

NORTH OSTROBOTHNIAN, ACTIVE, GOOD, AND FUNCTIONAL

Sustainable Vitality by Investing in Well-Being

In North Ostrobothnia, the welfare economy has the potential to increase sustainable well-being and economic growth. Promoting well-being focuses on tracking effectiveness. At the regional and municipal level, decisions are made based on the welfare impact and in accordance with the principles of the welfare economy. The region invests in well-being, responding to social challenges caused by unusual conditions, increasing physical activity, and improving exercise opportunities. The North Ostrobothnia Welfare Agreement 2019-2025 gives direction to the welfare work in the region and its municipalities. The international success of North Ostrobothnian welfare innovations is promoted.

Effortless Everyday Life for Children, Young People, and Families

The well-being of North Ostrobothnian children, young people, and families is created in everyday operational environments. The Regional Programme binds actors to the goals of the Child Strategy, regional implementation, and the creation of cooperation structures. Mental health, mental well-being skills and readiness are systematically strengthened in different environments from early childhood. Accessibility and interoperability of mental health services for children and young people is being developed. The expansion of compulsory education strengthens the well-being and social inclusion of young people at risk of exclusion. Education is regularly evaluated and developed. Regional cooperation between education providers is being strengthened. High-quality educational environments are the region's pull factors and they are being invested in.

Opportunity for All to Participate

Residents of the region are actively offered opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. Municipalities are enablers of local participation. The aim is for the residents to be able to participate in developing the municipality and in solving local problems. Participation should be easy, so that as many people as possible can participate at their will and participation feels attractive and rewarding. The region supports its residents to influence common issues alone and together, either in their own group, in the immediate surroundings, in the local community, or in society at large. Young people's opinions are considered. Young people bring up things that are important to them. As matters proceed, they have positive consequences.

Diverse and Rich Culture

In North Ostrobothnia, culture creates well-being, strengthens vitality, and secures a sustainable lifestyle. Culture is close to people's everyday lives, and it is a central part of everyone's happy and active life. Building a personal and vital, life-long cultural relationship is encouraged. Equal and diverse opportunities are offered to achieve this. Culture is one key element of the comprehensive well-being of North Ostrobothnians. Customer journeys for cultural well-being are identified and they are being developed in a diversified manner. Culture and creative industries provide the area with pull and keep factors, innovative value creation, jobs, and prosperity. The region looks interesting through its culture. Northerness, cultural characteristics, stories, distinctive events, and places increase the attractiveness of the area. Culture also offers ways to tackle ecological crises and build a sustainable lifestyle.

High-Quality Local Nature and Strong Nature Connection

Diverse and prosperous nature is the foundation for the economic system, livelihoods, and health. When well maintained, the region's most important ecosystems, such as forests, bogs, and running waters, provide well-being to the North Ostrobothnian communities. Cosy green environments and nature destinations revitalise, move, and unite people in everyday life. The options for outdoor exercise in nature are being improved by developing the accessibility of the areas and the quality of the natural landscape as well as the environment, routes, and safety. New cooperation structures are needed to strengthen nature connections so that functional, nature-based operating models can be rooted in, for example, educational and social work. A high-quality living environment keeps people in their home municipality, directs lifestyles in a more sustainable direction, and increases attractiveness. The sea, lakes, rivers, and surface waters are important habitats for many species and, therefore, it is important to maintain and improve them. Attention must also be paid to water quality through various restoration and reconstruction measures in drainage basins. The diverse nature, forests, and running waters of North Ostrobothnia form an excellent setting for the hunting and fishing economy and nature tourism linked to it.

Equal and Safe North Ostrobothnia

The goal of North Ostrobothnia is to secure the equality of residents and sustainable well-being for all population and age groups. This is achieved when people have a good ability to work, study, and act and they feel that they can influence their own matters. Safety is the region's strength. Important safety themes include the old people's housing safety, the prevention of young people's exclusion, reducing social inequality, developing sparsely populated areas, and the availability of digital services. Especially elder people are at risk of digital exclusion, but so are other target groups such as children and young people. Activities focus on the promotion of sustainable lifestyles, mental health and communality, housing safety, health security, and the prevention of various environmental problems. The goal of the wellbeing services county is that everyone receives quality health care and social services equally and that regional and socio-economic disparities in well-being are reduced. Municipalities are being supported in the reform of healthcare and social welfare as well as employment and economic development services, so that the entire region will be equally acknowledged.

