Finnish and Russian Civil Society Actors Working Towards Common Global Goals – In search of sustainable practices of collaboration
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Глобальные цели и устойчивые местные практики в сотрудничестве российских и финских НКО

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This handbook itself is the product of a fruitful cooperation and ongoing dialogue between NGO Most from Helsinki, NGO Development Center from St. Petersburg and other member organizations of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum’s Working Group “Social Issues and Civic Participation”. This publication is developed as a part of the project Global Goals with Local Agendas: Principles of Sustainable Development in NGO Practice and Social Innovations in EU and Russia. The book wishes to pave the way for new cooperation between Russian and European NGOs, based on common values and new ideas for reaching sustainable development in our societies. The book is one part of the partnership project – we have also organised meetings and a panel discussion in Helsinki, and a seminar in St. Petersburg where we have together with leading experts discussed the realities and prospects of Finnish and Russian civil society cooperation in connection to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Also, a distance course directed for Russian civil society actors on raising awareness of the 2030 Agenda and its utilisation will be made available online during spring 2019.

We wish to thank the Working Group “Social Issues and Civic Participation” and especially our partners Svetlana Makovetskaya (Center for Civic Analysis and Independent Research GRANI, Perm) and Olga Drozdova (Agency for Social Information, Moscow) for their contribution to this project. Also, we want to thank our partner in Finland, Peace Union and especially Laura Lodenius and Kalle Sysikaski for their participation in the project, and sharing their experience on this handbook. We are thankful for the expertise of Rilli Lappalainen and Jussi Kanner from Fingo on the 2030 Agenda and sharing their remarkable insights at our events in Helsinki and St. Petersburg.

We are truly grateful for Airi Leppänen’s distinguished book Kansalaisyhteiskunta liikkeessä yli rajojen (2005) for inspiration for this handbook. Leppänen’s book addressed how the cooperation was initiated between Finnish and Russian civil society actors after 1996, especially in the fields of social and health issues. Leppänen also looked at how these connections developed into genuine partnerships, and how the political environment of the 90s, and emerging challenges of the 00s affected these developments. We wanted to bring forth recent knowledge on what this cooperation between Finnish and Russian civil society actors is now, and connect it to the discussion on the role of civil society in the 2030 Agenda. We truly appreciate Airi’s long-standing experience and expertise, and her willingness to share it with us.

Also, a great number of other experts have contributed to the handbook, we want to thank especially Pauliina Lukinmaa for her valuable comments on the content of the book. We wish to thank all the authors of the articles and interviewees for your valuable time and work and the inspiration and encouragement you provide others. Without your generous support, as well as funding from KONE foundation and EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, the realization of this publication would have not been possible.

Finally, we wish to thank our project coordinator Meeri Siukonen for her outstanding work and dedication in
conducting the interviews, writing and editing texts. We cannot thank her enough for her hard work.

We hope that this enthusiasm and genuine support with which the handbook project itself was most often met, is a good omen and speaks of the growing interest in building sustainable partnerships between Finnish and Russian civil society actors.

This book is dedicated to all civil society actors on both sides of the border, who promote the principles of sustainable development and change for the better.

Helsinki & St. Petersburg,
March 2019
NGO Most & NGO Development Centre
"Goal 17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships."

In a world that is more interconnected like never before, partnerships and the strengthening of global solidarity between civil society actors are facing new challenges, but alongside new possibilities for cooperation are presenting themselves. Global phenomena often cause very concrete effects on a local scale and vice versa. Climate change, violations against fundamental human rights and democratic decision-making, migration caused by wars, ecological catastrophes, political oppression or economic inequalities - to name a few - know no borders and directly or indirectly affect everyone’s lives. Do we have the tools for navigating in these interconnected and rapidly changing environments and tackling the global challenges?

This handbook addresses these vast and complex questions by taking a local and specific approach, by focusing on the role of Finnish and Russian civil society actors in doing their share for common global goals. From the perspectives of civil society actors in Finland and Russia, the handbook explores what a good and mutually beneficial partnership constitutes of in the age of sustainable development, and asks what the possibilities and prospects of enhancing the 2030 Agenda could be for internationally operating civil society actors. “The more people are involved, the better” and “the more there are people and the more there are movements, the more hope there is that the world will become a better place” were some of the comments, which reoccurred in the articles and expert interviews for this handbook. These quotes catch something essential of what both civil society cooperation and global goals are ultimately about: by joining forces and collaborating with actors across all sectors of the society as well as across all borders, it is possible to reach larger effects and to contribute to a bigger change.

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN FINLAND AND RUSSIA

The handbook focuses on the cooperation between Finnish and Russian civil society actors during the period of 2010-2019. During this period, the cooperation or information about the ongoing cooperation between Finnish and Russian CS actors has decreased especially due to the changes in the funding base, various legal restrictions as well as political tensions. It has also been difficult to find information about the ongoing cooperation in one place. The aim of the handbook is to cater to this need by offering an overview to the Finnish-Russian civil society cooperation by letting civil society actors themselves share their experience about their cross-border partnerships. What does partnership mean for civil society actors involved? What motivates to cooperate and what kind of change are these partnership projects calling for? What benefits, possibilities or challenges has the cooperation brought about?

We hope that this handbook will offer inspiration, encouragement and practical support for those willing to embark on a journey towards building genuine partnerships and sustainable practices of collaboration. This handbook, like any publication, is partial at best and hopefully only the beginning for an uninterrupted dialogue. Geographically,
the handbook covers civil society actors’ collaboration mostly between Helsinki or Uusimaa region in Finland and North-West Russia. While much of the cooperation has indeed concentrated around this area, this is not the full picture and especially the potential for cooperation around the Arctic region and Barents Sea is also important to keep in mind. Also, although this handbook focuses on the cooperation between Finnish and Russian civil society actors, similar cases of successful cooperation between CS actors from other EU-countries and Russia exist, too, and good practices of collaboration are applicable to other contexts as well. It is of crucial value to understand and be sensitive to differences in operating environments, but it is also necessary to acknowledge what civil society actors from different countries share in common. By looking closely, we can see that locally and globally we often share very similar concerns and aspirations. The 2030 Agenda offers one possibility to articulate these concerns into concrete strategies in a common and shared language.

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships are key principles of the the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. The agenda consists in total of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 more specific targets, which all United Nations’ member states, including Finland and Russia, are politically committed to implementing. Whereas the preceding Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were mostly targeted at eradicating poverty in so-called developing countries, the 2030 Agenda offers a more comprehensive approach by emphasizing the interlinkages between economic, social and ecological challenges. According to the Agenda, these challenges that humanity is globally facing, cannot be addressed and solved separately from one another but they are interconnected in complex ways. Reaching the goals indeed requires global solutions, as well as active participation of all sectors of society.

In this handbook, we have taken the goal 17, “Partnership for the goals”, as the starting point and prism through which civil society cooperation and sustainability are being reflected. None of the goals can be realized without implementing others, too, but the seventeenth goal is still perhaps the most overarching and all-encompassing one. The goal 17, which in full reads “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development” and more specifically targets 17.16 and 17.17 recognize the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships for mobilizing and sharing knowledge and expertise. According to the Agenda, non-governmental organizations are one of the “major groups”, ie. main channels through which broad participation and commitment to sustainable development will need to be facilitated. CSOs also play a critical role in holding governments accountable to their commitments to sustainable development. Therefore examining how civil society actors contribute globally and locally to sustainability is crucial.

What this handbook offers is one interpretation and multiple perspectives onto the good practices, benefits and challenges of creating and maintaining sustainable partnerships across national borders. The non-governmental organizations, other civil society actors or particular projects, which
are featured in the handbook, vary in size and scope, ranging from CS actors with decades of experience from Finnish-Russian collaboration to more recent initiatives. The handbook advocates for the idea that besides drawing inspiration from the established and traditional means of cooperation, we need new ideas and innovations to understand what cooperation could mean. This is why we have also wanted to present not only the work of NGOs but differently organized groups of activists as well. Most of these civil society actors also work in different fields, such as promoting child welfare, gender equality, peace and justice to working for ecological sustainability and supporting cooperation within fields of art and culture. Featuring such a wide range of activities has been a conscious choice, since also all SDGs intersect with one another. Also in reality, the work of CS actors can rarely be reduced to one specific goal.

The aim of this handbook is not to prescribe how CS actors ought to promote sustainable development, but rather to explore the potential that global partnership can add to reaching these goals as well as to display the valuable work that CS actors are already doing to promote change within these particular fields. Civil society actors, both on a very grassroots level as well as in more established non-governmental organizations, are experienced in working with issues related to sustainability and social justice. Therefore, commitment to the 2030 Agenda and utilizing the SDGs in one’s work need not start from scratch. Rather it is often only a matter of harnessing this work and capacity that CS actors already have, and building new practices on the already existing ones.

OUTLINE OF THE HANDBOOK

The structure of this handbook is divided into three main sections. The first part consists of five articles by experts with years of experience in working with sustainable development and/or Finnish-Russian civil society cooperation. Their analyses will shed light into these two thematic blocs that constitute the core of this handbook. Rilli Lappalainen, the director of advocacy and policy work at the Finnish Development NGOs umbrella organisation Fingo, opens the discussion by examining the potential role of the third sector in implementing the 2030 Agenda and introduces the experience of Finland, where NGOs have closely collaborated with the government to implement the SDGs. By focusing on goals 5 (Gender equality) and 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), gender equality expert Marianne Laxén analyzes how all the SDGs are intertwined with one another and illustrates the roots of the SDGs. Journalist and expert on environmental issues, Angelina Davydova, looks at the role of the 2030 Agenda in the Russian socio-political and public context and argues that although the SDGs are not yet widely established, there is a growing interest and potential for progress. Moving on to the state of civil society cooperation, an interview with Hanna Koppelomäki sheds light to the pioneering civil society cooperation, which the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs facilitated from mid-1990’s until 2007. Although the network no longer exists, it has left a lasting effect on many Finnish and Russian civil society actors and therefore learning from Koppelomäki’s experience is valuable. In her article, researcher and political scientist Anna Tarasenko analyzes what repercussions the numerous legal amendments, implemented
in Russia during the ongoing decades, as well as changes in the funding base have had on international civil society cooperation. As she argues, these amendments and financial challenges undoubtedly influence the work of Russian NGOs, but they are not an obstacle for international cooperation.

The second part of the handbook focuses on the work of Finnish and Russian civil society actors, who work for a better and more equal world and, in order to do so, cooperate with one another. This part displays in total ten cases, covering a variety of civil society actors from some of the oldest and most experienced organizations to more recent forms of cooperation that have emerged during the ongoing decade. The cases are presented in a chronological order, starting from the earlier cases of cooperation and moving on towards the more recent forms of cooperation.

The strong tradition of cooperation between Finnish and Russian social and health welfare sector and especially the cooperation on the field of child and family welfare has continued to be active. The experience of The Central Union of Child Welfare, Vozrozhdenie, GAOORDI, The Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association and Malenkaya Mama illustrates the persistent work and shared goals that these organizations have continued striving for also in the face of rapidly changing operating environments. By having created multi-stakeholder partnerships between NGOs, municipal authorities as well as governments both in Finland as well as in Russia, the work of these CS actors has often contributed to structural changes. Long-standing peace organizations such as Soldiers’ Mothers St. Petersburg and The Peace Union of Finland share a long history of exchanging experiences together, but also more recent cooperation, especially related to conscientious objection, has been initiated in the past few years. The Finland-Russia Society, perhaps best known for its work within the field of cultural activities, language courses and cultural tourism, has also actively sought ways of facilitating and engaging in civil society cooperation. International and well-established human rights organization Amnesty International has also found supporting grassroots activism to be an efficient way of creating sustainable grounds for partnerships. Moving on to more recent collaboration, the experience of The Creative Association of Curators, Connecting Points as well as Eve’s Ribs illustrate how artistic methods can be used as a way of exploring social phenomena as well as problems that Finland and Russia share in common. Environmental organization Bellona shares their experience of enhancing international cooperation through their volunteer programme. The benefits as well as challenges of cooperation will become evident throughout the chapters of the handbook. In the end of each case, we have also gathered together good practices that we hope can offer inspiration and ideas for starting cooperation or developing it further.

The third and last part of the handbook is an annex that offers more sources of information for funding, support in finding partners and information about the 2030 Agenda for civil society actors. The list is far from being comprehensive and instead of trying to cover everything, our aim has been to offer some ideas and examples that can provide to be useful and encourage to look for more opportunities for future collaboration.
Civil Society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

RILLI LAPPALAINEN

The 2030 Agenda and sustainable development challenge us all to think about our actions. Citizens, organisations, states and companies alike affect our planet and future. Even though the 2030 Agenda is first and foremost a political commitment to sustainable development signed by states, the NGO sector can have a huge impact in the implementation of it.

NGOS AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

NGOs have a multitude of different ways to promote sustainable development. Firstly, the 2030 Agenda can be incorporated into the strategies of NGOs by simply integrating the goals into their own objectives. NGOs that have been working with sustainability and development issues before can also redefine their work in the language of the 2030 Agenda. Secondly, even if the organisation does not itself promote the 2030 Agenda as such, sustainable development can be taken into consideration in the day-to-day work. NGOs can identify any sustainability challenges they might have in their planning and actions, or they can start taking sustainability into account in their daily practices. Lastly, the civil society does have one more role to play: civil society actors can challenge, monitor and support their state’s implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Finnish NGOs’ connection to the 2030 Agenda depends on their own approach on the issue as they do not have any obligations to deal with the 2030 Agenda if considered irrelevant for their own work. However, for many NGOs the 2030 Agenda has offered a new political frame, nationally and internationally, to enhance the issues they work on. The situation varies from country to country but in Finland new social structures of multisectoral cooperation have emerged due to the 2030 Agenda. NGOs are also able to contribute to the national debate and activities on basis of their own expertise but without formal reporting responsibility of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as that is government’s task. However, NGOs in general are largely enhancing SDGs as many of their activities in Finland or their development cooperation projects abroad as such contribute to their achievement.

The universal approach of the 2030 Agenda has meant for civil society a new kind of cooperation over traditional sectorial borderlines and with other civil society actors such as trade unions. In Finland civil society network was formed during the preparatory process of the negotiations of the 2030 Agenda and is still alive. It still shares information, carries out collective activities and discusses civil society’s participation at the national work on the 2030 Agenda. Some examples of concrete collective civil society efforts include the recommendations made in 2016 for the government and municipalities on the implementation of all 17 SDGs, and civil society’s annual follow-up reports, which estimate Finland’s performance in the local, national and global context on SDGs. These reports support NGOs’ advocacy work and communicate to the decision-makers and wider public how Finland is doing regards sustainable development. It is safe to say that in Finland the NGO sector truly has stepped up to support and, whenever needed, to critique the national implementation of SDGs.
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AS A TOOL FOR NGOS

The 2030 Agenda and sustainable development are not only goals for NGOs – they can also be used as a tool for project planning and management. They offer plenty of useful principles and approaches, such as leaving no one behind, multi-stakeholder partnerships and human rights-based approach, which can be applied in project planning to give some new ideas on ways of doing things.

There are also fundraising opportunities in using the 2030 Agenda in project planning. It is a wide agenda and includes a variety of issues and themes. Because of this, pretty much anything can be justified to contribute to the 2030 Agenda. Donors also understand and implement the 2030 Agenda in different ways, so there might be a variety of different sorts of actions to be financed. This, however, does also have some risks: when forming your project as an 2030 Agenda project only in the hope of fundraising, the individual targets might be prioritized over the transformative agenda and its broad principles.

One of the principles of the 2030 Agenda is cooperation and partnership. The principles and goals can be a tool for cooperation and offer a common language for NGOs or multi-stakeholder cooperation. We in Fingo have experience from both the multi-stakeholder cooperation for sustainable development in Finland as well as project cooperation with different NGOs.

Multi-stakeholder cooperation for sustainable development in Finland

The Finnish government has from the very beginning indicated that achieving the SDGs requires a collective national effort in which all social sectors need to be involved and has thus organized and initiated spheres to enable such cooperation. Civil society is one of the important parts of this cooperation and Finnish NGOs have been very active in the process of the implementation of SDG.

VOLUNTARY COMMITMENT TOOL

As the main way of implementing sustainable development in Finland, the Prime Minister’s Office created a voluntary commitment tool. Companies, municipalities, organizations, administration, educational institutions, local actors and individuals can make operational commitments on how they will change their ways of working to promote sustainable development. This offers NGOs one opportunity to take sustainable development into account in their everyday work: they can commit to for example reducing use of paper or flights or serving only vegetarian food. The commitment tool is the same for everyone and as such it emphasizes the need to have everyone on board when it comes to sustainable development.
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

The Development Policy Committee and the National Commission on Sustainable Development are the most important forums for multi-stakeholder participation. Their members include a variety of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, such as private sector actors, academics, interest groups and NGOs. The Development Policy Committee follows the implementation of the 2030 Agenda from the development policy perspective, whereas the National Commission on Sustainable Development aims to integrate sustainable development into all Finnish policies. Aside from the two committees there is a variety of other participation mechanisms as well, such as Sustainable Development Expert Panel of scholars, a youth group for 2030 Agenda and a citizens’ jury of 879 members.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT

In general, the connection between civil society and the authorities on the 2030 Agenda is open and smooth. There is for example always an NGO representative in the Finnish delegation at the United Nation’s Higher Level Political Forum (HLPF). Also formulating the National Action Plan on Sustainable Development and identifying the national indicators for SDGs were carried out as multi-stakeholder processes. One of the positive aspects in the national action plan is that the government must annually report on its progress on sustainable development to the parliament. The monitoring system opens several opportunities for public discussion and gives a chance for civil society, citizens and other stakeholders to advocate for more ambitious measures to achieve sustainable development.

NGOs participate very actively in the Agenda 2030 processes in Finland, but the experiences naturally vary from one NGO to another. The civil society sector involved in the 2030 Agenda does not form a homogenous group, since the NGOs have very different themes they are working with, different ways of doing things and their relationship to decision-makers varies. As already pointed out, the connection between civil society and the decision-makers has largely been an open and fruitful one, and there are many spaces for interaction. However, content-wise there are many points in which the government and NGOs have differing opinions. In these cases, the NGOs have found it difficult to get their views forward.
and to participate in the decision-making process. Even though the implementation of sustainable development in Finland is in no way accomplished yet, the process itself and the way all different sectors of society have been involved in it is a great example and an act for sustainable development.

NGO Cooperation – experiences with European and Russian NGOs

Fingo and the two organisations preceding it, Kepa and the Finnish NGDO Platform to the European Union Kehys, have had the privilege of working together with NGOs from many different countries and environments to promote sustainable development. We firmly believe that cooperation is necessary to achieve the SDGs but also fruitful in itself. We have learned a lot from our partners and had the possibility to share our best practices and experiences with NGOs from for example the Baltic countries, Mediterranean area and Europe of course. In the past few years there have been three projects that really stood out and have given us plenty to think about when it comes to the 2030 Agenda and sustainable development.

BRIDGE 47 – BUILDING GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

The Bridge 47 Network was established soon after the UN member countries adopted the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Borrowing its name from target 4.7. of the SDGs, its aim is to bring different types of value-based education together to share and learn from each other, and together help us acquire the skills and attitudes needed to achieve sustainable development. In 2017, the European Commission decided to fund this initiative, which resulted in the Bridge 47 - Building Global Citizenship project, co-created by 15 European and global organisations. Global Citizenship Education inspires us to do more for each other and our planet. It empowers us transform ourselves and the world. It encourages us to reflect upon our assumptions, make informed decisions and demand policies that create a more fair and equal world.

As NGOs, we need to reflect upon our role as facilitators in creating a more sustainable future. Global Citizenship Education can be the tool that helps us achieve this. Through a set of imaginative and creative educational methods, it can help create a space for citizens to dream and, subsequently, to act for a more sustainable future. Building the capacity of civil society requires that we challenge and transform ourselves by rethinking our own contexts and the roles we play in our organisations, networks and regions. This can be made possible in the safe, shared spaces where we get together, exchange ideas and cooperate. Working together in networks, advocating for better policies, working in partnership with organisations that we have previously not engaged with and being innovative and challenging our own assumptions are some of the ways in which the Bridge 47 project tries to transform ourselves and the world. We have learned that civil society focusing on formal education only is not sufficient, but that real change requires lifelong learning. It also requires that we continuously re-evaluate our work, take time for critical reflection and put an emphasis on developing ourselves.
PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN NORDIC AND RUSSIAN NGOS

The Non-State Actors: Partnership and skills for sustainable development -project brought together NGOs from Finland, Russia and Sweden in 2017 to exchange experiences, learn from each other and increase the networks of NGOs within and between these countries. The project was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers and the main partners of Fingo were NGO Development Center from Russia and The National Forum for Voluntary Work from Sweden. The project responded to the situation in which NGOs in the Nordic countries and Russia are increasingly facing similar challenges, such as changes in the funding base and the growing role of the private sector. Furthermore, global aspects are increasingly influencing local realities. Civil society actors need to adapt to these changes, work sustainably and be ready to meet the needs of citizens.

The project aimed to improve the work of NGOs by exchanging best practices, project management skills and fundraising methods as well as establishing networks across these countries. The 2030 Agenda formed the backbone of the project activities. These goals acted as cross-cutting principles and ensured commonly shared values for the project. Through the common goals the NGOs from different countries were able to speak through a same language. In the project the transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda was emphasized. Many Russian NGOs had heard of sustainable development and specific goals, which they were using for example in their work related to youth and children. However, the 2030 Agenda as a whole was not part of the organizations’ work. This is why understanding the transformative nature of the 2030 Agenda could bring a much-needed mission, vision and sustainability to the action of mainly project-based NGOs. The 2030 Agenda also emphasizes the need to action: active citizens, organisations and countries are needed. In this way, the 2030 Agenda could push NGOs to put more emphasis on participation in their activities and use the 2030 Agenda in planning and organizational development.

CIVIL SOCIETY COOPERATION IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

Nordic countries have many common challenges around the implementation of SDGs, but so far NGOs from Nordic countries have not cooperated much around sustainable development. Now in 2019 with the support from Nordic Council of Ministers, four Nordic NGOs are working together to strengthen our efforts on monitoring our countries' implementation of the SDGs. The project partners are the Danish 92 Group, Concord Sweden, Fingo from Finland and the Forum for Environment and Development from Norway.

We aim to form a Nordic civil society network to ensure also future knowledge sharing and joint Nordic efforts on the 2030 Agenda. The project gathers Nordic experiences to identify common challenges and to find common solutions. The activities carried out include, for example, support for Norwegian civil society to elaborate their demands to their government to initiate a collective process to formulate a national action plan. In February 2019 we will work together to organize a working group on the Nordic SDG implementation at the SDG Conference at the University of Bergen. All of our countries have different ways of implementing the SDGs and the role of civil society actors varies. Together we hope to
produce analysis and recommendations for political decision-makers and for the Nordic Council, based on the exchange of experiences and best practices, to further push for ambitious sustainable development politics and practices in our countries.

**As our experiences with Nordic, European and Russian NGOs as well as different stakeholders in Finland show, sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda work well when it comes to finding common language and starting cooperation.**

The 2030 Agenda is in no way perfect – it is a compromise by all the states of the world, a way of trying to compress complex global issues, challenges and interconnections into specific goals and targets. Even though it cannot be seen as a comprehensive plan for saving the world, it gives us much needed joint vision and common ground for aiming to do so. It is the best tool we have. NGOs and citizens of course have their role, but the main strength of the 2030 Agenda is that it is agreed by all the UN member states. It is not just an agreement to try to reach the targets in time. The 2030 Agenda is a political commitment to sustainable development and leaving no one behind. And this way it is also a tool for us as citizens and NGOs to keep our decision makers accountable.

