

Civil Society and cross-border cooperation between Norway and Russia

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Summary

This report looks at cross-border cooperation among civil society actors in Norway and Russia since the mid-1990s, in relation to the development of bilateral relation between Norway and Russia at a state-level. We look at organizations that are based in the High North border region, and that have offered various health and social services in Murmansk Oblast over decades. Some of these organizations have cooperated closely with Russian health authorities, receiving funding from Russian authorities, private donors, and sometimes from abroad (mainly Norway).

Preface

This report is a part of the research project “Adapting to a changing society. The case of civil society in the Murmansk region”. The project (2020–2023) is financed by The Research Council of Norway and answers a call for research on social- and health related topics in the Russian-Norwegian cooperation within the Barents region. The aim of the project is to study civil society engagement in social and the public health domain in a border region. The focus is on non-profit organizations in Murmansk region, and how they have adapted to changing legal, political, and socioeconomic circumstances since 2000. This also includes the changes in cross-border cooperation towards the Norwegian neighbor region. Our work was originally organized in 4 work packages, with the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of civil society in the Murmansk region?
2. How is civil society in Murmansk region affected by national policies, regulations and laws?
3. How has changes in the political climate affected ties between civil society in Murmansk region and Norway?
4. How has internal and external changes and politics affected cross border cooperation between civil society in Murmansk and Norway?

The Norwegian Research Center - NORCE is the lead partner, and The Luzin Institute for Economic Studies of the Kola Science Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Apatity, Murmansk region was a cooperating partner up to 31 March 2022. Due to the Russian war in Ukraine and the subsequent suspension of all bilateral research cooperation between Norway and Russia in accordance with the statement of the Norwegian Research Council, the institutional cooperation within this project ended. By that time, data collection in Russia had stopped, and we had to rely on already gathered data. All further contact with the Russian researchers has taken place on an individual basis, without the Russian institution involved. This period has been challenging for all the participants and for finalizing the project. We want to thank the researchers from Russia Lyudmila Ivanova, Larissa Riabova, and Svetlana Britvina for their valuable contribution in collecting statistical data, conducting interviews, following the media debate on our research topics, giving context and knowledge to discussions as well as co-authoring articles and presentations.

This report and Nygaard (2023) sum up our work in the 4 original work packages, while a third report (Nygaard, Kårtveit, Normann, 2023) presents the additional data and analysis made because of the expansion of the project to also cover the covid – 19 pandemics.

Summary

This report looks at cross-border cooperation among civil society actors in Norway and Russia since the mid-1990s, in relation to the development of bilateral relation between Norway and Russia at a state-level. We look at organizations that are based in the High North border region, and that have offered various health and social services in Murmansk Oblast over decades. Some of these organizations have cooperated closely with Russian health authorities, receiving funding from Russian authorities, private donors, and sometimes from abroad (mainly Norway).

Specifically, we look at five organizations that have been active on cross-border cooperation between Norway and Russia: the Norwegian People's Aid-NPA; SOS Children's Villages; Women's Congress of the Kola Peninsula; the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. While different in profile and structure, there are some similarities in how these organizations have operated.

First of all, these organizations take part in several small-scale projects, often starting with short-term, highly localized forms of work, sometimes building into more long-term projects. The canteens run by the Red Cross represent one such activity. The SPAtex store and job-training courses run by the Salvation Army another. Second, they build on work that their cooperating partners are already doing in Norway, and the skill sets and experiences of their local members. The Salvation Army job training project was a direct duplication of a similar project first tested in Kirkenes. The NPAs engagement with helping people with disabilities and their caretakers to achieve greater mobility and self-reliance, relies on the professional skills and personal commitments of the NPA-volunteers based in Kirkenes. This has also been the case with projects aimed at promoting broader societal change, such as the establishment of women's crisis centers, combined with public campaigns against domestic violence. Locally rooted cooperation across the border has been focused on addressing specific, everyday problems, such as hunger, unemployment, and health care needs, through concrete actions.

Since February 2022, institutional cooperation between Norwegian and Russian SONPOs has been shut down. While official, institutional cooperation across the border is no longer possible, some individuals who have established personal ties across the border, stay in touch with each other. At a local level, cross-border cooperation depends largely on informal, personal relations between individuals involved. As such, local organizations based in Sør-Varanger, or local branches of national organizations that retain informal relations across the border, may be well placed to be the first organizations to re-establish civil society cooperation between Norway and Russia sometime in the future, if political considerations allow for it.

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1. Introduction

This report is a part of the research project “Adapting to a changing society. The case of civil society in the Murmansk region”. The project (2020–2023) is financed by the Research Council of Norway and answers a call for research on social- and health related topics in the Russian-Norwegian cooperation within the Barents region.

The Norwegian Research Center - NORCE is the Lead partner, and Kola Science Center in Murmansk region, Russia was a cooperating partner up to 2022 when all institutional cooperation stopped as an answer to the sanctions on Norwegian-Russian research cooperation, following the war in Ukraine. The Russian partner has contributed with interviews and collection of data on the Russian side and took part in the discussions around the analysis.

The aim of this project is to study civil society engagement in social and the public health domain in a border region. The focus is on socially oriented non-profit organizations (SONPOs) in Murmansk region, and how they have adapted to changing legal, political, and socioeconomic circumstances in the Murmansk region since 2000. This also includes the changes in cross-border co-operation towards the Norwegian neighbor region.

This report will explore cross-border cooperation among civil society actors in Norway and Russia since the mid-1990s, in relation to the development of bilateral relations between Norway and Russia at a state-level. Other reports and articles within this project, deal with the present situation for social oriented non-profit organizations in the Murmansk region, and the peculiar circumstances of covid affecting civil society on both sides of the border.

Civil society commonly refers to “organizations that are not associated with government— including schools and universities, advocacy groups, professional associations, churches, and cultural institutions” (Ingram 2020).¹ In some contexts, the line between government institutions and civil society is not always clear-cut. Civil society organization may receive funding from, respond to calls from, and operate within perimeters set by national and sub-national governments. In very different ways, this is that case in both Norway and Russia.

Under these circumstances, it is naturally to assume that the activities of non-governmental organizations within their own communities, and especially their cross-border activities and collaborations, will be affected by politics, and by the political relations between the countries involved. With that as a starting point, this report seeks to address the following questions:

How has changes in the political climate affected ties between civil society in the Murmansk region and in Norway?

What characterizes locally grounded cooperation across the border, between organizations based in Sør-Varanger, Finnmark, and in the Murmansk region?

What are the trends in Norway-Russia cross-border civil society cooperation over the years?

¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/04/06/civil-society-an-essential-ingredient-of-development/>

When approaching these questions, with a focus on cross-border cooperation rooted in the local border community of Kirkenes, the municipal center of Sør-Varanger, it can be useful to distinguish between political currents and aspiration at a national level, and at a local/regional level.

The politics of cross-border relations in the region of East-Finnmark, and the municipality of Sør-Varanger sometimes differ from that at a national level, and local cross border cooperation can be informed by both. For some types of projects, changes in the political climate can impact access to funding, while other types of projects are unaffected. At the same time, if political changes at a national level are not reflected at the local level, they may have little impact on people's willingness and enthusiasm for cross-border cooperation at the local level.

As a premise for the report, we will present a thesis that local politics on cross-border relations, as well as cross border civil society cooperation are shaped by convivial aspirations. Conviviality refers to a capacity to live together, to share certain spaces and enjoy each other's company across cultural/ethnic and religious divides. It also relates to the ability to accommodate and embrace difference in a way that enrich people's lives (Neal et.al. 2019). The term is most commonly used with reference to large, urban multicultural communities. However, it may well be used with reference to small-scale communities characterized with high levels of diversity, such as the small border town of Kirkenes. In a cross-border setting, the term may be used with reference to organizations that collaborate closely, over a long period of time, involving a small group of people that establish personal connections across the border.

This first part of this report is based on a close reading of research literature, open government documents and evaluation reports on volunteer work and civil society in Russian, and on cross-border cooperation between civil society organizations in Norway and Russia. The second part, consisting of selected cases of non-profit organizations that operated in Murmansk, with a base in Norway or in Russia. These interviews have been open-ended, starting with a few set questions, but evolving in different directions depending on the information we have received. This interview material has been further complemented with evaluation reports and news coverage on the organizations involved, and their projects in the region of Murmansk.

As a starting point, we will give a brief outline of political developments in Norwegian – Russian relations, with a special focus on the northern border regions of Finnmark and Murmansk, and of civil society cooperation across the border, since the end of the Cold War.

1.1. The Cold War Period

In the aftermath of WWII, geopolitical tensions rose between the USA and the Soviet Union and their respective allies, the Western Bloc consisting of mainly Western European countries, including Norway, and the Eastern Bloc consisting of countries, mainly located in Eastern Europe. These blocs were consolidated with the formation of NATO in 1949, and the Warsaw Pact in 1955.

As a founding member of NATO, Norway became part of the antipole to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Through its NATO-membership, Norway had sought a strategy of military deterrence, and there was little interest in collaboration with its large neighbor in the East

(Wilhelmsen & Gjerde, 2018, p.387). However, since Norway shared a border with the Soviet Union, it was widely agreed that Norway had to combine military deterrence with political reassurance (Holtsmark, 2015). Based on such considerations, Norway implemented a self-restraining base policy in 1949 designed to reassure the Soviet Union that although allied with the US, Norway would not allow the building of US military bases on Norwegian soil (Holtsmark, 2015, p.315).

