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# The Norwegian Government's Arctic Policy

## People, opportunities and Norwegian interests in the Arctic - Abstract

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## Preface

Norway's Arctic policy revolves around security, stability and interest-based international cooperation. For us, foreign and domestic policy converge in the Arctic.

Climate change presents unprecedented global challenges with a particularly strong impact in the Arctic, but this is also accompanied by widespread opportunities for reform and adaptation to a new reality. However, international cooperation is under pressure and protectionism is on the rise. And now, and for some time to come, the multi-layered crisis caused by the corona pandemic will have an impact on all areas of social, economic and political cooperation – in the Arctic as well.

This white paper gives broad consideration to domestic policy issues in the Arctic. North Norway accounts for 35 % of Norway's mainland territory, and 9 % of Norway's population lives north of the Arctic Circle. Responsible economic growth and future-oriented jobs in the north are therefore a matter of national interest. Considering Norway's geopolitical location, this also has strategic significance beyond the demographics. Further developing North Norway as a strong, dynamic and highly competent region is the best way to safeguard Norwegian interests in the Arctic.

Since the early 1970s, urbanisation has led to a relative population decrease in the north compared to the rest of the country, and the last few years have seen a net population decline in North Norway. Dealing with this, and possibly reversing it, will require abandoning traditional approaches that have failed to deliver and seeking new solutions instead.

Resilient towns and municipalities, sustainable business development, infrastructure, competence-building and security are vital to succeed in maintaining a strong region. Sami culture is a valuable part of our national historical heritage in the north and an important component in our Arctic policy. These factors are important to the future and opportunities for young people north of the Arctic Circle. Input from the youth panel established in connection with this white paper is reflected throughout the document.

While the growing international interest in the Arctic creates new opportunities for Norwegian cooperation, it also presents a number of challenges. The Norwegian Government will continue to emphasise the importance of the rule of law and strong multilateral structures. There is a well-functioning legal regime in place in the Arctic. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea provides the fundamental framework, for instance as regards environmental protection, research, the delimitation of the outer limits of the continental shelf, and shipping. Norway supports cooperation with non-Arctic states based on respect for international law and within the framework of existing cooperation structures.

Nato is the cornerstone of Norway's security and our defence and deterrence policy is based on effective national defence and the guarantee of Allied reinforcements in the event of war or crisis.

The white paper underlines the importance of bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation with our neighbours and partners in the Arctic. The Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Council of Baltic Sea States, the Northern Dimension and the EU's cross-border programmes provide a solid architecture for dialogue and practical cooperation.

The impacts of climate change in the Arctic are affecting countries both in and outside the region. The UN Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement provide the overall direction for Norway's Arctic policy. We must find a good balance between the exploitation and protection of living marine resources. As maritime nations, the Arctic states have a special responsibility to take action to ensure healthy and productive oceans.

A successful Arctic policy will depend on experience, understanding and facts, and this white paper is based on over a hundred conversations with relevant stakeholders. The Arctic remains Norway's most important area of strategic responsibility, and the Government will work to maintain its established security policy, promote observant diplomacy and cultivate a strong, innovative and sustainable North Norway. Our political choices in the north will be founded on presence, vigilance and knowledge.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Overarching goals

Norway's Arctic policy focuses on the international picture, relations with neighbouring countries in the Barents region, the northernmost regions of Finland, Norway and Sweden (known in Nordic countries as the North Calotte), and the development of North Norway. Further developing North Norway as a strong, dynamic and highly competent region is the best way to safeguard Norwegian interests in the Arctic. The region is rich in natural resources that contribute to economic growth for the country as a whole, and the economy and social development of this region are therefore a matter of national importance.

Norway's Arctic policy is based on a long tradition of safeguarding Norway's interests in the north through broad-based international cooperation. The Arctic will continue to be Norway's most important area of strategic responsibility. The Government will maintain its engagement in broad-based, proactive international cooperation in the north and in global arenas where the Arctic is discussed. This includes facilitating cross-border local and regional cooperation in the north.