

## LATEST NEWS ON THE ARCTIC INVESTMENT PLATFORM COOPERATION

### Promoting financial cooperation in the European Arctic

The Arctic Investment Platform (AIP) project promotes financial cooperation in the Northern Sparsely Populated Areas (NSPA). The NSPA consists of the seven regions of East and North Finland, the four northernmost regions in Sweden and the three northernmost regions in Norway. Since January 2019 the Regional Council of Lapland has coordinated an Interreg Nord project in close cooperation with BusinessOulu, Region Norrbotten, Region Västerbotten and Norinnova AS with the aim of further deepening the AIP cooperation in the NSPA.

The project will produce a feasibility study, including an analysis of the investment needs and potential in the NSPA as well as a proposal for a funding model and support system to be implemented. If the study concludes that setting up an investment platform would be feasible, the project will also develop a road map, presenting the required steps and resources for establishing the platform.

### Improved use of existing networks

The project was launched early this year with a workshop held in Rovaniemi, where it was agreed that the investment cooperation should focus on the investment needs of expansive small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It was also agreed that future investment cases, financed through the Arctic Investment Platform, should relate to digitalisation and Arctic natural resources.

A survey mapping the needs and potential of financial cooperation was sent to SMEs and financiers of the NSPA in June. The purpose of the survey is to gain information on the investment needs of the SMEs, and on the expectations and provided financial instruments of the financiers.

The relevance of the European Arctic to the EU has gained visibility over the past few years. At the same time, East and North Finland together with the NSPA have taken concrete steps towards a more visible cooperation in Brussels. All of this has helped create a big interest in the financial cooperation, both within the NSPA and outside, including the highest level of the European Commission.

A close connection with the European Investment Bank (EIB) was established already early in the project, which has eventually led to a cooperation agreement in August 2019. According to the agreement the EIB will provide its professional services to the project for the rest of this year, free of charge, with an option to continue the contract into 2020 depending on the results of the feasibility study. Already during spring the project has been able to utilise the EIB's expertise in developing the surveys.

### How will the cooperation continue to develop?

The aggregated results of the surveys sent to the SMEs and financiers will be gathered in early autumn. In connection to this, a survey to the cluster and intermediary organisations of the NSPA will be carried out, with the specific aim to fill potential gaps or question marks of the earlier surveys.

A workshop targeted at financial experts for examining the results of the surveys, will be held in September. Regions will provide their input to the preliminary results in October, through a high level steering group meeting in Umeå and a more operational mirror group meeting in Brussels.

The final report, compiled from the survey data, inputs of regional representatives and experts, as well as potential interviews, will be finished by the end of November. Before finalizing the report, the mirror group will be able to provide final feedback on the content and agree on a way forward in the year 2020, based on the results and the proposed road map.