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Europe's Northern Neighbourhood: A New Strategy for the Arctic

Introduction

The Arctic is changing fast. The European Union is responding. For decades, the Arctic **stood as a beacon of** stability and **international** cooperation. Predictability and restraint prevailed.

Since 2022, this reality has fundamentally changed. The Arctic is warming nearly four times faster than the global average, and the implications are global. As the ice retreats, the Arctic is becoming more accessible, but also more contested: for resources, emerging trade routes, strategic access, and influence.

At the same time, Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine has reshaped the security of the Arctic and the EU as a whole. Russia has been steadily rebuilding its Arctic military footprint and pursuing hybrid strategies against its neighbours. Sovereignty, territorial integrity and the rules that have underpinned stability in the region can no longer be taken for granted. China's strategic ambitions in the European Arctic are also growing, as it deepens its partnership with Russia. Multilateral cooperation remains indispensable, but it can no longer be the sole foundation of the European Union's Arctic approach. In short, **the Arctic is close, connected and critical to our future.**

Europe is responding to these challenges responsibly and sustainably, engaging with the speed and ambition the situation demands.

The Arctic is not someone else's frontier. It is Europe's Northern Neighbourhood and the European Union is part of the Arctic. More than 500 000 EU citizens live in the Arctic. Three EU Member States (the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland and Sweden) are Arctic nations. The EU has deep ties with Iceland and Norway, alongside Canada and the United States. Although not an Arctic state, the United Kingdom is an important partner due to its strategic location.

What happens in the Arctic directly affects Europe – its climate, environment, security, connectivity, resources, economic resilience, and peace and stability. **Europe's strategic autonomy is inseparable from the Arctic,** and the ability of the Northern Neighbourhood to chart its own course, free from coercion and undue dependence, plays an integral role in shaping a strong and engaged Europe.

This Strategy responds to the Arctic's new reality, building on the issues identified in the 2021 Arctic policy. It redefines what the Arctic means for Europe and Europe means for the Arctic by moving towards a shared political, economic and strategic framework, shaped together with our Arctic partners and the people who call the Arctic home, in full respect of their sovereignty and territorial integrity. The strength and resilience of the Arctic regions go hand in hand with reliable physical and social infrastructure and are inextricably linked to the safety and prosperity of the region.

Our ambition is clear: to work with people living in the Arctic, protect the environment and uphold sovereignty, strengthen security and resilience, deepen connectivity with Europe, and ensure that development of Arctic resources is sustainable and contributes to the prosperity of Arctic people and Europe as a whole. This strategy seeks to deepen the EU's partnerships in the Arctic.

1. The EU's Northern Neighbourhood: a Strategic Framework for Structured Cooperation

With its vision for a Northern Neighbourhood, the EU is making a strategic choice: to pursue deeper, more structured cooperation between the EU and like-minded countries, economies and peoples of the Arctic.

The EU is already present and active in the Arctic through its three Arctic Member States: the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland and Sweden. It has proven itself a values-based Arctic partner, connecting Arctic countries, regions and communities with each other and with the rest of Europe.

This engagement delivers concrete results. Through over EUR 1 billion in cohesion funding for 2021–2027, the EU helps to:

- improve living standards;
- build new infrastructure;
- give a voice to communities;
- protect and restore fragile ecosystems;
- adapt to climate change;
- support sustainable and responsible entrepreneurial efforts.

The EU also supports the Arctic through the following:

- the EU Arctic Forum, the Indigenous Peoples Dialogue and the Arctic Youth Dialogue, which offer a platform for EU-Arctic discussions and engagement;
- the Arctic Urban/Regional Cooperation network, where local leaders share innovative solutions;
- the Aurora Line grid connection, which strengthens energy security and brings more affordable electricity;
- polar research and innovation projects amounting to EUR 100 million per year;
- more than 89,000 exchanges under Erasmus+.

Today, **the EU has a range of bilateral relations with non-EU countries in the area**. Within this context, the EU wants to strengthen cooperation on the Arctic: deepening coordination, improving connectivity, advancing convergence and developing greater collective weight behind shared priorities.

The EU's vision is of a Northern Neighbourhood connected by common values and interests, comprising all EU Member States and like-minded partners, working together to build stability, prosperity and deeper integration.

The purpose is to work with partners on **a political framework for cooperation** on shared priorities and the joint development and financing of projects with partner countries. Building on the momentum of the European Arctic Summit in Rovaniemi in September 2026, **the EU will work with its Member States and like-minded partners to organise regular high-level summits** as a space for discussion on common issues and shared approaches. Any such cooperation would complement, rather than duplicate, existing structures, including the Arctic Council.

The **deepening of the EU's partnership with Greenland** is a cornerstone of this new approach. For decades, the EU and Greenland have been close partners. Greenlanders are EU citizens and enjoy freedom of movement within the Union. Greenland has duty-free and quota-free access to the single market. The Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement promotes good ocean governance and responsible fisheries, to the benefit of both sides. In addition to Erasmus+ support for the Arctic, the EU has invested substantially in human development, providing EUR 600 million since 2007, mainly for education and skills. Over time, the partnership has also shifted towards economic diversification, notably through the Green Growth programme and cooperation on sustainable raw materials. In March 2024 the Commission opened a permanent office in Nuuk.

On 7 September 2026, the President of the European Commission, the Premier of Greenland and Prime Minister of Denmark signed a **new EU–Greenland–Denmark Joint Declaration,** reaffirming the two sides as longstanding, like-minded partners. To turn it into concrete action, a EUR 200 million Global Gateway Partnership Package for 2026–2027 will support transformative investments in sustainable raw materials, renewable energy, digital and satellite connectivity, sustainable tourism, housing, SME finance and strategic infrastructure. Under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (2028–2034), the EU will deepen the partnership further through an expanded Team Europe investment agenda. Throughout, the EU's position remains clear: the future of Greenland is for its people to decide.

With the **Faroe Islands,** the EU signed a Memorandum of Understanding on enhanced cooperation in 2024 that recognises shared values and principles which provides the EU and Faroe Islands with the opportunity to pursue further and new avenues for cooperation. The EU and the Faroe Islands already cooperate closely on trade and scientific cooperation.

The EU will prioritise its **partnerships with like-minded partners** to preserve a peaceful, stable, safe, secure and resilient Arctic. The ambition is to strengthen collaboration and invest in joint projects in the Arctic. The Northern Neighbourhood is a political framework open to all like-minded partners who would like to participate.

- With **Norway** the EU established a regular bilateral Arctic Dialogue in 2026 to tackle concrete joint challenges in the Arctic, such as domain awareness, the protection of critical infrastructure and territorial integrity. Norway is deeply integrated in the EU single market through the European Economic Area and Schengen. The EU and Norway signed a Security and Defence Partnership in 2024[1].
- With **Iceland**, the EU addresses Arctic matters in its overall bilateral frameworks of engagement, including through the High-Level Dialogue on Fisheries and Oceans Affairs and the Security and Defence Partnership from March 2026[2]. Iceland is deeply integrated in the European Union single market through the Agreement on the European Economic Area and Schengen through its Schengen Association Agreement.