Though the countries belonged to opposing sides, relations between Norway and the Soviet Union would come to include collaboration within specific areas. In the Barents Sea, Norway and Russia had cooperated on marine research and fisheries in the early 20th Century. Building on this history, in 1975 Norway and the Soviet Union established the Fisheries Commission for a joint management of the fish stocks in the Barents-Sea (Hønneland, 2006). On the regional level, cooperation also began during the Cold War. Communities along the border established friendships and traded across the border, and in 1973, Sør-Varanger municipality and Pechenga municipality signed a friendship agreement. Some years later, in 1988, Finnmark county and Murmansk oblast also signed a friendship agreement (Holtsmark, 2015, p.540). These agreements served to facilitate increased economic cooperation, as well as cross-border cooperation within other fields, such as culture and sports. In the late 1980s, a rapprochement between the Soviet Union and her northern neighbors had been encouraged through a series of foreign policy proposals from the General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, Mikhail Gorbachev. These proposals would later be referred to as the Barents Initiative (Holtsmark, 2015, p.531). As such, in the later days of the Cold War, there was already an informal infrastructure for social and economic interaction across the border, pursued at a local and regional level, and encouraged at a national level.

1.2. The start of the Barents Cooperation

As the Soviet Union dissolved and the Cold War came to an end, Thorvald Stoltenberg, the Norwegian minister of foreign affairs, sought to establish a new relationship with Russia based on dialogue and cooperation (Holtsmark, 2015, p.557). In line with this ambition, Norway became the first country to acknowledge Russia as a sovereign state in late 1991 (Holtsmark, 2015 p.547). In 1993, the Kirkenes declaration was signed by Russia, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the European Commission (EC) – officially initiating the Barents cooperation. The Barents cooperation sought to facilitate cross-border cooperation in a range of fields, including: environment, economy, science and technology and regional infrastructure, indigenous peoples, human contact and cultural relations and tourism specifically (Kirkenes Declaration, 1993).

Both at a regional and a national level, the Barents cooperation was legitimized with reference to historical connections between Norway and Russia predating the Cold War. One of these connections was the Pomor trade between coastal Northern Norway and Northwest Russia that took place between the mid-1700s and the early 1900s. Another connection is the Red Army's liberation of Finnmark from German forces in 1945, still a source of gratitude among locals, especially in East Finnmark. Drawing on stories of largely friendly cross-border relations only disrupted by the Cold War period, the new Barents cooperation could be framed as a reestablishment of historically friendly relations (Neumann, 2002, p.642).

Institutionally, the Barents cooperation was built around three new institutions established in 1993, the Euro-Arctic Barents Council, the Regional Barents Council, and the Barents Secretariat.

The intergovernmental Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) consisted of government representatives from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the European Commission. Interregional Barents Regional Council (BRC). The inter-regional Barents Regional Council (BRC) consisted of the thirteen regional entities that make up the Barents Region, as well as representatives from the indigenous peoples in the region. Members of the two councils have established thematic working groups that constitute cross-border platforms for exchange for the civil servants and professionals of the respective field both on the national and regional level.²

The Norwegian counties have important ownership roles in several of the Barents institutions, including their position in the regional council. Finnmark is the only Norwegian county bordering Russia. At the municipal level, the mayor of Sør-Varanger, the only Norwegian municipality bordering Russia, has traditionally taken on an active and vocal role in promoting the Barents cooperation and the interests of the local population in relation to Norwegian foreign policy towards Russia. Local authorities and engaged individuals have proudly referred to Kirkenes as the Barents capital, promoting it as a natural center of political meetings, conferences and other activities centered on international affairs in the broader Barents region.

1.3. The Barents Secretariat

The Norwegian Barents Secretariat (NBS) is an institution owned by the counties of Nordland, Troms and Finnmark, based in Kirkenes, Sør-Varanger. The Secretariat has 8 employees (2023) who have different areas of expertise and responsibility - from culture projects to business and industry projects. The main activity of the Secretariat is to distribute and administer project funds from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the aim of fostering cooperation between people living in Norway and her neighboring countries in the Barents Region, within a range of different areas. Until 2023, the main focus was on cooperation between Norwegian organizations and their partners in Russia. Since the summer of 2023, the focus has been directed towards cross-border cooperation between the Nordic countries in the Barents Region. While being responsible for coordinating and granting project funds, the Secretariat also often serves as a link between actors on both sides of the border, putting Russians and Norwegians in contact.

In the very same building as the Norwegian Secretariat is the International Barents Secretariat, which was established in 2008. Its role is to facilitate meetings and support activity in the BEAC and the BRC and serve as a mediator between the regional and governmental levels.³

² <https://www.barents-council.org/working-groups>

³ <https://www.barents-council.org/barents-euro-arctic-council>

1.4. The first phase of the Barents Cooperation 1993-2013

The Barents Secretariat allocate funding for NGOs and civil society projects involving cooperation across the border to Russia. As such, it plays a crucial part in facilitating and shaping the content of people-to-people collaboration that takes place across the border. The Barents Secretariat funds projects within the following five fields: 1) Business development and entrepreneurship, 2) Competence-building and education, 3) Environmental protection, 4) Welfare/Culture and 5) Indigenous people.

Throughout the first fifteen years, close to half of all projects that were funded had a main focus on competence building and education, with the main bulk of activities taking place in the Murmansk region, and with both Norwegian and Russian organizers. The second biggest thematic bulk was Welfare/Culture, which counted for 37 % of the projects, and environment, which was covered by 22 % of the projects (Holm-Hansen. et al. 2008). This thematic breakdown remained much the same in 2020, after almost 30 years of Barents cooperation (Holm-Hansen et.al. 2020).

The Barents Secretariat financed projects that involve activities in the Norwegian and Russian regions in the Barents, with partners from both countries. The co-operation was based on vigorous interaction incorporating local authorities, institutions and private individuals. In order to receive funds from the Barents Secretariat the proposed project had to be a genuine co-operation between a Russian and a Norwegian partner within the Barents Region.

In the first decade of the Barents cooperation, from 1993, Russia saw a lot of changes. The country's economy improved immensely, and public institutions had developed their administrative capacity. At the same time, the country remained stuck with a top-down, vertical and in some respects, authoritarian ways of thinking (Holm-Hansen. et al. 2008, 28). Among other things, this would mean that Russian partners had to secure thorough anchoring or support with regional authorities before they could commit to cooperation projects.

In the beginning, cross-border collaborative projects relied almost exclusively on funding from Norway, from the Barents Secretariat and other sources. This put Norwegian and Russian project partners on a less than equal footing. As the Russian economy improved, Russian civil society actors are better able to raise funds on their own. This made it easier for Norwegian and Russians partners to meet on equal terms (Holm-Hansen et al. 2008).

Equality between Norwegian and Russian partners have been an important issue in cross-border collaboration between Norway and Russia. A 2008 evaluation of project collaborations funded by the Barents Secretariat found that an imbalance of resources strongly affected the collaboration in 38 % of projects surveyed. Other challenges, such as language difficulties, professional differences, and misunderstandings all affected less than ten % of the projects surveyed (Holm-Hansen. et al. 2008, p. 54).

Throughout the 1990s, organizations with a strong national presence in Norway, such as Norwegian People's Aid and Red Cross, that had local branches in Sør-Varanger, started organizing their own projects in the Murmansk region, in collaboration with Russian partners. In addition, some of these established their own offices with Norwegian and Russian staff based in Murmansk. A somewhat different story of is played out by The Congress of Women of the Kola Peninsula, established solely on the Russian side in 1992. The organization would evolve to

become an encompassing umbrella organization for various civil society initiatives. Another example is SOS Children's Villages Murmansk, that would emerge as a popular partner for cross-border collaboration with Norwegian organizations that sought to work in Murmansk. Throughout the 1990s, cross-border cooperation would evolve differently within different thematic fields. In the following, we will describe some central developments within different fields.

1.5. Local and regional governance cooperation

Sør-Varanger Municipality and the town of Kirkenes has been able to capitalize on the growing significance of the northern areas. Since the end of the Cold War, Kirkenes has evolved into a hub for a variety of industrial activities, commercial services and tourism, with features of internationalization and a political center for cross-border cooperation in the Barents Region. In line with this, Sør-Varanger Municipality has also been at the forefront of cross-border cooperation at a municipal level. They have sought extensive cooperation through municipal friendship agreements with the neighboring municipality of Pechenga from 1973 and Severomorsk from 2016, a closed military town and home to the Russian Northern Fleet. A city twinning-agreement between Kirkenes and Nickel was established in 2008 (Joenniemi & Sergunin, 2013). These friendship agreements have involved collaboration and sharing of experiences on the provision of municipal services, but also cross-border cooperation in health services, culture, sports and commerce. With its active pursuit of cross-border cooperation, it is fair to say that Sør-Varanger municipality has engaged in paradiplomatic activities. Paradiplomacy can be defined as "subnational governmental involvement in international relations, through the establishment of formal and informal permanent or ad hoc contacts, with foreign public or private entities, with the aim to promote socioeconomic or political issues" (Cornago 2000, 2). In the Barents context, Sør-Varangers support for cross-border cultural, sport and economic collaboration through the friendship agreement with Pechenga, as well as the more recent twin city-cooperation with Nickel can be seen as paradiplomacy, with an aim of nurturing peace, stability and mutual trust between Norway and Russia, and of spurring a social, cultural and economic revitalization of Sør-Varanger itself. Since establishing these cooperations, Sør-Varanger has signed consecutive agreements every 2-3 years with both municipalities. These agreements have involved yearly meetings between municipal delegations from both sides of the border, meetings between teachers at high school levels, exchange of art, and of performances from stage artists, cross-border participation in sport contests, among other things.⁴

The ministers of foreign affairs in Norway and Russia saw new opportunities for combined state and local in initiatives in establishing a Pomor zone in the border area for more smooth trade, transport of goods and people. With the state support, Sør-Varanger signed a twin-city agreement with Pechenga municipality for a more targeted cooperation between the border towns Kirkenes and Nickel in 2008, committing the two towns to pursue close cooperation within field such as support for small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs); establishment of a joint Business Cooperation Center in Nickel; environmental protection; health care (including direct cooperative schemes between municipal hospitals); education (direct links between elementary and secondary schools); training programs for municipal officials; tourism; cultural festivals and exhibitions; library and museum cooperation; mass media cooperation; women and youth cooperation; and

⁴ <https://www.sor-varanger.kommune.no/soer-varanger-kommune-inngaar-fornyet-vennskapsavtale-med-severomorsk-russland.5022178-17830.html>

sports (Joenniemi & Sergunin, 2013, 8). Haugseth (2013) refers to this initiative as a failure and without bringing much new into the already established cooperation through the municipal friendship agreements. “The Pomor free trade zone” was never established, but the inhabitants of the two towns came closer as a Border-zone proof of living within 30 km from the border gave visa free border crossing from 2012.