**ABOUT THE WRITER**

Rilli Lappalainen is the director of advocacy and policy work at the Finnish Development NGOs umbrella organisation Fingo. Fingo was founded in the end of 2018, when Kepa and the Finnish NGDO Platform to the European Union, Kehys, formed a new umbrella organisation together. Fingo has more than 300 member organisations working in the areas of development cooperation and global education. Fingo’s role is to make our members stronger civil society actors by offering training, advisory services and opportunities for networking and cooperation.

Website: https://www.fingo.fi/english
A world without violence with justice and equality for all – Interconnections between the SDGs 5 and 16

MARIANNE LAXÉN

Securing peace and improving women's position as well as increasing gender equality between women and men have been objectives in the work of the United Nations (UN) since its very foundation in 1945. During the latter half of the 20th century and increasingly during the 21st, attention has been paid to the need for global sustainable development, where these different goals would be understood to be interdependent. In a global world, where boundaries cannot prevent climate change or environmental degradation, also the work for sustainable development needs to focus on all areas of society and on how these different areas affect one another. For the first time, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges the fact that solving global challenges requires understanding the interconnectedness of different social and ecological problems – including the work for peace and gender equality.

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In 2015, the world's governments adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is a universal agenda committing United Nation's member states to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Agenda consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 more specifically defined targets, thus representing a plan of action for both the people and our planet. Gender equality (SDG 5) and peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16) are two of the global development priorities that the agenda recognises and that I will focus on in this text.

Goal number 5, “Gender equality”, aims to end all discrimination against women and girls. Globally, women’s opportunities for an independent life have increased considerably as more women and girls get an education, can work and be financially independent. Also more and more women are being elected to national parliaments and local municipalities. However, there is still much to be done. There are many countries in the world that do not yet recognize that human rights are women’s rights. We know that religious fundamentalists around the world and from all religions suppress women. Violence against women in close relationships exists throughout the world and in all social groups. Trade in women who are sexually exploited is a profitable business for criminal leagues. Achieving gender equality requires zero tolerance for exploitation and suppression as well as the questioning some of the fundamental structures, such as patriarchy and male dominance, that our societies continue to be based on.

Goal number 16 is called “Peace, justice and strong institutions”. The United Nations was originally formed to secure world peace and its stated purpose is “to maintain international peace and security, and, to that end, take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace.” The challenge has been enormous. Wars between nations as well as civil wars and terrorism have not been avoided. During the first 15 years of the 21st century, armed conflicts within and between states, have been causing an estimated 55,000 deaths annually worldwide. Global military expenditure has grown steadily, to around $1.7 trillion, or $236 per person. During the same period, the volume of international transfers of major conventional
weapons has grown by about one-third. Nine countries together possess more than 16,400 nuclear weapons. This massive militarisation is deforming our societies, stifling civil liberties and wrecking the environment. Weaponry and standing armies are an immediate source of danger in themselves, making an armed response likely when a conflict of interests arises, but the long-term causes of war are more deeply rooted in our social, economic and political systems i.e. structural violence. That is why we, to pursue our task of ending war, must be able to imagine peace. This is the task we have implementing the SDG 16.

The organisation I represent, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), believes that the SDGs can be a powerful tool for preventing conflicts and sustaining peace. This, however, requires that the SDGs will be understood as a transformative and holistic agenda that must be implemented through a human rights framework. Understanding how the goals crosscut is crucial for their successful implementation.

*There is no peace without justice, no justice without equality, no sustainable development unless everyone joins the work.*

**THE WORK FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS HAS LONG ROOTS IN THE HISTORY OF UN**

Within the UN’s first year, the Economic and Social Council established its Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), as the principal global policy-making body dedicated exclusively to gender equality and the advancement of women. After the International Women’s Year in 1975, several World Conferences on Women were held. The last one of these was held in Beijing in 1995 where The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) famously asserted that women’s rights are human rights and committed to specific actions to ensure respect for those rights. The CSW reviews the implementation of the BPfA, promoting women’s rights, documenting the reality of women’s lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women. In 1979, the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which often is described as an International Bill of Rights for Women.

In response to active pressure from the civil society, especially women’s organisations, the UN Security Council has adopted eight resolutions on “Women, Peace and Security” of which the resolution 1325 from year 2000 is the most known. The eight resolutions together make up the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. They guide the work to promote gender equality and strengthen women’s participation, protection and rights across the conflict cycle, from conflict prevention through post-conflict reconstruction.

By examining the UN’s previous activities and involvement, we can see a clear connection between Sustainable Development goals 5 and 16. Domestic violence against women, sexual exploitation and control of girls and women occurs everywhere in the world and in all social groups. These issues are addressed by the CSW, CEDAW and UN Women. The role of women in peace efforts and participation in decision-making in peace processes is addressed in the resolution 1325
(and the others in connection with it). Follow-up takes place in the Security Council. A follow-up of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is also done annually in the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), where the countries voluntarily submit reports and where the UN Secretary-General makes an analysis of how SDG’s are realized on a global level.

**IN Volving the Civil Society**

It is not only the UN and the national governments that must be involved in the work to achieve the goals. Global and local partnership should support and try to achieve the ambitious targets of the 2030 Agenda by bringing together national governments, the international community, civil society, the private sector and other actors. Concerning the goals 5 and 16 it is utterly important that women’s organisations, feminist organisations, men’s organisations working for gender equality and peace organisations try to find each other and begin working together to achieve a world without violence, with justice and equality for all.

As Ella Mikhaylovna Polyakova, the chair of the peace organization Soldiers’ Mothers in St.Petersburg said in her speech when she won the Hessian Peace Prize¹ in 2015:

“Now 67 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we have forgotten the meaning of the most important human rights – keeping the fragile peace and avoiding violence and bloodshed. Our task now is to stop neglect and contempt for human rights. When I say ‘we’ – I mean all of us, no matter where one lives on the planet Earth, human rights know no borders. And this principle is particularly important now, right now it is important not to stop the dialogue with one another, and to seek constructive solutions to promote the development of friendly relations between nations.”

¹ The Hessian Peace Prize, established in 1993 by the former Hessian Prime Minister Albert Osswald and his foundation, is awarded to people who have rendered outstanding services to international understanding and peace.
ABOUT THE WRITER

Marianne Laxén is a gender equality expert. She is a member of the board at the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Finland, member of WILPF standing constitution committee and vice chair of the Peace Union of Finland.

Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) is the oldest Women’s peace organisation in the world, which was founded in 1915. During its long history, peace and gender equality have been the main focuses of WILPF’s work and activities. WILPF has been active in many forums in the United Nations, having consultative status within the UN.

Website: https://wilpf.org/
The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have only recently been established in the Russian socio-political and public context, and the process of developing Russian indicators for the SDGs is ongoing: evaluation reports and studies that analyse various aspects of the implementation of the SDGs in Russia are regularly published, and at discussion forums experts continue to deliberate ways on how to make the SDGs a basis for the formation of strategic documents. However, the reference to the SDGs is often a mere formality - a radical reformation of the view and the priorities of socio-economic development. It is noteworthy that companies are actually at the forefront when it comes to initiating the implementation of the SDGs and their methodology, by including them as a tool for tracking and analyzing corporate social responsibility measures, or sustainable development policies.

In September 2015, Russia along with 192 other countries approved the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is based on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Since then, the SDGs have slowly begun to be mentioned in public political speeches, however only as a theme among rather abstract priorities.

The concrete inclusion the SDGs into socio-economic development plans and their direct integration into long-term development strategies still remains unanswered. It is still unclear, whether the SDG indicators will be incorporated into the strategies that have already been developed and approved, or if they will only be included in new plans and projects. Furthermore, it is also uncertain how the SDGs could be merged with a system of indicators that assess activities of Federal and regional authorities.

“Strategic documents on the implementation of the SDGs are still not there. At public events one will often hear representatives of the government stating that Russia has its own national goals, such as those of Vladimir Putin’s May Decree, where the SDGs are reflected but not mentioned by name”, says Tatyana Lanshina, a researcher at the Center for Economic Modeling of Energy and Environment, RANEPA and coordinator of the youth division of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) in Russia. Natalia Zaitseva, the head of Sustainable Business Center at the Moscow School of Management SKOLKOVO, agrees that the May Decree essentially follows the structure of the SDGs. Nonetheless, the May Decree remains a mere document entitled “On the national goals and strategic tasks of the development of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2024”, which comprises of the main targets for Russia and gives the government instructions to take certain measures in order “to implement a breakthrough in the scientific, technological, and socio-economic development of the Russian Federation”.

Against this backdrop, Rosstat (Russian Federal State Statistics Service) informs about the status of the development of Russian SDG indicators\(^2\), collects and publishes data on the indicators of each of the individual SDG achievements in Russia\(^3\), and analyzes the correspondence between each of the 17 goals and the relevant regulatory acts of the Russian legislation\(^4\).

Russia is preparing a report on the implementation of the SDGs for the next
meeting of the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2020. Over the past few years, the country has issued several analytical reports on the implementation of the SDGs in Russia, as well as on the national adaptation to the international methodology. Among these studies are a number of annual publications by the Analytical Center for the Government of the Russian Federation, some of which summarize the implementation of the SDG agenda in the Russian Federation as a whole (e.g. the report on The UN Sustainable Development Goals and Russia from 2016), while others focus on the implementation of its individual components, e.g. environmental issues (see the report Environmental Priorities for Russia from 2017) or scientific innovations (see the report Man and Innovations from 2018).

The most important trend concerning the SDGs in Russia is that a growing number of companies – both representative/subsidiary offices for foreign business, and Russian companies who publish reports on sustainable development, have begun to use the terminology and to some extent, the methodology of the goals. As an example, Deloitte Russia's Sustainability Report from 2018 showcased concrete markers of the company's contribution to the achievement of seven SDGs, which were of particular focus that year. The sustainability report of the company Norilsk Nickel also presents the company's policy in connection to the achievement of the UN goals for sustainable development in the period until 2030; Already on the report’s first pages, the company declares their support for the goals, which is followed by a further detailing of their activities in the field of sustainable development, where activities are classified according to the SDGs. Another company, Polymetal also published a report on sustainability in which they describe their support for the goals, as well as their attempt to align their business strategy with the SDGs by labeling their programs and actions of sustainable development with selected SDGs. Furthermore, the Russian steel company Severstal considers their approaches and commitments in the field of corporate social responsibility to fully meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The most important trend concerning the SDGs in Russia is that a growing number of companies – both representative/subsidiary offices for foreign business, and Russian companies who publish reports on sustainable development, have begun to use the terminology and to some extent, the methodology of the goals.
Development Goals, as they are presented in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This Agenda was adopted by the world leaders in 2015 at a historic UN Summit in New York. While the main responsibility for achieving the goals lies on a national level, partnerships involving all stakeholders - governments, civil society, businesses and other entities - are recognized as an important element of the implementation and success of the strategies. In their report on corporate social responsibility and sustainability in terms of the company’s development, Severstal states that they contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by taking the particularities of their activities into account and by categorizing projects, programs, and measures for all the SDGs. https://www.severstal.com/files/22123/social_report_2017.pdf.

“The Sustainable Development Goals provide an opportunity for business representatives to reassess the challenges facing humanity and transform them into opportunities that can contribute to sustainable development as well as improve competitiveness and help the companies establish a more advantageous market positioning. Since the adoption of the Agenda, many major brands have already begun to integrate the SDGs into their business strategies, making them a natural extension of their sustainable development activities. To a large extent, this has been caused by the rise of expectations from stakeholders, which includes increased consumer awareness and consumer responsibility. The growing numbers of responsible consumers are significantly transforming the global competitive environment and thereby creating new opportunities for businesses.

Companies use responsible manufacturing as a way to differentiate and gain competitive advantages in the market. However, for the consumers, it is not only important how a specific product is produced, but also how the company generally approaches sustainable development and meets the standards of corporate social responsibility,” assert the authors of a cooperative study11 by Effie Russia and KPMG, titled “Effie Russia and KPMG Joint Study under the Program of Effie and the United Nations to Promote the 17 Sustainable Development Goals in Russia”.

Last year (2017), the Russian national network of the UN Global Compact (the UN’s largest initiative for corporate responsibility and sustainable development) and the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP) co-presented the results of a survey12 of 78 Russian companies, encompassing divisions of international companies, entitled Sustainable Development. Role of Russia.

“For some time in post-Soviet Russia, the topic and practices in the field of corporate sustainability were guided mainly by the divisions of global companies. Today, the division into trendsetters and neophytes is no longer relevant. Russian business leaders have their own full-fledged portfolios of cases, and are themselves initiating, introducing and implementing elements related to sustainable development into their activities. Advanced Russian businesses are not only changing, introducing, and distributing effective practices in the field of corporate environmental and social responsibility, systemic philanthropy, corporate volunteering, etc., but also taking an active part in the formation of new approaches to the mission,
role, and objectives of the respective business and its partnerships in the context of sustainable development – the values and principles of which are increasingly becoming invested in their long-term business strategies,” state the authors of the study.

Simultaneously however, “many global players do not yet see a direct link between the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the commercial success of their businesses. Companies primarily associate the achievement of the SDGs with the needs of society and the company’s reputation. Generally speaking, companies’ priorities of achieving the SDGs correspond with the tasks and needs of the business itself. Large Russian companies are beginning to take the Sustainable Development Goals into consideration when developing their strategies, but the technologies for monitoring the implementation of the SDGs at the company level are still not sufficiently developed,” the authors of the report conclude.

“We consider the SDGs from two different aspects; On the one hand, they are important for the internal relationships of the company. At some point the SDGs become a kind of an exoskeleton, or in other words, the framework to which any business, marketing, and social strategy can be ‘attached to’. Moreover, these points tie all these three strategies together. Externally, the SDGs are a single cultural code; a language that helps us to understand to what extent we are consistent with one another. The SDGs are a synergetic tool, which can give certain prominence to activities performed by the company and the efforts of every employee; they can unite stakeholders, release hidden human and corporate resources, and make a substantial contribution to public and social life for years to come” says Sergey Dolgov, Communications Director at the National Legal Service AMULEX, in connection to using the methodology of the SDGs for motivation. Nevertheless, the authors of this study also note how “in the perception of most companies, sustainable development is still equated with corporate social responsibility and philanthropy. For the Russian consumer, the responsibility of a business is primarily to provide decent work opportunities, to show concern for the well-being of their employees, and to produce high-quality items at fair and affordable prices.”

In the same vein, one can note how the public sector is falling a bit behind when it comes to integrating the SDGs into its activities. So far, the SDG terminology has emerged as a benchmark and framework for development strategies on only a more

13 For more details see p. 10-11 of the survey.
abstract level. In addition, most of the public campaigns are more likely to address either social development, environmental issues, or issues of participatory urban development rather than working with all the topics in an integrated manner (this applies to both bigger campaigns and campaigns at a more grassroot-level). Some of the few public projects aimed at solving several SDGs combined, are projects for sustainable development of territories which include social and environmental components, or programs for developing and supporting social or “green” entrepreneurship.

The SDGs have yet to take root across the majority of Russian civil society’s representatives and their agendas; this concerns professional NGOs that have been operating for many years as well as new grassroots initiatives or groups. To a large extent, this is due to the abstract nature of the indicators and the ambiguity related to their practical use and potential benefits. An identification with, plus a promotion and communication of the SDGs within programs and projects of Russian NGOs, societal movements and initiatives, could be extremely useful for the strategic development of Russia’s civil sector as a whole. The application of the SDG-methodology allows civil society organizations to clearly articulate the priorities and directions of their work. It enables them to identify potential areas of network cooperation with other organizations, and it furthermore serves as a foundation for studying the long-term intersectional effects of various projects or initiatives. Incorporating the SDG-methodology into the work of NGOs can also support an improved communication of current projects by simultaneously appealing to international and Russian experience when analyzing successes or failures in program implementation. Finally, the SDGs as a framework for NGOs can create new common ground for developing international cooperation between Russian NGOs and initiatives and representatives of civil society from other countries.

Hence, when speaking about the Russian society as whole, for the time being it is hard to view the concepts of the SDGs as firmly rooted. “The topic has not yet entered the public. Most economists and managers consider sustainable development utopic, and do not believe that economic prosperity can be achieved while leaving only minimal negative impact on the environment and at the same time providing equal opportunities for all. In Russia, the prevailing view is that one must choose either economic growth or a primitive life in a cave among wild animals. Ordinary people do not think about sustainable development at all, they do not even know what it is.” says Tatiana Lanshina in a disappointing note.
In Russia, the notion of a sustainable or balanced development, covering both the environmental and social component, has generally appeared rather slowly. The paradigm of stable economic growth (mainly measured through GDP) was central to the development strategy of post-Soviet Russia for most of the 1990s and 2000s. However, recent years’ experiences have demonstrated that not even when the Russian economy received surplus revenues from the sale of natural resources, did the country experience an increase in the overall life quality, nor a reduction of inequality or a minimization of the burden on the natural environment. As a result, the “lagging” sectors are becoming more visible by making a significant negative contribution to the otherwise often positive macroeconomic statistics. Life expectancy is increasing, but the rates of mortality, primarily among the male population, are still significantly higher in Russia when compared with countries on the same level of socio-economic development. While the country has overcome the problem of hunger, not all citizens have access to high-quality and varied food; hence rates of obesity and diabetes are on the rise, and vitamin deficiency remains a problem across the population. Russia’s most pressing issue of disparity rests in its regional inequality: Indicators of the Human Development Index (HDI), quality of life, the share of social expenditures, the level of modernization of the infrastructure, the investment into creating new cultural and social capital, as well as the maintenance of natural environments, all vary greatly between regions.

In general, it should be noted that social and environmental issues appear rather regularly in the Russian socio-political context; nevertheless more often as inconsistent and unrelated elements than as parts of a holistic system of holistic sustainable development. Furthermore, social policy and environmental policy continue to have separated priorities, leaving almost no room for crosscutting interaction. Reactions are more likely to occur as responses to disasters than to daily problems, and this concerns both the social and the environmental regional protests (for example, regarding the expansion and inadequate management of landfills, the closure of medical institutions, or the abolition of electric trains).

Based on the content of this article, we can summarize that sustainable development in general and the methodology of the SDGs, are still only finding their place and path in the context of Russia. Viewed against the backdrop of continuous legislative reforms (in the economic, environmental, and social sphere), revisions of long-term socio-economic development strategies (including priorities for the forthcoming years), and attempts to expand the range of indicators of good governance and achieved results to include social and environmental criteria - the role of the SDGs still remains limited.

Nevertheless, the growing importance of the SDG methodology in international context, the increasing interest in the topic from Russian and international businesses, and the rise in demand for an integrated, sustainable, flexible, and participatory approach to solving problems and responding to current and future challenges from various actors of the Russian society, will all combined gradually increase the need for comprehensive indicators.
and benchmarks that include issues of inequality, health, quality of life, maintenance of natural ecosystems, and environmentally sustainable production, consumption and urban development. And this is where the SDG targets and indicators can play an extremely relevant and important role.

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THE SDG AGENDA IN RUSSIA: FIRST STEPS
What can be learned from previous Finnish-Russian cooperation in the field of social and health NGOs?

INTerview with Hanna Koppelomäki

Hanna Koppelomäki is a long-standing actor in the Finnish civil society and has three decades of experience in organising various civil society activities. She started working with Finnish-Russian cooperation already during the second half of the 1990’s, when a pilot project called "NGOs for Better Social Welfare and Health" was initiated. Eventually, when the project developed into the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs (Sosiaali- ja terveysjärjestöjen Venäjä-verkosto), Koppelomäki became one of the coordinators of the network in Helsinki. In 2008-2011, Koppelomäki worked at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, where she was responsible for coordinating the neighbouring area projects between Finland and Russia. Having thus extensive experience both from the civil society as well as the governmental side of the cross-border cooperation, Koppelomäki shares with us her experiences from building sustainable partnerships across the border.

"GOLDEN DAYS" OF NEIGHBOURING AREA COOPERATION

According to Koppelomäki, the late 1990s and early 2000s were the "golden days" of the neighbouring area cooperation between Finland and Russia. Among other factors, the collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in closer relations between Russian and Finnish civil society actors. "NGOs for Better Social Welfare and Health" was a pilot project, which was carried out in the field of social and health NGOs in 1996-1999. The original goal of the project was to provide practical training for socially oriented organizations in Russia, but as it turned out, many of these organizations that had been founded since the late 1980’s already had a lot of expertise in basic skills such as project management. Instead, the project started to focus on facilitating concrete development projects that could be interesting and useful for both Finnish and Russian partners. This is also how the project subsequently developed into the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs, a platform for facilitating partnership projects based on genuine collaboration.

The aim of the network was to function as a forum for encouraging collaboration and exchange of experiences between Finnish and Russian NGOs working within social and health sector. For the period of 1999-2007, the network was funded by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Finnish Slot Machine Association and coordinated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Together with her colleague Ossi Oinonen, Koppelomäki was responsible for coordinating the network activities in Helsinki. The network had an office in St.Petersburg where the local coordinator Anna Skvortsova was heading the Information and Analysis Center for Social and Health NGOs and who nowadays works as the head of NGO Development Center (Zentr Razvitiia Nekommercheskyh Organisazii) in St.Petersburg. At the latest stage of existence, a branch office was opened also in Petrozavodsk. Having offices in both countries enabled the effective creation and maintenance of wide networks as well as offering extensive expertise in assisting member organizations with practicalities such as visa invitations, travel tickets, translation and possible bureaucratic challenges.

The network was its most active in 2002-2007 and successfully facilitated projects covering various issues from child protection,
elderly care and mental health to substance abuse prevention and disability issues between tens of NGOs from Finland and all the North-West Russia (St. Petersburg, Leningrad Region, Karelian Republic, Murmansk and Arhangelsk Regions). In a book called "Civil society crossing borders" (Kansalaisyhteiskunta liikkeessä yli rajojen), published in 2005, journalist Airi Leppänen has collected and edited an extensive account on the network activities, by displaying the array of various projects it enabled. As she summarizes the results and achievements: "Consistent networking has brought good results. New forms of activities have been developed, contacts across the borders have been made on different levels and 'project know-how' has increased as well as our [Finns'] knowledge of the operating environment in Russia. It has also helped ordinary Finns to grasp the significance of the collaboration between Finland and Russia. After all, Russia is and always will be our neighbour, although Finns often tend to forget this fact. Therefore, Finland and Russia are even obliged to work together to solve problems concerning, for example, the environment or the health and welfare of their citizens."

Despite the good results, operating under uncertain conditions defined the network's functioning since the very beginning, because funding was allocated on an annual project basis. The first disruption to the funding occurred already in the beginning on 2000s, but from 2002 until the end of 2007 the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs managed to continue their work. From 2007 onwards, the network no longer had full-time employees, but continued to exist on a voluntary basis and organised meetings irregularly. Eventually, the funding for the neighbouring area cooperation between Finland and Russia was completely cut in 2012 by the Finnish government. Since then, the work has in some cases continued informally because some NGOs have maintained contacts with their previous partners. As for example the cases of the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association and Malenkaya Mama or GAOORDI in this handbook show, the cooperation enabled by the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs sometimes continued and lasted even without external funding, due to the friendships and close connections that the years of joint projects had enabled. Also Koppelomäki herself admits that witnessing successful cooperation left an “itch” for keeping up the connections whenever possible.

By learning from the history of the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs, we can see that the internal development in Russia, such as restrictions on legislation, is only one factor contributing to the decrease of civil society cooperation since the late 1990’s and early 2000’s. What has also influenced civil society cooperation remarkably during the last ten years is the lack of funding from the Finnish side for neighbouring area cooperation. This has directly resulted in fewer partnership projects and the lack of a stable structure that could facilitate and support cooperation.

SUCCESSFUL COOPERATION BENEFITS FROM A STABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

According to Koppelomäki, the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs functioned as an infrastructure that connected different organizations working with similar thematic issues on different sides of the border together. As Hanna metaphorically illustrates, the network was the palm and the projects
were the fingers connected to it. Whereas the network enabled international cooperation for many organizations that would otherwise not have become involved in it, the substance was produced by the organizations themselves, who focused on innovating and realizing projects with the support of the network.