- With the **UK**, we have a valuable partner in the Arctic across climate change, research and development, and security and defence. There is potential to expand collaboration on Arctic issues through existing partnerships, including the Security and Defence Partnership concluded in May 2025[3].

[1] 2024 https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/abc084fe921e403791ddb505622ba365/eu-norway-security-and-defence-partnership.pdf
[2] 2026 https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14421-2025-INIT/en/pdf
[3] 2025 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/3w3hhlxz/eu-uk-summit_sdp.pdf

- With **Canada,** the EU has a Strategic Partnership Agreement and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), both have been provisionally applied since 2017, as well as a Security and Defence Partnership, concluded in 2025[4]. The 2019 EU-Canada Oceans partnership[5] also covers Arctic matters. At the upcoming EU-Canada Summit on 29-30 October 2026, the EU and Canada will further deepen cooperation, including on Arctic issues.
- The **United States of America** is an Arctic state, a founding member of NATO and of the Arctic Council. The EU and the US have a long-standing cooperation in the Arctic. The EU is committed to continuing a pragmatic transatlantic engagement based on shared interests and values. A predictable partnership is central to European and transatlantic security, and key to preserve peace and stability and cooperation on joint challenges and opportunities. The agreement signed between Greenland, Denmark and the US in 2026[6] strengthens the common security in the Arctic.

In addition to EU Member States and Northern Neighbourhood partners, the EU will work with other like-minded partners, such as **Japan and the Republic of Korea**, including through existing Security and Defence Partnerships and other bilateral dialogues.

At the multilateral level, the **Arctic Council is the main forum** for intergovernmental pan-Arctic cooperation. Although work at the political and senior official levels has been paused due to Russia's illegal war of aggression in Ukraine, people-centred, environmental, search and rescue, and scientific cooperation continue in the working and expert groups (albeit in a limited format). The EU is a *de facto* observer since 2013 and contributes data and scientific expertise to the working groups. The EU reiterates its application for official observer status at the Arctic Council.

EU–Canada: Arctic collaboration in the Alliance for the Future

Canada is a long-standing partner and a natural ally in the Arctic. We share common values and the same way of seeing the world, from climate change to geopolitics.

The 21st EU-Canada Summit, on 29–30 October 2026, will be a decisive step towards bringing the relationship to the highest level possible. Guided by the joint commitment to multilateralism and rules-based governance, the EU and Canada will work on an Alliance for the Future to create a common prosperity and economic security space.

The EU and Canada will collaborate on the Arctic seeking opportunities for joint projects, strengthening efforts to combat climate change, fortify critical supply chains, foster space cooperation, secure connectivity, ensure stability and prosperity for Arctic communities and collaborate in addressing evolving geopolitical and Arctic challenges. Increased exchanges on Arctic matters between the EU and Canada will complement existing cooperation and identify new opportunities for collaboration.

[4] 2025 https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9783-2025-INIT/en/pdf
[5] https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/document/download/a83f3393-478f-4de1-9973-69826e41a95d_en?filename=2019-07-18-ocean-partnership-canada-eu_en.pdf
[6] 2026 https://stm.dk/media/fx1h4fqx/aftale_eng.pdf

2. A Secure, Peaceful, and Resilient Arctic

A secure, peaceful, and resilient Arctic is essential to a sustainable and prosperous future for Arctic communities and lies at the heart of the EU's Northern Neighbourhood vision. The EU's contribution to Arctic security requires **Arctic-ready capabilities** and support for stronger **societal resilience**.

2.1 Arctic-ready strategic capabilities

The Arctic security landscape is deteriorating. Russia is expanding its military posture in the Arctic. Hybrid activities - from drone incursions and Global Navigation Satellite System jamming to the sabotage of undersea cables – undermine Arctic security and the security of critical infrastructure. The EU is adapting its engagement accordingly. While Arctic States bear the primary responsibility for the security of their own territories, an effective response to these threats, and to challenges to the principle of territorial integrity requires multilateral cooperation and coordinated solutions.

As military, hybrid and commercial activity increase, the EU and its Member States need to **strengthen their capabilities** to operate effectively in the Arctic, in complementarity with NATO, notably by investing in **shared situational awareness and vigilance, as well as in preparedness and responsiveness.** The EU will do so **by promoting Arctic-ready, dual-use and multi-purpose capabilities** that benefit local communities, the Arctic and the EU.

Climate change and environmental degradation are significant risk multipliers in the Arctic, and climate resilience is a precondition for security. The EU will treat this climate and security nexus as a central consideration in its Arctic engagement and will work to mitigate risks, address strategic vulnerabilities and foster international cooperation to prevent conflict over resources and territories.

The EU will also continue to **deepen its engagement with NATO**, in line with agreed principles. Through its Structured Dialogues and staff-to-staff exchanges with NATO, the EU will continue to address shared interests in the regions, related to enhancing military mobility, resilience, space and maritime security, addressing cyber and hybrid threats, the protection of critical infrastructure, as well as the impact of climate change and environmental degradation on defence.

2.1.1 Vigilance

Vigilance requires enhancing the EU's **ability to closely follow and understand developments in the Arctic as they unfold**.

Increasing Arctic shipping activity in an inherently harsh and poorly charted environment substantially escalates the risk of catastrophic accidents, severe marine pollution and hybrid interference. The potential impact on this highly sensitive marine environment is considerable. The Arctic, North-Atlantic and the Baltic Sea are increasingly becoming a single and interconnected strategic space, where vulnerabilities in one region have wider implications for the security of Northern Europe. Moreover, geographical proximity to Russia exposes these regions to a common set of risks, including hybrid threats, radio-frequency interference, cyberattacks, disruption of air traffic, sabotage targeting critical land-based and subsea infrastructure. The increased traffic of shadow fleet vessels in the Arctic, with ships routinely disabling their Automatic Identification System to bypass sanctions or conceal high-risk ship-to-ship transshipment, poses a challenge to maritime safety and security. Incidents of damage to submarine cables in the Baltic and the Arctic expose the vulnerabilities of critical underwater

infrastructure. Therefore, it is essential to address such vulnerabilities and risks with transversal actions and geographical focus, notably in the Baltic and the Arctic. Responsible regulatory frameworks, effective and coordinated search and rescue response and enhanced maritime domain awareness are essential to Arctic, North Atlantic and Baltic maritime security. The EU will also continue to sanction the shadow fleet entering from the Northern Sea Route, which challenges international law, maritime safety and the integrity of international maritime governance.

To address these challenges, the EU will therefore **strengthen its situational and maritime domain awareness through satellite data, in-situ and remote sensor observation and information sharing**. Robust domain awareness will allow the EU to support its Arctic Member States and partners and respond to activities that pose a risk.

