

Västerbotten – An Attractive Region Where Differences Drive Development

Regional Development Strategy 2020–2030



Västerbotten – An Attractive Region Where Differences Drive Development

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Photo: Jonas Westling
Together for confident children.

Foreword

Together. We have gotten this far together. And our journey will continue together, as a team.

A regional development strategy is a roadmap. This document outlines the path for working with regional development, which we can turn to when at crossroads and when facing challenges. It helps us reach a consensus on what we can and what we should do for Västerbotten so that it will be the world's best place to live and work.

We have already come a long way. Västerbotten is a role model in several respects. Here, innovation capacity flourishes, investments and business establishments are increasing, gender equality initiatives are furthered, and culture is front and centre. While there is no doubt about our ability to create a sustainable society, we are working under a unique set of circumstances. Our location in the Arctic with cold and long distances, a declining population base in some places, and preconceived notions about our part of the world are factors that we must always consider as we move forward. We have come a long way in creating the world's most sustainable region, but much remains to be done.

The regional development strategy, together with the regional plan, are the leading policy documents for regional development. It is used by government agencies and directs and influences how regional and European project funds are allocated. Regional Development Strategy, together with the Regional Plan also defines how we conduct national and international lobbying. Our hope is that the regional development strategy will be the guide that groups and actors in Västerbotten turn to when planning their own work. Regional Development Strategy is not a product stored deep in a folder in our computers. It is to be a daily reference to turn to and trust.

Our regional development strategy is grounded in long-term and ambitious efforts. People, organisations, companies, and services from throughout Västerbotten have contributed incredibly with their opinions, experiences, and visions to create a common view of our region. Many perspectives and interests have been carefully weighed together to create a shared set of goals. The steps we are now taking to achieve these goals vary, and that is exactly what collective action is all about. We all must contribute to help Västerbotten develop into the place we want it to be. We would like to deeply thank everyone who has participated in developing our regional development strategy.

Our potential is great, with digitalisation, location-based business development, accessible infrastructure, sustainable development, healthy living conditions, a vibrant cultural sphere and long-term access to skills and labour are some of the crucial issues for our future.

Västerbotten is and will continue to be an attractive region where differences drive development. There is but one way to move – forward.



Rickard Carstedt (S)
Chair of the Regional Development Board
Region Västerbotten



Anna Pettersson
Regional Director of Development,
Region Västerbotten



Photo: Patrick Trägårdh
Outdoor life with a view of the Ume River.

From Strategy to Collective Action

The Regional Development Strategy is a government commission and has been developed to present the desired development for Västerbotten¹ by 2030. The strategy, which was adopted by the Regional Council, defines the county's common ambitions, and is intended to be a roadmap for actors in every sector.

The overall purpose of the strategy is to identify goals and priorities for regional development based on Västerbotten's particular circumstances. For this reason, it should link the conditions of the county with the overall goals for both the regional development policy at the national level² and EU Cohesion Policy. The strategy outlines how EU and national funds for regional development policy are to be allocated and used in the region. Thus, it will also be the basis for EU structural fund programmes that include Västerbotten.

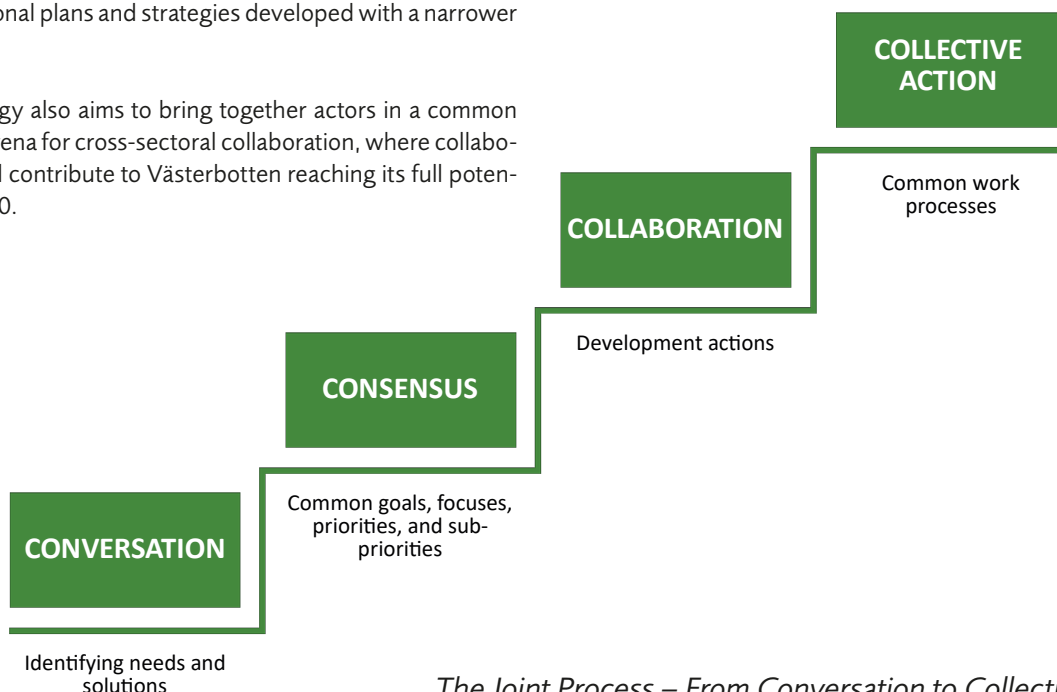
Another purpose is to bring together goals for all the policy areas where initiatives can and need to be implemented at a regional level, making it more comprehensive and complex than strategies within a more narrowly defined policy scope. Thus, the regional development strategy is also a guide for other regional plans and strategies developed with a narrower scope.

The strategy also aims to bring together actors in a common regional arena for cross-sectoral collaboration, where collaborations will contribute to Västerbotten reaching its full potential by 2030.

Regional Development Strategy – A Joint Responsibility

The Regional Development Strategy has been developed in broad collaboration with the county's actors.³ Wide-ranging engagement is necessary for Västerbotten to achieve the goals that have been identified.

The strategy promotes collective action and joint coordination. During the development of the strategy, there were conversations about challenges and opportunities, and ways of dealing with them (see figure The Joint Process – From Conversation to Collective Action). The prioritising and implementing of initiatives create a consensus, in turn providing a basis for collaboration, such as in joint projects. This collaboration can then shift to collective action with common work processes.



The Joint Process – From Conversation to Collective Action

1. The terms "the region", "Västerbotten" and "the county" are used synonymously in this strategy document and should not be confused with the organisation Region Västerbotten.

2. Driving development with strong local and regional competitiveness for sustainable development in all parts of the country.

3. While developing the Regional Development Strategy, wide-ranging discussions and workshops were held in the following thematic areas: The future labour market and access to skills and labour, the future sustainable society, the future business community and entrepreneurship, the future innovative region, future mobility and transport infrastructure, future leisure and civil society, future health and social welfare, future cultural life and the future digital region

Once the joint priorities have been established, the strategy will guide and coordinate efforts for sustainable growth. More specifically, this will be achieved by the Regional Development Strategy:

- providing the basis for other regional strategies and programmes, such as regional EU programmes and the county transport plan.
- being a roadmap for local strategies, plans and programmes.
- connecting the county's strategies with national and European programmes and strategies.
- providing the county-wide starting point for regional growth issues in the dialogue with national and European levels of government.

Region Västerbotten is responsible for regional development in Västerbotten County and is explicitly commissioned to coordinate the implementation of the Regional Development Strategy. Many actors work together to implement the strategy. The following is a list of some of these stakeholders in alphabetical order:

- Business sector and business sector organisations
- Civil society and civil society organisations
- Education providers, including folk high schools and adult education organisations
- Municipal and regional networks within and outside of Sweden
- Municipalities and sub-regions (Region 10, Skellefteå Region, Umeå Region)
- The Sámi Parliament and Sámi organisations
- Special interest organisations
- The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)
- The Swedish Public Employment Service, the National Board of Housing, Building and Planning, the Swedish Energy Agency, the National Land Survey, the County Administrative Board, the Swedish Geological Survey (SGU), the Swedish Forest Agency, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, the Swedish Transport Administration, Vinnova and other government agencies
- Umeå University, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, and Luleå University of Technology

Regional Development Initiatives and Expanded Capacity in the Region

Västerbotten is a county rich in resources, but its most important resource is its people. In the emerging knowledge-based

society, where the most important driving force for growth is creativity and skills, the role of people becomes central to regional development.

Västerbotten is, together with Norrbotten, one of the EU's 242 NUTS 2 regions, and it ranks first when measuring welfare through the Social Progress Index (SPI), which is a way of measuring welfare beyond economic wealth.⁴ This index has three main categories: basic human needs, foundations of wellbeing, and opportunities for personal development. Västerbotten is highly ranked in the first category and well positioned in the other two. This shows that Västerbotten's development is moving in the right direction and that it has good potential to maintain its unique position.

Regional development initiatives aim to strengthen the region's capacity for change. This will lead to the desired societal changes that are formulated in overarching goals, focus areas, and priorities.

Target groups for regional development initiatives vary depending on priorities and context. They can be public actors, civil society organisations, businesses and business organisations, or residents. One organisation may be responsible for implementing a regional development initiative while at the same time being the target group of another initiative.