AN ACCESSIBLE REGION OF STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Multi-Location and Location Independent Everyday Life, Work, and Study

The aim of multi-location work and study is to create a region where people can study and work in different parts of the region according to their situation in life. This requires a new kind of development of digital and physical services. Digital service concepts in the health and service sector must be developed to be more flexible from the customer's point of view. They should also support customers' responsibility for their own well-being. The revolution of work is going to affect North Ostrobothnia in many ways. In the future, the increasingly fast-changing work emphasises multiple skills, resilience, and learning identity. At its best, the revolution can effortlessly combine work and leisure time. The new situation provides areas outside the city centres with new development opportunities. Improving working conditions and well-being at work is part of the region's attractiveness. The relatively large and young population provides good potential for business operations and the reform of education. The barriers between globality and localness are coming down and supporting this development must continue. The North Ostrobothnia region can be a pioneer in developing multi-location work and utilising its opportunities.

Access to Education, Services, and Hobbies

Raising the competence level of the residents of North Ostrobothnia requires continuous diversification and strengthening of competence, as well as the anticipatory and needs-based development of learning environments and the regional education system. Flexible study paths and educational solutions facilitate accessibility to education. The multi-campus model makes it possible for the higher education needed by the region and economy to be agilely brought to a locality through multimodal and contact teaching. The time and location independent learning and education made possible by digitalisation requires the development of learning environments and pedagogies that support it. In addition to digital accessibility, the educational and recreational opportunities of children and young people in particular affect the faith in the future and well-being of young people in the region. It is important to increase low-threshold leisure activities, secure immediate services and develop club activities in schools. Accessibility is being developed with new models that combine physical services and digitalisation while considering the needs of different groups.

Broad Embracement of Digitalisation

Digitalisation and the multicentricity of the regional structure secure and promote the availability of services and the development of specialised services. The effects of digitalisation are visible in many different areas of everyday life. Digital solutions have become an established part of everyday school life, work, leisure activities, and transactions with public authorities. They can increase the smooth running of everyday life and the well-being of individuals, but they require adequate digital skills from the user. Platforms enable location independent work in a new way. The co-development of the public sector, municipalities, and residents can be promoted through electronic platforms. Equality must be considered when embracing digitalisation. A functioning telecommunications infrastructure is a key enabler for location independent work, education, and leisure time. One of the key conditions for developing accessibility in North Ostrobothnia is a comprehensive mobile network alongside a fibre-based network covering the entire region. With the combination of these, a data network of the future can be built. The goal is to achieve one gigabit of internet speed throughout the region.

Enabling Regional and Demographic Structure

In North Ostrobothnia, enabling regional and demographic structure means strong regions and districts that interact not only with adjacent areas and other regions, but also internationally. North Ostrobothnia and the Oulu region play an important role as the northernmost node in Europe in the Baltic Sea and Barents regions. The aim is to develop the region based on a balanced population structure, strengthening national and international development zones. Regional development measures must be allocated in as flexible and needs-based manner as possible, considering the structural and operational differences between the regions. A balanced regional structure requires not only the strengthening of the attractiveness of urban and regional centres, but also wide-ranging interaction between urban and rural areas. The balanced regional structure is complemented by the service network provided by the municipal centres. The network-like structure does not emphasise boundaries or hierarchy, but effortless cooperation. Good accessibility and balanced regional structure are based on a well-maintained transport network and reliable transport and delivery services, as well as a comprehensive fibre-based network covering prospective telecommunications needs. The aim is to level out gender distribution in education and different industries.

