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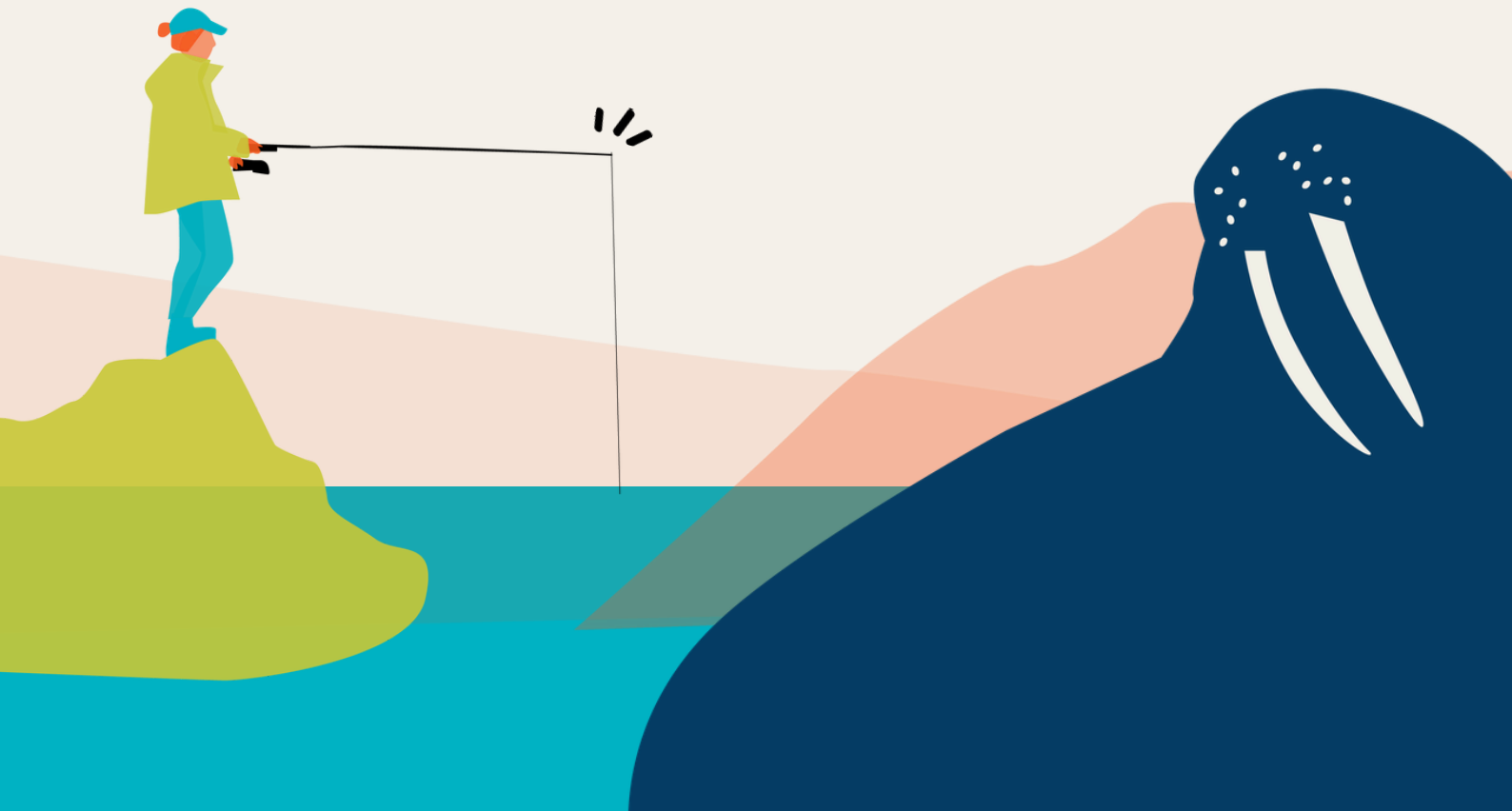
Security Dimensions in the Arctic

Policy recommendations by the
Arctic Youth Dialogue 2026 cohort

Brussels | August 28 – September 2



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The EU-Arctic Youth Dialogues are held as part of the EU Arctic Forum and Indigenous Peoples' Dialogue. The Arctic Youth Dialogue is an initiative of the European Union and a deliverable under the EU's Arctic policy. It is implemented under different workstreams, of which the EU- and Global Affairs Canada-funded project Youth Together for Arctic Futures is a major contributor. The project is delivered by a consortium led by the WWF Global Arctic Programme (WWF Sweden), in cooperation with the Arctic Youth Network, the European Youth Parliament, the Saami Council, Arctic Mayors' Forum, Tromsø municipality, UiT The Arctic University of Norway, and the Association of Polar Early Career Scientists. In the four days leading up to the EU Arctic Forum, 33 youth came together to co-create these policy recommendations across four key themes.