Monitoring of the Regional Development Strategy 2020–2030

The strategy explains how Västerbotten contributes to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the path to achieving them. These goals are made tangible through indicators that are monitored annually, which are then presented to decision-makers and stakeholders in the region.⁵

Sustainable development involves extensive and complex changes in societal systems and ecosystems. This means that measurable indicators cannot cover all parts and aspects of the desired change. The results of monitoring and evaluation need to be reviewed and nuanced. Not all indicators are available in published statistics and data will need to be collected from relevant target groups.

The strategy presents a selection of indicators that can be used to measure results. The indicators must be measurable, reflect desirable changes, and harmonise with indicators used by the UN, the EU, and other measurement systems that may be relevant. The relevant established indicators are determined and presented by Region Västerbotten at the beginning of each mandate period.

4. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/maps/social_progress, 2020-08-17

5. Region Västerbotten has a framework for strategic learning, describing the structured monitoring and evaluation of the regional development commission.

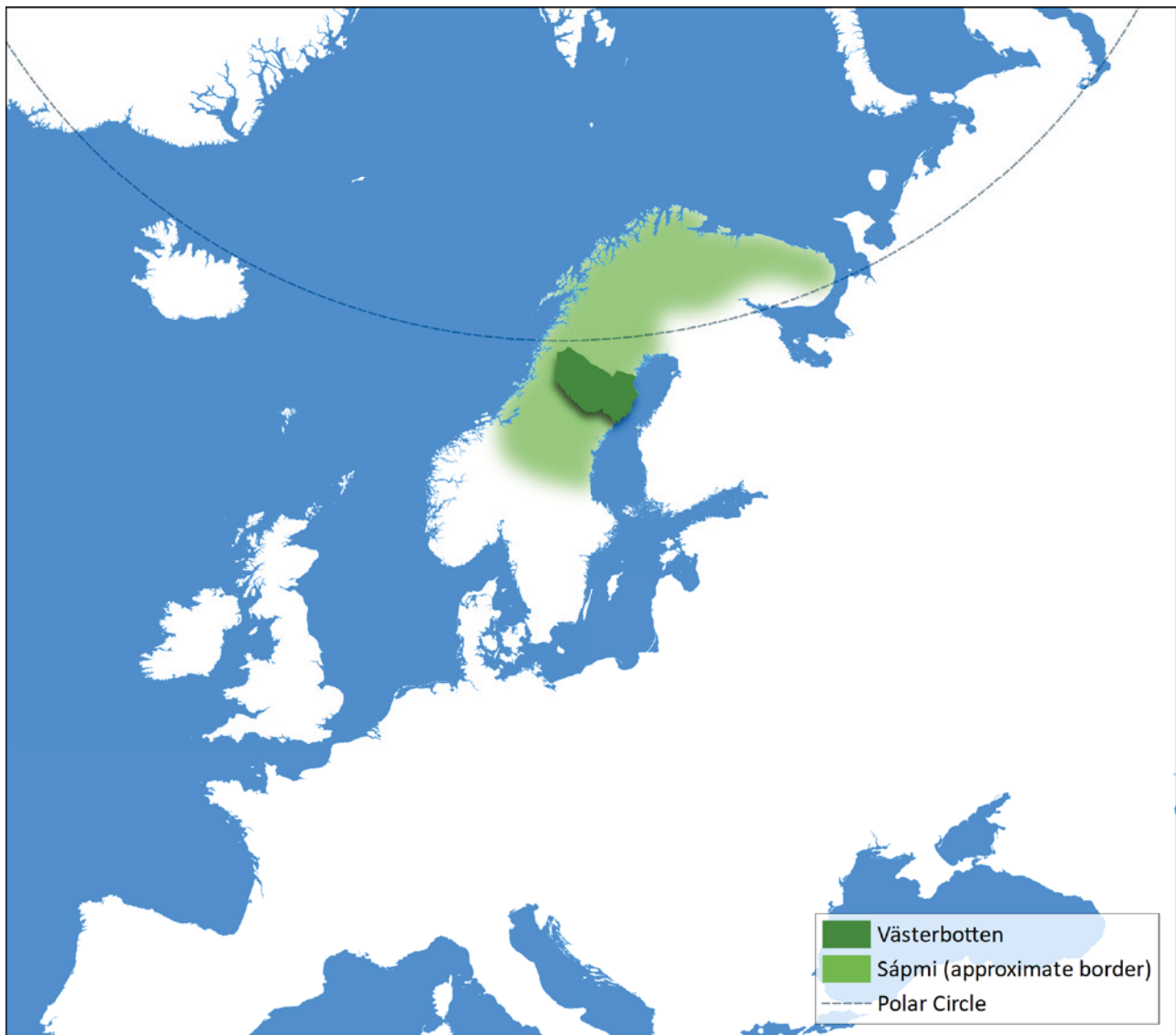
A Region in Norrland, Sápmi, Sweden, Northern Scandinavia, the Baltic Sea Region, Europe, the Arctic, and the World

Regionally, Västerbotten is a county stretching from the Scandinavian Mountains down to the Gulf of Bothnia and includes the province of Västerbotten along with parts of the provinces of Lapland and Ångermanland. The region has just over 270,000 residents in 15 municipalities, twelve of which have populations of less than 10,000 inhabitants.

The region is part of Norrland and is Sweden's second north-

ernmost region. The county is part of the larger geographical area Sápmi, which is home to the indigenous Sámi people. The county shares challenges and opportunities with other regions in this sparsely populated part of northern Scandinavia. Västerbotten is also part of the Barents Region and the European Arctic. Internationally, the county shares a land border with Norway and a sea border with Finland, which means that the region is part of the macro-regional EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region.

This geographic location, with the challenges and opportunities it brings, has encouraged cooperation and collaboration locally, nationally, and internationally. To promote the county's development through 2030, there is both room, and need, for increased international presence with deepened and further developed cross-border cooperation and collaboration.



Västerbotten County – the Geographic Focus of the Strategy



Photo: Jonas Westling
New construction in Skellefteå.

Västerbotten – An Attractive Region where Differences Drive Development

Västerbotten County is the region bringing together cities and sparsely populated areas, where high technology and cutting-edge research are found alongside Sámi traditions, where forests, rivers, mountains, bogs, and fertile agricultural land are next to industrial areas, where there are both research environments and cultural centres.

In Västerbotten, intraregional differences are leveraged to achieve the vision:

Västerbotten – an attractive region where differences drive development

This vision will be realised by focusing on achieving a cohesive region, a region with equal opportunities and gender equality, and being a pioneer in the transition to a sustainable society. This drive for development allows the region's business community, civil society, and public organisations to leverage the opportunities offered by its rich natural resources, knowledge, research, culture, and social trust to meet the challenges for sustainable development faced by the region in the coming decade.

Overarching Sustainability Goals

In Västerbotten, regional development will aim for two overarching sustainability goals: A Vibrant Place to Live and a circular society.

A vibrant place to live is a community where people want to stay, whether for a short visit or for the rest of their lives. It is a place well suited for visiting, growing and working in and, growing old in.

A circular society deals with climate change and creates economic opportunities and infrastructure while simultaneously taking care of natural resources and ecosystems so that Västerbotten becomes a vibrant place to live for future generations.

These goals incorporate all sixteen goals found in Agenda 2030. But Västerbotten also contributes to the seventeenth sustainability goal: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

The implementation of these goals requires global solidarity, improved capacity, and the mobilisation of financial resources to ensure that no country or group is left out. International investment and coordinated policy are needed to ensure development of innovative technologies, fair trade, reliable monitoring, and support in humanitarian crises. Sharing knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources are all important components for achieving these goals.

While Västerbotten is part of the move towards the global goals, the goals may have varying relevance for everyday life in the region. The Regional Development Strategy presents the UN's global goals.

A Vibrant Place 2030

The region welcomes new residents and offers good living conditions throughout the county. A vibrant place contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Agenda 2030 that pertain to society.

A vibrant place to live means that Västerbotten manages economic differences and reduces economic exclusion. No one goes hungry and Västerbotten secures its food supply and switches to sustainable agriculture and forestry.

In 2030, the residents of Västerbotten will live in a strong democracy where human rights are central and the obvious in-

trinsic value of a vibrant civil society is respected. In addition, the residents live healthy lives with a high level of wellbeing. They have access to inclusive and equal education of good quality, with increased opportunities for lifelong learning. Everyone has decent working conditions.

Västerbotten is a region with gender equality where all women and girls are empowered. The county has also reduced inequality within the region and has contributed to reducing inequality between regions and countries. Cities and communities in the county are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. The communities are inclusive as part of achieving sustainable development. There is justice for all as well as efficient and inclusive institutions.

Examples of Indicators for a Vibrant Place to Live 2030

The indicators are a selection of those proposed by the UN and responsible national authorities according to:

* proposed by the UN

** Swedish proxy for missing indicator proposed by Statistics Sweden

*** supplementary Swedish indicator proposed by Statistics Sweden. The environmental quality objectives are proposed for follow-up by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency.