- The first critical elements are the **cutting-edge satellites under the European Union Space programme that provide Earth observation data (Copernicus) and navigation services (Galileo)**. Copernicus data already covers the whole Arctic and is freely available. Specialised security and operational services of Copernicus are accessible to EU Member States and EEA countries, including Norway and Iceland. Galileo navigation services complement Copernicus data by guiding EU actors in the Arctic and supporting emergency operations. Looking ahead, the Copernicus expansion missions will greatly enhance the EU's capabilities to provide operational services relevant to the Arctic, such as land and sea ice mapping, permafrost-related changes, oil spill detection and maritime safety. The Copernicus services, coupled with the extension of its ground motion data to cover the Arctic will improve risk assessment for risks linked to infrastructure, landslides, and permafrost. The EU is **developing a new Earth Observation Governmental Service** to support decision making in security and defence. In this context, the EU will propose a dedicated Arctic pilot to strengthen maritime domain awareness in the Arctic in 2027 that will lay the ground for future enhanced capacities covering the Arctic. To complement Galileo's freely available navigation services, the EU will **initiate secure navigation services for government use** with the Galileo Public Regulated Service.

- The second critical element to build strong maritime domain awareness is **collaboration and information sharing with trusted partners**. The EU already connects the EU and EEA Member State authorities on maritime surveillance, inter alia, in the Common Information Sharing Environment. Similarly, Member States' naval information systems are connected through MARSUR, through a project led by the European Defence Agency, to improve maritime situational awareness. Looking ahead, the EU **will work with the maritime surveillance authorities through the European Maritime Safety Agency** to strengthen Long-Range Identification and Tracking data sharing. This type of data will allow authorities to better monitor shadow fleet vessels. Furthermore, the EU will explore opportunities with the governments of Denmark and Greenland to **better integrate Greenland in existing EU data sharing systems**.

2.1.2 Preparedness

Increased vigilance needs to be complemented by increased preparedness.

The Arctic as many other areas is experiencing increased sabotage and other malicious events. In this context, preparedness is essential. Access to vital sea lines of communications and natural resources, including in the Arctic, is a core interest of the EU and requires a comprehensive approach, including leveraging EU security and defence instruments, as well as stronger cooperation with Arctic partners. The EU is therefore **stepping up its capacity to**

protect critical infrastructure on land, at sea and in space. The EU will focus on long-term situational preparedness ensuring supply chain resilience, protecting northern maritime boarders, safeguarding critical subsea infrastructure. In line with the Critical Entities Resilience Directive and the Commission proposal for a Military Mobility Regulation, the EU will support Member States in the identification and protection of strategic dual-use infrastructure and build safeguards against disruptions. The EU Space Surveillance and Tracking (SST) provides services for collision avoidance, re-entry and fragmentation analysis and which could be reinforced with sensors in the Arctic to protect space infrastructure. These efforts support European collective security and reinforce the resilience of Arctic communities.

The EU will also leverage **the potential of unmanned systems** capable to operate in polar regions as a crucial innovative solution to enhance access, research, search and rescue, real-time monitoring and the protection of critical infrastructure. The Arctic's conditions put higher demands on such systems in terms of their ability to operate under extremely low temperatures at extended range and autonomy. The EU aims to use existing instruments and platforms, such as the EU Action Plan on Drone and Counter-drone Security and its upcoming Drone Industrial Forum, to develop such technologies and support their operational employment.

Furthermore, the EU will work to **further integrate maritime domain awareness and response capacities**.

Maritime Security Hub

In line with the EU's Action Plan on Cable Security, the EU will work with interested Member States and partners to develop **a maritime security hub to facilitate information sharing from various national and EU sources**[7] **from seabed to space**. More comprehensive information and integrated data on issues such as the security of other maritime infrastructure, including their landing sites, the tracking of shadow fleet vessels, detecting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, marine pollution as well as search and rescue components and navigation safety, will give the EU, its Member States and like-minded partners a better understanding of maritime and aerial domain awareness in the Arctic. Enhanced monitoring, data fusion and trend analysis could be the basis for a common response to detected challenges, ensuring complementarity with NATO efforts. This will be EU Member State led in its implementation with possible close coordination with like-minded partners.

As a first step, the EU will support Member States and interested EEA partners with the establishment of **an Arctic Cable Hub, to monitor, protect and support the repair of submarine cables in the North Atlantic-Arctic**. The EU will also invest in smart technologies on cables that act as early warning systems for potential threats. The Arctic Cable Hub will build on the experience of the regional Cable Hubs in the Baltic Sea and the Mediterranean, including cooperation with the private sector.

2.1.3 Responsiveness

Building on vigilance and preparedness, responsiveness is key to ensuring coordinated, timely and effective action when needed.

The overall EU effort to **boost investments in defence** and significantly increase capacities as outlined in the EU White Paper on Defence and the Readiness 2030 Agenda **already** includes

[7] EU assets in this context include smart cables and satellite remote monitoring. Existing information sharing platforms are the systems and services of the European Maritime Safety Agency and the Common Information Sharing Environment.

several projects that strengthen Arctic-ready capabilities. The European Defence Fund supports ten projects with around EUR 260 million that address Arctic requirements such as the development of an aircraft that can withstand severe environments, textiles adapted to extreme conditions and over-the-horizon sensing that covers the Arctic.

Strong cooperation with EU neighbours in the Arctic and with NATO will be essential to improve Europe's military mobility in the region. In particular, rapid large-scale deployment of troops in and across the Arctic, when needed, as well as the reinforcement of West-East transport links in the European Arctic and to the Baltic Sea, sea-to-land connections and multimodal logistics corridors that are Arctic-proof and energy secure will be **facilitated through a speedy implementation of the proposed Military Mobility Regulation**, once adopted, together with EEA/EFTA neighbours as well as relevant Permanent Structured Cooperation projects. Multimodal military mobility corridors, including ports, airports, and their hinterland connections, should be planned as a logistics system, capable of operating in harsh weather conditions, including de-icing, handling heavy and oversized military vehicles on frozen ground, and rapidly repairing damaged infrastructure (e.g. due to reparation kits and skilled workforce).

These efforts are inherently multi-purpose as they support European common security and reinforce the resilience of Arctic communities.

The EU and Member States could organise exercises or stress tests focusing on seamless movement of military forces and assets to and within the Arctic region, in cooperation with like-minded partners and NATO, as appropriate. This will be essential for credible deterrence as well as emergency response and disaster relief in the area.

The EU already regularly organises **EU-wide crisis management exercises** testing response to cross-border, transboundary crises. These exercises regularly involve like-minded countries in the Arctic region and are conducted under the EU-NATO Parallel and Coordinated Exercise concept.

To improve the EU's ability to operate in the Arctic, **increased icebreaker capacity** is needed. Polar vessels are essential to access the Arctic to address multiple critical purposes ranging from civilian maritime safety, deployment and repair of critical underwater infrastructure, reacting to oil spillages, research, and dual-use strategic mobility.

Expanding European icebreaker capacity

To advance European icebreaker capacity while fostering technological leadership, the EU will work through the new EU Industrial Maritime Value Chains Alliance to map icebreaking needs and vessels, technical specifications and available manufacturing capabilities across Europe.