The network’s activities were numerous. It for example organised seminars and study visits from Russia to Finland and vice versa. As stated earlier, it also assisted with practicalities such as visas and translation. In this way, the network enabled international cooperation also for relatively small and locally operating NGOs, who would otherwise not have had the resources to find partners and realize projects together with them. The network’s key to ensuring successful projects and genuine partnerships was to enable the exchange knowledge and know-how on shared topics of interest. Although the operating environments differed in some crucial ways, many of the challenges and issues within the sphere of social and health NGOs were also very similar on both sides of the border. Moreover, the cooperation offered both partners the opportunity to reflect one’s own work critically in order to improve its quality and continue developing it further.

The Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs also functioned as a kind of living database on previous projects so that the cooperation itself was less dependent on individuals and their personal interest for promoting cooperation. Throughout its years of work, the network for example accumulated specific know-how on the Finnish-Russian cooperation, such as the possible differences between working cultures or how the work with interpreters is most efficiently organized. It also managed to establish large networks and to develop a deep understanding of the operating environments for social and health NGOs both in Finland and in Russia. This type of capital took time to build up and was the result of many years of cooperation. By providing this kind of expertise for its member organizations, also NGOs with no previous experience of international cooperation but an interest to gain it could more easily feel confident to use the opportunity to create partnerships with their Finnish or Russian colleagues.

The current situation shows that due to the lack of permanent structures to maintain connections, new projects or other initiatives often need to start from scratch. Because ensuring continuity and follow-up is very difficult, this leads to a situation where even successful results, established networks and good practices might easily fall into oblivion once the project is over. Also without a stable structure like the network, it can be difficult to convey the importance of the cross-border cooperation to the following generations. As for example Kirsi-Maria Manninen, the head of the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association put it, now that the cooperation between the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association and its Russian partner Malenkaya Mama has lasted for more than 20 years and many of the members of the original core group are soon about to retire, the lack of a uniting platform such as the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs is an especially pressing concern. “We older employees have the experience that our collaboration has been very fruitful, but I’m afraid that once we retire, this connection will be easily lost”, she lamented during the interview on the valuable experience of their neighbouring area cooperation, “We of course try to transmit
our experiences verbally to our followers, but since there isn’t any structure or platform anymore that would help in maintaining the cooperation, I think it will be very easily lost.”

FROM COOPERATION TO GENUINE PARTNERSHIP

Neither the Finnish nor the Russian societies are monolithic entities in a static state, which means that the prerequisites for collaboration also constantly change. Big changes have occured since the time when Hanna was actively working with Finnish-Russian cooperation. Both in Finland and in Russia, the operating environments for international cooperation have changed due to the scarce funding and new restrictions that influence the work of NGOs. On the other hand, also new methods or technologies, such as the social media, that enable and have made cooperation in some respects easier have emerged. Nevertheless, there are several points from which civil society actors operating today can learn from.

Most importantly, Koppelomäki emphasizes that sustainable cooperation needs to be based on genuine collaboration so that it is fruitful for both partners, instead of being based on lopsided structures or assumptions that good practices good could be imported elsewhere as they are. This was the whole principle of the network and, as such, it was a pioneering idea that has since then become mainstream. As a means of creating genuine collaboration, Hanna mentions that the value of personal encounters between partners still remains vital and cannot be underestimated. According to her, it is important to keep up regular meetings with different parties and involve everyone in planning joint activities. Hanna also emphasizes the need for an ongoing dialogue between experienced and more recent civil society actors in the field of Finnish-Russian cooperation. People who have long-standing experience in the facilitation of cooperation have valuable experience that continues to be needed today, but also fresh perspectives and new innovations are crucial.

In an ideal world, the resources needed for sustaining existing infrastructure would be recognised

Secondly, Koppelomäki says that projects should not be initiated just for the sake of initiating a project, but that they should be based on a deeper idea of the change we want to see in the society and reflect the goals we want to achieve in the long run. This is why Koppelomäki sees potentially problematic the fact that in terms of funding NGOs are dependent on passing trends that come and go in short cycles. This forces many civil society actors to use their resources on figuring out every time what is the “it” at a given moment and creating catchy titles to meet the expectations of donors. Different trends of cooperation come and go, but the connections between people last if they are based on shared history and close bonds that are created over a longer period of time. In an ideal world, the resources needed for sustaining existing infrastructure would be recognised, but, having said that, Koppelomäki also admits that there is no escaping the fact that funding structures have always created the framework for the cooperation and will do so in the future. Creating sustainable cooperation thus requires a balancing act between being able to adapt to the prevailing and often rapidly changing conditions and yet not giving up the long-term
vision of the direction where the work should be targeted at.

Finally, according to Hanna, the big picture is that we should fight against the creation of divisions and, instead, work towards common values and goals. Everything that creates connections and understanding between people, and enables to build something new together is good. In connection to working with the Sustainable development goals, Koppelomäki suggests that the seventeen SDGs could be discussed in various ways, for example as topics for different events. The goals themselves have much substance in them, and they are by no means self-evident. They can be looked at and understood in various different ways, and creating this mutual understandings can lead to interesting projects. This could be one way the civil society could utilise the 2030 Agenda as a starting point for not only projects but to discuss the global phenomena as such. As the experience of the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs shows, working for common goals and creating sustainable partnerships is nothing new. Rather than reinventing the wheel again, it is good to stop, look back and learn from the valuable work that has already been done.
WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM PREVIOUS FINNISH-RUSSIAN COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH NGOS?
International cooperation of Russian NGOs in the years 2010-2018 - laws, funding, and new practices

**ANNA TARASENKO**

The starting point for this overview has been the discrepancy between the deteriorating relations with our Western European partners in “high politics”, and the willingness to preserve and develop cooperation on the level of civil society organizations, and some political and economic stakeholders. As a result, grassroots initiatives are being adapted to the new political environment, and new forms and methods of cooperation are emerging. For this particular analytical work presented here, open source data from international competitions, projects, along with governmental regulation were used, and a series of expert interviews were held.

**THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES OF RUSSIAN LAWS**

Restrictions on foreign funding for NGO activities are not only a Russian modus operandi. Analysis shows that such legislative barriers are more common in resource-based economies and their neighbouring countries including Canada, Israel, India, Kenya, and others. States with fragile democracies are also at risk, as the examples of Russia and other Eastern European countries have shown. In Russia, between the period of June 2013 and October 2016, 144 non-government organizations were added to the register of Foreign agents according to the “Law on Foreign Agents”, and in December 2018, 72 organizations more were added to the list. During that time, 44 organizations managed to remove themselves from the register by refusing foreign funding.

“There are three types of reactions in the NGO-sector in connection to the laws on foreign agents and undesirable organizations,” says Darya Miloslavskaya. “There are bold and even ‘reckless’ NGOs that still cooperate with foreign organizations in the broad sense of human right protection, however unsafe it sometimes may be. Some organizations search for neutral topics for cooperation like social issues, culture or education, and they try to maintain international relations in this field. Also, some have stopped cooperation with any foreign organizations and will cooperate only when they are granted ‘high permission’.

The status of an “NGO acting as a foreign agent” causes two essential problems. First, there is more administrative reporting, which requires significant additional expenses from the organization. However, according to the experts including Gleb Yarovoy, “a lot depends on the agreements with foreign partners. If the sponsors and partners understand that the organization needs extra resources to continue working when it has been labeled as a ‘foreign agent’, which includes extra audits and reporting, then basically it is not a great problem”. Thus, the status of a foreign agent as such increases the costs, but in some cases it is not necessarily an obstacle for the work and implementation of international projects. Other problems are issues related to reputation of the NGOs and finding partners. Although state authorities are not formally prohibited to work with “foreign agents”, in practice they stop any cooperation, as e.g., happened with the Sakharov Center, which lost its cooperation with state educational institutions and business companies. However, some organizations do manage to keep their partners and projects in
similar conditions (e.g., Migration XXI Century Social Project Support Foundation).

A forced step in response to the laws is the registration of private legal entities for projects that are basically non-commercial. According to Gleb Yarovoy, “One does not have to remain an NGO. Many register as a private company with the same name, and, using their connections and trust of the society, begin raising the same money on behalf of a commercial company. Philosophically, this is perceived in a different way, as commercial is one thing, and non-commercial is another thing. But, it cannot be helped; it is the government that creates such conditions.”

A special category from the point of view of Russian law is the category of ‘foreign foundations and international organizations’. The Law on Undesirable Organizations has led to a strong decrease and even termination of activities of leading international organizations and foundations. In total, 15 organizations were entered on the register21. Any activities of these organizations in the Russian Federation are virtually illegal. In addition, the Ministry of Justice upholds a register of foreign and international non-government organizations operating in the Russian Federation, with 116 organizations listed in January 2019 (their number and activities have decreased significantly during the past 5 years)22. These organizations may also be potentially labeled as undesirable. According to Darya Miloslavskaya, “the vagueness and ambiguous interpretation of legal provisions allows for a selective application of the existing rules, which describes the law enforcement practice as such”.

In 2018, two trends in lawmaking emerged that may lead to extra financial regulation with foreign partners. The first is related to the recommendations of an intergovernmental organization for the development of financial measures to combat money laundering (FATF) and an assessment from Rosfinmonitoring, in which special attention is paid to NGOs. In particular, FATF advises to develop regulations for checking (1) the source of funds that come to the NGO, and (2) the beneficiaries or counterparties with which the NGO interacts. Darya Miloslavskaya believes that the first requirement “is much more difficult, because it is almost impossible to track down where the donation came from (if the organization is a charity)”. At the same time, administrative measures against potential NGOs involved in terrorism funding vary from letters to audits,

18 Darya Miloslavskaya is the Chairman of the Board of the Lawyers for a Civil Society Association
19 According to the Lawyers for a Civil Society Association, in 2015, the expenses of organizations increased by 273 thousand rubles per year in average (https://www.asi.org.ru/article/2016/10/10/kak-zhivut-i-rabotayut-inostраннные-agentsy/)
20 Gleb Yarovoy is a researcher at the University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, Finland
temporary suspension of the NGO activities and cancellation of the NGO registration\textsuperscript{23}. Rosfinmonitoring has named three basic legal structures of NGOs, for which there is a risk of terrorism or extremism funding, namely, religious organizations, foundations, and public organizations. Darya Miloslavskaya considers it logical, as “these legal structures are more entitled to donations than anyone else, and it is quite difficult to track them down from the source point of view”. It will depend on further recommendations and acts of Rosfinmonitoring whether the control over compliance with these requirements will remain solely in the competency of supervisory authorities and banks, and how serious the burden of responsibility for the NGOs will be.

The second trend is the increasing transparency of cash flows on foreign accounts for the purposes of tax evasion control\textsuperscript{24}. Although such disclosure has not yet been used against non-government organizations or their staff or/and management, it is important to keep this innovation in mind and keep one’s tax payments in order.

**CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION OASES, DEPARTMENTAL COMPETITIONS DESERTS AND FOREIGN FUNDING PHANTOMS**

The interest of the third sector in cooperation with foreign partners under the pressure of these unfavorable laws is not declining, which is, in particular evident in the high numbers of applications from Russian NGOs to the Nordic Council of Ministers. The amount of applications for the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument’s grant competition is not decreasing either, although, according to Gleb Yarovoy, “organizations are taking precautions by applying with multiple projects or/and joining multiple applications”. In particular, in November 2018, Russia invested in the joint implementation of cross-border cooperation\textsuperscript{25} programs, and in December 2018, the Joint Monitoring Commission already supported 11 projects\textsuperscript{26}. Yelena Belokurova\textsuperscript{27} has explicitly stated that these joint investments of the EU and the Russian Federation are ‘immune’ to the earlier noted restrictions on foreign funding, as the grant funds “are not regarded as foreign funding according to the laws of the Russian Federation”\textsuperscript{28}. Gleb Yarovoy has pointed out the importance of the context for the implementation of these programs, namely, “the interest of regional and local authorities in getting these funds, which are quite significant for near-border regions”.

\textsuperscript{23} Recommendations for the NGO sector for combating the funding of terrorism (developed on the basis of the FATF standards and best practices). Rosfinmonitoring, 2018. Available on the official website of Rosfinmonitoring: http://www.fedsfm.ru/search?searchText=%D0%9D%D0%9A%D0%9E

\textsuperscript{24} Order of the Federal Tax Service of 30.05.2018 N MMV-7-17/359 “On approval of the list of foreign states (territories), with the competent authorities of which there is automatic exchange of country reports “, available online at http://www.consultant.ru/law/hotdocs/54119.html/

\textsuperscript{25} https://regnum.ru/news/2517958.html

\textsuperscript{26} https://www.sefrcbc.fi/ru/%D0%9F%D0%B0%D0%B4%D1%83%D0%BC%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%87% D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B5%D1%80-%D1%80%D1%83%D0%B6%D0% BC%D1%83%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%B9-%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%BC%D1%82%D1% 80%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B3%D0%BE%D1%80-%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0% BD%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BE%D1%80-%D0%BE%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%BB%D0% BC%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%80-%D0%BD%D0% B8%D0%BD%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%BD%D0%B5%D1%80-%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BE% D1%80-%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D0% B0

\textsuperscript{27} Yelena Belokurova is the Director of the German-Russian Exchange, Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, and Associate Professor at the St. Petersburg State University and the Northwest Institute of Management of the Russian Academy of National Economy and Public Administration.
The interest of the third sector in cooperation with foreign partners under the pressure of these unfavorable laws is not declining

Cross-border cooperation programs can be seen as a kind of an ‘oasis’ for funding, while a prevailing trend of the last decade has been the closing of major and long-standing financial programs for NGO cooperation e.g. by the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. A few years ago, the German Federal Foreign Office 29 started a new competition for joint projects of German NGOs with partners from Russia and other Eastern Partnership countries. Major pan-European contests that are available for Russian organizations include the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) 30 and the European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument Competitions (ENPI) 31. There are very narrow opportunities for small initiatives provided by European cultural centers (e.g., the Danish Cultural Institute and the Goethe Institute in St. Petersburg), consulates and embassies. Individual projects with the participation of Russian and Scandinavian non-government and educational partners are implemented, in particular, with the support of the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education. It is still possible to get grants from the relevant ministries in Finland, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. In general, the withdrawal of major foundations reduces the chances for implementation of major strategic projects, which contributes to a shift towards earning money for short-term funding.

Experts have mentioned repeatedly in interviews that there is little or no information in the public access on projects that are supported by foreign foundations. According to Darya Miloslavskaya, “in the past 5-10 years there has been a trend towards less publicity in regards to cooperation with foreign partners”, although previously it was not like this. Yelena Belokurova regards this as a transparency problem where “both the call itself and the decision making process are closed for the public”, “this is not told about and it becomes indecent to ask... and the reason is not necessarily competition but rather fear or security issues”.

NOT GRANTS ALONE: INFORMAL COOPERATION

In addition to formal cooperation, there is an intensification of non-organizational forms, individual cooperation, and involvement of civic activists via established professional contacts and social networks. Even when there are no joint projects, international relations...
stay and cooperation continues. One of the examples is a child protection group, which includes representatives from Finland and NGOs from St. Petersburg. Some initiatives are promoted by activists who no longer have an organization. Such organizations have often transformed into network structures or initiative groups. There are also new activities that have never been registered, such as the Open Space, Trava, or the feminist space Eve’s Ribs in St. Petersburg. “This emerging informal community is just starting to build its international relations” is how Yelena Belokurova assessed the dynamics. In her opinion, individual cooperation of people by their interests can become an interesting and further developing area of cooperation, be it educational trips (internships) or tourism (ecotourism) with immersion into everyday life through innovative platforms and technologies (a sort of Uber) as a part of the growing economy of direct exchange between individuals without intermediaries (shared economy). As it develops, this trend can lead to international cooperation between civil societies of individuals rather than organizations that unite them.

SITES TO NEGOTIATE AND DEFEND COMMON INTERESTS AND FIND PARTNERS

A special place is held by the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum as an association that unites approximately 160 European and Russian NGOs. Currently, its main goal is to maintain cooperation and solidarity of non-governmental organizations and to defend their interests. Any organization can become a Civil Society Forum member and choose the format of its participation, from an active and involved member to a recipient of information on joint actions and cooperation opportunities. In addition to a platform on the international level, new grassroots projects are developing to unite the efforts of NGOs, such as the Bridges resource platform for finding partners from Finland, Russia and Denmark. Similar goals are expressed by the European Dialogue expert group, which includes civil society activists and experts who “advocate for a quick termination of confrontation and a return to mutually beneficial cooperation based on the norms and principles of international law”.

The emergence of these new sites, and the development of established relations show that civil society organizations are continuing to look for new forms for cooperation, and are creating new opportunities for it ‘from below’ despite the trends of ‘from above’.

FINAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The described practices and trends of international cooperation of NGOs prove wrong the common stereotype that there is no progress in this area. Foreign partners can find new online platforms, informal projects and turn to experienced organizations with long-standing experience of international cooperation, even the current unfavorable conditions. Numerous examples show that the cooperation continues primarily due to the joint interest of both specific activists and organizations committed to the value of ‘a civil society without borders’.

Of course, mitigating potential risks requires assistance and advice from experienced lawyers and activists who know all the pitfalls in this area. In addition to the existing precautionary measures, it is important to take account of the new requirements of FATF and to inform one’s Russian partners about any funds from organizations that have
been declared undesirable in the Russian Federation. Even if they are not too fair, obeying these provisions of the Russian law makes it possible to reduce many costs and avoid extra questions from the inspection authorities.

Numerous examples show that the cooperation continues primarily due to the joint interest of both specific activists and organizations committed to the value of ‘a civil society without borders’.

In general, Western European countries and Russia have many common agendas and challenges, which may become a basis for international cooperation both on the level of the organizations and on the level of personal contacts and informal initiatives. Although the Russian laws on ‘foreign agents’ and ‘undesirable organizations’ have caused serious damage to the established cooperation networks of NGOs, after a number of battles to preserve the organizations and an improvement of the law enforcement practices, the civil society is clearly adapting and maintaining international cooperation or/and moving it to the area of individual contacts and informal initiatives.

ABOUT THE WRITER
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Building trust and mutual understanding – The Central Union of Child Welfare and Vozrozhdenie in collaboration to promote child welfare

The Central Union for Child Welfare (CUCW; Lastensuojelun Keskusliitto) is an organisation that works as an active and uniting platform on matters of child welfare in Finland. Its mission is to develop child welfare on different levels of the society and to promote cooperation between non-governmental organisations, municipalities and governmental authorities. The union was founded already in 1937 and since the very beginning, also international cooperation has been one of the main principles that guide its work. In order to promote the fulfillment of children’s interests and rights in society, CUCW has for example joined a number of international networks, such as the Nordic Congress on Child Welfare, a network of child welfare organizations within Nordic countries, and Eurochild, a European-wide network for organizations and individuals who promote child welfare. Neighbouring area cooperation with Russia began already during the late Soviet era in 1989 and by now has continued for 30 years, which makes CUCW one of the few organizations with such a long history of collaboration with Russian partners. The main targets of the Finnish-Russian cooperation have been and continue to be promoting children’s’ rights, enabling the exchange of information and experience among different actors working on child welfare, as well as developing the capacities of non-governmental initiatives further. According to CUCW’s experience, multi-stakeholder partnerships that involve NGOs and foundations as well as authorities and research institutes has proven to be an effective way of promoting children’s rights.

"The more people are involved in the process of planning how to increase the awareness and implementation of children’s rights and increase child and family welfare, the better.”

CUCW cooperates nowadays together with several local non-governmental organizations and foundations especially in North-West Russia, for example in Petrozavodsk and St.Petersburg. “In Karelia with have collaborated with an organization called Vozhrazhdenie already for the past 20 years. We have organized many projects together, both on a grassroots level as well as on a broader level”, as Julia Kuokkanen, who works as a senior adviser at the Central Union for Child Welfare and coordinator of the neighbouring area cooperation in Russia since 2015, tells, “In St.Petersburg and Moscow we have had collaboration especially with Kluch 35 and Timchenko 36 foundations as well as with officials and ministries for example in various seminars. In other words, we have

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35 The charitable foundation Kluch, based in St.Petersburg, was founded by Gennadi Timchenko and his company Surgutex in 2007 for supporting foster families of orphan children by providing assistance for families as well as facilitating trainings, enabling the exchange of experiences and good practices among professional social workers. More information: http://forkluch.ru/

36 Timchenko Foundation, based in Moscow and earlier called the Ladoga Foundation, was founded by Elena and Gennadi Timchenko in 2010 for supporting foster families, elderly people, sports and culture. More information: http://timchenkofoundation.org/en/
ongoing cooperation on very different levels.” Over time, the dynamics between Finnish and Russian partners have shifted from simplistic and in many ways problematic client-recipient relations to genuine collaboration. “Earlier the cross-border cooperation was perhaps more so that Finnish organizations went to Russia and tried to solve certain problems in their own ways,” Julia describes, “Now we are in a situation where the cooperation is based on a more equal partnership and we can all learn from one another. Through collaboration, also Finnish civil society actors can mirror their practices as well as learn and develop new ideas, related to child welfare issues relevant in Finland, too.” According to Julia, creating and maintaining cooperation with Russian partners is equally important as with all other international partners and neighbouring countries. “Many civil society organizations in Finland have ongoing cooperation with Nordic countries or other EU-countries, so why not with Russia, too?”, she asks, “The more people are involved in the process of planning how to increase the awareness and implementation of children’s rights and increase child and family welfare, the better.”

Creating and maintaining multi-stakeholder partnerships plays an especially important role also because of the numerous custody conflicts and media scandals between Finland and Russia in matters of child welfare during the past ten years. In 2009, media attention on both sides of the border was drawn to the abduction of a young child named Anton, whose Finnish father and Russian mother fought over their child’s custody. This and other cases that followed later led to widespread rumours that families with a Russian background would be discriminated by Finnish social workers. Although according to a report by the European Commission on the separation of children from their families there were no grounds for such claims, these scandals made clear how urgent the need for more open communication and closer cooperation between Finnish and Russian officials as well as civil society actors was. “When I was still studying social work, there were all these custody fights between Finland and Russia”, Julia recalls, “I started to think how these situations could be solved and I think that cooperation is definitely one of the key solutions. It is very important to correct all possible misunderstandings and only after that can we start to think collectively what child welfare actually means to us and what we ought to do to improve the wellbeing of children in both countries.” Understanding and respecting the policies and practices, which guide the work to promote children’s rights and child and family welfare in other countries, forms an important basis for a successful and sustainable cooperation. Building trust and mutual understanding requires regular exchange of information and a shared interest and commitment of staying in close communication. This is why Julia perceives that a close collaboration not only with other CSOs but also with decision-makers is crucial. She considers that one of the main achievements during the past few years is that CUCW has succeeded in creating new platforms for enhancing dialogue among different stakeholders. “It is important to have an ongoing discussion on what we can do to increase the well-being of children in particular regions. In collaboration with The Embassy of Finland in Moscow, Aleksanteri Institute and University of Helsinki we have organized seminars at the Embassy of Finland in Moscow since 2016, where we have invited
Kuokkanen perceives that although there are certain cultural differences, people in Finland and Russia generally share very similar values when it comes to child welfare. According to her, there is a common ambition to think and act to improve child and family welfare although means to an end may sometimes vary. As an important factor that helps facilitate cooperation among experts on the same basis, Kuokkanen mentions the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which in its 7th article acknowledges the rights of children with disabilities. “The fact that both Finland and Russia have ratified these conventions creates common frames for thinking what we could do together to promote child welfare,” she says, “It is then easier to agree on more concrete subgoals, when we first share these broader ideals.” The convention has been an important factor in normalizing and mainstreaming for example the deinstitutionalization reform, which refers to the principle that every child ought to have the right to a family. “In Russia, there used to be huge institutions for homeless children. Most of the parents of these children were alive, but there were no serious attempts to unite the parents with their children again”, Julia says, “Then the deinstitutionalization process in Russia began and the promotion of the idea that we need preventive work so that the children will not have to leave their families in the first place.