End poverty in all its forms everywhere

- Low economic standards: proportion of the population with an income lower than 60 per cent of the country's median income*



End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture

- Proportion of agricultural land farmed organically**



Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages

- Maternal mortality*, under-5 mortality* and neonatal mortality*
- Life expectancy*** and self-rated health***
- Mortality due to heart disease, cancer, diabetes or chronic respiratory diseases*, mortality in suicide* and deaths due to accidental poisoning*
- Impaired mental wellbeing among adults*** and school students, respectively
- Road traffic deaths* and road traffic injuries, respectively, seriously injured and slightly injured***



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong opportunities for all

- Students at the end of lower secondary school who achieve at least minimum proficiency level in reading* and mathematics*
- Completed compulsory school*** and upper-secondary school***
- Population by highest completed level of education***
- Proportion of students who have experienced bullying in recent months***
- Proportion of teachers who have received at least minimum organised teacher training (e.g. pedagogical training) per school level*



Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- People subjected to sexual violence**
- Proportion of women in municipal and regional councils*
- Proportion of women in managerial positions*
- Net income of women as a share of men's net income***



Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work conditions for all

- Annual growth in real GDP per capita * and per employee*
- Unemployment rates by sex, age and persons with disabilities*
- Percentage of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training*
- Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries by sex and migrant status*



Reduce inequality within and among countries

- Growth rate for per capita income, average and median, among the bottom 40 per cent of the population and the total population*
- Proportion reporting having personally felt harassed⁶
- Proportion with incomes among the lowest 40 per cent, by sex
- Proportion living in households with a disposable income of less than 50 per cent of median income*



Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable

- Proportion living in overcrowded housing***
- Proportion victim of physical or sexual harassment in the previous 12 months*
- Demographic potential support ratio, by municipality



Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

- Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months*
- Proportion of the population that feels safe walking alone around the area they live*
- Proportion subjected to discriminating treatment**
- Participation in elections***

6. Survey question looking at the proportion subjected to discriminating treatment because of sex, sexual identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief system, bodily impairment, sexual orientation or age.

A Circular Society 2030

The region takes advantage of opportunities for sustainable development throughout the county and manages its plentiful natural resources.

A circular society sees opportunities and uses its assets to create good economic conditions, while also contributing to the transition to greater sustainability. A circular society contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals in Agenda 2030 related to the business community, infrastructure, ecosystems, and climate.

A circular society means that Västerbotten ensures access to, and management of, water and sanitation, as well as access to economically affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy.

Västerbotten works for lasting, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth; builds resilient infrastructure; works for inclusive and sustainable industrial development; and promotes innovation. Cities and human settlements are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. There are sustainable consumption and production patterns.

A circular society means taking immediate actions to combat climate change and its consequences.

Examples of Indicators for a Circular Society 2030

The indicators are a selection of those proposed by the UN and responsible national authorities according to:

* proposed by the UN

** Swedish proxy for missing indicator proposed by Statistics Sweden

*** supplementary Swedish indicator proposed by Statistics Sweden. The environmental quality objectives are prop



Ensure access to and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

- Water protection areas for municipal water sources***
- The environmental goal of good quality ground water



Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

- More efficient heating and energy use⁷



Promote lasting, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent working conditions for all

- The environmental quality goals Clean Air, a Non-toxic Environment, and a Protected Ozone Layer
- Passenger and freight volumes by mode of transport*
- Value added by the manufacturing industry as a share of GDP and per capita*
- Carbon dioxide emissions per unit, value added*
- Proportion researchers (full-time equivalents)*
- Proportion of the population with access to mobile phone networks, by technology*

7. The goal is expressed in terms of added energy in relation to the gross regional product (GRP)



Build resilient infrastructure, work for inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and promote innovation

- Environmental quality goals Safe Radiation Environment and Good Built Environment



Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

- Environmental quality goals Safe Radiation Environment and Good Built Environment



Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

- Material recycling



Take urgent action to combat climate change and its consequences

- Environmental quality goal Limit Climate Impact
- Greenhouse gas emissions by industry, territory and economic development*



Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

- Environmental quality goals Only Natural Acidification, No Eutrophication, A Balanced Marine Environment, and Flourishing Coastal Areas and Archipelagos



Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

- Environmental quality goals Wetlands Teaming with Life, Living Forests, A Rich Agricultural Landscape, Magnificent Mountain Environments, and A Rich Flora and Fauna

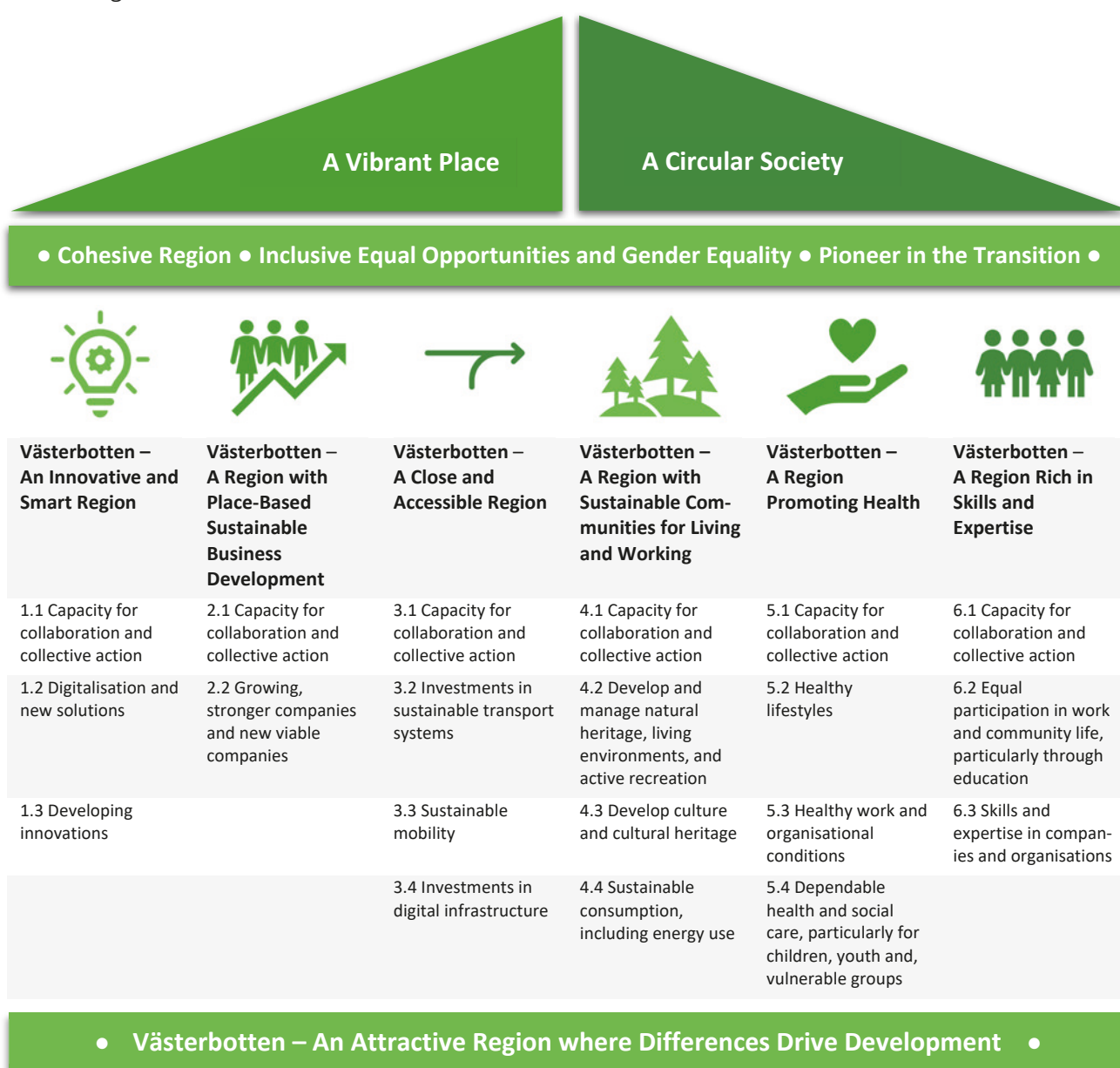


Photo: Johan Gunséus
Laboratory at University Hospital of Umeå.

The Road to a Sustainable Västerbotten in 2030 - Three Focus Areas and Six Priorities

The goals for sustainable development in Västerbotten include three focus areas and six priorities. The three focus areas describe the perspectives that need to infuse every regional development initiative for differences to drive development and for the goals to be realised.

The six priorities show which areas need to be developed for Västerbotten to become a vibrant place to live and a circular Society. Each priority is elaborated on in the twenty associated sub-priorities.



The Road to a Vibrant Place to Live and a Circular Society – Vision, Focus Areas, and Priorities

Regional Development Goals from the EU to the RDS

Västerbotten's work in sustainable development contributes to the national goals for regional development policy in Sweden and to the EU's five priority goals that govern cohesion policy and EU regional policy. See overview below.

The overarching goals in the Regional Development Strategy are further elaborated upon in various strategies and action plans for different policy areas. See under each priority.