ENTREPRENEURIAL AND REGENERATIVE NORTH OSTROBOTHNIA

Improving Preconditions for Entrepreneurship and Supporting Changes at Work

Strong entrepreneurship policy amounts to effective regional development policy that is created locally and regionally. The success of entrepreneurship requires active measures to promote companies' ability to grow, internationalise, and employ. Improving sustainable development, responsibility, and industries is important in every line of business. Licensing processes, the availability of labour, the risk and high cost of employment, recruitment competence, as well as the financial ability to respond to rapidly changing situations have been identified as obstacles to the growth of companies. Increasing regulation and corporate obligations to submit reports require new expertise from companies and their management. Entrepreneurs' resilience at work must be supported. Remote locations, long distances, and challenging winter conditions increase costs for companies and weaken competitiveness. The success and employment of a region will continue to be increasingly based on SMEs and micro enterprises. There is a need for effective measures to promote employment in the region to ensure rapid employment, increase employment rate, and secure the availability of labour. The transfer of employment and economic development services to municipalities during 2024 is a major reform for both municipalities and companies.

Strengthening Resilience in Entrepreneurship and Business Life

Industrial policy is carried out as part of the basic operations of municipalities and in future it will involve measures for the promotion of employment. Regions need to find their strengths and create their own operational networks. Regenerating businesses through anticipation, embracing digitalisation, and fixing control mechanisms increases companies' resilience. In the coming years, special emphasis will be placed on corporate environmental liability as well as social and administrative responsibility. The labour and the companies' employment needs require investments in education and its transformational capability. Universities, higher education institutions and other educational organizations, municipal development companies as well as the other economic services in the region are the closest development and innovation partners for SMEs. Research and innovation strategies, business-centred innovation services, business incubators, and experimental environments are significant business environments in which new and innovative know-how and competitiveness can be created in a business-oriented way. It is more important than ever before to link SMEs to regional innovation ecosystems. Telecommunications networks are the largest significant investment in the digitalisation and regeneration of companies' operations, new business models, national and international marketing, multi-location lifestyle, and in future, the creation of responsibility reports.

Developing Pro-Business Attitude

Business operations and related processes such as licensing, taxation and surveillance should be as seamless as possible. The digitalisation of public services streamlines companies' regulatory processes and makes the service more effective. The public sector in the region needs to be actively built as a platform for customer-oriented ecosystems that include both public and private service providers. This multi-provider model is enabled by information and service needs that move through open APIs and are used with the customer's consent. The digital infrastructure related to the seamlessness of things must be anticipated in the planning as the development needs of telecommunications networks. The aim is that licensing and other administrative practices do not slow down the construction of networks. Regional and national

advocacy for entrepreneurs is important for strengthening the region's competitiveness. Companies are active partners with the public sector. The goal is the same for both – success.

Diversifying and Streamlining Entrepreneurship Pathways

Basic requirements for entrepreneurship are excellent in Finland. There are various forms of entrepreneurial opportunities. Business activities and work are increasingly location independent due to telecommunications and digitalisation. Enabling and experimenting with entrepreneurial models must be supported by society. In North Ostrobothnia, the average age of entrepreneurs is around 50, and actions are required to guarantee the continuity of business operations. Opportunities for encouraging young people to become entrepreneurs in their place of residence or in Finland in general must be considered. In managing the migration trends in the region, the opportunity for entrepreneurship requires the introduction of entrepreneurship education in comprehensive schools. Raising a new generation of entrepreneurs is development of vitality at its best. It is important that local entrepreneurs are actively involved in the activities of educational institutes and communities. They give young people their own examples of entrepreneurship. Opportunities for part-time entrepreneurship or entrepreneurship try-outs during school days would guarantee the continuity of companies' operations. In future, the potential of immigrants to become entrepreneurs must be better strengthened to maintain and develop businesses. Over the next four years, there is going to be a need to effectively support business transfers in the region.

INTERNATIONALLY ATTRACTIVE AND SUCCESSFUL NORTH OSTROBOTHNIA

Internationally Competitive and Attractive Place to Settle in

The vitality and attractiveness of North Ostrobothnia is being developed to attract new residents, students, tourists, businesses, and investments to the region. Vitality means growth generated by the region's emerging businesses, companies' decisions to locate in the region, investments, increases in jobs, strong attractiveness, and new residents. In addition to high-quality business support services, the business environment, networks, and research environments that support companies' operations, influence location decisions.