These recommendations reflect the collective work and discussions of the Arctic Youth Dialogues 2026 cohort. While the recommendations represent shared visions, they do not encompass the individual views of every participant.

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How can we make sure food systems are resilient enough to give access to nutritious food for Arctic communities?

The Arctic produces an abundance of nutritious foods, yet they are inaccessible to Arctic residents due to food security and food sovereignty being insufficiently included within geopolitical, socio-economic and environmental policies. They are not holistically nor structurally addressed, leading to short-term and disjointed solutions that are not informed by Indigenous Peoples and Arctic communities, and fail to ensure long-term access to nutritious and culturally-preferred foods. We recommend that:

- The EU provides resources for communities to develop comprehensive assessments of their food security needs, including structural barriers to access, and develops initiatives addressing identified needs. Initiatives must be rooted in and revitalize cultural knowledge to ensure education in traditional hunting, fishing and harvesting.
- The Arctic States endorse the UN definition of food sovereignty: empowering communities to self-determine food policy and ensuring the full and meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples.
- The EU and Arctic States develop infrastructure and regulations supporting the production, processing and sale of local foods. Prioritizing funds and subsidies for local harvesters and organizations will decrease the environmental footprint of the food supply chain while increasing food, cultural, and health security in Arctic communities.
- The EU supports the development of trade partnerships between Arctic regions to ease the trade and transport of cultural Indigenous Peoples' food across regions, increasing connectivity in the North.
- The EU and the Arctic States set food sovereignty as a priority and a right in Arctic policies, thereby benefiting the Arctic's geopolitical standing through infrastructure investments that strengthen national security, competitiveness, and environmental sustainability.

Example

The Inuvialuit Regional Corporation in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada utilized flexible pandemic-related funds in 2021 to build a Country Foods Processing Plant. The plant collects local and wild food from Inuvialuit harvesters and distributes it back to Inuvialuit at no cost through semi-annual food baskets to the region's six communities. The plant employs local community members and decreases community reliance on southern food markets.

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How can inclusive and equitable processes ensure that Arctic populations' cultural security and identity are safeguarded?

There is a global lack of awareness of Arctic Indigenous traditions, cultures, and languages. Existing legislation lacks enforcement of Indigenous Peoples' rights and is rooted in institutional colonialism. Arctic youth often move away from home and do not return, due to a lack of opportunities and infrastructure investments that serve community needs in the region, diminishing cultural security and identity. This drives disproportionate mental health concerns amongst Arctic and Indigenous youth. We recommend that:

- The EU and Arctic Indigenous Peoples co-create mandatory education courses relevant to Arctic Indigenous cultures, languages, and histories, to be taken by all employees of the EU and Arctic States.
- The EU recognizes Indigenous languages, such as Sámi languages, as official EU languages, increasing visibility, providing a platform and agency to Indigenous Peoples, and enabling access to democratic processes.
- The EU incorporates the recognition of Indigenous Peoples and the right of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), as defined by UNDRIP, into the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Enforcing FPIC supports self-determination and land sovereignty, safeguards culture and identity, and protects Indigenous traditions, ways of life and land-based practices.
- The EU and Arctic States enable local entrepreneurship and leadership to create viable pathways for Arctic youth to stay and return to the Arctic. Funding opportunities should be co-created by the EU, Arctic Indigenous Peoples, and Arctic residents to make them applicable and accessible, and to drive regional self-sufficiency.
- The EU and Arctic States invest in socio-cultural projects led by and for Indigenous Peoples and Arctic residents that enable the creation of safe public spaces. These spaces will provide opportunities to share ways of knowing and living, foster community and a sense of belonging, improve mental health, and allow culture to flourish for generations to come.

"The increased presence of the EU in the Arctic must come with a bigger responsibility of educating the general public that there are Indigenous Peoples living in the EU."
- **Analaise Maria Sepp-Dallas**

"Keeping the people in the Arctic, keeps the culture in the Arctic."
- **Cole Robulack**

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How can we implement safeguards for Arctic climate degradation and biodiversity loss while advancing strategies for long-term adaptation and mitigation?