Julia sees that due to their existing work and expertise on issues related to child welfare, civil society organizations like CUCW and its Russian partners can make an important contribution in mainstreaming larger societal change and keeping the decision-makers accountable for committing to the shared goals. “It is really important to understand and bring the expertise of civil society organizations forth. For example in Finland, the societal change has often started from the third sector. Organizations have historically been active in pushing certain themes and projects forth, and slowly these reforms have become norms in the current system and policy-making.” Julia emphasizes that child welfare promotion cannot be isolated from other local and global developments. For example poverty and low level of education correlate with the increased need for child welfare services, which is why understanding the interconnectedness of social and economic problems is crucial. “Child welfare is also a complicated whole and it should not be considered as a separate part from the rest of the society”, Julia says, “If for example basic and preventive services work well, we will need less interventions and alternative care.” This is important so that information can be exchanged.

“The fact that both Finland and Russia have ratified the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child creates a common frame for thinking what we could do together to promote child welfare”
These kinds of big reforms have been realized since the early 2000's and nowadays more than 80% of the children, who can't stay with their biological parents for one or the other reason, nevertheless live in families.” Despite many similarities and shared goals, there are also certain differences between Finnish and Russian principles of child welfare work. According to Kuokkanen, the main difference is in the term “child protection” and how it is comprehended both legally and on the societal level. Throughout the history Finland has been emphasizing the importance of preventive service and rehabilitation and child protection is understood in a much broader context. It is implemented within the work of kindergartens, schools, maternity and health clinics and all the other child and family basic services. In Russia, child protection is understood as an intervention when child’s health and wellbeing is in danger.

When it comes to broader challenges of the sustainability of cross-border cooperation in child welfare matters, the key challenge according to Kuokkanen is ensuring the continuity and follow-up of projects. The circumstances for cross-border collaboration also for CUCW used to be better in the early 2000’s, when The Foreign Ministry of Finland still financially supported neighbouring area cooperation. Unlike many other CSOs who were forced to quit the cooperation altogether, CUCW has nevertheless continued their partnership projects with a small sum of money from their own annual budget. However, in a situation where most projects nowadays last for very short cycles and the prospects for further funding are always insecure, committing to long-term goals and guaranteeing sustainability is difficult. "If someone has already built the basis for cooperation, it feels so unnecessary to always reinvent the wheel. How can we ensure that this cooperation is sustainable and that we are actually going forward? In the future, the development should be much more sustainable, I think. What could be the platform, where those who are interested in cross-border cooperation could find information from? This is what I have been asking myself. If anyone needs contacts, you can always be in touch with us," Julia promises.

**INFO**

The Central Union for Child Welfare was founded in 1937. Nowadays it has altogether 95 member NGOs and 39 municipal members. The union’s operations are manifold: its experts for example exert influence on legislation by issuing opinions and statements, organize trainings for professionals, coordinate various programmes and projects, cooperate with member NGOs, stakeholders and media, and publish a monthly magazine called Lapsen Maailma (Child’s World). The CUCW is mostly financed by the profits from The Children’s Day Foundation.

Website: [https://www.lskl.fi/](https://www.lskl.fi/)
“Child welfare system in Finland”. Julia Kuokkanen in the middle. Photo by Elvira Galifurina.
Cross-border cooperation between the city of Petrozavodsk and Finnish specialists on child and family welfare work began in already 1989. Since the very beginning, the cooperation has been carried out together with multiple stakeholders such as social ministries, local governments, educational, health and social protection institutions, regional public organizations as well as active citizens aimed at supporting families and socially vulnerable children. The Karelian regional public organization Social Rehabilitation and Support Service Vozrozhdenie (“Revival”) was founded in 2003 to create a system of prevention of orphanhood, to promote the protection of children’s rights as well as to provide support for families, family life arrangement and upbringing of children who need the help of society and the state. “Our vision is a world, where each child can live in a safe and loving family and receive support for meeting their needs as well as developing their abilities and potential”, says Galina Grigorieva, the president of the organization. Since its very foundation, also Vozrozhdenie has closely collaborated many Finnish organizations, most notably the Central Union for Child Welfare, and taken part in multiple partnership projects. The organization also continues the successful cooperation between different NGOs as well as local authorities in Petrozavodsk and Karelia.

According to Galina Grigorieva, the goal of the international cooperation is to exchange experiences and good practices, which can contribute to developing together a system of services for families with children in difficult life situations. Multi-stakeholder partnerships have carried good results from early on and through cooperation on different levels, NGOs have been effective in mainstreaming their visions of the development of child and family welfare. “The work of Karelian specialists in the frame of the Finnish-Russian project on the protection of the rights of children in Europe and Russia deserves special attention, which was carried out in 2004-2007”, Galina Grigorieva tells. “The aim of the project was to develop the child protection in the Russian Federation and the Republic of Karelia. One of the outcomes of this project was a publication called “Protection of Children in Europe and Russia” (2008), where a comparative analysis of legislation, services, financing, training, along with a concept of the draft law on the protection of children of the subject of the Russian Federation was presented. “I believe that this project contributed to the fact that the European Social Charter was finally ratified by the Russian Federation in 2009”, says Grigorieva. The results of the work of this project were heard also at the Federation Council, which resulted in the recommendations on the topic of “Protection of the rights of children in Europe and Russia”, published in the Analytical newsletter of the Federation Council No. 30, 2008.

The city of Petrozavodsk and Vozrozhdenie have been especially active in transforming Petrozavodsk into a child-friendly city and a safe environment for families. In 2010, Petrozavodsk joined UNICEF’s “Child Friendly Cities”, which is a program designed to help cities become more child-friendly in all aspects related to management, infrastructure and services. By using the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child as a guide, the programme encourages cities to enhance the cooperation between political leaders, young people, social workers and community organisations to ensure that
children and young people can take part in decision-making processes that affect their interests. In implementing this goal, the international cooperation has been useful. In accordance with the agreement with the Joint commission on affairs of minors and defense of their rights and the Central Union of Child Welfare in Finland, Vozrozhdenie initiated a project called “Keys of success - supporting the development of preventive child protection in the Republic of Karelia in 2010-2012“ (Ключи успеха – поддержка развития профилактической защиты детей в Республике Карелия в 2010-2012 г.г.).

Within the framework of the project, a series of training to promote the work of the juvenile affairs commissions and the protection of their rights as coordinators of preventive work on the protection of children through professional development as experts was organized. The participants also made a study trip to Helsinki, where they visited the Helsinki city administration on a seminar on the preventive work on child protection at the municipal level as well as the Finnish Children’s Central Union, where a seminar-meeting on the preparation of a plan for the well-being of children and young people at the municipal level was held.

“Good and friendly relations between specialists give stability to cooperation.”

Challenges are inevitable, but cooperation is often the key for coping with them, too. “Unfriendly policies affect the decline in cooperation activities, but due to the long history of our cooperation at the level of public diplomacy and understanding of the importance of developing a system for protecting children on both sides of the borders, our cooperation continues”, Galina Grigorieva says, “Good and friendly relations between specialists give stability to cooperation. We consult with our partners on all the arising difficult issues and obstacles in the development of a child protection system and look for resources and solutions together.”

The main goal of the work of Vozrozhdenie and their cooperation with international partners continues to be deinstitutionalization so that all children can live in a family. “This is a difficult path and without the support of international experts it is difficult to achieve goals in the process of deinstitutionalization”, Grigorieva says, “Together with the social ministries we participate in the development of an Action Plan in the Republic of Karelia for the development of social protection of children in difficult life situations, based on a strategic analysis up to 2022-2030. The development of this plan requires joint discussion and consultation with international experts, which means cooperation will continue. There is a saying: ‘Миром Души – ворота открываются’.”
**INFO**

The Karelian regional public organization Social Rehabilitation and Support Service Vozrozhdenie (Карельская региональная общественная организация “Служба социальной реабилитации и поддержки “Возрождение”) works to promote child and family welfare and to support families in difficult life situations. The organization participates in the implementation of social state and municipal programmes and as well as partnership programmes aimed at promoting the process of reviving the family in the Republic of Karelia, as well as social support for various categories of the population.

Website: [http://kroo-vozrozhdenie.ru/](http://kroo-vozrozhdenie.ru/)

**GOOD PRACTICES:**

I  Multi-stakeholder partnerships between different actors, including CS actors, foundations, authorities and decision-makers, research institutes and universities who all work together in an integrated manner by pooling knowledge and expertise.

II NGOs role in mainstreaming topical issues and keeping governments accountable for committing to shared goals: over time reforms that have seemed radical or utopian at first, have become norms in the current system and policy-making.
KARELIAN REGIONAL PUBLIC ORGANIZATION SOCIAL REHABILITATION AND SUPPORT SERVICE “VOZROZHDENIE”: EACH CHILD DESERVES SAFETY AND LOVE
In 1992 a small group of parents of children with disabilities in St. Petersburg got together with the idea to help their children grow up and live the lives of ordinary children. Today, GAOORDI, the St. Petersburg Association of Public Associations of Parents of Children with Disabilities, comprises of 62 non-governmental organizations of parents of children with disabilities, as well as rare and genetic diseases. The association is working to enable these children to live independently in an open society, to study and work, make friends, be creative and just be happy.

GAOORDI would not exist without Margarita Urmancheyeva, who has led the Association from the very beginning. She is also a member of the St. Petersburg Civic Chamber and an Advisor to the Governor of St. Petersburg.

Connections with a sister organization in Finland played an important role in the establishment of GAOORDI. In 1992, Russia and Finland signed an Intergovernmental Agreement on Cross-Border Cooperation, and the development of the social sector was set as a priority. Soon GAOORDI became acquainted with a parental association, and later with an association of professionals working with children who have special needs. These organizations had been at the forefront of change and the development of assistance to people with disabilities in Finland. The decision to collaborate was made quickly, as they all shared the same respect for individuals with disabilities, and recognition of their right to a wholesome and happy life. They implemented many programs together back in the 90s and their connections never stopped.

“We got to know each other and started collaboration with GAOORDI through the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs in the mid-1990’s”, says Marjatta Tammisto, who was at the time the head of Inclusion Finland KVTL (Kehitysvammaisten Tukiliitto Ry). “We started systematic cooperation with GAOORDI in the early 2000’s, when we received funding for neighbouring area cooperation from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. Our mission was to improve the quality of life for children with disabilities from their early stages of life and to support their families in a way that the children could live at home instead of being sent to institutions. As a method for working towards this goal, we chose to focus on the education of families as well as social and health care professionals working with disabled children. The education was based on the United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child, and was carried out in interaction with the individuals and their families. Later the focus of the cooperation between GAOORDI and Inclusion Finland KVTL gradually shifted from early support during infancy and childhood to increasing the life quality of disabled young adults. From 2009 onwards, the main partner from the Finnish side was The Service Foundation for People with an Intellectual Disability (Kehitysvammaisten Palvelusäätiö). The goal back then was to support and develop disabled persons’ means for independent lives. The two partners continued using processual education as a method, but the education was more and more directed not only for social and health care professionals working with persons with disabilities, but for young adults with disabilities themselves. “The last title of our training module was called ‘Life in one’s own hands’”, Marjatta Tammisto recalls, “This name illustrated our mission well.”

Another important Finnish partner of GAOORDI was The Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
(FAIDD; Kehitysvammaliitto). Between 1997 and 2007, GAOORDI took part in six projects organized by FAIDD and supported by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. In 1996, FAIDD had organized the world conference of the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and invited representatives of GAOORDI to participate. Later they started a partnership project called "Podderzhka" (Support), where they developed support services, such as day rehabilitation groups for persons with disabilities. Afterwards, many day rehabilitation centers have been founded in several districts in St. Petersburg and they are still functioning. Jelena Vähäkuopus, a neuropsychologist and social policy expert, who then worked at FAIDD and designed joint projects with GAOORDI says, "Our main goal was to enable a good and worthy life for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Persons with disabilities and their family members were the central actors in this cooperation. We wanted to develop the cooperation between organizations working in this field and by doing so improve the situation of disabled persons both in Finland and in Russia. We also wanted to offer the family members of disabled persons the possibility to meet, share experiences, find friends, learn and find out more about life in both countries. We organized dozens of conferences, seminars for persons with disabilities and their family members, study trips. We also developed and published several handbooks and other publications".

The neighbors gave new ideas and models for working as well as moral support to GAOORDI. The best Finnish experience in helping people with disabilities was adopted well in the Russian context. In fact, there are many parents of children with disabilities and young people with disabilities at GAOORDI. Coping with their own problems at home, they are excellent experts who understand the practical needs of people with disabilities. This is why they immediately adopted the Finnish practice that one must involve people with disabilities in the activities and make plans and discuss problems with them. This is the way to find the right and sustainable solutions. Accommodation, employment, rehabilitation, recreation, and leisure are all issues that need to be addressed for the benefit, and with the involvement of the people in question themselves. The exact way to do this was learned from the Finnish colleagues, and now experts at GAOORDI share their experience with others generously.

"International cooperation is important so one does not “boil” in one’s own juice, understands what is happening in other countries, and thinks what can be improved at home.”
- Margarita Urmancheyeva

“We must cooperate with each other, because one should not “boil” in one’s own juice,” Margarita Urmancheyeva says. “Otherwise one loses one’s horizons and stops understanding how things are done in our neighbor countries that have gone a longer way in the social sector than Russia. And even if this way is successful, it still needs to be analyzed to see how it suits us and what can be applied in our circumstances and what cannot. International relations are very important for us, and we will not abandon them under any circumstances.”
Jelena Vähäkuopus emphasizes, “Our cooperation had a great impact on improving the situation of organizations working with persons with disabilities in St. Petersburg. I believe that the way we promoted equality of all human beings also contributed to larger societal stability. Our projects offered NGOs in St.Petersburg a lot of new knowledge, for example on how the NGOs can promote the rights of persons with disabilities. Our projects had a positive impact on the disabled persons’ possibilities of living an independent life and integrating into the society, by for example by finding work. Specifically, we also aimed at supporting disabled women and promoted their equal participation in the society. The first network, promoting the equal participation of disabled persons into the society, was founded. We also introduced plain language with which many people in St. Petersburg became familiar with.”

“Together we make our dreams come true,” says Margarita Urmancheyeva. She means one of the most important and biggest dreams – the implementation of a new system of accompanied accommodation for people with disabilities as an alternative to neuropsychiatric asylums. Russian visitors first saw a house of this kind in Finland many years ago. It was an excellent example of how independent living can be arranged for young adults with disabilities. They wanted to bring the same concept home immediately. However, it took two decades for GAOORDI to organize independent living for their children (who were adults by then) in addition to the temporary residence programs. And our Finnish friends helped again. They gave advice and moral support when we felt that the task was too overwhelming. GAOORDI managed to find a benefactor, LSR Group construction company. With its own funds and according to a special design, in the new Novaya Okhta neighborhood the company built a three-story house for 19 people aged 18 to 51 with intellectual disabilities including severe and multiple disabilities. GAOORDI organized the services; social workers, teachers, and a psychologist, who are in the house with the tenants 24/7. The tenants can master new skills and learn how to keep up good relations with their neighbors, how to cook, wash, and clean their homes. But there are no doctors or nurses in the house; medical services are provided under the mandatory insurance policy at the nearest medical institution.

In 2017, the house was donated free-of-charge for the use by GAOORDI for a period of 49 years with an option for extension. The association maintains the house with grants and its own funds; the tenants pay no rent, only the utility bills. When the project money runs out, the house will be funded from the budget of St. Petersburg in accordance with the Law on Social Services No. 442-FZ. “We Finnish partners are also very proud that in 2017, GAOORDI opened its first group home for disabled people and we believe that our cooperation that lasted for more than 10 years has played a big role in it”, says Marjatta Tammisto, “Our mission that disabled persons should have the right to live a good and personal life became reality once the house was opened.”

This house is a good and important example of how GAOORDI differs from many other organizations. Striving to change people’s lives for the better, the association seeks for systemic changes to take place in Russia. Every time they start a new project, they think how it could be implemented in the state system.
“This task is not easy, and sometimes it comes with blood, sweat and tears, because you know how difficult it is to change the system,” says Margarita Urmancheyeva. “To do this, one needs to establish a good dialogue and contacts with the authorities, know how to negotiate with everyone, state one’s opinion, and to argue for it. One must prepare joint decisions that would become the basis for government decisions.”

Over the 27 years of its work, GAOORDI implemented tremendously into the system of assistance to people with developmental disabilities. The example of Finnish colleagues helped them strive for sustainable change.

Some time ago, GAOORDI were the first in Russia to develop a system of healthcare recreation for special children, and now it already operates on its own as a state program. In the early 2000s, GAOORDI together with the Finnish parent association established a first aid system for families with newborn babies with developmental problems at St. Petersburg maternity hospitals. Another example is inclusive education; although there is constant improvements to be made, the things that have already been implemented and settled in the state system operate without their direct involvement.

It was the Finnish colleagues who once helped them see that they should transfer their services to the state system because this approach is efficient. GAOORDI has succeeded in that; together with the specialists of the Committee on Social Policy of St. Petersburg they draft regulatory documents to substantiate the need to finance new services from the budget. When last year the Minister of Labor and Social Security of the Russian Federation Maxim Topilin visited the house of accompanied accommodation, he said that this experience should be expanded all over Russia. In other words, the systemic change is not just in one city but in the whole country.

Together with Russian and Finnish experts GAOORDI prepared and published a tutorial guide titled “A Successful Start: How to Prepare a Person with Disabilities to Moving to the House of Accompanied Accommodation”37. Its objective is sharing knowledge with families and the staff of accompanied accommodation as a new form of living arrangements. The publication will help people with disabilities in many Russian regions start a new life safely and adapt to the new environment.

“What once began for a small group of people became a long chain of changes that led to an improvement of the lives of many other people. I think this is extremely important,” says Margarita Urmancheyeva. The main principle is that a “special” person is a person like everybody else, and instead of forcing our ideas of the right and wrong on them, we should

help them live their own lives with dignity, accompanying him on the road they choose.”

The experience of GAOORDI in the development of new forms of social support for people with developmental disabilities is known far beyond St. Petersburg. This is why among the partners of the GAOORDI there are federal sectoral Ministries, Committees of the St. Petersburg administration, universities and research institutes, NGOs and business companies.

“The main achievement of international cooperation is a humane attitude and a new view of the world”
- Margarita Urmancheyeva

But the main thing that Margarita Urmancheyeva mentions with regard to cooperation with the Finnish colleagues is a humane attitude. At the heart of any change there are people and their right attitude to the problem. One can write a manual or a good guideline without understanding how to communicate with special people, how to take account of their opinion, and how to build relationships with them. “Human relationships are at the heart of everything, and they are more important than any best practice. If there is no respect for the individual and human dignity, no joint project will be successful.”

The main achievement of international cooperation, according to Margarita Urmancheyeva, is what changes in one’s head. As a result of communication with colleagues from a different environment one sees new opportunities, looks at familiar things in a new way, and begins to work completely differently because one’s attitude to the problem and understanding change. As a result, the whole organization develops. Almost all GAOORDI employees have been trained by Finnish experts. This is why Margarita Urmancheyeva believes that “one of the best results of joint activities is that we began to see the world in a different way.”

“I think that one of the biggest achievements of our cooperation was that the number of children, who were sent to institutions, decreased remarkably”, says Marjatta Tammisto, “Another big achievement was how the disabled young adults’ self-confidence grew and the support they received from their parents increased a lot”. There was also one important internal result that Marjatta Tammisto mentions. "Cooperation with GAOORDI has carried good results and in that way, also enhanced the trust in our own expertise and the importance of our goal. GAOORDI has been a trustworthy, receptive and responsible partner, with whom the cooperation has been very fruitful and we have learned a lot”. In other words, the preconditions for a successful and mutually beneficial cooperation are trust and equal partnership. Good cooperation offers learning experiences, inspiration and possibilities for developing one’s work – as well as valuable friendships across all borders.
The house with accompanied accommodation

At the opening of the House on 8.6.2017, Marjatta Tammisto (right) next to Margarita Urmancheyeva and the St. Petersburg Governor Georgy Poltavchenko (right) and Andrey Molchanov (left).38

38 http://gaoordi.ru/dom-soprovozhdaemogo-prozhivanie-v-zhk-novaya-ohta-otkryt/
Boris Krivoshey, a human rights defender, a writer and one of the founders of GAOORDI together with his son Kirill.
FOR REFERENCE

GAOORDI, the St. Petersburg Association of Public Associations of Parents of Children with Disabilities is one of the first major parent organizations in St. Petersburg and Russia. Established in 1992 by a group of parents of children with disabilities, it nowadays comprises 62 non-government organizations of parents of children with disabilities as well as rare and genetic diseases. GAOORDI provides constant resource support for its members including expert, methodological, informational, legal, and advisory support and represents their interests with government authorities if required. The association shares its experience with other regions of Russia.

Kehitysvammaisten Tukiliitto, from 2009 on The Service Foundation for People with an Intellectual Disability (Kehitysvammaisten Palvelusäätiö), was founded by Inclusion Finland KVTL which is a non-governmental organisation aiming to promote equal opportunities in society for people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Foundation develops and produces services all over Finland. Their aim is to find individual solutions and to create high-quality services to support people with intellectual disabilities or special support needs and their families. Kehitysvammaisten Palvelusäätiö also works closely with other organizations within the EU and in Russia.

The Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (FAIDD: Kehitysvammaliitto) carries out research, offers training, engages in development, communicates, exercises influence and produces materials with the aim of bringing people with disabilities out of the margins so that they can fully participate in the functioning of society and their own communities. The goals of FAIDD’s work are: full citizenship for people with disabilities, a society where information and services are understandable as well as accessible and equal opportunities for lifelong learning.

Website: [https://www.kehitysvammaliitto.fi/](https://www.kehitysvammaliitto.fi/)

"WE STRIVE FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE": THE COOPERATION OF GAOORDI AND THE FINNISH ASSOCIATION OF PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS ON INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

The Finnish Association of Organizations for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities promotes equal opportunities in the society for people with developmental disabilities, helps their families, and trains professionals.

Website: [https://www.kvps.fi/](https://www.kvps.fi/)
The story of cooperation of the human rights organization Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg and the Peace Union of Finnish began in the early 1990s. The first meeting of the two organizations was an initiative of Boris Pustyntsev, a renowned Russian human rights activist who was then a co-Chairman of the St. Petersburg branch of the Memorial Society and (from 1992) the Chairman of the human rights organization Citizens’ Watch, which was established for control of the parliament and citizens over law enforcement bodies. The acquaintance emerged into fruitful communication and cooperation that has lasted for many years... The 1990s were a wonderful period for the development of such initiatives. There was an active exchange of information, and organizations, soul mates, activists, and ordinary citizens of various ages and occupations were discovering and getting to know each other, other countries, and a different life. There were exchange visits and information meetings in St. Petersburg and Helsinki.

During the long period of cooperation, especially in the time of the Chechen wars, help was needed many times for people whose rights Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg were defending. Our partners offered all of their resources in Finland for that purpose, and we will always be grateful for that. In addition to everything else, the goal of this mutually beneficial long-term cooperation was gaining and exchanging experience and building the trust that is needed so much in the new reality that appeared after the changes in the USSR and Russia. This is also very important in the modern Russian reality, which is already so different from the recent past, where trust and the ability to defend the rights of citizens with each other’s support in any situation are very relevant.

In 2008, after the legal reduction of the term of military and civil service (before that, the term of alternative civil service was more than three years), Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg began working with citizens who exercised their right to refuse military service because of their beliefs and the related right to alternative civil service (ACS). ACS resulted from a vast number of good intentions of many people to break the positions of war, violence, and problem solving by force and to strengthen the positions of those who act differently and to defend their right to their own opinion and the right of choice for those whose beliefs do not accept military service (be it military service in general, military service in a certain situation or military service for themselves). This was an important step towards peace.