Furthermore, the EU, together with Member States and like-minded partners, will develop options for joint procurement, pooling and sharing icebreaker capabilities and other capabilities relevant for the Arctic. The EU will explore opportunities to pool funding and technological resources within the Northern Neighbourhood. The EU will also examine mutually beneficial European Access Arrangements to facilitate the operational availability of Member State-owned assets, assets with special focus on ice breakers for extreme high North environments utilising advanced, high endurance propulsion systems, including nuclear, while fully respecting national command and control.

2.2 Societal resilience and civil preparedness

The strength of local communities and the availability and resilience of physical and social infrastructure are the bedrock of societal resilience and preparedness. Together with comprehensive national or regional risk assessments, this is a solid basis to build a risk-informed Arctic resilience planning.

Investment in climate-proof infrastructure, particularly in connectivity, advances economic development as well social cohesion, while providing the backbone for security responses and resilience. Strong local communities provide both support to security actions and contribute and benefit from economic growth and expanded infrastructure. A multi-hazard and whole-of-society approach will guide EU action, covering deliberate threats as well as climate hazards such as thawing permafrost, coastal erosion and extreme weather. This effort will **build on Indigenous and local knowledge**, promoting nature-based solutions, and ensure that local adaptation measures are co-designed with Arctic communities.

Societal resilience also requires **emergency preparedness and search and rescue**, which are essential to keep people in the Arctic safe. In line with 2025 Preparedness Union Strategy and 2026 Council Conclusions on EU energy and climate diplomacy, climate resilience is considered a precondition to security.

- **The EU already supports emergency management** in the region through coordination, information and resources. Copernicus provides flood warning and mapping as well as iceberg detection and other monitoring services which supports responders in their emergency planning. Galileo provides precise locations for people in distress and can relay distress signals. Government Satellite Communications (GOVSATCOM) supports secure connectivity by satellite including when terrestrial services are not available, which will be reinforced by IRIS^2, notably its polar option. Building end-to-end early warning systems, covering from risk identification and hazard detection to public warning is essential.
- The EU has the capabilities to coordinate disaster response in the Arctic through **the Union Civil Protection Mechanism** and provide additional resources from **the strategic rescEU reserve**. This includes ensuring that specialised operational assets, such as marine pollution response and oil-spill recovery capabilities, are fully Arctic-ready. In addition to all EU Member States, Norway and Iceland are part of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism.
- There is considerable expertise and capability across sectors, levels of governance, borders and northern international frameworks but they are not connected strongly enough. **Fragmentation** can mean delays, duplication or capability gaps. **Cross-border and cross-sector coordination** needs to be strengthened through targeted northern exercises, interoperability arrangements, and common planning. To support further coordination, EU will build a longer-term preparedness and resilience cooperation partnership with Greenland.
- To ensure that Arctic communities fully benefit from existing tools, the EU will **maximise capacity-building activities on the use of space-based tools** for local users and communities in Arctic regions through the Copernicus Arctic Hub.

The EU will also promote **preparedness for serious cross-border health threats**, including potential pandemic risks associated with climate and environmental change in the Arctic, building on existing EU health security and preparedness mechanisms.

Flagship actions to support resilience, security and peace in the Arctic.

The EU will

- ***Invest an additional EUR 200 million in Greenland*** *over the next two years (2026-2027) and build a long-term preparedness and resilience cooperation partnership.*
- ***Enhance Copernicus service provision*** *for the Arctic through the Copernicus Expansion Missions.*
- *Initiate an Earth observation governmental service* ***pilot project to prepare the ground for a dedicated capacity on domain awareness in the Arctic.***
- *Strengthen* ***Long-Range Identification and Tracking data sharing*** *through the European Maritime Safety Agency.*
- *Reinforce the EU Space Surveillance and Tracking (SST) with sensors in the Arctic to protect space infrastructure.*
- ***Establish a Maritime Security Hub*** *with an Arctic Cable Hub progressively extended in scope.*
- ***Expand European icebreaker capabilities****, including through the new EU Industrial Maritime Value Chains Alliance.*
- *Initiate* ***capacity building for local communities and Indigenous Peoples*** *on the use of Copernicus.*

3. A changing Arctic: climate change as a defining threat

The Arctic is experiencing climate change on an unprecedented scale. Arctic sea ice is shrinking across all months of the year, widespread thaw is observed in discontinuous permafrost zones, and the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation (AMOC) is slowing. The Arctic is projected to become 'profoundly different' by 2050 under all warming scenarios[8].

As a global climate regulator, the Arctic shapes weather patterns, biodiversity and sea-level rise worldwide. Within the region, rapid warming is destabilising ecosystems, threatening the livelihoods of Arctic communities, and multiplying economic and geopolitical risks.

For Europe, the consequences are direct. Arctic warming is driving more extreme and persistent weather patterns across our continent: deadly heatwaves, severe storms and other extreme weather events, and also leads to structural changes to ecosystems, agriculture and water. Europe is warming at twice the global rate, and the threats to our societies are both immediate and long-term.

Climate change amplifies security risks, reshapes economic opportunities and transforms the lives of the people who call the region home. It must be addressed proactively, through both mitigation and adaptation, and through resilience-building and climate-informed planning and decision-making.

The 2021 Joint Communication placed strong emphasis on protecting the Arctic environment and advancing the clean transition. That commitment stands. But the pace of change now demands more. The EU will:

- **Stay the course on its climate commitments.** The EU is firmly committed to the Paris Agreement and the **EU Climate Law**, which legally bind the EU to **reduce net greenhouse**

[8] https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/chapter/ccp6/

gas emissions by 90% by 2040 compared to 1990 levels and to achieve climate neutrality and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

- **Protect the Arctic environment and inhabitants.**
    - **Strengthen protection of Arctic marine, coastal, terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems** by using the Agreement on Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) to safeguard areas beyond national jurisdiction, driving efforts to establish marine protected areas under the OSPAR Convention, and protecting and restoring nature in line with the Nature Restoration Regulation and the Birds and Habitats Directives.
    - **Prevent and reduce pollution affecting the Arctic environment** by tackling oil spills, waste discharges, urban wastewater and diffuse pollution from expanding settlements, and by establishing sustainable systems for managing solid waste and sewage waste.
    - **Address air quality and black carbon emissions** from shipping and land based sources, including by working with parties to the UNECE Air Convention and within the International Maritime Organization (IMO).
    - **Ensure environmentally responsible economic development** in the region by applying appropriate environmental impact assessments to projects with potential effects on the Arctic environment, including mining and renewable energy investments; and by monitoring and mitigating broader impacts on the environment linked to increases in maritime transport in the Arctic.
- **Close the knowledge gap through monitoring, observation and research.** Although the EU already benefits from worldclass space-based observation services through Copernicus, gaps in data and knowledge remain a major weakness in understanding the Arctic.
    - Through **OceanEye**, the new European ocean monitoring and observation initiative, and the OceanEye International Alliance co-led with Canada, the EU will bring together Member States and partners, including the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Norway, to jointly collect and share ocean data. This will improve our ability to predict and mitigate climate impacts, strengthen European competitiveness at sea and enhance maritime safety and security.
    - Through **Destination Earth**, the EU's flagship digital twin of the planet and the European digital twin of the ocean, the EU will combine Copernicus data, supercomputing and AI-based prediction. This will strengthen our ability to anticipate extreme weather and cascading disasters such as coastal flooding.
- **Apply a firm precautionary approach to geo-engineering.** There is currently not enough scientific knowledge or testing to guarantee that such technologies are safe to use in the Arctic. The EU's answer to climate change remains emissions reduction and stronger partnerships, not untested shortcuts.
- **Ensure that investments in the Arctic are sustainable and climate-proof**, building on the forthcoming European Integrated Framework for Climate Resilience. Investments should advance the clean transition and be resilient by design.