1.6. Barents Optimism

In Norway, and in particular in Sør-Varanger, there has been great optimism about the cross-border Barents cooperation. 2010 may have represented the high point of Norwegian -Russian collaboration, a peak of Barents optimism, both at a national and a local level. At a national level, the signing of the Barents Sea Treaty, defining the Maritime border between Norway and Russia, a decades long issue of contention between the countries, was regarded as a diplomatic triumph in Norway (Henriksen & Ulfstein 2011). At a local level, the establishment of a visa-free zone for residents living in the vicinity of the border between the Sør-Varanger commune and the Russian towns of Nikel, Zapolyarny, Pechenga and Korzunovo, was regarded as a potential game-changer, enabling significant increases in cultural and economic cooperation and social interaction across the border. In particular, there were great hopes of growing trade and financial cooperation across the border. This optimism characterized the climate of cooperation, as the Barents cooperation approached its 20th year anniversary.

1.7. Barents Cooperation 2013 - 2022

In June 2013, the Prime Ministers of the Nordic Countries, in addition to Russia launched the new Kirkenes Declaration during the Barents Summit marking the 20-year anniversary of the Barents cooperation.⁵ The new Kirkenes Declaration set ambitions for further growth in cross-border movement, social, cultural and economic cooperation, and for this to bring economic growth and opportunities to communities on both sides of the border.⁶

The following year saw a peak in border crossings between Sør-Varanger and the Murmansk region at 400 000 crossings in one year. However, 2014 also saw the conflict over Crimea causing a setback in relations between Russia and the West (Wilhelmsen and Gjerde 2018). In response to Crimea, the European Union responded with swift economic sanctions against Russia. Norway joined a European regime of trade sanctions, banning the import of certain Russian goods to Norway. Russia responded in kind, banning – among other things – the import of Norwegian salmon to Russia. Trade and economic cooperation between Norway and Russia took hit in the aftermath of Crimea. Within other areas however, the post-Crimea impact on cooperation appears to have been limited. Analysing the Barents collaboration between Norway and Russia before and after the 2014 Ukraine crisis, Blakar (2016:iii) found that collaboration in the North remained ‘an island of normalcy’ after 2014, causing only moderately impacted by the deteriorating bilateral relations between the two countries. While bilateral relations between Norway and Russia grew colder following 2014 Ukraine crisis, cross-border collaboration remained a high priority at the

⁵ <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/high-north/barents-cooperation/id2008480/>

⁶ <https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/vedlegg/nordomrc3a5dene/barentssamarbeidet/barentssummitdeclaration2013.pdf>

regional and municipal level. At times, this has been a source of contention between Norwegian national authorities on the one hand, and municipal and regional authorities in the North. In the fall of 2019, Norwegian authorities marked the 75th anniversary of the Liberation of Finnmark from German occupation, executed by the Red Army. As an important event, and a symbol of unity in relation between Norway and Russia, local and regional leaders meant that it was important that President Putin was invited to attend the anniversary celebration. The Norwegian prime minister and minister of foreign affairs disagreed, and opted to invite Russian Foreign Minister instead, on account of the rather cold relationship between Russia and her Western neighbours at the time.⁷ This was as source of widespread discontent among local and regional leaders in the North. Among local and regional leaders, nurturing good relations with Russia has remained a high priority, also following the 2014 Ukraine crisis.

The mid-1990s also saw the start of extensive cooperation between Norway and Russia on public health that lasted for more than two decades. While health institutions throughout Norway started cooperating with institutions in Arkhangelsk, on institution and competence building on contagious diseases, heart and cardio health and telemedicine, the local hospital in Kirkenes established contacts with a hospital in Murmansk for more hands-on, low-level cooperation.

Representatives of the hospital in Kirkenes were asked by the Ministry of Health to establish cooperation across the border with a focus on containment of contagious diseases, in particular tuberculosis. A few health care workers specialized in contagious diseases visited institutions in Murmansk where TB-patients are treated, and took part in helping improve their routines for preventing further contagion. Contacts were established, and health workers at the hospital in Kirkenes, and at hospitals in Murmansk have stayed in touch, launching various collaborative project with funding from the Barents Secretariat, the Norwegian Ministry of Health and other sources, with a focus on joint efforts to manage contagious diseases, and establish good cross-border collaboration on emergency health and transportation across the border.⁸ Through this collaboration, developed over more than two decades, health workers have established personal relations with colleagues on the other side of the border. According to local health workers in Kirkenes, this has facilitated dynamic identification of public health challenges on both sides, and informal access to information about health challenges in Murmansk that are not available through more formal channels, at an institutional level.

This cooperation has not been affected by the 2014 Crimea crisis, and the deterioration of bilateral relations between Norway and Russia. Health services are considered a rather non-political issue, one that cover some challenges that must be dealt with through cooperation.

As such, there is broad agreement that this is an area where cross-border cooperation should be kept up, and not be dropped because of political tensions. In the following section, we will look more closely at a few organizations that have engaged in cross-border cooperation, from bases in Finnmark, or from Murmansk, not far from the border.

⁷ <https://www.sogat.no/vil-ha-putin-pa-besok/19.13197>

⁸ Interview with rep. of Finnmark Hospital, Kirkenes, 24.05.2022.

2. Socially oriented Organizations in the Border-region

Socially oriented civil society organizations often work in the intersection between health and social care, often providing various social services to people who also have health related challenges. Among organization operating from Finnmark, many of the active members have their primary work within the health sector, or within welfare services. This is where they have the strongest competence that can easily establish relevant professional contacts, and are best positioned to identify needs within their own communities, and on the other side of the border. In addition, these are the kind of activities that have easily gained support with the relevant authorities on both sides of the border.

This is reflected in the cases we have picked out, of organizations that have been active in Murmansk, or that have operated on both sides of the border, over a certain period of time. The dynamics of each cross-border collaboration is different, involving a variety of challenges as well as rewards. Furthermore, cross-border collaborations may be affected by regional and geo-political changes in different ways. The first case will center on Norwegian People's Aid, and their activities in Murmansk.

2.1. Case 1: Norwegian People's Aid -NPA– historical background

Norwegian People's Aid is a membership-based organization based in Norway, but with bases in more than 30 countries around the world. Founded in 1939 as the labour movement's humanitarian solidarity organization, NPA's stated mission is to "improve people's living conditions and to create a democratic, just and safe society." NPA's international work is focused on Mine Action and disarmament, Development and Humanitarian relief aid (NPA, 2020).

In its early years, during WWII, the NPA established units all over Norway, providing health services to people in need. After the war NPA was active in the efforts to rebuild the country, and especially its health services. In the 1950s and 60s, NPA organized welfare services such as vacations for exhausted housewives and children, and established health stations all over the country.⁹ From the 1960s, NPA has provided emergency aid and health services in theaters of war throughout the world. In addition, the NPA has focused on – among other things – the welfare and societal inclusion of disabled people in different parts of the world (Tjønneland & Hagen 2012). From the 1970s onwards, a lot of people in Finnmark, and in particular in Sør-Varanger sought grassroot-engagement with their Russian neighbours. This included people that were involved in the NPA.

NPAs local branch – the early years

In line with its profile as an industrial working-class community, Kirkenes became home to a local Norwegian People's aid office quite early, in 1961. This local branch, the branch of Norwegian People's Aid Sør-Varanger worked mainly with providing health services to people in need, to organize summer camp for housewives and their children – in collaboration with other branches,

⁹ <https://folkehjelp.no/om-norsk-folkehjelp/v%C3%A5r-historie>

and provide first aid personnel in accident/crisis situations. This branch, like most others, consisted of volunteers who belonged to the Labour Union, many of whom worked in the health sector.

In the early 1990s, when the Cold War came to an end, and the Soviet Union was dissolved, members of the civil society in Sør-Varanger, including the local branch of the NPA sought further interaction across the border. Russia was ridden with economic chaos, and regions like Murmansk saw widespread poverty, insufficient health services and a supply chain crisis.

Throughout the 1990s, members of the local NPA branch established their own contacts in Pechenga, Severomorsk and Apatity. On their visits to Murmansk they would observe abject poverty and an absence of basic supplies and equipment. In response to this, the local NPA-branch started collecting clothes, sports gear, and equipment to help disabled people, and other forms of supplies that were sent across the border and donated to their contacts on the other side. This gathering of clothes and other items was repeated on a regular basis, becoming a central part of Sør-Varanger NPAs cross-border activities throughout the 1990s.

NPA national level – engagement with the Murmansk region

In the early 1990s, the NPAs international involvements were focused mainly on the Middle East and North Africa, and for a brief period, Bosnia. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the partial opening of the border with Russia, most municipalities in Finnmark established friendship agreements with municipalities in Murmansk region, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported humanitarian aid projects directed towards Russia. At the same time, the local branches of the NPA called on the national organization to prioritize and engage with Russia.