EU Cohesion Policy Goals	A more competitive and smarter Europe	A more connected Europe by enhancing mobility	A greener, towards a net zero carb-on economy	Euro-pe closer to citi-zens	A more social and inclusive Europe	
National Strategy for Sustainable Regional Development 2021-2030	Driving development with strong local and regional competitiveness for sustainable development in all parts of the country					
	Innovation, renewal, and entrepreneurship	Accessibility through digital communication and transport infrastructure	Equal opportunities for housing, work, and well-being		Access to skills and skills development	
Regional Development Strategy for Västerbotten County 2020-2030	Västerbotten in 2030 – A Vibrant Place and a Circular Society					
	Cohesive Region • Inclusive Equal Opportunities and Gender Equality • Pioneer in the Transition					
	Västerbotten – An Innovative and Smart Region	Västerbotten – A Region with Place-Based Business Development	Västerbotten – A Close and Accessible Region	Västerbotten – A Region with Sustainable Communities for Living and Working	Västerbotten – A Region Promoting Health	Västerbotten – A Region Rich in Skills and Expertise
Area Specific Strategies and Plans	RIS Regional Digital Strategy Regional Tourism Strategy Etc	Regional Tourism Strategy Regional Food Strategy Etc	County Transport Plan Regional Plan for Mass Transit Etc	Regional Plan for Culture Regional Library Plan Physical Planning Etc	Health Strategy Etc	Regional Food Strategy Etc
Organisational and Project Plans	Improved regional capacity					
	Regional initiatives					

The Strategy in its Context – from the EU's Cohesion Policy Goals to the RDS

Focus Areas

Focus areas describe the perspectives that need to infuse the regional development initiatives required to achieve the priorities and the overarching sustainability goals for a vibrant place to live and a circular Västerbotten. The three focus areas are Cohesive Region, Inclusive Equal Opportunities and Gender Equality and Pioneer in the Transition

Cohesive Region

Västerbotten is a cohesive region, with well-developed collaborative structures in various areas of society. There is extensive experience of complementing each other and creating connections – despite the long distances. The geographic challenges, the long distances, and the differing conditions in cities, rural areas, and sparsely populated areas, are leveraged as advantages by using local circumstances for integrating and connecting across parts of the region and to the world.

Regional development initiatives contribute to location-based, outward-looking, and integrated development of cities, rural areas, and sparsely populated areas within and outside the county to ensure Västerbotten is a cohesive region.

Inclusive Equal Opportunities and Gender Equality

Västerbotten works for gender equality and inclusive equal opportunities irrespective of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnic origin, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation, and age. All people should have the same opportunities, rights, and obligations in all aspects of life. Active participation, economic opportunities, and opportunities for everyone to take part in society, must characterise work in the region.

Regional development initiatives ensure that differences between groups are addressed for equal and inclusive development in the county.

Pioneer in the Transition

Västerbotten's resources allow it to lead the transition towards a reduced impact on the climate and the environment. The region has natural resources, renewable energy sources, research, knowledge, a dynamic business community, civil society, and residents. They all give Västerbotten an advantage when preparing for climate change and transitioning to a circular society with reduced climate emissions and protection of biodiversity.

Regional development initiatives contribute to the county becoming a pioneer in the transition to a circular society while preparing for climate and environmental change.

Priorities



Photo: Johan Gunséus
Player and coach in electric hockey, Johanna Mårtensson.



Photo: unsplash.com
Wind and solar power for a sustainable energy supply.

Priority 1: Västerbotten – An Innovative and Smart Region

The OECD⁸ points to Västerbotten's absolute advantages as a starting point for increased diversification through innovations in forestry and the bioeconomy, production of renewable energy, utilising natural landscapes, mineral resources, and other natural resources.

This, and the region's combined knowledge and research expertise, rich natural and cultural resources, civil society, diversified business community, and other assets allow Västerbotten's actors to work together to take advantage of new ideas and transform these into innovations and new solutions.

Innovative and smart solutions based on equal opportunities and gender equality are needed to meet the societal challenges posed by changes in the world around us. At the same time innovations and digital solutions can contribute to making the region a pioneer and improve competitiveness.

The region's commercial and research resources are prominent in the development of the new bioeconomy. Additionally, Västerbotten has an abundance of forests that can meet the demand for sustainable products that come from forest raw materials. Wood is a versatile raw material, where the

county has expertise in everything from pulp production to the construction of multi-storey wood buildings.

The forest is also significant in the transition to a climate-neutral society.

Digitalisation and introducing new solutions for offering welfare services, providing cultural events, and improving business competitiveness need to be based on the circumstances specific for organisations and residents. Taking a systematic approach - with a view of the entire organisation - allows new solutions to have a greater impact.

It is crucial to actively combat digital exclusion. This exclusion can include different opportunities for using digital services and experiences, education, languages, or interests. When it comes to efforts to promote equal access to, and use of, digital technology and to counteract digital exclusion, actors from the public sector, private sector, and civil society have important roles to play.

The ability to innovate is a significant factor for growth and development. It is the prosperous regions in Europe that are

8. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

particularly well positioned to be innovative. Innovation is a several stage process, where individuals and organisations transform ideas into developed, and implemented new solutions.

Innovation processes can result in new and/or significantly changed products (goods or services), manufacturing processes, organisational structures, management systems, production systems, marketing, and other services.

Smart specialisation⁹ in a region is about long-term development efforts based on the region's unique conditions and about joint approaches where potential innovators are brought together with the knowledge and expertise of the actors in the innovation support system. This allows innovations to be developed based on the region's competitive advantages.

Identifying the region's competitive advantages, unique capacity, and resources makes it possible to strengthen the regional innovation system and to spread the benefits of innovation throughout the regional economy. This means the region can specialise in growth areas that will provide future competitive advantages.

The growth areas for smart specialisation in Västerbotten are found in the latest Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS) and are currently:

- Sustainable energy and environmental technologies
- Digital service industries for a smart region
- Life science
- Innovations in health care and medical treatment
- Experience companies within cultural and creative industries
- Test operations
- Technology and service development in industry
- Intersections between focus areas

Sub-priority 1.1 Capacity for Collaboration and Collective Action

Västerbotten has long worked systematically to bring together actors in the region to improve the capabilities for digital transformation. This has resulted in Västerbotten having a high-capacity intercommunity broadband network, the introduction of shared e-services among public actors, extensive experience in e-services for providing medical and other care in sparsely populated areas, and several structured collaborations between private and public actors.

Västerbotten has an extensive innovation ecosystem (regional innovation management) built up over time with actors providing services and helping to improve the innovation efforts of public actors, businesses, and civil society, based on the existing strengths and opportunities. Additional opportunities are created by improving the capacity to work with smart specialisation.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

Through this sub-priority, Västerbotten develops the capacity of the innovation ecosystem and the structures established for promoting digitalisation. This includes more clearly coordinating the innovation ecosystem.

Västerbotten needs to bring together actors and develop existing collaborations to reach new target groups. In this way, it will identify and develop its growth areas within digitalisation and smart specialisation to meet the challenges of the future.

Key actors are those that can help create good conditions for other actors, such as universities, civil society organisations, public authorities, science parks, test beds, cluster organisations, and already innovative/digitalised companies.

The way forward – examples of other strategies and plans:

- Culture Plan Region Västerbotten
- Local Smart Specialisation Strategies
- Local Development Strategies and Plans
- County Strategy for Gender Mainstreaming
- Regional Library Plan
- Regional Digital Agenda (under revision)
- Regional Electricity Strategy (under development)
- Regional Innovation Strategy
- Regional Climate and Energy Strategy
- Regional Food Strategy
- Regional Forest Programme
- The Sámi Parliament's Industry Development Strategy: Sápmi – An Industrious Resource

9. Smart specialisation is an essential tool in the EU's cohesion policy for regional development. The aim is to improve regional competitiveness by identifying and prioritising the areas with potential for growth and to use clearly identified goals and priorities to improve the conditions for interregional cooperation with other regions in Europe.

Sub-priority 1.2

Digitalisation and New Solutions

Digitalisation and the development of new technical solutions, such as artificial intelligence (AI), are occurring rapidly in a global context. A large and ever-changing supply of new solutions can make it resource-intensive to find the right one, especially for smaller organisations. Often, their introduction also requires custom adaptations for them to work in the organisation.

Digitalisation and new technical solutions offer great potential for developing both organisations and businesses. University research can serve both as an engine and a resource for developing new applications.

Encouraging companies and organisations to introduce digital or other new solutions can lead to innovative thinking that inspires them to participate in ongoing innovation processes or develop their own. The challenges are shared among most regions but are amplified in a region with many small communities and long distances, where there is a great need for alternative solutions to offer public and private services.

Digitalisation and new solutions help ensure the provision of medical and other care, education, and commercial services, and they enable the solving of future needs and challenges. They also lay the foundation for improving inclusiveness, both in terms of gender equality and equal opportunities, and can create opportunities for work and participation in society.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority realises the potential for private and public organisations to develop their operations and improve outcomes through the introduction of new innovations.

Identified needs include bringing actors together to jointly monitor developments and find suitable solutions. There is also potential in joint procurements. Knowledge of innovation needs to be integrated into more educational offerings to develop a culture of innovative thinking and smart solutions.

Key actors include those who can improve their operations and outcomes through the introduction of innovations or digital solutions. Actors include public enterprises, Sámi organisations, smaller companies, especially those that provide commercial services in rural and sparsely populated areas, and civil society organisations.

Sub-priority 1.3

Developing Innovations

Universities are key actors in the regional and global innovation ecosystem and are crucial for the Upper Norrland EU area being ranked as one of Europe's leading regions in innovation. They serve as engines for renewal, disseminating and making knowledge and research available in the Europe of the future, and they attract students and researchers from around the world.

Västerbotten has digital industries, a highly specialised manufacturing industry, industries based on the region's natural resources, reindeer husbandry, other Sámi industries, and a wide-ranging tourism industry. The county's rich resources and absolute advantages grant the potential for developing more innovations within the region. The public sector has great potential for expanding innovation efforts and the commercialisation of these.

The region's excellent digital infrastructure and digital know-how create potential for innovations through interaction with the region's other assets.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority realises the potential for more innovations in Västerbotten by developing innovation processes in companies, Sámi industries, the public sector, and civil society organisations. This means attracting more actors to initiate and implement systematic innovation work and developing existing innovation processes among active actors.

Identified needs include surveying and analysing needs and attracting actors to participate in platforms for existing smart specialisation within the innovation ecosystem. There is also a need to improve financing opportunities at various stages of the innovation processes.