- **Strengthen green transition partnerships with like-minded partners.** This includes the EU's Green Alliances with Canada and Norway and research collaboration to address the risks that climate change and environmental degradation pose to the Arctic's strategic and economic landscape.

4. A Prosperous and Economically Secure Arctic

As the Arctic becomes more accessible, it also becomes more central to Europe's economic security, from the critical raw materials essential to our green and digital transitions, the emerging shipping routes reshaping global trade, to the energy and connectivity infrastructure that will define the region's future. Integrating European infrastructure, such as ports, rail connections, energy terminals, satellite and digital infrastructure into emerging Arctic trade and transport networks would help unlock the growing potential of Arctic maritime flows by connecting them to the European markets and beyond and strengthening new supply chains. Fisheries, agriculture, forestry and rural development have a strategic role in maintaining economic activities and local communities in Arctic areas. Realising this potential responsibly and ensuring its benefits accrue to Arctic communities and Europe alike, is a core pillar of the Northern Neighbourhood.

The EU and the Arctic are already economically intertwined with five Arctic countries participating in the EU single market. The EU, leveraging the European Investment Bank and other European investment banks, will support a sustainable Arctic economy that benefits its inhabitants through **mutually beneficial investments** that respect the highest financial, environmental, social and governance standards, in areas such as connectivity and infrastructure, shipping and transport, clean energy, minerals, fisheries, services, and tourism. Investing in a thriving Arctic economy will not only **create prosperity** for the local and EU economies but also enhance the **joint economic security** by reducing dependencies.

4.1 Connectivity and infrastructure

4.1.1 Transport

The Arctic faces the **combined challenge** of insufficient transport connectivity whilst being increasingly viewed as the site of future trade routes. Transport developments in the Arctic need to address both external international and internal local demand. Besides enabling economic development, transport connectivity also supports defence efforts and enhances overall security.

The EU is steadfast that **full respect of international law**, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is central to stability in the Arctic. The EU calls for the **respect of freedom and safety of navigation, sovereignty and sovereign rights in maritime zones and the peaceful settlement of disputes**. The EU strongly supports the International Maritime Organisation in its central role in promoting maritime safety, establishing shipping standards, and protecting the marine environment.

As the Arctic becomes more accessible because of climate change, new **maritime routes** are emerging. The EU will actively engage on these developments.

- The EU will work to **ensure that freedom of navigation is preserved** in the Arctic Ocean.
- To ensure international standards are effectively translated into practice, **the EU will promote, through the IMO, high-standard maritime training and capacity building**, including the development and use of specialised ice-navigation simulators and polar emergency response training tools.

- The EU will produce **a foresight study on shipping routes** to assess the wider implications for Europe of emerging maritime corridors, traffic flows, fleet profiles, and ice conditions. The scenarios generated by the foresight study will be discussed with like-minded partners.
- The EU champions **renewable and low-carbon fuels for ships calling at EU ports**, driven by the FuelEU maritime regulation and the EU Emissions Trading System. At the international level, the EU will contribute actively to negotiations at the International Maritime Organisation to facilitate the transition of Black Carbon measures from voluntary guidelines to binding regulations. The EU will advocate for the definition of wider Arctic waters (above 60°N) to ensure regulations cover the actual footprint of Arctic shipping.
- Additionally, the EU will continue **promoting compliance with internationally binding requirements under the Polar Code** by making full use of existing enforcement tools, such as port State control, in full respect of established governance, to help ensure a level playing field.

Transport connectivity is equally crucial. Better connecting Arctic regions across Finland, Sweden and Norway is essential for economic development, military mobility, regional cohesion and the vibrancy of local communities.

- The **trans-European transport network (TEN-T)** already covers parts of the Finnish, Swedish and Norwegian Arctic and identifies strategic nodes to connect the Arctic to the EU Single Market. The EU will specifically strengthen transport connectivity towards the Arctic by upgrading the European Transport Corridors to dual-use standards. The EU priority military mobility corridors create dual-use connections towards the Arctic.
- The EU will **speed up TEN-T implementation**, including of the military mobility corridors. Building on experience from the Connecting Europe Facility support to the upgrading of the railway line between Oulu and Lulea, providing better hinterland connection and enabling the movement of larger military equipment to the Port of Oulu, the EU will **explore projects that facilitate better East-West connections** and multimodal logistics corridors in the European Arctic and continue to support initiatives like **the New North project** to ensure smooth cross-border transport connections and accessibility.
- The difference in track gauge in the railway network remains a key issue in TEN-T implementation and European Arctic transport connectivity. To speed up the migration of the northern Finnish rail network to pan-European track gauge, the **EU will speed up the implementation of the Rail Nordica project**. The completion of the Rail Baltica project will make a key contribution to strengthening North-South connectivity and reinforce the Eastern Flank of the EU and NATO and thereby assure wider network integration, resilience and sustainment from Central and Eastern Europe to the Arctic.
- The EU will also **facilitate transport infrastructure investment** to enhance civilian and military connectivity.

4.1.2 Digital connectivity and infrastructure

The EU has an **ambitious long-term vision for digital connectivity** in the Arctic, which is a priority area for Cable Projects of European Interest. The EU is working on a **Pan-Arctic Cable** concept that will connect Europe to Japan and South Korea via Greenland and Canada. In the coming years, the EU will connect Greenland to the European Union with a sovereign and secure submarine cable. The new submarine cable routes will enhance the access of Arctic communities as well as boost resilience and redundancy in Europe's digital connectivity. Such

connection is a pre-condition for further investments highly relevant for both competitiveness, inclusion, preparedness and defence.

The EU is **accelerating strategic computing capacity and technological sovereignty in the Arctic**. Through the proposed Cloud and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Development Act, the EU will provide a clear and faster framework to attract investment in computing capacity in EU Arctic Member States, Norway and Iceland. In Greenland, the EU is already supporting the authorities in assessing opportunities for data centres and exploring associated AI Factory access. Building upon compute capacity, AI and High-Performance Computing can address specific challenges related to climate change, sustainable resource management, and regional security. Greenland will benefit from EU AI Factory services, including access to AI-optimised supercomputing resources, technical support, training, and activities under Destination Earth and AI-powered Digital Twins.