In the past years, several educational projects have been implemented for spreading truthful information and working with negative public ideas about the alternative service institution. While working on the ACS subject (including direct appeals of citizens), the organization’s staff achieved a high level of the problem understanding and knowledge of laws and international standards. Such a level of competence is sufficient for independent legal assessment and preparation of analytical materials and recommendations. The Finnish experience of solving this problem turned out to be very important in the ACS issue. The development of international contacts provides for a significant increase of opportunities for activities and for gaining the required experience and knowledge. In particular, it was the contact with the Peace Union of Finland in one of the projects that enabled
the organization's staff to learn the Finnish experience of alternative service organization in detail and to see with their own eyes how pacifism can be used for the society's benefit.

The unique approach to the exercise of the rights to ACS in Finland, which is very different from the customary Russian practice, has made the activists rethink their own ideas and motivated them to study how civil service is organized in other countries. In 2018, having examined the state of the problem in a number of countries, the organization initiated and launched a resource entitled *Alternative Service without Borders*[^41]. In the recent years, most of the initiatives between Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg and the Finnish Union of Peace related to the development of the non-military service institution. The cooperation included, e.g., the implementation of a joint Russian-Finnish summer camp for objectors[^42]. Some ideas (such as the preparation of a collection of the objectors’ life stories) have not been implemented yet but will undoubtedly be implemented as soon as an opportunity arises.

The strategy of cooperation, which is building bridges of trust from person to person and from heart to heart, has proven to be right over the years and still helps establish the necessary contacts in Finland, since it is a convincing argument and a trustworthy and understandable recommendation in beginning any contact. For the Finnish party, the same important and tested argument for any business, negotiations or undertaking in Russia is the involvement of Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg. In other words, the reliable partnership of the two organizations has created a sort of reference points or benchmarks for civic activity on both sides of the border. This is something we are especially proud of.

“We all understand that only when human rights and freedoms are guaranteed all over the world and by all states, only then will the world and the individual live in harmony with each other.”

We all understand that only when human rights and freedoms are guaranteed all over the world and by all states, only then will the world and the individual live in harmony with each other. Universal respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms is what we demand and should demand from the government every day. If we turn to the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document that appeared after a global catastrophe, our states signed it in consideration that neglect and contempt of human rights had led to barbaric acts that

[^39]: International Memorial is an umbrella organization for one of Russia’s oldest and most established human rights movements, founded officially in 1989.

[^40]: Grazhdanskiy kontrol (“Citizens’ Watch”) is a Russian human-rights organization that was founded in 1992.

[^41]: [www.alternativeservice.info](http://www.alternativeservice.info)

[^42]: For more information on Baltic Glory, see page
outraged the conscience of mankind, and that the development of a world where people will have freedom of speech and belief and be free from fear and poverty was declared the highest aspiration of the people. At present, the situation in the world is very unstable and changing constantly, and the accents are somewhat shifted, but the value of understanding each other, new realities, and strategies for solving old and new problems by representatives of different countries is still important, especially if one considers that preserving the world peace, a problem common at both sides of the border, has stood out rapidly.

It seems that the wounds of World War II have only just healed, though not everywhere and not in every respect. And once again, the world is watching with dismay how certain attitudes, ambitions or bad intentions of politicians, religious fundamentalists, leaders of certain states, irresponsible military leaders or adventurers who want and know how to fight keep pushing the world to a new total conflict that can put an end to human history and its achievements, given the nature of modern weapons. Like magic skin, the modern world is shrinking rapidly because of the never-ending conflicts, injustice, unfriendliness, lack of solidarity and mutual understanding, and the growing cult of force. Peace is a fragile substance, and the cost of its strength is human lives.

Many years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the people have started to forget the most important meaning of human rights, which is preserving the fragile peace and preventing violence and bloodshed. Our objective these days is stopping any neglect and contempt of human rights anywhere on earth, as human rights know no borders. This principle is especially important now, and it is important not to stop talking to each other but to look for constructive solutions, to promote the development of friendly relations between nations, and to find new mechanisms for the preservation and development of peace.

The format of cooperation is primarily informational. Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg receives Finnish groups willingly and tells them about their work, the situation in the country, and problems and ways to solve them. The Finnish party receives activists from St. Petersburg. The parties participate in joint or subject conferences that are interesting for every party. Personal contacts are growing as well. The partnership with the Finnish Union of Peace opens other doors in Helsinki as needed for the organization’s activities and increases the number of our friends and associates.
INFO

Soldiers’ Mothers of St. Petersburg is an organization that was established in 1991 by enthusiasts who realized at that historical moment that the problems of the army and conscripts and defending the rights of future, current, and former military men are extremely relevant and need attention and assistance from the society. Since its establishment, the organization has defined its objective as protecting the legal rights of citizens conscripted for military service as well as military men and their families. The organization provides free legal and other social assistance and support and monitors violations of individuals’ rights and legal interests based on their complaints, which is followed by preparation of analytical materials and their delivery to competent government authorities and international human rights institutions. The organization's work is based on the principles of the rule of law, protection of human rights and freedoms, and the values of non-violence, responsibility and integrity, and development of the civil society. “When we were just starting our work,” the organization’s leader Ella Polyakova once said in an interview, “we thought we would last for two or three years. We would explain everything to people, teach them, they would understand everything and begin to do things right, and everything would be fine. And, holding our hands, a strong open civil society, we would move confidently to new achievements. And an organization like ours would no longer be needed. However, years have passed, but the problems are still there, and people keep coming to us for help and advice... And the organization, just as before, is very much needed!”

Website: https://soldiersmothers.ru/

In the picture: Co-workers of Soldiers’ Mothers St. Petersburg
The Finnish Peace Union (*Rauhanliitto*) is an umbrella organization for sixteen Finnish associations working for peace. Our work focuses on the promotion of disarmament and peaceful politics. These priorities are also visible in our international cooperation, because inasmuch as peace work covers the promotion of nonviolence generally, it is thematically intertwined with international politics and questions of national identity, too. Peace work thus by its very nature extends across all borders. At the core of our understanding of what "safety" means is human security, instead of national security that is always based on militarism.

"Peace work is thus by its very nature international and it reaches across borders."

We have wanted to support independent and free civil movements in Russia and to find ways of collaborating with our Russian colleagues, whenever our own scarce resources have enabled it. By keeping in touch with independent groups, specifically with Soldiers' Mothers but also other conscientious objector activists as well as human rights organization Memorial, we have aimed to raise awareness of the work of these Russian peace activists in Finland. We have also invited Soldiers' Mothers' representatives to Finland several times. Especially during the Chechynan wars[^43] peace groups were publicly the most visible war resisters in Russia. At that time also the need for collaboration was particularly urgent and the exchange of information was one of the main methods that we used. Peace groups from Finland for example organized trips to Russia for Finnish activists, decision-makers and journalists. The idea was to offer them a more multilayered image of the politics and civil society in Russia and to offer different perspectives on topic issues within Russia. Peace activists from Russia have also been invited to Finland to take part in international meetings by civil society actors. When in 2015, the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) turned 40, the Peace Union of Finland invited Russian civil society actors to Finland to speak about the OSCE-related human rights work in Russia. We have also encouraged the exchange of information and experiences by translating some of our materials into Russian. Peace Union has for example published and translated a book about Finnish civil society organizations as well as an information leaflet about Åland, a demilitarized and autonomous zone by the Baltic Sea, in Russian.

The cooperation with CS actors in our neighbouring country has often been challenging due to practical bureaucratic reasons as well as due to the lack of a common language. Authorities have also attempted to limit the work and collaboration of peace activists in Russia by reinforcing new legislation and other measures that has made the work of civil society actors more difficult. In Europe, too, the atmosphere has become more tense after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Also the public discussion about cyber influencing and possible external attempts to interfere with public debate or even democratic elections has in Finland increased the general suspicion and distrust to all information concerning cross-border collaboration and Russian civil society actors. This makes not only maintaining good diplomatic relations, but also creating "people to people"-cooperation more difficult.

However, we can find new areas of possible
further cooperation. The Peace Union runs a **Peace School** (*Rauhankoulu*) for pupils in schools all over Finland and the Soldiers Mothers’ run a **Human Rights School** (*Shkola prav cheloveka*) in St Petersburg. It might be beneficial for both organisations to plan some form of cooperation between these activities. Secondly, the conscientious objectors in both countries need to deepen their cooperation and mutual understanding. This process is already underway. Thirdly, the Peace Union wants to continue supporting Soldiers Mothers’ participation in European and global peace cooperation. We perceive that organisations like **The International Peace Bureau** and **The Asia-Europe People’s Forum** are good platforms to develop the relations between Russian and global peace movements.

Isolation of the active Russian grassroots and civil society activism from other European activities and international partnerships should not be in anyone’s interests. In a globalized world the big challenges that the humanity faces are common. This is one reason why the Peace Union of Finland has actively sought ways of supporting the possibilities of Russian CS actors in participating international collaboration, such as the Asia-Europe Peoples Forum’s activities and close communication in general. The Peace Union of Finland has also joined the **EU-Russia Civil Society Forum** network in order to promote this cooperation and networking of citizens across borders.

**INFO**

The present Peace Union, official called the **Peace Union of Finland – Association for the League of Nations**, was founded in 1920. However, the union had a predecessor in Finland already from 1907 to 1913, which makes it the oldest peace organization and also one of the oldest NGOs in Finland. Since the very beginning, Peace Union has been part of an international peace movement, for example by becoming a member of the International Peace Bureau. In its first agendas, the Peace Union placed emphasis on themes such as support of international law, non-violent conflict-solving, disarmament and peace education. These continue to be the main priorities today. The Peace Union of Finland resides at the **Peace Station** (*Rauhanasema*) in Helsinki, which is a lively center for peace activism and advocacy.

Website: [https://rauhanliitto.fi/](https://rauhanliitto.fi/)

43 The first Chechynan war was fought in 1994-1996 and the second in 1999-2009.
“There are no ‘our children’ and ‘their children’” - The Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association and Malenkaya Mama working for the best of families

The Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association (Helsingin Ensikoti Ry) is a Finnish non-governmental organization that provides child welfare services for families who are in need of extensive support in parenthood and managing everyday life with babies or small children. Already since the late 1990’s the association has collaborated closely with an organization called Malenkaya Mama (“Little Mother”), which is a city-funded mother and child home in St. Petersburg. Throughout more than two decades of ongoing dialogue and collaboration, the two organizations have been able to develop their customer work together and to learn from one another. A shared mission to work for the best of families both in Finland and Russia motivates in trying to continue cooperation also in the face of economic challenges and rapidly changing operating environments.

Kirsi-Maria Manninen, or Kikka as she is better known among her colleagues, has worked as the executive director in the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association for 18 years by now. When she became the director, she was at first surprised to find about the ongoing cooperation, which the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association had had with Russian colleagues already for a few years by then. “I was a little surprised to find out that a locally operating organization like the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association had had with Russian colleagues already for a few years by then. “I was a little surprised to find out that a locally operating organization like the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association had had international cooperation,” Kikka admits, “I somehow thought that creating and maintaining international relations would had been the responsibility of the federal organization (the Federation of Mother and Child Homes and Shelters), because most of our customers, after all, then came and still come from Helsinki or Uusimaa region.”

“What this cooperation has really been about is mutual evaluation of our work and developing it further together.”

However, as the new executive director got better acquainted with their Russian partner, she understood the value of the cooperation. “I realized that this cooperation is something worth using resources for”, Kikka describes, “What impressed me the most was that when our partners at Malenkaya Mama adopted certain elements from our methods, they soon developed them better suitable for their own operating environment. That is, the pace of development was really fast. Since then we have had very few illusions that we here in Helsinki would have some ‘grand expertise’ that we could just export abroad like that. What this cooperation has really been about is mutual evaluation of our work and developing it further together.” Although Malenkaya Mama is not a non-governmental organization but a city-funded service provider, Kikka says that the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association and Malenkaya Mama nevertheless shared the same target audience and thus benefitted from their cooperation. “We struggled then and we continue to struggle with similar challenges although our operating environments are in many ways different and have also changed over time.”

Practically, the cooperation between the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association and Malenkaya Mama took place in the form of regular meetings, study visits, workshops and seminars both in Helsinki and in St. Petersburg. The basis for sustainable collaboration were the personal connections that were created during several years of working together. “We
always aimed at having some of the same people in these meetings and other activities so that it would create certain continuity. However, we also offered new colleagues, who were interested in this, the possibility to participate." Having a core group of people, who took part in each meeting and study visit enabled a process of learning through building knowledge on already existing practices. Equally important, however, was to remain open for new participants as otherwise the responsibility of the continuation would rest too much on few people.

According to Kikka, one of the main benefits of the ongoing dialogue between the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association and Malenkaya Mama is that it has helped all participants to understand and evaluate better the methodological approaches that they apply in their customer work. “Our Russian colleagues had a much stronger emphasis on a socio-pedagogical approach, which was something completely new to us. Malenkaya Mama for example organized all kinds of child care and cooking courses. We felt like ‘a-ha!’ this is how you can also strengthen the capacities of young families,” Kikka explains and reminisces the early stages of the cooperation, “We had a much more therapeutic approach, which takes trauma as the starting point and then we think from there how we could create safe circumstances for the adults to grow as parents.” Neither approach is better than the other as such, but by sharing experiences and borrowing elements from one another, Kikka says that both parties could constantly develop their own work further and apply new strategies to their customer work. Also the challenges that certain methods would cause, were strikingly similar both in Helsinki and in St.Petersburg and sharing these experiences turned out to be productive as well. “In some discussion we found out that the social workers at Malenkaya Mama had adopted the counselor-model, where each customer is being assigned a personal counselor who is in main charge of that family”, Kikka says, “On the one hand this system works very well, but on the other it also creates certain conflicts, because often there will be disagreements between the personal counselor and the rest of the working group. I recall that when our workers in Helsinki heard about these conflicts that had also emerged in St.Petersburg, everyone started laughing out loud. So similar challenges we faced!” In the end, sharing and discussing this and similar challenges openly helped in making the work of Malenkaya Mama and the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association even more effective. “We all gained from observing and analyzing our work from many different perspectives and having this ongoing constructive dialogue with our partners”, Kikka says. Moreover, the cooperation also strengthened the relations between employees within their own organization and supported their critical and reflective approach to their own work.

According to Kikka, the role of the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs (Sosiaali- ja terveysjärjestöjen Venäjä-verkosto) in facilitating and enhancing the cooperation was irreplaceable for a small organization like the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association, which had joined the network already in 1996. “I don’t think we would had otherwise ever had the possibility to initiate this kind of cooperation”, Kikka says. During its years of existence, the network assisted with all practical details, which were necessary for
successful cooperation, such as arranging the visas, travel tickets and translation. In this way, the network’s member organizations could focus on using their capacity on the substance: creating, developing and maintaining partnerships as well as new projects. “We had the role of an innovator, where we could just focus on developing the cooperation and initiating projects freely”, Kikka says, “But we would have never had the practical means and resources to realize these ideas without the help that the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs provided.”

Once the Russia-network stopped functioning in full capacity in 2007 and later also the funding for neighbouring area cooperation by the Foreign Ministry of Finland ceased to exist, the cooperation between the Helsinki Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association and Malenkaya Mama has grown less regular and organized. “We were so committed to the idea that this cooperation will last and continue that it was a great shock to me,” Kikka recalls, “We had began to have this idea that there are no ‘our children’ and ‘their children’, but that they all were ‘ours’ in common. Knowing that both in Finland and in Russia we all worked for the best of families with babies or small children meant so much to us.” Although official cooperation and external funding for joint projects no longer exist, the Helsinki Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association and Malenkaya Mama have done their best to stay in contact with one another in the hope that there would once again be some other platform or structure that could enable closer cooperation and joint projects. “Sometimes we have applied for minor grants or received little money from the association’s own budget, so that we have been able to pay tickets to St.Petersburg and back to have meetings with Malenkaya Mama”, Kikka says. She made her last visit to St.Petersburg and local colleagues there in autumn 2018.

Despite the scarce material resources, Kikka, her team and Russian colleagues are not short on new ideas for future collaboration. “One of the themes we really could think and develop together is how to involve customers more in our cooperation,” Kikka says, “We have for example had the idea that since here in Helsinki we every now and then have customers with a Russian background, we could develop our work together with them by creating connections via Skype with colleagues from Malenkaya Mama. We could all discuss together what are the important factors in empowering families, both in the Russian as well as Finnish contexts.” Moreover, the broader challenges that NGOs and municipal organizations, working within child welfare, nowadays face are very similar and exchanging these experiences as well as tactics could be useful for all parties. “One of the themes that again unite Finnish and Russian civil society organizations is the challenge of being able to plan our activities strategically and long-sightedly, when the operating environment changes so rapidly”, Kikka says, “This is once again another theme, where we could learn from one another.”

“Cross-border cooperation benefits everyone, even if we would never set a foot to the other side of the border.”

Kikka perceives that the cross-border cooperation benefits not only civil society organizations involved in it, but the whole of society. “I recall when Ari Saarto from the
A-Clinic Foundation (A-klinikasäätiö), who was involved in the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs, used to say that when we talk about ‘neighbouring area’, it is already here. This means that there are many people with Russian origins already living in Finland, and they are part of our social security system, either within the public sector and/or within the third sector”, Kikka says, “So even if we would stay just within the borders of Finland, we will need understanding of and cultural insight into these so-called ‘neighbouring areas’. That is, cross-border cooperation benefits everyone, even if someone would never set a foot to the other side of the border. I am convinced that there is a seed of truth in this claim.”

INFO
The Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association (Helsingin Ensikoti Ry) was founded in 1936. During its early decades, the target group were single women with small babies, who back then did not possess the economic and social security, which marriage usually provided for women. Over time and following larger societal changes of gender roles, the target group has expanded to cover also fathers as well as couples, who for various reasons need extensive support in taking care of their children. Nowadays the association provides both institutional (residential) and non-institutional (open care) child welfare services. There are altogether seven different units in Helsinki and Espoo: two residential family units, two Mother and Child Homes for substance abusing pregnant women and families with infants, two open care units for substance abusing families and one open care unit for families with mental health problems and/or crises. Mother or both parents of the child usually come to residential units 2-4 weeks before the expected birth or soon after the birth. The Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association works in close cooperation with the municipal social workers. In 2018, the association’s units received customers from over 30 different municipalities from all over Finland.

Website: https://www.helsinginensikoti.fi/
Silk painting.
Photo by the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association.

Representatives of Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association and Malenkaya Mama practising baby massage.
Photo by the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association.
M. Grechishkina, Director of the Crisis Help Center for Women, a St. Petersburg state budgetary institution:

“Our contact with the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association (Helsingin Ensikoti Ry) began in 1998 soon after the establishment of Malenkaya Mama shelter in the course of a Finnish-Russian project titled “NGOs for Better Social Welfare and Health” (1996-1999). At the time, professionals in St. Petersburg were learning about the work of Finnish non-governmental organizations. In 2001, Malenkaya Mama and the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association started their own project providing services of long-term social and psychological support for underage pregnant women and adolescent mothers. The project was funded by a grant from the Nordic Council of Ministers. Afterwards from 2002, the cooperation continued in the areas of education and exchange of professionals in the field, with funding from the cross-border cooperation support program of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. The project’s objective was to develop a model of outpatient care for underage pregnant women and mothers including former clients of Malenkaya Mama.

In 2002-2004, meetings were meetings arranged with our Finnish colleagues twice a year. This included one training seminar for professionals in St. Petersburg and one internship in Finland. In 2002, the project was joined by child welfare officials from six St. Petersburg municipalities, specialists from two adolescents’ clinics and one women’s clinic and the Yuventa center of teenagers’ reproductive health; social workers, psychologists, and counselors from four social rehabilitation centers, two vocational schools, and the Center for Orphanages Graduates; employees of four social support NGOs and representatives of two universities who trained social work professionals (the St. Petersburg State University and the Institute of Practical Psychology). The training seminars in 2003 made the network bigger and stronger. Sociologists who researched problems of young pregnant women were also interested in the project.

It must be noted that the experts of the NGO Network of Finland and Russia provided information for the project and its advisory services for working groups in Finland and St. Petersburg and generally supported the project.

The results of the joint project of the Helsinki Mother and Child Home Association and the Malenkaya Mama shelter were the following; A St. Petersburg-wide expert system of exchange between St. Petersburg and Finnish experts in the welfare of underage pregnant girls and adolescent mothers with babies in difficult life situations was implemented, and the competence of professionals who helped young mothers with children increased. At Malenkaya Mama, there were daily joint meetings of the staff (counselor, psychologist, medical staff, social worker) and clients where they discussed their day, informed about current events, assigned house duties, and participated in individual and common activities; custody officials were invited to consultations for a joint solution of problems of the future life of young mothers and their children; there were liaisons with government and non-government organizations; for four years, there was a summer wellness campaign for mothers and children in a suburban area.
Of course, some of the work experience of the Mother and Child Home Association could not be applied by Malenkaya Mama due to the different cultural traditions, social systems, and mentalities. The project made it possible to establish a system for helping this category of citizens and offered opportunities for liaising with various organizations. The 60-year experience of the Finnish colleagues in helping women with children helped the professionals of Malenkaya Mama develop their own methods for working with underage mothers. The changes in the country and society demand a continuous improvement of the system for assisting people in need, and the Finnish experience can be helpful in this respect.

**INFO**

*Malenkaya Mama* (Little Mother), is the social rehabilitation department of the Crisis Help Center for Women, a St. Petersburg state budgetary institution, providing inpatient services to underage pregnant women and adolescent mothers with children in difficult life situations. The main objectives of the department are supporting the biological family, preventing “secondary” orphanage, and developing maternal affection as well as protecting the life and well-being of mothers and their children, providing vocational guidance, and assistance with employment.

**GOOD PRACTICES:**

I It is important to have same people regularly participating in meetings, seminars and study trips, because lasting personal connections are crucial in ensuring the sustainability of the cooperation. However, also involving new employees, interested in participating, is important so that the future of the cooperation can be ensured even if individual employees may change over years.

II Genuine partnership based on equality requires willingness to reflect critically one’s own work as well. Cooperation is about mutual evaluation of the work and developing it further together.

III Multi-stakeholder partnerships between NGOs and municipal organizations can be an effective way of pooling knowledge and expertise.
“THERE ARE NO ‘OUR CHILDREN’ AND ‘THEIR CHILDREN’” - THE HELSINKI MOTHER AND CHILD HOME ASSOCIATION AND MALENKAYA MAMA WORKING FOR THE BEST OF FAMILIES
"NGOs and Fatherhood": Strengthening the Capacity of NGOs Working with Fathers and Families in Different Life Situations was an international partnership project between Finnish, Swedish, Latvian and Russian NGOs that took place in 2016-2017 and was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The aim of the project was to strengthen the capacity of NGOs working with fathers and families in different life situations. The project was initiated by the Finland-Russia Society (Suomi-Venäjä Seura), and a St.Petersburg-based organization, Radomira. Other main partners included the Family Federation of Finland (Väestöliitto), Miessakit Association and a Swedish NGO Men for Gender Equality (Män För Jämställdhet). In total six other Russian NGOs from North-West Russia as well as a Latvian partner organization were also involved in the project. The focus on men and the largely absent role of fathers in family life enabled supporting men’s active participation in child care as well as tackling the diversity of sensitive gender-related topics such as domestic violence, substance abuse and divorce. One of the main achievements of the ambitious and extensive project was the creation of new partnerships and a North-West Russian network of organizations working with fatherhood issues.

“Our previous director had a lot of contacts with family centers because he had been working in several partnership projects with Russian NGOs in his previous workplace”, as Päivi Kärnä, the director of Finland-Russia Society’s Southern Finnish district, tells, “We had also already in the early 2000’s facilitated projects related to issues of gender equality, one of which had been funded by the Finnish Foreign Ministry, another by the Nordic Council of Ministers. These were some of the reasons why we became interested in thinking if we could perhaps initiate a new project, related to these themes.” As the Finland-Russia Society started negotiations with potential partners, including Radomira, together they decided to adopt a family-centered approach for tackling questions of gender equality. “Supporting the participation of men in family life was a widely accepted and understandable goal, but nonetheless a rather novel approach”, Kärnä says. The donors also seemed to think this way - at first, the project received funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers for one year, after which it received a grant for the second year as well.