Key actors include universities, companies, Sámi industries, researchers, innovators, public and civil society organisations active in the focus areas for smart specialisation in Västerbotten.



Photo: Jonas Westling
Digital business models for growing companies.

Priority 2: Västerbotten – A Region with Place-Based Sustainable Business Development

Västerbotten is well positioned to leverage the region's unique conditions with good access to natural resources, a well-educated population, research skills, and a well-established business community. Differences in needs and opportunities across cities, rural areas, and sparsely populated areas, can be overcome through regional collaboration.

The regional business community faces competition in most sectors. Climate change, urbanisation, digitalisation, and technological development are changing global demand, leading to a major structural transformation of the regional business community. To maintain or increase competitiveness, companies must change and develop their technologies towards reducing their environmental and climate impact.

Place-based business development takes a starting point in local challenges and leverages the regional advantages and unique opportunities. Urbanisation in Västerbotten involves people moving to the cities, increased migration to local population centres, and even growing populations in some of the county's rural areas. Västerbotten County can be seen as Sweden in miniature, with urban settings, rural areas, and sparsely populated areas that all have their strengths and development potential – and together strengthen each other.

The county offers absolute advantages in the form of renewable energy sources, land and forest resources, minerals, and other natural resources. The region's research (especially in key enabling technologies) and the knowledge of its residents offer good opportunities for taking the lead in the transition to an environmentally sustainable society and lays the groundwork for future competitiveness. Another strength in the region is the sustainability perspective of traditional Sámi entrepreneurship.

Long-term efforts have led to the establishment of several competence centres, test beds, and other platforms with a focus on sustainable smart solutions that can contribute to engaging more companies in the transition.

Many regional companies, for instance in manufacturing, mineral extraction, raw material recycling, energy production, tourism, and other industries, have already begun the transition, and are a resource for sharing gained knowledge.

Västerbotten is well positioned to turn the challenges of being a sparsely populated region in northern Europe, with long distances, into advantages. The county has a developed business community with different strengths throughout the county.

Education and research attract new residents to the region. It also has one of Sweden's leading university hospitals, good and well-developed digital infrastructure, and long-term efforts in developing solutions for sparsely populated areas.

These advantages can potentially create opportunities for more companies in the region, develop resilient companies, and contribute to presence in new markets. The county's actions for reducing the high thresholds for investments in its inland regions has been crucial. An active transition also requires leveraging the commitment of individuals, particularly among under-represented groups.

Västerbotten has a rich cultural life and cultural heritage, a multifaceted and dynamic Sámi culture, and a rich cultural resource in the form of long traditions of cooperation and trust. Cultural resources create opportunities for place-based business development in the form of new companies and social enterprises. Business development can also be achieved by strengthening and developing business models for companies in cultural and creative industries.

Sub-priority 2.1

Capacity for Collaboration and Collective Action

Västerbotten is a county with several local labour market regions. The highly populated labour market regions have a redundancy, while the labour market regions with fewer workplaces are directly dependent on existing employers. This makes it particularly problematic when companies risk being moved or closed. Supporting labour markets in distress can help ensure skills, entrepreneurs, and resources continue to be utilised, and businesses continue to operate in existing or new forms.

There is a well-developed business support system in Västerbotten with incubators, financiers, and business developers. The business support system includes many actors, including national authorities. Some actors focus on individual sectors or industries, while others work broadly with the entire business community.

Expertise and research at universities are assets for developing the business community in the region. The large number of actors and efforts to promote entrepreneurship show the need to bring actors together to collaborate and act jointly.

The state, the region, the municipalities, and other actors actively work to build a structure for improved business development to create opportunities for future investments. In recent years, Västerbotten has been chosen for large investments expected to result in several thousand jobs with impacts that can be experienced throughout the region..

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority is intended to develop the business community through improved capacity for business support.

Identified needs include gathering actors, building capacity for business support, and further developing structures for collaboration and collective action. It also includes systematic and long-term efforts to attract new businesses to the region. This could include new manufacturing industries based on Västerbotten's absolute advantages, such as energy-intensive industries, and the opening of chains, including e-commerce companies, for a range of services and goods.

Capacity for business support also includes preparations to save operations and skills when companies relocate or close, as well as preparations for unexpected societal crises.

Key actors include those able to improve conditions for businesses, such as public actors, companies, business organisations, business support organisations, universities and other education providers, and civil society actors..

Sub-priority 2.2

Growing, Stronger Companies and new Viable Companies

Business development involves promoting both existing companies and new viable companies, so that they can be competitive in a changing world. The initiatives affect both the owners and employees, as well as companies or other actors. Unequal opportunities for keeping pace with technical developments, risk an increasingly skewed distribution of opportunities and resources in the county.

Västerbotten has the potential for increased entrepreneurship. This requires a climate of inclusiveness and equal opportunity that promotes gender equality, entrepreneurship, and business creation. It is important to increase gender equality through the business support system and to include alternative forms of entrepreneurship.

The transition to more sustainable development, digitalisation, technological development, and globalisation, entail both challenges and opportunities. By developing their business models, companies can create opportunities to grow and remain competitive. This requires access to an adequate supply of capital throughout the county.

Different business models can be developed in several complementary directions. For example, a circular business model has an environmental and climate perspective, from raw material to reuse/recycling, while digital business models mean companies take the step of allowing integration of digitalisation throughout the organisation. There are also opportunities for business development by integrating internationalisation, especially exports, into the company's business model. Social entrepreneurship is another potential for business development, where companies integrate societal benefits into their business model or even have societal benefits as a business concept.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority includes starting new viable companies and attracting new investments to Västerbotten based on the region's opportunities for place-based business development. It also means developing and implementing business models in existing companies to make them more competitive and stronger in a changing world. This includes support in case of internal and external changes, especially for when a business passes from one generation to the next.

Identified needs include creating conditions for new entrepreneurs by building knowledge, access to financing, the opportunity to start and grow in an incubator environment, and systematically creating conditions for underrepresented groups in entrepreneurship.

Identified needs also include support in the development of business models (circular business model, increased internationalisation, digitalisation as a starting point, and increased social responsibility), financial support, business accelerators, creation of associated services, and collaboration to relieve peak loads, particularly for small companies.

Key actors include potential entrepreneurs and companies.

The Way Forward – Examples of Other Strategies and Plans:

- Local Development Strategies and Plans
- County Strategy of Gender Equality
- Regional Electricity Strategy (Under Development)
- Regional Action Plan for Business Investments in Västerbotten (Under Development)
- Regional Food Strategy
- Regional Mineral Strategy (Under Revision)
- Regional Strategy of the Tourism Industry
- Regional Strategy for Business Development (Under Development)
- The Sámi Parliament's Industry Development Strategy: Sápmi – An Industrious Resource
- Together for The Climate: Västerbotten County's Climate and Energy Strategy



Photo: Jonas Westling
Sustainable travel

Priority 3: Västerbotten – A Close and Accessible Region

Accessibility for residents and businesses to community services are essential for sustainable communities with equal opportunities and gender equality.¹⁰ A health-promoting region requires access to medical and other care services, and that businesses can reach their customers.

Accessibility is needed at multiple levels. These include basic community services, such as post, groceries, and leisure activities, but also more advanced services, such as education and medical care. For residents, employers, and organisations, accessibility is crucial for improving job opportunities in the region. Sustainable modes of transport and digital solutions create opportunities to live in Västerbotten while being a part of the global market.

Västerbotten is rich in natural resources. The county has natural resource-based industries, such as forestry, minerals, reindeer, and tourism industries, all of which are dependent on accessibility within and outside the region. The same applies to the manufacturing, food, and construction industries and various service industries.

The transport systems encompass the physical infrastructure in the form of roads, walking and cycle paths, railways, airports, sea lanes, and ports. A functioning transport system also requires vehicles, travel hubs, stops, and technical solutions, that facilitate use in various ways. Having a broad and well-functioning transport system and digital infrastructure that connects cities, rural areas, and sparsely populated areas in Västerbotten with each other and the outside world, is key to achieving the goals in the other priorities.

Both the transport system and its use are affected by external changes, while itself having an impact on natural environments, the climate, and communities. As such a transition to a sustainable system and a gradual transition to sustainable fuels are needed to maintain and develop the transport system in the future.

Digital infrastructure, technological developments, development of new fuels, and digitalisation of the transport system, are possible tools for the transition, while they will also change mobility needs, i.e., the ability to transport goods and people to the places they want to reach.

10. Access to health care and other forms of care, education and workplaces are also important for communities. Access to the transport system and digital connectivity are of direct importance for reaching these. These factors for sustainable communities are addressed under separate priorities.

Sub-priority 3.1

Capacity for Collaboration and Collective Action

Investments in transport systems and digital infrastructure are long-term processes, where each investment needs to be prepared over long periods. Investments in vehicles or technological development for the transition to a sustainable use of transport systems also require advanced planning.

For transport systems and digital infrastructure to offer a high level of accessibility, each part needs to be seen in a larger whole – locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. This requires cooperation and collective action.

Collaboration facilitates opportunities to jointly develop the county into an accessible region. Västerbotten has collaborations within the county and with other regions, within Sweden, and internationally, to develop the transport systems and their use together with the national and the EU level. Global changes in the form of climate change, urbanisation, globalisation, digitalisation, and technological developments affect transport systems and use. Similarly, there are successful collaborations that allow Västerbotten to have a well-functioning digital infrastructure.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority creates capacity for collaboration and collective action for a close and accessible region.