A Pan-Arctic Cable Vision

The EU has already invested EUR 107 million through the Connecting Europe Facility Digital to advance Greenland's secure and sovereign connectivity and the Pan-Arctic Cable vision. Efforts are ongoing to deploy a new cable along the western Greenlandic coast to improve connectivity for local communities. In cooperation and full alignment with the Danish and Greenlandic governments and building on the substantial investments made with the Connecting Europe Facility Digital, the Commission will further support the delivery of a sovereign, secure, and resilient submarine cable connection linking Greenland directly to the EU. Subsequently, as laid out in the Arctic priority area for Cable Projects of European Interest, the connections could be further expanded towards Japan, first connecting to like-minded partners like Canada.

Feasibility studies to advance planning for the whole route are ongoing. Canada's intention to build more secure broadband connections between Europe and Asia via Canada show growing mutual interest. The EU will continue its diplomatic engagement notably with Canada through the EU-Canada Digital Partnership and with Japan through the EU-Japan Digital Partnership, as well as with other relevant partners. The EU has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on submarine cables for secure, resilient and sustainable Global Connectivity with Japan in the framework of the EU-Japan Digital Partnership.

4.1.3 Space

The EU offers **space services** through its systems (Copernicus, Galileo, IRIS², Government Satellite Communications). At the same time, the EU relies on the Arctic region to reinforce its resilience in space, through ground infrastructure, space surveillance and data exchange. Beyond Earth observation and navigation services, the EU is currently developing **IRIS² which will offer satellite connectivity for secure government communications**. The EU aims to procure additional satellites that will allow expanding connectivity services to cover the Arctic in cooperation with Member States and third countries. In parallel, the EU is already supporting enhanced satellite connectivity in Greenland through the IRIS² framework, improving connectivity in remote areas that are not adequately served by terrestrial and submarine cable networks.

Furthermore, the Commission's proposed **EU-level authorisation of systems providing mobile satellite services** will make it easier to roll out secure, reliable satellite connectivity across Europe, including remote Arctic areas where terrestrial networks are weak or absent. This would improve communications, support safety and emergency response, and strengthen the EU's strategic connectivity in the Arctic.

The EU supports the development of its spaceports and launch service providers to reinforce its autonomy, while acknowledging the need for diversified capabilities in the Arctic. This approach is key to ensuring a resilient and competitive access to space, as part of the EU space policy, whilst reinforcing industrial competitiveness of the space sector and the overall space economy.

4.2 Renewable energy and sustainable raw materials

The EU will increase investments in the Arctic to **develop its renewable energy and sustainable minerals potential**.

4.2.1 Renewable energy

The Arctic is a powerhouse for renewable energy, with significant potential for hydropower, geothermal and wind energy as well as the production of renewable hydrogen.

The **EU is already one of the main funders of the energy transition in the region**. An important advancement is the EU-funded **Aurora power line**, inaugurated in January 2026, that better connects the Finish and Swedish electricity grids in the high north. The EU, Finland and Sweden are currently developing Aurora Line 2 to further deepen electricity market integration and alleviate grid bottlenecks. The EU is working closely with partners in the region, especially Arctic Member States and Greenland, to harness these clean energy opportunities.

The EU **will enhance energy security and continue to support renewable energy solutions** in the region, especially through its cohesion programmes.

In Greenland, the EU will support projects to transition from diesel generators to renewable energy sources in Arctic communities and will connect these communities to share best practices. Destination Earth will be able to further support this transition with scenario analyses.

In line with the 2021 Joint Communication on the Arctic, the EU's position remains clear on ensuring that oil, coal and gas stay in the ground, including in Arctic regions. The EU underlines the importance of meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement, including the transition away from fossil fuels in a just, orderly and equitable manner. The EU is committed to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 to accelerate the clean transition and enhance European energy security by reducing existing dependencies. The ambitious targets of the EU Climate Law will fundamentally transform the EU's energy landscape, vastly reducing and eventually eliminating the need for hydrocarbons for energy generation. Due to its specific vulnerabilities, the Commission will work with partners to protect the Arctic environment and prevent all hydrocarbon reserve developments that pose a threat to the Arctic ecosystem.

4.2.2 Critical raw materials and sustainable resource development

The Arctic hosts deposits of most of the EU identified critical raw materials. The EU is committed to working with like-minded Arctic partners to develop raw materials projects that support the EU supply chains, in respect of highest social, environmental and governance standards. This will be done to the benefit of local communities in respect of Indigenous Peoples' rights.

Several EU strategic projects selected under the 2024 **Critical Raw Materials Act** are located in the Arctic, including the Sakatti project in Finland, the ReeMAP project in Sweden, and the Nussir project in Norway. Strategic projects benefit from enabling conditions such as facilitated

access to finance and streamlined permitting when they are located in the EU. Another example of a project under consideration is the Greenland Resources Malmbjerg Molydbenum Project, highlighted in the EU's RESourceEU Action Plan.

The EU **will work closely with Canada, Greenland, Norway and the United States through raw materials strategic partnerships**[9] to continue developing additional sustainable raw materials opportunities.

The EU will continue to advocate against deep-sea mining until the scientific gaps on deep sea ecosystems are properly filled, until it can be demonstrated that no harmful effects arise from deep sea mining and until the necessary provisions in the exploitation regulations for the effective protection of the marine environment are in place, as required under the UNCLOS.

4.3 Fisheries and the blue economy

The blue economy underpins the livelihoods of many Arctic communities. Fisheries are central to people's livelihoods, food security and cultural identity. Expanding areas such as offshore and other marine-based energy systems contribute to sustainable development and the decarbonisation of the economy. Emerging sectors such as the blue bioeconomy and coastal innovation can provide important opportunities for local employment, diversification and entrepreneurship. The Ocean Pact and upcoming Ocean Act will contribute to preserving the ocean's health and its role as a climate regulator.

Europe has highly advanced blue economy sectors, which rely on European technology and know-how. The EU will facilitate an inclusive investment environment by enabling local and Indigenous communities together with regional authorities and local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to **jointly identify their investments needs**, supporting the **mapping of economic development potential and opportunities** in the Arctic, and **fostering sustainable public and private investments**, starting with the blue economy. Building on existing initiatives, the EU will foster a **network of Arctic blue economy and marine technology and research centres** to accelerate innovation and entrepreneurship from the European Arctic and to prepare European blue economy players to a changing Arctic and Baltic seascape.

The EU **works closely with its partners in international fora and on a bilateral level** to boost sustainable fisheries and emerging blue economy sectors.

Internationally, the EU will keep promoting the implementation of the **Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement (CAOFA)**, including the joint scientific programme to improve understanding of the distribution and ecology of fish in the Central Arctic Ocean, and the development of a precautionary exploratory approach as well as a robust high-seas boarding and inspection scheme. The EU will support the sustainable use of fisheries through **all Regional Fisheries Management Organisations**, including those that partially cover Arctic and sub-Arctic waters.

Bilaterally, the EU will continue its close work with **Norway** and the **Faroe Islands** to manage joint stocks in the north-east Atlantic. The EU will also continue coordination with **Iceland**, through the **EU-Iceland Memorandum of Understanding** that contains provisions on marine sustainability, scientific research, the energy transition in the fishing sector and broader Arctic cooperation. The EU works closely with **Greenland**, via the **Sustainable Fisheries**

[9] Memorandum of Understanding signed with Canada on 15 June 2021, with Greenland 30 November 2023, with Norway 21 March 2024, and with the United States on 24 April 2026.