Eventually, the stated goals of the project were to strengthen the capacity and expertise of NGOs working with fathers, to develop methods for working with men suitable for the Russian context as well as to create a regional network of NGOs working with fathers. As a concrete method available for NGOs to support men’s participation in family life, the project introduced so-called “fathers’ groups”, which Men for Gender Equality had long-standing experience of facilitating. These were groups usually organized within a family center and other type of NGO, where fathers could meet, talk and share experiences with one other and under the guidance of a professional trainer. “The aim of fathers’ groups is to offer peer support for fathers in similar life situations”, Kärnä illuminates, “For each meeting there is a certain theme or perspective to fatherhood that can be discussed.” The aim of the project was to establish fathers’ groups among the Russian partnering NGOs. Men for Gender Equality had already previously been involved in a project where fathers’ groups were arranged for fathers-to-be and “new” fathers with a child just born in the family, but this project targeted fathers in all periods of the
life cycle. During the two years of running the project, in total eight seminars were arranged as well as workshops and master classes in St. Petersburg, Cherepovets and Helsinki.

According to Kärnä, the Finland-Russia Society was mostly responsible for facilitating the cooperation and creating connections, whereas the partnering expert organizations were in charge of producing the substance. Being experts on issues concerning family welfare and a father-sensitive approach, the Family Federation of Finland and Miessakit Association from Finland were running the trainings whereas the Swedish partner Men for Gender Equality contributed by offering consultation and introducing the fathers’ groups. From the Russian partnering NGOs, especially Novyi Vzglyad (“New Look”) from Arkhangelsk and Sinyaya Ptitsa (“Blue Bird”) from Cherepovets took an active role in organizing seminars and trainings.

According to Kärnä, the project was successful especially in facilitating genuine collaboration and the exchange of experiences among the partnering organizations. Particularly for smaller and previously mostly locally or nationally operating organizations, like almost all of the Russian NGOs and the Miessakit Association, the partnership project enabled creating contacts and opening horizons for future collaboration. Kärnä sees the role of the Finland-Russia Society valuable in enabling this kind of interaction and networking - as an old and well-established organization with relatively large networks they can facilitate cooperation between civil society actors that otherwise would probably lack the means for finding one another. From what Kärnä has heard, Miessakit and Latvian organization have made attempts to continue cooperation with their Russian partners, which is a sign that the network has continued its life even after the end of the project. One of the aims of the project was also to some extent support and create multi-stakeholder partnerships by collaborating with local authorities, who were actively invited and represented in the seminars. This contributed not only to maintaining good relations with officials but also possibly to mainstreaming a father-sensitive approach at large.

Challenges for a successful cooperation were the financial difficulties of the Russian coordinating organization and that the coordinator at the Finland-Russia Society changed two times during the two years. “The fact that our project coordinator changed twice caused breaks in continuity. Since we were the main coordinator, ensuring sustainability would have been very important in order to keep things together”, Kärnä analyzes now in retrospect, “Continuity is of course important in any cooperation - it is through people and individuals that knowledge and experiences are being transmitted. It is necessary for being able to stay updated on what is going on, what to expect, whom to contact in case we have an idea and so on.” One further challenge was the big differences in expert fees between the partnering organizations. The Swedish cost standards, such as compensations for trainings, were radically higher than for the Finnish experts, which led to a situation where the Swedish partners couldn’t be invited to all events. As an efficient way of preparing to possible unexpected changes Kärnä emphasizes the importance of dividing labor clearly already in the early stages of the project. For example writing the responsibilities down
in an agreement approved by all partners so that all participants could anytime easily return to check them could be a way ensuring continuity and building trust. As an accidentally developed good practice, Kärnä also mentions an evaluation by an external expert, which the Finland-Russia Society commissioned after the first year. Although it turned out that this was not a formal requirement by the Nordic Council of Ministers’ partnership programme, the assessment that was conducted by an expert on family welfare issues and Russian civil society turned out to be valuable in planning of the second and last year of the project. “It was a very useful tool for us that helped us reflect our own work”, Kärnä says, “In the future, especially if we will have long-term projects I definitely hope we can continue using this good practice.”

“I definitely think there is a need for cooperation and that it is very important. However, I have also been asking myself what is the value of connecting people and NGOs if their prospects for finding future funding are almost nonexistent?”

Kärnä personally is interested in continuing developing new ideas for possible future collaboration, but she is also concerned about the preconditions and rapidly changing operating environments for successful partnerships. “I definitely think there is a need for cooperation and it is very important. However, I have also been asking myself what is the value of connecting people and NGOs if their prospects for finding future funding are almost nonexistent?”, she asks, referring to the scarce sources of funding available for NGO cooperation with Russian partners, “Personally I have started to think how it could be possible to collaborate without or with very little money. I have not come far in my thinking yet, but I would definitely like to brainstorm this together with Russian partners. This is what I currently find an interesting question, in terms of sustainable cooperation.” However, it is evident that for any larger scale development projects, adequate material resources continue to be needed and even for small scale exchange of experience, cooperation without funding is often tricky. “The lack of a common language makes spontaneous communication very difficult”, Kärnä continues, “We could do so much together across the border, because there are many topics and themes that we share. But because we often don’t have a common language, we always need a project funding that enables arranging seminars and professional translation.” Like the NGOs and Fatherhood- project shows, connecting people and NGOs with no previous background specifically working with Russian or Finnish partners sometimes carries good results. However, now after one project is over, financing is again a challenge for the continuation of the cooperation.

Before hacking this dilemma, the Finland-Russia Society continues doing their best to promote cooperation with the means available. “Without any bigger project funding as such, we aim at collecting information on our website about how to start cooperation with Russian partners, and what kind of NGO cooperation is already going on. It’s important that if someone searches information about Finnish-Russian civil society cooperation on Google, there would be even some hits and information available. This can be the starting point for those potentially interested in Finnish-Russian civil society cooperation.”
INFO
Finland-Russia Society is a Finnish non-governmental organization, founded in 1944. It aims at supporting the knowledge of Russian culture and language in Finland, by organizing various cultural activities, lectures, language courses, cultural tourism, and other events. The society also aims at supporting cross-border cooperation by assisting in finding partners and networking as well as carrying out its own partnership projects. In 2017-2018, Finland-Russia Society took part in organizing Nordic and Russian NGOs Building Bridges - project, which continues to maintain a database to support partnership projects. For many years, the society has also been the focal point organization of the Baltic Sea NGO Network. Since 2017, the society has been in charge of managing the Finnish Centre of Culture in St. Petersburg. The society receives funding from the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

Website: https://suomivajaseura.fi/
GOOD PRACTICES:

I An external mid-term evaluation of the project by a knowledgeable expert can help at assessing and identifying possible challenges that can be tackled and solved during the second half of the project.

II Sharing and stating the responsibilities of each partner, stating the timetable of activities and financial conditions clearly by signing an agreement before the project starts, and making payments only after all agreed activities have been completed. In this way it is easy to check and ensure what has been agreed, which might turn out to be useful especially if people from the original core group change during the project.

III It is important to plan the project together with all partners and to ensure that everyone can evaluate and agree together, which focuses and concepts are suitable for them and can be used in the project application. Due to the often rapidly changing operating environments, it is important to constantly re-evaluate what kind of cross-border cooperation is safe for all partners.
Seminar in St. Petersburg in April 2016. From left to the right: Russian coordinator of the project Ljubov Bragina, Finnish coordinator of the project Kirsi Muurama and trainer Sergei Krutov. Copyright: Finland-Russia Society.

On a study trip to Helsinki at the Miessokit Association’s office. Photograph by Päivi Kärnä. Copyright: Finland-Russia Society.
The Creative Association of Curators TOK (Tvorcheskoye Ob’edineniye Kuratorov) is a curatorial collective based in St. Petersburg. It was founded in 2010 by Anna Bitkina and Maria Veits, a curatorial duo with a serious social and political agenda as well as a passion for creating dialogue between Russian and international artists and researchers. During the past nine years, TOK has initiated and curated dozens of multidisciplinary projects, where edgy curatorial and artistic methods have been used to explore social issues such as migration, public space, education, collective memory and media propaganda. Many of these projects have been international collaborations with artists and researchers from all over the world and two of TOK’s relatively recent projects, States of Control (2017) and The Russian Bar: Why Relocate? New approaches to neighborhood and interchange (2018), took place in Helsinki. By bringing art into spaces, where it traditionally has not been displayed and collaborating closely with professionals from different fields, TOK's initiatives are an interesting example of some of the new and innovative forms of collaboration that have emerged between Finland and Russia in the past few years.

“For us it was interesting to explore how governmental strategies and media discourses, both past and present, are forming the understanding of ‘the Other’.”
– Anna Bitkina

“Around 2014, since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the media narratives worldwide started to resemble the Cold War-era media discourse. It was then that we began to develop the project ‘States of Control’ in 2015 during our residency in New York where it was interesting for us to scan the local media landscape”, Anna tells about the origins of the project, “Of course the language and the technical development are different from the Cold War period, but the positions were very similar. Because of this, we wanted to continue exploring how governmental and media strategies, both past and present, are forming the understanding of ‘the Other’.” Eventually two years later, the project took place in Helsinki in collaboration with the Helsinki International Artist Programme (HIAP) and Urb Festival. States of Control brought together artists, historians, researchers and curators from various backgrounds to explore media, propaganda, information manipulation and the reproduction of images of the ‘enemy’ The aim of the project was to create safe and censorship free environment, where questions of historical truth and journalistic freedom could be discussed openly and opposing political statements could be accepted and taken under consideration for further analysis.

The Russian Bar: Why Relocate?
New approaches to neighborhood and interchange was a project that was organized in 2018 and was indirectly a continuation for the "States of Control" that turned out to be a successful initiative. “We are witnessing how young creative people – artists, academics, LGBTIQ+ people – are leaving Russia, because they perceive that it has become either dangerous to work there or that their freedom of expression is being very much limited or that their future prospects are very disturbing. People are looking for alternative strategies for performing their work”, Anna says, “When organizing the ‘States of Control’ exhibition in Helsinki in 2017, we realized that a lot of the
people that we didn’t see in St.Petersburg anymore had moved to Helsinki.” “We decided to look at this process, by examining the contemporary but also historical relations between Russia and Finland during the past 25 years”, Maria continues. According to Bitkina and Veits, in 25 years much has changed in both countries, yet certain stereotypes and narratives have not changed with the same pace. In total, the Russian Bar – project covered 12 projects, which all approached neighbourliness through different perspectives: migration of the “creative class”, education and ideology, language and communication, political history and collective memory. As this variety suggests, neighbourliness cannot be understood merely as physical proximity, but as a specific position to one another with a long and often complicated history. “Keeping this historical context in mind is very important,” Maria says, “Russia and Finland share a complex and often contested history, and we don’t want to sweep it under the carpet, even though sometimes this is the history we want to forget such as the position of ethnic Ingrian Finns both in the USSR and Finland.”

Bitkina and Veits say that their objective is to bring art into spaces, where it traditionally has not been displayed and where also people, who most likely would not be exposed to art otherwise, can find it. This, according to the duo, requires understanding public space in a broad sense: it includes not only streets, parks and other outdoor places, but also public institutions such as schools and libraries. “Public space is one of the entry points to a number of very complicated questions and sociopolitical problems,” Anna says, “It is a sphere that combines the interests of several stakeholders like governments and local residents.” This is also why public space is constantly being redefined and negotiated. In St.Petersburg, TOK has for several years organized a public art project “Critical Mass”, which explores urban life and aims at stimulating the attention of dwellers into questions of city development. Also the Russian Bar-project in Helsinki consisted of a series of performances, lectures, artistic interventions and small-scale exhibitions, many of which also took place in public spaces or institutions. For example in his project the artist Taneli Viitahuhta reflected upon his personal experience of learning in the first Finnish-Russian school in Helsinki, which he contrasted with the relations between the two countries at the time. His project took place of a filed trip to the school, where Taneli held a performative lecture. Ilya Orlov exhibited his piece of work, inspired by the Russian literary theorist and critic Victor Shklovsky (1893-1984) and his short period of exile in Finland, at the

Urbi Festival is an annual urban art and culture festival organized by Kiasma Theatre, which is part of the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma in Helsinki. The festival program includes premieres by young Finnish makers, international guest performances as well as residencies, presentations, artist talks and workshops that illuminate the processes of creating art.
For more information: http://www.urb.fi/
Kallio library. Livsmedlet Theatre presented two performances, one of which was took place at the bust stop in Kamppi - a known and legendary spot for those who regularly travel between St. Petersburg and Helsinki. Alina Belishkina and Vera Kavaleuskaya addressed the theme of language among the cultural professionals, who have recently came from Russia, and analyzed their personal migration stories through the prism of learning Finnish.

“**When you know your neighbour, you might have a better understanding of yourself, too.**”  
– Maria Veits

“I think one of the biggest achievements of the Russian Bar project for all its participants was dealing very closely with very specific topics and trying to get them more multilayered and trying to get them implemented into the contemporary context of Russia and Finland and bring attention of more audience into these topics,” Anna summarizes the outcome of the project. According to the duo, in times like these when the media often produces very one-sided images of what is going on, it is all the more important to create an ongoing dialogue between different stakeholders and to display and explore complex phenomena with all the nuances, instead of simplifying them. “Fear often comes from the lack of information or from the way the information we receive is constructed. In the times of crisis, it is profitable for the media to demonize the Other because this distracts mass audiences from problems within a society” as Maria says, “However, if you get a chance to get to know your neighbor not through the media lens but, say, personally, you might start having a better understanding of yourself, too.” In
EXPLORING NEIGHBOURLINESS AND URBAN SPACE THROUGH ART
- THE CREATIVE ASSOCIATION OF CURATORS AND CONNECTING POINTS

Anna Bitkina (left) and Maria Veits (right), founders of the Creative Association of Curators at the opening of “States of Control” exhibition, Agusta Gallery, HIAP, Helsinki, in August 2017. Photo by Shir Comay.

Lado Darakhvelidze’s artwork “Cooking The New Planet” installed in Alkovi Galleria. Photo by Timo Karisalo for the URB 17 festival.
“Connecting Points” is a Finnish-Russian exchange program that wishes to enable exchange between art professionals in Finland and in Russia, and to also create possibilities of engagement and introduction to the specificities as well as similarities between the art scenes. For the cycle of 2017-2019 we work with themes related to knowledge, its production and distribution as well as media landscape connected to it. During this period, we have wanted to collaborate with independent Russian based curators and artists that deal with these topics somehow.

We offer residencies in Helsinki that have usually lasted for about one month. The artists are not necessarily expected to produce anything during their stay but often they have had exhibitions in Alkovi[^16], a gallery space we run, and also we have organized small presentations. In Helsinki we usually host 3-6 Russian artists or curators yearly and we also work with Finnish-based artists, researchers and curators, who take part in excursions to Russia. There is no specific criteria for being accepted to the residency, expect connection to the contemporary art field. Otherwise we use our curatorial focus to select the persons we collaborate with. Since 2016, Connecting Points residencies have functioned by invitation only, which might change in the future, depending from the possible partnerships. The excursions for Finnish art practitioners to Russia have sometimes been organized within the EUNIC-partnership project by The Finnish Embassy in Moscow that is directed to Russian based curators and is open call-based. The program itself is funded through the Ministry of Culture and Education in Finland. Practical challenges of cooperation that we have faced are the border, which exists in a very concrete way as visas are required, and language barriers, which is why a translator is in many instances a necessity.

We think the core question is that why would we limit ourselves in terms of how to bring different ways of working and thinking together? The program explores the interrelations and specific aspects of different sites and locations as well as understandings between them. For instance in our project that is currently focusing on Vyborg as a site that is in close proximity to Finland but also has a layered closeness due to the history, we explore how this is seen especially from the Finnish perspective. We want to explore how at the same time memory of the past and life in the present are intertwined, and how to provide tools for sharing varied understandings of the site. At a very core level this is tied to actual ‘residing’ on a site – that we constantly and temporary share spaces with each other.

[^16]: The project is organized within the EUNIC-partnership project by The Finnish Embassy in Moscow that is directed to Russian based curators and is open call-based. The program itself is funded through the Ministry of Culture and Education in Finland.
From 2019 onwards, the programme will only support travelling by train. We think that institutions should be at the forefront of making environmental-friendly choices in terms of travel.

Some of our main achievements or most interesting projects are for example the exhibitions that we have produced in Alkovi, and the visits to Ural Biennial (2017). Also our trip to Vladivostok with the Trans-Siberian train (2018) was quite interesting. From 2019 onwards, the programme will only support travelling by train. We think that institutions should be at the forefront of making environmental-friendly choices in terms of travel. Also with the content of programme we hope to develop partnerships in Russia that would be also more long term, same time as a sort of possible out let create trips and excursions to enable exploration.”

INFO
TOK (The Creative Association of Curators) is a female curatorial duo from St. Petersburg founded by Anna Bitkina and Maria Veits in 2010 as a platform for conducting interdisciplinary projects in the fields of contemporary art and social sciences. TOK’s research-based art and educational projects have a strong social component and deal with current issues that are widely discussed both in Russia and internationally such as public space and citizens, development of education, deprivation of social resources, collective memory, growing role of the media in the global society, changing political climate, migration policy and many others.

Website: http://tok-spb.org/

Helsinki International Artist Programme (HIAP) is a residency center, which was launched in 1998. The program was originally initiated by Marita Muukkonen, and then continued by Jenni Nurmenniemi who both worked at HIAP (Helsinki International Artist programme). Arttu Merimaa and Miina Hujala, who currently organize the activity, don’t work for HIAP but have an independent position and research project that is joined with HIAP.

Website: http://www.hiap.fi/project/connecting-points

GOOD PRACTICES:
I Interdisciplinary approach as an asset: helps examining phenomena from various different angles and, possibly, enhancing the effectiveness of the project.

II Utilizing or creating physical places and platforms that enable the exchange of experiences and communication between different stakeholders.

III Institutions play a key role in choosing environmentally friendly forms of transportation.

46 For more information, see: alkovi.com
Building an international network of local feminist communities - Eve’s Ribs working to end violence against women

**Eve’s Ribs (Ryobrya Evy)** is a Finnish-Russian social art project and feminist collective, dedicated to ending gender discrimination and violence against women. The project was initiated in 2016 and during the past three years, it has organized dozens of events such as performances and workshops in Helsinki and St.Petersburg. Besides regular meetings and planning of events together, the Finnish-Russian cooperation takes the form of a yearly seminar every spring and feminist festival every autumn in St.Petersburg, where Finnish feminist collectives and art groups have been invited to perform and take part in different workshops and master classes. For activists involved in Eve’s Ribs, art is much more than art - it is also a method for facilitating and supporting societal change across borders. In a relatively short time, Eve’s Ribs has become an established institution that is nowadays well-known both locally as well as internationally. It is a good example of the new and innovative forms of cooperation that have emerged during the past few years.

“Our mission is, firstly, to create a feminist community and, secondly, to change the public perception on questions related to gender discrimination and ending the violence against women.”
– Leda Garina

“We initiated Eve's Ribs, because we thought that we needed a feminist structure or platform for bringing people together from different regions and different countries,” as Leda Garina, the founder of the collective, tells about the origins of the project, “Our mission, firstly, is to create a feminist community and, secondly, to change the general perception and opinions on questions related to gender discrimination and gendered violence.” Leda herself, as well as most other activists in the core group of the collective, have a background in arts, which is why it is Eve's Ribs' main method of activism. “Before we can dismantle gender discrimination, we need to show that it exists”, Leda says, “By using artistic and nonstandard methods, we want to exhibit and raise awareness of gender discrimination and how it looks like. In this way, we can also tackle social problems much more visibly.” For a larger public Eve's Ribs has indeed probably become best known for its colourful, carnivalesque and sometimes even provocative performances that the collective has arranged for example on 1st of May in St.Petersburg. However, these performances are only one part of all the activities, which are very diverse. “In Helsinki we have had a lot of different kinds of theater workshops and shows, which all deal with violence and discrimination against women somehow”, describes Anita Parri, Eve's Ribs' coordinator in Finland, “These have included for example workshops on filmmaking and documentary theatre, as well as a public event at the Space for Free Arts (Vapaan Taiteen Tila).” In St.Petersburg, Eve's Ribs runs a feminist space that is open every day for different kinds of organized activities. “We have weekly gatherings by a support group for women who have encountered violence and a support group for women with cancer. Then we organize yoga and casual tea parties,” Julia Alimova, who is responsible for running the administration in St.Petersburg, lists the variety of activities, “We also organize workshops, lectures, clothing swap events...” So far, all of these activities in both cities have been free of charge for visitors and they have
been mostly funded by the Kone Foundation grant that Eve's Ribs received in 2016.

The main forms of the cooperation between Finland and Russia are a yearly seminar every spring and a yearly feminist festival every autumn, both organized in St.Petersburg. Each year, a group of people interested in feminist or gender-related issues and artistic methods of working with them have been chosen based on an open call for applicants and sent from Finland to St.Petersburg. “During the four-day seminar these activists are being taught by professional artists different methods of using art in their work, which they then can use in their own activities in their regions”, Anita illuminates the idea behind the seminar. On the one hand, the idea is that in the seminar professionals teach and offer activists artistic tools for working with domestic and sexual violence, which they could then pass on and multiply in their own regions. “Eve’s Ribs works as a uniting platform for many already existing organizations”, Anita says, “We want to facilitate new projects that, as such, could be initiated independently from Eve’s Ribs anywhere in the world.” The other purpose of the seminar is to create material that can be performed or exhibited during the autumn festival. “Every autumn for three years by now, we have organized a feminist festival, where the results of the spring-seminar as well as other performances are then being exhibited”, Anita continues. Both the seminar as well as the festival have offered platforms for feminists with different backgrounds to share experiences and practices as well as learning from one another. This in itself can have an impact in the mindsets and activities of the participating in the movement in the future”, Anita says.

The operating environments and preconditions for feminist art activism are in many ways also different in Helsinki and in St.Petersburg. In Finland, feminism is a relatively established concept and there are a lot of organizations as well as women’s shelters working to promote gender equality and to fight domestic violence. In Russia, the situation looks rather different. Especially outside big cities in Russia, the word “feminism” and even the promotion of “gender equality” is often misunderstood and can therefore continue triggering negative connotations. For Eve’s Ribs’ activists, feminism is first and foremost a movement against violence in all its different forms, which is key for promoting gender equality. Inclusiveness and non-discrimination are guiding principles also in most of Eve’s Ribs own activities, although there are certain gender-specific target groups, too. “All like-minded people are welcome to our happenings and to the feminist space in St.Petersburg”, Anita says, “Usually most of the participants in our events are women, but we don’t want to exclude others who also identify themselves as feminists.” In the spirit of intersectionalist feminism, Leda also points out that the fight for animal rights and against discrimination of migrants are also part of Eve’s Ribs’ struggle for a more equal and sustainable world.

Anita, Julia and Leda also emphasize that violence against women continues to be a real problem both in Finland and in Russia. “It is a fact that also in Finland violence against women is very common,” Anita says and refers to the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency FRA’s report from 2014, according to which every third woman in Finland has
experienced sexual harassment. “Our mission is to make this visible by using art.” The understanding that domestic and sexual violence is a problem in Finland as well as worldwide has been important for Russian activists, too. “Earlier we thought that it is only an internal problem in Russia or generally a problem in many so-called third-world countries,” Leda says. This is one of the reasons why international cooperation is important and useful: despite the differing operating environments, many of the challenges that people and civil society face are much more similar than one could imagine.