Exploiting the Arctic as an industrial resource threatens fragile biodiversity and ignores climate adaptation while directly undermining cultural continuity and sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples as well as food security in the region. This colonial perspective of the region de-centers Arctic inhabitants and leads to climate and biodiversity action being seen as oppositional to economic and geopolitical security interests. We recommend that:

- The EU leverages its market power and trade preferences to encourage the compliance of non-EU Arctic States with Arctic-related environmental agreements and legislation. This would drive non-Member States and trading partners to uphold environmental safeguards.

- The EU and Arctic states mandate 50/50 co-governance mechanisms for projects that impact Arctic ecosystems, by using proven frameworks like Canada's Inuvialuit Final Agreement, to give local rights-holders equal decision-making authority over environmental assessments, resource management, and special economic zones before development permits can be issued.

- The EU and Arctic States establish an Arctic climate adaptation and biodiversity fund, guided by Indigenous Peoples and Arctic communities, to tackle the Arctic climate adaptation and biodiversity finance gaps. This should support nature-positive economic activities, investments in climate resilience, and prevent further biodiversity loss in communities that depend on nature for their way of life, but fall outside the eligibility of global biodiversity and climate finance targets for developing countries, e.g. Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) Target 19 and Paris Agreement Article 9.

- Under the framework of the High Seas Treaty, the EU and the Arctic States establish an Arctic Ocean Reserve that spans international waters, with Exclusive Economic Zone integration for participating states, contributing towards target 3 of the KMGBF (30x30). This reserve framework should be grounded equally in Indigenous Knowledge systems and scientific knowledge and should protect food security for Indigenous Peoples and Arctic communities through “no-take” zones where subsistence cultural harvest is exempted.

Example

The Melanisian Ocean Reserve is an Indigenous-led, multi-national, marine governance framework and inspires the recommendation of the Arctic Ocean Reserve.

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How can health systems and strategies be utilised to ensure the resilience and wellbeing of the Arctic population?

Indigenous Peoples and other Arctic residents lack access to healthcare due to long distances to existing facilities, travel costs, expensive treatment, language barriers, cultural insensitivity, and discrimination by providers. As evidenced by high suicide rates, mental wellbeing in the Arctic is negatively impacted by intergenerational trauma, structural violence, discrimination, changing climate conditions, and the need to continuously fight for the recognition of Indigenous rights. Human health in the Arctic is threatened by pollution and climate change, specifically the increasing occurrence and severity of extreme weather and disease transmission. Meanwhile, emergency services and preparedness are being underprioritized, centralized, and underfunded. We recommend that:

- The EU, OCTs* and Arctic States decentralize healthcare and invest in: training and employing Indigenous Peoples and Arctic residents in healthcare, a pro-active preparedness approach, transportation infrastructure that connects remote regions to healthcare, free transport modalities to access healthcare, tele-health services, and emerging healthcare technologies such as artificial intelligence.

- The EU, OCTs and Arctic States increase the accessibility of physical and mental healthcare services to Indigenous Peoples by providing Indigenous Peoples' language courses for healthcare personnel and all medical information including forms in Indigenous Peoples' languages. Healthcare facilities should ensure there is always medical staff available that speak the languages of the Indigenous People they treat.

- The EU, OCTs and Arctic States strive for increased cultural safety through mandatory training on Indigenous Peoples' rights, history, intergenerational trauma, culture, body language, and facial expressions, starting with the healthcare sector as an example for other sectors to follow. Ongoing feedback from patients should be collected and used to ensure cultural safety is a reality.

- The EU, OCTs and Arctic States create and commit to sustained funding for long-term maintenance of community-led initiatives that support the mental health of Indigenous Peoples and other Arctic residents through land-based healing activities, multigenerational knowledge sharing, conversations about intergenerational trauma, social gatherings, and suicide intervention strategies.

- The EU, OCTs and Arctic States advance the regulation of environmental policy and prioritize human, animal and environmental health over industrial profits, honoring Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination and worldviews, including the principle of caring for seven generations ahead.

Example

Suggested advancements of the regulation of environmental policy include: removing exemptions for polluters based on volume or chemical "criticality", and re-scaling pollution allowances based on the precautionary principle, transparent and independent science, cocktail effects, and biomagnification.

*The term OCTs in this text refers to the EU's Overseas Countries and Territories.

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