NPA decided to head these calls, and in 1998, after a few years of preparation, they established an office in the municipality of Pechenga, with one steady employee, with the aim of establishing various social and humanitarian projects in cooperation with local partners.¹⁰

Norwegian People's Aid opened its office in Murmansk as a base for organizing multiple projects in Northwest Russia. While the local branch focused on providing strictly humanitarian aid to groups in need in the region, the NPAs Murmansk office, initially funded by NPAs national office, was committed to organize more long-term projects. These projects would focus on social issues and health care, with a strong focus on maternal and infant health, and NPA would spend 4-6 million NOK a year on these projects.¹¹ The activities of the Murmansk office would be organized as projects with one to three-year durations. These projects would depend on financing from external sources, such as the Norwegian Health Department, the Barents Secretariat and Nordic Council of Ministers.¹²

Among the projects NPAs Murmansk office fronted were the following:

¹⁰ Interview with former NPA-employee.

¹¹ <https://www.op.no/nyheter/grenselos-folkehjelp/s/1-85-764113>

¹² Interview with former NPA-employee.

-Loosely based on the Norwegian model of volunteer centers, Norwegian People's Aid established three volunteer centers, in Apatity, Nikel and Monchegorsk.¹³ These centers were located in venues provided by the local municipalities, offered a warm place to be, some food and various social services for people in need. They were run by appr. 40 local women volunteers, and the initial ambition was for these centers to be taken over by the municipalities after a three-year period. Based on unverified estimates from NPAs representatives, these centers were used by some 300-400 people, many of whom were poor single-moms and women who faced domestic violence at home. Building on this, the NPA was also instrumental in starting up other Volunteer Centers in other parts of Murmansk Oblast, but with a more limited role in running them.¹⁴

-In 2002, after years of preparations, the NPA opened a children's shelter, for children in need of protection or basic care. This was one of the NPA's biggest projects, established in collaboration with local partners in the city of Monchegorsk.

-A project on breastfeeding counseling, in collaboration with Ammehjelpen. This project, initiated in 2000, was designed to through which new mothers could receive advice and support in breastfeeding from mothers who have experience breastfeeding their children. This project was established based on reports that a majority of new mothers in Murmansk struggled with breastfeeding and had a hard time providing sufficient nutrition for their newborn babies. Ammehjelpen is a Norwegian organization that works specifically with promoting breastfeeding, infant nutritional health and counseling new mothers struggling to breastfeed their babies.

-NPA also took part in upgrading services at an institution for disabled kids in Monchegorsk. This is a resource center for children with special needs, which was run by regional authorities. NPA took an active role in providing special equipment designed to improve the mobility and self-reliance of children with various disabilities, and to teach techniques and training practices that enable disabled children to have more active, mobile lives.

These project all fit well with domestic changes in Russia with reference to civil society from the early 2000s – primarily a growing state interest and support for non-governmental socially oriented organizations (Stuvøy 2020). Some of their other projects may have fit less well with the policies of state and regional authorities.

Building on networks established through the volunteer center and their work on breastfeeding, NPA expanded their thematic field to working on other projects. In the early 2000s they started focusing on domestic violence against women – an extensive problem in Murmansk – as in other parts of Russia. In collaboration with local women's groups, they established support groups for victims of domestic abuse, started organizing public campaigns against domestic abuse, and offered legal support for women seeking to escape violent partners.¹⁵ Some of this work was done in collaboration with the Women's Congress of the Kola Peninsula based in the city of Murmansk, as well as Nora Crisis Centre in Sør-Varanger.

NPAs Murmansk office had been established based in the wishes of its local chapters in Northern Norway, and especially in Finnmark. At the same time, Russia was far away from the countries in

¹³ Interview with former NPA-employee.

¹⁴ <https://www.nrk.no/tromsogfinnmark/folkehjelpa-ut-av-nordest-russland-1.1068710>

¹⁵ <https://www.op.no/nyheter/grenselos-folkehjelp/s/1-85-764113>

which NPA had its primary activities and regional competence, in the Middle East and North Africa. As such, the Murmansk office was an outlier in NPAs international engagement.¹⁶

The idea behind the NPA office in Murmansk was that it would be sustained through project grants secured through external sources, such as the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Barents Secretariat, Health and Care Directorate and other sources. However, the Murmansk office struggled to acquire funding for a sufficient number of new projects, and remained reliant on funding through the National office for its sustenance.

In 2006, the Russian government introduced a new NGO law that would subject Russian and foreign NGOs to excessive government scrutiny and interference. This became a burden for NGOs operating in Murmansk, but the NPA adapted its work, and faced no particular troubles with the new law.¹⁷

Nonetheless, due to funding problems, among other things, in late 2006, Norwegian People's Aid decided to close its office in Murmansk, and in late 2007, the office was shut down. At the time of closing, the Murmansk office had been staffed for nine years, with three different representatives. Some lessons had been learned from the various projects and forms of cooperation they engaged in throughout this period.

2.1.1. The Legacy of NPAs Murmansk Office

Some of the NPAs projects in Murmansk came to an abrupt end when the NPA pulled out, others had a long afterlife. The community center for people in need, and the center and equipment base for children with disabilities were established in collaboration with local organizations. These centers would stay in operation after NPA downgraded its involvement. Today, the local NPA-branch in Kirkenes cooperates closely with these centers, provides equipment and offer courses on how to activate children with disabilities, and make them more self-reliant in their everyday lives. These are also centers whose activities match well with what kind of resources the local NPA-branch in Kirkenes can offer.

Some of the later projects led from the NPA-office in Murmansk turned out to be less durable. The main volunteer centers started by the NPA were established in three different cities, where the municipalities were supportive, and even provided facilities free of charge. Locally, these were run by local volunteers, all-together some 40 volunteers between the three centers.

The plan was for the management of these centers to be taken over by the local municipalities, after a three-year period. This however, proved more complicated than first expected. According to one NPA-representative, Russian legislation and bureaucracy made the municipalities ill-fitted to take over and run the volunteer centers on their own. In addition, the people who were put in charge of running these centers on behalf of the municipalities lacked the skills for the job. As such, these volunteer centers withered away and were eventually closed 1-2 years after the municipalities had taken over.¹⁸ A few years later, however, a volunteer center building on the

¹⁶ Interview with repr. of NPAs National Office.

¹⁷ Interview with former NPA-employee.

¹⁸ Interview with NPA representative who manned the NPA office in Murmansk.

model of the NPA-initiated centers was established in the city of Murmansk. Since then, volunteer center have been opened up in other cities as well.

NPA's projects on women's rights and domestic violence appeared to have a more durable impact. Projects such as *Kvinner i lukkede byer* (Women in closed military towns) which focused on women's rights and on combating domestic violence against women, appeared to strike a deeper chord with local forces. These projects were run in collaboration with local women's networks, and these networks would grow stronger, more resourceful, and more capable of organizing projects following their collaboration with Norwegian People's Aid.¹⁹

Norwegian People's Aid also organized youth projects through which young people in Norway and Russia could meet and get to know each other through mutual visits and engaging in joint activities. These projects, however, were dependent on external financial support, which was harder to obtain following the closing of the NPAs Murmansk office.

According to representatives of Norwegian People's Aid who staffed the Murmansk office during different periods, the NPA struggled with two main challenges in its engagement with Murmansk. First of all, the national organization appeared to have a half-hearted commitment to its involvement in Russia. Murmansk was far from its main theaters of international engagement, and it was not an area where they could fully utilize the human resources developed through their engagement in the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans, within mine-clearing, and first-response emergency services for war-ridden areas. As such, they committed limited resources, centered around one representative that was to be based in Murmansk. For the NPA to establish a stronger, more durable presence in Murmansk might have required a greater investment in personnel and resources. However, the national organization may have concluded that their resources could be put to better use in other regions of the world, where they held greater regional competence, skills and resources of value addressing the challenges at hand.

Second, there was limited coordination and collaboration between the Murmansk Office, which answered to the national leadership, and the local branch of the NPA. While the Murmansk Office was focused on projects that involved the building of lasting institutions, the local branch of the NPA – according to representatives at the Murmansk Office – were more focused on collecting, moving across the border and donating various supplies for people in need, in collaboration with local forces and institutions that were already in operation. From the mid 1990s until the mid-2000s however, Russia, including the Murmansk region, had seen economic recovery, and while abject poverty was still a major problem, the absence of basic supplies was not. With time, however, the local branch of the NPA adjusted its own activities towards more direct collaboration with local institutions in the provision and improvement of services in areas where local NPA staff could make a difference.

Many members of the NPA-Branch in Sør-Varanger are and have been health care professionals, with specialized skills and knowledge that can be passed on to people working within the health sector in Russia. This included NPA-members currently living in Kirkenes, who had grown up in

¹⁹ Interview with NPA representative who manned the NPA office in Murmansk.

Russia, and who had firsthand knowledge of Russian health and social services, and who knew their greatest shortcomings.

One field in which they have been able to make a contribution is within care for people with disabilities. In Norway, there's a certain tradition for activation and social inclusion of people with physical disabilities. In Russia, there has been a primary focus on catering to their most basic needs, and much less on activating them, often leading people with physical disabilities to stay immobilized within their own homes, or in institutions. Health workers affiliated with the NPA have organized courses instructing family caretakers as well as health workers on how to lift people with disabilities, use transportation equipment, and how to facilitate greater mobility and self-reliance among people with disabilities, allowing them to live more active lives. Part of their efforts has been focused on awareness building among health workers and family care takers, that people with disabilities can live more active lives with a little facilitation from those around them. In addition, the NPA has gathered state of the art mobility assistance gear for people with disabilities and their caretakers and donated this to the disability center in Murmansk. Some of this work has been conducted in collaboration with SOS Children's Villages in Kandalaksha.