Besides threats and confrontations with the authorities, also money and funding are challenges for Eve’s Ribs’ work. In 2018, the grant by Kone Foundation came to an end and now the collective needs to think of other sources of income. Especially the activists in St.Petersburg seem to have a lot of new ideas for funding the project. “We have opened a little shop with feminist merch, like t-shirts, and we also started a crowdfunding campaign”, Leda says, “We are also planning to open a co-working space that people could use during daytime for money. Let’s see, which source of income will turn out to be the most successful one.” However, even if these small sources of income could help in running the feminist space, it might not be enough for continuing and developing the Finnish-Russian cooperation. “We cannot maintain the scale with which we have done things so far, because of the lack of funding”, Anita laments, “We’ll see what the future brings - if our actions will focus only on St.Petersburg or if we will be able to maintain the collaboration.” Partly the difficulty of finding and receiving funding is related to the fact that Eve’s Ribs is not a registered NGO, but an informal network of artists and activists. On the one hand this enables more spontaneity and lessens remarkably the risk of facing problems with the authorities, but on the other hand it also leads to a situation where Eve’s Ribs is not an eligible applicant for most grant programmes and other sources for funding. “It’s difficult to say whether it is a challenge or an asset that we are not a registered NGO”, Anita comments on the situation, “At least that is something that influences our work a lot.”

Being a small actor and actually getting to make a change is difficult. This is why being active both in Finland and in Russia, where we have networks and channels, helps us in delivering our message.
– Anita Parri

During the three years of activities, Eve’s Ribs’ activities have constantly grown in size and scope, and the collective has already achieved its short-term goal, namely creating a feminist community. “I think we have more and more activist groups from different districts. At first we had mostly groups from the European part of Russia, but nowadays we also have groups from Siberia and Far-East,” Leda says, “Many activists often come to us, saying that we want to help you, how can we connect with you.” Anita continues in a similar vein and points out to how the interests on the Finnish side has also grown. “I’m very proud of the latest feminist festival we organized in autumn 2018. We brought more Finns there than ever before and there were much more Finnish performances, too”, she says. In three years the festival has indeed grown from a two-day event to a full week and in 2018,
there were more than 40 events during the festival week. Collaboration has been one of the keys for such a broad popularity. “Being a small actor and actually getting to make a change is difficult. This is why being active both in Finland and in Russia, where we have networks and channels, helps us in delivering our message”, Anita says, “We would also like to continue expanding our activities: we want more partners and more participants, because we perceive that it is really important that as many people as possible talk about these things. We have also had participants from Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan... our aim is to always widen our network and to raise awareness about these issues as much as possible.” It seems that Eve’s Ribs is determined to continue its way for reaching its long-term goal, namely dismantling gender discrimination. “Our main plan is to make a feminist revolution across the world“, Leda summarizes their mission.

INFO
Leda Garina is a theatre director and the founder of Eve’s Ribs. Julia Alimova is also an original member of the collective and currently responsible for administrative questions. Anita Parri is a culture producer, who works as a project coordinator in Eve’s Ribs since 2018. Parri has also been developing cultural exchange between Finnish and Russian modern dancers at Dance Info Finland (Tanssin Tiedotuskeskus).
Website: https://www.rebraevy.ru/

GOOD PRACTICES:
I Art as a way of gaining visibility, raising awareness, bringing attention to social problems and reaching larger audiences

II Multiplying the effectiveness of one’s work by organizing trainings

III Exploring new ideas of securing funding for the projects - for example opening a shop or a co-working space. Analyzing which sources of income could be the most successful.

VI Widening networks and developing channels of delivering your message.
Eve’s Ribs’ performance in Helsinki during the Night of Arts 2018. Photograph by Eve’s Ribs Festival.
BUILDING AN INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF LOCAL FEMINIST COMMUNITIES
- EVE’S RIBS WORKING TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Feminist festival in St.Petersburg. Photograph by Eve’s Ribs Festival.
Side by Side - the collaboration of Amnesty International Finland and Russian LGBTQI+ activists

Amnesty International is an international human rights organization, known worldwide for its campaigns, petitions as well as advocacy work for human rights. Raising awareness of the shrinking civil space and supporting human rights defenders and NGOs in Russia have been some of the central activities since 2000. However, around 2013, Amnesty Finland also started collaborating with Russian LGBTQI+ activists on a more grassroots level. According to Anu Tuukkanen, Amnesty Finland’s senior specialist on issues concerning human rights defenders, together the Finnish and Russian activists succeeded in developing good practices of cooperation. Although since 2016 the cooperation has grown less regular because of economic challenges and a necessity to prioritize other work, there is hope that in the future there would be resources for closer collaboration again.

“Traditionally quite a lot of Amnesty’s sections in Europe have been active in campaigning for human rights in Russia and they have also had direct relations with Russian civil society actors”, as Anu recapitulates the history of the cooperation, “By the early 2000’s a number of Amnesty sections had developed relations with CSOs in Russia in the framework of a ‘country linking’ project, where Amnesty sections explored cooperation opportunities in different Russian regions. Germany for example had connections to Perm, Norway to Murmansk and Finland to Arkhangelsk. Amnesty Finland’s cooperation in Arkhangelsk focused on a human rights education project around women’s and girl’s rights and co-producing a translation of a HRE material pack on the same issue. Country linking project created the roots for regional cooperation with Russian CSOs.” After the project with CSOs in Arkhangelsk ended, the focus shifted to more traditional campaigning and advocacy work, but since 2012 cooperation with Russian CSOs became a relevant topic again.

“After 2012 when the situation started getting worse, we started to think how we could start building closer cooperation with Russian CSOs and activists”, Anu tells, “We are anyway neighbours so we started thinking of different ways how we could somehow support and show solidarity in order to try to make the situation somehow easier for Russian activists. Of course we understood our limitations, too, because our resources were small and we didn’t have anyone at our office who would speak Russian.” As a solution both to the scarce resources and the lack of language skills, Amnesty started hiring interns specifically for Russia-work. “We had existing volunteer structures, because we had organized a so-called ‘Russia-group’ for some time. We had other country-specific groups as well, but Russia-group was by far the biggest of them.” In Russia-group activists interested in human rights had organized different kinds of actions and demonstrations, for example to commemorate murdered journalists and other human rights defenders. Developing cooperation with Russian NGOs and activists by utilizing these existing structures was therefore natural. Amnesty also had pre-existing contacts to St.Petersburg-based LGBTQI-organization, which together with the city’s proximate location and easy accessibility influenced the decision to start cooperation there. “Our main idea was that we wanted to support partners with whom we could do grassroots activism, for example so that our activists could travel to St.Petersburg and vice versa”, Anu says.
“Although everything went well in the end, these legislative changes could have had a direct impact on our possibilities of collaboration.”

The situation of sexual minorities and LGBT community in Russia was a particularly topical issue at that time, most importantly due to the implementation of the so-called “gay propaganda” law that was introduced in 2013. In 2015, Amnesty Finland supported contacts between Finnish and Russian activists by funding Amnesty activists’ visit to St Petersburg and Russian activists’ visit to Helsinki. Amnesty also started collaborating with a Russian LGBTQI+ film festival Side by Side (Bok o bok), which already then had had problems with the authorities. “Activists from the festival came to Finland to join the Helsinki Pride Festival and then we organized a movie screening as well as a public discussion, which both went really well”, Anu recalls. The collaboration with the Helsinki Pride Festival received a warm response from the Russian activists. “From what I heard afterwards, it had been a really good experience for all the participants and a lot of the Russian activists were happy that for once they could freely express themselves and be just who they are”, Anu says, “This is the kind of solidarity work we had originally wanted to promote.” The situation could have been very different, too. “On 23.5.2015, the law on ‘undesirable organizations’ was introduced and at the time when we were planning for our cooperation, we didn’t know if Amnesty will be included on the list of undesirable organizations. It could have been possible and this would of course have caused serious problems for our Russian partners”, Anu tells, “For a few weeks we lived and worked in a very uncertain and unpleasant atmosphere, but in June, when the event was about to take place it became clear that Amnesty was not on the list. Although everything went well in the end, these legislative changes could have had a direct impact on our possibilities of collaboration.” Luckily nothing bad happened and the collaboration with the Side by Side festival was even so successful that Amnesty decided to continue cooperation with the festival the following year. “In spring 2016, we also organized a ‘speakers tour’ with one volunteer from the Side by Side - festival. The volunteer brought one film and we organized screenings in Lahti and Helsinki. After the film there was also a public discussion, where the visitor told about her/his own situation and Side by Side-festival.” Also Amnesty’s activists traveled to St.Petersburg twice and took part in the festival by helping to organize it.

One reason why all partners perceived the collaboration to have been so successful was that, as Anu says, Amnesty had learned

48 Helsinki Pride is Finland’s largest and most influential cultural and human rights event and one of the biggest public events of the year.
its lessons from previous experiences. “Our collaboration with the Side by Side festival went very smoothly, but earlier we have also had experiences where we have been unable to take the interests of our partners truly into account”, she recalls, “For example back in 2013 we had invited Russian guest speakers whom we didn’t know personally and we had only been advised that they could be suitable for our event. However, we organized things too much on our own accord without for example understanding and being sensitive to the dynamics between the speakers and to the human rights issues they represented. We have learned by doing - like in Finland, so in Russia there can be certain cliques among civil society actors.” According to Anu, in the case of Side by Side the situation was different because this time the common interests were clearer and the cooperation offered mutual benefit for both parties. Also the fact that both partners were established and well-organized institutions enabled smooth cooperation. “Our partner [Side by Side] was an established actor and they had very well-organized ways of working especially with their volunteers, which is why it was very easy for us to collaborate”, Anu says, “Our situation was also easy in that we knew most of our partners and contacts already before, so we didn’t need to do research on their background and values. We both knew what we wanted so we had a shared vision of what we wanted to achieve in this project. That is how we didn’t need to compromise the interests of the other, but we were working for the same goals.”

After two years of successful cooperation with the Side by Side-festival and some other smaller projects, both Amnesty’s economic situation as well as international strategies changed. “Unfortunately from 2017 on we did not have resources anymore to hire new interns for our Russia-work. This was a pity, because during the two years we had succeeded in creating connections and good practices for collaboration, but we couldn’t maintain them any longer”, Anu laments. Also the situation in Russia changed for the worse and it became evident that civil society and especially human rights organizations were fighting for their survival. They were increasingly facing smear campaigns, lack of funding and increasing harassment, and Amnesty’s work had to adjust to the challenge. “Around 2015-2016 the vision of what kind of Russia-work we should do changed internationally within Amnesty”, Anu explains. “Amnesty’s strategic approach nowadays is that we try more actively to focus on topics that people in Russia find relevant. This has of course always been a criteria for our campaigns, but now even more so.” The change in the paradigm has meant that Amnesty has focused more on offering capacity building, trainings and consultation for NGOs working under challenging circumstances. “Amnesty’s sections around Europe have for example supported organizations in thinking how to organize fundraising in different ways and in hostile environments. Also we have been thinking together how to continue working in an operating environment, where strong narratives that create and emphasize divisions between ‘agents’ and ’national good’ prevail. In this way we have tried to channel the expertise and know-how that we here in Amnesty have to support Russian CS actors.”

As one of the most important aspects that made the building of successful partnerships possible in the first place, Anu emphasizes the input of the voluntary activists, who were
involved in Amnesty's Russia-work active on the ground. Both the volunteers as well as interns had expertise and networks that were crucial for the cooperation, whereas the role of Amnesty's office was more to enable their effective work. As another important factor ensuring smooth cooperation, Anu emphasizes the importance of assessing risks before any action. Especially an international, well-established and visible organization like Amnesty needs to be careful that it doesn't cause harm for its partners. “The legislation can have repercussions on practical aspects of collaboration - it is for example good to agree together on how to communicate with one another safely”, Anu advises, “Of course one also needs to be aware of what you can actually offer and promise to your partners. It’s good to be realistic and reflexive, so that you will not create too high expectations that you can't meet after all. We took one step at a time: first one project and then the second.”

In early 2019, Amnesty Finland has launched a visible campaign and petition to end the persecution of LGBTQI+ people in Chechnya. According to Anu, after a relatively quiet year in Russia-related campaigning, Finnish section has now tried to raise the situation in Russian and cases of Russian activists and human rights defenders in the framework of the current global campaign, which aims to support human rights defenders worldwide. However, future plans are still unclear. “We are warming up a bit and of course it would be very nice to continue collaboration with Russian activists if we will have the resources”, Anu says.

INFO
Amnesty International is an international human rights organization, founded in 1961. Amnesty International monitors and promotes the realization of human rights globally for example by conducting research, doing advocacy work and organizing visible campaigns as well as petitions. Amnesty’s Finnish section was founded in 1967, which makes it one of the oldest national Amnesty sections in the world. In 2018, Amnesty Finland’s four main priorities were human rights defenders, refugees, violence against women and the rights of transgender people.

Website: https://www.amnesty.fi/

Side by Side is an international LGBT-film festival, organized in St.Petersburg once a year since 2008. By showing LGBT-films from all over the world, the festival seeks to create an open cultural space in which homosexual, bisexual, transgender, queer people and all others can freely express and explore their identity. Moreover, the mission of the festival is to fight against all forms of discrimination and inequality based on gender, gender, sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender identity and gender expression.

Website: http://www.bok-o-bok.ru/
GOOD PRACTICES:

I  Focusing on topics that all partners find relevant and mutually beneficial

II Offering capacity building, trainings and consultation for NGOs working under challenging circumstances.

III Assessing risks of the cooperation thoroughly and discussing them together with your partner.

IV Enabling the work and cooperation of experts and activists, involved with the topic.

V Developing means of managing uncertainty by for example taking one project at a time and only after that, moving on to the next one.
Dismantling enemy images by creating connections - Finnish and Russian conscientious objector activists’ cooperation

The origins of the ongoing cooperation between antimilitarist activists from Nordic countries and Russia dates back to summer 2017 and a weekend-long event called Åland 17. It was an international peace exercise, organized by Swedish and Russian peace activists in Åland, a demilitarized and autonomous zone between Finland and Sweden. "I went to Åland 17 as a journalist to find out what the exercise was all about, because there were a lot of suspicious rumours going around in Finland as to what the mission of the exercise was," explains Esa Noresvuo, coordinator from the Finnish Union of Conscientious Objectors (Aseistakieltäytyjäliitto), "I think that these conspiracies are in themselves illustrating of how little we in Finland know about the Russian peace movement." It very soon became evident to Esa that instead of being plotted by the Russian government for propaganda purposes, as an article by the Finnish national broadcasting company YLE falsely claimed, the exercise had been organized with the aim of creating a platform for peace activists from different regions and creating links between countries that historically have often been perceived to be each others enemies. As the general response in media showcased, cooperation and critical counter-narratives that question and challenge these enemy images continue to be very much needed.

A year later in 2018 a similar exercise, then called Baltic Glory, was organized by Swedish, Finnish and Russian activists in the small town of Lovisa, Finland. That was when Finnish and Russian conscientious objector activists decided that they wanted to think of more ways of cooperating together and creating lasting partnerships across the borders. Their first meeting outside Baltic Glory took place in Helsinki in November 2018, where altogether 10 antimilitarist activists from all over Russia gathered together with the Finnish members of the Union of Conscientious Objectors at the Peace Station (Rauhanasema). During the weekend, activists spent together three days discussing, exchanging experiences and information as well as organizing a public event on the Russian movement of conscientious objectors and arranging a solidarity action on the streets of Helsinki for prisoners of peace. As we met for an interview in the last full day of their meeting, all the participants seemed convinced that this was only the beginning of a long-lasting cooperation that was just about to find its shape.

“The situations in our countries are much more similar than we are used to thinking”
– Alexander Belik

According to the conscientious objector activists, there are many reasons why international cooperation is of great importance, from very concrete practical aspects to broader questions of value. "One of our purposes is to share methods and tactics, which we are using in our normal work in our countries. The situations in our countries are much more similar than we are used to thinking", as Alexander Belik, lawyer and coordinator of the Movement of Conscientious Objectors (Dvizhenie soznatelnyh otkazchikov ot voennoi sluzby), says, "Sharing our methods and experiences is a way of demolishing enemy images that we have of each others."

Elena Popova, co-founder and coordinator of the Movement of Conscientious Objectors who
has been supporting conscientious objectors in Russia since 2009, agrees with Alexander. "For me the cooperation is interesting, because I had heard a lot about the Finnish system of alternative civil service and I had also heard about total objection," she says, "This visit and cooperation offer possibilities to know more about this system." Non-military service (Alternativnaya Grazhdanskaya Sluzha) exists also in Russia, but very few youngsters so far know about their right to refuse from the military service and choose alternative civil service instead. Therefore awareness raising, education and mainstreaming the non-military service are some of the main missions of the Movement of Conscientious Objectors.

If non-military service and total objection were something that the Russian activists were keen on learning more during their stay in Helsinki, then the Finnish participants had a lot to learn about the tactics which Russian activists use in their daily work. "I'm very interested in that Russian activists, such as the Movement of Conscientious Objectors, are actively using for example Telegram and having chats there", Esa says, "I think we in the Union of Conscientious Objectors are a bit too old school, because we are mostly active on Facebook and e-mail lists. The use of fast chat systems, where you can offer assistance and short videos in real time, is definitely something that we can learn a lot from."

One of the plans for future cooperation is to organize a workshop on different techniques of utilizing videos and fast chats as part of peace activism, which is especially important for reaching people in small towns across long distances, too.

**Cooperation offers useful methods for fighting problems that know no borders.**

Especially since many publicly active civil society actors have left Russia to seek asylum elsewhere in recent years, fast chats and social media also enable maintaining connections and cooperation between activists themselves. "Physical participation is not necessary to take part in a common fight for conscientious objectors, because we have social media", Alexander says, "Distance is not a barrier for cooperation." Through social media he and others who are in a similar situation can nevertheless keep in contact and take part in actions. The cooperation offers useful methods for fighting problems that know no borders.

Through international cooperation the peace movement can grow stronger and develop together tactics and methods for promoting peace. International partnerships also help increasing global solidarity and the size of the community of people who are working for similar goals. "For me, the community of
people is an important aspect and motivation to cooperate. We all are working on the same issues, only in different regions”, Irina Kizilova from Youth Memorial’s local branch in Perm says, ”Some of these people here I knew already from before, but there were also some people, like Konstantin, whom I had not met earlier. It has been so interesting to discuss with him! It is important to maintain old connections but also to create new contacts, because the more there are people and the more there are movements, the more hope there is that the world will become a better and more peaceful place.”

As an important aspect of uniting local agendas with global goals Elena mentions the sharing of a common language and concepts. ”It is really important to find the right words for your action,” she says, ”For example, several years ago it was very important for me to find out that there was an expression ‘conscientious objector’ [soznatelniy otkaz] and to adopt this expression into Russian language.” According to Elena, using the internationally established expression “conscientious objection” is a way of associating oneself with a larger worldwide movement, which also helps mainstreaming conscientious objection among the Russian youth. Especially the young conscripts in Russia, who often face a lot of pressure from the society and their families, can feel very insecure about their decision of not going to the army. For them, Elena says, it can be of crucial importance to understand that conscientious objection is a global movement for peace and that in a great number of other countries, young men are facing similar situations. ”The most important message that we want to share and spread is that conscientious objection is not a crime,” Elena summarizes, “This can change minds.”

INFO

The Union of Conscientious Objectors (Aseistakieltäytäjälitto; AKL) is a Finnish antimilitarist peace organization, founded in 1974. It is an interest organization for conscientious objectors, including civil servants, total objectors and others, who identify themselves as conscientious objectors.

Website: http://akl-web.fi/en/

The Movement of Conscientious Objectors (Dvizhenie soznatelnih otkazchikov ot voennoi sluzby) is a Russian initiative to support conscientious objectors that was founded in 2014. The movement offers consultation and support all over Russia through social media. One of their target groups is especially the LGBTQI+ community.

Youtube: http://youtube.com/stoparmy
Facebook: http://fb.com/stoparmy
VKontakte: https://vk.com/stoparmy
Telegram: http://t.me/stoparmy

International Memorial is an umbrella organization for one of Russia’s oldest and most established human rights movements, founded officially in 1989. International Memorial has independent regional branches in over 50 cities in Russia as well as in six other countries in Europe. Irina Kizilova is the head of public advocacy at Memorial’s local office in Perm. Since 1995, Kizilova has worked for the rights of conscripts and civil servants, by offering them consultation and helping them to prepare for the court.

Website: http://pmem.ru/

Baltic Glory is a peace exercise, organized by antimilitarist activists from Nordic countries and Russia once every summer since 2017. In 2019, also Ukrainian activists will participate in the exercise.

Website: http://balticglory.org/
GOOD PRACTICES:

I  The role of social media and fast chats in creating a feeling of community and increasing the effectiveness of activism by reaching a broader audience and overcoming distances.

II  Creating connections and involving activists also is smaller towns across the country, beyond the metropolitan areas.

III  “Leaving no-one behind”-principle and inclusiveness: the LGBTIQ+ community is particularly vulnerable for harassment during the conscription process, which is why offering assistance and support for them is especially important.

IV  People are making the reality. If your language does not have words for your topic, only you can create them. And if you find discriminative or not suitable words, which the society is using for you topic, you can change it. after that, moving on to the next one.
Environmental Rights Center BELLONA is an environmental organization established in 1998. Its mission is to protect the environmental rights of individuals through legal and informational support and contribute to the development of civil society. As it was already 20 years ago, one essential goal of BELLONA is to bring people together for environmental activities. BELLONA is not limited to involving only Russians in environment protection, and strives to make young people from other countries as well interested and involved in environmental human rights work. Every year, foreign volunteers participate in the work of the environmental center, and students from Finland, the closest foreign neighbor, come more often than others and are involved actively in the work of BELLONA.

We are sure at BELLONA that our organization and Finnish environmental NGOs have plenty in common and there are prospects for development of cooperation for the sake of sustainable development.

Despite the center’s long history and the vicinity of Finland, cooperation with Finnish NGOs has not been established. Nevertheless, we are sure at BELLONA that our organization and Finnish environmental NGOs have plenty in common and there are prospects for development of cooperation for the sake of sustainable development. The people of our countries have a strong desire for a clean environment and clean water in the Baltic Sea, which is shared by Russia and Finland, and which is being polluted mercilessly at the moment. It is the common environmental problems that can bring people together and make them work for the collective benefit. This may be the reason why foreign volunteers come to BELLONA as they realize the importance of their personal contribution to the environmental protection and the importance of international cooperation in this field.

An internship lasts from one to three months, but the cooperation is effective even in such a short period. Examples of specific projects with volunteers’ involvement show how the Sustainable Development Goals are being implemented in the framework of the BELLONA volunteer section.

ENVIRONMENTAL MEETINGS IN ENGLISH

Finnish volunteers master Russian at language courses or in their host families, but language problems sometimes prevent them from participating in Russian-language projects. In 2014, BELLONA solved this problem by opening a new project entitled “Environmental Meetings in English” where volunteers develop and implement environmental classes for children who are studying English. Local schools, with which the environmental center cooperates, are very appreciative of these classes, as in addition to language practice such meetings offer an opportunity to introduce the children to interesting people, new ideas, and different cultures. An important requirement for such classes is that the volunteers choose a subject that they themselves find important, so the story of caring about the nature or using resources rationally is indeed exciting and sincere.

The favorite subjects of Finnish volunteers that were discussed repeatedly at schools in the framework of this project have been waste sorting in Finland and climate change. However, sometimes the subjects are not as
customary and familiar for Russian children. E.g., Aleksis from Helsinki who worked at Bellona in the early 2019 prepared a class on whales in the Arctic and their protection, which resulted in a discussion of the relevant problems of the marine environment and the opportunities for everyone's participation in its protection. “For me as a sailor and a surfer, it is very important that we keep the marine environment clean. As I said in the classroom, I could not do what I love if the oceans were polluted and the environment was not healthy. I feel a responsibility to the sea animals and the ecosystem as a whole, because I use the ocean for my own pleasure. If I can enjoy the ocean breeze for sailing or a good wave for surfing, I have to take care of the sea. For me, my friends and future generations. I hope that the environment will continue giving us joy and happiness including surfing, sailing, diving or something else!” said Aleksis.

