youth's interests, make their voices heard on the transnational platform, and contribute to making Interreg NPA regions more resilient and attractive places to live.

Rasmus Emborg, Nordic Youth Council, shares his experience as an observer: ***“When it comes to including young people, it is important to have competent input representing the real experience of young people. Sometimes people forget this.”***



HOW TO GET INVOLVED



Interested in youth exchange, traineeships, volunteering, or expanding your knowledge? Check out what possibilities the European Union can offer you!

European Youth Portal

Discover all youth-related opportunities in Europe and beyond in one place.

[European Youth Portal](#) →

[EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027](#) →

Erasmus+

An EU Programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe.

[Erasmus+](#) →

European Solidarity Corps

An EU initiative helping young people take part in projects that benefit communities, either abroad or in their own country.

[European Solidarity Corps](#) →

European Youth Event

Brings together at the European Parliament in Strasbourg and online thousands of young people from all over the European Union and the world to share and shape their ideas on Europe's future.

[European Youth Event](#) →

EU YOUTH Dialogue

A dialogue with young people and youth organisations involving policy and decision makers, as well as other actors, as appropriate. It serves as a forum to discuss the European cooperation from the youth perspective.

[EU Youth Dialogue](#) →

The European Youth Energy Day

As part of Sustainable Energy Week, this initiative gives young participants the chance to get involved in Europe's sustainable energy transition.

[The European Youth Energy Day](#) →

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED WITH INTERREG NPA

The Interreg NPA programme would like to increase youth participation in its projects and Programme implementation. Would you like to get involved?

→ If you are interested in joining one of our projects or have a project idea of your own, contact our Regional Contact points, who can answer all your questions in your language!

[Regional Contact points](#) →

[JS secretariat](#) →

[NPA website](#) →

→ Would you like to become a volunteer for an Interreg project? Check out the Interreg Volunteer Youth platform and find your future project!

[Interreg Volunteer Youth platform](#) →



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“Young people have the right to be included in the decisions that affect them today or may affect them in the future. They are our future leaders, politicians, and citizens, and it is EU’s shared responsibility to prepare them for these roles via opportunities to develop critical thinking, voice their opinions, debate and co-create solutions.”

**Biliana Sirakova, EU Youth Coordinator,
European Commission**

Photo: All pictures in the brochure, if not stated otherwise, are credited to Håvard B. Rødsand.

