

Karelia Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2021-2027 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Summary

The Karelia Cross-Border Cooperation Programme 2021-2027 has been undergoing a strategic environmental assessment (SEA). The purpose of the assessment was to ensure that the environmental impacts are assessed and duly considered during the preparation and approval of the programme. The strategic environmental assessment was prepared in accordance with the directive 2001/42/EC on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment as well as with the corresponding Finnish legislation (SEA Act 200/2005 and its complementary regulation (347/2005).

The assessment was drafted in parallel with the programme document giving the strategic environmental assessment an opportunity to effect on the programme strategy. The process was launched in December 2020 by the Programming Committee of the Karelia Cross-Border Cooperation Programme. In Finland the regional councils of the programme region and the SEA groups working under them were involved in the process. The environmental legislation in the Russian Federation does not equally recognise programme level strategic environmental assessment as on the EU side. However, environmental experts and authorities were involved to the process from the Republic of Karelia.



The Karelia Cross-Border Cooperation programme area comprises of three regions in Finland, Oulu region, Kainuu and Northern Karelia and of the Republic of Karelia in Russia. The nature in the programme area is diversified and vulnerable.

Considering the state and the future of the environment on the programme area there are challenges. The loss of the biodiversity due the large-scale and intensive utilization of the forests is a serious concern to be taken into account. Challenges related to the waste management and circular economy as well as to the water management are typical for the programme region. Climate change also poses a threat to the region's environment.

The Programming Committee has defined five priorities for the Karelia Cross-Border Cooperation Programme:

- Priority 1: Competitive Regional Economy
- Priority 2: Environment
- Priority 3: Tourism
- Priority 4: Culture

- Priority 5: People to people

For each priority one to four specific objectives are defined. The comments of the environmental experts were taken into account when deciding on the programme strategy.

At this stage of the programme development, the exact locations, nature and impacts of the actions cannot be identified, as this depends on specific projects that will be implemented. Accordingly, the approach of the environmental assessment was to provide an indication of the range of potential impacts and suggest ways in which negative impacts can be mitigated.

As a result of the Priority 1: Competitive Regional Economy the introduction of new technologies can increase production and thus place an additional burden on nature. Also, increasing cross border trade may have negative environmental impacts. Then again the new technologies and innovations can be more energy and resource efficient which in turn can save natural resources. If environmental friendliness is seen as a competitive advantage positive impacts can be expected.

The Priority 2: Environment has a clear potential for positive environmental impacts as attention is paid to more efficient ways to use energy and polluting energy sources are being replaced by cleaner ones. Also, water pollution is reduced and the quality of drinking water is improved, the amount of waste going to landfills is reduced, energy savings are foreseen due the re-using of material, and the quality of the urban living environment is improved. If infrastructure projects are implemented, there may be negative environmental impacts during the construction phase.

The Priority 3: Tourism may increase tourism, which in turn can cause additional burden on nature, especially in nature parks. The negative effects can be reduced by emphasizing the development of tourism in an environmentally sustainable way.

The Priority 4: Culture is foreseen to increase the capacities of cultural stakeholders, which may increase the cross-border interaction, which then may have negative impacts environmentally. On the other hand, the intensification of cultural activities can increase the appreciation of nature

The Priority 5: People to people is considered to have positive or neutral environmental impacts in general.

In the strategic environmental assessment, the comparing is made between the chosen programme strategy and a zero-strategy. The zero-strategy intends that the Programme is not implemented. Comparing the chosen strategy to the zero-strategy it can be stated that the chosen strategy is better both from the perspective of the programme area and the environment. When implemented, the programme has the potential to prevent threats and enable positive development for nature as well as tackle the identified development challenges

Programme's monitoring function shall produce regular information about the performance of the Programme and environment shall be one element, key focus being on mitigating measures.