CREATIVITY AND ENVIRONMENT

Many Bellona volunteers are creative, enthusiastic and curious people. Artistic talents or good imagination are very useful for some projects. In 2016, Sohvi, a volunteer from Helsinki, participated in the preparation of an issue of Environment and Law, a magazine on economics and the environment. Sohvi came up with an idea for an infographic describing green economy and sustainable forest management. Another volunteer from Helsinki, Mia, made a creative contribution to the development of BELLONA’s educational project. In 2018, she prepared illustrations for a cycle of environmental classes entitled “Environmental Problems of the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ladoga” for developing a caring attitude to water bodies. The classes are designed for elementary school, which is why they are presented in the form of a fairy tale where the main character is a baby ringed seal. In addition to creating the baby seal’s image and the illustrations for the fairy tale, Mia drew a cartoon about the problem of microplastic. Based on this cartoon, there was a game in the class where the children had to put the elements of the cartoon in the right order and explain how microplastic gets into water and how dangerous it is for humans and the environment.

Martti from Riihimäki implemented his own educational project for the people of St. Petersburg. Unfortunately, the city residents do not have good knowledge of the birds that live in the outskirts of the city. Martti has studied birds at the university in Finland and is an expert in the region’s bird fauna. He made a video about the diversity of birds that live at the Suzdal Lakes in the north of St. Petersburg. For several days, he traveled to the
lakes for video shooting, and after the editing he presented a colorful video with the birds’ names.

**JOURNALISM**

Finding information and preparing materials for the BELLONA website is an integral part of a volunteer project. Marikki, an intern in 2017 studied the problem of sustainable development in Finland and prepared a publication entitled “The Unexpected Effect of Striving for Clean Energy: Finland Plans to Increase Logging by 20%”\(^{51}\). The author told her readers about the effects of logging on the biodiversity and nature in Finland.

In 2017, Darya from Helsinki attended a media tour named “Good Solutions for Improving the State of Water Bodies in the Luga River Basin”, following which she prepared a publication entitled “Tolmachevo for a Clean Luga River”\(^{52}\). Darya described the environmental situation in the area and told how the locals including children do public environmental monitoring of the river.

In her next article entitled “The Urban Way to a Green Future”\(^{53}\), Darya discussed the European and Russian approaches to environmentally sustainable cities. The publication was based on a presentation by the Dutch urbanist Edwin Gardner in a discussion entitled “The 21st Century City: Sustainability and Unpredictability”.

In addition to preparing the publications, volunteers act as photographers and help in finding information. E.g. Marikki’s internship included a study of publications in the Finnish media about the environmental threats of the Krasny Bor toxic waste landfill for the Gulf of Finland. There is a concern in Finland about the situation, because hazardous waste from the landfill may reach the Gulf of Finland. The published review has shown the Finns' attitude to the potential threat and thus helped raise awareness of the toxic waste problem in St. Petersburg, inform its residents, and draw the attention of the authorities to the unresolved problems of the landfill.

**CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION**

During Martti’s internship and with the support of his active involvement, BELLONA began developing a pilot project aimed at improving the living conditions in Russia and Finland. The objective of this project was to develop a water pollution index and determine the water quality class of Lake Saimaa, Vuoksa River, and Lake Ladoga by using a system of information technologies and unpiloted drones. This kind of a project can be implemented in the framework of international partnership for sustainable development, and therefore Martti’s task was to find potential partners among Finnish organizations and negotiate with them. One of the results of the joint work, a number of letters with cooperation proposals were sent to Finnish environmental companies.

**EXCHANGE OF EXPERIENCE**

An essential function of international volunteering is the exchange of experience. In addition to environmental meetings with children, volunteers participate in “green” festivals and professional events.

Marikki was a speaker at a roundtable discussion at the 14th German Week in St. Petersburg where she shared Finland’s experience in creating ‘cities for living’. She offered a fascinating and vivid story of Helsinki’s experience in addressing issues of environmental and climate security of urban life including gas-powered urban transport.
that is more convenient than cars; the development of cycling in Finland; the unusual district of Kallio where an action called “A City Without Cars” is held annually at the Kallio Block Party festival on the municipality’s initiative; and the sense of humor of the Finns who sort waste merrily and use tights for that purpose.

During her internship, Sohvi from Helsinki gave classes on climate change. As she noted a significant difference in the level of environmental education in Russia and in her native country, she prepared an overview for BELLONA of a new environmental education program in Finland, which covers many subjects including sustainable lifestyle, sustainable development, sustainable future, and eco-social education. This information is very important for the environmental center. On the one hand, it demonstrates the obvious lack of an environmental component in the Russian education system, and on the other hand, it calls for the need to exchange experience with Finnish colleagues.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERS

The very idea of international volunteering or internships is that the intern gains new skills and is introduced to the structure and style of the organization’s work. However, instead of only gaining new experience, trainees share their own ideas, views, and experiences, which makes their contribution to the organization’s work even more valuable. It is important to find common ground where cooperation could be most useful and enjoyable for everybody.

In addition to the projects described, volunteers are able to participate in the everyday work of the organization as well as in field trips organised by BELLONA. E.g., they can go to the woods to collect visual materials that are later used for educational purposes, or they visit animal shelters where they can also provide their help. During the warmer seasons, our volunteers can join subbotniki. One of the options is the Edificatory Subbotniks at the Botanical Gardens, which Bellona arranges several times a year. Unlike ordinary subbotniki, at these events volunteers work with plants in the greenhouses and parks rather than clean the natural area from garbage. This project was designed specifically for letting all the volunteers work on the ground, take care of plants and remember how beautiful the nature is, because one must love the nature to care about it.

HOW AND WHY VOLUNTEERS FIND BELLONA

Most often cooperation with Finnish volunteers is supported by organizations that organize foreign internships professionally.

51 https://bellona.ru/2017/03/21/finland-forest-climate/
52 https://bellona.ru/2017/07/07/luga/
Our main partners include Profintern and the German-Russian Exchange. The objective of these organizations is finding activities for volunteers that interests them the most. Young people who come to BELLONA are interested in the environment, sustainable development, education, international relations or environmental law.

Finnish students prefer internships in Russia for various reasons. Some have a Russian background and want to learn more about the Russian culture to know themselves better. Others are interested in the Russian language, journalism, and international relations and want to link their future profession with Russia. The vicinity of St. Petersburg is also important, as the volunteers can travel home for the weekends or Christmas holidays.

BELLONA sees the organization’s further development in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals in cooperation with Finnish volunteers and NGOs. We are certain that solving environmental problems and striving for fair and sustainable living conditions of the people should become the main priority not just for governments but also for businesses, NGOs, and individuals. We are proud of the success of our volunteer project and our cooperation with young, proactive, and enthusiastic Finns, as this is just the beginning of our long-term cooperation with Finland and the long and winding road to achieving the sustainable development goals.

INFO

Environmental Rights Center BELLONA cooperates with BELLONA International Association in providing legal aid to Russians and defending their rights to a fair environment. Every year, Bellona implements over five different projects, the results of which are published at Bellona.ru. However, we regard our main achievement of the past decade as the fact that an environmental human rights organization has been established and operates in Russia, and its reputation and image allow us to raise questions and solve problems of environmental safety, environment protection, environmental human rights, and environmental education on the national and international scale. BELLONA has the information, legal, and expert resources for being a resource center to protect the interests of independent NGOs, public activists, and ordinary individuals whose rights are violated by government authorities and businesses.

Website: https://bellona.ru/
GREEN VOLUNTEERING FOR THE BALTIC REGION: THE EXPERIENCE OF BELLONA

Illustration from the lesson about Lake Lagoda by Mia

54 https://ip-userpro.com/c8440971d6a966200836c264f94f7b57e97b.jpg
Martti on his way to the forest to collect materials for class. Picture by BELLONA.
GREEN VOLUNTEERING FOR THE BALTIC REGION:
THE EXPERIENCE OF BELLONA

Finnish volunteers Darya and Maija at the festival "Своя атмосфера"
Picture by BELLONA.

56 https://pp.userapi.com/c621702/v621702921/63c4b/8iBJuLC1bAI.jpg
Local Goals with Global Agendas-
In search of sustainable partnerships

As the work of those Finnish and Russian civil society actors, featured in this publication, showcase, the variety of their cooperation is diverse. Many established and traditional NGOs continue their cooperation already for the third decade. Alongside registered organisations, also more and more grassroots and informal networks have emerged during the past few years. Despite their differing statuses and methods, Therefore, cooperation is best understood broadly, because it is neither needed not only across national borders but among these different civil society actors: inasmuch as experience and know-how, collected throughout decades of persistent work, is needed, so are new innovations and fresh perspectives that more recent CS actors can often provide.

All the cases have illustrated manifold benefits and concrete results of cooperation. International partnerships for example enable avoiding misunderstandings; learning from one another and in that way being able to reflect and assess one's work critically in order to develop it further; creating personal relationships and in that way dismantling enemy images often created by the media as well as knowing and trusting that there is a wider community of people, who are working for shared goals. What unites all these diverse examples, is the emphasis on equal partnership and genuine collaboration. This is a development that already the Finnish-Russian Network of Social and Health NGOs was advocating for in the late 1990's and, as we can see, the work has carried results.

The starting point and most important precondition for sustainable collaboration, like most authors and interviewees emphasized, is that cooperation should be based on mutual respect and shared interests. This is the only way to try to ensure that partnership is genuinely fruitful for all parties.

However, it is not always easy and unproblematic to build these kinds of partnerships. All the articles pointed out to the numerous prevailing challenges, which civil society actors in Finland and Russia are facing and where no easy and straightforward solutions are at hand. There are the global challenges that these civil society actors aim at tackling through their work - discrimination based on gender, sexuality or abilities, military conflicts, black-and-white media narratives that create and maintain rivalries, environmental degradation - but also the challenges with which these civil society actors struggle on a daily basis such as changes in the funding base and legal restrictions. As many of the case-articles showed, one of the key challenges and central concerns that civil society actors globally are struggling with, are short project cycles and scarce funding. Assessing the efficiency of NGOs is most often based on money spent on inputs rather than on sustainable, long-term results of projects. Because of this, ensuring continuity and sustainability is often a very practical challenge for CSOs - how to achieve shared long-term goals and result in large-scale effects that the 2030 Agenda advocates for? The operating environments both in Finland and in Russia have changed, and there is no denying that in many ways this has made sustainable work and collaboration of civil society actors more difficult.

The handbook nevertheless shows that a lot of valuable work for a more sustainable world is already done, which creates a promising
ground for future cooperation, too. As we have seen throughout the pages of this handbook, navigating in rapidly changing environments and finding ways to cope under challenging circumstances, in other words, being able to continue and uphold one’s work is definitely something that many CS actors are good at. Various solutions include for example informal ways of organizing, such as loose networks, but also the role of the private sector has been growing and many organizations have partly or fully transformed from being a NGO to being a company. For many NGOs it a way of navigating in the oppressive legislation or even means of survival. The LGBTQI+ film festival Side by Side is an example of this.

Building partnerships and networks of horizontal ties are key principles in reaching these effects, both on a more local level as well a globally. They are needed between local authorities, indigenous peoples, local communities, academia and all other relevant actors. As the article by Rilli Lappalainen illustrated, NGOs and civil society actors can have several potential roles in implementing the SDGs. Besides having substance knowledge on particular goals and targets such as gender equality or peace, civil society actors have developed other practices necessary for the successful implementation of the SDGs. These include the capacity to mainstream one’s agenda by creating multi-stakeholder partnerships, pooling knowledge and expertise in order to constantly reflect one’s work critically and to develop it further, creating international communities and solidarity groups by creating partnerships with other civil society actors, and putting the “leaving no one behind” principle into practice by actively involving some of the most vulnerable groups in the society such as LGBTQI+ community and persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

However, ultimately the 2030 Agenda is an agreement between governments, which is why civil society actors alone, even if they continue working in order to mainstream sustainable development and to keep decision-makers accountable for keeping their promises, cannot succeed alone without international collaboration and the effort of other sectors of the society, too. As the handbook and especially the chapters on civil society actors’ own work and collaboration have displayed, CS actors have capacity and expertise. Implementing the 2030 Agenda requires the active participation of all sectors of the society and therefore the responsibility for implementing and promoting the SDGs cannot be outsourced only to the third sector.
DISCLAIMER: The list is not and cannot be comprehensive. Many foundations as well as Foreign Ministries of several EU-countries offer funding for cooperation. Some of the open calls listed below have ended already before the publication of this handbook, but these links and sources may nonetheless turn out to be useful.

**Funding for partnership projects with Russian NGOs:**

**EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (for members only)**

**PARTNERSHIP PROJECTS**

“Partnership Projects are organised to support collective projects of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum (CSF) members aiming at their capacity building and maximising CSF external social impact and outreach. The funding is available for co-operation on all the major topics of the CSF existing and emerging working and expert groups: human rights, environment, social issues, development of democratic structures, civic education, historical memory and education, fighting transborder corruption, migration”

More information: [https://eu-russia-csf.org/home/proekty/partnerskie-proekty/](https://eu-russia-csf.org/home/proekty/partnerskie-proekty/)

**STUDY TOURS**

“Study Tours (ST) is a programme for EU-Russia Civil Society Forum’s members to strengthen their practical knowledge and skills as well as their outreach, international and organisational competence.”

More information: [https://eu-russia-csf.org/home/projects/study-tours/](https://eu-russia-csf.org/home/projects/study-tours/)
Nordic Council of Ministers

A priority area of Nordic Council of Ministers’ funding programmes is civil society and collaboration with NGOs, both directly and through the inclusion of NGOs in other projects that involve local and regional authorities.

**OPEN CALL FOR NORTH-WEST RUSSIA**

The funding programme for cooperation in Northwest Russia comprises cooperation among Nordic and Russian partners and it covers five thematic areas: research, parliamentarian co-operation, journalists and media, health promotion and preventive healthcare, environment and climate. A minimum of two partners from different Nordic countries and minimum one partner from North-West Russia is required.

**FUNDING PROGRAMME FOR NGOS IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION**

“Objective of the Funding programme for NGOs in the Baltic Sea Region is to strengthen the civil society and democratic development through projects focusing on 1) social and health 2) culture 3) environment and climate. At least one partner from the Nordic Region (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), one partner from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania or Poland and one partner from North-West Russia or Belarus. At least three NGOs must be involved in a project for it to be eligible for funding.”

**ARCTIC COOPERATION PROGRAMME (2018-2021)**

“The primary target group of the programme is the Arctic population, with the aim of continuing to contribute to the sustainable and constructive development of the region. Four categories make up the priorities of the programme: planet, people, prosperity, and partnerships.”
Council of the Baltic Sea States

**PROJECT SUPPORT FACILITY (PSF)**

PSF supports projects that encourage building a common societal security culture in the Baltic Sea Region, by engaging civil society, in particular, volunteer organizations, children/youth, or senior citizens. Special emphasis is on encouraging people-to-people contacts, exchange of best practices and awareness raising for common attitudes to major threats and hazards as well as to situations of exploitation.

More information: [http://www.cbss.org/psf/](http://www.cbss.org/psf/)

**ENPI and CBC programmes (until 2020)**

“The strategic objectives for CBC activities is to promote economic and social development in regions on both sides of common borders, to address common challenges in environment, public health, safety and security as well as to promote better conditions and modalities for facilitating the mobility of persons, goods and capital.” The programmes are financed by the European Union, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Finland.

**KOLARCTIC CBC**

Website: [https://kolarctic.info/](https://kolarctic.info/)

**KARELIA CBC**

Website: [https://kareliacbc.fi/en](https://kareliacbc.fi/en)

**SOUTH-EAST FINLAND CBC**

Website: [https://www.sefrcbc.fi/](https://www.sefrcbc.fi/)

More info about Interreg, Interreg IPA and ENPI/ENI cross-border programmes as well as potential partners:

[https://www.keep.eu/](https://www.keep.eu/)
The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)

A thematic funding instrument for EU external action aiming to support projects in the area of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy in non-EU countries.


Civil Society Organisations as actors of Governance and Development

The global objective of this Call for Proposals is to contribute to the reinforcement of Russian Civil Society Organisations as a pre-condition for a more equitable, open and democratic society, for an inclusive and sustainable development and growth.

Swedish Institute

The Swedish Institute provides funding for joint projects in which Swedish organisations meet transnational challenges together with organisations from the Baltic Sea region countries and the countries of the Eastern Partnership. Swedish organisations can apply for funding from the Swedish Institute in order to cooperate with organisations in the Baltic Sea region countries and organisations in the EU’s Eastern Partnership countries.

SEED FUNDING FOR COOPERATION PROJECTS IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

The project activities that the Swedish Institute’s “seed funding” supports must be clearly linked to one or more of the challenges identified in the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea region.

THIRD COUNTRY PARTICIPATION IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

“Third Country Participation in the Baltic Sea region offers Swedish actors the opportunity to apply for project funding for the inclusion of actors from Russia or the countries of the EU Eastern Partnership in a current EU project or a flagship within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region. The projects will need to contribute to economic, environmentally and socially sustainable growth in the Baltic Sea region and its immediate area. In the long term they will contribute to an increased integration in the region.”

The Norwegian Barents Secretariat Funding Programme

“Norwegian citizens based in the three northernmost counties of Norway can be granted funding for their Russian - Norwegian cooperation project. The aim is to establish stronger relations between Norwegians and Russians living in the north.” The programme is funded by the Foreign Ministry of Norway.

Website: https://barents.no/en/barents-secretariat-s-funding-programme
For artists and cultural exchange:

The Nordic Culture Fund (Kulturfonden)

“The Nordic Culture Fund supports projects that contribute to an innovative and dynamic artistic and cultural scene in the Nordic region - one that is diverse, accessible and of high quality. Applications are accepted from individuals, groups, organisations, institutions, associations and companies. Applicants do not need to live in the Nordic Region or be Nordic citizens.”

Goethe Institut

INTERNATIONAL COPRODUCTION FUND
The funding programme supports artistic collaboration involving partnership and dialogue, with a view to encouraging new collaborative working processes and innovative productions involving international cultural exchange. This funding is intended for coproductions by artists in the fields of theatre, dance, music and performance art, in which hybrid and interdisciplinary formats and the use of digital media may be key components.

European Cultural Foundation

STEP TRAVEL GRANTS
“STEP travel grants support creative and critical artists and cultural changemakers travelling across Europe and its neighbours, to help foster a society with greater solidarity, participation, equality and a stronger sense of social justice.”
Asia-Europe Foundation

**MOBILITY FIRST! SPECIAL OPEN CALL**

“We live in fragile and uncertain times characterised by conflicts that often put people at risk, including artists and other professionals in the cultural sector. Various fundamental freedoms are also at risk including the freedom of movement and artistic freedom. In this context, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), through its Mobility First! travel grant, and Cambodian Living Arts (CLA) are launching a special call for artists and cultural professionals working in conflict and post-conflict societies.”

Website: [http://www.asef.org/projects/themes/culture/4651-mobility-first!-special-open-call](http://www.asef.org/projects/themes/culture/4651-mobility-first!-special-open-call)

Others:

Online Journal “Legal Dialogue”

**TRAVEL GRANTS PROGRAMME**

“The Legal Dialogue Travel Grants programme offers financial assistance for the participation of legal experts from EU countries in conferences, seminars, round tables, court hearings or other relevant events held in Russia and vice versa. It is also possible to apply for financial support for study visits of organisations working in the legal field in Russia or the EU.”

Website: [https://legal-dialogue.org/travel-grants](https://legal-dialogue.org/travel-grants)

Prague Civil Society Centre

**SWITCH GRANTS**

“Switch is the Prague Civil Society Centre’s grant scheme for tech solutions to social issues across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Switch is open to any individual, group or organisation which has a tech-based solution to a social problem, or a project to change their society.”

Website: [https://praguecivilsociety.org/switch-2019/](https://praguecivilsociety.org/switch-2019/)
PlanetRomeo Foundation

PlanetRomeo Foundation provides funding to grassroots emerging LGBTI projects and initiatives. The funding focuses on achieving societal change in order to improve the position of LGBTI people throughout the world, with an emphasis on the most disadvantaged regions and communities.

Website: https://www.planetromeofoundation.org/apply/

Useful networks and databases:

NGO Bridges Database

The website is created to help Russian and Nordic NGOs to find partners for joint projects. Search for partner, find information about past and future events and find resources and funding opportunities for your joint project for Russian and Nordic NGOs.

Website: https://ngobridges.com/hgo

The Baltic Sea NGO Network

“The Baltic Sea NGO Network is a cooperative body of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the Baltic Sea Area. The network is open to all organisations with an interest in Baltic Sea Cooperation.”

Website: http://www.balticseango.net/
The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

The Latvian NGDO Lapas

**SPOTLIGHT REPORT HOW SDGS ARE IMPLEMENTED:**

**CASE STUDIES ON SDGS FROM LATVIA (3 PER GOAL):**

**CASE STUDY HOW WE WROTE THE REPORT AND WORK ON SDGS:**

**GLOCALISATION METHODOLOGY**

**OTHER MATERIALS ON SDGS**
Website: [http://lapas.lv/lv/globalie-merki/](http://lapas.lv/lv/globalie-merki/)

Collective Leadership Institute

**THE DIALOGIC CHANGE MODEL**
Website: [www.collectiveleadership.de/blog/article/the-dialogic-change-model/?redirect=true](http://www.collectiveleadership.de/blog/article/the-dialogic-change-model/?redirect=true)

**MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS**
Website: [http://stakeholderdialogues.net/#&panel1-1](http://stakeholderdialogues.net/#&panel1-1)

**THE COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP COMPASS**
The NGO Development Center is a non-commercial non-governmental organization that has been working since 1994 for the development of civil society. At the present time, the main aims of the organization are support of NGOs and the development of philanthropy and civil initiatives in St. Petersburg and Russia. The mission of the NGO Development Center is to encourage the development of civil responsibility through support of civil initiatives and civil society organizations, and philanthropy development.

THE NGO DEVELOPMENT CENTER WORKS IN TWO MAIN AREAS:

- Serving as a resource center for NGOs. The NGO Development Center is one of the largest, most experienced and oldest resource centers for NGOs in Russia. We have been working in this capacity since 1994. For 25 years, our services have assisted in the professionalization of NGOs by providing new knowledge and qualifications, up-to-date information on all important trends and events, and establishing ties between NGOs and government officials, business and the media, as well as amongst themselves.

- Developing philanthropy and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Philanthropy development in St. Petersburg and sharing best practices with nonprofits from other regions is one of the priorities. We maintain that effective development of society requires popular and well-developed private philanthropy as well as the initiative of private citizens in solving social problems. We therefore consider this part of our work no less important than work of the resource center for NGOs. The NGO Development Center was a pioneer in developing a community of philanthropy researchers in Russia, held several conferences on the theme.

WEB-PROJECTS OF THE NGO DC:

- **NGO web site** www.crno.ru is also resource site for the NGOs with a lot of information methodological and training materials, information about various events and news of the third sector.

In 2015 NGO Development Center has been included by the Ministry of Justice of RF into the register of NGOs acting as a foreign agent.

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Website: www.crno.ru
Most is a Helsinki-based non-governmental organization founded in 2016 dedicated to supporting the development of and knowledge about civil society in Finland and in Russia. Most (Russian for bridge) wishes to promote collaboration with Finnish and Russian NGOs - according to its name build bridges between civil society and grassroots actors.

**OUR WORK HAS TWO MAIN DIRECTIONS:**

1. Enabling and facilitating cooperation related to human rights, social rights and fundamental freedoms between Finnish and Russian NGOs.

2. Raising awareness and interest on the contents of human rights and social rights and fundamental freedoms and how they are put into practice on both sides of the border

www.mostngo.fi