GENERATION BARENTS 2026

30-31 October 2026, Oulu, Finland

YOUTH STATEMENT

We, more than 80 young people from Northern Norway, Northern Sweden and Northern Finland, gathered at Generation Barents 2026 to define our priorities for the future of youth cooperation in the High North.

At this turning point for cooperation in our region, our message is clear: cross-border youth cooperation must continue. We share histories, cultures and challenges. We want to shape our future together while respecting our different identities and perspectives.

Drawing on discussions bringing together different nationalities and regions, we call on governments, decision-makers, youth councils and regional organisations to act on the following priorities:

Inclusive youth participation and representation

Cooperation must be open to everyone, including young people outside youth councils and political organisations. We want diverse representation from all northern peoples, cultures and regions, including national minorities, and wider Nordic participation.

We call for open applications, wider promotion through institutions and accessible information. Distance, cost, population size or limited resources must not decide who can participate in international youth cooperation. Travel support and funding must give every young person and youth council a realistic opportunity to take part.

We want a community built on mutual care, respect and open-mindedness, where newcomers can become involved. Cooperation must never become exclusive, elitist or controlled by a closed group.

Meaningful youth influence in decision-making

We want real influence over the decisions, projects and priorities shaping our region, not only invitations to activities. Young people and young leaders must be represented and actively involved. Our perspectives must be taken seriously and prioritised.

We call for legal requirements for youth involvement in decision-making and stronger regional and county voices in national government. We want to develop common regional positions without erasing different opinions, local identities or national interests.

Participation must be informed and voluntary. Young people need knowledge of decisions and their consequences, not pressure to accept responsibilities they do not feel prepared for. Our involvement must produce visible change, not additional processes without results.

Culture, sports and cross-border exchanges

We call for recognition and support for culture, sport and youth exchanges as core ways to build lasting relationships and mutual understanding. Shared activities must turn cooperation into practical work. Active cultural work and economic cooperation initiatives must continue, alongside other forms of cooperation.

Activities need funding, good planning, exchange partners and accessible information. Surveys should help identify young people's interests, and opportunities must be actively promoted.

We call for continued annual conferences such as Generation Barents and more international, in-person meeting places. Long distances make coordinated meeting places, committed organisers and better travel opportunities essential.

Continuity and future of High North youth cooperation

Youth cooperation must have a permanent, secure foundation, a clear mission and reliable annual funding that does not depend on changing political will. Countries must contribute fairly. We want stronger collaboration with organisations sharing our goals and values.

We call for a cross-border umbrella and support network for youth councils, including greater support for councils in Sweden due to the lack of a municipal law mandating local and regional youth councils. Each council must retain its identity, freedom and independence; support must not become control through hierarchy or strict rules. Councils need realistic support adapted to different cultural, legal and organisational circumstances.

Cooperation must remain youth-led, politically non-partisan and non-commercial, with ecological and sustainable values. We must preserve freedom of movement and communication across northern borders, remove harmful political barriers that divide us, and prevent party politics and global politics from dividing our cooperation. We also call for facilities, housing and jobs that give young people opportunities to develop their lives in the High North.

Open dialogue, communication and concrete action

We call for a formal, recurring forum for open dialogue with decision-makers, dedicated contacts linking northern youth and government, and task forces focused on northern youth issues.

In conclusion, we call on governments, decision-makers and regional actors to turn these priorities into action with us. Protect our relationships, provide lasting support and keep opportunities open to everyone. We want more international cooperation and more places where young people can meet, learn and build their future together.

Keep our cooperation alive. Give every young person a chance to take part. We are stronger together.