Partnership Agreement, which provides a stable framework for sustainable fishing, scientific collaboration and joint ocean governance.

4.4 Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)

SMEs are **crucial economic actors** in the local Arctic economy. Small firms make up 85% of businesses in the northern sparsely populated areas of Finland, Sweden and Norway.

The EU **supports SMEs in the Arctic through its cohesion policy, InvestEU and the partnership with Greenland**. For example, under InvestEU the European Investment Fund and the European Investment Bank provide EUR 100 million to support SMEs and mid-cap companies with innovation and resource efficiency across several blue economy sectors in Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Another example is the RoboDemo project that boosts the adoption new-generation robotics and smart manufacturing among small- and medium-sized enterprises in the European Arctic to enhance their competitiveness on the global market.

4.5 Sustainable tourism

Tourism in the Arctic is a sector of strategic economic importance that **holds transformative potential for the socio-economic vitality** of the Arctic. It can serve as a crucial catalyst for diverse local jobs and economic diversification, in particular for young people and women. Sustainable tourism **strengthens the resilience of local communities and Indigenous Peoples** and supports local craftsmanship and the creation of local micro-SMEs. However, its growth must be steered in a sustainable and responsible manner. Arctic destinations have a unique opportunity to **anticipate sustainability challenges** by managing visitor flows, encouraging seasonal and geographical dispersal, and balancing tourism development with environmental protection, infrastructure constraints and the rights and needs of local and Indigenous communities.

The EU is working closely with Arctic countries, regions and local stakeholders to **accelerate the transition toward a competitive, sustainable and resilient tourism ecosystem**. This is achieved for instance by supporting capacity building, enhancing strategy cooperation and exchanging best practices between destinations. Sustainable tourism is one of the main areas addressed under Arctic Urban/Regional Cooperation and strategic cooperation with Greenland. The EU also supports projects, such as RETURN, which explores tourism revenue models to support environmental and community resilience through taxes and voluntary payments across the Arctic.

4.6 Research and innovation

Research programmes in the Arctic are critical to better understand the scale of **climate change** and **biodiversity** degradation in the region as well as to support the **green transition and economic development** in the Arctic.

Europe is a **global leader in polar science**, with Horizon Europe, the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation[10], alone contributing nearly EUR 100 million per year. Norway, Iceland, Canada, Greenland and the Faroe Islands participate in Horizon Europe.

[10] Polar and ocean research, European Commission: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/research-area/environment/climate-change-science/polar-and-ocean-research_en

The Arctic is a critical early-warning system for climate destabilisation and biodiversity loss. EU-funded research tracks Arctic tipping points and strengthens early warning and risk management for local food, water and energy systems.

Polar science depends on sustained funding for **shared research infrastructures**, coordinated and equitable access, and a **long-term Arctic observing system**. The Horizon Europe-funded Polar Research Infrastructure Network (POLARIN) brings together research institutions from EU Member States, Norway, Iceland, Canada, the United States and others[11] to share research stations, research vessels, icebreakers, observatories and data infrastructure.

The EU considers the **involvement of Indigenous Peoples** in Arctic science as essential to improve the research and to ensure research results meet Indigenous Peoples' needs. All EU Arctic research consortia are mandated to invite Indigenous Peoples representatives to participate in projects. The EU also supports research that is directly led by Indigenous Communities and addresses their challenges.

The EU is **committed to maintain its position as a leader in Arctic science,** including in the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. The EU remains **a strong proponent of science collaboration and coordination**. The EU will reinforce and expand the European Polar Coordination Office, established in 2024 to make it a central coordination hub for the European polar research community and policymakers.

An EU Polar Research Hub

The reinforced European Polar Coordination Office will foster alignment between research, observation and policy by better connecting existing structures, such as the EU Polar Cluster, optimising access to polar research and infrastructure as well as strengthening coordination between stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples. The hub will also promote an improved science-policy interface through mechanisms like the International Platform for Ocean Sustainability. Through better coordination of research and resources, the EU will further strengthen polar science and reinforce science-based decision-making.

<u>Flagship actions</u> to invest in a connected, clean and innovative Arctic economy.

The EU will

- *Produce a strategic **foresight study on Arctic shipping** routes.*
- *Speed up the implementation of the **Rail Nordica project.***
- *Advance the long-term vision to build a **Pan-Arctic Cable.***
- *Provide **connectivity services over the Arctic through IRIS²** and, with the support of Member States and third countries, activate the polar option of IRIS².*
- *Continue the strong **support for renewable energy and sustainable raw materials projects.***
- *Launch an **initiative to promote local public and private investment in the Arctic** around blue economy sectors.*
- ***Promote sustainable tourism**.*

[11] Participating institutions in Polarin are headquartered in Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Canada, Chile, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, Türkiye, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States.

- *Develop an **EU Polar research hub** to strengthen research coordination and improve the science-policy interface.*

5. An Arctic that works for its people

Today, more than 500 000 EU citizens live in the Arctic, including Sámi in Arctic Europe and Kalaallit of Greenland[12]. The people living in the Arctic are at the centre of the political, security, economic and environmental objectives set out in this strategy.

The EU will **continue to work closely with people living in the Arctic, including with Indigenous Peoples** to guarantee that EU action benefits people in the Arctic and aligns with their own vision for their home.

The EU's presence in the Arctic is carried at local level, and many EU policies are implemented locally, whether by municipalities or regions, by universities and research institutions, or by business owners. The EU will work with local players, including regional representatives, the **Northern Sparsely Populated Areas Network**, the **North Calotte Council**, the **Arctic Six** alliance of universities, **UArctic**, the **Arctic Mayors' Forum**, the **Nordic Council of Ministers**, or the **Arctic Economic Council**, to support building sufficient local governance capacity and the sustainable development of the Arctic at local level.

5.1 Together for a thriving Arctic

The EU is investing substantially in regional development in the Arctic. **EU Cohesion support to the European Arctic amounts to over EUR 1 billion for the 2021–2027 period**.

The Arctic and the northernmost regions in Finland and Sweden benefit from cohesion programmes. Furthermore, the EU Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic and Interreg Aurora **programmes are specific to the Arctic and neighbouring regions** and foster transnational and cross-border cooperation. Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands participate alongside Finland and Sweden in the Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic, while Aurora is a land-based programme involving Finland, Sweden and Norway. Several hundred ongoing projects under these programmes cover a wide range of issues, including climate resilience, innovation, service provision in remote regions as well as the green and digital transitions.

The **Erasmus+ programme** is one of the most impactful ways the EU supports young people with their education. The programme is open to Arctic young people from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Greenland to support their education and training through people-to-people exchanges and cooperation projects. Between 2021-2025, over 89 000 people benefited from Erasmus+ exchange opportunities to and from the European Arctic, out of which close to 32 000 are higher education students and staff members. In the same period, around 2 200 cooperation projects including European Arctic partners were supported. Additionally, the Creative Europe programme contributes to strengthening social cohesion and community resilience, including by showcasing Sami culture.