The attractiveness and high-quality, diverse provision of study opportunities at the University of Oulu, universities of applied sciences, and vocational schools are the key to attracting students.

Developing the fascination also increases the region's attractiveness internationally. North Ostrobothnia offers a wide range of attractive housing options. A wide variety of leisure activities, stimulating environment, and the availability of services that respond to the needs of the residents increase the attractiveness of the region.

North Ostrobothnia is being developed into the country's most attractive, all-season resort with popular and accessible destinations for both domestic and international tourists.

International and Attractive Region for Skilled Labour

Large investments in, for example, the energy, bio, and mining sectors are expected in North Ostrobothnia and Northern Finland. The skilled labour shortage is a growing barrier in several different industries, which requires global recruitment and international seasonal employees. The working life skills of international labour must be supported in the recruitment process. Attention must be paid to the internationalisation capabilities of companies, the added value that international experts bring to businesses, and supporting companies in exploiting these opportunities. Additionally, actions are needed to ensure integration. In a successful integration process, a person attaches to their place of residence and work, which is a key issue from the employer's perspective. Residence permit processes for those starting work must be developed and accelerated. The aim is to strengthen integration of international students and working-age population into the labour market in Finland. North Ostrobothnia aims to become an attractive region where people want to work, study and live.

Innovation Networks, Strong Ecosystems, and RDI Activities

RDI activities in North Ostrobothnia are promoted through cross-sectoral cooperation between companies and research institutes. The aim is to accelerate the business activities of SMEs. The Smart Specialisation of North Ostrobothnia is a region-based innovation policy, with the aim of creating innovation ecosystems to support economic regeneration in the area. Cooperation between research and education institutes and companies to generate and implement innovations are key pillars of the strategy. North Ostrobothnia participates in EU-level networks that support specialisation. These networks can help develop business activities in the region. Higher education institutions and their ecosystems are innovation engines in their regions, generating new knowledge and skilled labour. Research infrastructures are essential prerequisites for successful and effective research and development of the business environment. Significant RDI requirements are related to, for example, bio and circular economy, energy production, and transport. North Ostrobothnia participates in developing nationally significant clusters, such as a battery cluster and a hydrogen cluster.

Regenerative, Prosperous, and Climate-Smart North Ostrobothnia

- Digital services and products
- Health and well-being industry
- Regenerative and low-emission industry

The Smart Specialisation of North Ostrobothnia

- Sustainable construction and mobility
- Innovative bio and circular economy
- Smart food production

International – Attractive – Networked

Transport and Digitalisation from the Perspective of International Competitiveness

North Ostrobothnia is a traffic junction at the intersection of the Baltic Sea and the Arctic. The Bothnian Arc at the bottom of the Baltic Sea forms the most significant concentration of industry, research, and know-how in Northern Europe. Large investments in the forest, metal, and mining industries in Northern Finland will significantly increase both freight and passenger transport volumes in the coming years.

In compliance with the TEN-T Regulation, the North Sea-Baltic Core Network Corridor has been extended from Helsinki through Oulu, Tornio and Haparanda (the Bothnian Arc) to Luleå in Sweden. The electrification of the Kemi-Laurila-Haparanda line opens a rail connection for freight and passenger

transport through Northern Sweden to Europe and the Arctic Ocean. Increasing capacity requires the construction of a double-track line from Tampere towards the North and completing the Seinäjoki-Oulu double-track line. Finland is committed to developing its TEN-T Core Network to comply with the Regulation by 2030.

Highway 4 in Finland is a class I main road and part of the TEN-T Core Network as part of the Bothnian Corridor. The service level of main road 4 must be raised to meet the standards of the TEN-T Regulation. Oulu will become a multimodal TEN-T urban node in Northern Finland in compliance with the TEN-T Guidelines Regulation. Additionally, the aim is to make Port of Oulu and Oulu airport part of the Core Network.

Functional travel and transport chains as well as the accessibility of nodes are key development objectives for the transport system. By developing the service level of nodes, it will be possible to streamline travel chains and increase the attractiveness of public transport chains and thus increase the use of sustainable modes of mobility.