Conclusion: When looking at the Norwegian People's Aid's experience in Murmansk, it is important to separate between the national organization's involvement through the Representative's Office in Murmansk 1998-2007, and the local Sør-Varanger branch of the NPA and their long-standing engagement across the border. The Representative's Office managed to initiate a number of good social projects and institutions in collaboration with local partners and local authorities in Murmansk. When the Representative's office closed down, some of these projects would go on, while others would wither away quite fast.

The Sør-Varanger branch of the NPA were active in Murmansk from the early 1990s and established their own contacts on the other side of the border. While the local branch held experience-based knowledge of Murmansk, and on how to operate across the border, there was rather limited cooperation between the local branch, and the NPA Representative's Office in Murmansk. Thirty years after the Cold War, the local branch have had Russian immigrants to Sør-Varanger among their members, people who have grown up in Murmansk, who know the region and who have extensive contacts there. The local branch of the NPA have cooperated with local forces and with local and nation-wide institutions based in Murmansk region – such as SOS Children's villages, providing health and social services based on need identified by their local partners. Furthermore, this is work that is very apolitical in nature, and as such, was not affected by political turmoil and tensions between Russia and the West, before the war in Ukraine. As such, these are also activities that may be picked up again at a later point, once the legal and political conditions for cross-border collaboration improves.

2.2. Case 2: SOS Children's Villages

This case-study is based on a desk review of academic publications and Internet sources, as well as informant interviews with representatives of SOS Children's Villages Norway, who are involved in SOS Children's Villages work in Murmansk region, and representatives of organizations based in Finnmark, who have collaborated with SOS Children's Villages in Murmansk region.

SOS Children's Villages is an independent, non-governmental, nonprofit international development organization that has its headquarter in Innsbruck, Austria. The organization

provides humanitarian and developmental assistance to children in need, in particular children who are orphaned, have been abandoned by their families, or in other ways are deprived of normal family care. The first SOS Children's Village was established in Imst, Austria, in 1949 to take care of orphans from WWII.²⁰ In 2022, SOS Children's Villages is active in 137 countries and territories worldwide.

In Norway, the "Committee of Norwegian Friends of the SOS Children's Villages" was established in 1964 to support the worldwide activities of SOS Children's Villages. In 1983 SOS Children's Villages Norway was established as a Foundation, headquartered in Oslo. Since then, SOS Children's Villages Norway has raised funds for SOS Children's villages abroad, as well as organizing social and project to help struggling children in Norway.

Throughout the 1990s, representatives of SOS Children's Villages Norway visited Murmansk region. Alarmed with the conditions for truly poor and orphaned children in Murmansk region, they established an emergency aid program in collaboration with Norwegian Red Cross, for children in need. In this project, they collaborated with the regional Red Cross office for Finnmark, located in Vadsø.²¹

In 2000, they also established a SOS Children's village in Kandalaksha, directed from, and funded by SOS Children's villages Norway. The same year, SOS Children's Villages Norway initiated collaboration with the regional authorities in Murmansk to implement a Foster Family Project that involves building a support system for the provision of childcare in foster families in Murmansk (Holm-Hansen, Feiring & Malik 2005). In 2010, responsibility for the Children's village in Kandalaksha was transferred to SOS Children's Villages Russia, headquartered in St. Petersburg.²²

The organization was established in Russia in 1992. As an international organization whose activities are rather apolitical, they established a good relationship with Russian state authorities, at a federal and regional level. In 2013, they also established Social Center -SOS Murmansk in Murmansk city, to help children in need into foster care, provide counseling, social and financial support for foster families, and for families who strived to provide adequate care for their own children (Kopalkina et.al. 2019).

Since taking over the Children's Village in Kandalaksha and the Social Centre -SOS Murmansk, these centers have been financed primarily through private donation to SOS Children's villages Russia, and financial support from the regional authorities in Murmansk (Ibid). During the last years, both organizations are also successfully applying for support in competition-based Presidential Grants Fund (see forthcoming Nygaard and Britvina, 2014).

A number of projects both in Kandalaksha and in Murmansk city have been initiated by Norwegian SOS Children's villages, originally funded by Norwegian authorities, and executed by local staff in Kandalaksha and Murmansk city in collaboration with Norwegian partners.

²⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/04/27/obituaries/hermann-gmeiner-of-austria-66-established-shelters-for-children.html>

²¹ Interview with repr. of SOS Children's Villages, Norway.

²² Interview with repr. of SOS Children's Villages, Norway.

Partners on the Norwegian side include the Sør-Varanger branches of Norwegian Child Services, the Red Cross and Norwegian People's Aid, among others. These partners all brought skills and human resources relevant to the specific projects on which they work.

For more than ten years, projects with a 1-3-year duration, have been funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care Services, and executed in collaboration between SOS staff in Murmansk and Norwegian Partners in Sør-Varanger. These projects have been designed to address local needs in Murmansk, and at the same time utilize the professionals' skills, and resources available among their Norwegian partners in Kirkenes and in Finnmark.

The latest project entitled Forster Families for Children with Disabilities was set to last from Sept 2021 until August, 2022. Building on two earlier one-year projects, the purpose of this project was to "create conditions for better adaptation to independent living and socialization of adolescents and young people age 18+ with disabilities (A&YwDs) from foster families and biological families in the Murmansk region."²³

The Project was implemented in Murmansk city, Kandalaksha, Monchegorsk, and included various activities that aimed to 1) Enhance the vocational skills of adolescents and youth with disabilities, 2) strengthen their social skills to enable better integration into society, 3) help them overcome psychological barriers to establishing independent lives, 4) increase the competence of caregivers in establishing good relations with adolescents and youth with disabilities, and 5) increase the competence of professionals in support of A&YwDs during their transition to independent life and support of their caregivers.

According to SOS Children's Villages, these projects are strongly appreciated within the local communities, and among local and regional authorities.

Since the start of the War in Ukraine, Norwegian authorities and NGOs have stopped funding projects in Russia. As long as economic sanctions towards Russia remains in place, no new projects will be funded by Norwegian authorities, and the coordination between SOS Children's Villages Norway and SOS Children's villages Russia will be kept at a minimum.

The Social Centre-SOS Murmansk has ten employees. These are all people with valuable experience from the regional health or school sector. SOS Children's villages are reliable and attractive employers, and as such, they have not had any problems recruiting well qualified candidates.

As an international organization that does largely apolitical work, that seeks to complement or make up for insufficiencies in the welfare and social care services of their host countries, SOS Children's Villages are in good standing with the authorities in their countries of operation. This goes for Russia as well. Since 2010 the state has stepped up its efforts to promote collaboration between the federal and regional authorities and certain categories of NGO, namely those deemed to be working in areas such as the provision of social and cultural services which align with the interests of the state (Bogdanova & Bindman 2016, Krasnopolskaya. et.al. 2015). As a result, SOS Children's Villages Russia has enjoyed substantial financial support from Russian

²³ Project Report for B1902 Foster Care for Children with Disabilities. Report for the Norwegian Department of Health and Care Services 2021-2022.

regional and federal authorities. In Kandalaksha and in Murmansk city, the authorities provide a steady base funding, covering localities, operating costs, and some staff salary. As an international organization, Russian authorities have allowed the organization to cooperate with Norwegian partners, even receive funding from them up to 2022. Having a stable and largely good relationship with the regional authorities also made them a reliable and attractive local partner for foreign NGOs, including those based in Norway. However, their relationship with Russian authorities has not been without challenges.

At the same time, SOS Children's villages at a federal level has experienced some challenges. The National Strategy on the protection of children clearly defined a preference for family-based care for orphans. In addition, the "Dima Yakovlev Law" prioritized the adoption of orphans by Russian citizens. As a consequence, SOS Villages received recommendations from above, simultaneously from the Ministry of Education and the Russian Committee of SOS Children's Villages, to formalize guardianship over their pupils. This meant that Villages were forced to form foster families, and switch from an institutional to a family model of care (Bogdanova 2017). This placed a considerably greater amount of responsibility on the shoulder of SOS Village employees (Bogdanova & Bindman 2016, 168). In Murmansk city, the Social Center -SOS Murmansk established a social center instead, set up to offer guidance, social, financial and professional support for foster families, and the broader apparatus of care around children in need of extra care.

Bogdanova & Bindman stresses the importance of skillful navigation in relation to regional and federal authorities for NGOs ability to success in Russia. "Loyalty and readiness to seek consensus are the basic aspects of an NGO's position, which make productive collaboration between the NGOs and authorities possible. To work successfully, and in order simply to survive, NGOs are forced not only to provide their social services, but also to be visible and noticeable to the authorities" (Bogdanova & Bindman 2016, 169). SOS Children's villages in Murmansk appear to have succeeded in this. That has also made them a safe and reliable partner for Norwegian organizations that wish to operate in Murmansk.

Conclusion: Throughout the 2000s, the conditions for NGOs operating in Russia have grown more difficult. A series of new laws have placed constraints on organization that receive funding from abroad – most infamously the "Foreign Agents Law" of 2012. Having the status of an international organization has helped the SOS Children's Village in Kandalaksha and Social Center – SOS Murmansk to avoid the negative consequences of the law as they have received foreign funding up to 2022 without being labeled as Foreign Agent. Other NGOs have not been this fortunate. Additional constraints have been placed on organizations whose work is viewed as having a critical bent towards Russian authorities. At the same time, regional and federal authorities have embraced and offered financial support for socially oriented NGOs, whose work is seen as supporting the social agenda of the Russian authorities and complementing public welfare services (Bogdanova & Bindman 2016). New federal and regional financial instruments have substituted the former often foreign finances of socially oriented NGOs.