Targeted social and skills development support

The Interreg programme Aurora includes dedicated funding for Sámi-led projects. An example is the Fierbmi project that works with the Wellbeing Services of County Lapland in Finland and the National Sámi Competence Centre in Norway. The aim is to strengthen cross-border

[12] Greenland Inuit

cooperation between Finnish and Norwegian children and family services and write a handbook on the possibilities and juridical restrictions on cross-border cooperation.

European Social Fund+ support in Finland and Sweden which helps boost employment, skills and social inclusion in the northern sparsely populated areas, with around EUR 280 million in total investment, including about EUR 147 million in EU co-financing. In Finland, around EUR 165 million of supplementary allocation in the northern sparsely populated areas supports employment, lifelong learning and inclusion, complemented by a Just Transition Fund supported project for Sámi employment and skills. In Sweden, around EUR 115 million supports local and regional capacity, cooperation, training and pathways to employment.

The EU **will continue to help municipalities and regions deepen cooperation among Arctic local governments** to address common challenges, share best practices and find new opportunities for sustainable development.

In 2023, the EU established an Arctic municipal cooperation network, the **Arctic Urban-Regional Cooperation** network, bringing together 15 local authorities from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Greenland, Canada and the US to share best practices developed in response to Arctic challenges and respond quickly to emerging needs.

The EU will keep providing support to municipalities and regions on governance, climate resilience, emergency preparedness, culture, social cohesion, youth engagement, education, local economic development and talent attraction.

Expanding regional cooperation in the Arctic

The EU will expand existing cooperation with a new initiative called **Building Resilient International Dialogue and Governance for Arctic Engagement.** The initiative will be led by the **Arctic Mayors' Forum** and will gather 22 towns and cities from across the Arctic to work together on shared priorities. It will enable municipalities and regions to address persistent and emerging challenges while capitalising on new opportunities for sustainable development in the region. Over the next four years, the forum will expand its membership to more interested Arctic municipalities and regions.

5.2 Strengthening engagement with Indigenous Peoples and young people

The partnership with Indigenous Peoples is **based on the principle of free, prior and informed consent** in decisions that may affect them[13].

The EU maintains regular contact with the **Sámi Parliaments** in Finland, Sweden and Norway, with the **Sámi Council** and the **Inuit Circumpolar Council**. A large part of Sápmi, the Sámi homeland, is in the EU. The EU-Sápmi partnership is long ongoing and expanding.

Additionally, the EU **supports the Sámi Council** in developing their capacities, so that it can engage with the EU and other players and do so in their own terms. Several grants under the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund have enabled this ongoing cooperation.

The EU emphasises the importance of local, young and Indigenous perspectives and lived experiences in Arctic policymaking. To facilitate this exchange, the EU organises the Indigenous Peoples Dialogue which offers a platform for discussion on Arctic matters affecting Indigenous Peoples. In the Arctic Youth Dialogue, participants develop youth-driven policy

[13] The EU is committed to this principle through the EU Council Conclusions on Indigenous People adopted in 2017 and the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples in its human rights policy.

recommendations on issues such as climate resilience, social equity, security and sustainable economic development. Several editions of the Forum and Dialogues have taken place in Brussels as well as in Arctic locations in Finland, Sweden and Greenland, with plans for the events to visit all European Arctic countries. The EU will organise regular Arctic Youth Policy Dialogues as part of these events.

To further engage Arctic young people in EU policy making, the EU will set up a **Youth Sounding Board** in Greenland, attached to its office in Nuuk.

5.3 Strengthening democratic resilience and protecting the integrity of information space

Support to local communities also comes through **consistent engagement through strategic communication, high-level visits, as well as monitoring and countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI)**.

Communicating within and with Arctic states is already a priority for the EU. Looking forward, the EU **will further increase its engagement to demonstrate the added value the cooperation and support the EU and Member States bring** to local communities and businesses. A particular focus will be put on youth. Communication will be targeted, locally informed and audience-specific, including through the use of appropriate local channels and, where relevant, local languages. The EU will continue to showcase the tangible results of its policies, programmes and investments in the Arctic, with a particular focus on their benefits for people living in the region.

High-level meetings in the Arctic will also provide useful opportunities to show commitment to the Arctic and deepen dialogue with partners on the ground. Regular Team Europe visits will be encouraged to reinforce coordination and the EU's presence in the region.

The EU stands ready to provide support to Arctic countries to strengthen **information integrity and counter FIMI and disinformation campaigns**, including in election periods**.** The EU will continue to monitor FIMI concerning the Arctic and disclose relevant findings publicly, including on EUvsDisinfo channels. The European Digital Media Observatory is monitoring the information environment and will provide trainings and share best practices with local civil society. The EU will work with EU Arctic states to coordinate, share intelligence and build capacity to ensure free, fair and resilient elections through the European Cooperation Network on Elections and the European Centre for Democratic Resilience. Additionally, EU Arctic states benefit from the Rapid Response System for elections which is a cooperation mechanism between social media platforms and fact-checkers, researchers and civil society organisations to identity content and trends that may pose a threat to electoral integrity. The EU will also address FIMI in the Arctic in existing EU Security and Defence partnerships with Arctic and like-minded countries as well as in the EU-NATO staff-to-staff exchanges.

<u>Flagship Actions</u> to work in partnership with Arctic communities.

The EU will

- ***Continue targeted social support****, including education and skills.*
- ***Strengthen Erasmus+ opportunities for Arctic young people****, through people-to-people exchanges and capacity building in higher education, VET, school and adult education, sport and youth.*

- ***Scale up the Arctic Mayors' Forum*** *through the initiative on Building Resilient International Dialogue and Governance for Arctic Engagement.*
- ***Strengthen the capacities of Indigenous Peoples*** *to engage more effectively with the EU and other actors.*
- ***Promote inclusion, youth engagement and Indigenous Peoples' participation and engagement*** *through the EU Arctic Forum, the Dialogues and regular exchanges.*
- *Set up a* ***Youth Sounding Board*** *attached to the EU Office in Nuuk.*
- *Enhance* ***communication*** *to and with Arctic countries and support to Arctic countries to strengthen* ***democratic resilience and information integrity*** *and counter* ***FIMI*** *and* ***disinformation*** *campaigns.*

Conclusion

The Arctic is part of the EU, and the EU is part of the Arctic. What happens in the region shapes the future of the Union as a whole. With this strategy, the EU sets out its vision of the Arctic as a Northern Neighbourhood: a shared political, economic and strategic space, built together with our partners and the people who call it home.

The EU will establish a framework for deeper collaboration between its Member States and willing, like-minded sovereign partners across the Arctic, to define joint priorities and translate them into jointly agreed concrete policy action. The Commission and the High Representative invite the European Parliament, the Council, and Member States to join this effort and help carry it forward.

A peaceful, stable and resilient Arctic. A prosperous and economically secure Arctic. An Arctic that works for its people. These are not separate ambitions, but one and the same: achieving them will take the EU, its Member States, its partners and all Arctic stakeholders working as one. That is the path to a thriving Arctic and to a stronger, more secure Europe.