SUSTAINABLY GROWING NORTH OSTROBOTHNIA

Developing an operational environment that enables sustainable growth simultaneously considers climate change mitigation and adaptation, the protection of carbon sinks as well as maintaining biodiversity, a good state of water bodies, and green environments. In accordance with the measures outlined in the region's Climate Roadmap, North Ostrobothnia invests extensively in sustainable growth in various sectors. National and international networks and partnerships are important for the effectiveness of the measures. The goals of the sustainably growing North Ostrobothnia reach into other themes of the Regional Programme.

Regeneration and Innovation Based on the Bio and Circular Economy

The abundant natural resources of North Ostrobothnia are used sustainably. Other key things are the protection of the ecosystems and the improvement and development of the state and integrated utilisation of water bodies. The bioeconomy benefits the region's growth centres and rural areas in many ways. The most important industries in the region are agriculture and forestry, chemical and mechanical wood manufacturing, as well as food manufacturing. Major bioeconomy projects and changes in the raw materials for biorefinery systems are under way in North Ostrobothnia and its surrounding areas. In industrial-scale processes, side streams can provide new, profitable business activities for SMEs. Increasing amounts of research information and innovations open new processing opportunities for value-added products and provide the facilities for new low-carbon business operations. Companies in cooperation with RDI and the public sector are actively developing the bio and circular economy. There are several ecosystems based on circular economy under development in the region. Funding demo and pilot projects is essential for putting research into practice. Access to the region and international markets requires new investments.

Efficient Land Use and Low-Emission Mobility

Sustainable growth requires both long-term and short-term actions. In long-term solutions, the function of land use is to ensure the preconditions for low-emission mobility, bio and circular economy and the production of renewable energy. At the same time, land use plays a central role in climate change mitigation and adaptation, the protection of carbon sinks, creating a diverse green environment, and

maintaining a good state of water bodies. Construction and land planning solutions must be prepared for increasing extremes of weather and other changes and risks caused by climate change.

Sustainable, Efficient, and Low-Emission Energy Production

North Ostrobothnia is closely involved in developing future energy sources and in solving the challenges caused by the energy transition. The production and storage of fossil-free energy, smart energy systems, and energy efficiency are being developed and increased in the region. The role of RDI activities as an enabler of land planning solutions, companies, and new technologies is significant in the sustainable growth of energy production. The energy transition offers new, significant opportunities for municipalities and cities in North Ostrobothnia, which requires extensive operational environment support.

Nearly a quarter of North Ostrobothnia's greenhouse gas emissions are caused by district heating and electricity consumption. The importance of peat in energy production is declining. A socially and economically just transition for the peat industry and security of energy supply are key issues to be resolved. In energy production based on combustion, peat is mainly replaced by wood. The estimated reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 is 700 kt of CO₂e. A steel manufacturer SSAB in Raahe is part of the HYBRIT project based on hydrogen technology. If implemented, fossil-free steel production would reduce Finland's greenhouse gas emissions by 7 percent. Nearly 40 percent of the country's wind energy is generated in North Ostrobothnia and production capacity will increase. The aim of the region is to promote sustainable development of the wind energy industry. In the Regional Programme, the locations of wind power plants are planned with green infrastructure and ecological corridors in mind. The production of biogas offers the strongly agricultural region new opportunities for the regional economy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Regenerative Agriculture

North Ostrobothnia is a nationally important agricultural region. Agriculture is a major employer and income generator in many regions, but many farms face acute problems. Developing agricultural industries is key to improving the situation. Securing agriculture and food production and increasing profitability is important for the security of food supply throughout the country. The food economy in North Ostrobothnia is committed to sustainability and supporting the operations that ensure it. The activities will comprehensively assess and provide for the challenges and opportunities posed by climate change in the food industry and find ways to respond to these changes through sustainable production and consumption. Agriculture has an essential role in climate change mitigation as a carbon sink. Through regeneration and innovation, the ability of agriculture to reduce the climate and environmental impact of food production is emphasised. In the future, the importance of agriculture as a carbon sink will increase.