Under these conditions, SOS Children's Villages appear to have thrived in Murmansk. The backing of a robust international organization, and a socially oriented, largely unpolitical organizational mission have both played a decisive role here. While facing some challenges with the authorities in the form of efforts to shape how they organize their care for children in need – SOS Children's

Villages have been allowed to operate and develop their core activities, since 2023, solely with financial support from Russian authorities and donors. Up to this point, they have been allowed to collaborate with, and receive project funding through partner institutions in Norway, but this has stopped due to the sanctions affecting possibility to transfer money through the international banking system. As seen in the case of SOS Children's villages, being in good standing with federal, regional and local authorities makes it easier to operate effectively in Russia.

2.3. Case-study 3. Women's Congress of the Kola Peninsula

This case-study is based on a desk review of academic publications and Internet sources, as well as key informant interviews with a person who was involved in Women's Congress of the Kola Peninsula during the entire period of the organization's existence (1993–2020). Two semi-structured interviews were conducted in March 2021 and January 2022. The interviews were conducted over the phone because of covid-19 restrictions.

Point of start-up. Women's Congress of the Kola Peninsula (*Kongress zsenshchin Kol'skogo poluostrova*) was founded in 1992 in the Murmansk region. Until 1990, the political public organization "The Soviet Women's Committee" and Women's Councils at workplaces were the only entities with the status of a women's organization in Russia. Women's Congress was a new, independent grass-roots organization in Murmansk region without being a part of a federal structure.

The organization was launched in November 1992 at the conference "Women's Congress of the Kola Peninsula" held in Murmansk city upon the initiative of the feminist teachers from the Murmansk pedagogical institute, Lyubov Shtyleva and Irina Fogt. The idea started with a local women's club that the founders had earlier established. 252 women from 27 newly founded and former Soviet women's organizations in the Murmansk region attended the conference (Noonan & Nechemias 2001, 280). Funding was raised through sponsorship of local entrepreneurs and the regional branch of the state pension fund (Shtyleva 2016, 17). Following the conference, the organization was registered in March 1993. The Congress's goals included fostering conditions that would support women's initiatives in society; promoting equal opportunities for women's participation in all aspects of life; achieving fair representation of women in governing bodies, and elevating women to positions of political leadership.

Form of organization at start-up, main activities and resources. Women's Congress of the Kola Peninsula was registered as a public movement and began functioning as an umbrella organization uniting 73 women's organizations (Noonan & Nechemias 2001, 280). Many of these groups emerged as (self)support groups in the 1990s to adapt to severe economic changes during the transition to a market economy. Member organizations included organizations for families with children with disabilities, groups for pensioners, clubs for large families, etc.

Most groups in the Congress were not political and provided moral and economic support to vulnerable populations protected by government before the crisis. (Henderson 2003). The leadership of the Congress was more politically oriented and aimed at long-term changes, including the promotion of women to political positions.

In 1994, the Congress launched programs to offer assistance to women, as well as to the general population of Murmansk city. The organization established a hotline to provide assistance to

victims of rape and domestic violence, and helped to establish the Soldiers' Mothers Committee, a regional human rights organization. The Congress also launched programs such as Special Child Studio for disabled children, Center for Women's Politics to educate female political leaders, and club Retro to alleviate the isolation of the elderly and more.

In 1996–1997, the Congress expanded its outreach, and opened new branches in 17 towns and villages of the Murmansk region. The Congress established a regional network of resource centers for NGOs in 9 towns across the region (which accounted for more than half of the total of what?). This project was funded by the Ford Foundation and the Soros Foundation (Henderson 2003, 126). Also, Center for social and legal counseling supported by the Soros Foundation and an educational program for women journalists were launched. Some activities were funded by national and regional banks, local governments and entrepreneurs.

According to interviews, new projects meant an additional, mostly unpaid work for the women involved. But despite the increased workload, members of the Congress worked with enthusiasm. They kept contacts with women's groups across Russia through conferences and published monthly newsletters electronically. The leaders worked to maintain a coalition of women's groups that presented a wide range of women's activism that reflected both Western and Russian concerns (Noonan & Nechemias 2001, 280). In 1996, at the municipal elections in Murmansk city, women won 12 out of 16 seats in the Legislative Assembly. Such achievement was largely the result of the work of the Congress, and pointed to a new phenomenon in the public consciousness – trust in women politicians.²⁴

As a member of the Congress said in an interview, *“Since the mid-1990s to the present, the situation in the Murmansk region has been quite good in terms of women's participation in political life”*. In 2000–2015, a significant number of women who were local and regional politicians or held leadership positions were members of the Congress. A vivid example is the life story of Svetlana Parshkova, who since 1995 was co-chair of the Congress and later its chair. In 2002, Svetlana became head of public relations in the Murmansk regional government. At the regional government she promoted the regional laws on the public chamber and support for public organizations. Later she became a member and secretary of the Public Chamber of the Murmansk region – an advisory body to the regional government, and in 2014 was elected the Murmansk region representative to the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation.²⁵ In view of the long-term agenda set at the beginning of the Congress to promote women to political leadership positions, this was a success of this NGO after two decades of active work.

Cooperation across the border. Women's Congress was a pioneer of cross-border cooperation between NGOs from the 1990s and one of its most active actors for the next two decades. In the interviews, it was said that the Congress had the greatest cooperation with Norwegian and Swedish partners. Cooperation with Norwegian colleagues began in 1995. *“It included travels, visits, exchange of practices. Important projects were implemented jointly with Norwegian partners. These projects were aimed at women and children issues, and the establishment of crisis centers for women who are victims of violence. We gained knowledge and competence during our*

²⁴ Women's Congress of the Kola Peninsula. *In Russian*. <http://www.owl.ru/win/women/aiwo/murman.htm>

²⁵ Svetlana Parshkova was elected as a representative in the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation. *In Russian*. <https://severpost.ru/read/4241/>

visits to Norway. There we've seen ways to improve the lives of ordinary people", a representative of the Congress said in an interview.

In 1996, the Congress organized the international conference "Women of the Barents Region" in Murmansk with the wide participation of Norwegian organizations. One of the most important projects carried out in cooperation with Norwegian partners at that time was the creation of the crisis center for women in Murmansk city. The first on the Kola Peninsula crisis center for women "Priyut" was opened in 1997²⁶. The center was the result of two-years work by local volunteers at the helpline for women, cooperation of women's NGOs in Murmansk with the crisis centers in Tromsø and Kirkenes, the Barents Secretariat and the Norwegian Council for Equality.

Financial support for the shelter in Murmansk was received through an application from the crisis center in Tromsø as a 3-year ½ million NOK grant from the Barents Secretariat²⁷. The Norwegian People's Aid was also mentioned in interviews as a partner in this project and as a sponsor of the other activities such as attending conferences, etc. When choosing a working model, the founders of the crisis center in Murmansk were strongly influenced by the Norwegian experience (Zayats 2004).

Work on the shelter project was carried out both in an organizational and scientific directions. The organizational efforts resulted in the establishment of a women's crisis center with accommodation for 8 to 16 persons, a permanent helpline, and a volunteer school. The aim of the research work was to find ways to adapt the Norwegian crisis center model to the Russian situation and to propose an effective regional model of crisis center. From the organizers' point of view, one of the criteria for the effectiveness of the proposed model should be the city administration's recognition of the feasibility of a crisis center and municipal funding (Zayats 2004). During the three years of the grant term, 7190 people applied for the center's support and more than 200 women were trained at its volunteer school²⁸.

Two more crisis centers were subsequently opened with the support of the TACIS program of the European Commission²⁹. These centers in Polyarnye Zori and Apatity were primarily financed by the local governments and represented a symbiosis of the psychological counseling services with social shelters. The centers became part of the *NCRB – Network for Crisis Centers for Women in the Barents Region* operated jointly by 12 Russian and 7 Nordic units located in the regions of Murmansk, Arkhangelsk, Karelia and St. Petersburg in Russia; Finnmark, Troms and Nordland in Norway; Norrbotten and Västerbotten in Sweden; Lapland and Oulu in Finland (1999–2002, 2002–2005) (Zayats 2004, Yukina 2003).

Lyubov Shtyleva, one of the founders of the Congress and the crisis centers and now a well-known Russian feminist teacher, said in an interview for the study "Global Feminisms" conducted at Michigan University in 2016: "We are very grateful to Norwegian women – those who participated

²⁶ Herald of the project 'New opportunities for women', 1997, Moscow, №10. In Russian. http://www.owl.ru/win/books/nasilie/10kr_cen.htm

²⁷ Information newsletter №1 (141). January 10, 2000. In Russian. http://www.owl.ru/win/infolist/2000/v1_00.htm

²⁸ Information newsletter №1 (141). January 10, 2000.

²⁹ TACIS – Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States program launched in 1991 by the European Commission to provide grant-financed technical assistance to countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia during their transition to democratic market-oriented economies.

in conferences and projects – and in particular, to women working at the Kirkenes Crisis Center with which we cooperated, and to the city of Tromsø, where it all began” (Shtyleva 2026, 17).

Another area in which the Congress collaborated with Norwegian partners was the prevention of women trafficking. In 1997, the Congress participated in a conference on the prostitution of women from Russia in Northern Norway and Finland. The conference was held in Tana, Northern Norway, by the Sami women’s organization “Sarahka”, the women’s organization “Ottar” and the Vadsø Women’s Network³⁰. After the conference, the Congress worked to prevent human trafficking by distributing information, creating local opportunities for women and young people, and providing assistance to victims of trafficking through crisis centers. In 1999, the Congress organized a “round table” in Murmansk to discuss prostitution as a threat to society and set up a working group to take actions against trafficking in women.

In 2005, the Congress participated in The Dignity Across Borders conference in Kirkenes to discuss violence and issues of human trafficking in the Barents Region. The conference was organized by The Northern Feminist University, NCRB network and the Nora crisis and incest centers in Kirkenes (Østby 2006). It led to the creation of the “Barents Women Gender Watch” network, and Women’s Congress became part of it.