Identified needs include joint monitoring of global developments, advocacy, and lobbying. It also includes developing and facilitating collaborations with the private sector, planning documentation and knowledge bases (e.g., traffic strategies and system analyses), building support, and joint implementation.

Key actors include public authorities tasked with promoting an accessible region, universities, the private sector, and interest groups.

Sub-priority 3.2

Investments in Sustainable Transport Systems

Functional transport systems are required for safe and dependable mobility. Västerbotten's transport systems are part of the Bothnian Corridor, which stretches along the coast of Norrland to Finland. The corridor through Sweden up to Narvik, Norway is part of the European TEN-T Core Network.

The regional transport system also includes the east-west route, which connects Västerbotten with Norway and Finland across the strait of Kvarken. In the western part of the county, there are north-south connections to the national road and railway system.

The county's ports and terminals, together with the five airports with regular service, also have strategic significance for maintaining accessibility for the county.

Cold winters affect the quality of transport systems and long distances mean large costs for maintenance and new investments. At the same time, the transport system needs to be high quality to reduce travel times for such a large county. Physical investments are needed to develop a more accessible transport system adapted to the conditions in Västerbotten and to benefit from the rapid pace of technological developments and new solutions.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority is intended to manage and develop an accessible transport system – locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. Accessibility is more than distance. It is also about time, frequency, and safety.

The transport system needs to ensure accessibility for residents and visitors, as well as for the business community and public actors. Particularly, social, and geographic perspectives should be considered to ensure accessibility, inclusion, and everyone's ability to use the transport system.

Identified needs include maintenance of, and upgrades to, the existing transport system through investments in infrastructure and rolling stock. Investments can be in the form of new technology, such as newly developed vehicles, smart systems, newly developed materials, and improved engine technologies. Investments are also needed for increased sustainability through reduced noise pollution, reduced emissions, and reduced risk of accidents.

Key actors include organisations working in the area in cooperation with private actors.

Sub-priority 3.3 Sustainable Mobility

The transition to sustainable transport involves reducing impacts on health, the environment, the climate, and the economy, but geographic and socio-economic differences also impact the potential for this. The range of transport solutions differs between different geographic areas. In addition, there are other limitations that make it more difficult for a company, organisation, or individual to transition to completely sustainable use.

One way of shifting to sustainable mobility is finding new solutions such as better coordination. Shifting more transports to using modes of transport with a less negative impact is another aspect of this shift. In addition to changing modes of transport, sustainable use can also mean switching to vehicles with lower impacts and improved logistics solutions.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority is intended to lead to a more sustainable use of transport systems to achieve sustainable mobility. Identified needs include developing travel concepts, initiatives to change travel habits, and transport routines among companies, organisations, and individuals, and creating opportunities for more people to choose sustainable travel and transports.

Key actors include companies, public organisations, civil society organisations, and individuals.

Sub-priority 3.4 Investments in Digital Infrastructure

Digital infrastructure opens opportunities for dealing with many of society's challenges. For new solutions to work and for people and businesses in different places to benefit from digitalisation, a digital infrastructure is required to address the needs of the county's various rural areas, sparsely populated areas, and cities.

As a result of long-term systematic efforts, Västerbotten has good broadband access compared with other Swedish regions but there are still areas where access is limited. Developing new services also means increased demands for speed and reliability, which drive further development of digital infrastructure.

Digital infrastructure focuses on creating accessibility through physical, high-capacity broadband, and stable mobile services. Infrastructure includes the entire system from management to software, security, and protocols that handle the data traffic.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority is about investments in digital infrastructure that enable high-capacity data transmission.

Identified needs include expanding coverage to places lacking broadband access and mobile coverage, upgrading as requirements for transmission capacity increase, and investments in complementary infrastructure.

Key actors include organisations working in the sector in collaboration with private actors from industry and civil society.

The Way Forward – Examples of Other Strategies and Plans:

- Local Development Strategies and Plans
- County Strategy for Gender Equality
- County Transport Plan
- National Transport Plan
- Regional Transport Service Supply Programme



Photo: Sergey Gavrilov
Caught in the Middle, dance performance at Norrlandsoperan.

Priority 4: Västerbotten – A Region with Sustainable Communities for Living and Working

Västerbotten has a rich natural and cultural heritage with valuable natural environments as well as many different types of communities with varying conditions, challenges, and opportunities, for people to live and work in.

The county's size and varied environments, from the mountains to the coast, and from growing cities to wilderness, present challenges but also offer a fantastic abundance and attractiveness, allowing the region to be a pioneer in the transition to a circular approach.

The county has vibrant rural and sparsely populated areas and growing cities, all of which offer abundant opportunities for businesses, participation in active associations, sports, culture, active leisure, community, and housing, in close proximity to the county's various natural landscapes. At the same time, there are major challenges that will impact communities in the region.

A shift to sustainable ways of living is needed to reduce environmental and climate impacts. The large distances require equal access to sustainable commuting options and improved digitalisation to increase opportunities for remote working.

Västerbotten also has a long tradition of volunteerism and an active civil society. The county has extensive social capital, where an active civil society is an important contributing factor. This plays an important role in giving voice to the needs, values, and interests of different groups and in reaching target groups that in many other contexts are difficult to reach.

A vibrant civil society actively contributes to creating attractive communities and works with other sectors to meet the major societal challenges of sustainability, integration, and social welfare. It is important to maintain its free and independent role vis-à-vis the public sector and to support the long-term ability to maintain and develop a vibrant civil society.

Demographic changes lead to challenges for society, for example, in providing both welfare services and commercial services throughout the county. The physical environment and settlement structure is the foundation for communities, but sustainable communities also entail having meaningful content and that the people who live in, as well as visit, Västerbotten are given the opportunity to participate in associations and volunteer work, sports, culture, creation, leisure, and outdoor life.

Västerbotten's communities need to be managed and taken care of for future generations, while also addressing the needs of different groups in society. This includes access to housing, work, commerce, active associations, sports, leisure, and culture.

There needs to be a special focus on the needs of children and youth for exercise, safety, and opportunities for social interaction.

The ecosystem is impacted by our total consumption¹¹ and production, which also leads to changes in climate both globally and locally. Sámi communities and some Sámi industries are strongly tied to nature, while climate change affects their economic resources.

Sub-priority 4.1

Capacity for Collaboration and Collective Action

Västerbotten's geography, with its long distances, presents challenges requiring collaboration and collective action to prepare the region for population change and integration, and to manage the challenges and opportunities that come with digitalisation, globalisation, and climate change.

Collaborative structures provide opportunities for offering sustainable communities with access to basic public services as well as a range of commercial and welfare services. There are well-developed collaborative structures within the region's cultural sphere and for the county's libraries. There are also collaborative structures in civil society, for many areas of community planning and for rural development, such as in the various Leader areas.¹²

However, there needs to be collaboration between different parts of society to increase the region's attractiveness and give more people access to the region's cultural sphere.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority is intended to create capacity for collaboration and collective action in the cooperative structures found in this priority.

Identified needs includes moving beyond collaboration to collective action and developing collaborative structures.

Key actors are those that can help create conditions for other actors. Key actors include civil society organisations, regions, municipalities, the county administration and other public authorities, universities, business organisations, and other support organisations.

11. Consumption is defined as the final use (consumption) of goods and services, but not all consumption takes place for financial compensation.

12. Leader is a method where the private, non-profit and public sectors work together to contribute to local development.

Sub-priority 4.2

Develop and Manage Natural Heritage, Living Environments, and Active Recreation

Västerbotten's communities are built on the principle of access to different types of services, access to natural and cultural environments, attractive living environments, and a sense of safety and security.

A varied range of transport options as well as housing that is economically accessible and meets residents' needs, are other factors that affect where people choose to live. Initiatives are therefore needed to create communities that attract more people to live and work in the county through good living conditions, good opportunities for culture, leisure, and participation in associations, and good opportunities for personal development.

For residents to feel good and want to stay, special focus should be given to the needs of children and youth for culture and active leisure. It is also important to develop approaches that involve more people in volunteer work and increase interaction among actors for collective activities.

Appealing living communities require the presence of meaningful activities. This, in turn, requires inclusive community planning and physical structures. Community planning brings together the different requirements placed on living environments and contributes to resolving conflicting goals between different needs. Land use is a particular area of conflict that needs addressing. Real collaboration is about seeking constructive solutions to opposing interests.

Ecosystem services can be provided by green infrastructure that safeguards Västerbotten's valuable natural and cultural heritage, while being a resource for sustainable tourism, entrepreneurship, people's quality of life, and other areas.

Managing communities means offering basic public infrastructure and community services. The municipalities in Västerbotten face major challenges in the coming decade from high maintenance and investment costs in public infrastructure as well as with providing community services with a declining working-age population.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority is intended to develop and manage existing physical living environments in the region. A good physical living environment includes a combination of housing opportunities, access to public infrastructure and community services, and access to green infrastructure that provide a sense of confidence, safety, and protection from causes of ill health. These communities must also be managed for future generations.

Identified needs are intended to increase the supply of attractive housing and ensure continued access to public services through maintenance investments and crisis preparedness. There is also a need for access to premises and spaces for various purposes, such as for business activities, association activities, and cultural and leisure activities. There needs to be a special focus on the needs of children and youth for culture, association activities, and active leisure.

Key actors include those who can contribute an increased range of cultural and leisure activities, organisations working with community planning, civil society, and businesses.