A member of the Congress said in an interview: *“We were very inspired when we started working with Norwegian colleagues. Thanks to this cooperation, we were able to visit different parts of the Murmansk region, meet with women and discuss women’s rights and equal opportunities. We had a very positive experience of cooperation. There was absolute trust and respect between us as partners and we had no difficulties working together. They were cool, these Norwegian women who worked with us!”.*

Changes in cooperation activities that may relate to changes in political relations or internal politics. Two major changes that emerged in Russia’s domestic policy related to civil society during the 2000s were the growing state interest in socially oriented organizations and the reduction of foreign funding for Russian NGOs (Stuvøy 2014). In 2005, in Moscow a meeting of the national Council for Promoting the Development of Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights announced the need to develop mechanisms to support the third sector, and after that the reforms started “in order to increase the role of public structures in the life of the country and regulate their activities” (Shapovalova 2019, 418).

Stuvøy (2014) suggests that the increased focus on SONPOs in Russia in the 2000s could be exemplified by the women’s movements which included SONPOs that established crisis centers for women. In the 2000s, the state showed increasing interest in these centers, with many being adopted by local authorities for inclusion in municipal welfare systems, or the NGO model of crisis centers was copied by state institutions (Stuvøy 2019, 412). The case of Women’s Congress confirms this. After the Norwegian three-years funding ended, the center in Murmansk, despite financial difficulties, worked for 10 years. It closed in 2011 due to lack of funding. Founder of the center, L. Shtyleva, said in 2016: *“We could no longer maintain the center, but we have created and promoted it and suggested this social technology to the authorities. And there are now several*

³⁰ Information newsletter №3 (58). January 23, 1998. *In Russian.*

other centers in the Murmansk region that help women, and not only women, but also men and children who have experienced violence” (Shtyleva 2016, 17).

In 2006, a federal law was passed imposing restrictions on foreign funding and its influence on Russian NGOs. Another law enacted in 2012 considered foreign-sponsored NGOs to be “foreign agents”. The color revolutions of the 2000s made the Russian government cautious about such support (Beznosova and Sundstrom, 2009). In the mid-2000s, the Congress worked with partners in Norway within “Women can do it!” program. In 2005-2010 it was implemented in 23 countries, including post-Soviet countries, by the Norwegian People's Aid to increase women’s participation in public and political life. The program included seminars on improving women’s rights and opportunities to participate in decision-making, elections and more.

After the “Women can do it!” project ended in 2010, cooperation of the Congress with Norwegian partners was reduced to occasional visits and then stopped. In 2014, political tensions arose between Russia and Western countries as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict over Crimea. A member of the Congress said in an interview that this had not affected their co-operative activities, as *“cooperation with Norwegian partners was suspended before due to legal changes in 2012 on NGOs, and before the tensions over Crimea in 2014”*.

From 2010 to 2019, the Congress implemented projects aimed at solving the pressing problems of the Murmansk region and Russia as a whole. These projects included building public control structures for preventing domestic violence, actions against smoking, development of charity and services of SONPOs (e.g., organizing the charity marathon "Good Cities of the Murmansk region" with seminars for fundraising). These projects were funded by national endowments such as Presidential Grants Fund, charitable foundations or corporate sponsors.

In March 2020, after almost 30 years of work, Women’s Congress of the Kola Peninsula decided to close. *“The main reason for this was personal burnout and tiredness. We have worked hard over many years. Perhaps the law on foreign agents can be called part of the story... But that was definitely not the main reason for the closure. After 30 years of hard work, we wanted to stop working as a large organization. Several smaller NGOs run by people formerly involved in the Congress, are active in the region. If we have an interesting project, we can get together again”*.

Conclusion. A case-study of Women’s Congress of the Kola Peninsula found this NGO to be exceptional in several respects. After its creation, it quickly developed into a diverse and strong organization with many local branches throughout the region. The Congress demonstrated great longevity and adaptability, high level of responsiveness to national, regional and local needs, and a commitment to international cross-border cooperation. The organization’s activities covered a period of rapid societal change in Russia from 1993 to 2020. For nearly 30 years, the organization has responded to the challenges of the times with dozens of completed projects and activities, mostly unpaid. The Congress was able to adapt to changes in society and develop successful partnerships and fundraising strategies that enabled it to address issues of global, national, regional and local relevance. Women’s Congress has achieved its goals, including its long-term political goals, and since the early 2000s has gained widespread recognition and influenced policy decisions at local, regional and national levels.

The study shows that cooperation with Norwegian partners was one of the central elements of the Congress’s international activities. Joint efforts focused on creating a crisis center for women in

Murmansk, preventing cross-border human trafficking, and educating and empowering women on the Russian side both personally and politically. At the systemic level, cross-border cooperation with Norwegian partners has contributed to policy changes aimed at promoting women's rights in Russia and building good neighborhood relations in the Russian-Norwegian border region. At the projects' level, Norwegian funding allowed to improve gender-responsive services in the Murmansk region. Financial support from Norway was greatly important as a seed funding, however, as was the case of the crisis center in Murmansk, it lacked a long-term basis to ensure the sustainability of the projects. At the organizational level, this cooperation has served to strengthen the capacity of the Congress as a civil society agency and contributed to the legitimacy of SONPOs working on women's rights. For Russian partners, an important aspect of cross-border cooperation was the knowledge and inspiration gained from sharing experiences and communicating with their Norwegian colleagues.

Research shows that cooperation with Norwegian partners ceased in 2010, before major legislative changes related to NGOs in Russia in 2012 and political tensions over Crimea in 2014. Women's Congress ended its activities at the beginning of 2020, mainly due to personal fatigue and loss of momentum, even if part of the reason was changes in the NGO law. Several SONPOs run by people formerly associated with the Congress continue to operate in the region, and if interesting projects arise, the Congress might be revived.

2.4. Case 4: The Red Cross

The Red Cross was established in 1863 in Switzerland and has since grown to become a global organization committed to helping people affected by conflicts and armed violence, and promoting the laws that protect victims of war. Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, the organization employs over 20.000 people and have 100.000 volunteers in more than 100 countries.³¹

The Norwegian Red Cross was established in 1865, and in 1939, a local branch was established in Sør-Varanger. Finnmark Red Cross is the regional unity consisting of 16 local organizations and with 1800 paying members. They conduct approximately 1300 hours of voluntary work per month. 9 local rescue teams are active in the region.

The Sør-Varanger branch has around 250 paying members aged 30-75, and a group of some 30 + active members. The Sør-Varanger branch is involved in a number of activities. Among other things, they certify and re-certify Red Cross members as emergency and first response-workers, they have a visiting service for elderly people and refugees, they organize a public 17th of May breakfast, and the Sun Fiest in February, in which they serve free food for hundreds of people, many of whom are people with little or no social network of their own. The Red Cross also take part in organizing the introduction course and Norwegian language training for refugees who have been settled in Sør-Varanger. In addition, the local branch of the Red Cross has a cooperation

³¹ <https://www.icrc.org/en/who-we-are>

agreement with Sør-Varanger Municipality, on coordinating emergency operations and crisis management in crisis situations.

2.4.1. Cross-Border Cooperation

Finnmark Red Cross has cooperated with Murmansk Red Cross since 1990. Earlier, this cross-border collaboration was mainly conducted by the local organizations. For instance, Alta Red Cross cooperated with Apatity, Hammerfest with Kola, and Sør-Varanger with Nikel. In recent years however, their cross-border cooperation has been coordinated from the regional branch of Finnmark Red Cross, located to Vadsø. One of the main projects since the early 2000s has been a canteen for school children in Ura-Guba. The number of schoolchildren in this town has decreased during the last years and is now 50. 30 of those are given a daily free meal. Sør-Varanger Red Cross has also over the years organized summer camp for the children, and Red Cross volunteers from Sør-Varanger went over as activity leaders. Russian Red Cross youth has also been at the Norwegian side to be trained as activity leaders. Once they took children to the Norwegian side, but this was not prolonged because of the huge gap in costs and the welfare gap between the Norwegian and the Russian side. It was concluded that it was better to spend the money in Russia and buy supplies there.

A similar canteen was run in Apatity, for which Alta Red Cross provided financial support. This project was transferred to the national level in 2017 to secure stable financial means. So, within the Norwegian Red Cross children program (national level), the canteens were operated in Ura-Guba, Apatity and Verkhnetolumsk, at least until 2022. According to Red Cross representatives, it was challenging to raise money for projects in the Murmansk region, and the main finances for these projects came from some stable donors and specific campaigns in relation to Christmas. There is still a need for projects like the school canteens, and a need to provide the Norwegian public with pictures to show what they do on the Russian side to keep the interest. They compete with other “more urgent needs” worldwide. For a few years prior to the Ukraine-war, Finnmark Red Cross had a “Murmansk account” to finance all the projects, one that was topped up by the Norwegian Red Cross at a national level when needed.³²

Overall, the Red Cross engages in humanitarian efforts that are valued by local communities, but not always by Russian authorities. A few years ago, Red Cross Finnmark cooperated with Red Cross Murmansk on running a bus that provided food and medical care for homeless people. Russian authorities were dismissive of the project, claiming that there are no homeless people in Murmansk. The project proved them wrong, revealing a very real community of homeless people, with urgent needs for food, medical care, and other basic needs. After a few years, the bus was taken over by the municipal authorities in Murmansk city. However, after a short period of time, this service was discontinued and replaced by other local services addressing the same needs.³³

Overall, Red Cross cooperation across the border has been low key. The first initiatives were from local units but many tasks were gradually transferred to the regional level in Vadsø or national level in Oslo. In the 1990s, when much of the work across the border was strictly humanitarian, the local branch of the Red Cross had more activity across the border, as these activities were more geared towards the profile and human resources of the Red Cross. Throughout the 2000s

³² Interview with Red Cross Finnmarks coordinator for international cooperation, March 2022.