Sub-priority 4.3

Develop Culture and Cultural Heritage

The region's cultural infrastructure consists of strong cultural institutions and municipal cultural activities, public libraries providing legally mandated services, dedicated cultural creators who drive developments, a dynamic cultural life, active associations, a significant tradition of adult education, a vibrant Sámi culture, and a strong civil society. The dynamics of the region's cultural life assumes that all parts of this infrastructure are allowed to develop.

To provide equal opportunities to add to, and participate in, culture requires the cultural sphere and cultural supply to ensure gender equality, other equality, and accessibility. It is particularly important for children and youth to experience and create culture. Music and art schools as well as the general school system play an important role in this regard. Culture is also a part of lifelong learning.

A rich and multifaceted cultural life needs breadth and depth. Culture must be democratic, in the sense that it must be accessible and important to all. In a society characterised by success and development, creativity is of particular importance.

Västerbotten will be an attractive environment for cultural creators to live and work in, where professionalism and expertise stimulate artistic renewal. Cultural creators, with their expertise and creativity, are important for the region's development and attractiveness nationally and internationally.

The region's cultural heritage and cultural environments are important resources that must be preserved, utilised, and developed. Culture is more than experiences. Culture contributes to society and communities by broadening and deepening perspectives, questioning, and creating discussion, and bringing people together. It plays an important role when people choose places to live and work in, long for, and visit.

Opportunities for culture, creation, and active leisure are affected both positively and negatively by changes, such as urbanisation, globalisation, climate change, digitalisation, and technological developments. This presents challenges while also offering opportunities to find new forms and interest.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority is intended to create an attractive and rewarding cultural life in communities. Access to cultural experiences and having opportunities to express cultural and active creation, are needed for a community to provide a high quality of life for its residents and to attract new ones. Opportunities are also needed for cultural creators to live and work in the region. Particular focus should be given to the needs of children and youth for culture to create wellbeing and a desire to continue living in Västerbotten.

Identified needs include finding approaches that can encourage more people to participate in cultural activities and develop through cultural experiences. Contacts between actors for collective activities need to be developed. The cultural environments and cultural heritage that have been preserved from previous generations need to be nurtured, cultivated, and developed.

Key actors are those who can contribute with an increased range of culture, such as cultural institutions and cultural organisations, civil society, the business community, and business support organisations.

Sub-priority 4.4 Sustainable Consumption, Including Energy Use

All participants in society are consumers, from individuals to companies, public authorities, and organisations. The consumption choices they make are crucial for global environmental and climate impact, at every stage of the chain, from raw material to final use. Achieving sustainable consumption requires a circular approach, such as reuse and recycling.

An important environmental benefit, where Västerbotten has substantial experience, is with energy efficiency and energy recovery. Through its renewable energy resources, Västerbotten has unique advantages for establishing electricity-intensive industries, which in turn create additional opportunities for efficient energy recovery.

Much of electricity production takes place in the northern parts of Sweden, where wind and hydro power are the primary sources. Large energy losses from electricity transmission and bottlenecks in the infrastructure mean there are advantages in establishing operations close to electricity production in the north. Access to sustainable energy is also important from a climate perspective and a circular perspective.

Identified Needs and Key actors

This sub-priority is intended to encourage sustainable consumption and increased energy recovery using renewable energy and energy storage as well as working for more energy-intensive establishments in the county.

Identified needs include improved electricity infrastructure that takes advantage of the region's potential to promote and attract electricity-intensive industries. It is also important to provide better opportunities to make environmentally conscious choices and to encourage procurements that are climate-smart and circular.

Key actors include companies, public organisations, civil society organisations, and residents.

The Way Forward – Examples of Other Strategies and Plans:

- Culture Plan Region Västerbotten
- Local Development Strategies and Plans County Strategy for Integration
- County Strategy for Gender Equality
- Regional Library Plan
- Regional Disability Policy
- Regional Action Plan for Green Infrastructure
- Regional Action Programme for the Rural Development Programme and the Maritime and Fisheries Programme in Västerbotten
- Regional Service Programme
- The Sámi Parliament's Culture Policy Action Programme



Photo: Jonas Westling
Health room in Bastuträsk.

Priority 5: Västerbotten – A Region Promoting Health

The people of Västerbotten are its most important resource. Sustainable regional development is not possible without good, equal, health outcomes, that is, reducing health gaps between different groups of people. This can be achieved by influencing the determining factors of health and creating good living conditions for the people of Västerbotten.

Västerbotten has expertise and research along with well-established collaborative structures within public health, rural medicine, municipal health care, and other care services. Dedicated organisations in civil society complement public actors and contribute to promoting health in Västerbotten.

Health is more than the absence of disease. It also includes overall wellbeing and mental health. Good and equal access to health care can largely be achieved by successfully addressing social, health, and environmental issues. Equal access to health care is one of the subgoals of Agenda 2030 and one of the overarching goals in Västerbotten – A Vibrant Place to Live and a Circular Society. The population's health depends on factors like society's structure, environmental factors, lifestyle habits, and genetics, together with access to health and social care.

The strategic choices for equal health outcomes and socially sustainable development in Västerbotten presume the popu-

lation's good health as a necessary requirement for regional development. Health trajectories are determined by the social and structural circumstances in which the population lives. People are affected both physically and mentally in settings where there are threats, harassment, and violence. The indigenous Sámi and other national minorities are among the particularly vulnerable.

The purpose of this strategic priority is to bring together the region's resources to address inequalities in health and to highlight the importance of a broad perspective on health and its role for development in the region as a whole. This priority is connected to the strategic public health efforts in Västerbotten, the regional sustainability efforts, the national public health goal, and the work begun for collective responsibility of regional coordination of public health efforts in the county, carried out by the County Administrative Board, Region Västerbotten, and Umeå University.

Here, the interaction and cooperation between Region Västerbotten, the County Administrative Board, the county's municipalities (where nine of the county's 15 municipalities are Sámi administrative municipalities), the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, the business community, and civil society, are of central importance for success.

Sub-priority 5.1 Capacity for Collaboration and Collective Action

Västerbotten has Norrland's only university hospital. Thanks to close collaboration with the universities, extensive experience with rural medicine, and the establishment of structures and e-services, it is possible to bridge the long distances.

Well-established collaboration structures are necessary to offer quality and accessible medical and social care in a sparsely populated region with long distances and where the population is declining in some areas. Collaborative structures can create collective preparedness for many challenges to the population's health, such as pandemics and natural disasters.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority is intended to build broader capacity in collaborative structures within medical, health, and social care.

Identified needs include ensuring good preparedness, bringing together actors for collective development efforts, collective monitoring of national and international events and knowledge development, and collaboration for equality in treatment, especially of heterogeneous and vulnerable groups such as the disabled and those with comorbidities.

Key actors include public organisations working within medical, health, and social care, universities, other education providers, private providers, and civil society organisations.

Sub-priority 5.2 Healthy Lifestyles

The way we live our lives has a great impact on our health. How we eat, drink, and move has a role in how we feel both physically and mentally. Alcohol, tobacco, and drug use also affect the body and our mood in both the short and long term.

A significant part of the overall disease burden is related to unhealthy lifestyles in the form of eating habits, physical activity, and alcohol and tobacco use. Lifestyle habits vary across individuals and groups, and are strongly related to the conditions and context we live in. By creating good conditions for healthy lifestyles, we can improve health and reduce existing inequalities in health in the county. There is a special focus on children and youth.

Food and meals affect our health but also serve as bearers of culture, opportunities for meeting, and sources of enjoyment. How we move, our physical activity, also has a great impact on both physical and mental wellbeing. Even small increases in physical activity can have major positive effects for people who are sedentary. A healthy lifestyle also involves sexual and reproductive health, where the right to decide over one's own sexuality and reproduction is central.

In Västerbotten, active public health efforts using several collaborative structures work with health-promoting activities aimed at different target groups at various stages of life. Västerbotten has extensive experience of using regular health surveys to promote healthy choices among the population.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority is intended to promote healthy lifestyles related to eating, physical activity, sex and cohabitation, and to avoid risk-taking and addiction.

Identified needs include creating conditions for physical activity, outdoor activity, and physical literacy throughout life. There is also a need for target group-adapted initiatives to promote mental health, for example to include more people in active associations.

Key actors include residents and organisations, and groups that interact with residents. This can include health and medical care providers, employers, education providers, the sports movement, and civil society organisations, who, in their interactions with residents, can contribute to healthy lifestyles.

Sub-priority 5.3 Healthy Work and Organisational Conditions

Work and participation in activities occupy a large part of our lives and these environments are of central importance to human health. Both physical and mental health are affected by the contexts in which people find themselves in everyday life.

One aspect of wellbeing is the balance between work, family, and leisure, something employers can encourage. Employers and those responsible for activities, both public and in civil society, are key actors in supporting good health in the population.

The wellbeing of the population is supported through healthy environments in workplaces, schools, and civil society. These also provide opportunities for taking social responsibility, and through these organisations make it possible for more people to work and participate in society, especially people belonging to vulnerable groups.

Västerbotten has a shared knowledge centre for occupational and environmental medicine, active throughout Norrland. There are also systematic efforts with development of associations in various parts of civil society and several actors working with targeted initiatives to develop both private and public organisations.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

The sub-priority is intended to ensure that environments for work and other activities are designed and organised to contribute to good health and prevent ill health. These environments can be workplaces, schools, preschools, care homes, or association premises.

Identified needs include counteracting and addressing bullying and discrimination, creating routines for safe environments, and creating the conditions for combining family, work, and leisure, regardless of gender.

Key actors include employers, those responsible for organisations and activities, trade unions, and other organisations in civil society.

Sub-priority 5.4 Dependable Health and Social Care, Particularly for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Groups

Ill health and social care needs, depend on a combination of heredity and environment. Healthy choices and good work environments can help reduce the onset of ill health and the need for care. Other ill health depends on factors that require active measures.

Medical, health, and social care are needed to prevent the negative effects of ill health, where detecting ill health and identifying social care needs early leads to a more favourable prognosis when there is access to effective treatment methods. Vulnerable groups include patients with comorbidities and groups with worse socio-economic conditions. The indigenous Sámi people need access to health and social care focused on their specific challenges.

Good health and social care administer available public resources to meet and treat emerging needs in ways that engender confidence both from those seeking help and from those working in these organisations. Close contacts with academia in Västerbotten are an asset when providing health care and social care throughout the county. These lead to contact with research and new findings but also benefit in the training of staff.

Västerbotten's low population together with long distances are challenges, however, there is extensive experience with developing knowledge and expertise in rural medicine, especially e-health.

Demographic changes mean that the proportion of senior citizens is growing throughout the county. Fewer and fewer people of working age will have to support more and more people of non-working age, while the need for health and social care is increasing. A falling tax base together with increasing needs are major challenges for sustainable health and social care for the entire region.

Today, there is an infrastructure to provide health care throughout the region with a Centre for Rural Medicine. In addition to the university hospital, there are two more larger hospitals and seven cottage hospitals with more advanced care options, and a large number of medical centres. There are different types of residential care options and organised home medical care, home care, and social services. Close collaboration between Region Västerbotten and the municipalities is also an asset for providing health care and social care in the future.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority includes the need for preventative health and social care for various diseases and care needs, especially those that are long-term or chronic, that can enable early detection and thus a more favourable prognosis, as well as to develop and introduce more effective treatments.

Identified needs include systematic work to identify and help individuals experiencing violence in close relationships, those who are at risk of, or are, suffering from a chronic illness, and those who are at risk of, or have, mental health issues. Other needs include organisational development, including organisational management.

Key actors include organisations within health, medical and social care.

The Way Forward – Examples of Other Strategies and Plans:

- Public Health Policy Programme for The Northern Regions
- Public Health Policy Programme Region Västerbotten
- Local Public Health Strategies
- Local Development Strategies and Plans
- County Strategy for Gender Equality
- Regional Disability Policy Strategy
- Strategy for Sámi Health



Photo: Christina, WOCinTech Chat, unsplash.com
Career opportunities in tech.

Priority 6: Västerbotten – A Region Rich in Skills and Expertise

It is important that organisations and businesses in Västerbotten have access to the right skills to increase competitiveness as well as continuing to provide community services in a region with significant demographic challenges. In a sparsely populated region with long distances, equal opportunities are needed for residents to develop their skills.

Several groups are stuck in long-term exclusion from the labour market, for instance some foreign-born residents, people lacking an upper secondary qualification, and people with various types of disabilities and ill health. There are also companies that have fallen behind because they do not keep up with technological developments.

The region needs access to skills to be able to manage the overall global trends affecting it, especially with the transition towards a reduced environmental and climate impact.

The intraregional differences are particularly noticeable when it comes to the county's demographic challenges. The potential support ratio (the ratio of those who do not work compared to those who do) increases every year and has already reached critical levels in some municipalities in Västerbotten. Access to skills and integration of new arrivals and other groups far from the labour market, are important for regional development efforts, as is counteracting a gender-segregated labour market. Groups far from the labour market need to be introduced to it, and training and education needs to be adapted for them. Improved collaboration between society and the private sector, where workplaces take on more responsibility for skills development, can contribute to workplace learning and to creating a socially sustainable working life.

The digitalisation and development of services for distance-based learning, create opportunities for developing skills irrespective of location. It is crucial for the entire population to be able to take advantage of these opportunities. Digital exclusion needs to be addressed to avoid increasing gaps in the supply of skills.

Sub-priority 6.1

Capacity for Collaboration and Collective Action

Coordinated efforts to ensure regional access to skills in Västerbotten, bring together representatives from the business community, public organisations, and civil society in joint work processes, to improve the opportunities for the county to include all residents in society and working life, and for increasing employer opportunities to recruit and retain staff, for a sustainable access to skills.

The regional skills platform is a government assignment aimed at contributing knowledge and overview of the access to skills and training (especially coordination of needs' analyses), strengthening collaboration for the planning of access to skills and training, and contributing to an understanding of the supply of, and demand for, different forms of education with a base in the national goals of the various educational forms and the responsibilities of public authorities.

Västerbotten needs coordinated preparedness to handle current and future challenges. Education and the labour market have a central role in attracting new residents, creating opportunities for residents to stay, and for public organisations to be able to provide their services. It also has a central role in helping the business community be flexible and maintain competitiveness when climate change, urbanisation, globalisation, and digitalisation cause new demands.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority intends to strengthen the capacity of coordinated efforts bringing together relevant actors, to ensure regional access to skills.

Identified needs include developing knowledge and analytical reports, developing networks and other joint activities, jointly monitoring external developments, preparing for changes, and jointly developing a strategy for the supply of skills. It is also important to work to counter a gender-segregated labour market.

Key actors include those who can improve conditions for other organisations, such as municipalities, other authorities working in the area covered by this sub-priority, business organisations and companies, civil society organisations, and Sámi organisations.

Sub-priority 6.2

Equal Participation in Work and Community Life, Particularly Through Education

Education and development of skills play a central role in ensuring access to the skills companies and organisations need for development. A rapidly changing world with globalisation, urbanisation, climate change, and digitalisation mean that the needs for skills will change.

In Västerbotten, there is a wide and varied range of education and training options. There is a well-developed tradition of adult education, a range of private and public education providers, and a systematic effort to attract polytechnic educations to Västerbotten.

A strength for Västerbotten is that the region has three universities (Umeå University, the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, and Luleå University of Technology) with good and close collaborations with the university hospital, the business community, and other actors.

The region also has local learning centres offering opportunities to attend distance programmes in a physical setting. The wide range of education provides freedom of choice but also means challenges, for both individuals and employers, in identifying suitable educational paths.

In a sparsely populated region with long distances, access to education has a clear geographic dimension. In more densely populated parts of the region, the educational opportunities are broader and more diverse, while more sparsely populated areas of the region have a narrower range of options. The use of remote and distance-based technology is necessary to ensure an equal range of education throughout the county.

Education is key for individuals to be able to find a job. It is also important for opportunities to participate in society. Learning and developing skills is also a source of joy and personal development for many people. Individuals unable to leverage basic education risk lifelong exclusion, both from the labour market and from society in general.

Equality in education means that the education system can serve students with different abilities and backgrounds, in various places. High-quality education systems provide disadvantaged children with good outcomes by giving them the ability to learn and solve problems, social and emotional well-being, and a good level of education.¹³

13. Definition from the OECD

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority is intended to improve the ability of residents to participate in working life and society, by striving for equal and accessible educational opportunities in urban, rural, and sparsely populated areas. The foundations for participation in working life in adulthood is already laid in preschool, primary school, and upper-secondary school.

For good access to skills, educational opportunities are also needed later in life. Knowledge and skills need to be maintained and expanded throughout life in a rapidly changing world.

Identified needs include developing opportunities for education in sparsely populated areas (for example through remote education), integrating knowledge for innovation and sustainable societal transformation in the education system, attracting polytechnic educations to the county, as well as validating and improving the range of courses and programmes offered by universities, for skills needed in the region. It is also important to provide opportunities to improve grades for those who are not qualified for higher education.

Key actors include civil society education providers in Västerbotten, universities, and municipal and private education providers, including learning centres and labour market training centres.

Sub-priority 6.3

Skills and Expertise in Companies and Organisations

Today, Västerbotten has an imbalance between those who enter the labour market and those who leave it, and this imbalance is expected to worsen in the future. This generally means a growing shortage of labour supply and, specifically, a shortage of key skills.

Lack of available labour poses challenges in providing welfare and necessary services, especially in inland areas. It also means challenges for companies both to grow and be able to adapt in a changing world. The employment rate is very high in the county's municipalities but could be raised further.

Many employers in Västerbotten report that it is difficult to find the required skills and that it will not be possible to remedy this by simply changing the available range of educational opportunities. With a systematic and long-term approach, employers can avoid negative impacts to their organisation. This includes identifying and utilising the skills available in the region. By developing contacts between employers and those seeking employment, the surrounding community can become involved in recruitment and the potential for retaining employees over the long term improves.

A long-term and systematic approach also increases resilience to changes in the world, where globalisation, digitalisation, technological developments, and climate change will affect how industry is structured and the demand for skills.

Identified Needs and Key Actors

This sub-priority aims to develop a sustainable access to skills and talent in a sparsely populated county with small labour markets and long distances, by strengthening the entire chain from recruitment needs to retaining employees in the long term.

Identified needs include mapping needs and the range of skills in organisations and reducing the need for external recruitment of difficult-to-recruit skills through internal mobility and in-house training. It is also important to identify alternatives to recruitment, such as sharing functions with other organisations or purchasing services, developing a recruitment offer that also includes solutions for accompanying families, including housing, and creating relationships with potential applicants during their studies.

Key actors are private, public, and civil society employers.

The Way Forward – Examples of Other Strategies and Plans:

- Local Development Strategies and Plans
- County Strategy for Integration
- County Strategy for Gender Mainstreaming
- Regional Food Strategy (Under Development)
- Regional Strategy for Access to Skills (Under Development)