³³ Interview with Red Cross Finnmarks coordinator for international cooperation, March 2022.

however, the local branch of the Red Cross has devoted their time and resources to activities mainly in Sør-Varanger. According to local members of the Red Cross, this reflects what kind of resources they have at their disposal, and where they feel that they can be of most use.

2.5. Case 5: The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army (TSA) is an international Christian charitable organization headquartered in London, England. The organization has a worldwide membership of more than 1.7 million, including soldiers, officers and adherents collectively known as "Salvationists". Founded by William and Catherine Booth in 1885, the Salvation Army was set up with the aim to bring salvation to the poor, destitute, and hungry by meeting both their "physical and spiritual needs".³⁴ Having expanded its reach throughout the 20th Century, it currently has a presence in 133 countries, including many authoritarian countries where other international organizations have struggled to gain access.

In 1888, the Salvation Army established its first branch in Oslo, Norway. Since then, it has spread out, establishing branches in all major cities in Norway. As of 2022 the Salvation Army has more than 8000 members, including 4000 soldiers, making it one of the largest civil society organizations in Norway.³⁵

In Russia, the Salvation Army had an early presence from 1910, but had to shut down in 1918 following the October Revolution. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Salvation Army returned to Russia in 1992, under a joint East European command. In 2015, the Salvation Army established its own distinct command in Russia, based in St. Petersburg.³⁶ As such, the Salvation Army has a long history in Norway, and a more recent history in Russia. Nonetheless, the organization is in good standing with Russian authorities, making it easier for the charity to operate in the country.

In 2003, the Salvation Army's local branch in Kirkenes was established. At the same time, the Salvation Army opened up Fretex second-hand stores in Tromsø, Harstad, and Bodø. Since then, the Salvation Army has established a solid presence in Kirkenes, where in addition to a Salvation Army office and a Fretex store, it has an office for employment and follow-up services for former Fretex employees.

Kirkenes is an international town, with settled immigrants and many refugees from different corners of the world. The Salvation Army has responded to this by organizing a language Café, in which foreigners can meet and talk to Norwegians, and learn Norwegian through personal interaction. The language Café has separate hours for immigrants who have a settled status of residence, but have only the most basic knowledge of the Norwegian language, and for recently arrived asylum seekers, who start entirely from scratch.

The Salvation Army also organize a band, in which they have both young and older musicians. The younger members receive music lessons as a part of their participation.

³⁴ <https://livesretold.co.uk/william-catherine-booth>

³⁵ <https://frelsesarmeen.no/om-oss/frelsesarmeen-i-tall>

³⁶ <https://www.thesalvationarmy.ru/about/history/>

Furthermore, the Salvation Army in Kirkenes holds mass two times a week, and the Saturday mass is followed by dinner prepared by, and for those who wish to attend. These and other activities are aimed in particular at the elderly, at refugees and others who may be lonely and socially vulnerable to isolation. It is about providing low key arenas for social interaction.

The most tangible activity run by the Salvation Army is Fretex, which offers employment, and a gateway to other forms of employment for people who may suffer from physical or mental disabilities, recovering drug addicts, and other, who – with some guidance – can work in, and to some extent run the store on a day-to-day basis.

In the early 2000s, the Salvation Army had a project focused on bringing people with disabilities into the workforce – by offering job training in the Fretex store, and assistance in obtaining part-time, or full-time jobs in other places. The regional County of Finnmark was impressed with this project, and in cooperation with them, and with funding from NAV (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration), they organized a similar project in Murmansk. A Salvation Army branch had just been opened in Murmansk city in 2007, so in collaboration with them, the Kirkenes Branch organized a project set up to provide job training and steady employment for people with disabilities.

This project was funded by NAV in Norway and lasted from 2008 until 2012. In this project, they worked with five groups of people with different disabilities, offered them job training adapted to their disabilities and individual skillsets, and moved on to help them acquire paid jobs in their own hometown. After receiving job training and working with the Salvation Army in Murmansk for a while, they were seen as being “employable”, and two out of three of them obtained steady employment in other places.

After this project, The Salvation Army worked on establishing a recycle and second-hand store in Murmansk city, and in 2016, the SPAtex store was opened, modelled on the Norwegian Fretex stores, and initially managed by the Salvation Army office in Kirkenes. In this store as well, young people with mental and physical disabilities receive job training and are put in charge of gathering, organizing and selling secondhand clothes in the store.

At first, they struggled to make the store work, financially. For the first few years, the store was run with net losses. At the same time, it became an important social institution and meeting spot. At the start of the Pandemic, in Spring 2020, the store was temporarily closed. In the Summer of 2020, the store was opened again. Since then, the store has been going well, with a lot of customers, and good sales.

To the management in Kirkenes, it felt like the local employees in Murmansk had cracked a code on how to bring paying customers to the store. Six years after it first opened up, the SPAtex-store is a well-run business, where young Russians with various disabilities can receive valuable job-training, before seeking permanent employment someplace else.

The store has several donation containers in and around Murmansk city. This helps them resupply their store every now and then. The regional prisons come to the store to buy clothes. Children’s shelters and other institutions also turn to SPAtex to buy the clothes they need at a reasonable price.

With the store running quite well, the Salvation Army sought to expand its activities in Murmansk. Their most recent project was the building of a social center for vulnerable people in the city of Murmansk. They had just received confirmation of funding for this project from the Norwegian Ministry of Health and Care services. After February 2022, everything froze, and since then, they have been unable to cross the border or transfer funds to their employees in Russia. The organization has just bought a new building in Murmansk. However, as long as there is a war in Ukraine, they are at a standstill. In the fall of 2022, some Salvation Army personnel in Murmansk serve soup to people in need. With time, they hope to move such activities into the new social center.

The SPA-tex store is in a special position. The Salvation Army in Murmansk have been forced to let off five out of eight employees, because of a freeze of foreign funding. The director of the office doesn't take out a salary any longer. By contrast, the SPAtex store generates its own income and was going well as of October 2022.³⁷

Representatives of the Salvation Army on the Norwegian side stays in touch with their colleagues in Murmansk only digitally. They are not worried about the fate and future development of the Salvation Army in Murmansk. They are resourceful people. At the same time, the Salvation Army has good relations with the Russian authorities, at a national, regional and local level. Their work is strictly humanitarian. By offering food and shelter for poor people, social inclusion and job training for people with various disabilities, the Salvation Army is addressing social challenges, and meeting social needs in a strictly apolitical manner. Being in good standing with Russian authorities, the Salvation Army is allowed to operate quite freely. However, as long as current sanctions between Russia and Western countries remain in place, they will have to generate their own income, or rely on funding from private donors or state funds in Russia.

2.6. Central findings

We have looked at a number of organizations that offer health and social services in the Murmansk region, trying to address various societal needs. Some of these organizations have cooperated closely with Russian health authorities, they receive funding from Russian authorities, private donors, and from abroad (mainly Norway), and much of their activities has up to 2022 involve cross-border collaboration between Norway and Russia. We have focused primarily on local organizations, or local branches of national organizations. While different in profile and structure, there are similarities in how they have operated across the border.

First of all, these organizations take part in several small-scale projects, often starting with short-term, highly localized forms of work, sometimes building into more long-term projects. The canteens run by the Red Cross represents one such activity. The SPAtex store and job-training courses run by the Salvation Army another.

Second, they build on work that they are already doing in Norway, and the skill sets and experiences of their local members. The Salvation Army job training project was a direct duplication of a similar project first tested in Kirkenes. The NPAs engagement with helping people with disabilities and their caretakers to achieve greater mobility and self-reliance, relies on the

³⁷ Interview with repr. of Salvation Army Norway, October 2022).

professional skills and personal commitments of the NPA-volunteers based in Kirkenes. This has also been the case with projects aimed at promoting broader societal change, such as the establishment of women's crisis centers, combined with public campaigns against domestic violence. Locally rooted cooperation across the border has been focused on addressing specific, everyday problems, such as hunger, unemployment, and health care needs, through concrete actions.

Partners on the Russians side, whether part of larger nation-wide organizations, or locally grown, also engage in activities aimed at addressing various social needs, with tangible results. For the most part, such partner organizations, whether it is the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, or member organizations of the Women's Congress, are engaged in activities viewed as non-political in nature, and that make a positive difference in local communities. As such, these organizations have also been in good standing with local and regional authorities in Russia.

Norwegian organizations that are socially oriented, benefit from collaborating with these organizations, and appear to be viewed in a positive light by regional and local authorities, much like their Russian partners. This appears to give them a wider space to develop their projects, and to expand their own networks without facing suspicions and negative attention from Russian authorities, at a local or regional level.

2.7. Concluding remarks

Up until 2022, the Norwegian-Russian border stood out as one area where cross-border cooperation could still be found, especially between socially oriented NPOs. Since February 2022 however, institutional cooperation between Norwegian and Russian SONPOs has been brought to a halt. Cross-border cooperation that involves Russian authorities or authority-affiliated organizations, has been shut down completely, and contact between organizations in Norway and Russia are kept at a minimum.

At a local level, cross-border cooperation depends largely on informal, personal relations between individuals involved. While official, institutional cooperation across the border is no longer possible, individuals who have established personal ties across the border, stay in touch with each other.

As such, based on such informal ties, local organizations based in Sør-Varanger, or local branches of national organizations may be well placed to be the first organizations to re-establish civil society cooperation between Norway and Russia sometime in the future, if and when political and security considerations allow for it. In the meantime, some of the projects, the ideas, and the training that Norwegian local civil organizations have brought to – and also from – Murmansk, have set roots there, allowing local civil society to make a positive impact in their own communities, and provide help for groups of people that may need it.

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